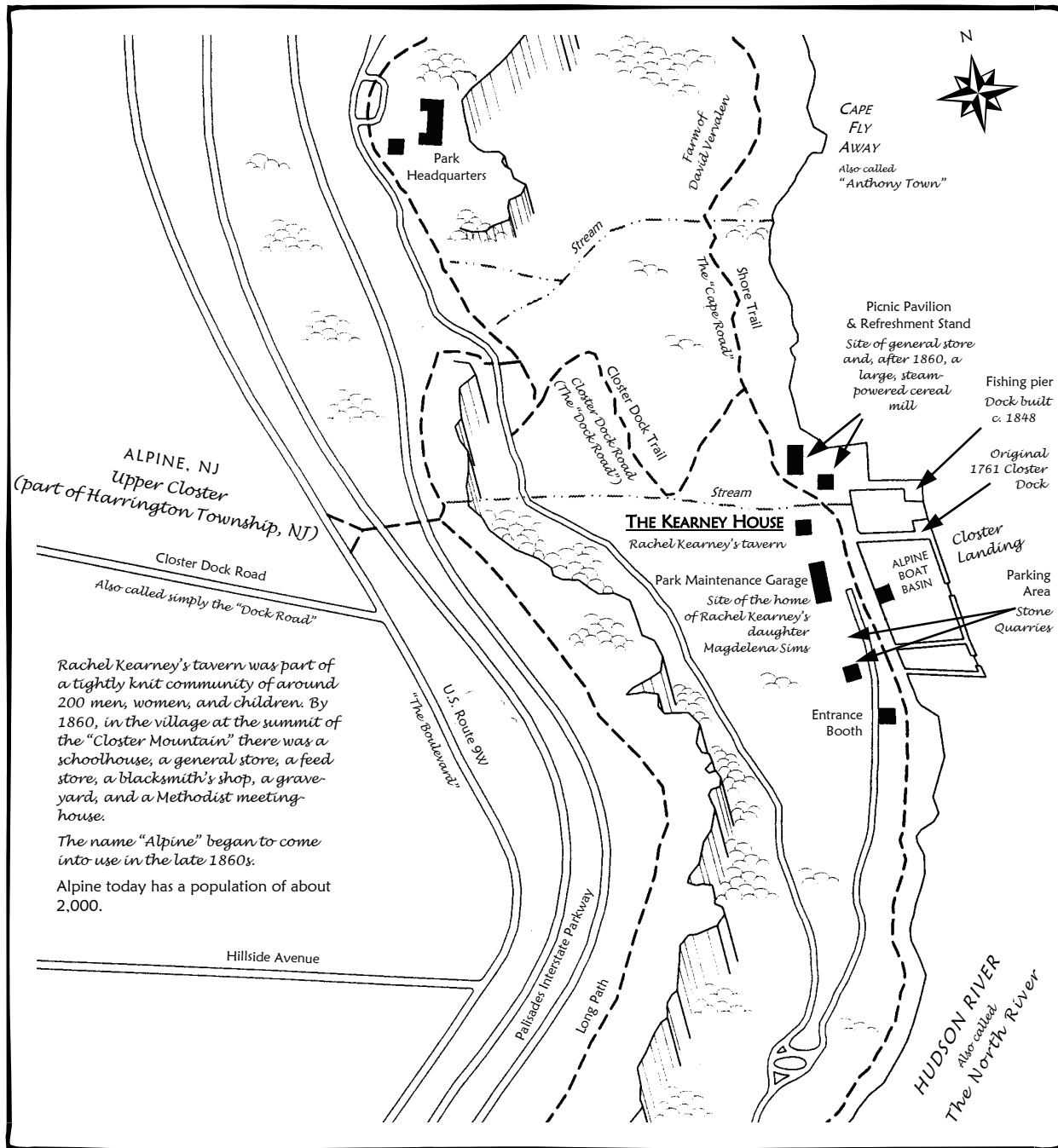


## “Now & Then...”

On the map below, the printed text shows present-day features.

The “handwritten” text indicates features from the mid-1800s—the time that the three period rooms of the house represent.



Listed on the National and New Jersey State Historic Registers as the “Blackledge-Kearney House”—but more familiarly known as the “Kearney House” or the “Cornwallis Headquarters” (it was once thought that the British general had stayed here in 1776)—this house has been a Hudson River homestead, a riverfront tavern, a Park police station, and a “historic shrine.” Today it helps bring to life two centuries in the story of the Hudson River and the families who depended upon it for their lives and livelihoods. The Kearney House has been preserved by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission with the ongoing assistance of the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs.



