



THE PRESERVATIONIST

MARCH/APRIL 2021

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A Message from the President

Dear Landmarkers,

Just like most of you folks, I was very happy to see winter come to an end! And I am happy to report that the mansions and grounds fared well. No issues or significant damage anywhere, which has not been the case in recent years. The only area that will need some clean up is out in back of the mansions. We had some heavy weather last fall and we lost a number of large limbs from the bigger trees. A little cutting up took place last year but poor weather brought that to an end. We will get back to that once the weather improves a little more and the ground firms up. Regardless if its inside or outside, we are all eager to turn the lights back on at Rutger Park!

We hope to get back to our ongoing roof repair on the #1 mansion very soon. A lot of work still needs to be done but we are in good shape. Overall, the project has gone well so far. Planning for this year's work has begun and we hope to avoid the delays we encountered last summer. However, there is no telling as to how this construction season will go. Both the weather and the remaining Covid protocols and restrictions will probably impact our progress to some degree.

Another thing we really hope to get back to sometime soon is our Program & Events schedule! Unfortunately, we are unsure of when we could start to consider some events. The many variables we are seeing with the pandemic are forcing us to hold off on any planning. Maybe we will get to host something over the summer? Or maybe it will have to wait until late summer or early fall? We just don't know at the moment and that is both frustrating and depressing to all of us. A few dates have been mentioned but they are very tentative at this point. We have a lot of fun hosting those events but the funds they all raise are the important part. We continue to be at a disadvantage without them.

Going back to our ability to 'keep the lights on', I can not thank you folks enough for helping us do just that. This past year was difficult, but the difficulty was lessened greatly for us by all of you. The memberships, the monetary donations, donations of time, expertise or services- all the individual contributions, kept us going through a very uncertain time. Your contributions alone kept the restoration effort moving forward. The progress was slowed but it never stopped! Sadly, it looks like we still have some challenging time ahead of us, but I am confident the historic preservation will not suffer because of it.

Again, thank you all for your continued support of the Landmarks Society and Utica's historic Rutger Park.

Steve Grant

President



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MARCH/APRIL 2021



Table of Contents

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE	1
NEWS FROM GREATER UTICA	2
IN MEMORIAM	3
MISSION STATEMENT	3
SPECIAL THANKS	3
THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS	3
STOP THE DESTRUCTION	4
FOR SALE/RENT	5
SCENIC & HISTORIC	5 - 7
ROME MURAL	8

MERCHANDISING

Our Merchandise Committee is at work with plans to increase our Landmarks Society shop. New ideas include mugs, glassware, t-shirts, and so much more are being considered.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE AN
EMAIL VERSION OF OUR NEWSLETTERS -
CONTACT US AT 315-732-7376.



NEWS FROM AROUND GREATER UTICA— by Michael Bosak

Fate of Iconic Rome Building and Mural are still in Question



It's hard to miss the huge, colorful mural that adorns the west-facing façade of 233-235 West Dominick Street in Rome, particularly if you are traveling east on Erie Boulevard. The mural was painted in 2001 by Jane Grace Taylor, a former RFA Art Teacher, and depicts Revolutionary War hero Brigadier General Peter Gansevoort on horseback. It has often been mistaken for a likeness of Paul Revere given the history of and proximity to Revere Copper and Brass. Taylor was inspired by a film that was shown at the nearby Fort Stanwix that depicted Gansevoort during the siege of the fort. The mural is 60 feet high and it took around \$1000 worth of paint to complete it, including a protective varnish finish.

However, the building, which was sold at the end of 2019 and on which the mural exists, has been deemed unsafe by the City of Rome. The front and side facades are visibly leaning, bricks are falling from the exterior walls and windows and doors are in a state of disrepair. A fence has surrounded the building since late 2019. As of this writing, it is unclear if there are any building repairs and/or developments planned but it is clear that the structure continues to deteriorate and its fate is further in jeopardy. At one point over a year ago, an architect had apparently checked out the

structure and deemed the building to be sound, according to the previous owner.

