

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

The City of Oneonta

Otsego County, New York

Survey prepared for Otsego 2000 and the City of Oneonta

Funding provided by Preserve New York*

*Preserve New York is a signature grant program of the
New York State Council on the Arts and the
Preservation League of New York State.

Preserve New York is made possible with the support of
Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature,
With generous additional support from
The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation.

Additional funding provided by Otsego 2000, the City of Oneonta,
Future of Oneonta Foundation, and the Otsego County
Chamber of Commerce

Prepared by Jessie A. Ravage
Preservation Consultant
34 Delaware Street
Cooperstown, New York 13326

8 May 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology	2
Existing Conditions — General	4
Natural Features and Geopolitical Location	4
Setting within Regional Circulation Systems	4
Local Circulation Systems and Spatial Plan.....	6
Built Environment.....	8
Context Statement — General	14
Early Development	14
Village Incorporated	16
Railroad Town	18
Rapid Growth.....	20
Becoming a College Town	27
Postwar Era	28
Urban Renewal	30
Pushback and reclamation.....	33
Study area discussions	
Expansion areas adjacent to existing NRHDs	35
Central Residential District	41
Sixth Ward	50
The East End	58
The West End.....	66
College Hill	72
Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations.....	75
Sources	83
Appendices	
1: Key map	
2: Study area maps	
3: Historic maps (1856 (Gates), 1868 (Beers), 1884 (Burleigh), 1903 (New Century), and Sanborn series for 1886, 1893, 1898, 1905, 1910, 1916, 1927, and 1949	
4: Streetview photographs organized by Study Area	

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 1

Introduction

Otsego 2000, an environmental and historic preservation advocacy organization, undertook this study to review areas beyond the city's two small listed National Register Historic Districts (NRHD) that encompass slightly more than 100 properties.¹ It was completed with the support and cooperation of the City of Oneonta (a Certified Local Government) *via* the City Codes Enforcement Office.

The City of Oneonta is a mid-sized city located in the Susquehanna River Valley in Otsego County. County tax records enumerate approximately 4,500 parcels with buildings in the city. Oneonta's largely intact residential historic neighborhoods, defined for this study as built before ca. 1970, form the greatest share of this inventory. These areas have never been reviewed in a comprehensive or consistent way to assess their eligibility for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. By rough count, the present study reviewed streetscapes embracing approximately 3,250 properties and delineates six geographical areas identified through review of historic records, especially maps, for further study that could lead to listing additional NRHDs.

The narrative sections of this report outline descriptive and contextual themes for each study area. These are illustrated by maps of existing conditions that tie them to the geographic development of the city. Streetscape photography offers a detailed "moment in time" in each area. This study provides guidance to Oneonta's local historic preservation commission as part of its strategy to plan for the maintenance of this defining set of resources. This includes making decisions about potential local landmark and historic district designations and the development of new or expanded NRHDs.

¹ The Oneonta Downtown NRHD takes in most of the historic commercial district (57 properties) and adjoining sections of Market and Chestnut streets. The Walnut Street NRHD lists 47 large properties with houses and associated outbuildings built facing that thoroughfare. An additional eleven properties are individually listed; five of these were incorporated into the later-listed Oneonta Downtown NRHD.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Methodology

page 2

Methodology

Reconnaissance-level historic resources surveys are undertaken to identify buildings and landscapes older than 50 years and to assess the degree of their historic integrity individually or collectively. Such studies often discuss these resources in terms of themes of significance as outlined in the guidelines for preparing individual and district nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. Surveys allow interested parties to improve their understanding of the significance of individual resources or groups of resources within a given study boundary. Survey reports may also comment on potential significance at the local level, possibly under a local ordinance acknowledging local importance. A good study allows interested parties to take a comprehensive approach in community planning with these resources in mind. Such planning might include listing in the National Register of Historic Places, local historic district designations, considerations for planning ordinances in areas with cultural resources, planning for economic development, or specific preservation projects.

Preservation consultant and principal investigator Jessie Ravage (36 CFR Architectural Historian) of Cooperstown, New York, was retained to complete the survey. The project was partially funded by Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts. Nikki Waters (M.A., Historic Preservation, 2021) of Alliance Archaeology in Chittenango, New York, conducted field review and photography of streetscapes throughout the entire study area from the public highways during dates under supervision by the principal investigator.

Ravage correlated the field review of the existing cityscape with published mapping episodes dating to the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. These comprise 1829 and 1841 (Burr, *Map of Otsego County*), 1856 (Cyrus Gates, *Map of Otsego County*), 1868 (Beers, *Atlas of Otsego County*), 1884 (Lucien Burleigh, [Bird's-eye view of] *Oneonta*, 1889, O. Harmon, *Map of Village of Oneonta*), 1903 (*New Century Atlas of Otsego County*), 1915 and 1943 (United States Geological Survey), and Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps (1886, 1893, 1898, 1905, 1910, 1916, and 1927). Collectively, these mapping episodes show major land divisions, roads, and property owners over time and space and can be correlated to the current cityscape and other historical resources.

The main body of this report is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a comprehensive review of existing conditions — natural setting, circulation patterns, spatial organization, land use, and buildings — within the municipal boundary of the City of Oneonta. This is illustrated by an overall map of the city showing topographical features, watercourses, street plan, and parcels in Appendix 1.

The second section is an overall context statement discussing Oneonta's historical and architectural development from European settlement in the 1780s through the early 2000s. It focuses on the period predating 1973, the current 50-year mark for National Register of Historic Places eligibility.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Methodology

page 3

The third section presents detailed discussions of existing conditions and historical development for the six study areas identified during field review throughout the city. Each study area is described, focusing especially on spatial plan, circulation patterns, land use, and related buildings and landscape. A short history of the development of each study area focuses on predominant architectural character and styles and how the area's spatial organization and development occurred over time. A map of each study area drawn by Maureen Seymour, GIS Technician in the City Engineering Department, is provided in Appendix 2. Opening the map in association with each section will help readers to grasp the relationship of the narrative to the landscape.

Photographs of representative street views illustrate each study area. These are sorted by street name and cross-street relationships. Historic maps referenced in the survey are provided in Appendix 3. Like the study area maps, opening these whilst reading the report will illustrate the context discussions.

The report is provided digitally to Otsego 2000, the City of Oneonta, and to the Preservation League of New York State. It is also recorded in New York State's Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS). In the last, a selected set of photographs is provided in the Supplemental Information section.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 4

Natural Features and Geopolitical Location

The City of Oneonta lies entirely within the Town of Oneonta in Otsego County, New York. The town is in the south-central part of the county and straddles the Susquehanna River. The city encompasses 4.36 square miles within the town, adjoining the west bank of the river, which flows out of Otsego Lake roughly 15 miles to the north. The river flows mainly from north to south over more than 400 miles; through southern Otsego County, it flows generally westerly to its confluence with the Chemung River in New York's Southern Tier. There, it turns south to flow through Pennsylvania and Maryland to the Chesapeake Bay. While the city is on the *west* bank of the overall river, it is located *north* of the watercourse. In the larger topographic scheme, the Susquehanna provides a comparatively level route connecting major waterways – the Delaware, the Hudson, the Susquehanna, and the Chemung rivers – across the interior of New York State.

Oneonta is dubbed the “City of the Hills” for the slopes that rise quickly to knobby ridges between 1,500 and 1,600 feet north and south of the river. Three streams carve ravines through the north slope and flow into the Susquehanna River within the city boundary. From east to west, these are Glenwood, Oneonta, and Silver (a.k.a. Elk, 1868) creeks. The lower reaches of Oneonta Creek flow through a reinforced, but open, channel. Silver Creek is partially culverted under city streets and empties into the race system established by millwrights beginning in the early 1800s. The race is preserved as a water feature in Neahwa Park. The heights enclosing the valley on the north side of the city are mirrored across the river in the Town of Oneonta.

At Oneonta, the Susquehanna floodplain (about 1,050 feet above sea level) spans roughly a half-mile at its widest point. A bench of land about 50 feet high encloses the northern edge of the floodplain within the city limits. The bench rises gently another 100 feet to the hillsides that enclose the city between Oneonta and Silver creeks. East and west of the two creeks, the slopes rise precipitously and form a bowl encircling much of the central section of the city. Wilber Park occupies the eastern ridge above Oneonta Creek; farther east, that ridge slopes downward into the ravine carved by Glenwood Creek near the city's eastern boundary. The area east of Oneonta Creek is known locally as the East End. West of West Street, a headland rises almost directly from the south edge of the first bench, leaving a narrow band of as little as 200 yards for about half a mile. Where the headland shears away to the northwest, a level section forms the area known as the West End.

Setting within Regional Circulation Systems

The Susquehanna River and its relationship with the surrounding hills shapes the region's circulation systems. Historically, the river itself was a travel corridor used by native

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 5

people in the pre-contact period. By the early 1800s, spring freshets carried an economically important rafting trade downriver to ports in Pennsylvania and farther south. At the same time, the broad floodplain and adjacent bench of land north of the river offered an ideal location for highway development and, by 1865, railroad development. A highway, now part of NY 7, connected Oneonta and villages downriver like Otego and Unadilla along the first bench on the north bank. At Unadilla, a ferry crossing connected the Catskill Turnpike (chartered 1800) and the State Road (built using lottery revenue in the 1790s) that penetrated lands west of Unadilla Creek and north of the Susquehanna.

Upstream from Oneonta, the highway paralleled the river and continued through a saddle alongside Schenevus Creek to pass over the summit between the Susquehanna and Schoharie valleys to the Village of Cobleskill in the Schoharie-Mohawk watershed. Another highway (now NY 23) on the opposite riverbank followed Charlotte Creek into Delaware County through the towns of Davenport and Harpersfield, eventually reaching the Delaware River watershed. In Otsego County, highways — some improved as turnpikes and subsequently maintained as local and state highways — follow the steep valleys north to villages such as Laurens and Morris and adjoining upland sections. Another route, now NY 28, parallels the Susquehanna north to its main source, Otsego Lake, passing through the towns of Milford, Hartwick, and Otsego to the Village of Cooperstown.

Railroad speculators identified the Susquehanna Valley as a potential route by the 1840s; the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad at last extended southwest to Oneonta in 1865. It reached Binghamton in 1869. In 1872, after the Delaware & Hudson acquired a perpetual lease to the route, that company began building its shops on the floodplain at the village of Oneonta. The village lay roughly equidistant from Albany and Binghamton. As diesel fuel gradually supplanted coal to fire its engines, the company began reducing the shops in the 1950s and finally closed them in the 1990s. The tracks still carry freight, but passenger service was eliminated more than half a century ago.

For a time in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Ulster & Delaware Railroad, its route named for those two counties, reached Oneonta from the south. During the short-lived vogue for electric-powered interurban trolleys, a line connected the City of Oneonta with the Mohawk Valley *via* the Otego Creek valley in the western part of the town and the Susquehanna Valley. This was disbanded in the 1930s.

In 1968, plans were made for I-88, a limited access highway to parallel NY 7 on a new alignment closer to the river. This added another route modality to the long-used transportation corridor in the Susquehanna Valley. Like NY 7, I-88 connects the Capital District with Binghamton, offering a high-speed connector between the Hudson-Mohawk and Susquehanna watersheds that underlie major transportation corridors in the region. It meets I-90 in Schenectady and I-81 and I-86 in Binghamton.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 6

Local Circulation Systems and Spatial Plan

The plat of a patent, or tract, labeled Sir William Johnston in pre-1850 maps was the earliest spatial plan imposed on the land now encompassed by the City of Oneonta.¹ The 28,000-acre patent flanked both sides of the Susquehanna River, running some distance into the interior. Later maps show that the 28 owners, headed by Alexander Wallace, subdivided it into 194 strips of varying widths running from riverbank to back line. Because the river was the primary route through the region, access to it for each lot was deemed essential. The 1903 New Century Atlas shows that the Village of Oneonta occupied lots 165 through 183. The city corporation established in 1909 added land east and west of the line in areas known locally as the East End and West End.

The present city circulation system, or street plan, builds out from the early route aligned with the first bench of land, or bluff, above the floodplain. Main Street forms the eastern section of this route, running from the city's eastern boundary to its T-junction with Chestnut Street where the bench curves westward. Chestnut Street carries the bench alignment west while Main Street bends south and drops to the floodplain to cross the river and the city boundary. Beyond the city boundary, Main Street meets the river highway (NY 23 and 28) on the Susquehanna's south bank, also in a T-junction. Points north of the riverside village are connected by town highways that ascend each of the three creek valleys within the present city boundary. These routes – East Street, West Street, and Cemetery Hill Road – meet the main travel corridor in the city.

Two areas, both tightly circumscribed by the landform of the first bench of land and the Main-Chestnut corridor, form residential districts abutting the south side of the corridor. The earlier one lies southwest of the junction of Chestnut and Main streets and is bounded by the bluff overlooking the floodplain. This generally level area is platted in a rectilinear grid. Its western section lies in Lot 173, and was known as the Watkins Tract. Cliff Street on its western edge is named for the bluff. A second area adjoins the east side of South Main Street between Silver (a.k.a. Elk, 1868) and Oneonta creeks. Here, streets and lots were platted in an irregular plan conforming to the topography and incorporating the sizable Riverside Cemetery.

Residential streets opened north of the main corridor within the numbered north-south-running lots as owners of the generally level land between the two main ridges subdivided that area and laid out mainly rectilinear streets. This section of the street plan retains a clear relationship with the early lot lines. Dietz Street south of Spruce Street aligns with the west line of Lot 177. East of that point, nearly all north-south streets north of Main

¹ Simeon DeWitt's 1802 Map of the State of New York labeled this patent as "Johnston's." Both the 1829 and 1840 versions of David H. Burr's Map of the County of Otsego also labeled the patent "Sir William Johnston." Some sources call this the Wallace Patent. (see Three Rivers, Ronald Baldwin, "The Wallace Patent of 1770," <http://threerivershms.com/wallace1770.htm>)

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 7

Street align with the lot lines east to Lot 183, which was the village line. Sand and North Sixth streets parallel the latter boundary. The small enclave of streets extending south of Main Street to the old fairgrounds (opened 1872) also conform to this pattern. East of the fairground, streets in the East End were laid out using the north–south lot lines. In the West End, the first subdivision opened within the village line in 1888, spanning the width of Lot 165 north of Chestnut Street. The orientation of house lots running east of that to Fonda Avenue on the south side of Chestnut underneath the headland conform to the lines of Lots 166, 167, and 168. The north–south streets of the grid on the rising land west of Clinton Street and bounded northerly by West Street align with the lines of Lots 169 and 170.

The level land of the floodplain lying west of the water-powered industrial area and south of the railroad offered land for additional residential development. Here, the river and the railroad exerted a greater influence in this area’s street plan than the ancient lot lines. The short segment of River Street, opposite the mills built on the east side of Main Street in the early 1800s, continued westward during the century. Broadway paralleled River Street on the south side of the tracks, and new side streets extended north to the railroad district and south towards the river, crossing the earlier lot lines at acute and oblique angles rather than aligning with them. This area was designated as the Sixth Ward by the early 1900s.

Development on the encircling hillsides within the city boundary is mainly associated with the postwar development of Hartwick College and rapid growth of SUNY Oneonta, formerly the State University College at Oneonta and before that the Teachers College and State Normal School. The spatial plan of these areas, mainly at higher elevation, contour to the rising land in curvilinear plats and bear little relationship to development at lower elevations throughout the city.

The City of Oneonta corporation encompasses two sizable city parks. Neahwa Park (63.9 acres) is on the Susquehanna River floodplain between Main Street and the James F. Lettis Memorial Parkway (NY 23). The water ditch that drew water off the Susquehanna River and Oneonta Creek to power mills forms its north boundary; the river and Main Street bound it on the south and west. The park has a variety of recreational features and a modestly scaled baseball stadium used by a minor league team in the summer. It has its own curvilinear road system that was laid out soon after the park was donated to the municipality in 1908.

Wilber Park (55.81 acres) is of similar size but differs in character. It is part of a long rectangular parcel in Lots 180, 181, 182, and 183 flanking Oneonta Creek north of Main Street. It was donated to the city in 1916. The park property now runs from Center Street north to the parcel developed for the Junior-Senior High School beginning in the 1960s. An enclave of city streets – Walling Boulevard, Roosevelt Avenue, Wilson Avenue, and Taft Avenue – were staked at the south end of the parcel adjacent to Main Street. Huntington Park (5 acres) is a smaller greenspace and encompasses the former Huntington property that includes the mansion facing

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 8

Chestnut Street, now used as the city library, and the land behind. This urban park features open lawn dotted by mature trees. It is accessed from Wall Street as well as Chestnut Street and is listed as part of the Oneonta Downtown NRHD.

There are also two sizable cemeteries within city limits. Riverside Cemetery (5.11 acres) occupies an irregular parcel adjoining the First Presbyterian Church property on the south side of Main Street. It was mapped as early as 1856. When opened, it was at the edge of village development, but its location adjacent to the Presbyterian Churchyard feels similar to earlier village graveyards. Glenwood Cemetery (18.48 acres) is the easternmost parcel in the city. Its upper west section aligns with Glenwood Creek; Main Street forms its south boundary. The corporation line, the east line of Lot 186, forms its east line. Opened in 1886, it illustrates the pattern of rural cemeteries opened at the periphery of villages in the last quarter of the century.

Built Environment

The City of Oneonta encompasses roughly 4,500 tax parcels with buildings. Roughly 75% of these retain buildings that have achieved their fiftieth anniversary. Only a small percentage of these properties, however, has been surveyed and assessed for eligibility to be listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places or other potential designation. At present, there are two National Register Historic Districts (NRHDs). The Walnut Street NRHD (listed 1980) runs from Maple to Church streets, encompassing a row of large houses on generous lots. It takes in adjacent similarly sized and stylish houses on Dietz, Ford, and Elm streets. The Oneonta Downtown NRHD (listed 2003) encompasses Main Street between Chestnut and Maple streets, Market Street west of Chestnut Street, Chestnut Street between Market and Church streets, and the elbow formed by Wall and Dietz streets.

Eleven more properties are individually listed. The Swart-Wilcox House, the oldest extant house in the city, was listed in 1991. Old Main, built for the state's normal school, the predecessor of SUNY-Oneonta was listed in advance of its demolition in 1978. The first building constructed on the Hartwick College campus, Bresee Hall, was listed in 1990. The Armory on Academy Street was listed in 1991. Five more properties —the Fairchild Mansion (listed 1973) reused as a Masonic Temple, the Ford Block (listed 1990), the Oneonta Municipal Building (listed 1990), the Old Post Office (listed in 1978) now used for city offices, and the Oneonta Theatre (listed 2002) — stand within the later-listed Oneonta Downtown Historic District. The brick Chapin Memorial Chapel (listed 2002), erected to replace an earlier frame church built by a Universalist congregation, and the Queen Anne-style George I. Wilber Residence (listed 2000) face each other across Ford Avenue. The descriptive narratives of the last two nominations note the potential eligibility for a large district surrounding these individual properties.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 9

Collectively, these listings identify fewer than 200 properties as culturally significant in a city that retains many more cultural resources in generally intact contexts and streetscapes that represent the city's development from the mid-nineteenth century through ca. 1970. This section discusses the types of buildings – by age, use, general location, and socio-economic context – found in the City of Oneonta.

Comparatively few buildings in Oneonta predate the mid-1800s. Many buildings shown on the 1856 *Map of Otsego County* in the commercial district occupying a short section of Main Street between Grove Street (a.k.a. Academy Place) and Silver Creek were lost to fire or simply demolished. Outside of that district, buildings surveyed that year in the small residential enclaves east and west of the commercial throughfare and on farmsteads now within the city boundary still stand, even if altered and augmented during the city's rapid growth in the post-Civil War period.

The Oneonta village plate in the 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County* shows how the municipality's street plan expanded mainly north onto the land sloping in that direction from the bluff and the intersection of Main and Chestnut streets in the Central Residential District study area. By the time Lucien Burleigh surveyed his bird's-eye view of the village in 1884, many new streets were opened for residential development associated with the Delaware & Hudson Railroad yards and shops on the floodplain (the Sixth Ward study area) and the village's expanding industry and commerce. Sanborn surveys taken between 1888 and 1927 and the 1903 *New Century Atlas* record the continued filling-in of streets already staked and lotted. They also delineated expansion into the East End and West End study areas even before the City of Oneonta was chartered in 1909 and expanded its boundary to include those sections. Growth encompassing new housing on the hillsides surrounding the Central Residential District study area began in earnest by the early 1960s in the College Hill study area where two colleges – one now designated a university – developed new campuses over the ensuing decades. Except in the College Hill study area, most extant buildings were designed as houses and continue in residential use. On College Hill, the majority of development is designed for the varied functions associated with running an educational institution in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Oneonta retains varied examples of academic architecture throughout its residential street plan in addition to Hartwick College and SUNY Oneonta. The city retains and still uses several primary and secondary school buildings constructed by the city. There are two large, pre-1940, two-story, brick edifices: the former Chestnut Street School in the West End study area and the Center Street School in the Central Residential District study area. Three elementary schools—Greater Plains in the West End, Valley View in the East End, and Riverside in the Sixth Ward study — were all built using International-style designs in the early 1960s on sites within historic neighborhoods to supersede older buildings in those areas. The junior/senior high school is east of Oneonta Creek and adjacent to Wilber Park. All exhibit the

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 10

low-profile, flat-roofed massing, brick veneer walls, and ribbons of windows popular in this period for academic architecture. The Elizabethan Revival school built in the early 1930s for teacher training once shared the oval scribed by State Street with Old Main (SR/NR listed, demolished 1978), the normal school's main classroom building. The former St. Mary's Parish School, built in 1923 in a similar style at the southeast corner of Walnut and Elm streets, of buff brick, faces the Mid-Century Modern Roman Catholic church on the north side of Walnut Street. The last was augmented and partially remodeled in the 1960s in the International Style. While not an educational building *per se*, the present Fox Hospital building in the East End study area exemplifies a similar utilitarian taste that was also typical for medical establishments of the time.

Oneonta retains a variety of church buildings. Of earlier wood frame examples built before 1900, only the Akron-plan River Street Baptist at the corner of Miller Street in the Sixth Ward study area remains. Most other nineteenth-century congregations built new masonry churches in the late 1800s or first third of the 1900s. Several of these – the Main Street Baptist, St. James Episcopal, the First Presbyterian, the First United Methodist, and the former First Baptist Church (now the Chabad of Oneonta-Rohr Jewish Center) – are previously SR/NR listed in the Oneonta Downtown District. The Chapin Memorial Chapel owned by the Unitarian-Universalist congregation is individually listed. The former Baptist Church on Grove Street in the Academy Hill study area stands on the oldest identified church site in Oneonta and seems to be the only wood-frame replacement of an earlier church building. The First United Presbyterian Church (a.k.a. the Red Door Church) built its English Gothic Revival taste in the early 1930s in the East End on the site of the former Walling Mansion. Oneonta retains two Mid-Century Modern churches that replaced earlier buildings. St. Mary's Roman Catholic church on Walnut Street was not old enough to be considered contributing when the Walnut Street NRHD nomination was prepared, but it is now past its 50-year anniversary. The Mid-Century Lutheran Church of the Atonement is near the corner of Center and West streets and Elm Park Methodist in the West End.

Of the numerous buildings and sidings that were part of the railroad shops located in the village beginning in the 1860s, little remains above ground. Those extant are located between the tracks and the bluff enclosing the floodplain. They include an elaborate brick passenger depot on the south side of Market Street, an altered brick warehouse to the east, and the smaller Ulster & Delaware passenger depot on Railroad Avenue east of Lettis Highway (NY 23). Warehouses and small manufacturing buildings, mainly built before 1940, stand between Railroad Avenue and the mill race drawn off the Susquehanna River in in the East End study area. Additional such buildings stand north of the tracks, also east of Lettis Highway. West of the Main Street Viaduct, where there was an enormous roundhouse and shops, most railroad infrastructure, except for the main tracks, is demolished. Trackside development at the west end of River Street, south of the tracks, is now mainly wholesale businesses housed in pole barns that generally postdate the historic period.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 11

Oneonta retains only a handful of historic-period industrial buildings. A few nineteenth-century brick examples are mainly found in the eastern part of the city near the tracks. A single example is located at the corner of Chestnut Street and Fonda Avenue in the West End study area. Later masonry and metal-sided pole barns face the west end of River Street in the Sixth Ward study area, also near the tracks.

