

A. INTRODUCTION

As part of the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan, this chapter considers the village's historic resources in order to determine how these resources could potentially assist in the revitalization of the downtown. One of the first steps in this process is to identify any recognized or potential historic resources that are located within the village.

In exploring the possibilities of the nomination of properties located in the Village of Attica to the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR), issues relating to the potential significance of the properties, their age, and the intact nature of the original construction were explored. This chapter also presents the benefits associated with listing on the Registers and the nomination process.

STATE AND NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Register of Historic Places is the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources. Properties listed on the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service (NPS), which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The New York State Register was authorized by the New York State Historic Preservation Act of 1980. The same eligibility criteria are used for both the State and National Registers. In New York, the State Register is administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) acting as the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

B. BACKGROUND HISTORY***EARLY SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

The area known today as Attica was first settled around 1802. The early settlers established a community that was called Phelps' Settlement, named after one of the first landowners. By 1810 the community had a gristmill, sawmill, blacksmith shop, church, school, tannery, tavern and cheese factory. Farming was important to the early settlers, who grew crops for their own use as well as for barter. After the burning of Buffalo during the War of 1812, the community grew rapidly, as many people fled Buffalo and moved to the area to become farmers and tradesman. In 1837 a charter was granted and the Village of Attica was incorporated. Industry and business continued to flourish, and by the mid 19th century the village had a foundry, a threshing

*Background history summarized by a report entitled "The Red Village", written by Thomas Flaherty, Jacqueline Conway, and Camille Manning, 1987.

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machine factory and wagon shop, a cabinet-manufacturing plant, a machine shop, malt house, distilleries, sawmills, gristmills, flouring mills, a planing shop and a nursing establishment. In the 1840s a number of dairy farms were established in and around Attica as a market for dairy products increased with the growth of cities.

Many professionals also were established in the village, including lawyers and doctors. The first local newspaper, the Attica Republican, was established in 1833. The first banks were established in the village in the mid 19th century.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

When the Fugitive Slave Law was passed in 1850, slave owners from the south and anyone they hired were enabled to chase down their runaway slaves in the northern states. Canada was the only place where slaves could obtain freedom. As a result, western New York became the main line of escape to Canada for southern slaves. Many stations – i.e., farms or homes where escaped slaves could receive clothing, food, shelter, and directions to the next station – were located in Wyoming County. The Attica Station was located on the Eastman Farm, which was about three and one-half miles south of the village. Matthew Eastman assisted many slaves in their journey to Canada by providing food and shelter.

TRANSPORTATION

Early means of travel was limited to paths or trails through the woods. The first road in the area was the Buffalo and Moscow (Leicester) Road which followed an old Indian trail. Attica's present-day Main Street follows the alignment of this early road. Additional roads were developed that enabled stagecoaches to transport people and goods to the village. The stagecoach became the primary means to travel, and soon hotels and taverns were constructed along these routes. In 1843 a railroad was built between Attica and Batavia that led to further development and growth of the village. This railroad was soon followed by the construction of a rail line from Attica to Buffalo, which made Attica a major stop on the rail corridor between Albany and Buffalo. Major railroads that traveled through Attica included the New York Central, the Erie, and the Tonawanda Valley (Attica and Arcade). The construction of the railroads greatly improved transportation, as well as created many new jobs. A machine and repair shop was located in Attica, and workers were responsible for repairing bridges, tracks, locomotives, and cars for all of the Buffalo area. The railroad helped to stimulate industrial growth of Attica, as the railroad enabled the village to become a shipping and receiving center for the area's farm products.

In 1928, bus service was introduced to the village. Bus service operated from Attica to Batavia, and from Attica to Buffalo.

WESTINGHOUSE ELECTRIC COMPANY

The Westinghouse Electric Company plant opened in 1906 and was located just south of the Erie tracks and east of the Buffalo, Attica & Arcade. With the completion of the plant, Attica experienced a new level of growth and development. New streets were laid out, new houses were built, and businesses were flourishing. Many new homes were constructed near Genesee Street, Elm Street and North View Park as a result of the Westinghouse plant. At its peak, the plant employed over 200 people. For over eighty years it was the major manufacturing plant in the village, employing generations of Attica residents. The plant closed in 1986.

ATTICA PRISON

By 1928 plans were underway to construct a new prison in Attica. Many residents and local officials wanted the prison to be located in Attica as they saw it as a way to bring revenues to the village from construction and future employment. It was to be the most modern prison institution of its kind anywhere in New York and in the country. By 1929, 697 acres of land were acquired for the construction of a prison in Attica. That same year, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt made his first visit to the village to inspect the new site. Construction of the prison was complete in 1931. The prison became a leading employer, supplying hundreds of jobs to area citizens.

The prison was designed by William J. Beardsley. It consisted of four two-story brick buildings, known as cell blocks. The cell blocks are labeled A, B, C, and D. These four cell blocks form a square near the center of the prison facility. Access to the blocks is provided by four above-ground tunnels that form a cross in the center of the square. Open yards for each block are located in an open square area between the block buildings and the enclosed tunnels. The prison is enclosed by a main wall, which is 30 feet tall. Other buildings associated with the prison, such as the Administration Building, are located within the high walls.

