

Spotlight on a Landmark,

The Historic Columbia/ Lafayette Street Neighborhood – Part 1

by Michael Lehman, AIA

Immediately west of the Genesee Street CBD lies a district rich in history that reflects the various stages of growth which occurred as the village of Old Fort Schuyler (incorporated in 1798) evolved in to the City of Utica by 1832- at its peak a bustling metropolis with greater than 100,000 inhabitants. Ready access to transportation has always supported the growth of the neighborhood, be it river, stagecoach, canals, railroad, trolley, or highways.

EARLY DAYS

An 1806 map of Utica depicts the fledgling settlement as only a crossroads at Bagg's Square with several houses lining each side of the roads. By 1816 Liberty Street had been laid out at the edge of the village. Court St which paralleled Liberty Street lay further south and was first known as Old Whitesboro Road as it originated as the old Indian trail leading westward.

A rectilinear street grid soon developed between the two roadways as the village grew rapidly aided by several stagecoach lines. New street names such as Liberty and Columbia reflected the patriotic pride of our newly founded country. Others honored early landowners and their family, such as Cooper (named for Appollos Copper who originally owned much of the land in the neighborhood), Charles, Cornelia and Sayre. Eastern sections of Cooper and Spring Streets were eliminated for the City Hall and Kennedy Plaza Apartments urban renewal projects.

THE 1835 & 1839 MAPS

These maps of the stagecoach and early canal era neighborhood reveals blocks of freestanding residences of Utica's early citizens built on a rectilinear grid with their business on the first floor or very nearby. This arrangement was necessary in the days of the walking city when compactness and closeness to the city center were the goals. Smaller side streets and alleys- Pine St., Sayre Alley, Butternut Lane, Carton Alley, Rome Street, and Madison Lane developed perpendicular to the main through fares. Even prominent citizens lived close to their businesses.

Alfred Munson, president of the Oneida Bank, lived on the west side of Broadway between Columbia & Lafayette. James Sayre- director of the Ontario Bank and Henry R. Hartowner of Utica Foundry, along with his partner Andrew S. Pond (who was also V.P. of Utica Mechanics Association) resided on Lafayette St. within a block or two of their enterprises.

Occupations ranged from butcher & baker, to soap & candle maker, agent for the Utica & Schenectady RR, carpenter, coach maker, constable, church sexton, cordwainer (shoemaker), looking glass manufacturer, music teacher, physician, and V.P. of Temperance Society co-existing with a "distiller of spirits".

Houses of worship were located nearby including Bethel Chapel on the east side of State St between Columbia & Lafayette and the original Grace Church at State and Columbia prior it relocated to Genesee St later in the 19th century.

With the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 the neighborhood found itself right on the canal banks and began transitioning from a primarily residential area to one that attracted businesses that benefited from being near the canal for transporting raw materials and finished goods to market. One of the first such businesses was an iron foundry, followed by a sash and blind manufacturer, coal & lumber yards, and a floor oil cloth factory complex. These early commercial & manufacturing buildings were solidly constructed but very utilitarian in style.



1835 Map- neighborhood outlined



Bethel Chapel- State St.



2016 aerial view- Lafayette & Cornelia Streets at center of outline

Neighborhood Timeline



Early Carton Ave. foundry



Ephraim Hart House



Baptist Church 1836 Columbia St.



General Lafayette

1798 Rev. Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, touring through the Mohawk Valley described Old Fort Schuyler as "a pretty village containing 50 houses".

c.1815 Ephraim Hart a merchant, iron manufacturer, director of the Bank of Utica, Erie Canal commissioner, and Hamilton College trustee built a large brick Federal style home on Lafayette St. He established the Utica Foundry in 1822 on site of the current police station parking lot. Other residences, churches, and small hotels were built during early 1800s in the Federal and Greek revival styles popular in the new nation at the time.

1816 Liberty Street is laid out at edge of village

1823 One of Utica's first industries- Alfred Munson opened a small shop for the manufacture of millstones and mill equipment at Hotel & Liberty Sts. In 1855 it relocated to the west side of Broadway between the Erie Canal & Lafayette St.

