

## I. HISTORIC RESOURCES

A community's architecture, perhaps more than any other single trait, defines its character, tells the story of its history, reflects its socioeconomic standing, and demonstrates its values. Cortland's older structures not only tell the story of its past but also provide opportunities for the future. Many architectural styles dating from all eras of Cortland's history are represented in the City, including Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Craftsman, Colonial Revival and Art Moderne, to name a few. The bulk of historic properties date from the mid 1800's to the early 1900's, typically known as the Victorian period. The maintenance and preservation of Cortland's older architecture is important in communicating a positive image of the community to residents and visitors alike. Cortland is designated as a Preserve America community due to its efforts to preserve and promote its historic resources.



### NATIONAL REGISTER STRUCTURES

The City of Cortland has a State, and federally designated "Main Street/Tompkins Street Historic District" that was also designated locally in 1990. This district includes portions of the downtown and the easterly end of Tompkins Street. Map 3 following this Section shows the boundaries of the historic district. Some of the important contributing buildings in the district include:

**Former Cortland Savings Bank**, 1-5 N. Main Street – The 1917 building was designed in the Classical Revival style. This style conveys strength, an attribute suitable for a bank. The current bank occupying the building is First Niagara.

**Samson Block**, 2-8 Main Street – One of four downtown structures with a stamped galvanized sheet iron front façade. The building was constructed in 1896 and is located on the corner of Main Street and Groton Avenue. The Groton Avenue façade is rough textured sandy brick with stamped metal and stone trim.

**Beard Building**, 7-9 Main Street – Built in 1884, the building originally housed the Beard and Peck furniture and undertaking business until 1903. The site has a stamped metal cornice, terra cotta tiles, colored glass, wood panels, and stamped tin ceilings on the inside. The height is emphasized by the use of pointed arches.

**Community Restaurant**, 10 Main Street – This building was erected sometime near the end of the Civil War. The brick front was added pre-1935, replacing wooden clapboard.



The building has an Italianate wooden cornice with dentil molding, paired brackets, and center gable with scroll sawn panels. It also includes a vintage 1940s neon sign.

**Garrison Block**, 17-29 Main Street – This 1887 building has unusual shaped window arches of light stone with dark keystones. The building was named for its original owner, the president of the Homer Horse Railroad.

**Burgess Block**, 33 Main Street – This site housed one of Cortland’s longest existing retail stores, the Burgess Clothing Store (1887-1977). The construction includes bracketed cornice and windows with stone sills.

**Old First National Bank Building**, 35 Main Street – This building was built in 1915-1916 to house a bank that began in the City in 1869. It is Indiana limestone with polished granite “water table” base. It is a Classical Revival style with Ionic columns. The rear three bays on the north side (Central Avenue) reveal a 1938 addition.

**Fireman’s Hall**, 38 Main Street – From 1875 to 1914, this building housed a volunteer fire company. The site included a horse stable in the rear which still exists, although altered over time. The Italianate style building includes a stamped sheet metal cornice, false gable and brackets, and circular attic window. The top floors have stamped metal lintels and wooden sills.

**Schermerhorn Block**, 43-49 Main Street – The building was erected in 1880 and has a crenelated cornice of stamped sheet metal mimicking a medieval Moorish fortress. There are pointed arches on the third floor and Tudor arches on the second. It was the site of several small shops and then was converted to one store in 1927 by the J.J. Newberry Company. J.J. Newberry’s occupied the site until it closed in 1992.

**Old Bank Block**, 51-55 Main Street – This was the original home site of one of Cortland’s first settlers, Jonathan Hubbard, who settled in 1794. In the 1860s, an Italianate style building was constructed on the site to house the Bank of Cortland.

**Beaudry Block**, 73 Main Street – Beneath the metal cornice and limestone nameplate is a terra cotta Indian flanked by two terra cotta floral panels. The third floor windows have colored glass transoms. Carved gargoyles top rough stone piers on the storefront. The building was originally designed for G.F. Beaudry who sold bicycles and stationery.

**Cortland Standard Newspaper**, 110 Main Street – The newspaper was established by Francis G. Kinney in 1867; a weekly newspaper that was originally called the Cortland County Standard. After being located in several spots in the City, the newspaper moved to its present location in March of 1883. The building was designed by Syracuse architect, Horatio Nelson White, and includes a mansard roof decorated with color slate, a portion of which was removed in 1948.



**Democrat Building**, 12-14 Central Avenue – This is a Richardson Romanesque design by Cortland native architect, George Conable. The building was built in 1889 and was the home to the *Cortland Democrat* weekly newspaper for over 100 years.

