1. Welcome to Herkimer Home State Historic Site—the colonial era estate of General Nicholas Herkimer. This audio tour will introduce you to General Herkimer, his home and the people who lived and worked here. Prior to his death after the Battle of Oriskany in August 1777, Nicholas Herkimer was one of the community’s most prominent citizens. Come explore his home and learn about the extraordinary legacy of this hero of the American Revolution. The tour numbers are posted throughout the grounds and in the house. Use the map as a guide and enjoy your visit!

2. Caretaker’s Cottage. After acquiring the Herkimer estate in 1913, New York State gradually made changes to the property, some of which you will see during this tour. For example, this cottage was built in 1927 to house a full time caretaker to maintain the property. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, New York was a national leader in its efforts to preserve historic and cultural places important in state history, such as Herkimer Home.

3. Cemetery and Monument. Shortly after Herkimer’s death in 1777, the Continental Congress passed a resolution to erect a monument in his memory. Although that project was never funded, for many years local residents continued to advocate for a monument in his honor. Over a century passed before the State of New York would make good on Congress’ pledge to honor their fallen hero. At the dedication of the monument, Civil War General Daniel Butterfield stated "Grand, glorious Herkimer! The blood of the hero and the patriots he commanded was not shed in vain. It is a precious memory and honor to the Mohawk Valley. May the state preserve and perpetuate this monument… a reminder that New York State, even after the lapse of a hundred and twenty years, has remembered to honor the hero."

4. Palatines. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, war and religious persecution created tremendous suffering in Germany and drove tens of thousands of refugees to flee to England for their own survival, hoping Queen Ann would offer them protection. Daniel Defoe saw the Germans in London, he wrote:
“they look...for a place of rest, a land where liberty is established and property secured,... where they may reap what they sow, and eat what they earn—where they may call their souls their own, and may not starve in the midst of plenty.”

3,000 refugees eventually were sent to New York to work for Governor Robert Hunter and Robert Livingston, a wealthy land owner in the Hudson Valley. In 1713, 50 Palatine families, totally about 600 people, illegally left Livingston Manor for the Schoharie Valley—unwilling to sign tenant leases. Ten years later, 92 of these Palatines purchased land from the neighboring Mohawk Indians and moved to the area around Little Falls and nearby Herkimer.

5. Rear elevation. The house was originally built in the 1760s and Herkimer lived here with his first and second wives, both named Maria Dygert. Enslaved people helped run the estate and some probably worked as house servants and likely lived in the basement or in an outbuilding. During the Revolutionary War, soldiers encamped here and officers were boarded in the house. Local residents also found refuge here when they were forced to flee their homes to escape violence in the surrounding area. Travelers along the river most likely visited the house as well because Herkimer controlled the carry place, a portage trail where boats were carried to avoid the rapids.

6. [Interior] General: The house’s furnishings, which are mostly not original, date to approximately the 1760s and represent what the interior may have looked like when the Herkimers lived here. Over time, there have been many changes to the building. Subsequent owners altered the house during the 19th century and the state undertook a comprehensive restoration in the 1960s. However, the restoration was shaped by ideas about 18th century life and building practices and do not accurately reflect the house’s original appearance. For example, the orientation of the stairs was changed—the original stairs probably faced the riverfront entrance. As you tour the house, we will identify architectural details considered to be original as well as point out inaccuracies in the 1960s restoration.
7. [Interior] Hall General: in Herkimer’s time, the center hall was a hub of activity, with visitors waiting to be received, servants hurrying to complete tasks and Mrs. Herkimer keeping the household running smoothly. In the summer, to take advantage of breezes coming through the open doors, guests would have been entertained in this space. In the cooler months, the doors would have remained closed to protect guests and family from drafts. The hall, like most rooms in 18th-century houses, was a flexible space. The servants would have stored extra tables and chairs here until they were needed for dining and entertainment in other rooms.