Commercial buildings in the City of Oneonta are concentrated in the previously listed Oneonta Downtown NRHD. The NRHD nomination inventories mainly masonry commercial buildings constructed in the first quarter of the twentieth century on Main and Chestnut streets. Additional later, but now mainly older than 50 years, commercial buildings face both Main and Chestnut streets outside the NRHD, extending into the East End and West End study areas. The short segment of Main Street south of the NRHD lies in the Sixth Ward study area. Most of the commercial development along this corridor originated after World War II. Buildings are mainly low-profile, one-story masonry examples with comparatively utilitarian decorative schemes. Some replace earlier houses shown on maps surveyed by the 1930s; others fill previously open lots. Replacement buildings were frequently related to the automotive trade, including service stations, a car dealership, motels, and fast food outlets. Some of these retain an appearance that identified them with a specific company. Much of the north side of Chestnut Street between Church and Clinton streets was redeveloped with a small pedestrian mall, commercial outlets, and a new building for the local newspaper. The south side of Main Street east of Maple Street, is similarly developed and includes the International-style post office with enameled blue panels, which stands at the southeast corner of Lettis Highway (NY 23). A.O. Fox Memorial Hospital's rambling two-story building constructed of buff brick occupies more than 300 feet of frontage between Third and Fourth streets. Unscreened parking lots run for two blocks east of the main building, stretching south to the A.O. Fox Nursing Home behind the main hospital.

Domestic architecture comprises the largest proportion of the properties reviewed in this survey. Several general patterns are identified here; the architectural discussion in each study area section reviews how these patterns are illustrated in each area. Most residential construction in Oneonta is wood-frame construction. Brick is unusual; stone was reserved for foundations and later superseded by concrete. There are two unusual examples built with steel frames clad in enameled steel panels. Both stand in the Central Residential District. One uses a design presented at the 1939 World's Fair; the second is a post-World War II Lustron house. Residential development throughout the City of Oneonta expanded outward from the corridor traversing the leading edge of the bluff overlooking the floodplain. The adjacent areas – the bluff, the surrounding hillsides, and the floodplain – were largely agricultural after European settlement began in the late eighteenth century. Buildings predating the second quarter of the nineteenth century are unusual within the city boundary, but a few Greek Revival and Italianate wood-frame houses built as part of farmsteads face the main travel corridor and are also found on the floodplain. These are found in what were sections peripheral to the growing village

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 12

during the late 1800s, especially in the Sixth Ward, the East End, and the West End study areas. Where older houses faced Main, Chestnut, and River streets, mainly Italianate examples, later Eastlakes and Queen Annes filled in.

Rapid population growth beginning in the 1860s encouraged the subdivision of land near the early transportation corridor, and new streets lined by house lots were staked. In the Academy Hill-Watkins Tract and Grand Street-Riverside study areas, early residents built Italianate-style houses. Those who followed in the 1880s and 1890s chose Victorian eclectic style designs. In the Central Residential District study area, actual construction often lagged, so that streets already staked by 1870, but at some distance from the main corridor, are lined by Craftsman, Four-square, and cottage-style houses built as late as the 1920s and 1930s. This contrasts with development in the East End east of Sand Street and in the West End, which were staked later, but supported by the horse-drawn street railways opened by the late 1880s. This access to transportation gradually diminished the importance of proximity to the main corridor and work.

This has led to individual blocks of many streets in Oneonta being stylistically varied, and makes chronological stylistic shift subtle. It can be observed, however, as one moves out from the commercial center of the city. Thus, Italianate houses are very unusual within the grid plans of subdivisions opened after ca. 1880, but can be found on the main transportation corridor where they were associated with earlier farmsteads and “suburban” residences built by the well-to-do. A similar tendency is illustrated by locations of later Victorian eclectic style houses. Stylistically coherent blocks tend to postdate ca. 1900. Blocks in subdivisions off Chestnut Street in the West End study area and off Main Street in the East End study area east of Sand Street tend to feature mainly modest Craftsman and Four-square houses. Similar conditions prevail in much of the western section of the Sixth Ward study area.

Domestic buildings throughout the city can be read not only stylistically, but also as representing socio-economic conditions. In general, more stylish, often larger, houses of all periods except for ones built after World War II, face primary rather than secondary streets, especially in the Central Residential District study area. The pattern is less pronounced in subdivisions laid out at the turn of the twentieth century and later. These feature houses of scale and design meant for those earning a middling income.

Oneonta’s most modest housing – tiny wood-frame houses north of the tracks in the Sixth Ward, along the lower reaches of Oneonta and Silver creeks, and residential hotels between the main commercial district and the railroad – was regarded as substandard by the 1950s. These areas were mainly cleared during Urban Renewal.

Buildings designed as multi-unit tenements still stand in the Sixth Ward study area, especially on West Broadway and in the narrow streets north of River Street, east of Wilcox Avenue. A sizable example also stands on Cliff Street in the Academy Hill-Watkins Tract study

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 13

area. The City established a housing authority during Urban Renewal that has both demolished buildings and erected multi-unit housing at several locations. Both Hartwick College and SUNY-Oneonta have built student residences. The old normal school site is now a small townhouse and apartment development. The Wilber Park Apartments (built ca. 1970) range over the steep hillside east of the park and command a sweeping view of the valley.

The two subdivisions opened in the 1950s and 1960s above the college campuses are also designed to face the views offered by the river and surrounding hills. Their Mid-Century Modern designs range in degree of stylishness and scale from rather plain to relatively costly. Some larger examples face Ravine Parkway. These areas represent characteristic development patterns of their time, but differ greatly from early residential development throughout the rest of the City of Oneonta.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 14

INTRODUCTION

This context statement is broad in scope to provide a basis for understanding how sections of the city developed in relation to each other and within the larger geographical setting. The development of each study area is inextricably linked to the better-documented downtown area and nearby “mansion” district listed in the two existing National Register Historic Districts (NRHDs). The statement relies on field review, historic maps and images, and local history writing to understand how transportation innovation, colleges, industries, a hospital, a fairgrounds, parklands, housing, churches, and schools have shaped the city’s overall development. The maps referenced in this statement are provided in an appendix, which can be opened separately to help readers orient themselves whilst reading this section and the subsequent sections discussing the study areas delineated in this survey.

Early Development

The area now designated as the Town and the City of Oneonta in south central Otsego County was lightly settled in the pre-Revolutionary period by European people descended from Palatine Germans who came to America during the first decade of the eighteenth century. Archaeological evidence indicates earlier use in the Oneonta vicinity by native peoples. One such settlement is said to have been located on the floodplain; it is labeled in the 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County*. The hill north of the early village was sometimes called Indian Hill. There were sites actively used at other locations along the valley.

The German settlers lived first at Livingston Manor, flanking the Hudson River in present-day Columbia County, and later along the Schoharie Creek and Mohawk River valleys before some moved into the Susquehanna Valley. They developed farmsteads in the Wallace Patent, a 28,000-acre tract established along both banks of the Susquehanna in the present towns of Unadilla, Otego, and Oneonta in 1770.¹ The twenty-eight men who held shares in the patent divided it into 194 narrow strips of land, or lots, perpendicular to the riverbank and running roughly a mile inland to a boundary of straight courses. These lots were numbered beginning at the eastern end of the patent riverbank opposite from the present city to the western edge of the tract and returned along the same bank as the city to the place of beginning. This plat allowed each lot access to the river, the only transportation corridor at the time. The owners received their share of the patent by lottery. They were, in turn, bound to

¹ Much of the land now in Otsego County was patented by the British Crown soon after the Line of Property was established in the treaty that ended the French and Indian War in 1768. By that treaty with the Haudenosaunee, Great Britain agreed that they would permit no land acquisition west of the Unadilla River, which now forms the county’s western boundary. The treaty led to a land rush whereby lands not yet unpatented to British owners were quickly surveyed for purchase from the Haudenosaunee. The patent in question was labeled “Sir William Johnston [sic]” in early nineteenth-century mapping. Johnson, as Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the New York colony, held shares in many patents as a perquisite of his post. The name Wallace probably comes from Alexander Wallace heading the list of the patentees in the British Crown papers establishing title. The Scottish and Irish surnames of most the patentholders suggests they were military men whose shares were reward for service.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 15

“improve” the land by making it agriculturally productive. In practice, they leased to tenants. The Germans lured into the remote interior abandoned their farms during the War of Independence (1776–83) as they were indefensible. Some returned in the 1780s and 1790s, while many others – mainly New England outmigrants – also cleared land and established farmsteads alongside them.

The alluvial soils of the flats along the Susquehanna provided good arable land. Moreover, the Oneonta and Silver creeks emptying into the river on its north bank provided waterpower harnessed by local mills for a variety of industrial processes. The region’s plentiful timber was sawn locally and lashed together in rafts floated downriver on the high waters of spring runoff to Chesapeake Bay markets.² By the early 1800s, a rough highway traversed the first bench of land above the floodplain of the Susquehanna. This, in turn, was improved as a turnpike that enhanced trade.

An article, “View of Oneonta in 1811,” listed nine house owners in the hamlet and reported that there were only buildings on the uphill side of Main Street except for Thomas Swart’s distillery. James McDonald lived at Main and River streets on the floodplain. There were a blacksmith, a store, and Walling’s tavern on Main Street between Oneonta Creek and Chestnut Street.”³ The considerable growth in population in central New York State generally that occurred in the decades following the Treaty of Paris of 1783 resulted in rapid political subdivision into new counties and towns. Until 1822, the area embraced by the Town of Oneonta was in the earlier established and much larger Town of Otego. That year, Huntsville, which included the present day towns of Unadilla, Otego, and Oneonta, was split off. Huntsville was further divided in 1830, and the town of Oneonta was officially named that year.⁴ Church societies formed the earliest non-governmental organizations in the area. The first Presbyterian congregation began meeting in 1786.⁵ The First Baptist Society organized in 1833.

Gordon’s 1836 *Gazetteer of the State of New-York* noted Oneonta’s position at the meeting of several valleys. This provided very accessible transportation corridors extending to all compass points except south, where Franklin Mountain presents its steep face to the valley. In 1832, the Charlotte Turnpike, running along the Charlotte Creek in Delaware County and meeting the Susquehanna River valley about five miles east of Oneonta, opened. A segment of its route was Oneonta’s main thoroughfare along the bluff overlooking the Susquehanna. Where Main Street diverged from the bluff, it dropped to the floodplain and was carried over the river on McDaniel’s bridge. Disturnell’s 1842 *Gazetteer of the State of New-York* listed four turnpike roads that met in the village, connecting it with Albany, Catskill, Cooperstown, and

² This information is taken from Horatio Gates Spafford, *Gazetteer of the State of New-York for 1824* (Albany, New York: B.D. Packard, 1824), 246, and Child’s *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Otsego County, New York, for 1872–1873* (Syracuse, New York: The Journal Office, 1872): 116.

³ [Hurd, Duane Hamilton]. *History of Otsego County, New York, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Everts and Fariss, 1878): 223.

⁴ Thomas F. Gordon, *Gazetteer of the State of New York, comprehending its Colonial History, General Geography, Geology, and Internal Improvements* (Philadelphia: T.K. and P.G. Collins, 1836): 626.

⁵ Child, 116.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 16

Ithaca.⁶ The stage routes plying these roads surely played a role in Oneonta's steady growth during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Gordon's 1836 description of the post village of Oneonta listed two churches, three taverns, a grist mill, a sawmill, a clothing works, three stores, and 50 dwellings.⁷ Six years later, Disturnell noted 90 dwellings with 500 inhabitants. By then, three churches (a Methodist Episcopal Society had organized after 1836) and ten stores served the local populace. In addition to the mills Gordon listed, Disturnell recorded a tannery, an iron foundry, and a distillery.⁸ Main and Chestnut streets were still the only local thoroughfares when the Village of Oneonta was first incorporated in 1848.

Village Incorporated

The earliest identified map of the Village of Oneonta – described by Disturnell in 1842 and incorporated on the 14th of October 1848 – was published in 1856.⁹ It depicts the early framework of the city street plan. Main Street aligns with the contour of the first bench, or bluff, of land overlooking the Susquehanna River floodplain for much of its route. At its east end, it is labeled “to Cooperstown.” Where it bent south and crossed the Susquehanna, it went “to Delhi,” seat of Delaware County. The west end of Chestnut Street went “to Unadilla,” another Otsego County village farther downstream.

By this time, Oneonta's central commercial district lined the south side of Main Street running east from near the intersection of Grove Street to just east of Dietz Street. A few offices, a marble works, and some dwellings faced a shorter segment of the north side of Main Street from Chestnut Street to Dietz. Bullard's and Watkins' hotels faced each other across Chestnut Street at its intersection with Main Street, where all the turnpikes and stage routes crossed. Buildings, probably mainly wood frame, housed two blacksmith's shops, a wagon shop, three law offices, a doctor's office, the printer's office of the *Oneonta Herald*, a cabinet shop, a carriage and trim shop, a shoemaker's shop and store, and a tin shop. At least six stores sold dry goods, medicines, hardware, readymade clothing, and groceries. More unusual businesses included Christian Ueble's melodion factory, a watch shop, and a steam works. The latter two faced Chestnut near Main Street. An industrial district was growing alongside lower Main Street as it approached the river. Here, there were a grist mill, a sawmill, a furnace, a wagon shop, a paint store, and another blacksmith's shop. A short row of dwellings lined the west side of the street.

Except on the section of Main Street on the floodplain where dwelling houses and businesses mingled, regularly spaced houses faced both Main and Chestnut streets to the village limit in the pattern established in crossroads villages throughout the region. The map also shows nascent sparsely developed side streets tucked into corners formed by the earlier

⁶ J. Disturnell, *A Gazetteer of the State of New-York*. (Albany, New York: J. Disturnell, 1842): 301.

⁷ Gordon, 626.

⁸ Disturnell, 301.

⁹ J.H. French, *Gazetteer of the State of New York, embracing a comprehensive view of the Geography, Geology, and General History of the State*. ([Syracuse, New York: G.P. Smith], 1860): 535.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 17

highways. Dietz Street was cut north from Main Street on the flat land east of Chestnut Street in 1853 by Jacob Dietz and made a sharp turn northeast to align with the western boundary of Lot 179.¹⁰ Jacob Dietz's house at the bend was mapped in 1856. Miss M. Dietz lived at the north end of the street. Six more houses occupied variously sized lots in between. Church Street (later renamed Center Street), a short elbow named for the M.[ethodist] E.[piscopal] Church, intersected the north side of Chestnut and bent west part of the way towards the town highway now called West Street. Another elbow street, now called Academy and Grove streets, opened the area southwest of the main intersection at Main and Chestnut for development, where a few houses, a schoolhouse, and the Baptist Church stood. On the floodplain, the east end of River Street where it met Main Street was surveyed, but no buildings yet faced it.¹¹

Local historians all cite Oneonta citizens Eliakim R. Ford, Harvey Baker, Jared Goodyear, and Colonel W.W. Snow as leaders in bringing the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad to Oneonta in August 1865, after more than thirty years of discussion by several differently proposed companies.¹² In 1856, Ford, a merchant, owned a large property shown surrounded by a grove of trees between Dietz Street and Silver Creek on the north side of Main Street. Snow's house stood at the northeast corner of Chestnut and East streets. Baker's furnace and plough manufactory was one of the businesses on the floodplain on Main Street. Goodyear's house was a little north of the Baker furnace. In January 1869, the railroad connected Binghamton with Albany, providing a connection between the navigations of the Susquehanna and Hudson rivers.¹³

The Albany & Susquehanna had in common with many railroad companies of the period a turbulent history of financial shortfalls, shareholder controversies, and a resulting confusing shuffle of names and ownerships in its formative years. In 1869, the road's owner, Joseph Ramsey, was locked in a struggle over its ownership with Jay Gould and James Fisk, owners of the Erie Railroad. This culminated in fisticuffs at Belden Hill between toughs hired by the rival owners. The courts ruled in Ramsey's favor, and he, in turn, leased the line in perpetuity to the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company.¹⁴ The "D. & H.," as it came to be called, then settled down to nearly a century of steady economic success with control of a corridor that connected the coalfields of northeastern Pennsylvania, the Hudson River navigation and rail corridor, and the agricultural and industrial areas of New England. The village of Oneonta received a special boost to its economy when the company decided to locate its switching yards and roundhouse on the flats west of Main Street and overlooking the Susquehanna River in 1872.¹⁵

¹⁰ Eugene D. Milener, *Oneonta: The Development of a Railroad Town* (New York: Courier Printing Corp., 1983): 326.

¹¹ Cyrus and R.C. Gates, *Map of Otsego County, New York, from actual surveys by C. & R.C. Gates*. Philadelphia: A.O. Gallup, 1856.

¹² James Catella, *Our Hometown Railroad* (Laurens, New York: The Village Printer, 1982): 2-4.

¹³ Catella, 9.

¹⁴ Catella, 11, and Mark Simonson, *Reminiscing Across the Valleys. Vol. I.* (Cooperstown, N.Y.: Barton-Butler, 2002): 21.

¹⁵ Milener, 319.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 18

Anticipating of the railroad's arrival in 1865, E.R. Ford, one of Oneonta's leading businessmen, cut Broad Street from Main to connect commercial development on the bluff with the proposed depot in 1864. Two years later, in 1866, Harvey Baker laid out Mechanic (now Market) Street parallel to the new tracks on the floodplain.¹⁶ These streets became an industrial area immediately north of the new railroad. The Oneonta plate of Beers' 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County* shows two foundries, E.R. Ford's machine shop on the south side of aptly named Mechanic Street, and the recently opened mill race on the floodplain south of the tracks. The race began at the confluence of Oneonta Creek and the river and curved west and south into a large impoundment east of lower Main Street. There a dam controlled the flow into Jared Goodyear's sawmill, gristmill, and foundry, a spoke factory, and another mill making sash and blinds for the burgeoning building trade. The railroad itself was drawn as a single track with switching sidings extending west from Silver Creek. The yard encompassed a passenger depot, a freight house, an engine house, and a turntable.

The 1868 Beers' *Atlas* shows that speculation for residential districts was expanding quickly by the time its survey was taken. The Oneonta village plate depicts a rural municipality with a corporation line enclosing newly staked streets and house lots poised for rapid growth north of the Main and Chestnut intersection and east of Silver Creek (labeled Elk Creek). Centre (renamed Church by 1884) and Dietz streets extended north to Brook Street (now Center Street). Elm and Maple streets paralleled Dietz Street between Silver and Oneonta creeks. The two blocks of east–west–running Walnut Street connected Dietz and Maple. Brook Street paralleled Walnut farther north through the newly platted area connecting West and Maple streets. East of Maple, a new residential subdivision presented in dashed lines included Cherry (now an extension of Center Street) and East streets. South of Main Street between Silver and Oneonta creeks, Grand, Division, and Prospect streets were laid out and lotted, but mainly undeveloped. The recently opened Riverside Cemetery occupied nearly six acres between Division Street and Silver Creek. In the same era, River Street was gradually pushing westward on the floodplain with houses on lots of varying sizes. The corporation line was drawn just east of Oneonta Creek.

Railroad Town

Oneonta's population grew exponentially over the next forty years. In 1870, the village reincorporated, probably because of its rapid growth and a necessity to restructure the functions of local government. The reincorporation may also have anticipated the tax benefit offered by the railroad's developing the floodplain site for its shops and switching yards. That year, the federal census recorded the village's population at 1,161, up from 678 only a decade before.¹⁷ Hamilton Child noted in his *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Otsego County for 1872–1873*, that Oneonta boasted a wide variety of shops and stores, two newspaper printing

¹⁶ Milener, 326.

¹⁷ Franklin B. Hough, *Gazetteer of the State of New York, embracing a comprehensive account of the history and statistics of the state with geology and topography described* (Albany, New York: Andrew Boyd, 1872): 537.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 19

offices, the three hotels shown in the 1868 atlas, and five churches. By inference, these were the Baptist on Grove Street, the Free Baptist (founded 1858 and located at Maple and Main), the Methodist Episcopal at Chestnut and Church, St. James Episcopal at Elm and Main, and the First Presbyterian on Main. Moreover, Child noted a village population of 1,383 persons and reported 100 new houses had been built in the past season alone.¹⁸

By 1880, the population was roughly 3,000, and it doubled again in the ensuing decade.¹⁹ Burleigh's bird's-eye view of Oneonta published in 1884 delineated the expanding street plan, which showed where new houses were going up quickly and where construction appears to have lagged. He was careful to show the undulating terrain of the city, illustrating how slope and drainage affected how land was used. The bluffs rising from the floodplain to the bench where much of the village lay were carefully drawn in, as was the second rise in the East End between the fairgrounds and Main Street. The rising land north of Spruce Street and the hillside where Clinton Street departed from Chestnut Street were obvious, as was the agricultural use of most of the surrounding hillsides. Forests cloaked the steep slope rising above Chestnut Street where the ridge drew close to the bluff between Clinton Street and Fonda Avenue. Oneonta Creek was drawn as a deep ravine south of Main Street, showing how it was an important boundary for development.

New streets mainly expanded east and west at low elevation rather than ascending the encircling slopes. Young trees were often set out along these new thoroughfares, distinguishing them from earlier, often narrower, streets where buildings, including houses, often stood close to the road surface and sidewalks were not set off by header lawns. This difference is apparent in the street plan of the neighborhood bounded by the bluff above the floodplain and Main and Chestnut streets in the Watkins subdivision of Watkins Avenue and Cliff and Spring streets, which adjoined streets of earlier design. Similarly, the triangular area south of Main composed of Grand, Prospect, and Division streets was now largely filled in with mid-Victorian houses on tree-lined streets, among them the village's only octagon house set in the fork formed by Grand and Division streets.

Fair Street crossed Oneonta Creek from Grand Street and was named for the Oneonta Union Agricultural Society's fairgrounds opened in 1872 south of Main Street. On otherwise undeveloped land, the society laid out a half-mile oval horse racetrack, a Floral Hall, and a few additional permanent buildings.²⁰ Also east of the creek, Otsego Street, still part of the present street plan, extended south from Main Street, crossed Fair Street, and continued to Lewis Street, a street paralleling the railroad. Hickory Street formed a block with Fair Street, and a few mid-Victorian houses faced these streets. A large orchard spanned the area between Fair and Main streets east of Otsego Street. Trackside buildings stood between the railroad and the river. Walling Avenue, already partially developed with houses, extended north from Main

¹⁸ Child, 115.

¹⁹ Simonson, *Valleys*, 29.

²⁰ Hurd, 44–45. Floral Halls were standard permanent, but seasonal, buildings on fairgrounds of the time.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 20

Street near Oneonta Creek, and inaugurated new residential development in the area known as the East End.

Between Oneonta and Silver creeks, Spruce Street extended the grid made irregular by different owners planning new house lots northward onto the rising land encircling that neighborhood. Two new north–south–running streets were opened. Elm Street originated on Main Street next to the Episcopal church, opposite the First Presbyterian church, and crossed Spruce, Ernst, and Cedar streets. Ford Avenue, which was opened in the 1870s over the former E.R. Ford estate, ended at Spruce Street and was lined by sizable houses. Overall, density decreased farther north in this neighborhood, indicating that house lots closer to the commercial district might have been preferred. Only eight houses faced the five blocks of Spruce Street. The wood-frame Roman Catholic church, St. Mary’s, was mapped on Main Street opposite Maple Street.

West of Silver Creek, new streets connected Church (labeled Centre St in 1868) and West streets. High Street extended the former elbow of Centre Street westward. Cherry and Green streets were farther north. Beyond West Street, Clinton Street looped over the shoulder of the ridge enclosing that side of the village. A few large houses clustered where it descended to Chestnut Street, but like West Street, this area was still mainly open land. Beyond this point on Chestnut Street, three houses clung to the bluff overlooking the railyards on the floodplain below.

West of Main Street on the floodplain north of the tracks, sidings accessed the railroad shops and turntable. Woodpiles, both covered and uncovered, provided materials for building cars. A small neighborhood filled the space east of Fonda Avenue between the yards and the bluff rising to the first bench of land and Chestnut Street.

