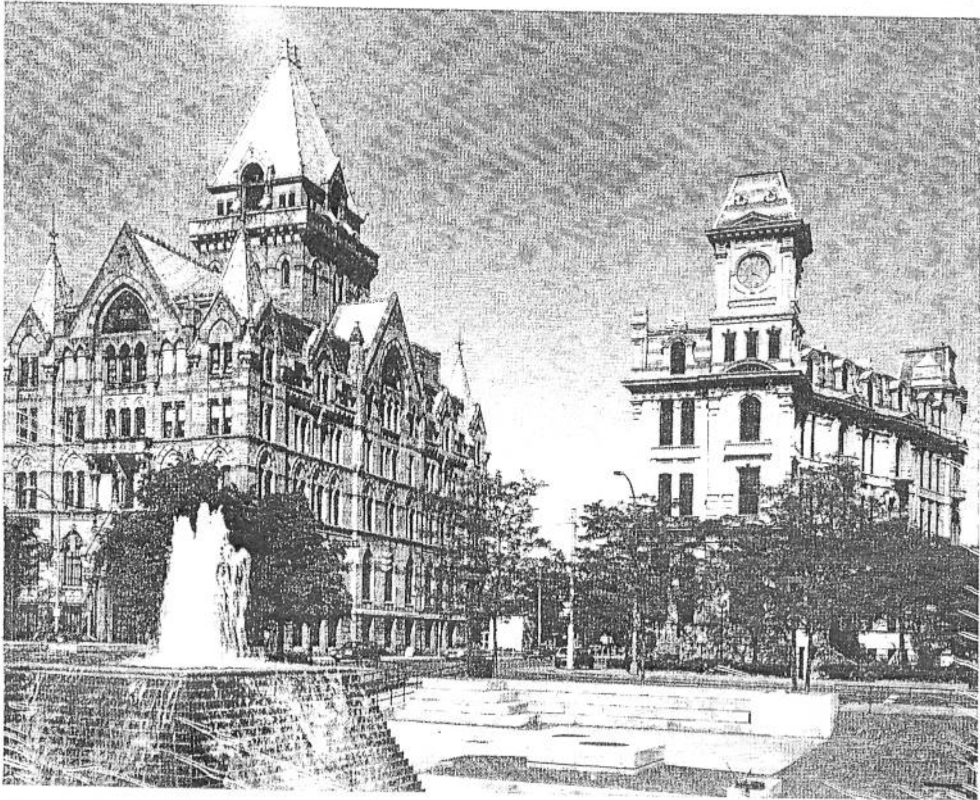
SYRACUSE



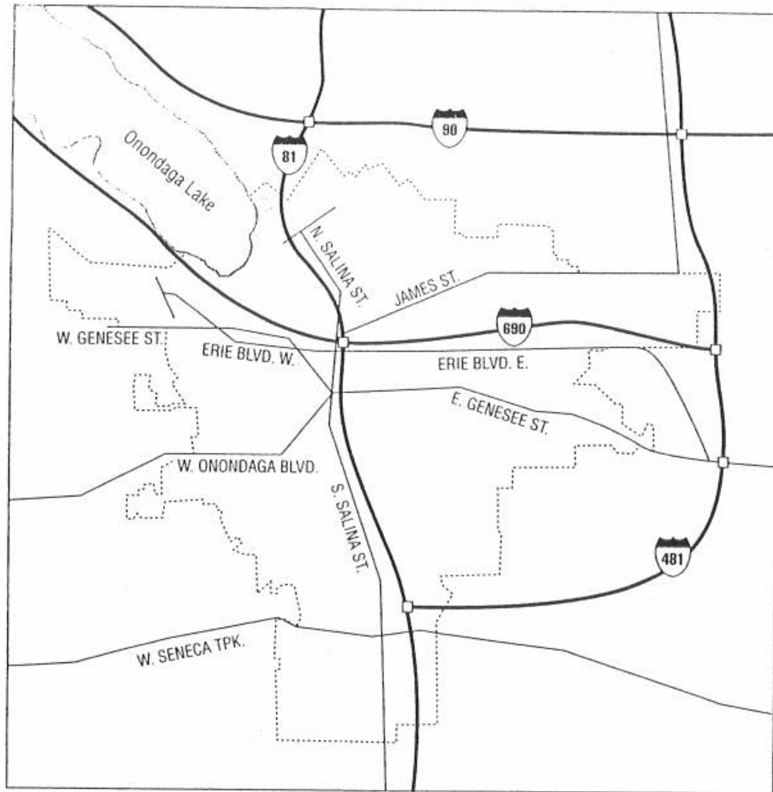
Landmarks

An AIA Guide to Downtown and Historic Neighborhoods

Evamaria Hardin

Photographs by Jon Crispin • Foreword by Dick Case

Onondaga Historical Association / Syracuse University Press



SYRACUSE: THE RISE OF A COMMERCIAL CITY

A glance at a road map immediately reveals two facts about Syracuse: it is at the geographical center of New York, and it lies at the intersection of the state's principal north-south and east-west thoroughfares. There has always been a crossroads here: first Iroquois trails, then wagon roads, followed in turn by canals, railroads, and finally interstate highways. Being at a crossroads makes a city possible, but having a product of its own to sell makes it grow and develop. It was an act of nature that gave the city its first trading commodity: an ancient sea had left deposits from which salt could be easily extracted. In an era before refrigeration, salt was a valuable commodity indeed. Ready salt and the Erie Canal transformed Syracuse from a crossroads into a city, and manufacturing and the railroad sustained it when the salt industry and canal faltered.

This is a city whose face has been shaped by commerce. Although something remains of an earlier period, especially in Hanover Square and Onondaga Hill and Onondaga Valley, in the middle of the nineteenth century Syracuse was a city in a hurry. Much of its architecture reflects that era of individualism, widely varied building styles, and explosive, unplanned growth. Those who look downtown for sustained elegance will be disappointed, but those who look for the visible manifestations of what propelled the United States during the past centuries will be amply rewarded.

As the city matured, growth shifted from the central city to its neighborhoods and suburbs, from commercial to residential construction. Just as downtown has good examples of every American commercial building type of the last two centuries, the outlying parts of the city are a veritable catalogue of the domestic architecture that was built in the United States during the last 200 years. Syracuse is not, like Colonial Williamsburg, a museum that evokes what is for most of us a fantasy image of our past but an ongoing, ethnically diverse city in which we can discover the more typical lives of our ancestors.