1825 Erie Canal opened. Utica's first industries began to cluster on the banks of the Erie Canal which passed just to the north of the area- including various foundries, lumberyards, coal yards, machine shops, and horticultural nurseries. The canal was crossed by means of foot bridges at Cornelia and Broadway Sts. and a vehicular bridge at Washington St.

Lafayette St., previously named Rome St., was renamed in honor of General Marquis de Lafayette whose carriage rolled down this though fare in 1825 traveling from a canal boat landing in Whitesboro to a luncheon held at the Bagg's Hotel in the General's honor. Lafayette was touring the newly opened engineering marvel.

1831 Alexis de Tocqueville (author of On Democracy in America) passed through Utica during his visit to the US to study prisons. He commented on the pleasant appearance of the village, its fine shops and residences- noteworthy praise coming from a French noble man used to traveling in the aristocratic circles of Paris.



Alexis de Tocqueville



Evidence of this once elegant residential enclave can be seen in vintage photos and is still visible at 440-444 Lafayette St.- the only three townhouses remaining from a cohesive residential block that existed from the early 1800s to the 1960s.

Vintage Lafayette Street views

440-444 Lafayette St. - extant

1832 J.D. Edwards opened Utica Floor Oilcloth Factory on Cornelia St between Columbia & Cooper St. This business appears on an 1839 map

1834 Chenango canal opened, crossed by vehicular bridges at Columbia & Lafayette Sts. State St. dead-ended north end at a large turning basin where the Erie and Chenango Canals connected

1837 Utica & Schenectady Railroad opened. The terminal was near Bagg's Square

1839 Utica & Syracuse Railroad opened. Neighborhood businesses along the Erie Canal included Utica Foundry (Hart & Pond) and Munson & Co. millstone manufacturers. The Fayette House hotel was located at the northeast corner of Lafayette and State Sts.



Utica map- 1839

1848 After a period of economic stagnation new steam knitting mills powered by Pennsylvania coal supplied via the adjacent Chenango canal opened near the neighborhood. German immigrants fleeing the Revolution of 1848 found ready employment in the Globe Woolen Mills, Utica Steam Cotton Mills, and Utica Steam Woolen Mills located within the surrounding blocks.

Neighborhood Timeline

Just as in larger eastern & mid-western US cities, these new arrivals started businesses such as breweries and restaurants, social & cultural institutions such as the Utica Maennerchor-music society, the Utica Deutsche Zeitung—a German language newspaper, and the Turn Verein—a German athletic & social club. Poles and Lithuanians followed the Germans to settle in West Utica later in the 19th century. An ever changing, diverse demographic continues to the present day.

As the Industrial revolution took off Utica became known as the furnace capital of America providing many new innovative products not previously in existence. One such innovator was John Carton, who invented and began manufacturing a hot air furnace in 1847. His sons Edward & William established a furnace company with front offices on Genesee St. and the foundry on Rome St (now Carton Avenue). The company eventually merged with International Heater Company. Carton Avenue still bears witness to the presence of their innovative technological endeavor.

Other heating related industries which eventually clustered nearby included:

- **Wood & Mann (est. 1858)** - steam engine manufacturers- Erie Canal & Carton St.
- **Utica Steam Engine Co. (1872)** at 406-408 Lafayette St. & 86-88 Cornelia St
- **Utica Steam Gauge Co. (1880)**-same address
- **Carton Furnace Co. (1883)**
- **Hart & Crouse (1890's)**- one of the early US manufacturers of stoves and furnaces at 332 Lafayette St. Hart was the grandson of Ephraim Hart, early foundry owner
- **Russell Wheeler, Son, & Co.** at 71-73 Lafayette St.
- **Utica Heater (1906)**
- **O'Hanlon & Shaw**- shops & offices at 2-4 Pine St- manufacturers of all kinds of steam boilers and sheet metal works. According to their ad they specialized in repairing & testing boilers.



