

**Reconnaissance Level Survey of Historic
Architectural Resources in the Village of
East Aurora, New York**



Prepared By

Martin Wachadlo and Francis R. Kowsky

for the East Aurora

Historic Preservation Commission

2013

PREFACE

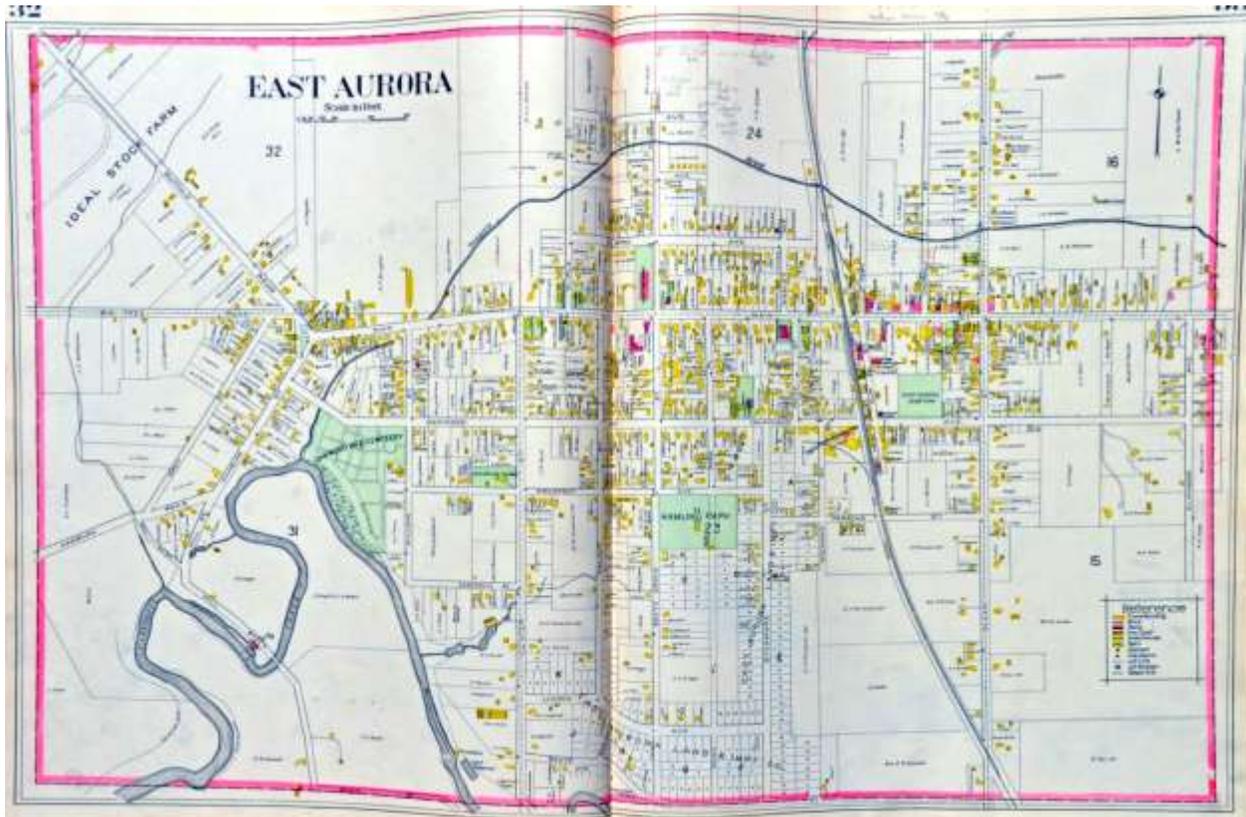
For their help with the preparation of this report, which was supported by Certified Local Government Grant from the New York Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the authors wish to especially thank the members of the East Aurora Historic Preservation Commission, Robert Goller, Town Historian, Bryan Gazda, Administrator, Village of East Aurora and Robert Englert, Historic Preservation Program Analyst, Historic Preservation Division, New York Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

The following abbreviations are used in connection with dates in the annotated property list:

- v. signifies that the date comes from the Village database
- c. signifies the approximate date that the preparers believe the building was constructed
- no prefix indicates an exact date of construction

The annotated property list also contains the Unique Site Number (USN), which are assigned by the Historic Preservation Office in Albany, for all properties so designated. These numbers may be followed by a letter which indicates a previous determination by the State Preservation Office: I = Individually eligible for the National Register; N = not eligible for the National Register.

Buildings which may be National Register Eligible have been noted as “Recommended NRE(I).