South of the tracks west of Main Street, new streets formed an irregular grid built off River Street. Wilcox Avenue and Miller and Gilbert streets crossed River Street running north–south. East of Wilcox, short dead end streets – Baker, Ann, and West Ann – ran north to the tracks. East of Ann Street, Depew formed a small block with Mosher and Meckler streets. Burnside Avenue and Henry Street formed a block with Wilcox Avenue west of Main Street. West of Wilcox Avenue, West Broadway paralleled the tracks. Fonda Avenue crossed West Broadway and the tracks running north to Chestnut Street. East of Baker Street and Burnside Avenue, most lots were built on. Construction tailed off quickly to the west. A gas works was located east of the water-powered industrial area on the floodplain east of Main Street.

Rapid Growth

The expansion and redevelopment of Oneonta’s earlier downtown district and its growing adjacent residential areas is delineated in the maps drawn by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company in 1886, 1894, 1905, 1910, 1916, and 1927. During this 40-year period, Oneonta followed a pattern common among villages and small cities where commercial, industrial, and residential areas were increasingly separated, and each use became visually and

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 21

physically distinct from the others. In 1886, Sanborn probably cited the previous year's state census figure when it gave the population as 4,500. If correct, Oneonta's population grew by 50% in just five years. The company published four sheets delineating Oneonta's most densely developed sections, since they were especially interested in industrial and commercial buildings because those owners were likely to buy insurance. The sheets included the Delaware & Hudson shops and turntables on the floodplain and the growing trackside industrial and commercial district south of Main Street on Broad, Front, and Mechanic streets. That year, three hotels stood in the downtown district near the corner of Main and Chestnut streets. These probably served a varied clientele as residential hotels were increasingly common in America's growing downtowns, while dwelling houses were moving to the expanding periphery. Hotel rooms could be rented as office space, and main floor rooms offered event venues. There were, of course, rooms for overnight accommodation.

Sanborn published an updated survey of nine sheets in 1893. On the covering index they recorded a population of 6,000. This series shows that commercial, railroad, and industrial properties was consolidated in established areas and expanded minimally. The entire north side of Main Street between Chestnut and Dietz streets was rebuilt with multi-story, brick-faced commercial blocks. Additional commercial blocks replaced dwellings and shops west of the Westcott Building and the town firehouse sheds between Broad and South Main streets. Across the street, on the north side, an additional commercial block extended the shopping area eastward toward Ford Avenue. Beyond Ford Avenue going east, the Briggs-Miller and Platt blocks stood midway to the Elm Street intersection. While Dietz Street remained largely residential, the commercial district had begun gradually pushing northward when Alfred C. Lewis built the Exchange Building at 2–6 Dietz in 1888–1889. It was also the period when several of the village's earlier wood-frame "meeting-house-style" churches were replaced with brick or stone Victorian Gothic edifices.²¹ The choice of building material signified permanence; the style alluded to an American interest in establishing the nation on the international stage established by northern European states. East of Oneonta Creek, adjoining the south side of the tracks at Susquehanna and Wells avenues, J.L. Bowdish opened a sash and blind factory to supply building components.

Explosive population growth encouraged new residential construction. The areas immediately north and south of the railroad, where small frame houses stood, were surveyed by Sanborn for the first time in 1893. New houses also went up in previously platted subdivisions north of the downtown commercial district approaching the State Normal School opened to train primary and secondary school teachers in 1889. Several prominent

²¹ The rebuilding of four of the six churches within the downtown district during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasizes Oneonta's prosperity in that period. All these buildings replaced older frame structures, except for the Episcopal church, which was built in stone when it was founded in 1871. Rather than replacement, the Episcopalians expanded their original building by adding a stone entrance tower in 1889 to the church. The Presbyterian Church rebuilt its 1815 edifice in polychrome brick in 1887, the Main Street Baptist congregation rebuilt in brick in 1890, and the First Baptist society built in brick on a new and prominent site in 1903.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 22

businessmen in the village had urged the Board of Regents to open a normal school in the village.²² The stone-coped brick Romanesque Revival building built at the top of Maple Street on the former Delos Yager farm was soon lost to fire and rebuilt slightly bigger on the same lot in 1894. In its early years, the college drew approximately a fifth of its student body from Oneonta itself, but as this percentage dropped, the college brought additional residents to the city as well as teaching staff from other places.

Just five years later, in 1898, the Sanborn Company resurveyed Oneonta and increased its exposure to eleven sheets. It reported a population of 9,000, a 50% increase over 1893, a figure not corroborated by census data. The company returned again to Oneonta in January 1905. They increased their exposure to seventeen sheets and added new “specials” – single buildings or properties that might be insured that were surrounded by open land, or sections with a low likelihood that owners would buy protection. Specials included recently built primary schools on Center Street, River Street in the Sixth Ward, and in the East End at the corner of Main and Park streets. The rebuilt State Normal School and the Oneonta Union Agricultural Society Fairgrounds were shown in separate insets. So, too, was the recently opened A.[urelia] O.[sborn] Fox Memorial Hospital on Norton Street east of Oneonta Creek, near the fairgrounds in the East End.

The four Oneonta plates of the *New Century Atlas of Otsego County* published in 1903 fill in areas skipped over by Sanborn, as the New Century survey covered the entire village regardless of degree of development.²³ The northwest plate showed a sizable grid of streets on the hillside west of Clinton Street. The northeast plate showed another subdivision north of Cedar Street and west of the State Normal School. The latter was accessed by the picturesquely named Winding Way and streets curving northeast to East Street. Both areas were laid out on hilly land, and the grids on the steepest sections were never developed.

More successful subdivisions were platted on Chestnut Street west of Clinton Street in the West End study area and on new cross streets off Main Street east of Oneonta Creek as far as the fairgrounds in the East End study area. Both were adjacent to the Oneonta, Cooperstown, and Richfield Springs electric street railway that opened in 1898, superseding the older horse-drawn trolley. The electric street railway built its sheds on the south side of Market Street, which allowed it to efficiently shift freight between the trolley and the railroad. Tracks were laid going west on Chestnut Street where it met the highway paralleling the East Branch of Otego Creek (now NY 205) and traveled north to Hartwick, where the shops were located. Tracks also ran east on Main Street towards the road (now NY 28) paralleling the Susquehanna River towards Cooperstown. A spur route departed Chestnut Street at Church Street, turned east on Center Street to Maple and thence north to the normal school through mainly established neighborhoods.

²² David W. Brenner, *State University of New York College at Oneonta*. The College History Series. (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2002).

²³ *New Century Atlas of Otsego County, New York, with Farm Records*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: New Century Atlas Co., 1903).

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 23

House lots laid out on Chestnut Street west of Clinton filled quickly during the first quarter of the twentieth century. By 1903, lots on Main Street east to Sixth Street were mainly occupied. Sporadic clusters of houses stood on new streets east of the fairgrounds north and south of Main Street as far east as Glenwood Cemetery. Glenwood differs from the older Riverside Cemetery adjacent to the First Presbyterian church. It features curvilinear paths laid out in a parklike landscape typical of rural cemeteries opened in many villages after the Civil War. It also differed from the Roman Catholic graveyard located near Fox Hospital that was later exhumed to make room for the hospital's expansion.

The same year as the street railway opened, the Ulster & Delaware Railroad at last reached Oneonta, connecting it with the Hudson River at Kingston.²⁴ Its passenger station stood where the U.&D. merged tracks with the D.&H. A small turntable for switching engines, a locomotive house, and a coal shed were mapped farther east on a siding opposite an icehouse on the U. & D. tracks in 1903 (New Century) and 1905 (Sanborn). Continuing east, the U.&D. became a single track line beyond Electric Lake, which was dammed for the Oneonta Electric Light & Power Company. In 1904, farther west, the old Main Street level crossing over the multiple busy tracks of the D.&H. was replaced with the first "viaduct," a name that's remained in use for successive structures flying over the tracks. Many communities with level crossings replaced them in the first decades of the twentieth century.²⁵

Between 1906 and 1910, three fires altered the streetscape of Main between Chestnut and South Main streets. In May 1906, the Wilber Bank at the southwest corner of South Main Street burned, imperiling the frame buildings to the west and the Westcott Block at the corner of Hamilton Avenue. The village trustees met in emergency session and decided to demolish the old engine house and village offices to stop the fire, which, in the end, stopped one building short of the fire hall.²⁶ In March 1907, the village began discussing rechartering as a city.²⁷ Oneonta's growing population – recorded as 9,491 in the 1910 census – and sizable commercial

²⁴ The Ulster & Delaware Railroad was a successor to the Rondout & Oswego in 1866 by Thomas Cornell, who owned the Cornell Steamboat Co. operating out of Rondout on the Hudson River. As the railroad inched its way through the Catskills, its ownership changed several times. Its planned route was shortened to the Village of Earlville, Madison County, *via* Oneonta in 1872 when the Rondout & Oswego went bankrupt. It was bought out by the New York, Kingston & Syracuse Railroad. That company went under in 1875 when the bank foreclosed on it. Reorganized as the Ulster & Delaware Railroad that year, it continued slow but steady progress through the Catskills, one village at a time. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_and_Delaware_Railroad) Entry appears to be drawn mainly from Gerald M. Best, *The Ulster and Delaware: Railroad Through the Catskills*. San Marino, CA: 1972.

²⁵ This happened in early every city, village, and hamlet on the New York Central line, which paralleled the north bank of the Mohawk River in Montgomery County, in the same era. The change often followed a fatal collision, determined by the municipality that it should be last such accident.

²⁶ Lucy Breyer, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Old Post Office (258 Main Street), Oneonta, New York*. Listed 1978. (Waterford, New York: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, 1978).

²⁷ "Oneonta Diary, 1908–2021," 1908 entry. (<http://www.oneontahistorian.com/images/oneontad.pdf>) This online document relies mainly on newspaper coverage and offers a useful basic chronology for events in the city. It is not paginated. Subsequent references – and they are numerous – follow the format: "Diary, [year entry]."

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 24

interests required the greater structure offered by a city council over the more limited structure of village government.

In December 1908, not long before the city charter was inaugurated at midnight on the 31st, fire destroyed the wooden row of buildings at the heart of the downtown district between the Hazelton Block and the First National Bank. The 1910 Sanborn map shows that in under two years, the hole left by the Wooden Block fire was swiftly filled with masonry buildings, illustrating Oneonta's economic stability and resilience derived from its importance on the Albany–Binghamton transportation corridor. In 1910, the Central Hotel at the northeast corner of Dietz and Main streets burned and was replaced by the five-story masonry Classical Revival Oneonta Hotel in 1911. Not only did the new hotel provide the grandest accommodation available in the city; beginning in 1918, it also housed the Delaware & Hudson Railroad Susquehanna Division offices, which moved to Oneonta in 1911.²⁸ During the World War I era, the Delaware & Hudson employed nearly 1,800 people, approximately 40 percent of the city's labor force. At the same period, nearly 4,000 freight cars passed through Oneonta's yards daily.²⁹

The pre-World War I era in many parts of the nation was characterized by progressive policies that expanded opportunities especially for working and middle-class people. In Oneonta, three parks were opened on land donated for that use by private citizens. The first was located east and south of the millrace system on the floodplain extending to the river. Lewis Rutherford Morris (1862–1936) and his wife Katherine Stauffer Clark Morris (1875–1974) donated the 75-acre tract to the city in 1908 and 1909. He resisted its being named Morris Park and asked Willard Yager, a local man knowledgeable in Indian culture, to provide a name. Yager offered Neahwa, possibly a Haudenosaunee word for meadows by the river.³⁰ In 1916, local benefactor George I. Wilber donated the land flanking Oneonta Creek north of Main Street and extending some distance eastward to the area known as Walling's Grove. It was dedicated as Wilber Park on the Fourth of July.³¹ The section south of Center Street was soon laid out in new streets named Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson avenues where a small neighborhood of sizable Colonial Revival houses was built. The wooded and hilly remainder of the park was kept as recreational space. Finally, in 1918, Henry E. Huntington donated his family's large Italianate house on Chestnut Street (turned into the public library opened in 1920) and its five-acre parcel for a city park.³² The undulating land of the park, relandscaped in the years 1917 to 1919 for its new use as a public green space, abuts both the library property and the Methodist Church lot. It adjoins the densely developed commercial district and the residential area spreading north of it west of Silver Creek.

²⁸ Diary, 1911 and 1918.

²⁹ Mark Simonson, *Images of America. Oneonta* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2001): 16.

³⁰ Obituary for Lewis Rutherford Morris (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67173215/lewis-rutherford-morris>)

³¹ Diary, 1916.

³² Diary, 1918.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 25

The city also expanded its schools as neighborhoods grew more densely settled and educational standards changed. In April 1908, four months after the village trustees voted to approve a city charter, Oneonta opened a new high school that replaced the union free school built in 1868 on Academy Street.³³ Both the former union school and the new high school were built to meet increasing demands encouraged through incentives by New York State. Many municipalities added high school departments in this period to encourage more young adults to continue beyond the eighth-grade level offered in the common schools throughout rural New York. The village had already built one-story, brick-veneered primary schools, the village version of one-room common schools, in the Sixth Ward at River and Miller streets and in the East End at Main and Park streets. Wings were added to each of these by 1927 (Sanborn) that probably incorporated indoor plumbing; both were drawn in 1916 with small ancillary buildings towards the rear of their lots that were likely used as outhouses.³⁴ There was also the much larger two-story masonry Center Street School in the Fifth Ward, the large and generally middle-class residential area north of Main Street between Clinton and East streets. In 1913, the city voted to build the two-story brick Chestnut Street School in the West End near Pearl Street, where houses continued to be built along the interurban electric trolley route opened in August 1898.³⁵ The 1927 Sanborn shows the two-story Mitchell Street School with its central auditorium in the eastern part of the Sixth Ward. For several decades, these school buildings remained in service even as the city's population surpassed 12,000 in 1930. St. Mary's parochial school opened at the corner of Elm and Walnut streets in a two-story buff brick building minimally trimmed in carved stone Gothic details in 1923.³⁶ Many of Oneonta's new residents in the late 1800s and early 1900s were Roman Catholic immigrants, and the parochial school might have alleviated some pressure on public schools.

Between 1916 and 1927, Sanborn increased its coverage of Oneonta from twenty-five sheets to thirty-two to cover development in the West End, including adjacent development in the town of Oneonta. City population continued rising to a peak in 1930 at 12,536. In 1917, the D. & H. began expanding its enormous roundhouse – said to be the largest in the world – seven stalls at a time. A seven-year plan increased the stalls to 49. By the early 1920s, almost all the large downtown houses that once faced Main and Chestnut streets between Elm and West streets were replaced with new buildings. Eliakim R. Ford's stone mansion built in the mid-1800s was demolished for the new Classical Revival sandstone Wilber Bank at the corner of Main Street and Ford Avenue. The Walling Mansion farther east was replaced in 1932 by the First United Presbyterian church, sometimes called the Red Door Church, now at the corner of

³³ Diary, 1908.

³⁴ Sanborn 1916, Sh. 24 and 10; Sanborn 1927, Sh. 27 and 17.

³⁵ Mark Simonson, "Backtracking: The Early Years: Conversion from Horse-drawn to electric trolley service began locally 1896." (https://www.thedailystar.com/opinion/columns/backtracking-the-early-years-conversion-from-horse-drawn-to-electric-trolley-service-began-locally-in/article_76368c59-2c08-539f-8611-dc1a4142d9bc.html) The electric trolley company organized in 1896, closed the horse-drawn trolley in December 1897, and opened the new electric service in August 1898.

³⁶ Diary, 1923.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 26

Walling Avenue.³⁷ Two, the Huntington and Fairchild mansions, were reused as the library and the Masonic Hall (acquired in 1929).

Commercial development remained almost entirely within the Main and Chestnut street corridor. Businesses continued operations in a variety of mainly three-story, purpose-built masonry buildings. Near the east end of the commercial area, roughly opposite the First Presbyterian Church, J.C. Penney built a low-rise buff brick building at the northeast corner of Main Street and Ford Avenue in 1928.³⁸ Beyond the main commercial corridor, small exceptions included short rows of connected brick storefronts built facing main thoroughfares in neighborhoods developed mainly in the 1910s or later. Two-story examples usually incorporated living quarters above the storefront. Charles H. Bennett's row built in 1926 at Chestnut and Shafer streets first housed an auto showroom and garage.³⁹ The M.A. Ross block built in 1927 at Main and Fairview streets adjoining the Viaduct is another example.⁴⁰ George B. Baird constructed a row at Chestnut and Church in 1929. This was replaced with a shopping plaza – a later, similar version of the same pattern – in the 1950s. In the primarily working class areas in the Sixth Ward and the East End, however, mixed industrial, especially railroad-related construction, and residential use persisted into the post-World War II era. In 1927, the Central New York Fair, which had used the fairgrounds in the East End south of A.O. Fox Hospital, closed its sizable property. D.F. Keyes platted and sold house lots on a street called Belmont Circle, which overlays the old racetrack.⁴¹ It was adopted as a city street in 1939.⁴² Houses there date from the late 1920s into the postwar era.

The small shopping plazas presaged changes engendered by technological innovation, most especially the ascendance of the gasoline-powered combustion engine. These buildings featured low, broad lines and streamlined decorative motifs typical of the Moderne style that seemed especially suitable for buildings catering to the motor trade. Several dealerships and garages were built in the 1920s. At the western end of Market Street, starting at the northwest corner of the Chestnut Street Extension, Oneonta Sales started selling Ford automobiles in their purpose-built showroom and service garage opened in 1920. The business was so successful that they soon expanded northward along Chestnut Street, roughly doubling their building in size with a new reinforced concrete building, in 1927. Farther east, near the corner of Main Street, garages and other automobile-related enterprises opened. On Dietz Street, Fred Van Wie opened his Chevrolet dealership next to the newly built Dibble Block. Several, like the Oneonta Sales addition, capitalized on industrial age materials and construction ideas, including structural steel and wall structures that allowed large display windows and unobstructed interior spaces.

³⁷ Diary, 1932.

³⁸ Diary, 1938.

³⁹ Diary, 1926.

⁴⁰ Diary, 1927.

⁴¹ Diary, 1927.

⁴² Diary, 1939.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 27

The D. & H. still dominated the city's economy in the late 1920s, and most industry in Oneonta was oriented to its corridor. The Elmore feed mill – still partially a water-powered operation – was the largest mill along the race east of Main Street.⁴³ The electric-powered Ide Shirt Factory clung to the bluff overlooking the floodplain at Chestnut Street and Fonda Avenue.⁴⁴ Lumber yards, building supply businesses, a feed mill, and the Oneonta Grocery Company stood alongside the D. & H. sidings on Market Street. New garages and service stations filled remaining open spaces. Quality Silk Mills, Inc., owned three small factories in the city. One was at 4 East Street, near where several small water-powered factories operated earlier.⁴⁵ Another stood at 6 Hickory Street in the East End.⁴⁶ The last was at 40–42 Market Street.⁴⁷ The three-story Oneonta Silk Co., Inc., occupied a large lot accessed by D. & H. siding off Wells Avenue in the east end. Silk mills ran in many places, often reusing buildings constructed for a different enterprise, where they manufactured yarn and cloth for undergarments, gloves, and stockings until the fiber was superseded by rayon for all but the most expensive markets. Oil tanks and coal yards adjoined both the D. & H. and the U. & D. sidings. Collectively, these businesses were important to the local economy, but the D. & H. dwarfed them all in its contribution to maintaining jobs and both supplying and moving goods for those businesses. By the early 1930s, the U. & D. was failing. In 1932, the Interstate Commerce Commission pressured the company to allow New York Central to acquire its assets. That company operated the road until 1954, when it ceased passenger service, which by then was a single run in each direction each day.⁴⁸

Becoming a College Town

Before economic depression gridlocked much of the nation in the early 1930s, the country's first Lutheran seminary in the town of Hartwick, Otsego County, began planning to move to the City of Oneonta. Essentially a boarding school offering high school courses, theology degrees, and freshman-level college courses, the seminary was at a crossroads in leadership, and its offerings were increasingly out of sync with evolving educational norms. In 1924, new principal and president Charles Myer was hired to expand its single year of college education to a four-year college program. He inaugurated a \$500,000 capital campaign. In March 1927, the Oneonta Chamber of Commerce brokered an arrangement whereby the college would raise \$400,00 and the City of Oneonta would provide \$200,000 and a site, and Hartwick Seminary was reorganized as Hartwick College. The city's share of funds was seeded by state supreme court justice, Abraham L. Kellogg, Sherman Fairchild, and the Bresee family. The rest was raised by a door-to-door campaign in the city where residents provided the lion's share of the requisite budget. The 115-acre site on what became called Oyaron Hill was chosen

⁴³ Sanborn, 1927: Sh. 29.

⁴⁴ Sanborn, 1927: Sh. 25.

⁴⁵ Sanborn, 1927, 23.

⁴⁶ Sanborn, 1927: 7.

⁴⁷ Sanborn, 1927: Sh. 5.

⁴⁸ Ulster and Delaware Railroad. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_and_Delaware_Railroad)

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 28

soon after.⁴⁹ The first building constructed on the ridge enclosing the city west of West Street was Science Hall, a three-story brick Georgian Revival building later renamed Bresee Hall. As it was not completed when classes began in 1928, the opening chapel service was held in the Palace Theater at Main Street and Ford Avenue, and classes were taught at the Walling Mansion. Bresee Hall was one of seven buildings planned for the new college campus, but economic exigency prevented the plan from being executed. For well about two decades students boarded out in the city as there were no dormitories built on Oyaron Hill.⁵⁰

As deepening economic depression set in, it appears – based on the architectural inventory and mapping – that new residential construction nearly halted in Oneonta. The city's population peaked in 1930, which may have allowed construction to level out relative to demand. During that decade, the normal school began planning its expansion on the hill above Old Main, which was dubbed the "Upper Campus." It opened the brick Tudor Revival training school east of Old Main and facing East Street in 1932–33. In 1933, it laid plans for its physical plant, but during the Depression and World War II, these lay moribund for nearly twenty years. During that time, however, primary and secondary education was increasingly professionalized. In 1942, the normal school was designated a state teachers college granting four-year education degrees. Similarly, in 1943, Hartwick College was chosen as a training center for the United States Cadet Nurse Corps as the war greatly increased demand for nurses. This established the nursing program that is still a mainstay at Hartwick College.⁵¹ Now, the city was home to two educational institutions that increased its population and provided assets to the community that carried into the postwar years.

Postwar Era

The gasoline combustion engine's increasing dominance over earlier transportation modalities enabled and engendered changes in Oneonta's built environment in the post-World War II era. It contributed to the decline of the rail freight and passenger industry, the city's economic mainstay, because freight moved increasingly on highways and car ownership increased rapidly. Greater reliance on automobile travel led to changes in street and highway planning, demolition in central business districts and adjacent residential areas to create parking lots, increased perimeter development, and diminished reliance on passenger travel by rail.

In 1949, a new zoning ordinance allowed commercial development on both Chestnut and Main streets to the city line.⁵² Existing houses were put to new uses, and within a few

⁴⁹ The name Oyaron has been assigned an Iroquoian etymology that appears to have little basis in truth, but owes a considerable debt to the writing of early twentieth-century anthropologist J.N.B. Hewitt. "Oyaron Fictions – Implications of Mythological Mistakes," *Living Anthropologically*. (<https://www.livinganthropologically.com/mythological-mistakes/>)

⁵⁰ *Hartwick's History* (<https://www.hartwick.edu/wickhistory/>). This site provides a well-documented overview of the college's history from its beginnings as the nation's first Lutheran seminary in the early 1800s.

⁵¹ Diary, 1943.

⁵² Diary, 1949.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 29

years, new low-rise commercial buildings replaced many houses. In 1951, an “urban arterial” was proposed that would bypass slow-moving urban traffic on Main and Chestnut streets, bypassing the commercial district. It proposed drawing traffic off Main Street at Gault Avenue to Walnut Street and thence to Chestnut Street *via* King Street. The right-of-way would be widened on all but Walnut Street. The plan also included a new alternate route for NY 7 in the town on the opposite riverbank.⁵³ The plan was scrapped. During the ensuing decade, however, several houses, commercial buildings, and the Palace Theater, facing the midsection of Dietz Street, were cleared for parking during the 1950s as people increasingly traveled by car.