Native Americans and Early European Settlement

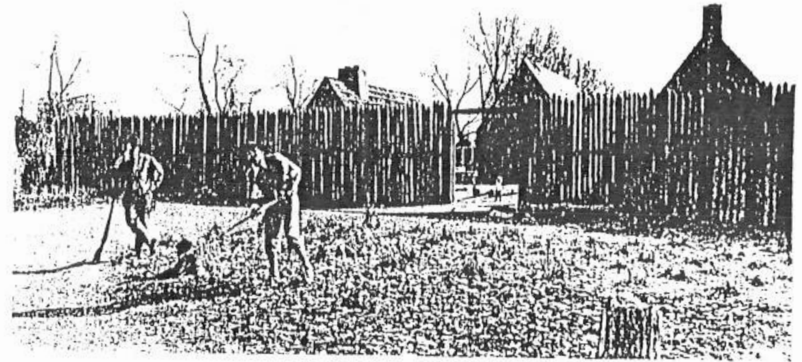
The story of Syracuse begins with an area covered with swamps and bogs, and with a vast forest surrounding a beautiful, pristine lake. That lake was named after the Onondaga Nation, which was in the geographical center of the territory occupied by the Iroquois League. (Iroquois was the name given to the Indians by the French; they called themselves Haudenosaunee—the People of the Longhouse.) Legend has it that the League of the Iroquois was founded by five separate peoples on the northern shore of Onondaga Lake. Two primary axes of movement through the territories of the "Five

Nations," one east-west, the other north-south, crossed the territory of the Onondaga. The symbolic longhouse of the Iroquois Confederacy was oriented along the east-west axis. The Mohawk guarded the eastern door, and the Seneca the western, while the Onondaga tended the council fire in the center. Along this axis the business of the league was conducted. The Cayuga aligned themselves with the Seneca to the west, and the Oneida joined with the Mohawk to the east. Later the Tuscarora joined the league, which thus occupied an area between the Genesee and Hudson rivers, although its influence extended well beyond the boundaries of the area that is now New York State.

The Onondaga rebuilt their villages throughout central New York approximately every fifteen years. Their houses were framed with saplings, bent to form a domed structure, and covered with elm bark shingles. Until the eighteenth century, fortifications consisting of rows of upright saplings surrounded the houses. Visiting Jesuits told of long houses arranged in rows, accessible by doors at either end. A central corridor held the cooking fires, with sleeping platforms for nuclear families placed to each side. A group of Onondaga settlements along Onondaga Creek named Onondaga Castle, was destroyed in 1779 by American Revolutionary soldiers in their retaliatory campaign against the Iroquois and their Loyalist allies on the New York frontier.

During the seventeenth century, the Europeans came, first as missionaries and explorers, later as traders and conquerors. In 1656, six Jesuits, ten soldiers and and forty warriors established a French outpost on the shore of Onondaga Lake, Ste. Marie de Gannentaha, which lasted for only two years. The first "re-creation" of this French settlement was completed in 1933 as part of a work relief program. It was replaced in 1991 by Ste. Marie Among the Iroquois, a historically more accurate reconstruction with an interpretive center (designed by Hueber Hares Glavin) that introduces us to the events and people of Ste. Marie and helps us understand the profound changes that the meeting of two distinct worlds created in this region as well as the determining role of the Iroquois in that balance of power for nearly 200 years. During the War of Independence, Iroquois allegiance was divided between British and American forces, whose power struggle eventually ended the league's supremacy. In 1790, a series of treaties was negotiated between New York State and the Iroquois Confederacy by which most of the native lands east of the Genesee River were taken away. Some Iroquois retreated to Canada, others to a reservation. The Onondaga were left with a tract of about 6,000 acres of their original territoriy south of the present city of Syracuse.

In 1782, the New York State legislature set aside a 1,500,000-acre area, known as the Military Tract, that encompassed the present Onondaga, Cortland, Cayuga, and Seneca counties, as well as portions of four others. The land was parceled out as bounty to American Revolutionary soldiers, but they represented only a minority of the settlers because many sold their land claims to speculators. In 1786, Ephraim Webster and Benjamin



Ste. Marie Among the Iroquois

Neukirk were the first to set up a trading post, Webster's Landing, where Onondaga Creek at that time emptied into Onondaga Lake. Because the course of the creek has been straightened several times since then, the exact site of the post is not known. Neukirk died shortly after their arrival, but Webster stayed on. Trader, trapper, soldier, spy, subject of many a tall tale, Webster spoke the languages of the Iroquois and lived with a Native American with whom he had children. Although he later married a European settler, he maintained good relations with his Onondaga neighbors, who had given him a square mile (Webster's Mile Square) of their lands in Onondaga Hollow.

It was through Webster's influence that Comfort Tyler settled here, along with Asa Danforth and his family. Webster had met Tyler and Danforth during a hunting trip in Montgomery County, where both men farmed. They were to play an important role in the development of that area. Before long, land-hungry, tax-weary Protestant New Englanders pushed their way westward along the Seneca Turnpike (now Route 173), the region's first east-west road. Those who stayed found a healthy upland location with good farmland, salt springs six miles to the north on Onondaga Lake, and a saw- and gristmill to provide for their immediate needs. Among these people were the founders of Syracuse.

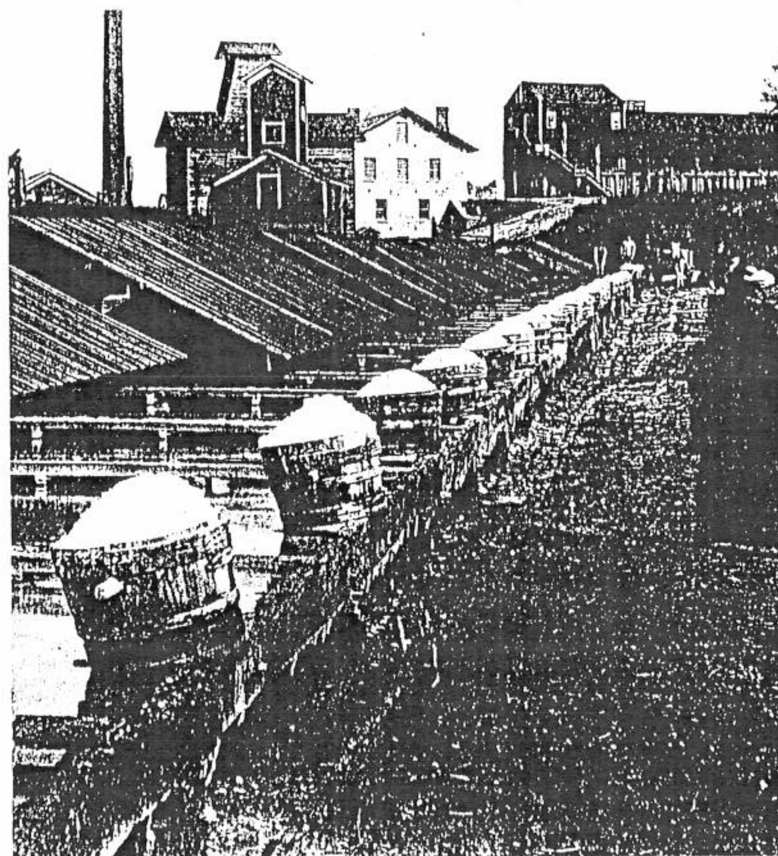
Onondaga Hollow and Onondaga Hill, two early settlements along the Seneca Turnpike, were the core of what became the seat of government of Onondaga County, established in 1794. By 1810, the first Onondaga County Courthouse, a simple timber-frame building, was erected on the Hill, officially making it the county seat. The designation of county seat meant prestige, an influx of new settlers, and an increase in business; county court was held twice a year in frontier towns. It was not surprising

that the Hill and the Hollow prospered. The surviving houses of the New Englanders tell us about their prosperity and the latest trends in architectural designs that had been inspired by classical architecture.