It is most unfortunate because Rome lost most of its 19th century downtown during the tragic 1970's-era urban renewal movement, and this is one of only a handful of those remaining.

Former Rome School Building Demolished for a New Car Wash

It's been nearly invisible among the numerous commercial establishments that line Erie Boulevard West in Rome. That is, unless you stopped to look for it, and you realize what a fine, attractive and substantial building it was. The former West Rome Elementary School Building at 1315 Erie Boulevard West was purchased by the Hoffman Development Corp. of Albany for the express purpose of demolition; the Rome Planning Board recently approved the company's request to build a 6400 square foot car wash on the site. There was significant opposition to the proposed project, including Landmarker and Oneida County Historian Joseph Bottini who declared it a historic site that should be preserved. The Planning Board found no legal reason to deny the Hoffman request, saying that it met all city codes, including safety and construction guidelines. Those who opposed the project were required to submit their comments on line or otherwise in writing due to pandemic protocols, and those comments were read at the meeting of the Planning Board. Despite the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process, which has been previously shown to be badly flawed during the Utica Downtown Hospital review, and numerous negative comments, the Rome Planning Board found for the developers.



The building has been vacant and for sale for several years. It was recently used as a veterinary clinic and the interior was apparently remodeled. At least from the outside it appeared to be in excellent shape with beautiful limestone block exterior facades. As an appeasement, Hoffman stated that they would reuse at least some of the beautiful limestone blocks in front of the new facility for a sitting area and placement of a historic marker, which apparently now suffices as a historic preservation mitigation element.

Opposition comments included addressing the issue that the building is not currently on the National Register of Historic Places, but that it should be eligible for that designation.

Hoffman Development plans another car wash at the site of the former Rite Aid building on Black River Boulevard that will also be demolished.

Ultimately, the former West Rome School has succumbed to development pressures exacerbated by extensive commercial development all around it.

The Beeches in Rome to be Purchased by Nascentia Health

Nascentia Health of Syracuse is under contract to purchase the former Beeches complex at 7900 Turin Road in Rome. The 50-acre plus site closed in 2018 and has been for sale, but a major stipulation of the sale was that it remain an asset and resource to the community, and Nascentia's plans apparently fulfill this requirement. It has been owned and operated by the Destito family since 1949, and when it closed, was in its third generation of ownership. It consists of The Beeches Restaurant and Conference Center and The Inn at The Beeches, along with a number of other ancillary buildings that are occupied by various businesses. Those tenants will not be affected by the purchase according to sources. The sale is scheduled to be finalized by mid-April.

The current plans are for mixed-use development: the Inn is slated to become independent senior housing that will include supportive services, single family residences specifically for seniors are scheduled to be constructed on the grounds, and the current restaurant and conference center will be renovated and updated as communal space that will be available for private meetings and events.

The landmark and historic Beeches Complex will remain a vital and vibrant asset to the Rome community through the care and concern of the Destito family and the sensitive development plans of Nascentia Health.

IN MEMORIAM

WILLIAM ARTHUR MILLS, JR. | 1953-2021

Passed away on Thursday, February 4th, 2021 at age 67 with his loving husband/partner and friend Scott Molampy by his side.

He was born in Utica on February 23, 1953, a son of the late William and Jeanette (Dietz) Mills, Sr.

Will was a fine artist and painter, while his partner Scott was a commercial artist. They met in 1982 and moved to New York City in 1984. They formed Geppetto Soft Sculpture, Inc./Geppetto Studios.

Will received a BFA (Bachelor of Fine Art) and studied art at the Maine College of Art. He studied many religious faiths, and became an interfaith minister, ordained at St. John the Divine Cathedral in Manhattan in the mid-1990s.

After 33 years in NYC, Will and Scott returned to Whitesboro.