The nation’s population boomed in the postwar era. In many places, suburban development, mainly housing subdivisions that sprawled over previously agricultural lands, mushroomed. Unlike most prewar development, especially pre-1930 development, new suburbs almost required residents to own automobiles to carry out even basic errands. It appears, however, that in Oneonta, where the population fell to 11,731 in 1940, household size rather than number of households contributed more to the rebound to 13,564 in 1950. The suburban sprawl experienced in many places was comparatively limited in Oneonta, occurring mainly in the western section of the Sixth Ward and adjacent to the colleges, where enrollments and, thus the number of faculty and staff, rose. After the state legislature appropriated \$1,250,000 to construct new buildings on the upper campus of the state teacher college in 1948, Ravine Parkway was proposed to connect it with the city downtown, making clear the anticipated importance of the growing institution to the larger community.⁵⁴

The city responded to an anticipated boom in high school-aged students when, in 1953, it bought a 100-acre tract off East Street, mainly east of Oneonta Creek, as the site for a new high school. The same year, the state approved a new elementary school site in the East End on Valleyview Street between Main Street and Belmont Circle.⁵⁵ In 1954, the Mitchell Street School in the Sixth Ward was renovated and put back into service.⁵⁶ Valleyview opened in 1957, and in 1959, voters supported augmentation of the Center Street and Academy Street schools. They overrode, however, a proposal to build two more elementary schools, one in the West End and one in the Sixth Ward.⁵⁷ St. Mary’s Roman Catholic church responded a bit later to the Baby Boom and added to their parochial school on Walnut Street in 1967.⁵⁸ The building retained its Tudor Revival stone trim; the most apparent exterior alteration was the International-style influenced windows featuring brightly colored enameled steel panels below single-light openings. Similar windows were used at Valleyview a decade earlier.

⁵³ New York State Department of Public Works, “Report on State Arterial Route Plans in the Oneonta Urban Area.” Prepared in cooperation with the Bureau of Public Roads, U.S. Department of Commerce. 1951. (Oneonta, N.Y.: Office of Codes Enforcement)

⁵⁴ Diary, 1948.

⁵⁵ Diary, 1953.

⁵⁶ Diary, 1954.

⁵⁷ Diary, 1959.

⁵⁸ Diary, 1957.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 30

Churches also responded to the Baby Boom. In 1957, St. Mary's built a large masonry Mid-Century Modern edifice able to seat 1,000.⁵⁹ This replaced the brick edifice east of Grand Street where Lettis Highway (NY 23) now intersects Main Street. In 1959, Atonement Lutheran replaced its building at the west end of Center Street with a Mid-Century Modern one. Both the Lutherans and the Catholics chose to stay within one of the most established residential neighborhoods in the city.

The problem of public school crowding continued into the 1960s: Oneonta's population peaked at 16,030 in 1970. For a time, voters continued to turn down new construction, rejecting bonds for a new high school and new elementary schools. In 1960, the district inaugurated split sessions at the high school building on Academy Street.⁶⁰ In 1961, the district rented space in the Armory at the corner of Academy and Fairview streets to avoid a second year of split sessions.⁶¹ At length, in 1962, after six attempts, voters overwhelmingly supported building a new high school.⁶² In 1963, citizens approved a \$2M bond to build both the Riverside and Greater Plains elementary schools in the Sixth Ward and the West End respectively. The siting and plans of the elementary schools illustrate postwar trends for new school design. Both are single-story, flat-roofed, rectilinear brick buildings with sprawling plans and strongly horizontal details, mainly ribbons of large single-light windows. They occupy large, level, mainly open lots at the periphery of the neighborhoods they serve. The space accommodates open play areas and large parking lots signal a largely non-pedestrian attendance and teacher force. The 100-acre high school site is similar with its long access drive and plentiful parking. It differs in that the building and playing fields are backdropped by the wooded east slope of the surrounding hills, abutting Wilber Park, embodying a trend where outdoor areas were viewed as potential laboratories for students.

Urban Renewal

By the early 1960s, it was apparent that higher education might indeed become the leading economic driver for Oneonta as railroads – the D. & H. included – lost market share. In September 1952, the first long-run diesel locomotive passed through the Oneonta yards, heralding the gradual shift to the new fuel during the coming decade.⁶³ The D. & H. closed its passenger and ticket office in Oneonta in 1958.⁶⁴ Not only did fewer and fewer people stop traveling by rail, but more goods traffic traveled on the nation's new limited access highway system established by the Eisenhower administration in 1956.

Automobile travel was associated with the planning ideas billed as "urban renewal" in a belief that these strategies would improve the city's economy and quality of life. In June 1963,

⁵⁹ Diary, 1967. The new church cost \$225,000.

⁶⁰ Diary, 1960.

⁶¹ Diary, 1961.

⁶² Diary, 1962.

⁶³ Diary, 1952.

⁶⁴ Diary, 1958.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 31

the Common Council retained John C. Burdis Associates to plan Oneonta's renewal as a forward-looking city attuned to its future.⁶⁵ It appears Burdis got off to a rocky start when, in April 1964, he proposed demolishing the Wilber Mansion, already saved in 1951 from demolition when the arterial was proposed.⁶⁶ In January 1966, Burdis presented his Master Plan to the city. It was submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development soon after. Review of the plan was delayed by HUD's concern that too many residents would be displaced, but the Common Council's approval in December 1967 cleared the final hurdle that allowed the city to proceed.⁶⁷ In 1968, HUD granted \$4.1M for downtown redevelopment.

Oneonta was poised to execute its urban renewal plans against the backdrop of work beginning on the new I-88 corridor paralleling NY 7 from Schenectady to Binghamton. In 1970, the Grand Street Arterial, now the James F. Lettis Highway, was proposed as a connector between Main Street (NY 7) and NY 23 on the south side of the river. The city's new Environmental Advisory Board protested its location flying over New Island and the river. Local businesspeople argued for its being essential to bring people downtown from the I-88 bypass scheduled to begin the next year and successfully overruled the objection.⁶⁸

During Block One of the urban renewal plan, the four-story Stanton Block at the corner of Main and Chestnut and adjacent buildings extending to Grove Street were demolished in 1973 to be replaced with a two-story office building called 125 Main. In Block Two, the row of three-story masonry buildings that continued the commercial streetscape through the main intersection on the opposite side of Main Street was knocked down in 1974 to be replaced with Clinton Plaza. Its banked foundation straddles the slope dropping from Main Street to the floodplain with one-story storefronts facing Main Street and a second row of storefronts one story below grade facing the opposite direction towards Market Street.

Late in 1975, the new parking garage at the corner of Market and Chestnut streets opened.⁶⁹ The two-story steel and concrete structure features decorative concrete blocks that screen the parking decks from the street. It was meant to accommodate patrons of the new downtown shopping mall to be built where numerous industrial, commercial, and residential buildings on Market, Broad, and Hamilton streets were demolished in 1976. An agency called Downtown Developers announced groundbreaking for the 24,000-square-foot mall in 1979.⁷⁰ A year later, though, the Southside strip on NY 23 in the town was first discussed, and Downtown Developers said the proposed mall in the Broad Street area would be unable to compete. In January 1981, a developer from New Jersey revealed plans for an \$8M enclosed mall on

⁶⁵ Diary, 1963.

⁶⁶ Diary, 1964.

⁶⁷ Diary, 1967.

⁶⁸ Diary, 1970.

⁶⁹ Diary 1975.

⁷⁰ Diary, 1976 and 1979.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 32

Southside. It opened in 1983 with Penney's and K-Mart as its anchor stores.⁷¹ The area cleared for the downtown mall remains largely unoccupied.

Urban renewal work in the city's oldest sections paralleled rapid physical plant development by Hartwick College and the Teachers College. In the early 1950s, both were preparing for building campaigns on the slopes encircling the older, low elevation parts of the city. Three connected buildings called the Morris Conference Complex, the first buildings on the state's upper campus, were completed in 1951. Four more buildings, including the home economics building, opened in 1954.⁷² When Nelson A. Rockefeller (1908–1976) began his first of nearly four terms as governor of New York in 1959, he set in motion an expansion of the State University that greatly benefited state schools and, by extension, the places where they were located, Oneonta among them. In 1961, Rockefeller dedicated two residence halls, a dining hall, and the first Milne Library on the State College campus, just before redesignation as a four-year state college offering a broadened range of programs in 1962.⁷³ Buildings on the campus multiplied: two in 1964, ten in 1966, and ten more before the early 1970s. Hartwick launched its own building program in 1959.⁷⁴ At the time nearly all students still lived off campus, and dormitory construction was inaugurated.⁷⁵ It opened Yager Library and Museum in 1967. A year later, Binder Gymnasium opened. Its Center for the Arts was completed in 1971.⁷⁶

New subdivisions were laid out adjacent to both campuses. The land northeast of the state college was platted in dead end streets running northeast from Bugbee Road, the eastern access to the campus. When Old Main was demolished in 1978, low-rise apartments and townhouses were built on State Street, the drive that had encircled it. Sunset Terrace and College Terrace followed the contours of the hillside above West Street, northwest of Hartwick College. Except for the apartments, houses were generally single-unit dwellings.

Multi-unit dwellings were planned by the city on disused school sites to reduce displacement, especially for the elderly and low-income households. In 1970, the city housing authority forwarded plans for Nader Towers on the site of the Mitchell Street School to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Construction on the nine-story, 112-unit concrete and steel building began the next year.⁷⁷ In 1984, the 28-unit Academy Arms was built on the site of the former Union Free School on Academy Street. The site later accommodated Oneonta's first high school. That building became the junior high in the 1960s when the new high school opened in the northwest corner of Wilber Park. The building on Academy Street was disused when the junior high school moved in 1976 to its new wing adjoining the high

⁷¹ Diary, 1980, 1981, and 1983.

⁷² Diary, 1954.

⁷³ Diary, 1961 and 1962.

⁷⁴ Diary, 1959.

⁷⁵ Diary, 1961.

⁷⁶ Diary, 1971.

⁷⁷ Diary 1970-71.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 33

school.⁷⁸ The Academy Arms extended the adjacent housing authority's apartment development (now the James F. Lettis Apartments) bordered by Fairview and Academy streets and Watkins Avenue north on Academy Street, opposite the Armory.

Pushback and Reclamation

By the mid-1970s, a countercurrent to urban renewal and associated suburbanization was emerging in American communities. In some places, demolition of particularly treasured buildings raised awareness as long accepted landmarks disappeared. Oneontans' twice-over and successful opposition to razing the Wilber Mansion might be an example of this kind of reaction. The nation's Bicentennial celebrated in 1976 engendered nostalgia and encouraged an interest in historic buildings as the foci of celebration. In 1972, the State Historic Preservation Office conducted a statewide survey of historic buildings. Two buildings identified in Oneonta – the Fairchild Mansion, used as the Masonic Hall since 1971, and Old Main, the 1894 Oneonta Normal School building – were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 and 1976. The latter was documented on the eve of its demolition.

Early listings in many places usually singled out large, stylistically prominent buildings. Oneonta's masonry Beaux-Arts Post Office built in 1915 was threatened with demolition after the USPS built a new International-style building at the southeast corner of Main and Maple streets in 1967.⁷⁹ Citizens pushed back, and at the time that its National Register listing was written in 1977, the city was considering its reuse as offices and the jail.⁸⁰ The city moved some offices there in 1980 from the Beaux-Arts Municipal Building and Firehouse built in 1906 and listed in 1982. That nomination noted that the city was "hoping to ensure its continued contribution to the city's historic character."⁸¹ Just before that, in 1980, the city had undertaken refurbishing the Main Street commercial district to recall its historic appearance with brick walks, planters, and streetlamps resembling old gas fixtures.⁸² In 1983, rehabilitation of the Ford Block began.⁸³

The city's first National Register Historic District, encompassing Walnut Street and short segments of adjoining streets, was listed in 1980. It emphasized the large houses of leading businessmen in Oneonta, mainly in the late nineteenth century. Its author wrote that surrounding "commercial pressure has led to increased awareness of the historic value of the district."⁸⁴ Individual nominations for Bresee Hall, the first building on the Hartwick College

⁷⁸ Diary 1984. In 1974, the city supported adding a junior high wing to the high school.

⁷⁹ Diary, 1967.

⁸⁰ Breyer, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Old Post Office, Oneonta, New York*.

⁸¹ Breyer, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Municipal Building, Oneonta, New York*. Listed 1982. (Waterford, New York: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, 1982).

⁸² Diary, 1980.

⁸³ A second rehabilitation by Springbrook is under way in 2023.

⁸⁴ Dan Mayer, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Walnut Street National Register Historic District, Oneonta, New York*. Listed 1980. (Waterford, New York: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, 1980).

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Introduction

page 34

campus, and the Ford Block on Main Street, were listed in 1984. The Swart-Wilcox house, thought to be the oldest house in the city, was listed in 1990. The Armory was listed under a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) in 1995. Another spate of nominations began in 2000 when the by-then twice-saved Wilber Mansion was listed followed by the Oneonta Theatre on Chestnut Street in 2001 and the Chapin Memorial Chapel in 2002.

The Oneonta Downtown NRHD was listed in 2003, illustrating the shift in preservation from the identification of individual high style buildings to a more inclusive paradigm where buildings are reviewed within contextual streetscapes for their sense of place. Where in 1977, it was remarked that the Post Office, Wilber Bank, the Municipal Building, and the Oneonta Hotel were the “major remnants of a Main Street, which at one time had great architectural character,” the new district recognized a generally intact streetscape of varied masonry buildings characteristic and representative of prosperous communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Breyer, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Old Post Office, Oneonta, New York.*

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

page 35

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

The Academy Hill-Watkins Tract and Grand Street-Riverside Cemetery study areas bookend the Oneonta Downtown National Register Historic District (NRHD). The latter study area is located south of the Walnut Street NRHD. Combined, they encompass approximately 56 acres and would add about 150 properties to the current Oneonta Downtown NRHD under Criteria A and C representing themes of architecture, social history, and community development.

Academy Street and Watkins Tract Neighborhood

This study area encompasses approximately 34.25 acres and about 100 properties.

General geographical description: This study area is laid out on generally level terrain above a short, steep slope rising from Main Street on the east, where it is bounded by the rear lines of lots facing Main Street. The area extends north and east across the generally level area of the first bench (1,100 feet) and is bounded west and south by the bluff. Lots facing the south side of Chestnut Street west of the former Baptist Church at the corner of Academy Street – the last property listed in the Oneonta Downtown NRHD (listed 2003) – are included in the study area. The area incorporates the SR/NR-listed Oneonta Armory (listed 1995).

Spatial plan and circulation: This neighborhood is a small, mainly residential enclave tucked into the corner formed by the intersection of Oneonta's two main through-routes — Main and Chestnut streets — on its east and north sides respectively. The neighborhood is laid out with three internal streets – Academy, Watkins, and Spring – running south from Chestnut and two streets – Grove and Fairview – running west from Main Street. Cliff Street runs north-south between Fairview and Grove – along the edge of the bluff. These form an irregular grid plan. House lots in this neighborhood generally have narrow frontages and deep yards. Grove Street and Watkins Avenue feature tree-lined header lawns adjacent to the street and separated from the lots by city sidewalks. On other streets, street trees are more sporadically planted because sidewalks mainly adjoin the street surface.

Buildings and land use: This study area encircles the block once occupied by the union free school and later high school buildings that served the Village, and later, the City of Oneonta. Those earlier buildings were located on the block outlined by Academy and Grove streets and Watkins and Fairview avenues. Alterations to the school site and adjacent properties to the south occurred after 1970, when the academic buildings were demolished. The opposite sides of all four streets, however, retain intact streetscapes developed mainly between 1855 and 1920 that are similar to the rest of the neighborhood. The previously SR/NR-listed Oneonta Armory stands at the south end of Academy Street.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

page 36

Houses in the eastern part of this area appear to have been mainly built as individual single-unit dwellings interspersed by a few duplexes. Wood-frame houses designed in the Italianate and late Victorian eclectic styles predominate nearer the main travel corridor with later tastes increasingly common moving south and west toward the bluff.

A few buildings differ from this pattern but fit into the streetscape with similar lot sizes and setbacks. These include a diminutive Gothic Revival house on Fairview Avenue and a brick apartment building with stone coping (built ca. 1915) that mimics details of the Armory on the west side of Watkins Avenue. West of Watkins Avenue, houses are typically more modest in scale and detail. There is a six-unit house at the northeast corner of Fairview and Cliff streets. In the western section, on Cliff and Spring streets, multi-unit dwellings are common. A few very modest single-story, wood-frame houses built between the wars are found in this section.

The area also incorporates the former Baptist Church on the north side of Grove Street in the first block off Main Street. The current building is a late nineteenth-century, gable-front, wood-frame, late Victorian Gothic building on a stone foundation that may have supported the earlier church, built in 1834 and mapped in 1856.

The block that was the site of the union free school and the later high school is altered. The school lot extending south from Grove Street on the west side of Academy Street was redeveloped as a low-rise senior housing in 1984. This adjoins the earlier townhouse complex built during Urban Renewal when the housing authority cleared the site of approximately a dozen houses similar in scale and design to those in the immediate area. This occupies the south end of the block with frontages on Academy Street and Fairview and Watkins avenues. Several houses between Chestnut and Grove streets on the west side of Academy Street were demolished for parking lots in the same period. A split-level, U-plan office building at Grove and Watkins constructed ca. 1960 is the only other notable intrusion.

Context Statement

This study area represents the earliest foray away from the linear development of Main and Chestnut streets in the Village of Oneonta and encompasses approximately 100 properties. It is tucked into the southwest quadrant of the intersection formed by those two main thoroughfares. Over time it extended south and west to the edges of the first bench overlooking the floodplain to the south. It encompasses Academy, Grove, Cliff, and Spring streets and Fairview and Watkins avenues laid out in a generally rectilinear plan on level ground. It features a variety of building types and styles, most of them characteristic of Oneonta's mainly residential neighborhoods developed adjacent to the commercial thoroughfares from the mid-nineteenth century to ca. 1920. The streetscapes are composed of almost entirely wood-frame houses in various styles popular during that period. The Baptist church site on Grove Street is still used for religious purposes. The SR/NR-listed Armory stands at the south end of Academy Street where it meets Fairview Avenue. Infill construction

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

page 37

includes senior and low-income housing on the west side of Academy Street, where two brick schools occupied part of that area successively.

Historic mapping illustrates how the neighborhood grew overtime. It was first mapped on the inset map of the village on the 1856 *Map of Otsego County*. The northernmost block of Academy Street and the easternmost block of Grove Street formed an elbow connecting Main and Chestnut streets. Grove Street ascends steeply westward from Main Street to where the village school stood at the corner near Academy Street at the time. Five houses faced Academy Street; a sixth faced Grove Street opposite the Baptist Church. Of these, it appears that two or three houses still stand; the others are later, but historic-period, replacements or augmentations. The current church building (owned by Community Gospel Church) on Grove Street is on the Baptist church site in use by 1834. The wood-frame building rests on a rough stone foundation typical of the period, but the steeply gabled front façade with corner towers is characteristic of the last quarter of century. The later church builders may have incorporated the old foundation while also increasing the footprint towards the rear of the property.

The 1868 Beers *Atlas of Otsego County* shows that by then, Academy Street extended south to the easternmost block of Fairview Street. The latter was drawn as a dashed line running alongside the south edge of Isaac H. Peters' house lot facing Main Street. A cemetery occupied the lot at the southwest corner of Academy and Grove streets. Moving south, the large new union free school occupied the adjacent large lot on the west side of Academy Street. The east side of the street formed the back lines of house lots facing Main Street. North of the Grove Street intersection, there were three new Italianate houses facing Academy Street; one more faced the church on Grove Street.

In 1868, the western part of the present neighborhood remained undeveloped land and was labeled "H. Watkins." It lay within the bounds of Lot 175 of the Wallace Patent and was bounded physically both south and west by the bluff rising from the floodplain to the first bench of land above the valley floor. During the 1870s, the Watkins Tract was subdivided into house lots facing onto new streets named Watkins and Fairview avenues and Spring Street.

In April 1886, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company surveyed Oneonta for the first time. It only mapped Academy Street and Grove streets between Main Street and Watkins Avenue. Houses occupied most lots on Academy Street by this time, and the brick-veneered armory (replaced or remodeled in 1905) stood at the northeast corner of Fairview and Academy. The great majority of houses mapped that year – a blend of Italianate and mid-Victorian eclectic wood-frame houses – still line these streets. Although Sanborn didn't survey the western part of Grove Street in 1886, street survey shows that it was already lined by slightly more modest Italianate houses on similarly sized lots to those farther east. Similar development also lined much of Fairview Avenue all the way to Cliff Street.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

page 38

By 1898, Sanborn extended its survey westward, and the extant multi-unit wood-frame building on the northeast corner of Fairview and Cliff, labeled as a tenement at the time, was drawn. This building, on its high brick foundation, is unusual within the historic streetscape of this neighborhood of predominantly single-unit houses designed mainly for middling households. The Sanborn maps and the 1903 *New Century Atlas* plates of Oneonta show the almost complete filling in of the area before the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

A new brick high school replaced the union free school on the same site in the early 1900s. It became the junior high school when the new high school off East Street opened in 1964 and continued in use until the mid-1970s until the junior high wing was added to the new school. The old high school was demolished in 1976 and replaced by senior housing. This adjoined the city housing authority project completed during Urban Renewal a few years earlier, when it purchased approximately a dozen parcels with houses like others in the neighborhood. These faced Fairview and Watkins avenues and Academy Street. They were demolished and replaced with townhouse blocks designed as low-income housing. While these changes have altered this block from its earlier appearance, these buildings are similar in height to those in the surrounding neighborhood and stand on lots with similar proportions of green space. The U-plan split level office building (22-26 Watkins Avenue) at the southeast corner of the Academy Street block, built ca. 1960, is the only other notable intrusion in a neighborhood that preserves much of the appearance it achieved during the period 1850 through the early twentieth century.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

page 39

Grand Street and Riverside Cemetery Neighborhood

This study area encompasses approximately 21.7 acres and about 50 properties.

General geographical description: This study area is a small neighborhood located between the southern edge of the bluff (1,100 feet) above the floodplain and Main Street between Oneonta and Silver creeks. Riverside Cemetery fills its western section and roughly aligns with the ravine on the east bank of Silver Creek. The ravine of the west bank of Oneonta Creek forms the eastern boundary of this area.

Spatial plan and circulation: This area has an irregular street plan composed of three streets – Grand, Division, and Prospect – that conform to the creeks, the bluff, and the cemetery. It is accessed from Market Street on the floodplain *via* Prospect Street, from Main Street on the bluff, and from Fair Street, which crosses Oneonta Creek to the East End. Fair Street passes under Lettis Highway, a recent (1971) addition to the street plan that connects Main Street and the Southside district of the Town of Oneonta located on the bank of river opposite the city. House lots in this neighborhood generally have narrow frontages and deep yards that are shaped by the irregular street plan. All streets feature header lawns that separate sidewalks from the street surface. These lawns feature sporadically planted trees and occasional poured concrete steps connecting sidewalks and streets.

Buildings and land use: This small study area features houses of varied styles spanning a period from ca. 1850 through the early 1900s. A few mid-nineteenth-century vernacular Greek Revival houses face the east side of Grand Street, but most of the neighborhood features wood-frame houses built during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Riverside Cemetery occupies a five-acre parcel at the west end. Its irregular lot is partially encircled by a wrought iron fence, and the entrance off Main Street is set off with heavy, rusticated stone gate posts. The open, lightly rolling site features large deciduous and coniferous trees, small blossoming trees, and shrubs are planted throughout its rectilinear plan.

Two properties, both peripherally located, differ visually from the overall neighborhood. These are the two-story, Town House Motor Inn (built 1962) accessed both from Grand Avenue and Main Street and a Mid-Century Modern house (built ca. 1960) standing on an elevated lot on Prospect Street overlooking the valley.

Context Statement

This study area was the second tract opened for residential development as the Village of Oneonta expanded in the 1860s. It encompasses approximately 50 properties east of the early commercial district. Silver Creek forms its west boundary; Oneonta Creek forms its east boundary. The bluff encloses its southern edge. The area backs onto the Presbyterian Church lot, a contributing property in the previously listed Oneonta Downtown NRHD and the Fairchild Mansion (previously individually listed in 1990), used as the Masonic Lodge since 1929. Its

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

NRHD Expansion Study Areas

page 40

three streets – Grand, Prospect, and Division – are laid out in a triangle. Late-period vernacular wood-frame Greek Revival houses face the east side of Grand Street alongside Oneonta Creek. Additional wood-frame houses built mainly between 1875 and 1910 in varied styles fill intervening lots and form stylistically consistent streetscapes elsewhere. Infill construction includes a motor inn built behind the Fairchild Mansion on Main Street and a Mid-Century Modern house on Prospect Street.