Village of East Aurora in 1909

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Village of East Aurora in the Town of Aurora in Erie County, New York, is an independent rural community that is also a suburban residential address for many who find employment in Buffalo and the surrounding metropolitan area. The Village is also important in the annals of American art for the presence here in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Roycroft Campus. Listed in the National Register of Historic places and also classified as a National Historic Landmark, the Roycroft campus was the most important manifestation of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the United States. Its leader, Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915) was well known around the world for his writings on art and culture and his sponsorship of various craft enterprises that emulated the ideals of William Morris in England. The Village is also important for having been the home of Millard Fillmore (1800-1874), the thirteenth president of the United States. In 1850, Fillmore signed the historic Missouri Compromise that is credited with delaying the breakup of the Union for another decade. The house he built in 1825 and which housed his law practice now stands at 24 Shearer Avenue (where it was moved from nearby Main Street in the 1930s) and is designated a National Historic Landmark. In the 1930s, the well known Fisher-Price Toys was founded in East Aurora. Its world headquarters are now located just outside the Village boundaries in the Town of Aurora.

This project seeks to identify buildings, structures, and landscapes that are historic resources in the Village of East Aurora. It also outlines the historical context of these resources. The consultants have identified approximately 580 properties that appear to retain a significant amount of remaining historic architectural integrity, and may be eligible for designation by the East Aurora Historic Preservation Commission as local landmarks; some have the potential for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. (Architectural integrity refers to how close the present building is to its historic form, appearance and materials). The cultural resource survey is the initial step toward a fuller understanding of the significance of the Village's built environment. The information and recommendations in this report should form the basis for local planning efforts, in particular, integrating historic preservation into any future plans for

development and revitalization. The fact that a building is not included in the list of properties considered eligible for National Register of Historic Places or local designation does not mean that it is not a valuable neighborhood asset.



194 Olean Street during the 1970s; the exterior is still largely original.



194 Olean Street in 2013, after receiving modern siding and windows.

The loss of original character is obvious.

The researchers note that older structures that lack enough architectural integrity for designation are often well maintained or capable of restoration. They should be retained whenever possible to preserve the scale and general character of the Village. The greatest threats to the architecture of the Village appear to be replacement windows (neither more efficient nor longer lasting than the original wood windows they replace), plastic (vinyl) siding and inappropriate additions. However, there are numerous buildings in the Village whose historic integrity could be significantly restored by the removal of later siding, exposing the original siding underneath.

There may also be buildings that deserve recognition for their historical significance, a factor that the researchers of this report did not generally consider. The annotated list of properties catalogues architecture only. The researchers, however, would encourage further study to determine the addresses of historically significant individuals. A tentative list would include Dard Hunter, a nationally recognized artist, graphic designer and paper maker who worked for the Roycrofters; native son Clifford Goldsmith, a well known playwright who wrote *What a Life*, as well as scripts for *Henry Aldrich*, a nationally syndicated radio program that was popular from 1939 to 1953;¹ and Stephen Crane, author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, who lived in the Village while he was associated with Elbert Hubbard.

Of great value is the survey of historic buildings in the village undertaken by Peter Anderson during the 1970s. The present survey can be considered an updating and expansion of that pioneering work. Also utilized were two earlier partial surveys. The first was M. Lisa Spaulding, Gloria McKenna, and Benjamin Nelson, *Cultural Resources Investigation of PIN 557638, Route 16 (Olean Street) from Main Street to South Street, Village of East Aurora, Town of Aurora, Erie County, New York* (Albany: New York State Museum, 1987). The other was Mark S. Lorusso, *A Cultural Resources Survey Report for a Historic Setting Analysis of PIN 5576.67.101, And U. S. Route 20A/NY Route 16/78, Village of East Aurora, Erie County, New York* (Albany: NY State Department of Transportation, 2005). Unfortunately, a number of buildings in these surveys have been so greatly altered as to lack historic integrity today.

The report opens with an explanation of the methodology that the consultants made use of and explains how the survey and research work were conducted. This is followed by a historic and architectural overview of the Village and a bibliography. The final section of the report is an annotated list of properties that appear to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or designation as local landmarks.

¹ See "Clifford Smith, 72, Dies: 'Aldrich Family' Originator," *New York Times*, July 12, 1971.

METHODOLOGY

The consultants worked in cooperation with Robert Englert in the Survey and Evaluation Unit of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to determine the scope and character of project objectives and to clarify issues related to decisions on the eligibility of individual properties for landmark designation. The consultants also spoke with members of the East Aurora Historic Preservation Commission concerning questions related to local designation of individual properties.