Salt

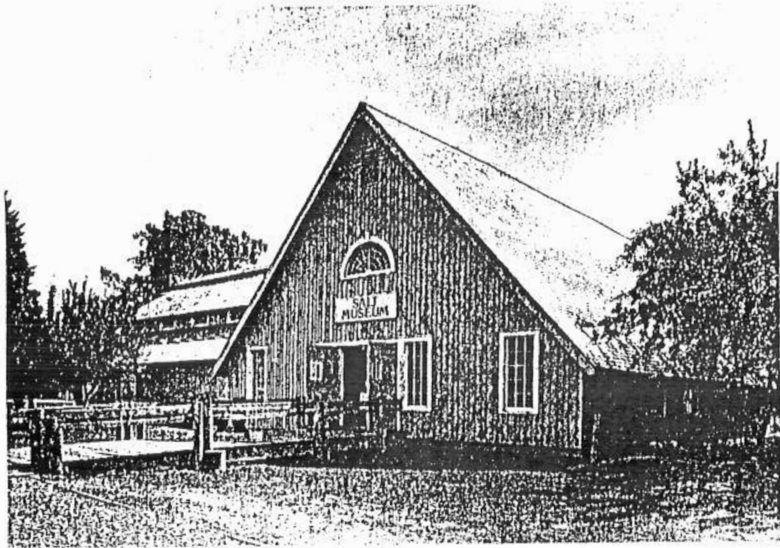
The dominance of Onondaga Hollow and Hill was soon to be challenged by a new development. Salt deposits, residues from an ancient salt ocean, became the source of salt springs that lined the shore of freshwater Onondaga Lake. In mid-seventeenth century, Father Simon LeMoyne, a French Jesuit priest doing missionary work among the Onondaga, had been invited by his hosts to drink from the bitter-tasting water. Quick to realize that he tasted salt, he boiled the brine and derived salt crystals. His report about the rich natural resources around Onondaga Lake, however, was met with skepticism once he returned to Canada. A century later, Sir William Johnson (superintendent of Indian affairs for the northern colonies), mindful of the British crown's as well as his own interest, acquired vast tracts of land in upstate New York, among them Onondaga Lake, and a strip of land containing the salt springs. The War of Independence intervened before his heirs could exploit the land for its riches, and after the Revolution the property reverted to New York State. A treaty provided for common rights for both the Onondaga and the European settlers. Everyone was in need of salt; appropriately named "white gold," it was used as barter before money became the regular currency.

As early as 1790, squatters set up their kettles on the southeast end of Onondaga Lake nearest the spring hole that was thought to be most productive of brine. Thus evolved Salt Point, later to become Salina and eventually Syracuse's First Ward, or the North Side. In 1794, James Geddes established his saltworks on the southwest corner of the lake and was the first to manufacture salt on a large scale. After the state took possession of the Salt Springs Reservation in 1797, Geddes surveyed the tract and laid out salt lots to be made available through public auction. Everyone engaged in salt manufacturing had to acquire the right to erect saltworks and to cut wood for fuel. An administrator was installed to oversee production and to levy taxes on salt, which for decades was an important revenue for New York State. At first salt was gained by boiling the brine. A later method was solar evaporation. Soon the landscape was covered with wooden well houses sheltering brine wells. Set into hills were stone pump houses from which brine would be pumped into reservoirs. There were salt blocks, so called because of the blocks that contained large vats for boiling the brine, and salt covers, shallow vats where brine was stored for evaporation. Although most houses where saltworkers and their families lived have been demolished, some of the Salina homes that belonged to salt manufacturers and administrators still exist. Making the necessary kettles and barrels became an equally important industry. Almost every farmhouse on the roads leading to Salina became a cooperage, and North Salina Street was originally known as Cooper Street.



Solar salt 'flats' near Spencer Street in Syracuse, c. 1895. Courtesy Onondaga County Parks Museum Office, Salt Museum collection.

As the demand for salt increased, great fortunes were made. Syracuse salt manufacturers formed one of the nation's first combines, the Salt Company of Syracuse, which was so successful that it was accused of being a monopoly, but was later exonerated. During the industry's peak years, salt flats stretched from Liverpool along the southern half of Onondaga Lake all the way to downtown Syracuse. The early Civil War years were especially profitable for the salt industry. After production reached a peak of 9 million bushels in 1862, the industry slowly declined as salt deposits were found elsewhere. The last salt block stopped boiling in 1890, and the last solar saltwork ceased operation in 1926. On the lakeshore near the site where



Salt Museum

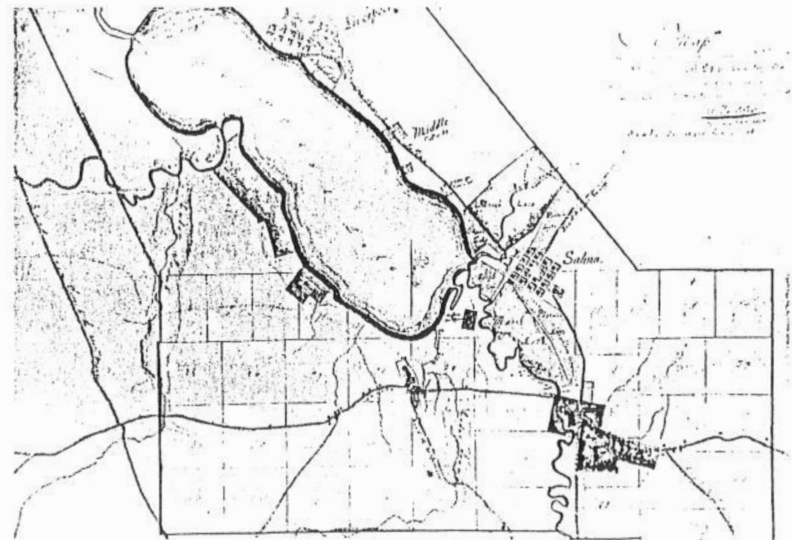
Father LeMoyne first tasted the water from the salt spring stands the Salt Museum (1933; Leon Howe), designed and built as part of a work relief program. The building's exhibit gallery interprets the history of the local salt industry. A section of the building contains a re-created salt-boiling block built around a chimney that was part of a salt block erected in 1856.

One important survivor of the salt industry was the Solvay Process Company in the nearby village of Solvay, the first plant in the United States to produce soda ash. The Solvay process for manufacturing soda ash from brine and limestone was patented by Ernest and Alfred Solvay of Belgium in 1861. It remained a secret for almost twenty years until Rowland Hazard, a successful Rhode Island industrialist, and his engineer, William B. Cogswell, a native Syracusan, secured the U.S. manufacturing rights to the process. Well aware of the area's resources in the limestone and salt needed to make soda ash, Cogswell convinced his employer to erect the plant on abandoned salt land on the shore of Onondaga Lake, and the company was incorporated in 1881. Around the plant grew the village of Solvay. Most of the laborers who worked at Solvay Process immigrated from the Tyrol, and many of their descendants still live in Solvay. Solvay Process was known for its benevolent paternalistic labor practices. One of the company's projects was a kindergarten, the first in the area. When Frederick Hazard (son of Rowland) died in 1917, the mayor of Syracuse flew the flag at half-mast in honor of his "great contributions in dollars and in humanitarian leadership." The company merged with Allied Chemical and Dye Corporation in 1920, and sixty-five years later closed its doors in Solvay.