Ad-1907 city directory



Former Turn Verein Club House- 509 Lafayette St extant,



members 1915-1919



Wood & Mann c. 1875, 529 Oriskany Blvd. W. -extant



1st Presbyterian Church

1851 First Presbyterian congregation built a new Gothic Revival style church at Columbia & Washington Sts. Minard La Fever, a renowned church architect of the time was the designer. Utica National Insurance Co. currently occupies the site.

1863 Utica horse drawn trolley service started.

1860s Knights of St. George Hall was built at corner of Columbia & State St. in the Second Empire Style, as was the Utica Opera House.

1868 Munson Brothers built a mill equipment factory east side of Broadway at canal.



466 Columbia St.- St. George Hall -Then



466-470 Columbia St.@ State St.- 1990s



Munson Bros. Works, 227 Oriskany Blvd. W.- Then



227 Oriskany Blvd. W.-Now



Church of the Redeemer 1883

c.1875 Wood & Mann (est. 1858) built a factory on Erie Canal at 529 Oriskany Blvd. West- later owned by Utica Steam Engine Co., Carton Furnace and Utica Heater, currently occupied by Schmalz Mechanical Contractors

1883 The Church of the Redeemer, an English language German Lutheran Church opened on the south side of Columbia St. near State St. F.H.Gouge FAIA was the architect, designing in late Victorian Gothic Revival style. Gouge used similar design vocabulary and tower configurations in 1888 at his Park Baptist Church and Church of St. Francis de Sales (extant).

Neighborhood Timeline

1890 Electric trolley service started. The Utica Belt Line RR trolley system served the area with lines running from Genesee St. along Lafayette and Columbia St, then up State Street to Lincoln Avenue. Street cars and later buses provided easy access to residents, workers, and shoppers alike. By this time Columbia St. which previously terminated east at Broadway had been extended to meet Genesee St.

By the late 1800s the neighborhood was a mixed use district as evidenced by the listing in the Utica City Directory of 1897. New immigrants groups were arriving and adding to the diversity and vitality of the city. Evidence of West Utica's German population can still be seen in the Witzemberger Building logo. Peter Witzemberger operated a restaurant in the building according to a 1908 map.

Most commercial buildings of the period were brick with heavy timber framing or load bearing walls. Retail storefronts occupied the first floor with rental office and residential space on upper floors.

Popular at the time were commercial/ industrial adaptations of the bracketed Italianate style with decorative window lintels (312 & 458 Columbia St.) and Queen Anne style (Maher Bros. bldg.) with rounded windows heads, elaborate brickwork trim & banding, rustic stone trim, and cornices with upright decorative elements extending above the roof and parapets.



458 Columbia St. - extant



Witzenberger Building Logo - 464 Columbia St.



Maher Bros. Lafayette St.



Haberer Building - 326-334 Columbia St., Then



Haberer Building - extant



312-316 Columbia St. - extant

A 1907 atlas listed T.E. Jones and Moak & Haberer as doing business at the buildings on Columbia St that still bear their names.



Jones Building - 336 Columbia St., Then



Jones Building - extant



Witzenberger Bldg. - 460-464 Columbia St. - extant



Utica Maennerchor Hall - 1893



Utica Opera House



Replaced by Hotel Majestic/Pershing. Hotel Utica, right

With the advent of the canal and commercial/industrial uses the precinct lost its luster as a residential area but provided housing for workers in the nearby mills on Court St & State St., other factories, and the canal. The smaller Columbia, Crystal, Metropolitan, Mansion House, Germania & Coles (extant) Hotels provided modest accommodation for budget minded workers and travelers. Grander hotels such as Hotel Utica, Hamilton, Martin and Yates were located closer to Genesee St. and the train station.

1893 Utica Maennerchor - German musical Society opened a new five story hall on the south side Columbia St. between Broadway and Cornelia St. Jacob Agne Jr. FAIA was the architect. Designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style with three story blind arches, large elaborate dormer elements and stone decoration, it was destroyed by fire in 1901 and rebuilt in 1902.