Will is survived by sister-in-law Tracy Mills, wife of his late brother, John, and their son Grant; Jason Warsala, son of his late sister Priscilla; and his wife Suzanne and their children Jack and Julianne.

There was no funeral or calling hours. Arrangements were made by the Dimpleby Funeral Home in Whitesboro.

Will designed the iconic 1981 Landmarks Society Utica poster that are still available. Several years ago, Will autographed a handful of the posters, and those too are available.



Copies of this poster are still available for purchase from The Landmarks Society for \$10 each while the supply lasts. As Utica continues to change and grow, this could well become a collectible item. To order your copy, call the Landmarks Society at 315-732-7376 or message on Facebook.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Landmarks Society is to actively promote the preservation and restoration of historically and architecturally significant buildings and sites in the Utica area. Through projects, community education, advocacy, marketing and planned activities, the Society engages its members, partners and the community in preserving the past and protecting the future.

The Landmarks Society was chartered by the State of New York in October 1974 as a nonprofit, educational corporation. The purposes for which the Landmarks Society was created include the following: 1) To protect, enhance, perpetuate and preserve buildings, landmarks and other districts of historic, architectural and cultural significance; and 2) To acquire by purchase, gift, device, or otherwise, the title to, or the custody and control of sites, buildings and areas of historical and cultural significance."

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS!

Martha Brody
Beth & Don Stookey
Michael J. Lehman
Moon Nimon
Donna Beckett
Mrs. Walter Green Kincaid
Annette Parsons
Anna T. & Paul D'Ambrosio

Mary E. Fenocchi
Maureen Croop
Adele Reilly
Marilyn Slack
Mark Swire
Maureen & James Maher
Richard & Martha Widdicombe
Joan Blanchfield

Mary Cardinale
Harry & Kathy Lenz
Robert & Mary Schepisi
Nick & Carol Carparelli
David & Elaine Trevisani
Lois Pirro

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

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The Tianaderrah Foundation

My righteous indignation turns to sorrow with real tears when I learn of the destruction of the historic legacy of past magnanimous benefactors.

At times, when it involves a modicum of nature in an urban setting, the experience is too disgusting to bear.

How much of the "Quality of Life" amenities must a community destroy before the mere existence of life is denigrated beyond the biological well-being of its inhabitants?

One might contemplate the unjust conduct of civic affairs of a community when the leaders ignore bequeathed urban parks intended as places of solace giving an opportunity to commune with nature.

During the 19th century urban parks were a necessity for quality of life.

During that time of 9–10-hour work days six days a week, a walk in the park might have been the only diversion from the dull routine of life. Here one could sit or stroll while communing with nature and nature's creatures. An added feature might have been a beautiful fountain to give quality to the ambiance.

The urban parks have long ago lost their luster. Sitting on a park bench and enjoying the private conversation with "a girl of your heart" is seldom part of the urban landscape. I fondly remember many quiet evenings enjoying the company of a young lady (who became my wife) courting in the only way we could afford. In this day of impersonal means of communication (read cellphones), and a more detached means of transportation (read cars) displacing the intimate horse and buggy; parks have been replaced by a multiple array of entertainment venues.

Parks are left today only to lend a scenic quality infused among the many mundane array of concrete block buildings and blacktop streets.

Most of those places in Utica were gifted by the many gracious benefactors such as the Munson, Williams, Proctor and Johnson families.

To absolve our local government's responsibility for honoring those gifts is a rude response to those wonderful citizens of the past who shared their wealth with a city they loved, and with the folks who were to enjoy those gifts in perpetuity.

One could excuse the leaders' lack of responsibility by declaring an absence of knowledge about the inception of those parks and a lack of compassion for the more noble qualities of an urban existence. Or, one could express disgust with those leaders for their ignorance and worse, their unwillingness to be enlightened of their void of local history understanding.