In 1856, none of the streets in this neighborhood were yet staked out, and this area was shown as open land save for the earlier wood-frame Presbyterian Church facing Main Street. The 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County* is the first published map to show streets and buildings and the new cemetery in this section. Riverside Cemetery occupied the open space behind the Presbyterian Church and was laid out in the grid plan of paths still used today. A small industrial district with a planing mill, a marble works, and a foundry lined Silver Creek, which formed its west boundary. While houses lined both sides of Grand Street to Division Street and continued southwards alongside Oneonta Creek, the amply proportioned numbered house lots, most labeled with owner names, on Division Street and at the far end Grand Street were as yet undeveloped.

The designs of houses now on Division Street and the south end of Grand Street indicate that by the mid-1890s, most were occupied even if the Sanborn Company forbore surveying them in that era. Most are sizable late Victorian eclectic wood-frame examples mingled with a few earlier Italianate houses. The large, two-story, mansard-roofed octagon house on an English basement at the fork of Grand and Division streets is the most prominent building both in design and siting in the neighborhood. A large, high-style Queen Anne house with a three-story tower occupies the first lot on the east side of Grand Street behind the site of first Roman Catholic church. A large Shingle-Style house, at the corner of Grand and Division, now used a funeral home, may replace an earlier house on that site.

The New Century Atlas of Otego County published in 1903 shows houses on all lots in this neighborhood. It also shows Hunt Street, a more densely developed street frontage with smaller lots adjoining the back lines of house lots on the east side of Grand Street. This modest neighborhood was demolished when Lettis Parkway was built over its alignment during Urban Renewal in 1971. A second street called Brookside with of row of modestly scaled wood-frame houses, several multi-unit tenements, was tucked against the bluff below Riverside Cemetery and the north bank of Silver Creek was later demolished, possibly during Urban Renewal. Both Hunt Street and Brookside appear to have been worker housing for the industrial area centered on Market Street north of railroad and east of Main Street. On the bluff in this neighborhood, there is little infill except for the motor inn built in the 1970s behind the Fairchild Mansion and a small Mid-Century Modern house at the northeast corner of Prospect and Division streets.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 41

Central Residential District Study Area

This study area encompasses approximately 300 acres and about 1,200 properties. It is divided into four zones based mainly on development period within the longer era represented over the entire locale. These are shown on the study area map. This division is suggested due to the sizable number of properties to be reviewed and researched in a subsequent study phase. These zones are colored in different shades of blue and numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 on its study area map.

General geographical description: This study area spans a broad swath of the first bench of land (about 1,100 feet) in the City of Oneonta. The degree of slope increases gradually at the northern end of the area, and is then, in turn, enclosed by hillsides enclosing much of the city on the north, west, and east. Those slopes begin their rapid ascent to the surrounding hills at about 1,200 feet and rise to nearly 1,600 feet. The study area incorporates the lower reaches of Silver Creek, which forms the area boundary on the west until it bends southeasterly and flows through the area. For some distance the creek is culverted to contain its flow; south of Walnut Street, near Dietz Street, it is also covered for a distance and passes under Main Street. The study area is bounded at its eastern edge by the lower reaches of Oneonta Creek and the Wilber Park parcel extending to the northeastern boundary of the city. The area is bounded southerly by the rear lot lines of the north sides of Main and Chestnut streets (NY 7 and 23) from the Oneonta Creek on the east to Clinton Street, which forms part of its western boundary. Between Maple and Church streets, this is also the northern boundary of the Oneonta Downtown NRHD (listed 2003).

Spatial plan and circulation: The area encompassed by this large study area lies in portions of the eighteenth-century lot divisions of Wallace Patent Lot nos. 173, 174, 175, 176, 179, 180, 181, and 182. The first four of these long, narrow lots were surveyed at a more acute angle than those farther east and sharply about the west line of Lot 179. The north–south lot lines form the underlying framework for Maple, Elm, Ford, and Dietz streets and the southern portion of East Street. The Wallace lots shift alignment west of Dietz Street, and both West and Clinton streets align with that southwest–northeast shift. Church Street conforms to the east line of Lot 175, and High Street is perpendicular to it. Similarly, the lower end of West Street and all of Maple Street within the village boundary conform to historic patent lot lines between lots 173 and 174 and lots 180 and 181 respectively. These highways, which parallel the drainages of Silver and Oneonta creeks, connected the commercial village to the town highway system.

Center Street functions as the area’s primary east–west connector between East and West streets. The latter streets become part of the larger town highway system north of the city boundary. The slightly irregular grid formed by intermittent east–west streets that

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 42

occasionally also shift north or south across the area probably reflects decisions made by different lot owners at the time of subdivision into house lots. This circulation system creates a sizable neighborhood generally insulated from the bustle of the commercial district centered on Main Street to the south and the College Hill area to the north and west but connected by selected through-streets. Wilber Park encloses the study area on the east side. Clinton Street and the western hillside enclose the study area in that direction.

House lots throughout this large study area generally have narrow frontages and deep yards. All streets have sidewalks. North of Walnut Street, most streets are tree-lined and retain sidewalks set off by header lawns. In the section west of Dietz Street and south of Center Street, there are no header lawns between the street surface and sidewalk except on Cherry and Church streets. East and north of that general line, sidewalks are nearly all set off from the street surface by header lawns sporadically planted with mature deciduous trees.

Buildings and land use: This mainly residential study area takes in the previously listed Walnut Street NRHD (listed 1979) and abuts the north boundary of the Oneonta Downtown NRHD between Maple and Church streets. The very earliest houses in this study area feature modest Greek Revival profiles, but there are a great many more Italianate examples. Working from south to north, styles tend to be later, with enclaves of Eastlake, Queen Anne, Classical Revival, and Arts and Crafts houses forming coherent streetscapes. The study area incorporates not only the Walnut Street NRHD, but also some individually SR/NR-listed properties. These are the Wilber Mansion (listed 2000), the Universalist Chapin Memorial Chapel (listed 2002), and Old Main, the oldest building of the State Normal School (listed 1978 in advance of its demolition soon after). The Wilber Mansion and Chapin Memorial Chapel face each other across the first block of Ford Avenue. Two Mid-Century Modern churches – St. Mary’s (built 1957; previously non-contributing to the Walnut Street NRHD) and Grace Lutheran (built 1960) – are now old enough to be considered contributing properties in a NRHD. St. Mary’s is likely individually eligible as a highly intact and well-designed example of type. Post-1973 intrusions and loss are concentrated in a narrow swath from Ford Avenue to Main Street north of the main transportation corridor along the proposed alignment of an arterial that was never developed.

In the area south of Center Street, residential construction predominates, although a few commercial corner properties using buildings similar in scale and style to surrounding houses stand at several intersections in the area east of Dietz Street. Houses throughout the area south of Center Street feature mainly vernacular Italianate and Queen Anne designs. Houses between Dietz and West streets tend to be more modest in scale and detail. The short segment of Chestnut Street between West and Clinton streets features a large gambrel-roofed Colonial Revival house, a diminutive Italianate Villa, and a large multi-unit Italianate house on raised sites overlooking the floodplain.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 43

The section between Dietz and Maple streets features houses with more high-style designs matched by those of several other large houses lining Walnut Street in the previously listed NRHD. Some of these retain carriage houses; all occupy sizable and generally level tree-lined lots. Designated an intrusion in 1980, Saint Mary's large Mid-Century Modern Church (built 1957) faces its earlier Moderne parish school building (built 1923–4; renovated 1967). The latter retains International-style details dating to the school's remodeling a decade after the new church was built. In the area west of Dietz Street, houses tend to be more modest in scale and details, and the Italianate style persisted there later than it appears to have done in other possibly wealthier sections developed elsewhere in the study area at the same time.

The portion of this large study area running north from Center Street, spreading west to Clinton Street and east to Oneonta Creek, is almost entirely residential. Houses north of Center Street were mainly designed as single-unit dwellings. In general, late Victorian examples predominate at the southern end nearer Center Street; these mingle with later Craftsman and Georgian Revival examples farther north. Thus, the northernmost blocks west of Maple Street generally feature more modest houses in tastes popular in the 1910s and 1920s although there are singular Queen Anne examples on Cedar and Spruce streets. This section of the larger study area incorporates the three-story brick Center Street School (built 1897). It also includes the modest Mid-Century Modern Atonement Lutheran Church (built 1959) at the west end of Center Street.

The section between Maple Street and Oneonta Creek and north of Center Street features modest single-unit dwellings constructed mainly in the 1920s and 1930s that illustrate popular tastes of that era. The Tudor Revival Bugbee School (built 1932) stands on the oval drive, which encircled Old Main, the old normal school building, and faces towards East Street. To the north and east of the Bugbee School, the neighborhood comprises mainly modest bungalows and American four-squares continuing to the city boundary.

There is little post-1973 construction throughout this large study area. A few individual houses have been replaced or remodeled beyond recognition. Non-historic building materials are gradually replacing historic ones. The main area where historic infrastructure is gone in this area wraps through the area between the Downtown and Walnut Street NRHDs where parking lots replaced buildings. New, low-rise residential construction is being built in part of that area on east side of Dietz Street at the time of this writing. These multi-unit buildings overlook a small grassy park associated with the Italianate Huntington mansion (part of the Oneonta Downtown NRHD) used as the municipal library that faces Chestnut Street. The Oneonta YMCA occupies a large site adjacent to that parking area on the east side of Ford Avenue. The YMCA moved to this site from its location on Broad Street between Market and Main streets when that area was leveled during Urban Renewal in the early 1970s.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 44

Context Statement

This study area spans the generally level section north of the main transportation corridor that is encircled east, west, and north by the surrounding hills. It is bordered on the east by Wilber Park, the west by Clinton Street, the south by the main commercial corridor, and the north by steep slopes. This study area presents a generally coherent, mainly residential neighborhood demonstrating a characteristic stylistic shift over time and space during the period ca. 1855 through 1925.

This is the largest area surveyed for this study, and this report recommends dividing it into four sections for the next phase of review and documentation. The westernmost section takes in the area west of Silver Creek running west to Clinton Street, taking in the portions of Dietz and Ford streets on that side of the creek. The second area uses the Walnut Street NRHD as its south line and the back lines of properties on Elm Street as its east line. It extends north to Monroe Avenue. The third area abuts the second area on its west line. It extends east to Wilber Park and north to College Circle, (now called State Street) where Old Main, the first building of the normal school stood until the 1970s. The fourth area encompasses the north end of East Street and Woodside Avenue to the city boundary as well as the small enclave northeast of State Street. It does not embrace Bugbee Road and the adjacent postwar development north of it. There are no previously determined eligible properties or districts in this locale; Old Main was SR/NR-listed previous to its demolition in 1978 and so recommended for delisting.

In 1856, Cyrus Gates's *Map of Otsego County* delineated the lower ends of Maple, Dietz (opened 1853), and West streets, while Church Street and High Street formed an elbow north of Chestnut Street, west of Academy Street.¹ While commerce concentrated along the main east-west corridor of Main and Chestnut streets aligned with the bluff, and industry developed on the floodplain stretching to the river, residential development gradually spread northwards on both sides of Silver Creek and west of Oneonta Creek beginning in the 1850s.

The Oneonta town plate of the 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County* showed six north–south streets – West, Church (Center at the time), Dietz, Elm, Maple and East – all aligned with the ancient Wallace Patent lot lines. Walnut Street ran east–west between Maple and Dietz. When it was staked, this area is said to have had scattered houses and hop warehouses.² Farther north, Brook Street (now Center) paralleled Walnut Street and connected Oneonta Creek and West Street. The village plate showed the village corporation line established in 1848, which in this locale followed the west line of Lot 173 and the east line of Lot 181.

¹ Milener, 326, provides date for Jacob Dietz opening Dietz Street.

² Mayer, Walnut St NRHD, 16.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 45

By 1868, most lots on Dietz Street were occupied by houses labeled with owner names and numbered to key to Dietz's survey. Interestingly, only half of the twelve buildings drawn in 1856 appear to have had the same owners a dozen years later. In 1868, S. Huntington, one the village's wealthiest citizens, owned eleven house lots on the west side of recently extended Centre (now Church) Street running north to Brook Street, where his initials marked an additional ten lots on the north side west to West Street. It seems likely Huntington also owned most of the lots on the south side of the block, as he also owned the large parcel adjacent to them on the east side of West Street where Franklin, Cherry, Birch, and Columbia streets were later staked. Huntington also owned the land that now comprises Huntington Park and the bluff that rises to the level land on the east side of Church Street.

Farther east, between Dietz and Maple streets, several open lots faced Walnut Street. A subdivision of fifty-five modestly scaled, numbered lots faced the east side of Maple Street, both sides of East Street, and the south side of Center (then Cherry) Street. Only Lot 25 featured a house; it was owned by G.W. Ernst. These represent the pattern of rectilinear streets set at a distance where the back lines of the deep house lots met rather than enclosing an interior area. This differed from the interior of the block between Dietz and Elm streets that was part of E.R. Ford's large property. His prominent stone house faced Main Street. Its parcel included a large carriage house, springhouse, and fishpond. Silver Creek passed though it on a southeasterly course to the corner of Elm and Main. Large, numbered house lots lined both sides of Walnut Street; those on the south side backed onto an interior "island" rather than abutting the back lines of lots facing the next street. East of Elm Street, the undeveloped lots facing Elm and Walnut were labeled "E.R.F." signifying Ford's ownership. North of Walnut, no lots were staked east of the back lines of houses facing Dietz Street and Maple Street. Beyond the back lines of house lots on the north side of Brook Street, land in Lots 179 and 180 was undivided. Thus, by 1868, the framework of this locale's rectilinear street plan was codified using the ancient lot boundaries of the Wallace Patent combined with syncopated distances between cross streets determined by individual property owners.

The bird's-eye view of Oneonta published by Lucien Burleigh in 1884 provides a detailed view of how this neighborhood continued growing and changing in the sixteen years since the 1868 survey. Several earlier street names were changed, some in confusing ways. The street formerly known as Centre [*sic*] Street was renamed Church Street. Brook Street became Center Street, reflecting its importance as the main east-west cross street in the neighborhood. A new north-south street running north from the newly named Center Street was named Brook Street. The street labeled Cherry Street in the eastern section was renamed Potter Street, and a new street running between Church and West streets was now Cherry Street. Burleigh's names in this part of Oneonta are nearly all those used today.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 46

Streets opened since 1868 included Ford Avenue opened the following year, in 1869.³ It crossed Silver Creek south of Walnut Street and was lined by large houses as far as Oak Street, a recently opened one-block street between Elm and Ford streets. Silver Creek wended its way through the neighborhood from a tree-lined ravine into the village, crossing streets and house lots before passing under Main Street. Spruce Street paralleled Center Street north of the earlier grid. Still farther north, Ernst and Cedar streets ran between Elm and Maple streets. Farther south on Maple Street, between Main and Center streets, the rear sections of the lots backing onto Oneonta Creek were now bisected by Pine Street (now the south end of East Street). West of Silver Creek, Cherry and Green (now Columbia) streets connected West and Church streets between High and Center streets.

Density still varied throughout the locale in 1884, but was generally highest nearer the main transportation corridor, especially east from Dietz Street to Maple Street. While the short streets projecting east from Church Street – Hill Place and Lawn Avenue – featured a few houses, the interior of that block was still dotted with trees. The view also shows the variety and scale of architectural achieved by the mid-1880s in this study area. On High Street, the earliest street in this locale, there are Italianate house like those in the Academy Street neighborhood. Additional, generally larger examples face the lower end of Elm Street, the earliest developed section of Walnut Street, the upper end of Dietz Street, and sections of Center Street. By the mid-1870s, gable-roofed designs were superseding the low-hipped and flat-roofed designs popular earlier on. By the mid-1880s, Victorian eclectic predominated for new construction with unusually large and elegant examples on Walnut, Center, and Ford streets. West of Silver Creek, on newer streets, houses tended to be less stylish, often smaller, with slightly narrow frontages leading to more densely packed streetscapes. East of Silver Creek, house lots tend to be more generously scaled with space for gardens and trees and outbuildings, mainly carriage barns.

Houses appear to have been designed mainly for individual rather than multiple households, although many probably accommodated live-in servants. By this time, the street plan of the area bounded by Church, Center, and East streets was nearly complete relative to today. West of Church Street, there remained open land between Church and West streets, where High, Cherry and Green streets were lotted and partially developed. Based on architectural style, Franklin Street and its one-block connector to High Street, Harmon Avenue, probably opened soon after 1884. This filled one of those open parcels, where a single house stood at the end of a long drive in 1884. Plantings suggesting family orchards were shown in the rear yards of several Dietz Street properties, on the former E.R. Ford property, on the large Sullivan property north of the Methodist Church, and on Center and Brook streets. Several streets in the north section featured young trees lining the streets.

³ Mayer, Walnut St NRHD, 16.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 47

The second Sanborn Fire Insurance Company survey, compiled in August 1893, presented the recently built (1889) State Normal School in a separate panel. It stood in the northeast section of the village at the top of Maple Street where the land steepened to the encircling hills. East Street passed it a short distance east. The overall survey stopped two blocks short of the school at Spruce Street. This remained the case in 1896, 1905, and 1910. Not until 1916, did Sanborn extend its survey to include the adjacent neighborhood.

Sanborn expanded its survey nearly to West Street and north to Spruce Street in 1898. This showed how Walnut Street was extended for its third and final block west to Church Street in 1895.⁴ The year before the survey, an interurban electric railway connecting Oneonta with Richfield Springs and eventually the Mohawk Valley opened. It offered both passenger and freight services and traveled the Main-Chestnut Street corridor in Oneonta. It also ran a spur line to the normal school via Church, Center, and Maple streets. Its car barn was located on Market Street adjacent to the Delaware & Hudson tracks, which offered an easy freight transfer between the two systems.

The 1898 survey showed, in addition to Reynolds and Franklin streets west of Silver Creek, two narrow cul-de-sacs called and Cozy and Washington avenues. These two narrow streets lined by modest dwellings on small parcels parallel the lot divisions of larger, earlier platted house lots facing the west side of Dietz Street. This survey also shows a few small businesses tucked into this mainly residential locale. A blacksmith shop was in the rear yard of 4 Maple Street. On East Street between Center and Spruce streets there were the Empire State Co., M.J. Goodrich's machine shop, and A.C. Bonton's cigar box factory and carpet cleaning service. There were glass hot houses for growing flowers and bedding plants at 34 Elm. On Dietz Street, the lower end near Main Street featured the Metropolitan Theater and a veterinary practice with a large stable block. A flight of steps descended from Lawn Avenue to the rear of the theater lot.

The 1903 *New Century Atlas* plates of the Village of Oneonta provide a comprehensive view of parcels, buildings, owner names, and uses. In this study area, speculation and growth are most evident west, north, and east of the State Normal School set within its oval drive. Immediately south of the oval parcel, houses faced most lots on Maple and Elm streets. Continuing north, the east end of Cedar Street, between Ford Avenue and Union Street, was recently lotted. More than half of these lots featured houses. Union Street was the central north-south street in a two block subdivision platted by M. Olin between East Street and the 1848 corporation line formed by the Walling property in Lot 182. Narrow lots with shallow yards faced Union and East streets north of a half-width street labeled Olin Avenue. New streets – Lincoln, Appian Way, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Paul, Annex, View, Arnold, and Southview – with characteristic house lots were drawn on the slope north and west of the

⁴ Mayer, *Walnut Street National Register Historic District*, 16.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 48

normal school site. A few were labeled with owner names, but these streets were never opened and developed, possibly because of the steep slope. Hazel Street, at lower elevation and paralleling East Street, is the only one extant. Northeast of that, East Street passed through agricultural land. During the 1910s and 1920s, owners of those farms subdivided the street frontages of their properties into house lots, following a pattern of expansion along existing highways already in use by the mid-1800s. Woodside Avenue paralleled East Street on the slope to the west, nearer the normal school.

The slope west of Clinton Street was similarly laid out with as yet unnamed streets with house lots platted by M.L. Keyes and C.W. Lewis. Farther upslope, Esek Blend had laid out blocks, but not yet lotted them. Like the area north and west of the Normal School, these streets were never developed. Much of this hillside forms the Hartwick College campus, known as Oyaron Hill, and forms part or all of the property donated by the Chamber of Commerce to the former seminary for its four-year college in 1927.

During the 1910s and 1920s, individual houses gradually filled still open lots, mainly north of Center Street and especially north of Spruce Street. The ribbon of land west of Oneonta Creek and east of Maple Street filled with modest houses during the same period and running into the 1930s. The Oneonta School District built a new brick school on Center Street in 1897. In 1925, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church built a parochial school at the southeast corner of Walnut and Elm streets. By World War II, the entire study area was developed to density in coherent streetscapes representative of various socio-economic levels from modest to well-to-do. These present a variety of stylistic tastes depending upon the period when built – a period spanning about three-quarters of a century. The handful of small businesses found in the area were largely gone by the postwar period.

Much has changed in the City of Oneonta, which was chartered on New Year's Day 1909. The D. & H. Railroad, which gave rise to its economy and rapid growth in population, began withdrawing from Oneonta during the 1950s and had largely abandoned its shops and offices there by the mid-1970s. During the postwar era, the Normal School went through several metamorphoses, becoming a teachers college granting two-year degrees, then four-year degrees, followed by a full academic undergraduate program by the early 1960s. It became a university in 2023. The college began moving to its new campus before 1960, and during the Rockefeller administration, the institution experienced explosive physical growth. In the late 1970s, Old Main (SR/NR-listed, 1978) was demolished and the area within its oval drive was redeveloped as apartments. Hartwick College and SUNY-Oneonta, in all of its iterations, have transformed the city into a college town.

Despite such overall change, the adjacent large neighborhood that forms a significant portion of Oneonta's residential infrastructure has changed comparatively little. The greatest changes have occurred in the southern section near the Main-Chestnut corridor. There, several

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Central Residential District Study Area

page 49

buildings at the south end of Dietz Street were demolished anticipating an arterial and increased desire for parking. As of this writing, new loft buildings intended as below-market-rate housing and studio space are being built. When the YMCA moved from its Broad Street location between Main and Market streets, during Urban Renewal, it constructed a new building on Ford Avenue. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church moved from its first building on Main Street to a large, handsomely designed Mid-Century Modern building on the north side of Walnut Street opposite the parish school in 1957. When the Walnut Street NRHD nomination was prepared, the new church was considered an intrusion. More than three decades on, it would now be considered contributing to the district. The Atonement Lutheran congregation built a new church in 1959 off Center Street. By and large, however, this area preserves much of the appearance it achieved nearly a century ago.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 50

Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

This study area encompasses approximately 420 acres and about 575 properties and incorporates Neahwa Park. The study area is divided into two zones based mainly on development period within the lengthy era represented over the entire locale. This division is suggested due to the sizable number of properties to be reviewed and researched in a subsequent study phase. These zones are colored in different shades of purple and numbered 1 and 2 on its study area map.

General geographical description: This study area spans the floodplain (about 1,050' above sea level) of the Susquehanna River and runs north to the foot of the 50-foot bluff that marks the first bench of land (1,100') enclosing the watercourse. The neighborhood south of the railroad and west of Main Street is often referred to as the Sixth Ward. Historically, it was also known as the "Lower Deck." The study area incorporates Neahwa Park, a city park developed on land encircled by a former mill race – still filled with water – dug at the base of the bluff. The race draws water from the river near the city's eastern boundary and returns it to the river just east of Main Street. Both Oneonta and Silver creeks debouche into the Susquehanna near the eastern end of this study area.

Spatial plan and circulation: The lot divisions of the eighteenth-century Wallace Patent underlie parts of the spatial plan of this area, but the landform and the railroad, which conforms to the river, play larger roles influencing the circulation system and lot plan. The railroad traverses the floodplain generally east–west. The floodplain in this neighborhood is cut north–south by routes that carry traffic through or over the study area. Main Street is carried over the railroad on a raised highway known locally as the "Viaduct" and continues at grade south of the railroad, passing under I-88 and crossing the river into the Town of Oneonta. Farther east, Lettis Highway (NY 23) flies over the railroad and the east end of Neahwa Park, under I-88, and crosses the river to the surrounding town.