1895 J.H. Cole built a hotel at 418 Lafayette St. In 1906 Utica Heater built a rear addition for factory use on Carton Place - both buildings are extant

1896 UTICA ATLAS SHOWED THE FOLLOWING ENTITIES:

Lafayette St (then Fayette St.) north side west from Washington St. included:

- Utica Opera House @ east corner Washington (Susan B. Anthony and other national known speakers lectured here, some as guests of the New Century Club)
- Mansion House Stables @ east corner of Broadway
- Hart & Crouse & Germania Hotel @ east corner Cornelia
- Utica Steam Gauge Co. & Cole's Hotel @ west corner of Carton St.
- Freestanding residences to State St.



437 Lafayette St - extant

Neighborhood Timeline

Lafayette St. south side west from Washington St included:

- Mansion House Hotel @ west corner Washington St
- residences to Sayre's Alley
- Russell Wheeler & Son Hot Air/Hot Water Heaters- Sayre's Alley to Cornelia St.
- freestanding residences- Cornelia to State St.

An example of a typical mid to late 19th century Utica home remains at 437 Lafayette St. - a brick bracketed Italianate house with carriage house to the rear. Another extant example of this style is the Metzler Printing Co. building at 317 Lafayette St. Such buildings with their accessory buildings provide a glimpse into life on the street over a century ago. In addition, they provide an inspirational blueprint & pattern book as to the character and scale of development that would create an appealing livable environment for the 21st century. Who doesn't like a carriage house apartment?



456 Columbia St. - carriage house (above)



317 Lafayette St. - extant (right)

Metzler Printing Co., Inc.
IMPRESSIVE PRINTING
A New and Modern Equipped Plant
BEAUTIFUL STORE
MARCH 1910

Columbia St north side west from Washington St included:

- 1st Presbyterian Church - Minard LaFever - architect,
- Russell Wheeler & Son Hot Air & Hot water heaters between Sayre's Alley and Cornelia St,
- residences to State St

Columbia St. south side west from Broadway included:

- Maennerchor Music Hall, Columbia Hall/Hotel
- Floor Oil Cloth Works @ corner of Cornelia St.
- Freestanding residences
- Church of the Redeemer
- carriage shop

Liberty St. south side Erie Canal (now Oriskany Boulevard West) west from Washington St. included:

- Sash, Door & Blind Factory
- Chas. C. Kellogg & Sons Co. Lumberyards
- Munson Bros. Machine Shops- both sides of Broadway
- Knox Planing Mill
- Hart & Crouse- between Pine St & Cornelia St.
- Utica Foundry- both sides of Cornelia St.
- Utica Electric Light Co. (later merged with Niagara Mohawk)
- Utica Electrical Mfg. & Supply Co.
- Carton Furnace Co.- between Erie Canal & Rome St.



Former Factory buildings 1906 - Carton Ave. - extant



Columbia Hotel ad -1907



Barnes & Buhl Organ Co. ad - 1907



124 Columbia St-1909

1907 Columbia Hotel at 61-63 Columbia St advertised in the city directory. It was located next to the Utica Maennerchor Hall. The owner, Fritz Brand, also operated a hotel/casino in Forest Park adjacent to where Proctor Boulevard is today. Barnes & Buhl Organ Co. was operating at 204-208 Columbia St. making "high grade" tubular pneumatic pipe organs including the one at St. John's Church. The NYS National Guard Troop G Riding Hall was located on the west side of Sayre Alley between Columbia St. and Broadway

1908 Interurban express trolley garage opened at 300 Lafayette St @ Broadway. The building was later home of Girard Chevrolet.

1909 A.J. Manning operated his photography studio at 124 Columbia St. Manning was responsible for many of the vintage photos we have of the Greater Utica area today. Utica's "creative class" was thriving at this location in the early 1900s.

1911 St. George's Lithuanian Church opened at 427 Lafayette St.



Interurban Trolley Garage- 300 Lafayette St.



Rear, Trolley garage- extant



124 Columbia St- 1960's

Neighborhood Timeline



Hippodrome



Avon - 1915



Olympic



Typical Lafayette St. theater interior

c.1920 Movie theaters made their debut along Lafayette St.