Archival Research

In an effort to determine dates for individual buildings, the consultants looked through the files of the Building Permits department in the Village Hall. This yielded considerable information on the date of construction and alteration of many buildings, although not all structures could be dated from the files. Research in primary and secondary sources for preparing the overview statement was conducted primarily at the historian's office in East Aurora. Other sites included the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Central Branch, the Butler Library at Buffalo State College, and the library of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. A number of online resources were also utilized. At these institutions, we consulted a variety of resources, including historic maps, atlases, local histories, public records, newspapers, periodicals, and unpublished materials. Archival research also helped determine the date of some structures, architects' names (rarely), and other information that aided in the interpretation of the properties. The bibliography lists the published and unpublished resources that we used.

Field Survey

The field work consisted of visiting each street in the survey area and documenting the physical characteristics of all properties determined to be potentially significant. (All photographs were

taken by Martin Wachadlo.) The physical condition of a building was not a major factor in determining whether or not to include it in the survey; architectural integrity was. Buildings and landscapes that were deemed to have lost too much of their historic integrity were excluded from the survey annotated list. The current survey considered only above ground historic resources. Prehistoric and historic archaeological sites lay outside the scope of this project.

Selection criteria were based on the historic themes and property types established by the National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation. The National Register criteria can be summarized as follows:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, 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 local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of New York or the United States; or*
- b. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in local, New York or national history; or*
- c. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or that represent the work of a master or possess high artistic value, or represent a significant 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 of the local area, New York or the nation.*

Structures that did not entirely meet these criteria, but which were thought to have above average integrity were listed as possibly eligible for local landmark designation.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The following proposed historic districts consist of notable concentrations of architecturally significant properties, which are considered contributing to the historic character of said districts. Architectural significant buildings identified in the survey within the boundaries of these proposed districts are thus noted as contributing in the annotated list. However, some buildings within the proposed districts that have lost much architectural integrity (and thus were not noted in the annotated list) may later be determined to be contributing properties in those districts if they retain their historic forms (historic shape, roofline, porches, etc.). It is also possible that some of these proposed districts could be combined to form larger districts.

CHESTNUT HILL ROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT

A district of early to mid-twentieth-century residences along Chestnut Hill Road.

EAST MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

A district containing the best concentration of preserved high style residential designs in the Village, ranging in date from early nineteenth through mid-twentieth century, also including parts of Elmwood Avenue.

FILLMORE AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

A district containing an exceptional concentration of late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential designs, extending over most of Fillmore Avenue and including part of North Grove Street.

SOUTH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

A district of mostly early twentieth-century residences running the length of Linden Avenue, a notable thoroughfare divided by a center median, and including residences on intersecting streets, including South Grove, South Walnut and Center Street.

OAKWOOD AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

A district of late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential designs, extending over most of Oakwood Avenue and including houses on four intersecting streets.

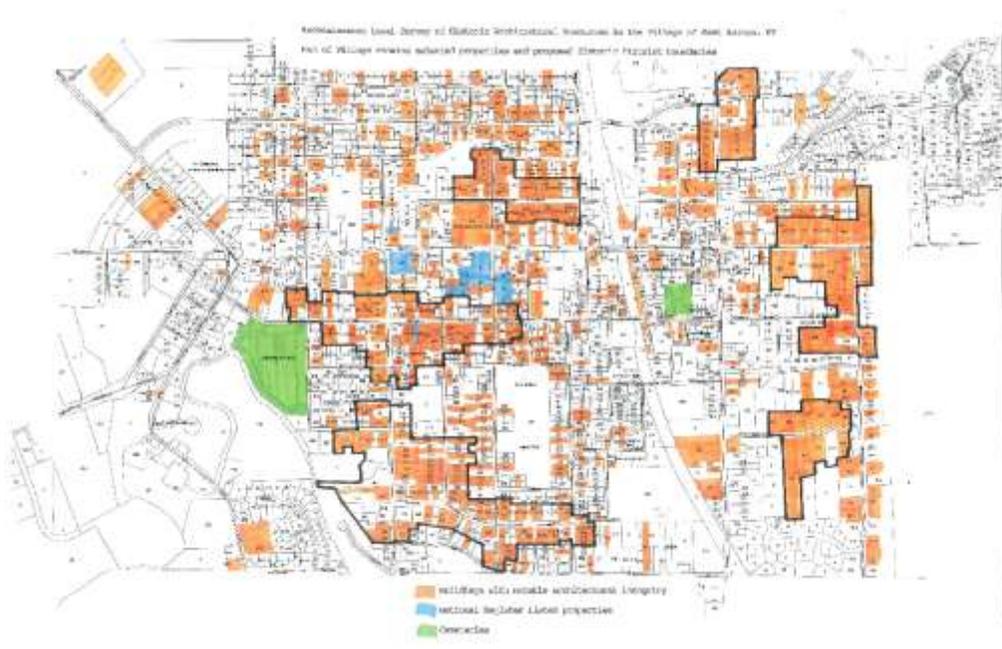
PINE STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

A district of late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential designs along Pine Street and the Porterville Road.