The sections east and west of Main Street each have an internal circulation system accessed mainly *via* a single street. River Street is aligned east–west and is the main through-route in the Sixth Ward west of Main Street. It runs between the river and the railroad. Secondary cross streets and a few tertiary streets form an overall rectilinear layout in this long, narrow neighborhood. Residential lots mainly feature narrow frontages and relatively deep yards east of Gilbert Street. This pattern is broken at the southern edge alongside the riverbank by a small, more curvilinear enclave south of Henry Street with wide frontages and shallow yards.

Streets in the northeast section of the Sixth Ward north of River Street are narrow and mainly do not have city sidewalks. West of Ann Street and from River Street south, most streets except Henry and the curvilinear subdivision south of it, do have city sidewalks, some

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 51

with header lawns. Few of the header lawns feature street trees, although there are many trees planted internally on house lots that give some parts of the study area a leafy appearance.

Neahwa Park is east of Main Street with its main access nearly opposite River Street. A secondary access to the park, called James Georgeson Avenue, originates at Market Street and crosses the railroad into the park. The park itself has its own curvilinear circulation system.

Buildings and land use: The Sixth Ward study area encompasses varied historic land uses and buildings. Former railyards occupy the level land north of the railroad and west of Main Street. I-88 bounds the study area on the south; the river parallels the south side of the interstate highway. Between the tracks and the interstate, residential development extends west from Main Street to Gilbert Street. The short segment of Main Street in this study area is lined mainly by commercial outlets capitalizing on proximity to the I-88 ramps immediately south of the residential area. East of Main Street, Neahwa Park, a city-owned recreational area, is encircled by a disused mill race drawn off the Susquehanna River. The park spans the floodplain east of Main Street and continues beyond Lettis Highway, first denoted the Grand Street Arterial. The SR/NR-listed Swart-Wilcox House, a historic house museum, stands near the Riverside School located on a large lot adjoining the north bank of the river. West of Gilbert Street, lot size and property use on River Street quickly change to light industrial buildings, a low-rise national chain hotel, and wholesale outlets for the building trades.

River Street forms the spine of the neighborhood extending west from Main Street, between the tracks and the I-88 corridor paralleling the riverbank. While now almost entirely residential, River Street retains evidence of more mixed development, mainly commercial. At its east end, a few late vernacular Queen Anne houses mingle with earlier Italianate and late Greek Revival houses that were once widely spaced on River Street. A few similar houses face the east side of Main Street opposite River Street. Working west on River Street to Wilcox Avenue, a pre-war barrel-truss service garage is fronted by a later one-story service outlet. The local Salvation Army on the south side of the street occupies an International-style building constructed in the 1950s or 1960s. A handful of businesses, including at least one eatery, operate from houses, some with new space added to the front façade. Beyond Wilcox Street, lots are larger, and houses are mainly built in styles popular in the early twentieth century. Four-squares are the most common. The Akron-form River Street Baptist Church occupies the southeast corner of River at Miller Street.

The side streets that form a narrow grid north and south of River Street illustrate varied patterns and periods of residential development. North of River Street, houses date mainly between 1865 and 1925. The section east of Ann Street between River Street and the railroad retains modest Italianate houses on small lots facing narrow streets. West Broadway, which parallels the south side of the railroad to Duane Street, is lined by late vernacular Greek Revival and Italianate houses built during the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. These mingle with a few early

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 52

twentieth-century bungalows and four-squares. Fonda Avenue, which used to cross the tracks and ascends the bluff to Chestnut Street, features somewhat larger, often more stylish Italianate and late Queen Anne houses on spacious lots with generous header lawns. Parish Avenue, a narrower street lined by mainly multi-unit houses, runs north from River between Fonda and Wilcox avenues.

South of River Street, side street development varies more than that north of River Street. Italianate examples are less common; vernacular Victorian eclectic examples are more common. These mingle with bungalows, four-squares, and even a few modest postwar houses. The last type is more numerous farther west in this area. South of Henry Street and Lonergan Avenue, most houses were built in the postwar era. Modest ranch houses face open, curving streets without sidewalks that extend to the southern edge of the neighborhood.

The Sixth Ward incorporates several sizable service and civic properties built using Mid-Century Modern designs executed in concrete block and brick. The tallest of these is the Brutalist multi-story Nader Towers on Mitchell Street, west of Main Street and south of River Street. This was the site of the Mitchell Street School until after World War II. The site of the former River Street School at the northeast corner of River and Miller streets is reused for low-rise apartment buildings constructed ca. 1970. Other relatively recently constructed buildings include a single-story clinic building owned by Bassett Healthcare and the Oneonta Boys and Girls Club, both on River Street. These are both low-slung, one-story buildings. The International-style Riverside Elementary School (built ca. 1964) occupies a large open lot at the south end of Wilcox Avenue, now bounded on the south side by I-88.

Neahwa Park retains characteristics of an early twentieth-century city park such as tree-dotted lawns, an irregularly shaped pond, stone gateposts, and a war memorial on a nearly level site. There is a minor-league baseball stadium, Damashke Field with associated parking, a smaller scale ballfield, and tennis and basketball courts.

Context Statement

The Sixth Ward Study Area spans the Susquehanna River floodplain that forms most of the southern section of the City of Oneonta. It is physically bounded along its northern boundary by the bluff that encloses the floodplain as far east as the head race of the waterpower system dug to power mills before ca. 1830. The river forms its south boundary.

The Sixth Ward study area represents nearly all layers of Oneonta history from European settlement to the present. These layers abut and interleave with each other depending on location within the study area. Collectively, they represent themes of agriculture, water-powered industry, transportation, commerce, community development, recreation, and architecture. It is, however, a large area for detailed review, and this survey recommends dividing it into two sections for the next phase of review and documentation. The first section

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 53

spans Neahwa Park west to Fonda and Lonergan avenues. The second section encompasses the area west from Fonda and Lonergan avenues to Duane Street and the location of the historic “lower crossing” of the river. Additional research may suggest a slightly different division or prefer review over the entire study area.

The entire study area spans land in Wallace Patent Lot nos. 167 through 181, and at one time the divisions between these lots marked off farmsteads, each with access to the river, the region’s first “highway.” The 1856 *Map of Otsego County* shows a highway on the alignment of River Street with regularly spaced houses running west from Main Street to the highway paralleling the river that continued to the Village of Otego and points farther west on the Susquehanna River. It appears that Lower River Street in the Town of Oneonta once connected with that early route over the floodplain; its name alludes to that relationship. The connection was severed by development of the Albany & Susquehanna rail corridor, later part of the Delaware & Hudson, that changed the commercial and milling village of Oneonta into a small city in ensuing decades. Remnants of the early subdivision can be traced in present lots and streets in the Sixth Ward. The SR/NR-listed Swart-Wilcox house (built ca. 1807) on Lot 176 marks one of the farmsteads developed within the early patent divisions west of Main Street. It is shown without an owner name on the town plate of the 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County*.

By the early 1800s, a highway network was threading its way through the region, aligned with the river and its tributaries. While there was a significant spring rafting trade on the river, the waterway presented an obstacle to wagon trade. In 1805, Joseph McDonald built the first crossing.¹ Its alignment is roughly retained in the present Main Street bridge, which is at least the fifth crossing at this point. Joseph and his brother James played leading roles in the early development of a water-powered milling center on the east side of Main Street during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. By the early 1830s, a long head race drew water from the Susquehanna about a half-mile upstream. The main race still runs along the base of the bluff enclosing the flats that now form Neahwa Park east of Main Street. Jacob Goodyear expanded this system in the mid-1800s. The 1868 village plate shows a large millpond gated to power a sawmill, a grist mill, a foundry, a spoke factory, and a sash and blind factory. A short row of houses faced the mills across Main Street, and additional house lots, some with buildings, were subdivided on River Street. House lots on the north side of that highway extended to the recently opened Albany & Susquehanna Railroad.

The railroad was constructed starting in Albany in 1851 and took a dozen years to reach Schoharie Junction in 1863. Sometime later it reached Oneonta; it reached Binghamton in 1869. The next year, in 1870, the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company acquired a lease for the

¹ This is presented in several secondary sources including Beach’s album of historic photographs at the Huntington Library. Gordon’s *Gazetteer of New-York State* published in 1836 incorrectly called the second crossing, built by Joseph’s brother, James, after the first bridge washed out in 1816, McDaniels’ bridge.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 54

A. & S. in a hostile takeover orchestrated by John Pierpont Morgan.² The route was important for transporting coal from northeastern Pennsylvania to the Hudson River navigation, where the railroad established its main headquarters. In 1868, the freight house, passenger depot, engine house, and turntable were located at the foot of Broad Street. These continued as the interface between the railroad and other land transportation for the ensuing century. Oneonta's location midway between Albany and Binghamton, an important hub, also made it a convenient switching site. The village donated a twenty-acre site north of the tracks and west of Main Street to construct shops where rolling stock was built and engines were repaired. In 1871, the village rechartered. Its new corporation line embraced that area. Its population reached 3,002 in 1880.³ In 1878, that operation employed 100 men, a number that could be doubled "in cases of extra pressures of work."⁴ By 1886, the shops employed 305 men on a ten-hour day shift.⁵

This set the stage for residential development on the floodplain adjacent to the yards and mills in ensuing decades. The 1884 Burleigh view shows this process under way. Narrow streets lined by modest, late-period Italianate houses formed an enclave between River Street and the tracks just west of Main Street. This area runs west to Ann Street and remains largely intact. Small wood-frame houses lined Lake, North, and William streets north of the shops, south of the bluff. William Street connected steeply with Chestnut Street near the Clinton Street intersection. Similarly scaled houses stood along the southside of the main tracks. Of this neighborhood and the shops and early roundhouse, little remains aboveground. Other, more permanent streetscapes faced River Street as far west as Burnside Avenue, the first southbound street paralleling Main Street. Burnside Avenue ran south to Henry Street, which ran west to meet the next north-south street, Wilcox Avenue. (By then the old Swart farmhouse was owned by the Wilcox family.) Luther Street connected Main Street and Burnside Avenue north of the corner with Henry Street, and, like River Street east of Burnside Avenue, was largely filled in with new houses. While many houses on River Street featured Italianate designs, those on Luther Street were slightly later vernacular Victorian eclectic examples with gabled roofs.

These streets inaugurated the framework of the generally rectilinear street plan aligned with the railroad and Main Street in the Sixth Ward. Wilcox Avenue ran north of River Street to West Broadway, which paralleled the tracks and was lotted only on the side abutting the railroad. Here, rough tenements were beginning to fill the north side of the streets alongside the tracks. Fonda Avenue, the connector between the western section of Chestnut Street on

² "Albany & Susquehanna Railroad." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albany_and_Susquehanna_Railroad)

³ United States Census figures; published in "Oneonta, New York" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneonta,_New_York)

⁴ [Hurd], 227.

⁵ Sanborn, 1886, Sh. 4.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 55

the bluff and the busy work area on the floodplain continued south to River Street. Houses on Fonda were larger and more stylish than most others found in the Sixth Ward. West of Wilcox Avenue, south of River Street, and west of Fonda on the north side of river, the cross streets Gilbert and Miller were laid out, but there were just a few houses. Those on the south side of River were surrounded by agricultural outbuildings and fenced farmland. Fence lines drawn crossing the area south of River Street aligned with the old Wallace Patent lot lines, indicating that the early divisions still formed the framework of farmstead divisions at the time. In 1903, these farms were mapped and labeled with owner names. Some names match ones noted in 1868, and a few are retained in modern street names in the Sixth Ward. East of Main Street, the mill district stood between Main Street and the raceway. Open land dotted with trees extended eastward to the bend in the river and north to the raceway dug along the base of the bluff. A gas works stood on the south side of the race east of Broad Street.

The 1903 village plate of the southwest part of Oneonta suggests that development in the Sixth Ward occurred as house lots were subdivided from the frontages of new streets that crossed earlier farms. Although the historic Wallace Lot lines ran diagonally southwest to northeast through the Sixth Ward, the street plan was staked in relation to right-angle relationship of Main Street with River Street and the railroad. By 1903, the Edmunds farm was subdivided this way, with large open parcels backing up onto neatly divided house lots facing Gilbert and Miller streets and the western section of Henry Street. (Henry Street did not cross the land between Wilcox Avenue and Miller Street until later.) The Parish farm was similarly divided on a smaller scale. By 1903, roughly half of these house lots had wood-frame houses, a few associated with outbuildings. The large two-story, hip-roofed brick River Street School stood on a raised stone foundation between Fonda Avenue and Miller Street.⁶

It is evident from the 1903 map that the residential areas north and south of the tracks were closely tied. Further, many living in the western half of the Sixth Ward areas relied on links with the commercial district and churches *via* Chestnut Street rather than *via* Main Street. Workers and schoolchildren who lived in the growing West End went to and from school and work *via* Williams Street and Fonda Avenue or on the staircases scaling the bluff shown on the Sanborn maps. Those living in the eastern part of the Sixth Ward could more easily reach the commercial area and the school on Academy Street *via* Main Street. Until 1904, this mainly pedestrian traffic crossed the busy railroad tracks at grade – at best, a perilous undertaking. That year, the plate-and-girder Main Street Viaduct opened. The \$175,000 cost was borne half by the railroad, a quarter by the state, and a quarter by the village.⁷ An iron box bridge viaduct

⁶ I've been unable to date this building. Stylistically, it was Richardsonian Romanesque and featured a substantial asymmetrically placed tower with a tall pyramidal roof. It was demolished in 1973.

⁷ Marilyn E. Dufresne, *The Delaware and Hudson Railroad*. Images of Rail Series. (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2010): 47. Fred E. Beach provides the financial details in one of his photograph albums. These albums focus mainly on railroads but also includes other Oneonta documentation. (Huntington Library)

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 56

was built at Richards' Crossing farther west two years later.⁸ Finally, in 1915, the level crossing at Fonda Avenue was replaced with a pedestrian bridge.⁹

The Sanborn maps and review of buildings, almost entirely residential, many single-unit, in the Sixth Ward shows that the process of filling lots and opening new ones on new cross streets continued into the 1920s. By that time, the Sixth Ward was culturally mixed with people of Italian, Russian, Polish, and Lebanese descent.¹⁰ As the neighborhood swelled, a second school was built on Mitchell Street, in the southeast corner of the residential area. It was a large two-story building veneered in tile. An auditorium was centered on the rear of the building.¹¹ By that time, nearly all land north of Henry Street and west of Gilbert Street was fully developed. The singular exception was a strip of land running diagonally across the grid plan and accessed by Scramling Avenue. Its boundaries parallel the Wallace Patent lot lines, and it remains open land today. On the east side of Main Street, the 75 acres of open land running to the river was given to the city as a park by Lewis Rutherford Morris and his wife in 1908. This was named Neahwa Park in 1911.

In the postwar period, the narrow strip of land south of Henry Street bisected by Gilbert Street and bounded southerly by the river, was platted into house lots. These differ from the rest of the Sixth Ward, where narrow frontages and deep lots typical of the prewar period were set out. The postwar subdivision features long frontages that allowed for garages and driveways. Houses built here are mainly modest, one-story, wood-frame ranches. They form a distinct sub-neighborhood and represent patterns of house design popular at the time when many working- and middle-class Americans became homeowners for the first time.

Oneonta's population boomed in the 1950s and 1960s, leading to overcrowded classrooms throughout the city. After rejecting bonds to construct two new elementary schools (in the West End and the Sixth Ward) for several years beginning in the late 1950s, voters approved the referendum in 1963.¹² Riverside Elementary replaced two schools – Mitchell Street and River Street – in the Sixth Ward. In 1971, ground was broken at the former Mitchell Street School site for Nader Towers, the city's first foray into subsidized housing.¹³ The poured concrete, nine-story building provides 112 units for senior citizens. It is one of only a few examples of this deeply utilitarian design aesthetic in the city except on the SUNY-Oneonta

⁸ Dufresne, 45.

⁹ Diary, 1915.

¹⁰ Details found in exhibit at Greater Oneonta Historical Society, now closed, that opened in 2022 and examined the development of Oneonta from early European settlement to the present. Exhibit text states that about half of the more than 600 people who recorded these birthplaces, about half lived in the Sixth Ward in 1915.

¹¹ This was first mapped by Sanborn in 1927. So far, I do not have a construction date or a photograph. It was put back in service in 1955 after being abandoned in the postwar period, when enrollment soared in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹² Diary, 1963.

¹³ Diary, 1971.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

The Sixth Ward, a.k.a. The Lower Deck Study Area

page 57

campus, and is one of a handful of buildings exceeding four stories. The River Street School, at the corner of Fonda Avenue, was demolished in 1973. The privately held, low-rise Oak Square apartment complex occupies its site.¹⁴

Riverside Elementary was constructed on a 10.36-acre lot on the former Wilcox farm. The one-story, flat-roofed brick building with ribbons of plate glass windows and a sprawling plan exemplifies school design of the time. Its open site offered areas for recreation and outdoor study by now deemed essential to education. When built, its site bordered the river, giving it its name. It is now bounded by the I-88 corridor, which cuts it off from the Susquehanna.

The new interstate route was one postwar innovation that affected the built environment of the Sixth Ward during the 1970s and 1980s. The highway wrapped the south border of the Sixth Ward and accesses to it *via* Main Street and the Lettis Highway – first called the Grand Street Arterial – twice bisected the area by the mid-1970s. While in the 1950s and 1960s, the city had anticipated a downtown mall and an internal arterial, mall companies reset their sights on the surrounding town by the early 1980s.

Meanwhile, the railroad was losing ground rapidly to trucks carrying freight and individual car ownership. The D. & H. promised to revitalize the yards north of the railroad in the Sixth Ward into the 1970s.¹⁵ When the D.&H. was bought by Canadian Pacific, Ltd., in 1991, just 40 people worked in the Oneonta yards. Nationally, the D. & H. had about 625 people on its payroll.¹⁶ By early 1996, there were no D. & H. employees in the city.¹⁷ It is unclear how much of the neighborhood of small houses and narrow streets north of the yards remained by then.

The residential area of the Sixth Ward, with its limited access points, was an island around which these forces swirled. New buildings – a health care clinic and the Boys and Girls Club – occupy large sites on the north side of River Street, but these are exceptions in an area that preserves much of the appearance and use in place nearly a century ago. The most notable changes to its built environment occurred on the segment of Main Street between the arterial and the I-88 access ramps. Nearly every building on the west side of the street, mainly houses similar to those surviving opposite, was replaced by gas stations and retail outlets oriented to the interstate trade by the 1990s.¹⁸

¹⁴ Diary, 1973.

¹⁵ Diary, 1977.

¹⁶ Diary, 1991.

¹⁷ Diary, 1995 and 1996.

¹⁸ Diary, 1989.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 58

The East End Study Area

This study area encompasses approximately 370 acres and about 775 properties. It is divided into three zones based mainly on development period within the longer era represented over the entire locale. This division is suggested due to the sizable number of properties to be reviewed and researched in a subsequent study phase. These zones are colored in different shades of pink and numbered 1, 2, and 3 on the study area map. The first and generally earliest section takes in the area west of Sand Street and north of the railroad. The second section spans the area between Sand Street and the eastern city boundary. The third section encompasses developed land between the railroad and the river.

General geographical description: This study area is bounded westerly by Oneonta Creek and the west line of Wilber Park. South of Main Street, the Lettis Highway continues the west boundary to the former mill race, which forms much of the south boundary. The study area is bounded easterly and northerly by the city line. In this part of the city, the first bench of land above the floodplain rises more gently than the steep bluff farther west and extends over about a half-mile to a second bench of land north of Main Street. There the land steepens quickly to nearly 1500 feet. Near the eastern edge of this area, Glenwood Creek descends through a steep ravine, pours over the floodplain, and empties into the river just west of the city boundary.

Spatial plan and circulation: Main Street (NY 7) runs east–west through this study area and forms its main through-route. The railroad traverses the floodplain and forms a second through-route paralleling Main Street. Between Main Street and railroad, Frederick Street runs alongside the track and functions as an internal east–west route within the study area. It also delineates the southern boundary for residential development in this area.

Three secondary streets – Sand Street, Rose and East End avenues – run north–south, crossing Main Street and paralleling historic Wallace Patent lots lines that divided Lots 184, 185, 186, and 187. Additional north–south streets, some of them numbered from west to east (Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth), run a single block south from Main Street. Between Otsego Street, which parallels Oneonta Creek at the western edge of the study area and Rose Avenue, a few east–west tertiary streets form a loose grid of varied angles conforming to the sloping land and the curves of Main Street. The most prominent of these are Fair, Hudson, and Valleyview streets. In the western half of this area, North and South Belmont Circle traces the oval racetrack of the former fairgrounds located here from ca. 1873 to 1927. The section east of Rose Avenue to East End Avenue follows a simpler rectilinear grid with east–west running Chester and Frederick streets connecting the north–south streets.

North of Main Street, Center Street continues east over Oneonta Creek from the central residential area of the city to Gardner Place, and two-block streets run north–south between it

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 59

and Main Street. Streets running north from Main Street east of Gardner Place – North Fifth, Sixth and Seventh – are cut short by the steep slope. Herkimer Road aligns with Glenwood Creek near the eastern city boundary.

A narrow sliver of land platted with irregular streets lies south of the railroad and extends south to the river. It is bordered on the west by the head race dug for mills once located near Main Street. Interstate-88 runs east–west between the railroad and the river.

Throughout most of this study area, house lots are mainly laid out with narrow frontages and deep yards. Lots on Hudson Street, which bisects Belmont Circle east–west, feature wider frontages and shallow yards. Most streets have city sidewalks, many set off from the roadway by narrow header lawns. A.O. Fox Hospital and Valleyview Elementary School occupy large lots south of Main Street.

Buildings and land use: The East End study area encompasses varied historic land uses and buildings. The area is mainly residential, but commercial properties mingle with houses facing the Main Street corridor. Additional commercial buildings and some industrial buildings occupy sites adjacent to the rail corridor traversing the area’s southern section. A large hospital complex faces Main Street and extends south nearly to the former fairgrounds racetrack, still apparent in the street plan as an oval subdivision. Glenwood Cemetery, a large rural cemetery, spans the hillside north of Main Street at the city’s eastern boundary. There are no SR/NR-listed properties or districts in this study area. Later construction that might be considered intrusive include the Wilber Park Apartments (built ca. 1970), accessed by a long drive to its steep site north of Main Street, and Fox Hospital, built in phases facing Main Street beginning in the mid-1900s. There are also commercial outlets facing Main Street and the International Style post office (opened 1967) at the southeast corner of Main Street and Lettis Highway.

Buildings used for both residential and commercial uses face Main Street, the latter sometimes occupying historic houses typical of the corridor’s development between 1870 and 1935. In general, the north side of the street retains a greater proportion of its earlier residential appearance. On that side of the street, houses east of Walling Avenue, where the stone Gothic Revival United Presbyterian Church (built ca. 1930) stands, occupy sloping lots where front entrances are often reached by steps adjoining the narrow sidewalk. The spaces between a few Italianate houses are filled mainly with a variety of late Queen Anne and early twentieth-century Colonial Revival houses and smaller four-square and bungalows. West of Walling Avenue, the north side retains similar houses on more level lots, but these are interspersed with post-war and later retail outlets. The south side of Main Street retains houses of similar construction period to the north side, some converted for business uses. Many others are replaced by commercial outlets – stores, eateries, etc. – associated with parking areas opening onto Main Street. Fox Hospital with its ancillary buildings and parking areas, of course, occupies two full blocks between Third and Fifth streets.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 60

North of Main Street, the residential section bounded west by Oneonta Creek, north by Center Street, east by Gardner Place and south partly by the rear lot lines of Main Street properties and partly by Wilson Avenue illustrates chronological style migration moving eastward. Houses on Gault and Walling avenues are similar to the mainly Victorian neighborhood west of the creek. Those on Roosevelt Avenue, Walling Boulevard, Taft Avenue and Draper Street are built in tastes popular mainly between the world wars and form a coherent enclave.

The stylistic shift north of Main Street is less pronounced south of Main Street, where enclaves developed in relation to the railroad, the fairgrounds, and the hospital. Wood-frame construction is nearly ubiquitous. Many houses were designed for single-household occupancy. Otsego Street and Rose Avenue, the main north–south streets, feature houses built mainly between 1880 and 1910, mainly using vernacular Victorian eclectic designs. A handful of Italianate houses predate the main development period. A few industrial buildings stand at the southern edge of this area. A two-story brick mill building is midway down the west side of Hickory Street. At the foot of Hickory Street, where it meets Lewis Street, there is a barrel truss workshop (built ca. 1920–40).

