

Weekender | Rosendale, N.Y.

By DAVID WALLIS

WHEN Lucille McAssey attended college in New Paltz, N.Y., 30 years ago, she rarely ventured into Rosendale, nine miles away. "Oh, no — it was very, very run-down," she said. Aside from bars where you could get beer and a brawl, little bustle remained in Rosendale, once a mining town famous for Rosendale natural cement.

In Rosendale's heyday, Ann Gilchrist wrote in "Footsteps Across Cement: A History of the Township of Rosendale," the industry employed 5,000 workers and annually produced four million barrels of cement. Renowned for its strength, Rosendale cement was used in the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty and the Washington Monument. But the development of cheaper portland cement ruined the business. The last of the local cement producers shut down in 1970.

Rosendale was a boomtown gone bust. This summer, when Ms. McAssey returned to Ulster County with her husband to search for a weekend retreat, she discovered that Rosendale had undergone a makeover. "I was very surprised," she said. "Many of the homes and the town itself had been restored, and it looked like the kind of place I wanted to live in."

She said that she and her husband, Bill, had originally wanted to go back to New Paltz, but "after driving down Main Street, I realized that New Paltz had become too crowded."

New Paltz had also become too expensive. In October, the McAsseys bought a three-bedroom, two-bathroom Victorian house in pristine condition on Creekslock Road for \$326,000, far less than a comparable home would have cost in New Paltz. Their house, across from Rondout Creek, which winds through Rosendale and empties in the Hudson River, also yielded an artifact from Rosendale's industrial past: a surveyor uncovered a 19th-century mooring on the property that had secured barges carrying coal and cement on the D & H Canal.

The Scene

Incorporated in 1845, Rosendale includes a village of the same name, as well as the hamlets of Tillson, Bloomington, Maple Hill and Binnewater, and parts of High Falls and Cottekill. In the hamlets, houses from the 1960's can be right down the road from a longtime working farm; a double-wide can neighbor an estate. Nestled between Rondout Creek and Joppenburgh Mountain, the Village of Rosendale mixes an appealing cocktail of architectural styles on Main Street, including the Gothic Revival public library, the Italianate brick facade of the defunct Astoria Hotel and several Victorian-era wooden houses painted colors like periwinkle and pistachio. Some feature balconies where, in wilder times, prostitutes are said to have advertised their services to prospective clients.

Though not one of the most remarkable buildings in town, the Rosendale Theater, a family-owned, single-screen cinema celebrating its 55th anniversary this year, draws movie buffs from all over the Hudson Valley. At 7:15 each night — and on weekend afternoons, if demand warrants (call ahead, 845-658-8989) — the movie house presents foreign films like "The Motorcycle Diaries" and blockbusters like "The Incredibles." Admission is \$5, popcorn is \$1, and patrons can buy treats like Necco Wafers and Good & Plenty for 50 cents from a candy machine circa "Some Like It Hot."

Next to the theater stands an imposing

JUST SLEEPY, NOT DEAD Rosendale has come back since the departure of the cement industry some three and a half decades ago.

red-brick Gothic-style structure that was the Dutch Reformed Church. It is now Belltower Lighting, a glass studio and gallery that sells hand-blown chandeliers and hanging lamps in a swirl of pastels.

Belltower's owner, Louis Sciafani, arrived in Rosendale (which he remembers finding "scary") in 1985 to tackle a restoration project of profound proportions. He resuscitated the church, a boarded-up wreck with broken windows, into a majestic building that dominates Main Street. He also restored the rectory next door.

Adam Weil, a real estate agent at Li Daniels Distinctive Properties in Rosendale, credits the influx of artists with turning the town around. "Everyone you meet in the area has a sideline in the arts," said Mr. Weil, who moonlights as a cabinetmaker. As if to underscore the point, the agency where he works doubles as an art gallery; it currently markets psychedelic oil paintings as well as a number of country cottages.

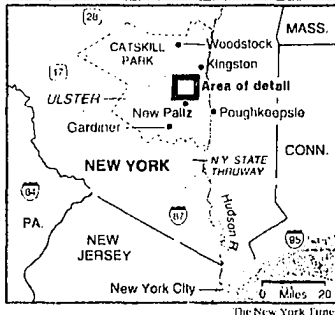
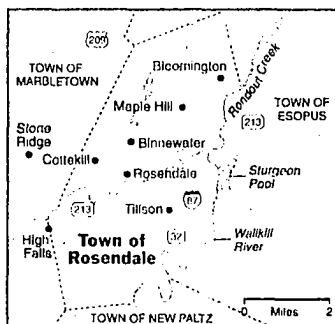
It seems that everyone in town is involved in Rosendale's underground arts scene. The Widow Jane Mine, a limestone cave run by a local historical society, holds subterranean concerts, readings and parties. Recent events have included a poetry reading, a fund-raiser for John Kerry and a performance by a Japanese drum troupe (warning to concertgoers: lean at your own risk, water sometimes trickles down the cave's walls).