ROYCROFT THEMATIC HISTORIC DISTRICT

A possible non-contiguous district of properties associated with the Roycrofters, excluding the Roycroft Campus, such as homes of prominent craftsmen the Roycroft shops. This district may contain about twenty properties. More research will be required to identify appropriate addresses.

A previously identified potential historic district of six properties on Olean Street, across from Chestnut Hill Road, was determined to have lost integrity and is no longer a potential historic district.



ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW

The Village of East Aurora, New York, is located near the center of Erie County in the Town of Aurora in the southwestern portion of the state. It is about twenty miles south of Buffalo, to which it is joined by the East Aurora Expressway. The present day Village is the union of two earlier settlements that were a mile apart and known as Upper Village and Lower Village. The latter hamlet was also known after 1851 as Willink. Today, the Village has a population of approximately 7000 people and covers about two-and-one-half square miles of level land. A community primarily of single family homes on wide, tree-lined streets, it benefits from the presence nearby of Fisher-Price, the well-known toy maker whose headquarters are just outside the Village boundaries. Moog Incorporated, another worldwide corporation (it manufactures airline safety equipment), is also located nearby and has had a positive influence on the local economy. In the later 19th century, dairy farms and horse farms added much to the local economy and charm of the place. They continue contribute to the quality of life here. In 2009, the median family income was estimated at \$66,512, well above the New York State average of \$54, 659.

Physically, the present day Village of East Aurora, which is comprised of three historically distinct districts, is laid out in a grid iron system of streets. Many of these bear old-fashioned names like Walnut, Linden, Maple, and Oakwood that recall the aboriginal forests that once grew here.

Main Street, which runs east-west through the heart of the Village, is the chief commercial thoroughfare. Main Street is also NY 20A. In bygone days, this road was a principal highway traversing the state for 300 miles from Lake Erie to the Hudson River. It is now considered a picturesque byway. "The road is like a highway set in aspic," wrote a recent travel writer," with

vignettes of architecture, . . . a visual encyclopedia of American building types."² Spared many of the changes that have drained away the special small town charm from other Upstate communities, East Aurora is one of the highlights of the journey. Coming from the west, NY20A enters East Aurora on Hamburg Street and continues about a half a mile to a traffic circle (first put in place by the Works Progress Administration in the mid 1930s) where it meets Buffalo Road and the overlapping routes of NY 16 and NY 78. This intersection was formerly called Willink Square. The three routes join and follow Main Street, which was bricked between 1908 and 1915, through the center of the Village. At Olean Street, one mile east of the circle, NY 16 turns south toward Olean, New York, some 65 miles distant. US 20A and NY 78 remain concurrent as they exit the eastern boundary of the Village and meet NY 400, the high speed connection to Buffalo.

The Village traces its origins to the first decade of the nineteenth century when it was formed from holdings of the Holland Land Company, the syndicate of Dutch investors that in 1797 had purchased much of Central and Western New York. In June of 1803, Joseph Ellicott, the Holland Land Company agent whose headquarters were in the Village of Batavia, contracted with Jabez Warren, who was among the first of many to immigrate to Western New York from New England (he came from Vermont), to survey a road that would facilitate the sale of land in this part of the state. Known alternately as the Middle Road or the Big Tree Road, it ran from Geneseo westward to Lake Erie. After Warren had mapped out the route, the company directors paid him ten dollars per mile to cut the road through the dense virgin forest. Chopping a passage wide enough for a single wagon to navigate the wilderness, Warren adhered to a straight and narrow course. Only occasionally, states an early chronicler of the county, did the intrepid road builder deviate a little "in case of some extraordinary obstacle."³ His efforts opened the area to settlement.

In excellent position to realize the future potential of the area, on April 17, 1804, Warren purchased 1700 acres of land along the Middle Road. His holdings included the present Village

² Tracie Rozon, "On Route 20, Where the Past Is Present," *New York Times*, August 11, 2008, F1.

³ Crisfield Johnson, *Centennial History of Erie County, New York* (Buffalo: Matthews & Warren), 1876, 113.

of East Aurora as well as a large area south of the Village. He built a small log house at the west end of the present Village. At the same time, Warren's son-in-law Henry Godfrey and two associates, Rufus Earl and Taber Earl, also bought land here. Although these men built log houses, they spent the winter in Buffalo. During the summer of 1804, Joel Adams purchased land and built a log house to which his family, which included five sons, came to live in that autumn. They were the first white settlers to spend an entire winter in East Aurora. Their stay was not without peril. When the family ran out of food, two of the oldest boys set out on foot dragging a sled through the snow to a mill in the Village of Warsaw to replenish their supply of flour.