**1890 House Museum**, 37 Tompkins Street – This is a Chateausque limestone mansion, originally designed for Cortland industrialist Chester F. Wickwire (Wickwire Brothers) with a 1920s fernery addition designed by Carl Clark.

**The YWCA** – The building currently housing the YWCA was built as a private residence in 1869 by William Pendleton Randall, a prominent local businessman. The house served as the main residence for Mr. Randall and his family. In 1919 the YWCA bought the house and has remained in the building for the past 91 years. Significant additions and changes to the structure have been made since that time.

Individually listed buildings outside of the District include:

**City of Cortland Fire Department**, Court Street – The City of Cortland’s fire station is an architectural prize. Erected in 1914 and designed by Sacket and Park, Architects, the building is a remaining example of the pseudo-Dutch style popular in Upstate New York at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Cortland County Courthouse**, Courthouse Park – The present courthouse was erected on the ashes of the Cortland Normal School, which burned in 1919. Riley Gordon of New York City designed the existing structure, which was completed in 1924.

**Cortland Free Library** – The neo-classical library was designed by Carl Clark Design in 1927 and was just recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



**Unitarian/Universalist Church, Church Street** – The cobblestone church was completed in 1837 in the “New England Meeting House” style and was one of Cortland’s first four churches. Congregation member, Jonathan Hubbard, lobbied for the City to become the county seat. The basement of the church was used as the first Town Hall. During the Civil War era, church members were sympathetic to the abolitionist movement. They provided food and warm blankets for escaping slaves and invited well known abolitionist speakers such as Henry Ward Beecher, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Beecher Stowe to speak at the church.



## OTHER HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND SITES

In order to be listed on the State or National Registers of Historic Places, a structure must be nominated and undergo a formal listing process. The relative scarcity of listed properties in the City outside the single historic district does not necessarily mean that no historic structures are present, but that a complete inventory of historic resources, and the subsequent listing process, have not been undertaken. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of potentially historic structures in the City. Some of the most notable include:

**St. Mary's Church**, 46 N. Main Street – This Roman Catholic Church was designed by William Ginter and was erected between 1909-1913. Reminiscent of European cathedrals, its perpendicular Gothic form, proportions, Tyrolean stained glass, and other ornamentation is outstanding.

**Cooper Brothers Foundry** (Present site of Cortland Cable Company) River Street – Lester and George Cooper created an iron foundry and machine shop on River Street in 1881. Cooper Brothers continued manufacturing milling machines, air furnaces, concrete mixers, gas engines and more until it closed in 1935. Although altered, the site still contains the footprint of the original building.

**Cortland Wagon Company**, East Court Street - The site of the present Cortland Corset Company was the former site of the Cortland Wagon Company. The company was established in 1869 by L.J. Fitzgerald and Gee. In 1872, an interest in the company was purchased by C.W. Kinne and the company became known as Fitzgerald and Kinne. New and larger buildings were erected on the site allowing the construction of wagons to increase from 4,500 in 1877 to 27,000 in 1888. The company built such products as carts, road wagons, platform spring wagons, and elaborate carriages, and it was the first Cortland company with a world-wide market. Financial problems and the introduction of the automobile caused the plant to close in 1910.

**Cortland Line Company**, East Court Street - The Cortland Line Company also had its start in one of the old Cortland Wagon Company buildings. In 1915 the company manufactured fishing line; during WWI, it made medical sutures; and in WWII it produced parachute and bomb fragmentation cords. During the 1930s, the company extended into tennis racquet production, which was later sold to Wilson's Sporting Goods. The Cortland Line Company still produces premier fishing line and is located in a newer facility on Kellogg Road in the City.

**County Office Building**, 60 Central Avenue – In 1893, the concept of progressive education took hold in what was then the Village of Cortland. On Railroad Street (now Central Avenue), the new Central School welcomed students through grade 12. Today the building is the home of Cortland County government offices.



**Traction Company Park**, across the River from Cortland Cable Company – The trolley company had a recreational park here that was accessed by trolley over a bridge at Elm Street. Today only a wooded area remains.

**Cortland Water Works**, Broadway – The Cortland Water Works Company began in 1884 at its present location. It originally provided three million gallons daily through 17 pipes to all parts of the Village of Cortland.



**Port Watson**, along the banks of the Tioughnioga River, east of River Street – Elkanah Watson (1758-1842) was a man with many interests, one of them being land acquisition and development in Central New York. The Village of Port Watson was planned as a model town on the River. An historic marker is located at the eastern gateway to the City near the Port Watson Street Bridge. The Village was absorbed by the City in 1867.