In 2003, the Central New York Conservancy had a study done of the "Historic Parks in Utica" (Katechen Cardamone). This organization has been growing in its mission with its most recent director, Phil Bean, performing admirably in maintaining and improving the major parkway system of parks; following the good work of previous efforts.

"A Sustainable Neighborhood-Based Master Plan" was created in 2011. It included a chapter on "Parks, Recreation, Arts/Culture & Historic Preservation.

In 2017, the Utica Common Council developed a Utica Parks Master Plan (Mark Williamson chairman of the council's Parks Committee is well-grounded in local history and has a compassion for the well-being of the city of Utica). The plan outlined the attention to be given to 21 of the city's neighborhood parks.

There are many neglected city parks or misused former parks. A few listed below.

Johnson Park was given to the city by the Alexander B. Johnson for one dollar in memory of his parents. He lived and prospered in Utica and "felt much good will toward its inhabitants." Although technically still in existence, the beauty of the fountain and pond once in the center have been gone for many years.

Watson Williams Park was given to the city in 1897 by Rachel Proctor. At one time it contained a pool with park benches enjoyed by many as a place of respite. Eventually, it was reduced to a smaller concrete pool adjacent to

a baseball diamond. In 1990, the park was transferred to the Utica School District so an elementary school could be built there.

Seymour Park has been allowed to become obliterated with other uses. How does an enlightened government allow a gift of such generosity become desecrated with a high school field (football) with locker/shower building, a professional baseball stadium, and a parking lot for a private business? The frosting on this un-eatable cake is rental space for a private outdoor advertising sign obtrusively jutting above it all. In extension, this gift was given to the people when it is graciously handed to the city. The people ought to have the intended use of that gift, or have input how it is to be parceled.

The Chancellor Park of my interest at the moment is piqued by the notion of using another neighborhood park as a receptacle for other than its original intention. To use our local urban parks for other than a "quality of life respite" while experiencing a small bit of nature is shortsighted and destructive.

In 1810, village of Utica officers "set aside land (about 3 acres) for a park where people could sit under giant elms during the summer months and just read a good book, play with their children or relax." It featured a large fountain depicting Neptune on a chariot drawn by two dolphins from which water sprayed for about 30 feet. It was nine feet tall - set in a basin of 50 feet in diameter. At one time (1830s) the Common Council authorized the building of a fence around the park "to keep hogs and ducks from invading its sacred precincts."

Its "sacred" precincts are now in danger of being invaded by government's willingness to desecrate its "once bucolic" setting with other modifications; not in keeping with an urban park's purpose.

To be sure, one must be cognizant of the following:

"Every blade of grass, scoop of dirt or stone wall that has significant history attached, is not worthy of impeding legitimate progress.

However, progress should not have the over-arching right to denigrate our valuable and beneficial legacy.

Some events and places are nationally or internationally important. They must be given extreme consideration when making a decision to destroy their places or the memory of their existence. Some events and places are of local or esoteric nature and require careful contemplation as to whether they are worthy enough for preservation and preventing potential progress."

Utica has lost too much of its history and local landmarks through benign neglect and foolish decisions (made with little understanding or respect) by too many ignorant leaders. Ignorance is no excuse, because there are many groups and individuals who would be willing to share information that could lead to better, more noble development. The Landmarks Society members is one group of very interested, knowledgeable people. They have worked diligently for over 40 years with efforts to preserve a venerable Utica park on Rutger Street.

When a city ignores its roots, the cradle of its birth, sentencing that location to a shameful existence, someone must stand up and call out the sins of our elected officials. How can any official proclaim his/her love for the city as its birthplace park is obliterated by a beautiful bridge in an improper location? This one decision relegated Bagg Commemorative Park to a level of forgotten importance. Again, what do we conclude when a gift from another Proctor (Maria) is allowed to become a blight on the landscape of the neighborhood of our city's birth?