8. [Interior] The Herkimers played host to not only some of the area’s most influential men, such as Sir William Johnson, General Jeffrey Amherst, Native American leader Joseph Brandt, Major-General Phillip Schuyler and Reverend Samuel Kirkland, but also tenant farmers, soldiers, Native Americans and local residents. Located on Mohawk River on the edge of the frontier, the house also served as a waystation of sorts, providing hospitality to weary travelers.

9. Interior] General Best Parlor: From the expensive furniture to the elaborate trims, everything about this room expresses wealth, style, and sophistication for the time period. The room is called the Best Parlor because it contained the family’s best furnishings and reflected their stature in the local community and beyond. Herkimer and his wife would have used this room for formal occasions, such as entertaining important guests. In his will, General Herkimer left his second wife Maria exclusive rights to this room until such time as she remarried.

10. [Interior] Only a few of the furnishings in the house are thought to have belonged to the Herkimers. The Chippendale ball-and-claw foot side table on the north wall and the gate-leg table on the east wall were likely Herkimer pieces. The side table was recently donated by a Herkimer descendant. The furniture in this room and the southeast parlor are similar and might have been made locally in the English style. The window trim and ceiling cornice in this room are believed to be original. They were repainted based on paint analysis conducted in 2013. The
18th-century colors identified through the paint analysis were used to assist in the selection of the reproduction wallpaper, which was installed in 2014.

11. **[Interior] Women’s Roles:** Traditional gender roles often influenced how rooms were furnished during the 18th century. For example, the best parlor was notably feminine because women were responsible for entertaining here. Nicholas married his first wife, Maria Dygert around 1760 and she died sometime between 1771 and 1776. He married his second wife, Maria Dygert, prior to August 1776. As the ladies of the house, both Marias would have filled the role of hostess for a variety of visitors. Women were expected to manage the running of the household, ordering supplies, directing servants, and entertaining guests.

12. **[Interior] Why Maria’s Room:** Herkimer’s second wife, Maria, was almost 30 years younger than him. They probably married to continue the alliance of two wealthy Palatine families. In his will he left Maria the use of half the house and the exclusive use of the best parlor along with some income and two enslaved people. She chose to quit her claim to the house in January 1778 and left with £100, fifty skipple of wheat, roughly 37 bushels, and another £150, paid to her over ten years.

13. **[Interior] Second Parlor General:** This room was known as Herkimer’s office for many years, but it more likely served as a second parlor. Herkimer probably met with tenant farmers, conducted business and may have hosted informal social gatherings here. This room probably contained a desk and book shelves in addition to tables and side chairs, which would be rearranged as needed for dining and entertainment.

14. **[Interior] Hints of the 18th century:** The ceiling cornice in this room dates to the 18th century, and the English Georgian style, gate-leg table, armchair and two side chairs may have been owned by Nicholas Herkimer. The furniture is made from native birch, a wood widely used by New York furniture makers at the time, but was finished to look like mahogany to imitate more expensive Georgian style
furniture. Similar construction techniques among the furniture suggest that the pieces were made by the same workshop.

15. [Interior] General Dining Room: This room is being restored, including its plaster finishes, and will be repainted. Although paint analysis was conducted to determine the original color of the room, the results were inconclusive—so it will be repainted white. This large room was originally two rooms with a central chimney. The rooms would have mirrored the two on the other side of the central hall, which was typical of Georgian style houses of the period. One of the rooms was probably a dining room and the other a library or bed chamber. This area of the house were altered during the 19th century and later subdivided into smaller rooms. During the 1960s restoration, this space became one large room.

16. [Interior] 18th Century Dining: Elegantly decorated dining rooms were a status symbol during the colonial period. Such a room meant that a family, with the help of enslaved workers, could lavishly entertain guests in a refined setting. All the courses of food would have been brought from the kitchen and set on the table in what is known as the English style. The butler, likely an enslaved man, would oversee the meal, attend to the guests’ needs and made sure that all the servants were doing their jobs. Dining, however, was not always exclusive to one room. The dining room would have been used for formal entertaining, but one of the parlors might have been used for informal dining, such as family breakfasts and tea.