1925 City directory listed a veterinary hospital at 411 Broadway operated by Drs. Walter G. Hollingworth & Walter J. Chynoweth.

1924 New Utica Police Station opened, designed by Bagg & Newkirk Architects. A new city hall/government complex was also proposed by Olmsted Bros. but plans were abandoned in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression.

Steel framing for commercial buildings came into wider use in the early part of the 1900s. This allowed for larger windows as glass making methods also improved.



301 Columbia St. @
Bway - then



301 Columbia St.,
Utica Paint extant



Central Markets-
Columbia St.



401 Columbia St. - then



401 Columbia Pl.,
RCIL - extant

By the mid-1920's, one could buy almost anything on Lafayette, Columbia, and surrounding streets- from apples at the Central Market and mom & pop groceries (no food desert here) to furniture at E. Tudor Williams and wringer washing machines at H.D. Morehouse & Sons. As technology advanced Lockner's on Columbia St. kept pace, selling the latest in radios & electric refrigerators. They also sold bicycles. Several restaurants served the neighborhood and a sweet treat could always be enjoyed at Weber's on Lafayette St. Printing businesses thrived in the area.-



Morehouse & Son- 1928



Lockner's- c. 1932



Weber's ad-1925



327-331 Lafayette St. Then



327-331 Lafayette St. Now-extant

By the early 1920s livery stables that had dotted the neighborhood gave way to parking garages, automobile dealerships, auto parts and auto repair businesses. Harry Heiman's dealerships and others were fixtures on Lafayette St.

c.1930 Berger's Department store expanded and remodeled in the Art Deco style popular at the time. Linne Kinne, AIA was the architect. The design used porcelain enamel metal panels on the first floor facade which can still be seen today. Kinne's original architectural drawings for the remodeling at 338-358 Columbia St. are in the collection of the Oneida County Historical Society.



320-22 Lafayette St.-1925 ad



Harry Heiman Inc. car dealer-
Lafayette St.



333-362 Columbia St.-
Berger's-1930s



333-362 Columbia St.- extant

To be continued...
watch for
Part 2 in the
next edition of
The Preservationist

Spotlight on a Landmark,

The Historic Columbia/ Lafayette Street Neighborhood – Part 2

by Michael Lehman, AIA

Immediately west of the Genesee Street CBD lies a district rich in history that reflects the various stages of growth which occurred as the village of Old Fort Schuyler (incorporated in 1798) evolved in to the City of Utica by 1832—at its peak a bustling metropolis with greater than 100,000 inhabitants. Ready access to transportation has always supported the growth of the neighborhood, be it river, stagecoach, canals, railroad, trolley, or highways.

1940's Like most downtowns, city directory neighborhood listings included businesses offering everything from baked goods to billiards, cars to clothing, dentistry to dry cleaning, electronics, flowers to furniture, hotdogs to hotels, shoes to shovels, pianos to paint to plumbing supplies, violin lessons to veterinary care, and everything in between.

1960's As part of the urban renewal movement vision's plans were developed but never realized for a SUNY technology institute campus (complete with underground parking garage similar to the NYS Empire State Plaza complex in downtown Albany) and a new governmental center. A downtown mall shopping center was also proposed but not built.



Urban renewal target area



Center City Mall



2016 aerial view looking west

All that remains of those schemes are large holes in the urban fabric, vacant lots awaiting development, two high maintenance deteriorating parking structures that were intended to be built upon and Columbia Street garage storefronts that never fully realized their intended potential and add little to the life and vibrancy of the adjoining neighborhood.

Other fragmented remnants of these uncompleted mega block schemes include Utica City Hall/Hanna Park, Kennedy Plaza Housing and a reoriented Radisson Hotel which includes a Columbia St. ground level facade with mechanical equipment, dumpster, and loading dock. This facade and adjacent unfinished parking garage contribute little to the streetscape or downtown ambience.