On east–west streets, lots were gradually filled in over time, mainly from west to east to Rose Avenue. Moving east from Tilton Avenue, houses are generally later: four-square and bungalow variants predominate except on Fair Street, which retains several Italianate houses. The outer perimeter of Belmont Circle, north and south, features a variety of bungalows and 1930s cottages, while later ranches and late “colonials” line much the interior street frontage of the circle. Hudson Street is lined by houses like those on the exterior lots of Belmont Circle and continues east, lined by a variety of modest bungalows, modified four-squares, and slightly earlier vernacular Victorians. The area from Rose Avenue to the city’s eastern boundary features slightly earlier houses, dating from ca. 1895–1920. This section, extending from Main Street to Frederick Street, which parallels the tracks is near the location of the former Ulster & Delaware yards and the former electric plant with its dam impounding Electric Lake. The International-Style Valleyview Elementary School (built 1957) occupies a terraced site overlooking the valley from the south side of Valleyview Street.

The area south of the (former) Delaware & Hudson tracks retains the Ulster & Delaware passenger depot on Railroad Avenue. East of that, light industrial development, mainly post-dating 1973, spans the level area extending east along Susquehanna Street. Wells Avenue retains residential development like many parts of the East End from ca.1890–1910. A cement plant occupies a large lot on the south side of the D. & H. tracks at the top of Wells Avenue.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 61

Context Statement

The East End study area spans the eastern section of the City of Oneonta. Wilber Park, Oneonta Creek, and Lettis Parkway form its western line north to Wilber Park, the large, mainly wooded, city-owned recreation area. The study area extends east to the city boundary and follows the city's north and east boundary, taking in Glenwood Cemetery, but excluding the junior-senior high school property adjoining the Wilber Park parcel. The former mill race at the bluff encircling the flood plain forms most of the study area's south boundary and extends east along the I-88 corridor. It preserves a coherent, mainly middle- and working-class neighborhood that demonstrates a characteristic chronological stylistic shift extending eastward during the period ca. 1870 through ca. 1960.

When Cyrus Gates mapped his survey of Otsego County in 1856, he did not show village corporation lines and the East End was open agricultural land. The Beers survey published in 1868 shows that at the time, the village corporation line followed the division between Lots 181 and 182 of the Wallace Patent, which still forms the west boundary of Wilber Park. The town plate shows that east of that point to the present city line between Lots 187 and 188, just six houses and the District No. 11 school faced the Charlotte Turnpike, now Main Street (NY 7).

In 1884, when Lucien Burleigh published a bird's-eye view of the Village of Oneonta, he only depicted the section of the East End between Oneonta Creek and the fairgrounds, and there were only a few streets. Fair Street crossed Oneonta Creek from Grand Street to reach the Oneonta Union Agricultural Society's fairgrounds, which opened soon after the society formed in the fall of 1872. Otsego Street ran north-south paralleling the creek and crossing Fair to connect Main and Lewis streets. Lewis Street paralleled the railroad between Otsego Street and the slightly irregular racing oval. Its grandstand on the north side was banked into the bluff formed by grading the site. Hodge Street roughly paralleled Otsego Street and ran south to the northeast curve of the racetrack. Irregularly spaced houses characteristic of vernacular design occupied lots on the south side of Lewis and Fair streets; a few more faced Hickory and both sides of Otsego north of Fair. A large Italianate house occupied the northeast corner lot at the intersection of the last two streets; otherwise, houses are shown with gabled roofs typical of mid-Victorian vernacular design. A large orchard filled the west half of the large parcel bounded by Otsego, Hodge, Main, and Fair streets. Larger houses faced Main Street west from the Italianate Walling mansion and outbuildings on the Walling Lot (Lot 182 in the Wallace Patent) at the northeast corner of Main and Walling Avenue. A row of four houses, two with low-pitched Italianate roofs, backed onto Oneonta Creek at the north end of Walling Avenue. Beyond this, agricultural land bounded the developed area of the village.

The fairgrounds were among the factors that influenced the irregularity of the generally gridded street plan laid out between Sand Street and Oneonta Creek by the end of the decade. Streets were laid out perpendicular to Main Street, which follows a curving alignment

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 62

throughout this area. Thus, along the route of Main Street, cross streets at right angles to it were not parallel to each other. Tertiary streets that crossed the secondary ones meeting Main Street adopted alignments that allowed them to be laid out with level rather than banked frontages. Some of the irregularity might also be explained by parcel divisions that pre-existed subdivision.

The railroad attracted businesses and house builders to the East End over the next quarter century, a time when the village population doubled between 1880 and 1890, slowed briefly in 1910, and continued expanding into the 1930s. In raw figures, between 1870 and 1930, Oneonta's population increased twelvefold from 1,061 to 12,356. A map surveyed of the village in 1889 by O. Harmon, the year the State Normal School opened in Oneonta, shows that much of the present street plan in the East End was staked in the half-decade following Burleigh's survey even though much of the area remained outside the village line. Except for Otsego Street, however, few lots were drawn with houses. The area adjoining the railroad was the most developed section in the East End. Here, a small industrial district north of the tracks included the Oneonta Table Company and a chair factory.

Streets in the East End were slow to fill with houses relative to development on the floodplain adjacent to the Delaware & Hudson shops and yards and streets. Village services only gradually extended into the East End. Further, it was a comparatively long walk to work in village businesses. That changed quickly with the opening in 1898 of the interurban Cooperstown & Richfield Springs electric rail line. It appears this absorbed the route of a slightly earlier horse-drawn line operating in Oneonta. Electric Lake, which was dammed on the wetlands southeast of the East End streets between the river and the D. & H. tracks, supplied the head to run turbines meeting increased power demands.¹ The new car barns on Market Street were drawn by Sanborn in 1896.² The line opened in 1898: it connected the entire Main and Chestnut corridor and extended past East End Avenue.³ This offered easy transportation anywhere along its route. In 1898, the Ulster & Delaware Railroad reached Oneonta, forming a double track junction with the D. & H. at the bottom of Delaware Street that connected Oneonta with the Mid-Hudson Valley and the West Shore Railroad at Kingston. The U. & D. built its passenger station a little farther east, south of the fairgrounds. Still farther east, between Sand Street and Rose Avenue, stood the engine house, an icehouse, and a turntable.⁴

¹ Electric Lake was dammed in 1898 to increase electric power, probably especially for new street railway. It was drained in 1958, and more recently, its site has been studied for its ecological changes. Tracy H. Allen, "Electric Lake and New Island: A Landscape in Progression"

(<http://employees.oneonta.edu/mosemadl/projects/posterguide/LOTM2013-Allen.pdf>)

² Sanborn, 1896, Sh. 8.

³ *New Century Atlas*, 1903, Southeast plate. "Backtracking through the Years."

(https://www.thedailystar.com/opinion/columns/backtracking-the-early-years-conversion-from-horse-drawn-to-electric-trolley-service-began-locally-in/article_76368c59-2c08-539f-8611-dc1a4142d9bc.html)

⁴ Sanborn, 1905, Sh. 16, shows this in greater detail than the 1903 *New Century Atlas* and labels the coal shed.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 63

Continuing southeast, the tracks crossed the outlet of Electric Lake, which lay between the D. & H. and U. & D. tracks, on a trestle.

By 1903, the village corporation line extended east to the line between Wallace Patent Lots 183 and 184, the present day alignment of Sand Street. Large Queen Anne and Colonial Revival wood-frame houses with carriage barns faced the south side of Main Street. On the north side, where the land rose more rapidly, houses were more modest, and fewer had outbuildings. South of Main Street, Mrs. A.E. Walling owned much of the property between Otsego and Third streets as well as land adjoining the west line of the fairgrounds. Here, there were both open lots and wood frame houses, and only the first block of Otsego Street was fully developed. The brick Aurelia Osborn Fox Memorial Hospital stood on a large lot at the northeast corner of Norton Avenue and Third Street, forming the kernel of the greatly expanded present-day plant. Houses lined both sides of Valleyview Street between Fifth and Sand streets. East of Sand Street, the village line at the time, most house lots on both sides of Main Street remained open. At Herkimer Street, the District No. 11 schoolhouse was replaced with a brick one after a fire in 1900.⁵ The majority of the houses mapped in 1903 still stand, now mingling with four-squares and bungalows that filled most remaining lots by the late 1920s.

Glenwood Cemetery, opened in 1886 and platted with curvilinear paths, spanning 18.48 acres bordering Main Street and the east bank of Glenwood Creek. Its site and plan are representative of the increasing tendency to establish parklike cemeteries at the periphery of dense village development. These were modeled on the elaborate rural cemeteries opened by large trendsetting cities in the mid-1800s.

In March 1907, the village trustees opened discussion about rechartering Oneonta as a city.⁶ In May 1908, the governor signed the bill that chartered Oneonta as a city on New Year's Day 1909.⁷ Among other provisions, the city expanded the village corporation line east to the back lot lines on the east side of East End Avenue south of Main Street and Glenwood Cemetery on the north side of Main Street. This brought the U. & D. yard and depot into the city tax boundary as well as the Electric Lake power generating system. It enabled extending city services – water, sewer, and fire protection – to the entire East End, and the District No. 11 School became part of the city school district. It was renamed the East End School.

Over the next two decades, much of the area between Sand Street and East End Avenue developed to full density with mainly middling wood frame houses using late Queen Anne, four-square, bungalow, and cottage designs. North of Main Street, the enclave south of present-day

⁵ Fred E. Beach Collection, Caption in album focused on the East End area. (Oneonta, N.Y.: Huntington Library, Local History Collections).

⁶ Diary, 1908.

⁷ Diary, 1908.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 64

Wilber Park and named for early twentieth century political figures – Roosevelt, Wilson, and Taft – was platted in the eastern portion of the Mrs. J.R. L. Walling property. These streets were lined by newly fashionable Colonial Revival wood-frame houses, many with now requisite automobile garages built adjoining the back lines of the lots. These largely completed the highly coherent streetscapes still found in the East End between the D. & H. railroad and Main Street.

Development in the space between the D. & H. and U. & D. tracks was mixed, with a few houses and assorted light industrial buildings and warehouses related to the railroad. The three-story brick mill east of Wells Avenue housed the Oneonta Silk Company. Immediately north of the D. & H. were a lumber yard and a sash and blind factory that supplied the very active building trade in Oneonta.⁸ South of the U. & D. on Factory Street, there were two large hen houses and a telegraph office.

The last streets in the East End were staked when the fairgrounds closed in the late 1920s. The April 1927 Sanborn map survey noted that the fairgrounds property was “to be developed into building lots.”⁹ Soon after, Hudson Street was extended westward to bisect the old racetrack, and house lots were laid out around the oval to make North and South Belmont Circle. House lots here filled gradually with the last houses constructed in the postwar period.

During the late 1920s, Fox Memorial Hospital was expanding on its site with a new wing and home for its nursing staff.¹⁰ The Walling Mansion, the easternmost of the large family mansions that once faced the Main and Chestnut corridor, was demolished ca. 1929; the cornerstone of the stone English Gothic Revival-style United Presbyterian Church (a.k.a. the Red Door Church) was laid in September 1930. The building was dedicated in June 1932.¹¹ The same year, the Interstate Commerce Commission pressured the New York Central to acquire the Ulster & Delaware in a plan to preserve the route.¹²

Mapping and the built environment of the East End indicates that the late 1920s and 1930s were otherwise a period of relatively little change in the East End. This lasted into the postwar period. The city’s population dipped slightly in 1940 to 11,731 and rose steeply in 1950 to 13,564. This exerted pressure on the city schools. The East End School was replaced by Valleyview Elementary School in 1957. The new school occupies a site on Valleyview Street, tucked against the rising land overlooking the fairgrounds, the railroad, and the river. Its one-story International-style design with ribbons of plate glass windows and enameled steel panels represents the radical changes in school architecture of the time. During the 1960s and 1970s,

⁸ Sanborn, 1910, Sh. 20.

⁹ Sanborn, April 1927, Sh. 16.

¹⁰ Sanborn, April 1927, Sh. 15.

¹¹ Diary, 1930 and 1932.

¹² “Delaware and Hudson Railroad.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_and_Delaware_Railroad)

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

East End Study Area

page 65

Fox Hospital expanded to its current physical size, overtaking houses on the south side of Main Street and the Roman Catholic cemetery that probably indicates numbers of Italian and Irish descendants living in the East End during the first half the twentieth century. Like Valleyview School, the expanded hospital features a utilitarian International-style design meant to express a forward-thinking and modern approach to medical care.

While radical changes in traffic patterning and building uses were proposed for the Main and Chestnut corridor between Oneonta Creek and West Street and the adjacent areas north and south of it, change in the East End was mainly carried out on individual properties with little or no change in circulation patterns. Alteration and outright demolition of houses on the south side of Main Street for commercial development is the most apparent change in a largely intact neighborhood reflecting the appearance it achieved before World War II. Starting at Lettis Highway, the U.S. Postal Service built a new post office using the International Style template it adopted in the 1960s. Some recent retail and fast food outlets, some with signature façade treatments, mainly face the south side of the street. East of the hospital, retail outlets mingle with houses built between ca. 1890 and 1925. Progressing eastward, houses on the north side of Main Street have steep rear yards that make such reuse difficult.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

West End Study Area

page 66

West End Study Area

This study area encompasses approximately 145 acres and about 365 properties.

General geographical description: This study area is located north of the bluff (1,100 feet) overlooking the river floodplain in the western section of the city. It forms a “lollypop” originating at the point where Chestnut Street is enclosed southerly by the bluff and northerly by the steep hillside rising to nearly 1,600 feet almost directly from the leading edge of the bluff. For roughly 700 feet, the street parallels the edge of the bluff dropping to the floodplain. The bluff is reinforced by the Chinese Wall, a 30-foot-high dry-laid retaining wall built 1888–90, that is hidden by later renovation. A narrow sidewalk runs along the south side of the roadway overlooking the floodplain. As Chestnut Street continues west, the bluff shears away to the north and the area opens out to a relatively level section known locally as the Plains.

Spatial plan and circulation: Chestnut Street (NY 7) connects the West End with development east of the steep bluff and is the only through-route in this area. About three-quarters of a mile west of the city boundary, Chestnut Street forms a T-junction with NY 205, an important main north–south highway through the mid-section of Otsego County. Along the narrow ledge between Clinton Street and the Plains area, house lots cling to the south side of Chestnut Street; on the north side of Chestnut, houses are built into steeply sloping lots. West of the steep slope enclosing Chestnut Street, three small residential enclaves of rectilinear streets are platted north of Chestnut Street. Each is about a block deep and extends to the slope rising northeast of the Plains. As the bluff diverges northwest from Chestnut Street, level land there is platted with additional short streets. James and Walters streets form a U with Chestnut Street. Shaffer Avenue is a single-block street a little farther west.

House lots throughout the West End have narrow frontages and deep yards. Most streets have municipal sidewalks. On Chestnut Street, header lawns between house lots and the street surface are unusual and there are few street trees. The first enclave going west on the north side has no sidewalks; the second has narrow ones on one side of the street; the one farthest west features sidewalks set off by header lawns on both sides of the streets. South of Chestnut, the secondary streets have no sidewalks, and street trees are unusual.

Buildings and land use: The West End study area encompasses residential, commercial, industrial, and educational properties. Most commercial properties face Chestnut Street, the only through-route in this area. Many of these businesses converted houses to offices and storefronts. Side streets are entirely residential. An early twentieth-century, two-story brick mill building stands at the corner of Fonda Avenue. Near the western boundary of the city, commercial buildings with large parking lots constructed after ca. 1960 – one-story storefronts, a motel, an assisted living apartment complex, and a car dealership – face directly onto Chestnut Street without buffering. The International-Style Greater Plains Elementary School

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

West End Study Area

page 67

(opened 1966) straddles the city line on a large open lot at the north end of West End Avenue. There are no SR/NR-listed properties in this study area.

On Chestnut Street, between Clinton Street and Fonda Avenue, both east and west of the Chinese Wall section, houses with steeply banked foundations face the south side of the street. Many of these houses are vernacular Queen Anne examples. These are interspersed with a few one-story, mid-twentieth-century commercial buildings that open directly on the roadway level. Houses built using vernacular designs popular from ca. 1890-1920 occupy steep lots on the north side of the street. Early twentieth-century bungalows and modified four-square examples predominate, but there are also late Italianate on sizable lots at the east end near Clinton Street. Many are reached by steps running down to the road surface. A small commercial property is tucked at the base of the cliff immediately west of Clinton Street on the north side of the street. The brick mill building with segmentally arched windows and brick corbeling stands on a banked foundation at the southwest corner of Fonda Avenue.

West of Fonda Avenue, the Chestnut Street corridor balances residential and commercial use, the latter sometimes occupying historic houses typical of the corridor's development between 1880 and 1935. Late Italianate multi-family houses mix with vernacular Queen Annes and Craftsman-influenced examples. Beyond the steeply cut quarry wall on the north side where there are now parking spaces, the steep hillside recedes northward and houses on both sides occupy generally level lots. The former Chestnut Street School (built 1914; decommissioned 1961), a two-story, hip-roofed brick building with a symmetrical façade, occupies a raised site on the north side.

West of the former school, Chestnut Street is lined mainly by residential development dated ca. 1910–35. Single and multiple-unit, wood-frame houses use vernacular designs drawn from the late Queen Anne and Craftsman styles. A Greek Revival house on the south side between Pearl and Kearney streets marks an earlier agricultural property from which house lots fronting Chestnut Street were carved in this period. West of Kearney Street, commercial development dating mainly to the last third of the twentieth century fills spaces where residential development was sparse. Surviving houses are similar in character, scale, and density to the area east of Kearney Street. A one-story brick commercial block built in the mid-1920s stands at the southwest corner of Chestnut Street and Shaffer Avenue, one block from the city boundary.

The residential enclaves on side streets adjoining Chestnut Street all date to the period ca. 1890–35. A small U-plan subdivision of streets south of Chestnut Street is the most modest of these, with small houses, narrow streets, and no sidewalks. The neighborhoods north of Chestnut Street feature header lawns and sidewalks, with houses set back far enough to generate a general spaciousness. Four-squares and bungalows predominate, but there are also earlier vernacular Italianate and Queen Anne examples and later cottages dating to the 1930s.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

West End Study Area

page 68

All present coherent streetscapes of mainly individually constructed, mainly single-unit, dwelling houses. There are a few rows of two or three houses that appear to have been built on spec using the same plan. The Greater Plain Elementary School (built 1961) is located at the end of West End Avenue on a broad, open parcel.

Later constructed intrusions in this neighborhood all face Chestnut Street. These include several businesses including a car dealership, one-story residential facilities, a motel, and restaurants. Most of are fronted by large, unbuffered parking lots opening onto Chestnut Street.

Context Statement

The West End study area spans the western section of the City of Oneonta on the bench above the floodplain adjoining the Susquehanna River. The study area boundary aligns with the back lines of lots developed along the Chestnut Street corridor and adjacent cross streets west of Clinton Street to the city boundary. It presents a coherent, mainly middle- and working-class neighborhood developed mainly between 1895 and 1935.

When Cyrus Gates mapped his survey of Otsego County in 1856, the West End lay outside the village corporation and was open agricultural land. As today, the highway labeled “to Unadilla,” now Chestnut Street, threaded along the leading edge of the bluff around the point where the ridge plunges to the bluff edge, before continuing west. The map showed five or six houses facing the highway west of the point. Mrs. Hacket’s [*sic*] place on the south side is probably the vernacular Greek Revival, now flanked by later houses. The 1868 town plate for Oneonta in the Beers atlas shows that little had changed in the interim. This map delineated the Wallace Patent lot lines; land in the present West End spans Lots 165 through 173. The lines indicate that the houses facing the highway as it crossed each lot boundary marked farmsteads developed within the historic divisions. Later, these lines were the framework within which residential subdivision was platted in the West End.

Neither the 1856 nor the 1868 map shows the highway described in some accounts as descending the bluff near West and Clinton streets to the lower crossing over the Susquehanna River. William and Lake streets shown on the 1884 Burleigh bird’s-eye view may show where that route crossed the floodplain. Otherwise, the view shows that west of Clinton Street, circumstances were little changed since 1868. Chestnut Street clung to the bluff until it reached Fonda Avenue and then turned away from the edge. Between West and Clinton streets, four sizable houses stood on the high ground on the north side. These included the Italian villa surrounded by high, open ground and an adjacent multi-unit Italianate house still there. Two of the three smaller houses shown opposite on the south side of Chestnut Street mark the eastern “gateway” to the West End. Three gable-roofed houses on banked foundations stand a little farther west, about two thirds of the way to Fonda Avenue. Fonda Avenue connected Chestnut Street with the railyards and shops on the floodplain and then

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

West End Study Area

page 69

crossed the multiple sets of tracks to River Street. West of Fonda Avenue, more than a dozen houses, among them vernacular late Greek Revival and Italianate examples, and somewhat later wood-frame house with steeply pitched gable roofs, faced both sides of Chestnut Street.

In 1888, the village retained John Haggerty to reinforce 700 feet of the bluff alongside Chestnut Street past Clinton Street. Dubbed the Chinese Wall for its massive 30-foot height and between seven and ten feet thick, the dry-laid structure remains in place, although hidden by reinforcements made in 1956. It took two years to build and cost \$13,000.¹ Its construction assured a safe route westward for traffic. In 1898, when the Cooperstown & Richfield Springs Street Railway opened, the new electric interurban route ran along Chestnut Street, connecting the West End with the Main Street commercial district and the East End. This innovation played a leading role in the development of the West End as a residential streetcar suburb in the early 1900s.

When O. Harmon surveyed his map of the Village of Oneonta in 1889, the West End still lay outside the corporation line and was excluded. This suggests that, in contrast with the East End, which was shown as far east as Sand Street despite also not being within the corporation, development remained sparse west of Clinton Street. Although Oneonta had experienced its most rapid population growth between 1880 and 1890, house builders strove to keep pace with demand into the early 1900s. The 1903 *New Century Atlas* shows how quickly development advanced in the 1890s in the West End, even though it remained outside the corporation until the city was chartered in 1909. The southwest plate of the village shows nearly twenty fully developed deep, narrow house lots facing the south frontage of Chestnut Street beyond Fonda Avenue. Most of these single- and double-unit wood-frame houses still stand. On the north side, beyond the steep cliff enclosing the roadway, development varied. A few large properties adjoined the cliff, interspersed by small tenant properties built closely to each other and adjoining the road surface. While there are a few later remodeled or replacement buildings, these match the density of development if not the styles used earlier, and this area strongly resembles its early appearance.

The city incorporated on New Year's Day 1909 with an expanded boundary that took in the West End as far as the rear lot lines on the west side of West End Avenue. For the first time, the Sanborn company indexed development to Fonda Avenue. At the time, it appears that "West End" also applied to the western section of the Sixth Ward as the West End School was located at Fonda Avenue and River Street.² In 1910, the Oneonta Promotion Company completed the two-story brick factory banked into the bluff at the southwest corner of Chestnut Street and Fonda Avenue. By the early 1900s, new factory sites were frequently

¹ "The Chinese Wall." (https://www.thedailystar.com/opinion/columns/ask-mark-oneontas-chinese-wall-forgotten-by-many-these-days/article_e4e7693d-212a-5593-94dc-dd2c45dd9b6c.html)

² Sanborn, June 1910, Sh. 4.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

West End Study Area

page 70

chosen to take advantage of city services such as water, sewer, power, and fire protection. The new mill first housed an overall manufacturer.³ The 1927 Sanborn labeled it as a shirt factory.⁴

By 1913, the newspaper opined, “No section of the city is making more rapid development than the western part of the fifth ward and it is believed that a school building in that section would aid in its growth.” The recent census recorded 100 children living west of the intersection of Chestnut and Clinton streets, who attended classes at some distance from home in either the Sixth Ward on the far side of the busy railroad tracks or farther east in the Fifth Ward at Center Street or Academy Street. The school district responded by building the large, two-story brick school on Chestnut Street west of Fonda Avenue in 1914. Just before groundbreaking in April, Fred Van Wie bought a large parcel farther west and surveyed three new streets – Richmond Avenue and Kearney and Bronk streets – and laid out 50 house lots. These sold for between \$2,000 and \$6,000.⁵ The purchase price suggests that buyers bought lots with houses built, but the variations in design and scale of the bungalows and four-squares that quickly filled the new subdivision may indicate that buyers chose a house design for their lot upon purchase. Development continued apace in the West End. The Sanborn survey taken in July 1916 found Chestnut Street lined with houses as far west as Kearney Street, but this may not reflect the full extent of new construction as Sanborn exposures often lagged at the periphery of the places it reviewed.