Having a competent knowledgeable director of urban planning, many studies and long-term park plans available, in addition to the many local historians willing to share their perspective are all available. The government of Utica needs to allow some of its "know-it-all" attitude (by its leaders) to dissipate and be replaced by a collective spirit moving forward.

How can we continue to allow the bastardization of some areas, and the total destruction of iconic architecture? Which nail (poor decision) in the coffin of Utica will spell the quality-of-life death of our noble city?

FOR SALE/RENT

in the Utica Scenic and Historic Preservation District

Among several properties located in Utica's S&HP District are the following four:

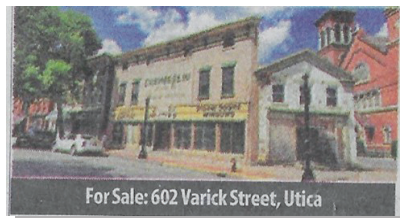
106 Hotel Street (prior to 1860) \$150,000 MLS# S1318648

Per the realtor a "Great location in the heart of downtown Utica. Empty canvas w/ great architectural look like no other." Situated in the National Register of Historic Places listed Lower Genesee Street Historic District and Utica's Bagg's Square West neighborhood on one of the oldest streets in the city, it is adjacent to a vacant lot at the northeast corner of Whitesboro and Hotel Streets that was originally the site of the Manhattan Branch Bank of New York City- Utica's first bank. The large brick three story Federal style building was erected about 1810 and occupied by the bank until it ceased business in 1818. Thereafter it was the residence of Colonel John E. Hinman, who as Utica mayor in 1851. After his death the property was occupied by different uses lastly in 1917 at the time of its demolition by Isadore Rapaport who ran a boarding house with furnished rooms rented by the day or week and the New York Jewish Restaurant there. These two brick former residences were most recently used by the Seneca Brass and Plating Works.



The two connecting buildings represent the last remaining examples of Greek Revival and Italianate style residential architecture in Downtown Utica or any evidence that this was once a thriving mixed use residential and commercial neighborhood.

Consult Howard Hanna Real Estate Services, Utica/New Hartford Office, 141 Genesee Street, New Hartford, NY 13413 at www.howardhanna.com or 315.735.8515 for additional information.



For Sale: 602 Varick Street, Utica

602 Varick Street (c. 1865)

Per the realtor "redevelopment opportunity at the former Chamberlain within the historic Brewery District. 3 apartments for additional income & floor plans available".

In addition, period photographs of building exist for those wishing to achieve an historically appropriate renovation as required by the Utica Scenic and Historic Preservation District design guidelines.

Consult Pavia Real Estate Services at www.paviarealestate.com or 315.736.1555 for additional information.

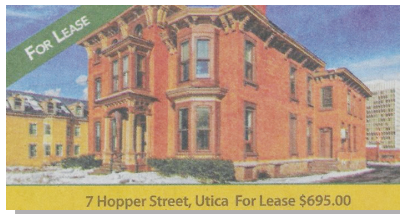
1103 Parkway East (c. 1926) \$359,900

Per the realtor "come see this historic home located on the prestigious Parkway East with 4,600+/- SF of living space, 4 bedrooms & 4 full baths with 1st floor bedroom, there is room for everything".

Located in one of Utica's five Olmsted Brothers designed Garden neighborhoods- Sherman Gardens and the Utica Scenic and Historic Preservation District- the painted stone and clapboard house (c. 1926) is the work of noted Utica architectural firm Bagg & Newkirk. Built for real estate developer Harry W. Roberts and Mary Sage Roberts, the garden was designed by the Olmsted Brothers' firm and included low stone walls, paved terrace, fountain, pool and arbor. The house was published in the December 1926 issue of *The Architect*. The original Olmsted designed site and garden layout options also exist for the owner wishing to restore the lot to its historically correct intended configuration.