Jabez Warren moved from Buffalo to East Aurora in March 1805. With him came his 21-year-old married son William to whom his father had given a tract of land east of the Village. William, who would later be known as General William Warren because he headed the area militia, set himself to clearing the land by cutting down the soft the soft maples and basswoods and girdling the hard species. He also managed to plant four acres of wheat, the first significant crop to grow here. The growth and development of East Aurora had begun. Although the region's prosperity was interrupted by the events of the War of 1812, following that bloody conflict the rural economy of Western New York and East Aurora in particular experienced a period of rapid development that endured until the late 1830s. During this time, log cabins gave way to houses of considerable more pretense, and churches and commercial architecture made its appearance in the Village.

Unfortunately, none of the simple dwellings of the hardy initial settlers survive, however, the small frame Federal style house (NHL listed, 1975) that Millard Fillmore erected for himself and his bride Abigail recalls in its modest scale and architectural simplicity many of the Village's early dwellings. The Village's first white settler, Jabez Warren, purchased land from the Holland Land Company and built the first permanent dwelling here in 1804. Shortly thereafter, following tree markings Ellicott had made in 1803, Warren and other early settlers cut the Big Tree Road, present day Main Street, through the forest. The Village experienced a languid period of growth through the middle decades of the century. During this early settlement period, log cabin and simple houses gave way to more elegant dwellings in the Federal and Greek

Revival styles. These buildings reflected the attachment to New England tradition--Warren had been born in Connecticut-- which was the origin of most of the early architecture in Western New York. After the Civil War, when the community was linked to Buffalo by rail service, the scale and character of the Village and the surrounding township began to change. The railroad brought new wealth to the area in the form of large rural estates that became famous especially for the race horses that were bred there. "East Aurora was the town of Cicero J. Hamlin, of Ed Geers and Billy Andrews," declared an early-twentieth-century resident, ". . . Those who know claim that 'Pa' Hamlin did more to evolve the American trotting horse than any other one man."⁴ All year long, Village locals were accustomed to seeing inveterate horsemen exercising "their beautiful horses hitched to spindly sulkies on their private tracks and on the high roads round about."⁵ East Aurora earned the moniker "the horsey Village."

The Village benefited from this influx of wealth and social status. During the last decades of the century, many well-to-do residents built houses, undoubtedly designed by architects, in fashionable styles. More modest middle class families also took up residence here and erected substantial houses in the same styles. Most of these drew inspiration from pattern books and offerings of house building companies such as Sears Roebuck & Company. It was during this period, too, that Main Street became the locus of the Village's commercial buildings.

Main Street also evolved into an avenue of churches, many of which are located on the western end of this important Village street. These ecclesiastical buildings in several different styles of architecture lend charm and dignity to this area of the Village. These buildings reflect the important role of religion in the lives of the residents. The congregation of Baker Memorial United Methodist Church (1928), which occupies a prominent corner lot at Center Street, brought the nationally known firm from Philadelphia to design their present home in 1928. A fine example of Collegiate Gothic architecture, the church complex has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. St. Mathias Episcopal Church (1928) at the corner of Maple Street, also a good example of Gothic ecclesiastical architecture, was designed by Robert

⁴ Shay, 56.

⁵ Shay 56

North, an important Western New York architect who lived in the Village and was a parishioner at the church he built.

The Village assumed national attention between 1895 and 1915 when Elbert Hubbard, a former executive of the Larkin Soap Company in Buffalo, established the Roycroft Campus there. Modeled on William Morris's Arts and Crafts ideals and the Kelmscott Press, which Hubbard had visited, the Roycroft studios--the name signified "fit for a king"--turned out beautifully crafted books, many of which were written by Hubbard himself. The Roycrofters also made furniture and household goods that became famous around the country for their simplicity and honest construction. The Roycroft Inn, which went up in 1904, became a popular venue for visitors who wished to partake of the quaint, semi-religious Roycroft experience. "Elbert Hubbard is the only man who ever had to build an Inn to house his admirers," remarked a contemporary.⁶ The roster of the world's greats who came included Henry Ford, Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and Ellen Terry. Hubbard employed five hundred workers at the height of his success, mostly from the local area. Yet, East Aurora continued to be quiet, peaceful place conducive to serious work, especially during the winter months. "East Aurora is a populous place in Spring and Summer," remembered one of the Roycrofters, "but in the old days, when the snow settled down, and the corduroy road to Buffalo was snowed in, that was the end of the visitors--except the rare ones--till the following Spring. In Winter one has to search out his own fun."⁷