The Canals and Their Legacy

The Erie Canal established Syracuse's dominance over its rival settlements to the immediate north and south. As a result of the boom of the early canal years, the villages of Salina and Syracuse merged to become the city of Syracuse in 1848. One year later, a local paper announced that 250 houses were under construction and that 500 more would be built in that year, thus giving a first glimmer of credibility to Harvey Baldwin's famous "Hanging Garden" speech of 1847. Baldwin, Syracuse's first mayor, predicted "a population of 100,000 souls and immense structures of compact buildings"; and he added, "our beautiful lake on all its shores will present a view of one continuous villa, ornamented with its shady groves and hanging gardens connected by a wide and splendid avenue." For this vision, Baldwin received only ridicule because Syracuse's beginnings had been less than promising. A map of 1810, drawn up by James Geddes, shows a well-established settlement of Salina to the north laid out in a gridiron plan. To the south was the future Syracuse: a crossroads in the swamp.

In 1804, James Geddes sponsored a bill to sell 250 acres of land in the Salt Springs Reservation to finance the construction of a road from Manlius to the west line of the salt reservation that would allow salt manufacturers to take their product to market. Thus Genesee Street and Syracuse came into being. The surrounding swampland tract was bought by Abraham Walton of Utica for $6,550. The "Walton Tract," the present site of much of downtown, did not have much to offer besides water to power mills, a basic necessity for settlers. Walton, who never moved here, built a gristmill in



Syracuse and Salina, map 1810. New York State Archives.

1805 on the east bank of Onondaga Creek (where West Genesee Street now crosses). Soon two more mills, a school, and a church joined the Old Red Mill, creating a center of activity. A millpond to the south covered the area now occupied in part by Armory Square.

With the condition that a tavern be built, Walton sold one-half acre for $300 to an American Revolutionary soldier named Henry Bogardus, an ancestor of James Bogardus, inventor of the cast-iron building. Bogardus' Tavern (1806), a small one and one-half-story frame structure, faced the newly constructed road at its intersection with the wagon trail to Salina, on what is now the northwest corner of Genesee and Salina streets (the present site of the Syracuse Newspapers Building). This early crossroads, propitiously located in the central part of New York State, was to develop into an important transportation center.

The tract changed hands several times between 1814 and 1824, until a group of enterprising businessmen from Albany who saw beyond this "most unhealthy locality in the state" agreed to purchase the tract at $30,000 and gave the owner, Henry Eckford, a draft on the newly formed Syracuse Company in Albany, "the largest draft on Albany from the West up to that time." William James had established this new company with his New York City representative, James McBride, and his friends Isaiah and John Townsend. Moses DeWitt Burnet, James's brother-in-law, acted as the company's agent in Syracuse. These men gave their names to Syracuse streets, and their company was the first to improve and promote the tract systematically. William James was the grandfather of the famous James brothers, William, the philosopher, and Henry, the novelist, who were supported throughout their lives with money made from Syracuse property and salt.

The 1820s were important years for the fledgling settlement, then called Corinth. Joshua Forman, credited with being the father of Syracuse, moved from Onondaga Hollow to the south side of Clinton Square, where he lived in a frame house surrounded by a flower garden and a pine grove. The lowering of Onondaga Lake, along with a drainage system devised by Forman, reclaimed marsh lots that became usable land. A post office was to be established, and because there was another Corinth in the state, a new name had to be found. Having read a poem about the ancient Siracusa of Sicily, Forman's protégé, John Wilkinson, first postmaster and resident lawyer, saw similarities between the two: each had salt springs and a freshwater lake nearby. Thus Syracuse was named. Forman and Wilkinson laid out the village within the Walton Tract, and the rest of the land went into five- and ten-acre farm lots. One can only venture guesses about its appearance. Colonel William L. Stone, a visiting journalist from downstate, remarked to Forman that "Syracuse would make an owl weep to fly over it." Stone saw "a slab settlement with three frame buildings, a start for a brick tavern and two hundred people.... It was the canal diggers who built the slab houses... pine slabs at a penny a piece were used... with plenty of nails the house could be made airtight and the roofs were of the same material."

The canal diggers were local people, mostly of New England origin. They had been hired by farmers, merchants, and professional people who lived along the water route that was to connect Lake Erie with the Hudson River. The enormous task began in 1817. Harsh working conditions and lack of sanitation killed many who built the 363-mile waterway through wilderness and malaria-ridden swamps. In the absence of engineering schools, workers and engineers had to learn their skills on the job. A fortunate coincidence was the discovery of natural cement near Chittenango in 1818 by Canvas White, an important canal engineer. It provided a mortar, "hydraulic cement," that hardened under water and was used for the construction of the Erie Canal.

As surveyed by James Geddes, the route ran past Bogardus' Corners. The completion of the entire waterway in 1825, the same year that Syracuse became a village, was celebrated with a relay of cannon fire along the route, with bands playing and people cheering. Because of its success in transporting goods and people, the Erie Canal had to be enlarged and deepened in midcentury. By then the Irish immigrants provided a ready labor force, giving credence to the often-repeated story that the Irish built the canal.

Revenues from the salt industry helped to pay for the Erie Canal, and in turn, salt merchants profited considerably from it, because much Onondaga salt was shipped along this waterway. Its branch, the Oswego Canal, opened in 1828 and led through Salina, which four years earlier had been incorporated as a village. Dividing the city into north and south, with the Oswego Canal making an east-west division, the Erie Canal physically shaped Syracuse and molded the appearance of buildings erected along its shores. Despite original pessimism and ridicule—Thomas Jefferson dismissed the idea of an east-west waterway as one just "short of madness"—the Erie Canal's success in providing easy access to markets, helping to open up the West, raising land values, and stimulating the growth of cities along its route, was soon acknowledged. Syracuse was a prime example: it had 600 inhabitants in 1820, and 2,565 in 1830. It grew to 11,014 in 1840, and ten years later the city had 22,127 people. When in 1829 Colonel Stone returned to Syracuse on a second visit, he spoke of "massive buildings" and "lofty spires of churches, well-built streets thronged with people" and described the change that had occurred within a decade as "one of enchantment."

More than a mere commercial force, the Erie Canal was a lifeline for many fugitive slaves and provided an escape route to freedom. It also brought entertainment. Revivalist preachers plied their trade up and down the Erie and saved souls along its banks. A publisher from Cooperstown floated his bookstores between Albany and Buffalo. Perhaps the most unusual attraction was an embalmed whale exhibited along the canal by an enterprising mariner who got his catch to Syracuse just in time for the 1890 New York State Fair. That was the first state fair to be held permanently in Syracuse, on farmland to the west of the city close to the Erie Canal and

the New York Central railroad tracks. Twenty-two bridges spanning the "Grand Canal" provided vantage points from which daily life could be observed. During these early years, handsome homes were built along East and West Water Street, allowing their owners to keep a watchful eye on canal traffic and to enjoy a glimpse through a newly opened window into the outside world, perhaps finding it exciting and threatening at the same time.