In 1971 Attica made national headlines as the site of a four-day prison uprising. Roughly 1,200 rebellious prisoners held 39 guards and civilians hostage. After several attempts at peaceful negotiations, state troopers ultimately stormed the prison to regain control. In the end, roughly 30 inmates were killed, 200 were wounded, and nine hostages were killed. The Attica uprising brought national attention to the conditions of American prisons.

C. STATE AND NATIONAL REGISTER STANDARDS

Properties listed on the State and National Registers must meet established standards of eligibility published by the National Park Service. The National Register's standards for evaluating the significance of properties were developed to recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have made a significant contribution to our country's history and heritage. The criteria are designed to guide State and local governments, Federal agencies, and others in evaluating potential entries in the National Register.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved by their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- A birthplace of grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life; or
- A cemetery which derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and present in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- A property primarily commemorative in intent of design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested in with its own exceptional significance; or
- A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

D. DESIGNATED HISTORIC RESOURCES

There is one designated historic resource located in the Village of Attica. The Attica Post Office is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the United States Post Offices in New York State - 1858 to 1943 - Thematic Resources. The nomination includes 148 United States post office buildings that were constructed by the United States Treasury Department and are currently owned by the United States Parcel Service. The Attica Post Office, located at 76 Main Street, is a brick Colonial Revival building that was constructed in 1936-1937. It has an interior mural that was created by Thomas Donnelly in 1941.

E. POTENTIAL HISTORIC RESOURCES

POTENTIAL INDIVIDUAL RESOURCES

ATTICA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

The New York State Attica Correctional Facility is potentially significant for its design and construction. It also may be significant for its history, especially for the events surrounding the 1971 prison uprising. Since this may still be a sensitive issue for many members of the community, their feedback regarding the potential significance and importance of the prison is essential in any planning process.

POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The Village of Attica has wealth of Victorian homes that were constructed during the late 19th Century. The homes are primarily located along Main Street, Prospect Street, East Avenue and Walnut Street. While some of these homes may be individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a group of houses, defined within a specific boundary, also may be eligible as a historic district. These homes may be locally important as they represent the wealth of local residents, which was likely due to the railroad. In addition, any homes that were constructed as workers housing for employees of the Westinghouse plant or Attica Correctional Facility may be locally important for their association to the plant and/or prison.

OTHER POTENTIAL RESOURCES

Other resources within the Village of Attica may be locally significant for their role in the historic growth and development of the Village. Such sites include archaeological resources associated with milling activities, commercial buildings located with the downtown area, and local churches.

F. BENEFITS OF S/NR LISTING

Listing on the S/NR can result in several benefits for historic properties. Those benefits are assessed below.

RECOGNITION THAT A PROPERTY IS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO THE NATION, STATE OR COMMUNITY

This is the primary benefit of listing on the National Register. Such recognition can be used as an education, promotion, and fundraising tool.

ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTAIN FEDERAL TAX BENEFITS

Property owners are eligible for an investment tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of income-producing certified historic structures. This would apply to any commercial properties that are designated.

CONSIDERATION IN PLANNING FOR PUBLIC PROJECTS

This is meant to protect historic resources from impact by projects involving State and/or Federal agencies or State and/or Federal funds. This does not limit private property owners in any way. The owner is free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their private property as they choose, provided that no State or Federal funds are involved. Once a property is listed on the S/NR, any action involving State or Federal funds near the listed property triggers a review process (e.g., a roadway project). The OPRHP reviews projects that have the potential to impact historic resources. OPRHP determines if the proposed project has no effect or an adverse effect on the historic resource. This review process is one that takes place quite frequently, as federal and state projects often have the potential to impact historic resources.

The OPRHP's determination of effect is very much influenced by examining the important features of the historic resource. The impact on the elements identified in the S/NR nomination as the important features of the site is considered in the evaluation of effect. If a proposed project included removal of all evidence of these features, the OPRHP may determine such a removal to be an adverse impact to the historic resource. However, if a proposed project did not

significantly impact the important features of the historic resource, the OPRHP would make a finding of no effect and the project could move forward. Therefore, the argument of significance and the features called out as contributing elements in the nomination are very important.

QUALIFICATION FOR FEDERAL, STATE, AND PRIVATE PRESERVATION GRANTS WHEN FUNDING IS AVAILABLE

Various funds are available, many specifically for the preservation of standing structures. However, listing does not immediately qualify a site for federal funds. The amount of federal funds available are usually limited in both dollar amounts and the type of projects eligible for funds. Many of the grants are earmarked for the rehabilitation or restoration of National Register listed properties. Other eligible projects include survey work, the development of preservation plans, and the development of public outreach materials.

New York State has several funds which provide grants toward the acquisition, restoration, preservation, rehabilitation, protection and improvement of historic buildings, structures, sites, and object. The Environmental Protection Act/Environmental Protection Fund and the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act both provide matching grants for up to 50% of project costs.

National, statewide, and local preservation organizations also have preservation grant programs. The National Trust for Historic Preservation grant programs includes the Johanna Favrot Fund for Historic Preservation which funds activities such as producing marketing and communications materials, sponsoring conferences and implemental educational programs.