

Spotlight on a Landmark,

The Historic Columbia/ Lafayette Street Neighborhood - Part 1

by Michael Lehman, AIA

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

EARLY DAYS

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

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

THE 1835 & 1839 MAPS

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

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

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

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

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



1835 Map- neighborhood outlined



Bethel Chapel- State St.



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