Consult Pavia Real Estate Residential Division at www.PaviaRealEstate.com or 315.736.1555 for additional information.



7 Hopper Street, Utica For Lease \$695.00

7 Hopper Street (c. 1865) rent \$695/mo. MLS# S1312750

Per the realtor, this large former Italianate style brick residence-at one time the office of prominent Utica architect Linn Kinne- and currently used for offices boosts a "great location, walk anywhere downtown. Remodeled office space-single or multiple offices available".

Consult Howard Hanna Real Estate Services, Utica/New Hartford Office, 141 Genesee Street, New Hartford, NY 13413 at www.howardhanna.com or 315.735.8515 for additional information.

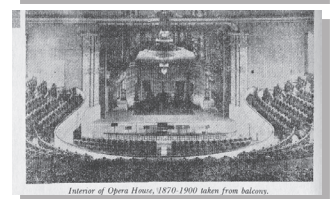
Scenic and Historic

LOST UTICA - by Michael Lehman, AIA

The Utica Opera House 1871-1900 | Lafayette at Washington Street

Before there was the Stanley Theater.....

In March of 1870, the Mechanics' Association announced plans for a new "Opera House", designed in the elaborate *Second Empire* or *parvenu* style, very popular at the time, to be erected on the northeast corner of Lafayette and Washington Streets. The first floor was to be occupied by five storefronts. The entrance to the main stairway leading to the upstairs performance space would be the first doors at the east end of the front of the building, toward the Genesee Street end. The stairway, fifteen feet wide, ascended to the lobby with three doors opening from the lobby to the main hall. The building was 70 1/2 feet by 80 feet in size.



Interior of Opera House, 1870-1900 taken from balcony.

The stage was to be 60 by 42 ½ feet on the west side with a 43-foot proscenium. Private boxes flanked the curtain. A magnificent prismatic crystal chandelier with its one hundred gas jets shed a softened light over the whole auditorium. Almost 1,700 elegantly upholstered chairs were provided for the spectators.

In 1906, the history of the opera house was briefly related by Carroll T. Waldron in *A Hundred Years of Amusement in Utica*:

“The new playhouse was well attended from the start, refuting the prophesy volunteered by a visiting manager (probably from the Wieting Opera House in Syracuse which opened in the same year and at 1017 seats was about half the size of Utica’s,) who, glancing over the expanse of seats, remarked that ‘not in a hundred years would the town (Utica) be big enough to need a theater such as this’. He was proven wrong. One of the early attractions was *William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody* and his company of cowboys and Indians in a howling frontier drama- *Scouts of the Prairies*.”

TIMELINE

1871 Jacobs and Proctor’s Opera House opened.

Of its opening on October 16th, 1871, the *Utica Observer* newspaper wrote:

“The audience was a remarkable one, comprised as it was of members of the families representing the wealth, beauty, fashion, intelligence and usefulness of our city. By the side of the gentlemen and ladies of wealth and leisure, sat the artisan and his wife and family, and each seemed interested in the event which brought them together. Nearly 2000 persons were seated within the walls of the new Opera House last evening; and from the time when the first notes of the fine orchestra, in a selection from *Fra Diavolo*, were heard, until the close of the entertainment, the closest attention was paid, and the best of order preserved.”

When the new opera house opened, *old Mechanics’ Hall* (c.1836- extant) at Liberty and Hotel Streets was quite inactive except for a few lectures and an occasional use as a roller-skating rink during the 1880s when that craze hit Utica and the rest of the nation. From 1892-1896 it was transformed into the *Wonderland Theater*- comprised of a Curio hall (with circus side show type acts) and a “family theater”. A fire in 1893 damaged the building’s interior. It was reconstructed and reopened in 1894.

1891 The opera house was leased to H.E. Day, who entirely redecorated it, enlarged the stage, and renamed it the *Utica Opera House*.

