

The Window

Volume 1, No. 1

ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

A Welcome Message:

From the Mayor Diana Smith

As the Mayor of the most beautiful Village in Upstate New York, I am extremely excited to join fellow Village Board members and our entire Historic Preservation team in publishing the first edition of *The Window*.

The concept of this newsletter has been years in the making. It has always been my belief that Seneca Falls community members would share a stronger collective enthusiasm for our fascinating and rich historic character – if only we could more fully sense it, live it, and perceive its benefits.

Village Planner Fran Caraccilo possesses a unique combination of talent: years of experience in preservation, a love of history,
Mayor continued on page 2

*From the Commission
Chair Susan Noble*

Welcome to the first issue of *The Window on Historic Preservation*. The goal of this publication is to inform, explain and entertain. Preservation (“to maintain in safety from injury, peril or harm; to keep in perfect or unaltered condition”) can mean many things in a community. In the greater picture, preservation is usually perceived as a worthwhile effort. An environmentalist working to save land for wildlife, a scout troop giving up a weekend to clean up and rescue an old cemetery are seen as items worthy of news coverage. A car enthusiast will spend many hours and dollars to make his “classic” as close to original as possible. Few will question those ideals.

Sometimes, when it becomes personal, as with our homes, it is difficult to see the overall picture of the neighborhood and to work within the guidelines of the district. But our homes and our neighborhoods are a lasting piece of history. They will show future generations what life was like and the roots from which they came.
Chair continued on page 2

The Window

1

January 2006



Through The Window

Through *The Window* above we can see a Seneca Falls streetscape from the early 1900's. The Hoskins Block, the building with the clock tower, is of the Italianate style. The Italianate style is distinguished by wide cornices, arched windows, and decorative brackets.

During this time period in Seneca Falls the Barge Canal was widened and Van Cleef Lake was created; nationally, women were granted the right to vote and Americans had fought in WWI.

Photograph Courtesy Seneca Falls Historical Society

HERITAGE & PRESERVATION

Mayor continued from page 1

and expertise in graphic arts. Through his beautifully designed presentation of *The Window*, we can explore the many benefits of living in historic Seneca Falls.

In coming editions, Fran, along with Preservation Commission members and a variety of guest authors, will be sharing knowledge of our community's history as well as expertise in preservation techniques, a better understanding of New York State's confusing preservation guidelines, and – most importantly -- tips for making winning proposals to our local Heritage Preservation Commission.

This is the opportunity for better communication that I have hoped for, for a very long time. I have had countless conversations with community residents about the perceived benefits – and frustrations – of living in a historic community. I have also done some research on Historic Preservation -- and the increased property values, more frequent grant opportunities, and enhanced development and investment it brings to communities like ours.

I have been successful in challenging some strong opponents of Preservation to consider whether their position is based on limited exposure. If a resident's only experience with preservation is restrictive or negative, how can we expect them to appreciate how preservation improves our quality of life?

In the famous Christmas story, ghosts allowed Scrooge to clearly see what life would be like without Christmas joy. Without a "Ghost of Architecture Past" to demonstrate for us, property owners in our Historic District can't make a similar comparison. Tragically, so many benefits of historic preservation are virtually intangible. Meanwhile, stories circulate, frustration levels rise and many ask, "Why do we put ourselves through this inconvenience?"

In marriage, it's love that gets us through the trials of personal irritation. We're reminded daily just why we embrace the compromise. Similarly, it's time Seneca Falls residents have the opportunity to sense the "love" of history which drives so many of our community members to work hard to support it, enhance it, and promote it – for everyone's benefit. It is my hope *The Window* can be that opportunity.

I truly believe historic preservation makes sense for Seneca Falls -- aesthetically, emotionally, and financially. I look forward to learning more about historic preservation through *The Window*. Seneca Falls is special *because* of our history. Its preservation will ensure that the story of our community will continue to be told for generations to come.



Chair continued from page 1

We are not an old country, yet, but it is important to begin now to save our heritage, one building at a time.

In this publication we will try to explain the reasons behind the decisions, share ideas on home maintenance, tell a little about the history of Seneca Falls, challenge you with questions and hopefully bring you some understanding of the Heritage Preservation Commission.

The Window ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

is a publication of the
Village of Seneca Falls

Village Board of Trustees
Mayor, Diana Smith
Philip Dressing
Sylvester Campese
Anthony Petrocchia
Tim Masino

Heritage Preservation Commission
Chair, Susan Noble
Cathleen Johnson
Patricia Gere
Susan Harkey
Bonnie Vaughn

Edited by Francis Caraccilo

The Window on Historic Preservation is an historic preservation newsletter for the people of Seneca Falls, NY. This publication is also available online at www.senecafalls.com. Questions or comments about this publication, or about historic preservation may be directed to 568-6894, sfha@rochester.rr.com, or by writing to: Planning Department, 60 State Street, Seneca Falls, NY 13148.

