

Historic Resources



GOAL:

- A. Encourage the preservation of historic and culturally significant buildings and landscapes.**

Background Information

Early History

Sodus derives its name from the Cayuga Indian term “Assprodus” which means silvery waters. Sodus Bay, considered to be the best harbor on the southern shore of Lake Ontario, induced Putney Estate to begin to develop the Sodus area in 1794. Pioneers began settling in Sodus Point at that time and by 1811 the Town of Sodus was formally formed. By 1809, the Village of Sodus was established and the first school erected on Geneva Road north of the Hamlet of Wallington. Sodus had become a bustling center of commerce, one of only five prominent commercial centers in western New York. Sodus Bay served as a shipping port for grain, lumber and, later coal. Although, agriculture served as the mainstay of the economy due to the rich soils and temperate climate provided by its proximity to Lake Ontario. Much of the other local businesses that developed and grew in Sodus served the agrarian economy.

During the War of 1812, Sodus, or Troupsville as it was then called, due to its prominence as a commercial center was attacked by the British. The battle, however, was of no major consequence as the British forces were easily repulsed with little loss of life on either side and little damage to the Village.

After the construction of the Erie Canal, the demand for agricultural goods from western New York increased significantly causing a growth in the importance of agriculture particularly fruit orchard production in the Sodus area. Due to the relatively close proximity of the Erie Canal, several efforts were made to obtain financing to construct a canal to link Sodus Bay with the Erie Canal, a distance of only 12 miles. In fact, one effort did secure enough financing to actually enable the promoters to begin the construction of the proposed canal, but it was never completed. By 1871, the idea was abandoned with the advent of the railroad as the rail replaced the Erie Canal as the main conveyance for goods and products.

In the late 1800s, there was need for additional routes to Canada for the shipment of coal from Pennsylvania mines. It was at this time the Sodus Bay and Southern Railroad line was constructed between Sodus Bay and the a northern juncture of the Pennsylvania Railroad in the Town of Gorham (Ontario County). Docks, wharves, a trestle, coal tipples were constructed on Sodus Bay to transfer the coal from railcars to ships. Coal was transported by rail to Sodus Bay for shipment to Canada until 1967. Canadian lumber was also shipped from Canada to Sodus Bay for shipment to points in New York and other states via rail.

Although Sodus Bay and the Erie Canal are no longer used for shipping goods and products, agriculture continues to play a key role in

the local economy as evidenced by the many orchards that blanket much of the rural area in the Town and the prominence of agricultural support businesses in the community. In addition, a variety of other small businesses unrelated to the agrarian economy may be found operated in Sodus today.

Sodus is also noted for the presence of a Shaker community which was located on the Alasa Farms. The Shakers, or more accurately, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, is an offshoot of the Religious Society of Friends (Quackers). They were commonly referred to derisively as the Shacking Quackers, due to the manner in which they writhed and trembled during their worship services. The tenets of the sect included celibacy, communal living with no private property, and personal industry. Although the Shakers invented an array of devices including the common clothespin, the flat broom, a revolving oven and a folding stereoscope. Today, the Shakers are probably best remembered for the furniture they manufactured with its with attractive, simple designs.

Although not commonly known, the Town of Sodus was also the birthplace of Arbor Day due to the efforts of Edward C. DeLano. Mr. DeLano, who was elected as the Wayne County School Commissioner in 1881, wrote a letter published in the *Wayne County Alliance* newspaper, Mr. DeLano urged the residents of Sodus to donate money and labor to plant trees in every school yard in the township to set an example for other townships in Wayne County and across the State. For the next eight years, Mr. DeLano led the push for the establishment of the observance of an official Arbor Day. In 1889, Mr. DeLano, then chief examiner of the State Department of Public Institution supervised the preparation and mailing of the first Arbor Day circular to all the schools across New York State.

Exiting Conditions

Due to the early prominence of the Town of Sodus as an agricultural and commercial center, many historically significant buildings and sites exist in the township. A plethora of cobblestone homes and structures dot the landscape as depicted in Map 31: Local Historic Sites. Among these are the Wallington Cobblestone Schoolhouse and the Wallington Cobblestone Tavern which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The others, although they may be eligible, are not listed. The Sodus Center Baptist Church, a brick structure, is also listed on the National Register.