Because of its significance in the history of American art and design, the Roycroft Campus has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1974 and in 2007 the National Park Service designated it a National Historic Landmark. For this reason, the buildings of the Campus have not been included in this reconnaissance level survey. However, Hubbard and the Roycrofters exerted influence on the progress of the Village beyond the actual workshops. A number of craftsmen who worked for the company erected Arts and Crafts style houses in the Village. The home of one of the more important craftsmen, Scheidemantel, at 363 Oakwood, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (listed 1993). Other artists who worked for

⁶ Shay 79.

⁷ Felix Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*. (New York: W. H. Wise, 1926), 57.

Hubbard and later achieved significant reputations in the United States and Canada, notably the printmaker and papermaker Dard Hunter (1883-1966). For a time in the mid 1890s, writer Stephen Crane (author of *The Red Badge of Courage*) was also a resident and contributed several essays to Hubbard's popular magazine, *The Philistine*.

The death of Hubbard in 1915 as an ill-fated passenger on the *Lusitania* greatly diminished the Roycroft experiment, but the shops continued to function for more than another two decades under the leadership of Hubbard's son, Elbert Hubbard II. The Roycrofters finally went out of business in 1938. During the Great Depression, which contributed to the Roycrofters' downfall, the Village enjoyed renewed investment in its future with the establishment in 1930 of the toy company founded by Herman Fisher and Irving Price. The Fisher Price toy manufacturer eventually grew into a worldwide enterprise and still maintains its corporate headquarters just outside the Village boundaries in the Town.

After World War II, the Village saw an increase in the building of homes as East Aurora became a suburb of Buffalo. Rail service had disappeared and in its place commuters used their automobiles to go back and forth to work in Buffalo. Fortunately for the quality of life, suburbanization did not overwhelm the charming, almost New England character of the Village, which is preserved to this day. Together with many new ranch houses erected within its boundaries, East Aurora managed to hold on to its historic identity and its sense of a Village community. Defining moments in this regard occurred in 1995 and 1999 when the community successfully resisted the attempts of Wal-Mart to establish a department store within the Village borders.

The Village of East Aurora today preserves a variety of building types from different periods in our history. There are representative examples of a variety of styles of architecture that were popular during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Early Modern architecture, while not as distinguished as that of the nineteenth century, is, nonetheless, represented by good examples in the Village, as are developments in post-World-War II design. For the purposes of this survey, we have considered all structures built before the mid 1970s. Pride of ownership is evident on every street whether buildings are historic or not. Indeed, misguided and expensive

updating has in many cases led to the loss of historic integrity, as owners have replaced original windows, removed historic ornaments and other features, and changed original wood with vinyl or metal.

The remainder of this overview will be organized according to the periods and styles listed in the National Register of Historic Places guidelines.

EARLY REPUBLIC

Federal Style. The Federal style, which came to Western new York from New England, was the first example of "high style" architectural design in East Aurora. Based on the Classical tradition that had dominated European taste since the Renaissance, the Federal style drew its inspiration from the works of the Scottish architect Robert Adam. In Britain the style is known as the Adam or Adamesque style and was influenced by the renewed knowledge of ancient Roman houses that came from the excavations at Pompeii. In the United States, it was favored by well to do residents of New England who adapted the British example to the more modest material of wood. Clapboard, usually painted white, was especially popular here as a siding material. The Thomas Ruggles House of 1818-1820 in Columbia Falls, Maine, is often cited as a good example of the Federal Style in New England.



Thomas Ruggles House, Columbia Falls, ME (1818-20)

The Ruggles house has the five-bay facade across the long side of the building that was common for larger Federal style dwellings. Central entrance, simple pitch roof, central entrance often

sheltered behind a small porch supported on Classical columns, multi-paned sash windows, and handsome entrance doorways with skylights and sidelights of clear glass are other typical features of the style. Popular ornamental details were elliptical and semi-circular fan motifs in the center of the facade or above the entrance door. East Aurora has several fine Federal style homes. The house at 893 Main Street (c. 1823) is a classic Western New York example of the style, despite later additions at the rear.



893 Main Street (1823): known as the Robert Persons house

This pattern is repeated in the residence at 340 Main Street, dating from c. 1828, while the large dwelling at 227 Olean Street displays an elliptical fan motif in the gable. This house, in its massing and entrance doorway also displays elements of the Greek Revival style that would succeed the Federal style in the progress of American architecture.