1894 April 19th *Susan B. Anthony* addressed an enthusiastic women’s suffrage meeting in the Utica Opera House under the auspices of the *New Century Club*- a women’s organization promoting social, literary, and artistic endeavors, that was founded in Utica the previous year.

Otis Skinner, a world-famous stage actor best known for Shakespearean roles attracted more than 1,200 theatergoers to the opera house where his national touring company presented “*Macbeth*”. Uticans were joined by dozens of people from the Rome and Herkimer County areas.

Political rallies, where one listened to the soul-stirring oratory of such spellbinders as *William Jennings Bryan* and *Theodore Roosevelt*, were held in the opera house. World famous lecturers of the day, such as *Ian McLaren* charmed the more sophisticated audiences.

The building by today’s safety standards was an atrocious firetrap, up two long flights of stairs, with doors at the foot opening inward rather than in the direction of exit. None the less it was crowded night after night by the citizens of Utica, who there saw all the great actors of the day. For many years it was the custom of noted actors, actresses, and playwrights to open their new plays in Utica to test the waters as it were. Those were the days when new productions were always started in the smaller towns and tried out for a few days before being taken to Broadway. *Utica and New Haven, Connecticut*- both having a demographic which apparently represented the tastes of the majority of America’s theater going public- were the two cities most commonly used for this purpose. As a result, many of the great theatrical stars of the era came to the Utica Opera House as regularly as they appeared on Broadway.

1899 Utica was proud of its opera house and of the artists who appeared there. It was, therefore, a terrible shock to have impresario Charles Frohman announce after Maude Adams had appeared there in *The Little Minister* on October 29, 1899, that the building was such a firetrap, so dirty, and so ill equipped with dressing rooms that he would not allow any of his companies to come to the city until a new adequate ground-floor theater was provided for them.

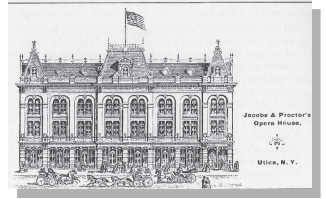
1900 Per Carroll T. Waldron, “But kindly as were the sentiments surrounding the old house, Uticans finally came to consider it quite out of keeping with the city’s advancement. Its long flight of stairs, tolerated by a past generation, were now climbed under protest. The theater’s interior construction, with the rear seats almost beyond hearing and seeing distance of the stage, began to be termed ‘barn-like’. The last performance in the old Opera House and the lowering of the final curtain were punctuated with the sounding of “*Taps*”- ironically composed by *General Daniel Butterfield* who grew up nearby across Washington Street from the venue on the opposite north west corner of Lafayette Street in his father John Butterfield’s house.

1900 Utica Opera House was renovated and renamed the *Majestic Theater* by Utica developers *Milton M. Northrup* and *Seymour D. Latcher*, who built the *Kanatenah* and *Olbiston* Apartments

1912 *Hotel Utica* constructed to the east of the site.

c. 1915 Ground floor Movie theaters made their debut along Lafayette St. creating Utica’s “theater district” in the first half of the 20th century.

1922 During the Roaring Twenties, in August the *Majestic Realty Company*, headed by Barney Abelson, purchased the *old Majestic Theater Building*, tore it down and erected in its place the *Majestic Hotel*. This opened in May 27, 1923, under the management of Robert Block, formerly steward of the Fort Schuyler Club. Later the hotel was taken over by new management and renamed the *Hotel Pershing*.