**SUNY Cortland** – The Cortland Normal School began in 1868 on property where the Cortland Courthouse now stands. Most students enrolled in the Normal School to obtain a secondary education in preparation for college. It burned to the ground in 1919 and was relocated to its current site on the crest of the hill on Graham Avenue and West Court Street in 1923. Its sole building was Old Main, which still exists today. By act of the State Legislature and the State Board of Regents, the college became a four-year learning institution providing course work leading to a bachelor's degree. In 1948, it became one of the chartered State University of New York schools. The campus encompasses some 191 acres in the City, and a portion is also located in the adjacent Town of Cortlandville. Numerous educational and dormitory buildings have been added over the years.

Despite the individual importance of many of these individual buildings, the bulk of the City's undocumented historic resources can be found among its housing stock. From the ornate industrialists' mansions on Tompkins Street, to Victorian homes of East Main Street, to 1930's and 40's capes and Tudors near the Water Works, and the simple worker housing in the South End, the City's housing stock had a rich abundance of architectural character and provides the City and its neighborhoods with a unique sense of place. It is perhaps these resources that are most at risk of being lost.



**Cortland has many historic residential structures that provide the City with character and links the community to its past.**

Listing on the State or National Register of Historic Places is purely honorary, and does not protect a property from alteration or demolition. National Register listing only protects a property from actions of the State or federal government, and private owners may do what they wish



with their properties. The City of Cortland has established a local historic district that does provide the City's Historic District Commission with the right to review exterior alterations to District properties, such as signage, landscaping, painting, new construction, lighting, and parking.

Cortland is also a designated Preserve America Community. Preserve America is a White House initiative developed in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to encourage and support community efforts for the preservation and enjoyment of America's cultural and natural heritage. The goals of the initiative include:

- A greater shared knowledge about the Nation's past.
- Strengthened regional identities and local pride.
- Increased local participation in preserving the country's cultural and natural heritage assets.
- Support for the economic vitality of communities.



**Much of Cortland's historic residential architecture is at risk due to decay, deferred maintenance, and inappropriate alterations. The cumulative loss of architectural features and character can decrease the City's appeal as a place to live and work.**

In addition to the honor of being a Preserve America Community, designation also provides the City access to Preserve America funding for local preservation initiatives. Since designation, the Cortland Downtown Partnership has received two Preserve America grants, with the City agreeing to sponsor the application.

Despite the above efforts and initiatives, age, deferred maintenance, inappropriate alterations, and a lack of recognition of historic resources are slowly eroding the City's historic character. The City should take further steps to protect and preserve its historic resources, and by extension, preserve the quality of life and sense of place of its neighborhoods. Historic Resource Surveys should be conducted for many areas of the City, in particular neighborhoods near SUNY Cortland that are threatened (see IV. Housing). The City should also educate property owners and the general public regarding their historic properties and assist them in



undertaking appropriate repairs. Inclusion in a National Register District provides property owners with the opportunity to access tax credits that can offset renovation costs. The City should also adopt the “444-a” real property tax exemption law. This law enables local taxing jurisdictions the option of enacting an ordinance to exempt the increase in valuation of real property taxes resulting from the rehabilitation of a historic building. There are no tax increases in years 1-5 and a 20% increase each year in years 6 through 10 until the property reaches full valuation. This law eliminates a disincentive to renovating an older home.

## HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

The City’s Historic District Commission oversees alterations to properties in the Main Street/Tompkins Street Historic District. They are also authorized to conduct surveys of buildings for the purpose of determining historic and/or architectural significance, and to formulate recommendations concerning the preparation of maps, brochures, and historic markers. The Committee must include the following members:



- A professional in the related areas of architecture, historic preservation, or urban design.
- The City Historian.
- Two members of the Cortland Downtown Partnership.
- Three members that have a known interest in the preservation of historical sites within the City.

The level of qualifications for Commission members is not defined, and the quality of design reviews are dependent on the experience of the members at any given time. Over the years, the stringency of design reviews has varied, as have the design considerations that are important to the Commission. Several actions should be undertaken to enhance the effectiveness of the Commission, and to ensure appropriate design reviews in the future. These are detailed below:

**Certified Local Government** - Seeking Certified Local Government (CLG) status through the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation/State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) will help to ensure the qualifications of the Commission over time and will provide additional resources to the community to manage its historic resources. Established by a 1980 amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the CLG program is a nationwide initiative that directly links a community's preservation goals to state and federal preservation programs. The standards for participation include having enacted appropriate preservation legislation and appointing a qualified preservation review commission. All certified CLGs are eligible to receive a variety of services from the SHPO, including:

- Ongoing, focused support from the SHPO.
- Technical preservation assistance and legal advice.