340 Main Street (1828)



227 Olean Street (c. 1832)

The Federal style dwelling at 194 Olean Street preserves its original elegant entrance. Sadly, the original white clapboard siding has been replaced by modern aluminum siding, windows have been replaced with modern ones, and the elliptical fan decoration in the gable has disappeared. These modifications have compromised its historic character and beauty.

MID 19TH CENTURY

Greek Revival. During the 1830s and 1840s, American designers became aware of the early heritage of Western architecture that began in Greece during the 5th century BC. Thomas Jefferson can be credited with introducing into architecture this association between the young republic and ancient Greece, the cradle of Western democracy. In the 1780s, he designed the Virginia state capitol in the form of an ancient temple. Awareness of the rich architectural heritage of antiquity was also fostered also by the publication of books on fresh archaeological discoveries and new measured drawings of ancient Greek buildings. The Parthenon in Athens, with its impressive colonnade of Doric columns supporting a continuous entablature, especially, became the focus of intense research.



The Parthenon, Athens. 5th century, BC

In America, the fascination with Greece also benefited from the sympathy that many patriots felt for the Greek war of independence against the Ottoman Empire, a revolution that began in the 1820s.

In addition to academic studies and national fellow feeling, a number of books began to appear in England and America that translated the discoveries of archaeologists into plans for modern houses, commercial buildings, and churches. These so-called builders manuals explained to American carpenters in both urban centers and rural areas how to create Greek columns and decorative details, which had been made of marble, into the less expensive material of wood. Rose Hill in Fayette, New York, is a nationally recognized example of this phenomenon. Built in 1837, it relied heavily on Minard Lafever's newly published *Beauties of Modern Architecture* (1835).



Rose Hill, near Geneva, NY (1837)

Western New York became an especially fertile ground for the Greek Revival style, and East Aurora, in particular, preserves a number of handsome dwellings in the style from the period. "Western New York in those days," writes Talbot Hamlin, the first modern scholar to write about the Greek Revival style, "was a country of experiment, of striving for the new -- a restless, utopian country. . . There is an enormous variety of house types; many of the different schemes found farther west in Ohio and Michigan had their seeds sown in New York State."⁸ One of the notable features of the style in New York, Hamlin points out, was the "ubiquitous use of porches." This is evident on the house at 227 Olean already mentioned and occurs on other East Aurora Greek Revival homes. One is the farm house built c. 1835 for Aaron Riley at 644 Oakwood (where it was moved from Main and Elmwood a long time ago). Unfortunately, it has modern siding, but otherwise retains the general characteristics of its original appearance, especially the handsome doorway that is based on Plate 28 in Asher Benjamin's *Practical House Carpenter*, which came out in 1830 and went through several editions thereafter.⁹

⁸ Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 269-270.

⁹ We are indebted to Jack Quinan, SUNY Professor Emeritus, for this information.



644 Oakwood Avenue (c. 1830)

The former Aaron Riley House. Although it has recently received plastic siding and windows, it still retains its original entry and Greek Revival porch.

The house at 281 Olean Street (1845) represents a common L-shaped plan. The gable displays the proportions and moldings derived from Greek temple architecture and the large porch is sheltered beneath a wide entablature supported by Greek Doric columns. The dwelling at 49 Kolver Court (probably after 1860) is a later version of the type. Its more prominent porch, however, is less well integrated into the overall composition of the house. Dwellings at 746 Main (c. 1820) and at 162 Pine more modestly reproduce this type of building. The former house has some historical interest attached to it. Built for Ephraim Woodruff, the first blacksmith in East Aurora, it was purchased in 1854 by Millard Fillmore for his elderly father and his step-mother. Fillmore's father, Nathaniel, had been the first father of a US President to visit his son in the White House.



281 Olean Street (c. 1842)



746 Main Street (c. 1818)



49 Kelder Court (c. 1850)



162 Pine Street (c. 1818)

LATE VICTORIAN

The revival of the architecture of ancient Greece opened the door to the revival of a wide range of historical styles. The progress of American architecture during the rest of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century has been characterized as the "battle of the styles." The most enduring was the Gothic Revival that affected primarily church architecture, but other phases of Western architecture came back into vogue as well. The historicizing architecture of the late nineteenth and twentieth century revival periods is well represented in the streets of the Village of East Aurora. During this period, from the 1870s to the 1920s, East Aurora became a fashionable suburb of Buffalo. This followed the establishment of a rail link in 1867. Moreover,

large private estates were built nearby in the Town of Aurora and these would have a positive effect on the local economy. Most important of all, however, was the establishment of the Roycroft Campus in the Village in the early years of the twentieth century. Elbert Hubbard, the founder of the Roycrofters, would put East Aurora on the national map.