17. [Interior] Second Floor Hall: The upstairs hall, like the first-floor hall, was a flexible space. It often held extra tables and chairs and perhaps a daybed to accommodate an extra overnight guest. In warmer months, this light and airy space would have been used for entertainment. According to period practice, a linen press—a cabinet for storing sheets and other textiles—was placed in the hall near the bedchambers to store bed linens and towels.
18. [Interior] General Northeast bedchamber: This room has the footprint of the original 18th-century bedchamber although its woodwork, window trim and mantle date from the 1960s restoration. The four-poster bed features reproduction blue check bed hangings, which were common in the 18th century. The cradle would have been used by visiting families because the Herkimers were childless. A room of this size might have accommodated more than two people with trundle beds and extra mattresses on the floor. Only an honored guest would have merited a private chamber such as this when the house was filled with overnight guests.

19. [Interior] The Laying In of Jerusha Kirkland: In the summer of 1770, Jerusha Kirkland, wife of Reverend Samuel Kirkland, was pregnant and traveling east on horseback from Oneida on her way to her mother’s home in Connecticut. She got as far as the Herkimers’ estate and had to stop. Her first visit here, in December 1769, was just after her wedding while she waited for her husband to enlarge his nearby cabin, where he engaged in missionary work among the Oneida Indians. She gave birth to twin boys on August 17, 1770, and, when she was well enough, returned to Oneida with her babies. She stayed at the Herkimers for a total of nineteen weeks.

20. [Interior] General West Bedchamber: Beds and mattresses of this period were quite different from those that we sleep on today. In the 18th century, for those who could afford one, the bed would probably have been a four-poster with rope, sacking or slats at the bottom to hold an assortment of mattresses, including down-filled mattresses on top with wool, moss or hair filled mattresses as the next layer, and straw on the bottom, depending on a family’s income and what materials were available. Although Nicholas Herkimer’s will did not mention beds or mattresses, after his brother, George Herkimer, died, an inventory of the house did list 4 bedsteads and 4 feather mattresses. Currently on display in this room are a barn loom, spinning wheel and other textile production equipment. While early interpretation of the house focused on textile production, that activity would have likely taken place in a barn.
21. Attic. Although the house’s attic is not open to the public, it played an important practical role in the Herkimer household, providing storage for off season clothing and textiles not in use, and it may have accommodated overnight guests when the house was full. Though much of the historic fabric of the house was lost during the 1960s restoration, some evidence of the earlier building remains in the attic, offering important insight into the house’s original construction and later alteration.

22. Vault/Root Cellar. In Herkimer’s day structures like this one would have been used for storing and protecting valuables, especially gunpowder. As a militia officer, Herkimer might have stored gunpowder here, but he also traded and may have stored other valuable goods, such as rum. An 1890 painting of this structure by Rufus Grider shows what looks like a c1750 Palatine house on top of the arch. At that time, however, the building was being used as a stable. In the early 20th century, the vault was believed to have been a root cellar—used to store vegetables.

23. Former door on side elevation. The different brick colors on this side wall illustrate some of the changes that were made to the house over time. Photographs and postcards of the house prior to the state’s 1913 acquisition show an elongated window at this location. During the early 19th century, that opening was likely for a door. Around 1915, a door was put back into the opening, along with a set of exterior steps. That door was later removed and the opening was bricked over sometime before 1959.

24. Well. At least 9 enslaved people lived on the estate. We do not know much about their lives, but some likely served domestic functions in the house, including cooking, cleaning, tending to chamber pots and keeping fireplaces lit and stocked with wood. Other enslaved people probably worked outside, tending to the farm or livestock and clearing woodlands. Herkimer also may have rented them to neighboring farmers, particularly during periods of planting or harvesting, when
labor was most in demand. A 19th-century newspaper article about a descendant of a former Herkimer slave claimed that there were 33 enslaved people on the property—causing speculation that Herkimer may have been involved in the buying, selling and trafficking of enslaved people.