In addition to the many cobblestone structures and the Sodus Center Baptist Church identified above, other historically significant structures stand in Sodus. Among these are St. John's Episcopal Church and the 1812 Hotel. The Alasa Farms, the former home a Shaker community, is among the historically significant properties in Sodus. The locations of these structure are also identified on Map 31: Local Historic Sites.

Issues and Opportunities

The historic resources in the Town and Village of Sodus contribute to the character of the community. They provide a physical link to the community's past and the preservation of such historic resources.

The preservation of privately-owned historic buildings require the participation of individual landowners. The Town and the Historical Society may be able to provide information about grant funding and technical assistance that may be available to individuals.

Lack of an Inventory—Despite the many known historically significant structures and sites that exist in the Town of Sodus, a comprehensive inventory has never been prepared nor has the historical significance of each been researched and documented. In fact, it is quite probable numerous people own historically significant buildings, but are unaware of it. It is also quit possible that many historically significant structures that appear to be historically significant, could be listed on the State and Nation Register of Historically Significant Places if the research were conducted to document their significance. Little can be done to preserve such historically significant buildings until their historical significance is documented. An inventory of cobblestone structures in the Town of Sodus has been prepared, however, and may serve as the starting point for preparing a more thorough inventory of historic resources.

Lack of a Review Process—Currently, the owners of historically significant buildings not listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places can alter or raze their buildings without any consideration being given to the loss of the cultural resource to the community. No process is in place that would provide historical groups or the Town and Village with an opportunity to take action to preserve such structures or their historical appearance.



Tools and Techniques

Techniques available to local governments to encourage the preservation and restoration of historic buildings include both recognition programs and regulatory approaches.

Recognition programs for privately owned buildings

The National Register of Historic Places recognizes buildings, sites and landscapes that are historically and architecturally significant. The program does not provide protection to privately owned buildings. However, public money cannot be used to alter or demolish buildings that are in a Historic District or are individually listed on the National Register without a formal review of the impacts.

Municipalities may develop their own recognition program to designate historic structures or to acknowledge private efforts to restore or rehabilitate historic buildings. Such a program would send a message to the public that historic preservation is important to the community, and may encourage private property owners to restore historic buildings.

Municipalities may also provide information to private property owners to assist in restoration and rehabilitation efforts. There is a considerable amount of literature and technical assistance available to ensure that restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings is done in a manner that is consistent with the building's historic character and that does not damage the building's architectural features or materials.

The Town may undertake a formal survey of the historic resources in the Town. Such a survey could form the basis for a recognition program or a regulatory program.

Regulatory techniques

Municipalities may establish regulations to protect historic buildings. The process typically requires the designation of certain historic buildings as "landmarks," or the delineation of an area as a "Historic District." A citizen board, usually known as the "Historic Preservation Commission" or "Landmarks Preservation Board," is appointed to review applications for building permits that would affect historic landmarks or buildings within the Historic District. The board is responsible for ensuring that changes to historic properties are consistent with the historic character of the property.

Certified Local Government Program

The Certified Local Government Program of the National Park Service encourages municipalities to pass laws that provide for local review of development proposals that would affect historic buildings. Municipalities may be certified by the State Historic Preservation Office if they enact a law that designates local historic landmarks or district, and that establishes a procedure for reviewing proposed changes to designated properties. Certified local governments are eligible for grant funding that is set aside for participants in the program. Grants may be used for research, education, and restoration of properties.

Tax Incentives for Private Properties

Pursuant to the Farmer's Protection and Farm Preservation Act, passed in 1996, property owners can claim a tax credit for up to 25% of the cost of rehabilitating a historic barn. Barns constructed or placed into agricultural service before 1936 are eligible, provided that the barn is used for agricultural purposes and meets the tax definition of "income-producing." The rehabilitation must not "materially alter the historic appearance" of the barn. Costs incurred after January 1, 1997 are eligible. Technical information is available on the NYS Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation website, at www.nysparks.state.ny.us/field/fsbl/barns.htm. This law also enables local governments to phase in the increase in assessed value that results from the rehabilitation of barns built before 1936.

Federal tax credits are available for the rehabilitation of historic and older buildings. A tax credit of 20% of the cost of rehabilitation is available for "certified rehabilitation" of "certified historic structures." This credit generally applies to buildings that are on the National Register of Historic Places. The renovations must comply with the Secretary of Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation." This credit applies only to buildings that are used for agricultural, commercial, industrial or rental residential purposes. Both the structure and the rehabilitation must be approved by the National Park Service. The project must also meet the guidelines set by the Internal Revenue Service.