JACOBS AND PROCTOR'S
OPERA HOUSE



OLD MECHANICS HALL, C.1836



HIPPODROME THEATER



AVON THEATER- 1915

1937 : In April the *Old Majestic Theater* at the rear of the hotel building was razed for a parking lot



HOTEL MAJESTIC/LATER HOTEL PERSHING C. 1942, WITH HOTEL UTICA ON RIGHT

About the Architect

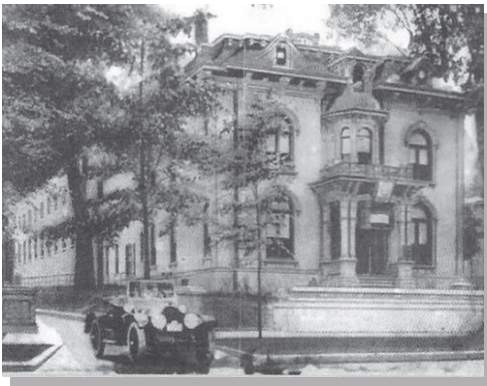


Azel J. Lathrop was a prominent, prolific and talented mid to late 19th century upstate NY architect who practiced in the Utica area. He started his career as a skilled carpenter, designer, and cameo miniature carver- according to the 1839 Utica City Directory- and went on to become one of the first commercially successful architects in New York State during the second half of the 1800s. He was a contemporary of fellow Utica native and cameo miniature carver Erastus Dow Palmer who became a nationally renowned sculptor.

According to the 1860 Census, Lathrop and his wife had 9 children- 8 daughters and a son, Charles, who following in his father's footsteps also became an architect. The family lived in a house at 121 John Street designed by the architect, now gone. Lathrop Place- which runs parallel to John Street on the east near Rutger Street - was named in his honor.

Structures designed by Lathrop (some currently on the National Register of Historic Places- NRHP), included several residences, commercial, and institutional buildings in the Mohawk Valley and upstate New York:

- *The Marble (Commercial) Block* on lower Genesee St.-"long block" (gone)
- *The Arcade Building*, Genesee St., Utica, NY (gone- later site of the Boston Store)
- *First Faxton Hospital* (gone)
- *Faxton Home for Elderly Women* (adjacent to the first hospital- gone)
- *Faxton Hall*, corner of Court and Varick St., 1867 (extant- now Knights of St. John)
- *Oneida County Clerk's Office*, Genesee St. (extant- but greatly altered Bank of Utica)
- *Senator Matteson House*, 294 Genesee St. (extant)
- *Churchill-Buxton house*, 296 Genesee St. c. 1871 (extant)
- *Charles Yates Mansion*, Genesee St., (extant-former Knights of Columbus main bldg.)
- *Former bank/now town offices*, Boonville, NY- NRHP (extant)
- *Dodge-Pratt House Arts Center*, Boonville, NY 1878- NRHP (extant)



CHARLES YATES MANSION



THE ARCADE BUILDING



DODGE-PRATT HOUSE

Conclusion

Like many of the sites in Utica's historic Columbia Lafayette neighborhood, the Opera House was one of several structures that sat on the property over the years, giving Utica its unique authentic and special identity. It was a source of pride for the city-much like the *Troy Music Hall* (of similar vintage to the Opera House) which still serves the residents of that Capital District city today.

As economic development efforts increase in the downtown area many opportunities to showcase Utica's greatest economic asset- our unique history as manifest in our historic architecture- are being missed. Unfortunately, rapidly growing number of surface parking lots in the Columbia Lafayette neighborhood and other sections of downtown do not promote or capitalize on these assets, create a sense of pride, or uniqueness of place. The use of the site of the Opera House and recent demolition of an adjacent early 1920s era parking garage (despite its location in Utica's Scenic and Historic Preservation District) as an undistinguished surface parking lot for the former Hotel Utica-now the Doubletree by Hilton- is but one of many examples.

Utica is in danger of fast becoming just another undistinguished "Anytown USA". Despite local community leaders wishes, our city will not be "worth getting off the Thruway to experience" if the unnecessary indiscriminate demolition of NRHP listed and eligible buildings (which began during the 1960s urban renewal era) continues unabated at its current pace. It has been said, and rightly so, that all old buildings cannot be saved. Given the current attitudes and actions of some misinformed leaders in our community that argument does not hold water.

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THE PRESERVATIONIST



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