2005 More historic urban fabric was lost when buildings are demolished to accommodate parking for the police station support facilities and new Utica City Courts, which 10 years later may be relocating. Urban design efforts to date do not appear to be part of a larger, coordinated implementation plan.

Conclusion

Whatever the ultimate decisions are for the location of the new hospital and for this area, there are certain things that must be considered as a matter of course.

- Large-scale, multi-block demolition of a significant segment of the downtown area, unseen since the era of "Urban Renewal" of the 1950s and 60s, destroys the fabric, character and sense of place that defines the uniqueness of what makes Utica what it is. While some of the existing buildings have certainly lost character and charm, many others remain a wonderful testament to the historicity of the city. Infill buildings that erase the gaps between existing structures can be built that complement the size and scale of their neighbors and create a pleasant, cohesive and very livable community.
- As Utica continues to experience the long awaited rebirth, revitalization and Renaissance, the buildings that would be lost represent a lost opportunity for small scale structures where ground floor commercial uses would complement upper floor residential uses in a walkable, urbane setting. This is in keeping with smart growth Principles, and with the tenets of the National Trust of Historic Places that espouses that smaller, older, and more walkable is better. Planners must consider the

Neighborhood Timeline

highest and best use of the buildings. Let's build upon the rich and fruitful successes realized in Bagg's Square. Furthermore, these buildings would remain on the tax rolls.

- Given that this section of the city was once part of Utica's industrial past, there is a potential for what could be described as a 19th century "brownfield" lurking beneath the existing structures that would need to be remediated, adding significantly to the ultimate project cost. Remember, the former Erie Canal was used as a dumping ground after it was abandoned.
- Among the most significant issues of concern to relocation of the consolidated hospitals into one downtown site is the proximity of this site to the CSX mainline railroad tracks (within approximately 1500 feet). Given the increased shipment of potentially hazardous freight on the rail lines, not the least of which includes crude oil trains, if it were necessary to evacuate a section of the city due to a derailment, the triage center would be the hospital; however, the hospital the hospital could potentially be within the evacuation zone, creating a potential compound disaster.
- What few plans and concepts that have been shared for a downtown hospital location are reminiscent of Robert Moses in size and scale, a huge, iconic structure surrounded by a sea of parking. This would be the antithesis of what makes Utica unique.
- The St. Luke's site is not entirely perfect, but it is certainly far more suitable for this type of plan. It is already a campus. It is adjacent to Utica College that has an established medical curricula that could be expanded. It has room for expansion. It is easily accessible from Route 8/12 and sufficiently distant from the CSX railroad mainline. A new structure could be built in the parking areas adjacent to the existing hospital, the existing hospital could then be demolished (if that is what must happen) and parking structures could be added in the available space. Demolition would be relatively minimal compared to the downtown alternative.

Ultimately, there is a real need for public input and discussion on this process as it potentially affects all of us. We can all "agree to disagree," but we will all have to live with the end results for a long time to come, and everyone needs to be heard on an issue of the importance and significance of this one.



Terracotta cornice c. 1880- 430 Columbia St.

Sources:

- Building Structure Inventories-various authors -Division for Historic Preservation NYS Parks & Recreation, 1978.
- Clark, T. Wood. Utica for a Century and a Half. Utica, NY: The Widtman Press, 1952.
- Illustrated Utica. 1890.
- Klossner, Joan. Utica Streets; A Stroll into History. Utica, NY: Oneida County Historical Society.
- Older, Smaller, Better- Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality. National Trust for Historic Preservation- Preservation Green Lab study, 2014. www.preservationnation.org/greenlab
- Oneida County Historical Society
- Truett, Brett- current neighborhood photos
- Utica Atlas- 1896
- Utica City Directories 1897, 1907, 1925
- Utica Maps- 1806, 1835, 1839
- Utica Observer Dispatch Archives
- Utica Sanborn Maps- 1908

#NoHospitalDowntown

**We're working to save the remaining buildings
and this neighborhood. Please join us on Facebook or
obtain more information at:**

www.NoHospitalDowntown.com