Pride in Our Heritage

Francis Caraccilo

What is an historic district? It is a specifically defined area judged by a municipality to have sufficient significance in history, for any number of reasons, to be protected by law against inappropriate changes that could alter its character, obscuring or otherwise negatively affecting its significance. Simply put, the local government, recognizing the significance, declares that it is a benefit to the community - the general public - to protect and preserve that area or areas.

A district can have a single significance: the neighborhood that once was a local marketplace and later expanded to be a major banking center. Or a district may have multiple themes of significance: the local marketplace neighborhood that started the major banking industry, and was also the place where a future president of the country grew up, and the neighborhood contains intact examples of architecture that reflect those particular aspects of the community's past growth and development.

Historic buildings are non-renewable resources that cannot be duplicated once they are destroyed. They are also our physical links to the past, subtly providing us with a sense of personal, and even national identity. Very often it is the unchecked loss or alteration of historic buildings that convinces a community to begin a preservation program.



The Armitage - Demolished

Our village's historic district has multiple layers of significance. These include the setting for the first women's rights convention; the rapid industrialization of the area along the Seneca River; the fact that Seneca Falls is situated on all of the early travel routes used to cross the state; the early twentieth century Barge Canal project and how it forever changed the face of this village; and the excellent examples of architecture of various types and styles that still exist here.

Few people would disagree that the grand brick mansion that once belonged to a famous industrialist such as Seabury Gould is significant. However, the average citizen living in the average, simple house might wonder "Why is my simple

A SENSE OF PLACE

house important? What is so important about the people who once occupied my house? Or my neighborhood?" Maybe no one even knows their names, and even if their names are known, they certainly never appeared in a history book. But the physical "glue" that ties our village together on all levels is our neighborhoods where everyday people lived and worked and played and socialized.

One of the roles of historic preservation is to protect designated properties so that generations to come may learn the other, more common story that can often be found only in the properties themselves, because the story wasn't considered "big enough" to make it into a history book. After all, it just isn't practical to expect that written history should include *everything* that ever happened. Stories such as *What Early Neighborhoods Were Like* and *Architectural Styling That Was Available Even To The Average Citizen* and *How Neighborhood Status May Have Evolved Over The Years* are just a few. They may not sound like very exciting stories but they're the stories being told whenever someone reminisces about "the good old days" or remembers tales of the neighborhood as told by grandma or grandpa.

Many of the houses in these neighborhoods have been changed in various ways over the years, but most still retain enough of their past styling and material to indicate or suggest what they once were. Continue to change these houses in ways that use materials or methods considered incompatible or inappropriate by established historic preservation standards and in relatively little time those stories get more difficult to conjure up from the mists of what remains.

Remember, certain things happened here that did not happen anywhere else in the country. Other things that happened in our history are important pieces of our cultural heritage, that is, the things that make us what we are today.

Historic preservation laws have long been accepted by the courts because of the public purpose or benefit they provide. The goal of the historic district is to honor our heritage by retaining whatever physical links to the past are still available. We can't deny history. The women's rights convention happened here; Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived here; a thriving pump industry was born here; the role of the canal locally and nationally is a fact; and average citizens lived, worked, played and died here. To dismiss the significance of these examples of local history is to dismiss the local link to our national heritage. Understanding this may be one way of appreciating the district and the public benefit intended to educate and enrich the lives and experiences of those yet to follow us here.

MEETING SCHEDULE

2006 Heritage Preservation Commission Meetings

• Meetings start at 7pm and are held in the meeting room at 60 State Street

January 24	July 10
February 28	August 22
March 28	September 26
April 25	October 24
May 23	November 21
June 27	December 12

• Procedural Training Sessions begin at 6:30pm before each meeting

Where Am I?

This photo depicts an architectural detail found somewhere in the Seneca Falls Historic District.

Can you identify the building?



To have a project included on a meeting agenda for review please submit to the Village Planning Office, at 60 State Street, a completed and signed application form and supporting materials by noon of the Wednesday before a scheduled meeting.

Contact the Village Historic Preservation Coordinator Francis Caraccilo at:
60 State Street
Seneca Falls, NY 13148
315 • 568 • 6894
email: sfha@rochester.rr.com
Office Hours Mon. - Fri. 8am to 4:30pm

The Window

ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION
Village of Seneca Falls
60 State Street
Seneca Falls, NY 13148