Pros

Shortly after Rochelle Riservato bought a second home on Creekslock Road in 1991, her 10-year-old son, Jesse, summed up the family's feelings about Rosendale: "I like it here because we are close to civilization." A year later, Ms. Riservato moved full-time into her three-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bath farmhouse on 17 acres. She loves being a short drive from both the Catskill Mountains and Kingston, a city settled by the

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open to the public for a modest fee.

Anglers can hook brown, brook and rainbow trout in the Rondout, but experienced fly-fishermen prefer casting in the nearby Esopus Creek. (Before breaking out the waders, they buy New York State fishing licenses, available at most bait shops in the area.)

The town plans to make it easier for visitors to enjoy its attractions by contracting with a private bus company next year to shuttle passengers from Rosendale to the Metro-North rail station in Poughkeepsie, about 20 miles away.

Cons

New Yorkers are not the only ones flocking to the Catskills these days. Black bears, which can approach 500 pounds, have been migrating from New Jersey to Ulster County, joining an indigenous community. This bonanza for hunters (sportsmen killed about 100 bears in the area last year) unnerves some homeowners. According to Ms. Riservato, an editor at the local newspaper, The Blue Stone Press, a bear popped by Rosendale a few weeks ago to investigate beehives kept by a homeowner as a hobby, and not long ago a determined bruin broke into a home in a neighboring town, interested in raiding the refrigerator.

Some say it is easier to track down a black bear than an available contractor in the area.

The Real Estate Market

Since the attacks of 9/11, house prices have shot up in much of Ulster County, as city dwellers look for rural havens. But several real estate agents speculated that the market peaked this summer.

"More houses are being listed than being sold," said Mr. Weil of the Li Daniels agency. He said some sellers had lowered their asking prices. In August, his office listed a

LAY OF THE LAND

Catskill Views With Few Frills

POPULATION 6,352.

SIZE 17.3 square miles.

MEDIAN HOUSE PRICE \$221,750.

RECENT SALES A three-bedroom, two-and-a-half bathroom contemporary house on 7.5 acres with a brook sold for the asking price of \$369,000, after 87 days on the market. A two-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom ranch-style house with a screened porch sold for \$274,000, reduced from \$300,000, after 94 days on the market. A four-bedroom, one-bathroom stone house built in 1784 and needing work was reduced from \$219,000, to \$207,000. It sold after more than 13 months on the market.

DISTANCE FROM NEW YORK 97 miles.

TRAVEL TIME One hour, 45 minutes in light traffic.

GETTING THERE Take the New York State Thruway (Interstate 87) north to Exit 18, New Paltz; then take Route 299 west to Route 32 north. After about nine miles, turn left onto Route 213, which is Main Street in Rosendale. Trailways, (800) 776-7548, offers bus service from the Port Authority terminal in Midtown Manhattan for \$19.50 each way.

WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING The Williams Lake Resort (Binnewater Road, Rosendale; 845-658-3101) is open on weekends until June 1 and then full-time until Nov. 1. A borschit-belt-bungalow-colony-meets-suburban-country-club, Williams Lake, founded in 1929, has 57 rooms that run from \$149 to \$289 a person, including three meals.

The Inn at Stone Ridge (3805 Route 209, Stone Ridge; 845-687-0736) has five suites for \$195 to \$425, including breakfast.

The Victorian Knoll Bed and Breakfast (30 Peak Farm Road, Stone Ridge; 866-262-0100) has three rooms for \$115 to \$150.

2,500-square-foot, three-bedroom contemporary house on a landscaped plot of just under an acre — on Binnewater Road, a tranquil area near a popular lake — for \$459,000; the price was recently dropped to \$349,000.

Mary Collins, owner of Mary Collins Real Estate in High Falls, agreed about the softening of prices. Nevertheless, she said, stone houses remain in great demand and buyers snap up any property — stone or not — offered for less than \$300,000.

Real estate taxes in Rosendale are comparable to those in neighboring towns. According to Marc Plate, the assessor of Rosendale, annual school and general taxes on a \$200,000 home in Rosendale would be \$5,332. Taxes on a similar property in New Paltz would also run about \$5,300.

This week, Win Morrison Realty in Woodstock was listing a 1930 two-bedroom cottage for \$145,000. The house borders the Wallkill River in Tillson. Given the price, the agent, Jesse Berger, expects the property to move quickly. A young artist can't afford Woodstock anymore, he said, "but you can certainly get yourself a bargain in Rosendale."