25. **Cellar.** During the 18th century, basement kitchens were common in the northern colonies. Enslaved people lived and worked in these rooms—each with its own entrance, they likely served as spaces where food was being prepared and stored. Unlike the elegant spaces for family and guests above, these utilitarian spaces were created for hard work, without thought of comfort.

26. **[Interior] Kitchen General:** The kitchen was reconstructed in the 1960s based on evidence available at the time and an understanding of period practices. The kitchen is in its original location and is furnished with period-appropriate objects. In the 18th century, this kitchen would have been a hot, humid and busy work place, especially when the Herkimers were entertaining. Food was cooked, probably by an enslaved person, on an open hearth. During this period, people generally ate a light breakfast followed by the largest meal of the day—a midday dinner with meat or fowl, seasonal fruits and vegetables, and bread or biscuits. Light refreshments would have been served with tea around 4 pm, and a light supper was prepared for the late evening. Leftover meat might have supplemented breakfast and supper.

27. **[Interior] 18th Century Foodways:** The sights and sounds of a working farm would have greeted you when you arrived at the Herkimer estate. In the inventory taken after George Herkimer’s death in 1789, 8 dairy cows a churn were listed, suggesting that the family consumed or sold a lot of butter and cheese, most likely produced on the estate. The inventory also listed a large number of livestock, including pigs, hogs, sheep, lambs, heifers, geese and oxen. Some of these animals probably supplied the meat that was consumed at the midday dinner. The estate also produced primarily wheat and probably some other grains in smaller
quantities, staples of the Palatine diet. Travelers passing through the Mohawk Valley in the 18th century mentioned the region's vast fields of wheat.

28. [Interior] Enslaved at Herkimer Home: Like other wealthy families at the time, the Herkimers probably entertained on a regular basis, keeping the kitchen servants very busy. An enslaved person was probably the cook perhaps with an assistant, who were responsible for all the cleaning, preparing, chopping, boiling, roasting and baking that happened in the kitchen. Once the fires were blazing, the kitchen would have been a very hot place to work, especially in summer. There was also an enormous amount of back-breaking hauling and cleaning associated with keeping the kitchen functioning, such as carrying water from the well for cooking and disposing of it afterwards. While some of the enslaved people likely slept in the rooms attached to the kitchen, it is unknown where the remaining workers stayed, but it is possible that some lived in an out building.

29. Front elevation. Herkimer Home is a fine example of late eighteenth century Georgian style architecture in the Mohawk Valley. A pleasing sense of symmetry is one of the most noticeable characteristics of the style. The front and rear facades of the house are symmetrical, with center entrances flanked by an equal number of evenly-spaced windows. And, on the upper story, five windows are all equally spaced as well and aligned to the lower story, giving an overall appearance of regularity. The use of symmetry continues inside—the first and second floors feature wide center halls flanked by four rooms with evenly spaced door and window openings.

30. Monument Trail Marker. The Battle of Oriskany was one of the most violent and bloodiest battles of the American Revolution. General Herkimer, his Tryon County militia and their Indian allies were on their way to help defend the besieged Fort Stanwix when they were ambushed by British loyalist forces. Taken by surprise, many of Herkimer’s men were seriously wounded or killed. In the midst of the chaos, Herkimer, who was also gravely injured, regrouped his men and continued to lead them into the battle. His courage under fire saved the American forces from a complete defeat and eventually forced a draw with the British. Herkimer’s actions at Oriskany were a key factor in the American success at the Battle of Saratoga two months later, considered by many to be an important turning point in the American Revolution. Fourteen historic markers commemorate the 40-mile march of the Patriots and their Indian allies.

31. Recreated garden. An early canal survey map shows a formal garden on the property near this location, offering evidence that a garden was on the property at the beginning of the 19th century. Vegetables, flowers and herbs were probably grown in the garden—a common practice during this period. Fresh seasonal vegetables like beans, peas, cabbages, melons, pumpkins, gourds, tomatoes and peppers were stables of the colonial diet, and herbs and flowers served both culinary and medicinal purposes.