Much of the excitement and doubtless some of the sense of threat was provided by the steady stream of European immigrants, who came initially to work in the salt industry and later to labor in manufacturing and commercial enterprises. Although "salt barons" were mostly of Protestant New England stock, salt boilers came from Catholic areas of Ireland and Germany, and later from Italy and eastern Europe. The initial waves of immigrants were followed successively by Armenians, Greeks, Canadians, northern and central Europeans, and Asians. Syracuse is still a city of ethnic neighborhoods. Part of the West Side, home for many of the Irish who were later joined there by Poles and Ukrainians, soon became known as Tipperary Hill. Its Irish roots are recognized by a traffic signal—the only one of its kind in New York State—in which the green light is placed above the red.

Building churches became increasingly important in a community that was facing problems of incorporating large immigrant groups. Church and temple not only seemed effective institutional forms of social control but also served as important social centers for many immigrants. Before churches were built, services were held in private homes or in schools, which, as a rule, preceded church buildings in Onondaga County. In the 1820s, three churches were built in Syracuse, and by 1851 there were nine churches in the city, including one synagogue. The Syracuse city directory listed forty churches (including three synagogues) in 1873, and one hundred churches (including eight synagogues) in 1918.

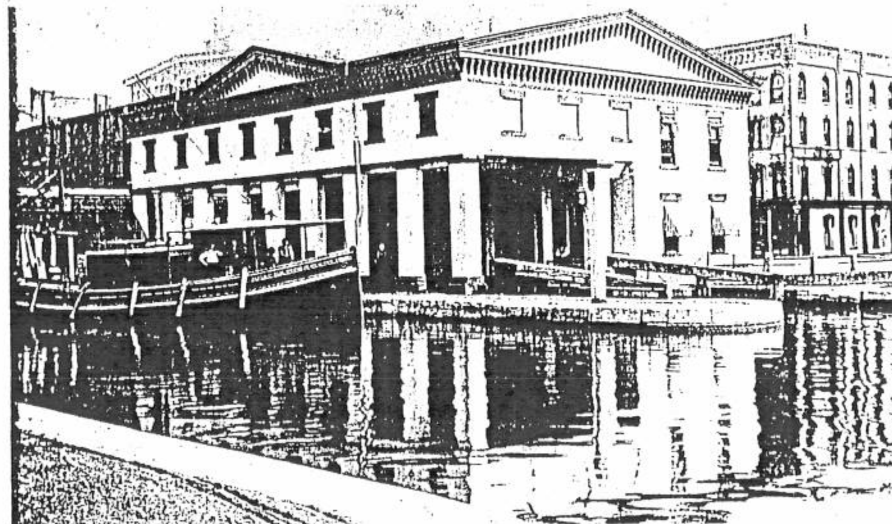
The Erie Canal was the conduit for ideas as well, and most of them were linked to religion. Syracuse, in the midst of a region where habitual revivalism occurred— the "burned-over district"—became a favorite stop for revivalist preachers, some of whom held the crowd's attention with their dramatic performances. William Miller, founder of the Adventists, had a large following in Onondaga County. After he announced the Second Coming of Christ in 1843, the faithful gathered in their ascension robes on the rooftops of downtown buildings. It was an anxious time for them, and children were frightened because they did not want to go to heaven just yet.

This religious fervor took many forms and imbued secular activities. Besides being used for religious purposes, churches also became focal points for the temperance movement, women's suffrage, and pro- and antislavery activities. Readily accessible by canal boat and train, Syracuse became a convention city that warranted the construction not only of hotels but of the Convention Hall on East Genesee Street (1858; Rufus Rose; now demolished). Many public and commercial buildings of that time were equipped with public halls to be used for social, cultural, and

political activities. Two thousand suffragists gathered in the public hall of the old City Hall for the Women's Rights Convention in 1861. They were not popular, and Susan B. Anthony and Samuel J. May, pastor of the Unitarian church, were burned in effigy in Hanover Square.

But the Erie, the old "horse ocean" that inspired many romantic tales, had its dark downside. Packet boats, which brought visitors, new ideas, and immigrants, also brought two cholera epidemics. The canal was used for the disposal of waste generated by the very cities that owed their existence to it. The plagues of the Erie were said to be harlotry, blasphemy, drunkenness, rioting, and chills and fever. And there were other calamities, both major and minor. Local architect Russell A. King tells the story of his firm's predecessor, Archimedes Russell,who, after having driven his car into the canal waters, later relied on the driving services of Harry King, a teenager then and not yet an architect. Neither had a driver's license, which was not required in the early 1900s, and there was no rail along the canal to prevent these not-infrequent mishaps. Some survived the plunge, but some less fortunate drivers and pedestrians did not emerge from the canal waters alive. A more spectacular mishap occurred in 1901, when a bridge collapsed under the weight of a trolley. The worst disaster was a canal break in 1907, when a crack in the foundation caused by the collapse of the underground aqueduct of Onondaga Creek drained the canal for six miles. Small boats and a building were swept away in the torrent.

Although the opening of the new Greek Revival weighlock building in 1850 indicated that the canal business was going well, it gradually diminished under strong competitive pressure from the railroads. Even when canal tolls were abolished in 1882, the Erie Canal could no longer compete



Weighlock building, ca. 1900. Courtesy Erie Canal Museum, Syracuse

with this less expensive and faster means of transportation. Railroad owners effectively used their political power to oppose any improvements to the canal; consequently, this grand construction, once considered by some as "the Eighth Wonder of the World," died of neglect.

The electrically operated Barge Canal, completed in 1918, replaced the Erie. It followed a similar route overall but no longer flows through Syracuse. The original canal's Syracuse section became Erie Boulevard when it was filled during the 1920s, with hard landfill in Clinton Square and with soda ash deposited by Solvay Process in the western section. The banks of the remaining Erie Canal now offer recreation. The Oswego Canal metamorphosed partly into the Barge Canal system, partly into Oswego Boulevard and Interstate 81, which was built through the city in the 1960s, dividing Syracuse into east and west. Both Interstate 81 and Interstate 690, the latter creating a north-south division, facilitate out-of-town travel and remove long-distance traffic from city streets. But because they promote easy travel to the suburbs and neighboring shopping centers, they have also encouraged the flight of larger retailers from the downtown area.