A 10% tax credit is available for rehabilitation of "non-historic" buildings built before 1936. This credit applies only to "depreciable" buildings that are used for non-residential purposes. The renovation must be "substantial," exceeding either \$5,000 or the adjusted basis of the property, whichever is greater. Certain guidelines apply for retaining external and external walls and the internal structural framework. The tax credit must be claimed on IRS form 3468 for the tax year in which the rehabilitated building is placed in service. There is no formal review process for the rehabilitation.

Grant funding

Grant funding is available to both private and public owners of historic properties. In 2000, the **NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation** made \$2 million in grant funding available to restore and preserve historic barns and related agricultural buildings. Similar funding opportunities may be available in the future.

The **Preservation League of New York** administers a program to provide grants to municipalities and not-for-profit agencies for cultural resource surveys, historic structure reports, and historic landscape reports. Grants awarded are usually between \$3,000 and \$15,000. The application is usually due in May, with applications available in January.

The **Rural New York Grant Program** has provided grants of up to \$5,000 for surveys, studies and public education projects. Local governments and not-for-profit agencies are eligible. Grant applications were not accepted in 2000. Information on grant availability in 2001 is expected to be announced in the near future.

The **New York State Council on the Arts** provides grants to local governments and not-for-profit organizations for planning and design, capital funding, and independent projects. The application deadline is generally March 1 of each year. Information is available from Anne VanIngen, Director, Architecture, Planning and Design, NYS Council on the Arts, 915 Broadway, New York, NY 10010, (212) 387-7013.

Funding is also available from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, under the **Environmental Protection Fund**, for the preservation and restoration of historic properties.

The **New York Landmarks Conservancy** provides grants for historic religious buildings that are owned by a religious institution and are listed in the State or National Registers of Historic Places. The maximum grant is \$15,000. Deadlines are May 1st and November 1st of each year.

Western New York Landmark Society

The Landmark Society is a private, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to preserving historically and culturally significant structures and sites. The organization has trained staff available to assist, for a fee, with historic preservation efforts. One service the Landmark Society will perform is a "cultural survey." A cultural survey essentially involves researching historical records and preparing an inventory of historically significant structures and sites and describing each structure or site in its historical context. Another service the

Landmark Society provides is the preparation of applications for listing structures and sites on the State and National Register of Historic Places. The methodology used to prepare cultural surveys and applications for listing are governed by State and federal regulations. The review and approval of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is also required.

Historical References

The Wayne County Historian's Office and the Wayne County Historical Society have a number books and materials that may be useful for efforts to identify and inventory historical structures and sites. Among these books and materials are the following:

History, Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Legends of Great Sodus Bay, Sodus Point, and Sloop Landing, Sodus Village, Pultneyville and Environs by Walter Henry (1945)

Wayne County Atlas (1945)

Wayne County: The Aesthetic Heritage of a Rural Area (1979) NYS Council on the Arts

Landmarks of Wayne County New York (1895)

Recollections of New York

Remembering Wayne: A Pictorial View of People, Places and Pastimes of Wayne County, New York (1999) and A Gathering of Memories: Images and Recollections of Wayne County, New York (2003) both by Andrea. T. Evangelist

History of Wayne County, New York by Professor W.H. McIntosh (1877)

Bibliography of Town of Sodus Before 1900

Hoffman Essays (1954-1999) – A collection of high school student historical research papers submitted for entry into a scholarship competition formerly sponsored by the Hoffman Foundation

Century Farms of Wayne County – Comprised of a collection of type-written descriptions of old farms in Wayne County organized by township.

Recommended Actions

1. Identify and inventory potentially significant historical structures and sites and research and document their historic significance.
2. Provide support the Town Historian's office.
3. Establish a recognition program for privately owned historic buildings.
4. Provide information to owners of historic buildings and properties regarding grant programs.
5. Distribute pamphlets and sponsor workshops that provide suggestions for appropriate exterior treatments of historical buildings and appropriate landscaping.
6. Consider the adoption of a local historic preservation law after historic buildings have been inventoried to establish a review process to be undertaken whenever an application for a building or demolition permit is submitted that involves an historically significant structure.