32. View of highlands. In the 18th century, the Appalachians, which include the Adirondack and Catskill mountains, created a formidable barrier for colonists looking to expand westward. Although famous passes like the Cumberland Gap provided access, the Mohawk River Valley was one of the only naturally flat openings in the mountains from Georgia to Canada. Control of this route to the west was important to both Europeans
and Native Americans, and Herkimer Home was built near the river to take advantage of trade and commerce along this east-west corridor.

33. Replica Bateaux. Bateaux were the workhorse vessels of 18th-century river trade. The flat-bottomed vessels were typically 25-40 feet long, pointed at both ends and could be rowed or poled. The “tractor-trailers” of their day, bateaux carried men, military supplies, trade goods, animals, wheat and agricultural produce across the rivers and lakes of colonial New York. At Little Falls, however, bateaux had to be portaged, or carried, because they could not negotiate the rocky rapids. Nicholas Herkimer controlled that mile-long portage and charged a fee for its use—profiting from the hundreds of bateaux that traveled east or west every year. The portage began here at Herkimer Home, roughly along the path where this replica bateau now sits.

34. River and fields from immediate environs. The alluvial flats of the Mohawk River were incredibly fertile and well-suited to growing wheat. The Mohawk Valley ranked among the greatest wheat-producing regions in America until the Midwest was settled and cultivated in the 1830s. Soon after the arrival of the Palatines in 1722, wheat production became the community’s economic mainstay. Nicholas Herkimer had a grist mill on his property and was heavily involved in river trade—meaning his mill could grind his neighbors’ wheat and his bateaux could transport it to market in Albany, making a profit at every stage.

35. River, detail. From this spot you can see the house as Nicholas Herkimer intended visitors to see it over 250 years ago. Situated on a rise above the river flats, the large and imposing brick house was the centerpiece of his estate, and helped to convey the wealth and sophistication of its owner, particularly in the sparsely settled Mohawk Valley.

36. Iroquois. Prior to the 1720s, this land was home to the Mohawk Nation, keepers of the eastern door of the Iroquois Confederacy, an alliance of Indian nations. As early settlers moved west across the state, so did the Iroquois, and this area became populated with European colonists, most notably the Palatine Germans. When the Revolutionary War broke out, the Great Peace of the Iroquois Confederacy was shattered by civil war among the Indian nations. At the Battle of Oriskany, warriors of the formerly allied nations fought against one another for the first time in centuries.

37. Herkimer’s grave. Herkimer lost almost half of his men in the ambush at Oriskany during the six hours of bloody, hand-to-hand combat that followed. Seneca warrior “Governor Blacksnake” described the fighting, saying “tomahawk and knives and swords to cut down men...there I have seen the most dead bodies [that I ever did see].” During the ambush, Herkimer’s leg was shattered and his horse killed. After the battle, he was carried back to his house, where ten days later, a surgeon amputated the wounded leg. The next day, Herkimer died of complications from the amputation. His grave remained unmarked until 1847, when a family member paid to erect a gravestone in his honor.

38. Lack of Maria’s grave. In his will, Herkimer left half of the house and a portion of his estate to his young widow Maria. In January 1778, only five months after her husband’s death, Maria sold her portion of the estate and cut her ties with the Herkimer family. She eventually remarried and moved out of the area, but we do not know where she was buried.
39. Alida & George’s grave. After Nicholas’s widow Maria sold her portion of the estate, his brother George gained full ownership. After George’s death in 1788, his widow Alida and his other heirs divided the estate into 29 parcels. George’s son John inherited the main house, and in 1814 sold it and 222 acres out of the family.

40. Zinc monument. The Connor family owned Herkimer’s house and surrounding property from about the 1830s to the 1860s, and made several changes to the building. This marker for Connor family members is made out of zinc, a material that was popular for gravestones after the Civil War. Typically, a family would order a zinc tombstone from a catalog, choosing the design, decorative motif and epitaph.

41. Conclusion: Thank you for visiting Herkimer Home State Historic Site. We hope you enjoyed exploring the property and learning about its history. This concludes the audio tour. Please return your audio wand to the front desk.