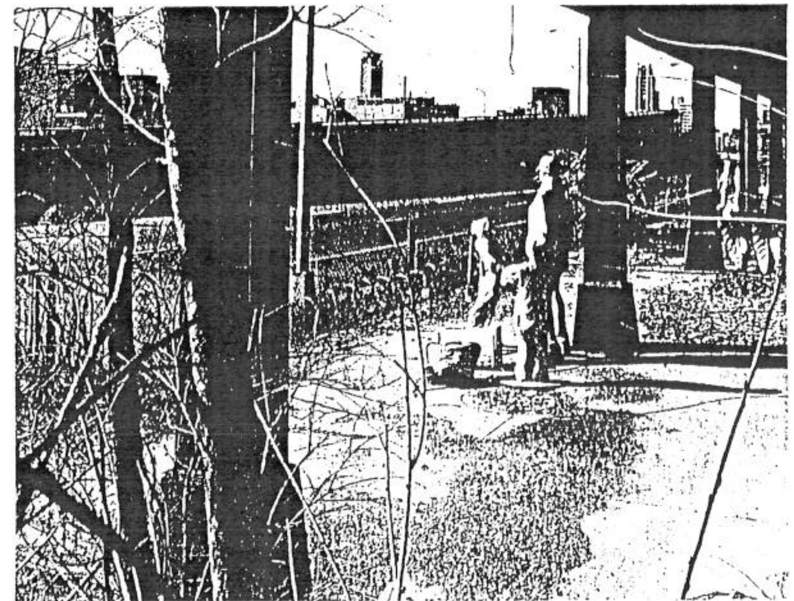
Railroads

The railroad came to Syracuse in 1839, and by 1890 the city was connected with nine railroad lines. The first station was built at Vanderbilt Square. Strap-iron rails were laid along Washington Street, and trains sped through downtown Syracuse "at twenty miles an hour under favorable conditions." The railroads played an important part in the development of the city and changed its face. They themselves developed rapidly, from cars pulled by horses along wooden tracks to fancy locomotives with overnight sleeping and parlor cars gliding along iron rails. By the turn of the century, an array of shops, roundhouses, and yards related to railroading had been constructed throughout the Syracuse area. Trains crossed Salina Street, enticing hotel and retail business to move from Clinton Square to Vanderbilt Square and Salina Street. When the old train station was demolished in 1869, passenger stations were built to the west in the area of present-day Armory Square, resulting in lively building activities there of hotels, warehouses, and flophouses.

With an average of ninety train movements daily, twenty-nine crossing points, and locomotives billowing smoke into the air and covering building facades with soot, downtown Syracuse was busy, congested, and noisy, especially when streetcars joined trains in the 1860s. Horsepowered at first, they soon were replaced by the street railway, which was electrified in the 1880s. This new means of transportation allowed people who could not afford horse and carriage to travel inexpensively within the city and to the outskirts, away from the place of work. As a result, surrounding settlements such as Geddes, Danforth, Onondaga Valley, Elmwood, and Eastwood became part of Syracuse between 1886 and 1927. The villages of Lodi and

Syracuse had been united as early as 1834. Whereas during the second half of the nineteenth century James Street, Fayette Park, and West Genesee Street were enclaves of the well-to-do, the new "streetcar suburbs" became home for people with less money. Speculation and development became profitable as many realized the American Dream in these newly developing and now easily accessible parts of the city. There are stories of most-accommodating trolley drivers who would perform errands and deliver messages, and of a philanthropic family living on West Genesee Street who ran a private trolley line for their own and their neighbors' convenience. In 1939, buses replaced the electric trolleys, initiating the removal of miles of trolley tracks and a vast street-paving program.

Three years earlier, the New York Central had started to use an elevated route, and Syracusans celebrated their city's liberation from train traffic. The replacement of trains by automobiles was complete in the 1960s when the elevated railroad bed became Interstate 690. Most train stations disappeared from the face of the city, and Syracuse's last New York Central passenger station (1936; Frederick B. O'Connor; National Register of Historic Places) on Erie Boulevard became a bus station in the 1960s. As you are traveling west along Interstate 690, you may get a glimpse of lonely figures waiting on an abandoned platform for trains that never come. *Waiting for the Night Train* was sculpted by Duke Epolito and Larry Zankowski in 1982. Those who want to take a train now have to travel to Amtrak's passenger station in East Syracuse.



Waiting for the Night Train

Change, often equated with progress, became a constant factor in building the city. Frequent fires played as important a role as the need to replace older buildings with larger, newer ones. As a consequence, there are but few pre–Civil War buildings left in Syracuse. Those that remain are simple in form and ornament, their design inspired by classical styles that were adopted for commercial, residential, and religious buildings. Writers of builders' guides, such as Asher Benjamin (1773–1845) and Minard Lafever (1798–1854), were highly successful in promoting classical revival designs at a time when there were neither architecture schools nor architectural journals in this country. Architects learned their trade by experience.

Although the majority of early local buildings were of wood, which burned easily, three-story brick buildings, a source of pride, were erected during the late 1820s and 1830s. (Salina led the way with a three-story brick building constructed in 1808.) Because of the soil's heavy clay content, brick making was a lucrative local business through most of the nineteenth century. A coat of whitewash, to which a dash of yellow ochre was sometimes added, helped preserve the soft brick of the early years. The various limestone beds of the region provided building stone as well as raw material for the production of lime. Limestone gypsum, another raw material discovered in this area, was used for the manufacture of fertilizer, Portland cement, plate glass, plaster of paris, and stucco.

The present appearance of Syracuse was shaped in the years after the Civil War, a time when salt manufacturing declined here. A diversified industry assured the city's economic prosperity. Candle makers, beer brewers, steel producers, and manufacturers of furniture and caskets, of bicycles, cars, clutches, and gears, of agricultural machinery, of typewriters and electrical devices, and of shoes, glass, and china (to name but a few products) availed themselves of Syracuse's good transportation system, its central location, and its ready labor force. Building activities that had declined during the Civil War boomed after the war years. Between 1860 and 1870, the wealth of the city more than quadrupled; 850 buildings were constructed within the city limits in 1868, at a cost of $2.5 million. Local architects were busy.

Most commercial buildings in Syracuse in the 1850s were constructed with load-bearing walls of brick or stone and a wooden framework for floors and roof. In 1851, the *Syracuse Daily Journal* announced "one of the greatest improvements of the day is the exchange of massive stone pillars in front of stores for smaller ones of cast iron, adding to light admitted to the interior and giving the front a lighter appearance." It was then erroneously believed that the use of cast iron as building material would make a structure fireproof. It seems that no buildings with full cast-iron fronts were constructed in Syracuse, but cast-iron lintels, ornamentation, and pillars—items that could be ordered from catalogues and shipped by canal boat or train—were readily employed.

By midcentury the heavy-timber frame used for dwellings had been replaced by the balloon frame, a light framing system that utilized machine-made nails and standardized lumber, by then readily available. The picturesque styles replaced Greek Revival temples and their vernacular variations. Bay windows, porches, and Carpenter Gothic ornamentation embellished houses. For design ideas, one might consult books by Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–1852), who worked with Alexander Jackson Davis (1803–1892), or by Calvert Vaux (1824–1895). Their designs resulted in a tradition of rural and suburban dwellings, villas for the well-to-do, and cottages for the middle class. Agricultural journals also informed their readers about house designs. Like other city dwellers, Syracusans soon began to move into houses where life was softened by surrounding lawns and trees, away from the urban harshness associated with the place of work. Most likely the house owner's money was made in a downtown commercial building, usually a rectangular block that fit into the urban grid and could be added onto when needed. Modestly ornamented, the designs of these Italianate and Renaissance Revival buildings were inspired by Italian Renaissance buildings that had served their merchant princes several centuries before.