At Alpine Boat Basin & Picnic Area  
PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK  
New Jersey Section

[njpalisades.org](http://njpalisades.org)

## THE KEARNEY HOUSE



Revised Fall 2011

Open May through October  
Weekends & Holidays

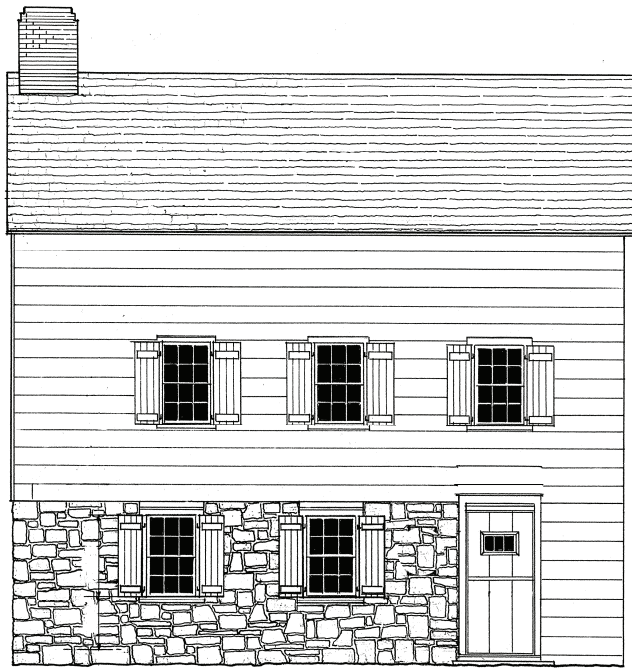
12–5 PM

201 768-1360 ext. 108

[kearney@njpalisades.org](mailto:kearney@njpalisades.org)

The southern part of the house was built first, probably after 1761, when the colonists of the farming settlement called Closter, on the other side of the Palisades, built a road (the “Closter Dock Road”) through a pass in the cliffs down to the Hudson River. This allowed them to ship their farm goods to New York City’s markets by sailboat.

The house may have been built to be a dock master’s house, to supervise the busy river landing at harvest time.



In 1817, James and Rachel Kearney moved into this house. They had three children from Rachel’s first marriage (her first husband had died two years earlier) and they would have five more of their own before James died in 1831. Rachel also adopted a daughter—for a total of at least nine children she brought up in this house. Widowed a second time, and with young children in her care, Rachel began to keep a tavern at her house.



*Perhaps when they were old enough to get up and down the stairs, the children would have slept in the attic. In the winter, they may have stayed downstairs for warmth. In either case, it would have been unusual to have a bed to yourself.*

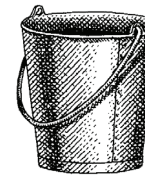
*The cedar shingles on the roof expand when they get wet. (Even though it seems to have holes in it, the roof does not leak in the rain.)*



*In the 1930s, a modern bathroom was installed upstairs. The bathroom was later removed—though we still have the 19<sup>th</sup>-century equivalent of a “bathroom” in the bedroom. (But not everyone recognizes it...)*



*The stone walls of the old part of the house are a foot-and-a-half thick, made from Palisades stone. The mortar between the stones is made from Hudson River mud, with an outer coating of limestone mortar. The beams above the stone walls are made from tulip poplar trees. (A deed from 1802 called this part of the house a “cellar.”)*



*We use this room as our “Park History Room,” where we present the story of the NJ Section of the Palisades Interstate Park.*

*What clues are there that this half of the house is newer than the other section?*

*Although most of the furnishings in the house are as old—or older—than the house, few are original to it. Many were donated in the 1930s by Women’s Clubs from all across New Jersey. Other furnishings are reproductions.*



*Why does the house have such low ceilings?*

*Hint: It’s not because “people really were shorter back then”...*



The northern addition was probably built around the 1840s to make room for the tavern.

Besides offering food and spirits, taverns played an important role in nineteenth-century life. Mrs. Kearney’s tavern would have served as a meeting place for the captains and crews of the sailing vessels that arrived and departed daily from Closter Landing, as well as for the local workforce of quarrymen, dock workers, and tradesmen. Gossip, strongly argued political opinions, the latest joke—all would have been shared within these walls.



The upstairs door in the new addition may have been for lodgers at the tavern, giving them their own entrance to a room separate from the family’s space.

The Palisades Interstate Park acquired the house in 1907, and in 1909 enlarged the porch to serve as a grandstand for a dedication ceremony for the new park.

Through the 1920s, the Park Commission used the house as a police station.

The cover photograph was taken around 1897 (gift of the Lamb family). The diagram of the house is from the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), 1935.