- Direct involvement in SHPO programs, such as identifying properties that may be eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places.
- Training opportunities that increase the ability of communities to protect their historic resources and integrate them into short- and long-term planning initiatives.
- Grants designated exclusively for CLG projects, including funding for historic resource surveys.
- Membership in Statewide and national CLG networks.

**Design Guidelines** – The Historic District Commission has put together a binder with information to provide assistance to applicants regarding design reviews. Although this is a helpful document, it does not reflect design concerns and goals specific to Cortland, and more importantly, is not adopted as part of City zoning. A qualified preservation architect, or similarly qualified professional, should be hired to develop concise design guidelines that would be formally adopted by the Common Council. Adopted Design Guidelines for the historic district would ensure long-term consistency in decisions by the Historic District Commission, and would better guide property owners in undertaking projects in the historic district (see also Section XV. *Development Management*). Sample Design Guidelines from another New York community are included in Appendix F.

**Professional Assistance** – As aforementioned, the City provides the Planning Board with a qualified engineer to assist them on an as-needed basis. The Historic District Commission is not provided with similar staffing to assist them with making appropriate decisions. They can only employ outside professionals upon authorization of the Common Council. The seven, all-volunteer members of the Commission are appointed by the Mayor subject to the approval of the Common Council. They may or may not have any knowledge or experience with historic preservation, and must make important decisions impacting the future of the historic district with no professional guidance. A design professional with experience working with historic structures should be contracted with to provide opinions to the Commission, and to assist them in making decisions that are consistent with historic preservation standards, including the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, a copy of which is included in Appendix G.

## GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

**GOAL 1:** Preserve and protect the City’s historic architecture and character.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Complete one or more Historic Resource Surveys for areas of the City outside the existing historic district, particularly the College Hill neighborhood, to determine appropriateness for new or expanded historic districts or individually designated historic properties.



- B) Expand the Tompkins/Main Street Historic District to include the entire zoned Central Business District and the east side of Church Street adjacent to the Central Business District.
- C) Adopt a City-wide demolition ordinance to protect and preserve resources of historical, architectural, archeological, and cultural significance. Historic buildings that are demolished should be properly documented prior to removal.
- D) Seek funding or support other entities in leveraging funding sources to preserve, restore, and/or rehabilitate historic properties.
- E) Preserve and enhance the architectural character of homes or commercial properties renovated through City rehabilitation programs.
- F) Educate property owners on the federal and State historic tax credits for rehabilitation.
- G) Adopt the “444-a” real property tax exemption law.

**GOAL 2:** Develop the capacity of the government to properly manage, protect, and promote the City’s historic resources.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Seek Certified Local Government (CLG) status with the assistance of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.
- B) Require high standards and qualifications for members of the Historic District Commission and require ongoing training to ensure that members are knowledgeable in architecture and historic preservation standards.
- C) Provide the Historic District Commission with the services of a qualified professional, such as a preservation architect, to provide assistance with design review.
- D) Develop and adopt clearly written and illustrative design guidelines specific to Cortland to ensure that decisions of the Historic District Commission are consistent and to provide property owners with guidance in developing projects. Such guidelines should follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and deal with issues such as size, scale, proportion, rhythm, massing, building materials, roof pitch, architectural style, and relationship and compatibility to neighboring buildings and surrounding neighborhood.
- E) Update regulations as needed to hold property owners legally responsible for the violation of preservation laws through strict fines and other penalties.



- F) Ensure that all local ordinances, codes, and zoning support the City's goals to preserve its historic architecture and encourage new development that is compatible with surrounding development.

**GOAL 3:** Recognize and promote City history and the role and value of cultural resources within the City.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Work with the City and the County Historian and other entities to educate the public on the importance of historic architecture, to increase support and appreciation for historic preservation, and celebrate local architecture.
- B) Maintain existing, and foster new, partnerships with the Cortland School District and local preservation organizations to develop elementary, junior high, and high school curriculum programs designed to educate students on the City's heritage, historic architecture, and the connections between the built environment and social development of the community.
- C) Encourage community groups and school officials to provide quality educational and volunteer opportunities aimed at preserving and enhancing City cultural resources.
- D) Partner with community groups, not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions, the City and County Historian and other interested entities to continue to advance quality cultural events, and educational opportunities which benefit the citizens of the Cortland community.
- E) Create a podcast tour of the City's historic district/resources to work in tandem with the current historic walking tour brochure.
- F) Educate local real estate professionals and property owners on the rules and regulations governing the historic district so that existing and new property owners are aware of their obligations.