The Industrial Revolution made it possible to have more for less. Post–Civil War architectural styles exhibit people's delight in highly ornamented objects that could be made by machines. Reproductions of houses designed in Second Empire and Queen Anne styles, in Stick style, and in eclectic combinations ornamented with Eastlake designs filled the pages of a multitude of pattern books, so called because they reproduced patterns of architectural details to scale. Drawings of plans and elevations could be purchased from the publisher for little money, and if the client wanted a custom-designed house, drawings would sell for 2 percent of the building's cost, in contrast to the 3.5 percent an architect would charge. Houses in many Syracuse neighborhoods might have been inspired by designs in pattern books, which provided a rich source of information for carpenters and builders. Whereas the floor plan of the earlier classically inspired house was often dictated by its symmetrical design, that of the house built during the second part of the nineteenth century was arranged according to function. Important improvements in heating, lighting, and plumbing made the house comfortable. Architectural journals first appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century and kept architects abreast of the latest developments in building technology and style.

By the 1890s, fireproof and steel-frame construction had arrived in Syracuse. This, together with the passenger elevator, made tall buildings possible, and rising real estate prices in downtown areas made them necessary. Although Syracuse was not as squeezed for space as were larger northeastern cities, tall office towers nevertheless took over part of the central business district. Symbolizing corporate power, their prestigious height soon overshadowed church steeples, which in an earlier age had been the focal points of the skyline.

As the commercial core of the city grew vertically, the horizontal spread

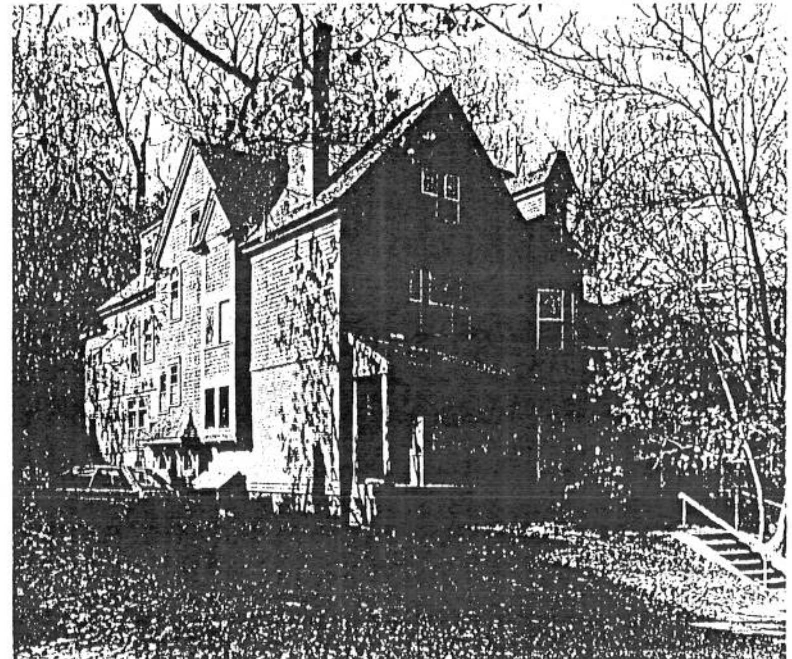
of residential areas continued. The rapid growth of industrialism had generated not only products but a large urban middle class. Homeownership was an important ingredient in being defined as middle class. An 1890 survey indicated that 48 percent of families in the United States owned their own homes. In Syracuse in 1924, homeownership was 37 percent and remained below 50 percent through the 1950s. But there were some who thought it convenient to live in apartment houses in the city, a way of living never as accepted here as it was in Europe. The popularity of the apartment house for the affluent middle class grew to some extent in the United States during the latter part of the nineteenth century. There were 9 apartment buildings in Syracuse in 1898; twenty years later there were 128. Most of them have been demolished. Attempts have been made to reverse negative associations with living in an apartment in the city. Five apartment towers in the downtown area were constructed during the years of urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. Through the conversion of former commercial structures into apartment buildings, a trend in Syracuse since the late 1970s, developers and city planners have hoped to bring back city dwellers.

Commercial and public buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became larger. Their classical form and ornateness were in part fashioned after the buildings of the White City of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), where the architectural vocabulary of imperial Rome was used as a unifying style. It was hoped that a return to classical order in architecture together with urban planning (also brought to the public's attention by the World's Columbian Exposition) would bring beauty and harmony into cities that, excepting the gridiron plan, had grown haphazardly and lacked an overall design. The City Beautiful movement, sparked by Frederick Law Olmsted's (1822–1903) boulevards and park systems, and by the White City, provided the blueprint for city planning. What this came to in many cities, Syracuse among them, was attention to civic art rather than to an overall urban plan. The grand Beaux-Arts design (now diminished in size) of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument on Clinton Square is an example.

Before the late 1800s, planning in Syracuse had consisted mainly of subdividing land, arranging streets, and locating municipal buildings. General Elias W. Leavenworth, president of the village of Syracuse and second mayor of the city, had insisted on wide, tree-lined streets, many of which were laid out along Indian paths and wagon trails. A modern system of paved streets was created by straightening and leveling roads, filling in ravines and hollows, and bridging and sewering brooks. The public squares and some cemeteries of the early settlers evolved into the city's park system. A tree-planting program of elms and maples was started after the Civil War, and eventually elms arched over streets like cathedral ceilings. The Dutch elm disease of the 1960s killed most of them, as well as many maples, which deprived of shade could not survive.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, less became more, and the smaller, simpler, and more economic house was now put forth as the American Dream. Locally influential in this trend was the Arts and Crafts movement, which flourished in New York State and in Syracuse during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and attempted to bring happiness by good design and fine craftsmanship. Influenced by English Arts and Crafts designs, Gustav Stickley (1858–1942) began manufacturing furniture in the Syracuse suburb of Eastwood in the 1890s. He also published *The Craftsman*, a journal that was to become one of the most influential Arts and Crafts magazines in the United States. Stickley redesigned the interior of his Syracuse home according to Arts and Crafts principles; the house, which still stands at 438 Columbus Avenue, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Other important Arts and Crafts proponents in Syracuse were ceramic artist Adelaide Alsop Robineau, whose home and studio still exist on Robineau Road, and architect Ward Wellington Ward (1875-1932), who built not only homes for the well-to-do but also several fine bungalows that exemplify the ideals of the small Arts and Crafts house.

Stickley's *Craftsman* was joined by such important tastemakers as *House Beautiful* and *Ladies Home Journal* as advocates of simple and economic housing. Much emphasis was placed on technological systems and on



Gustav Stickley House

landscaping. The number of rooms and partitions declined, floor plans opened up, and the kitchen became the central core. Houses were frequently ordered through mail-order firms, such as Sears, Roebuck and Company. The Architects' Small House Service Bureau, Inc. was organized in 1921 to provide home builders with designs for small, inexpensive houses, and in the early 1930s, Herbert Hoover's government launched a campaign to increase moderate-cost dwellings. Colonial Revival style houses, English Tudor cottages, and Mission style houses combined modern efficiency and comfortable associations with the past. Syracuse neighborhoods are visual reminders of all of these trends. Although the building of row houses, much used in larger northeastern cities, was little exploited in Syracuse, the multifamily house, especially the two-family residence, is a characteristic Syracuse institution. And here, as elsewhere, public housing made an appearance: between 1938 and 1940 Pioneer Homes was constructed on East Adams Street as the first U.S. Housing Authority project in the country.