By 1927, the West End was almost entirely residential. The factory at Fonda Avenue and the car repair shop housed in a characteristic, extant retail block at the corner of Shaffer Avenue were the salient exceptions. Sanborn also labeled several hen houses for egg production, mainly west of Kearney Street.⁶ By 1949, many of the hen houses were gone, likely superseded by larger rural operations. Evidence of the greatly expanded use of petroleum products shows in a garage and a one-story machine shop opened on Chestnut Street near King Street and a small filling station just west of Fonda Avenue. Two more filling stations faced each other across Kearney Street facing Chestnut Street.⁷ Two large lots faced this site, where two houses were cleared sometime later for a car dealership. Similarly, the gas station sites were reused for other businesses. Farther east, from just west of Fonda Avenue to Pearl Street, the largely open area on the south side of the street was developed in the postwar period with retail outlets and the VFW hall. Wholesale demolition of houses in the adjacent prewar

³ Diary, 1910.

⁴ Sanborn, April 1927, Sh. 25.

⁵ Simonson, « Oneonta’s Chestnut Street School opened in 1914,” (https://www.thedailystar.com/opinion/columns/oneontas-chestnut-street-school-opened-in-1914/article_37262e18-d159-5594-a31f-51e8bff21294.html)

⁶ Sanborn, April 1927, Sh. 24 and 25. With electricity, eggs became a year round commodity. Because perishable, small-scale producers like the ones here probably sold to local stores.

⁷ Sanborn, 1927 + 1949, Sh. 25, 25, and 30.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

West End Study Area

page 71

neighborhood was limited to the north side of Chestnut Street between Kearney and James streets. There, a one-story motel with large parking lot and an assisted living center were built.

Some of the new development on Chestnut Street in the West End may have been prompted by the proposal for an arterial in the City of Oneonta in 1951 that would have adopted Chestnut Street as part of a route that would bypass the city's downtown commercial district.⁸ The arterial design in the downtown area stalled as local people pushed back on the plan, but it appears that Chestnut Street as far east as Clinton Street was widened to accommodate increased traffic. It retains sidewalks on both sides, but there are no header lawns buffering them from the street surface.

Postwar planning affected the school district as well, especially because like many communities, Oneonta experienced renewed population increases, especially school-age children. By the late 1950s, the city was struggling to accommodate its children in its existing school buildings. Residents voted down ballot measures to add infrastructure for several cycles until 1963 when a bond issue passed that included building a new elementary school in the West End. Greater Plains Elementary School opened on a large parcel at the north end of West End Avenue in 1966. The mainly one-story masonry building clad in brick features ribbons of plate glass windows and a band of vertically laid wood paneling below the eave line of its flat roof. It occupies a large open site typifying the postwar trend of placing schools at the periphery of communities rather than on city streets accessible by pedestrians. The former Chestnut Street School was turned into offices for the school district; it was sold out of city ownership in 2000.

⁸ "Report on State Arterial Route Plans in the Oneonta Urban Area." Manuscript: 1951. (City of Oneonta: Codes Department)

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

College Hill Study Area

page 72

College Hill Study Area

This study area encompasses approximately 550 acres. It combines two mainly postwar residential subdivisions comprising about 200 individual properties and two college campuses, SUNY-Oneonta and Hartwick College. One subdivision spans the section adjoining the northeast boundary of SUNY-Oneonta. The other subdivision is north of Hartwick College and west of the SUNY property.

General geographical description: This study area encompasses a band of high ground (roughly 1,260 to 1,400 feet) that wraps around the wooded slope enclosing the northern and western sides of earlier, lower-elevation residential development. The eastern boundary of this study area runs along the western slope of the hillside enclosing Oneonta Creek. The ravine of Silver Creek, the westernmost named watercourse within the city boundary, descends southerly through the study area, bisecting the slope at its upper northwest “corner.” That stream bends gradually southeasterly to pass through the earlier low-elevation residential area (the Central Residential District study area in this survey). The study area boundary continues southerly along the shoulder of the western slope of the “bowl” within the city boundary.

Spatial plan and circulation: The interior spatial plan and circulation system of this study area is designed in response to its hilly terrain. East and West streets link the area to regional circulation. Those streets are part of the town highway system developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and both align with stream valleys to reach farms and hamlets north of the Susquehanna River.

Nearly all development in this study area is laid out on the terraces formed by the native sedimentary rock layers. The streets run longitudinally along the terraces and are connected by short steep streets that form “steps.” House lots with generally wide frontages face the longitudinal streets in terraces ascending the slope, offering each house site a view over the surrounding landscape. Both subdivisions have limited access. The one north of SUNY-Oneonta is reached by Bugbee Road off East Street and is composed of parallel dead-end streets. House lots in this area are smaller than in the subdivision northwest of the Hartwick College campus. The latter is reached *via* College Terrace off West Street. Neither subdivision has pedestrian sidewalks.

Both college campuses rely on terraced walkways and building sites designed mainly for pedestrians and oriented to the surrounding hillsides. Vehicle access to both campuses wraps around the pedestrian-oriented precincts. Bugbee Road and Ravine Parkway form a through-route on the SUNY-Oneonta campus. Hartwick Drive is the primary access to the Hartwick campus.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

College Hill Study Area

page 73

Buildings and land use: This study area encompasses two college campuses and adjacent residential development. The campuses of SUNY-Oneonta and Hartwick College face each other from hillsides overlooking the valley formed by Silver Creek. Nearly all construction in this study area postdates World War II. Two adjacent postwar residential subdivisions fill the space between the campuses and the area northeast of SUNY. Georgian Revival-style SR/NR-listed Bresee Hall (built 1928) on the Hartwick campus is the notable exception.

Both residential subdivisions feature a variety of house styles popular since ca. 1950, especially ranches and split-levels. There are also some individually designed contemporary examples using a variety of exterior cladding materials: wood, brick, and composite. House lots on College and Suncrest terraces north of the Hartwick campus tend to be larger and set on wider lots than those in the subdivision north of Bugbee Road.

The SUNY Oneonta campus features a traditional quad oriented north–south and composed of classroom and administrative buildings and a library. Residential areas with dormitory blocks adjoin this area to the south and west. In the southern section, there are additional classroom buildings. Collectively, the buildings exemplify two radically different design aesthetics. Some feature brick veneer facades and details alluding to the Georgian Revival popular in collegiate architecture into the 1960s. Others use a more stripped down Brutalist aesthetic with concrete slab walls and expanses of glass. Several of the latter have been “softened” with recent renovations. The smaller Hartwick campus features a similar dichotomy, but its buildings are nearly all brick veneered. This finish draws the campus together and alludes to the construction of its oldest building, Bresee Hall.

Context Statement

The College Hill study area spans the upper elevation sections at the north end of the city. In addition to properties within the city boundary, there is additional property associated with both colleges located in the adjoining town. The area presents as an area developed recently – mainly between the mid-1960s and ca. 1980. This differs from most other parts of the City of Oneonta and represents a shift to late Mid-Century Modern aesthetic in terms of individual building design and the collective placement of those buildings with their surroundings. Further, their landscape setting has been shaped in ways generally not undertaken in the pre-World War II era.

Throughout most of its history, the College Hill study area has been open farmland and woodland divided into farmsteads. Except for construction of Bresee Hall by newly organized Hartwick College in 1928, subdivision, earth moving, and building mainly occurred throughout this study area beginning in comparatively small ways, in the mid-1950s. The bulk of the work that shaped both campuses and the adjacent small residential subdivisions is only just now achieving its 50th anniversary. These developments are discussed beginning with the

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

College Hill Study Area

page 74

“Becoming a College Town” section of the general context statement of this report. The level of detail offered there can eventually offer a starting point for reviewing the College Hill study area when the timing seems appropriate.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 75

Assessment of Historic Integrity

This survey of the City of Oneonta in Otsego County, New York, identifies and delineates areas for further study, anticipating the establishment of National Register Historic Districts (NRHDs). This work is important to the city as it has nearly completed the process of becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG). Among the planning goals of becoming a CLG, the city hopes to begin developing NRHD nominations to aid property owners in the city through state and federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC) programs. A CLG can also access designated funds to support planning for identified historic resources. This survey has not focused on individual eligibility for listing in the State and National registers, although there are surely such properties found throughout the survey area. Based on discussion with Stephen Yerly, Deputy Director of Community Development in the City Codes Enforcement department, this report concludes with assessments of historic integrity for the identified study areas and a sequence for subsequent intensive survey to delineate potential NRHDs.

The City of Oneonta in the Town of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York, embodies layered historic patterns of land use dating to all periods of its development from the 1780s through the late twentieth century. These patterns of historic land use and their associated buildings are displayed over space in topographically distinct areas in the city. While the topographic areas are distinct, the historical development layers interleave within areas and are also represented across areas. Collectively, the layers represent several National Register themes of significance, including settlement, community development, industry, transportation, commerce, social history, education, and architecture. Others may emerge with further study in subsequent work phases. All or parts of each of the study areas identified in this phase appear to retain the level of historic integrity necessary for listing in broad-based NRHDs.

In broad strokes, the topographic areas are defined first by the Susquehanna River, which flows westerly through the Oneonta area, dividing the ancient, deep, and faulted sedimentary layers of the Allegheny Plateau to the north and the Catskill Mountains to the south. Smaller streams – Silver, Oneonta, and Glenwood creeks – are remnants of glaciation and carve the plateau into narrow ridges running southwest-to-northeast in Otsego County. Oneonta’s moniker, the “City of the Hills,” describes this landscape, which forms the geological framework of the region. The named streams drain into the river’s broad floodplain where farmsteads were opened before 1800, water-powered industry engineered by 1810, and the railroad and yards were laid out in the early 1870s. The bluff enclosing the floodplain provides a level area of varying breadth where a highway – a turnpike by the early 1800s – still follows its leading edge. By the 1850s, commercial and residential development spanned the bluff’s edge between the high ridges that encircle a bowl eroded by the drainages of Oneonta Creek to the east and Silver Creek to the west. New streets were

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 76

opened beginning in the 1850s on the gently rising section north of the turnpike route (now Main and Chestnut streets (NY 7)) between the ridges. Residential village development expanded in lobes – south onto the floodplain near the rail yards and east and west of the ridges enclosing the bowl – over a lengthy period (ca. 1865–1935). The high slopes of the bowl remained agricultural land until two colleges were laid out there, beginning with Hartwick College's first building constructed in 1928. As the State Normal School evolved into a four-year college in the mid-1900s, it began moving to its present hillside site. Now, two postwar college campuses and associated residential subdivisions crown the upper slopes of the bowl.

Field review for the survey was begun using present ward boundaries. Historically, six ward boundaries were drawn that aligned generally with topographical areas, but recent redrawing to accommodate eight wards has reduced the topographic relationships between historic development layers. Further, the changes in ward boundaries to accommodate the increase from six wards to eight means some areas were identified historically with a different ward from the one in which they are now located. This seems potentially confusing because it imposes a structure not represented in the city's built environment.

The comparatively large number of properties – about 3,250 reviewed on a street-by-street basis for this survey – that retain a degree of historic integrity representing varied themes of significance makes the nomination of a single sweeping district, or even an expansion of one of the existing NRHDs, a large undertaking. Since the city divides along easily identified topographic features that influenced land use decisions made by generations of Oneontans, the boundaries delineating areas recommended for further study conform largely with those features.

The sequence offered considers additional factors of Oneonta history and existing conditions. A very large proportion of the city's residential infrastructure – the primary focus of this survey – was built before World War II in response to continued expansion of the work force at the Delaware & Hudson Railroad yards. As the D. & H. gradually succumbed to national market forces beginning in the 1960s, the State Normal School – by then a four-year college – and Hartwick College inaugurated building programs that created two new campuses wrapping the northern slopes of the bowl. By the time the D. & H. went bankrupt and was sold in 1991, the colleges were Oneonta's primary economic driver. This shift resulted in a second, short-lived population peak at 16,030 residents in 1970. By 1990, that number dropped into the 13,000s, where it remains today. The colleges responded with dormitory construction in the 1970s, which now appears to accommodate enough of the student population that little new housing is required beyond what was used earlier. Previously, students had lived off campus, especially boarding with local people. Off-campus accommodation today is virtually all in self-catering, often group-living, settings.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 77

For a small city in central New York, Oneonta has an unusually low owner-occupancy rate and median age. The 2020 census recorded a median age of 23, due in great part to the college student population that comprises about 30% of the overall figure. A little more than a tenth of the population is older than 65, while the ratio of school-aged children is falling. Owner-occupancy accounts for roughly half of all housing units and is highest and most stable on the floodplain and on the bluff east and west of the encircling ridges in the East End and West Ends. The rate of tenancy, mainly by college students, is highest in the study area designated the Central Residential District in this survey. It adjoins the campus upslope and the historic downtown commercial district. At the older end of the age spectrum, the city housing authority has, since the 1970s, endeavored to build multi-unit buildings to accommodate both older and low-income residents. Interestingly, these stand mostly on former decentralized historic school sites that served those neighborhoods in sections now recommended as study areas. Over time, to accommodate the student population, people who own tenant properties have consolidated their holdings to improve earnings. This has the potential to quickly erode historically intact streetscapes in high-tenancy neighborhoods.

Recommendations

The following offers a sequence for additional review for each of the study areas identified in this project with the intent of developing NRHD listings.

Central Residential District study area

This study area encompasses approximately 1,200 properties in the area bounded by Clinton and Monroe streets, Oneonta Creek and Wilber Park, and the back lines of properties on the north side of Main and Walnut streets. It is the largest study area and is divided into four sections based mainly on development period within the longer era represented over the entire locale. This division is suggested due to the sizable number of properties to be reviewed and researched to develop NRHD nominations.

This area encompasses a large, almost entirely residential area that illustrates the increasing tendency to divide workplace and home in the post-Civil War period. Designs range from vernacular late Greek Revival examples through bungalows and cottages built in the early 1900s. It retains streetscapes of generally high to very high historic integrity with very little postwar intrusion. The only obvious area of loss is the swath of parking lots where houses were cleared when an arterial route bypassing the commercial district on Main and Chestnut streets was planned.

This study area overlies the earlier Walnut Street NRHD and abuts the north, or rear, lines of properties on the north side of Main Street in the Oneonta Downtown NRHD. Review in this phase excluded the north side of Chestnut Street from Church Street to Clinton Street,

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 78

where a mix of earlier, generally remodeled buildings, mingles with a variety of recent commercial buildings.

This largest of the recommended study areas encompasses the full range of single and multiple unit dwelling houses constructed mainly during the period ca. 1860–1940 in Oneonta. Because of its ownership makeup, this area may be at the greatest risk of unguided alteration resulting in irreparable erosion to its sense of place.

Academy Street/Watkins Tract and Grand Street and Riverside Cemetery Study Areas

It seems best to combine the two discontinuous neighborhoods located at either end of the Oneonta Downtown NRHD and propose them to SHPO as expansions of that NRHD. Collectively, these two study areas number approximately 150 properties.

Their chronological and physical relationship with early village development on the bluff rounds out the story of Oneonta's first expansion away from the main highway corridor during the period ca. 1845–80. They were platted in densely laid out village lots entirely unlike the linear and mixed development that characterized the main highway corridor, aligned with the bluff and extending development at the same elevation at either end of the small commercial village. The neighborhoods share themes of significance – especially community development, social history, and architecture – chosen for the Downtown nomination listed in 2003.

Architectural designs in these two neighborhoods span a stylistic range from late Greek Revival through early twentieth-century houses. Unlike somewhat later residential districts in Oneonta, these areas appear to have been more socio-economically diverse, continuing the first pattern of close integration that existed on the Main and Chestnut corridor until the 1880s. In the Watkins Tract, a few modest houses built in the 1930s replace an earlier greenhouse operation. Riverside Cemetery combines aspects of the earlier types of a church burying grounds, community graveyards, and rural cemeteries at the periphery of villages. The proposed study area excludes adjacent, more recent development on Chestnut Street and a motel accessed from Grand and Main streets. The SR/NR listed Armory stands at the corner of Academy and Fairview streets.

Like the Central Residential District, both of these small study areas have a high proportion of rental properties combined with generally strong historic streetscapes.

Sixth Ward (a.k.a. The Lower Deck)

This study area encompasses approximately 575 properties. Located on the floodplain between the bluff and riverbank, European development in Oneonta spans the longest period here than in any other part of the city. The study area is divided into two sections based mainly on development period within the longer era represented over the entire locale.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 79

These are shown on the study area map. This division is suggested due to the sizable number of properties to be reviewed and researched in a subsequent study phase.

The Sixth Ward, also called the Lower Deck for its elevation about 50' lower than any other part of the city, represents early land partition and its agricultural use as well as water-powered industry in its extant millrace. It is bisected east–west by the railroad and illustrates the route's importance as part of the larger transportation system and as the major employer in Oneonta. Finally, Neahwa Park represents the opening of municipal recreational facilities in the city.

Architectural design in the Sixth Ward study features large Italianate examples facing the main thoroughfares – River Street and Fonda Avenue – and more modest ones near the tracks in the northeast quadrant. In much of the area, however, slightly later vernacular Victorian builders' plans segue into early twentieth-century bungalows and four-squares. Some streets feature mainly multi-unit houses; others are lined by single-unit houses. The postwar Riverside Elementary School replaces two earlier schools, whose sites are reused for multi-unit housing constructed in the 1970s. There are two more interior intrusions facing River Street: the Boys and Girls Club and a Bassett Hospital clinic. On the Main Street corridor, several historic-period buildings were replaced by various service outlets oriented to the I-88 access opened in the 1970s. These are exceptions to generally coherent streetscapes throughout most the Sixth Ward study area.

East of Main Street, Neahwa Park retains its historic open plan and uses consistent with its donors' intentions as a recreational site for Oneonta residents opened in 1908. It reuses the area developed for waterpower in the early 1800s and retains a portion of the race system as a water feature. North of the railroad, above-ground evidence of the Delaware & Hudson railyards and shops and the associated neighborhood of small wood-frame houses is virtually erased.

Limited access to the residential section of the Sixth Ward west of Main Street and its elevation relative to other parts of Oneonta have set this section aside physically from the rest of the city. Compared to the Central Residential District study area north of Main Street, the Sixth Ward study area has a high owner-occupancy rate. This has probably contributed to its consistent and generally high degree of historic integrity as a residential district developed in sections, mainly from the 1860s through the 1920s. It appears that the Sixth Ward could be nominated as a stand-alone NRHD in the city following work to establish boundaries and individually document properties. Such a nomination would emphasize how the city's middling neighborhoods represent Oneonta's history.

The East End study area

This study area encompasses approximately 625 properties. It is divided into three sections based on land use and development period. The East End mainly represents mixed

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 80

residential village development in relation to the two main transportation corridors in this section: the main line railroad and the electric interurban streetcar line on Main Street opened in the late 1890s. It is bounded westerly by Oneonta Creek, which until after the Civil War, was the topographic feature marking the village's eastern boundary, and incorporates Wilber Park, a large, mainly wooded city park given to the city in 1916 as a recreational area. The park is bisected by the Oneonta Creek ravine. The East End study area extends south to the river, north to the present city boundary, and incorporates Glenwood Cemetery on its east line. It incorporates the railroad and associated industrial buildings, evidence of the dam and power system at the west end of the Electric Lake, and the Oneonta Union Agricultural Society fairgrounds, which operated until 1927.

Architectural style and scale vary in the East End. Proximity to earlier developed areas west of Oneonta Creek prompted initial subdivision south of Main Street as far east as Sand Street, but this area and land farther east were not fully developed until after 1909, when this area was incorporated in the new city boundary. Sizable Victorian eclectic style houses built during the streetcar era face Main Street and mingle with occasional earlier Italianate houses. South of Main Street, in the western third of the East End, more modest Italianate and Queen Anne houses mark early development interspersed with later vernacular Victorian examples. These give way farther east to more modest late Victorians and eventually bungalows and four-squares in the neighborhood north of the junction of the Ulster & Delaware Railroad with the main line of the D. & H. An enclave of postwar one-story houses lines the streets laid out on the old fairgrounds racetrack; they match the style of Valleyview Elementary School.

Commercial development characterizes much of the development on the Main Street, where there are both newer and older houses repurposed for a variety of retail and service businesses. There are additional purpose-built structures, mainly on the south side of the street, including a motel, professional offices, a post office, national chains, and A.O. Fox Hospital. Further assessment should determine the degree to which this intrudes on the overall, generally strong historic and architectural integrity of the East End.

The East End records the highest proportion of owner occupancy to tenancy in Oneonta. Like other neighborhoods opened beyond the earlier central residential district north of Main Street, the East End retains streetscapes illustrating how middling neighborhoods provided housing to the people employed by the city's economic backbone businesses.

The West End study area

This study area encompasses approximately 365 properties. The West End was developed and subdivided comparatively rapidly between ca. 1895 and 1935. Much of it aligns with Chestnut Street (NY 7 and 23) west of its intersection with Clinton Street and continuing to the city boundary. The West End study boundary aligns generally with the bluff overlooking the flood plain. Its north boundary conforms to the northern extent of three small residential

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 81

subdivisions, forming junctions with Chestnut Street and the back lines of intervening properties on the north side of Chestnut Street.

East of Fonda Avenue, which once descended the bluff and crossed the railroad, the late Queen Anne style of many houses on the south side of this stretch of highway dates to the early streetcar era in the mid-1890s. Later bungalows mainly face the north side of the street. Farther west, beyond the brick mill (built 1910) at the corner of Fonda Avenue and the former Chestnut Street School roughly opposite, house styles tend to be ones popular in the early 1900s. These fill later-platted lots that surround earlier Italianate and late Greek Revival houses that mark older farm properties. The three subdivisions branching north from Chestnut form intact, coherent streetscapes typical of middling neighborhoods of the time. A smaller, more modest subdivision runs south from Chestnut Street near the city line. The Greater Plains Elementary School at the far northwest end of the study area illustrates postwar architectural patterns in early childhood education.

Areas that were lightly developed or open until after World War II in the West End feature a variety of commercial development, including a motel, a car dealership, and retail outlets. These are concentrated in small enclaves, and many are nearing their 50th anniversary. Subsequent review will determine how intrusive they are within the overall study area and determine a viable NRHD boundary for this generally intact area of the city representing the last phase of concentrated housing development for people of middling economic status before World War II.

College Hill Study Area

This study area combines two mainly postwar residential subdivisions that encompass approximately 100 individual properties and two college campuses, SUNY-Oneonta and Hartwick College. One subdivision spans the section adjoining the northeast boundary of SUNY-Oneonta on the high ground west of Oneonta Creek. The other subdivision is north of Hartwick College and west of the SUNY property. The two college campuses span most of the high ground of the slopes encircling the older part of the city.

This part of the city differs notably from other sections of Oneonta in elevation, layout, and use. The two educational institutions now form the greatest part of the city's economy, but this is a comparatively recent circumstance. Hartwick received its initial 70-acre parcel in 1927 and constructed its first building Bresee Hall (SR/NR-listed 1984) in 1928. This remained its only building until after World War II. Like the State Normal School, later the Teachers College, which opened earlier in the Central Residential District study area, its students boarded into the 1950s when both colleges began planning their present campuses. Both achieved something close to their existing plans by the early 1970s, roughly 50 years ago. Both have continued adding and improving since that time. Without detailed study, it is unclear that

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

Assessment of Historic Integrity and Recommendations

page 82

either is yet eligible for listing, and it may be a matter of allowing time to elapse rather than a clear case of ineligibility.

Similarly, neither of the adjacent postwar residential subdivisions seems obviously eligible for listing as a stand-alone NRHD or as part of larger district. Again, this may simply be a matter of time. There may be a case for some architect-designed, high-style, Mid-Century Modern houses, but these would require considerable documentation. This is beyond the scope of these recommendations designed primarily to identify NRHDs.

Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

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page 83

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Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

City of Oneonta, Otsego County, New York

8 May 2023

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page 84

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Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

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8 May 2023

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Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

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8 May 2023

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