Exodus, Urban Renewal, and Preservation

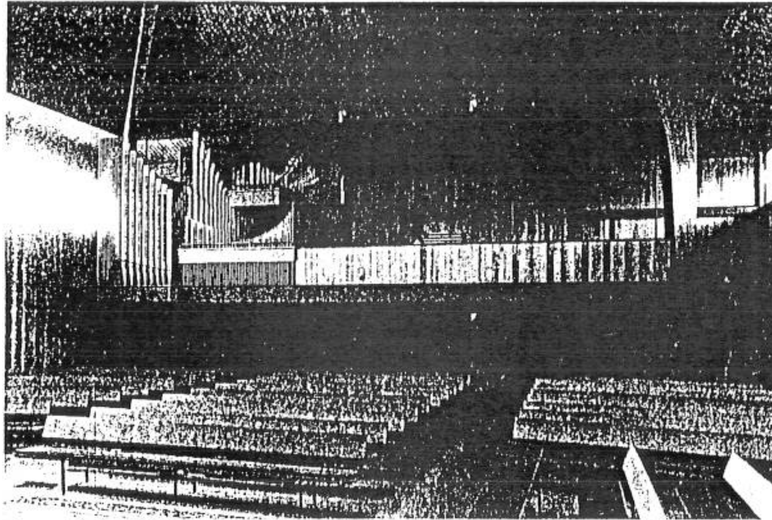
The Depression and the Second World War put a temporary halt to building activities and marked the end of Syracuse's great period of growth. The doldrums were somewhat alleviated by the construction of a handful of major Art Deco-inspired buildings. While the State Tower Building (1927) on Hanover Square was the tallest in the city, the Niagara Mohawk Building (1932) on Erie Boulevard West was the brightest. Four years later, the New York Central's fourth passenger station opened its doors to travelers on Erie Boulevard East, and a milestone in building technology was reached upon completion of the Onondaga County War Memorial on Montgomery Street in 1951.

Aided and abetted by improved highways, the steady exodus into suburbs and exurbs, which grew 70 percent during the 1950s, changed the character of many of the one-time urban residential areas and condemned the older inner-city districts to decay. Urban renewal, launched by the Housing Act of 1949, seemed to many city planners the panacea for urban ills. It was believed that once the old "eyesores" were replaced with modern buildings moneyed clients would come into the city, thus revitalizing downtown. Because progress was equated with newness, in Syracuse, as in other nineteenth-century industrial cities, many buildings marked with use and age gave way to parking lots and shiny new towers. The demolition of older housing stock forced a large migration of lower-income people to other areas of the city, particularly to the near South Side. The social and architectural fabric of the city changed considerably. Because the design of many of the new buildings of that era did not reflect the design of their remaining older neighbors, the architectural collage that ensued threatened to become an unsightly hodgepodge. Remarked Ada Louise Huxtable of the *New York Times*, "Syracuse's great consistency...had been its will to self destruction."

The loss of old buildings also meant the loss of the city's history. There were some who were alarmed by this, among them the late Syracuse University professor Harley J. McKee, who pointed to the importance and beauty of nineteenth-century buildings in Syracuse at a time when historic buildings for many people meant Williamsburg. Under his influence, SAVE—Society for the Advancement of the Visual Environment—was founded in 1967, one year after a national act was passed that provided for the establishment of historic preservation offices in every state. SAVE metamorphosed into the Landmarks Association of Central New York in 1976. It now exists as the Preservation Association of Central New York and was joined in 1989 by the Heritage Coalition, Inc. Local preservation groups work together with the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board, an advisory group that reports to the Syracuse Planning Commission and the Syracuse Common Council on the local designation of historic resources. The Landmark Preservation Ordinance of 1975 also established a citywide system for the controlled protection of individually listed buildings and districts. Finally, the federal investment tax credit program of the early 1980s provided an important impetus for the revitalization of many of the older downtown buildings, some of which are adaptively reused and look better now than during their heyday.

Two publications reinforced awareness of our architectural heritage. In 1964, the Syracuse University School of Architecture published *Architecture Worth Saving in Onondaga County* (McKee et al.), and *Onondaga Landmarks* (Syracuse–Onondaga County Planning Agency), produced by the Cultural Resources Council of Syracuse and Onondaga County, Inc., came out in 1975. During that time the Design Section of the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency under the direction of Manuel Barbas identified downtown buildings for adaptive reuse in one of the first municipal planning studies.

On its brighter side, during the period of urban renewal some buildings designed by internationally known architects were constructed. The May Memorial Unitarian Society at 3800 East Genesee Street, the fifth church of the society, was completed in 1962. It was designed by Pietro Belluschi (Boston, Massachusetts) and constructed in association with the local firm of Pederson, Hueber and Hares, Architects; Glavin, Landscape Architect. The church was named May Memorial after the society's second minister, ardent reformer Samuel Joseph May (1797–1871), who is said to have been burned in effigy more than any other Syracusan. In 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson gave the first phase of his famous Gulf of Tonkin speech at Syracuse University; the occasion was the dedication ceremony of the Newhouse Communication Center (Newhouse I), named after its donor, Samuel I. Newhouse. The building was designed by internationally known architect I. M. Pei. Ten years later Newhouse II was added by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill of New York. The notable Everson Museum of Art, I. M. Pei's other building in this city, opened its doors on the corner of State and Harrison streets in 1968.



May Memorial Unitarian Church, sanctuary

In the 1970s, New York State launched its Urban Cultural Parks program. Not a park in the traditional sense, the Urban Cultural Park invites the visitor to learn about the city's history and culture, to enjoy its architecture, monuments, and green spaces, and to support their preservation. There are fourteen parks in New York State, including the one in Syracuse. Each park emphasizes a particular theme; "Business, Capital, and Transportation" was the topic chosen for Syracuse. It will be the focus of a permanent exhibition to be housed in the Urban Cultural Parks Visitor Center at the Erie Canal Museum.

There are plans to clean Onondaga Lake, once beautiful and pristine but now polluted by those whose lives it sustained. Large-scale alterations in Syracuse's urban fabric have ceased, with the possible exceptions of the redevelopment of "Oil City" at the south end of Onondaga Lake and the city's plan to link Franklin Square, the Carousel Center, and the waterfront with the downtown area. Also, a conference center to the south of the War Memorial and the Everson Museum has been built. Although occasional new buildings will arise, most of the physical changes now consist of rehabilitating and adapting older structures. For the time being, at least, there has been a marriage between economics and a concern for maintaining the architectural links with a robust past. One can only hope that the union will be both lasting and fruitful.

WALKING TOURS