Eclectic. Some designers preferred to incorporate a variety of historical references rather than follow a single style. For want of a better term, these buildings have been described as "eclectic." The large brick house at 866 Main Street (1885) is a good example



866 Main Street (1885)

of this mode of design. Built by James D. Yeoman and later known as the Brotherhood House after a successive owner, it has many tall, round-arched windows which were called Byzantine, while the picturesque tower incorporated the Mansard roof popularized by the Second Empire style. The overall composition owes much to the current picturesque Queen Anne style.

Italianate. The dwelling at 509 Main Street represents the remodeling of a Federal Style house in the Italianate or Italian villa style which looked to the rural architecture of Tuscany for inspiration. Houses such as this were popular for rural and small town settings. The larger dwelling at 853 Main (erected c. 1870) is a fully evolved example of the type. The low pitched roof projecting beyond the walls on decorative brackets and the cupola, then referred to as a

belvedere, were distinguishing features of this style that seemed more picturesque than the sober Federal and Greek styles that preceded it.



509 Main Street (c. 1860)



853 Main (c. 1870)

Round arched windows is also a notable defining characteristic of the Italianate style, and appear in numerous houses in the Village. The large brackets are sometimes missing in smaller or less expensive examples.



411 Main Street (c. 1861)



11 Park Place (c. 1860)

Queen Anne Style. The Queen Anne style is a term architects coined to describe an eclectic mix of both late medieval and classical elements in designs that aimed at picturesque effect. It was mostly popular for houses, large and small. Overhanging upper floors, projecting eaves, stained and leaded glass windows, balconies, oriel and bay windows, and round or polygonal towers

recalled the Middle Ages. It was also known as the "Free Classic" style because of the free or asymmetrical arrangement of spaces and the unconventional way classical elements such as pediments, columns, and Palladian windows were combined. Queen Anne style derived from England but was quickly domesticated in the United States where it was thought of as more American than the French Second Empire Style (no examples of this style exist in East Aurora) that was popular at the time. A well-liked feature was the commodious porch, which often extended across the front and wrapped around one side of the house. A mixture of materials also often characterized the exteriors of larger Queen Anne dwellings. The Queen Anne style, which was spread, like other revival styles, through books and magazines, was fashionable from the late 1870s to the 1920s.



Queen Anne Style house published in the *Scientific American*, March 1890

In the Village of East Aurora there are a number of large Queen Anne dwellings that embody the full range of elements of the style. Of particular note are the residences at 530 and 898 Main Street, 53 Elmwood Avenue, and 473 Oakwood Avenue.



Residence 898 Main (1892)



473 Oakwood Avenue (c. 1890)



53 Elmwood Avenue (c. 1892)



530 Main Street (c. 1890)

Stick Style/ Eastlake Style. A mode of design for wood frame houses that became fashionable in the United States in the 1860s and 1870s got the nickname "Stick Style" because of the decorative use of thin wooden elements and panels on the exterior. Although originally developed in France, it became popular in the United States probably because it was a way to express on the exterior the wooden balloon frame that sustained the building. Brackets, gable trusses, spindles, and other devices appropriate to wood often appear as well. Often these dwellings were embellished with details reminiscent of the furniture designs of the English craftsman, Charles Eastlake, hence the alternate name, Eastlake Style. The architect H. H. Richardson, just after he returned from studying architecture in Paris, designed his own home on Staten Island in the Stick Style.



H. H. Richardson's home, Staten Island, NY (1868)

Several Stick Style homes were built in East Aurora. Two of the larger ones are at 852 Main, a house reputed to have been a wedding present to Henry Fuller from his father, and at 30 Park Place, which has a porch and tower associated with the Queen Anne style.



852 Main Street (c. 1880)



109 Park Place (c. 1860)



30 Park Place (c. 1890)



115 Buffalo Road (c. 1870)

Shingle Style. The Shingle style originated after the Civil War when architects such as Stanford White and Charles McKim rediscovered the early houses of colonial New England. Many of these were covered with wooden shingles rather than clapboard. (In Europe, the shingles had more often been of terra cotta.) When the shingles weathered they turned a lovely soft gray color that made the dwelling blend nicely with the landscape. In the 1880s, McKim, Mead & White and other prominent architectural firms began to design large houses, especially at seaside locations, using unpainted cedar shingles. These dwellings had little decoration, something that ran contrary to prevailing Victorian taste and, especially, to the popular Queen Anne style of architecture. The simple shingle surfaces also tended to emphasize the building's volumes, which seem to flow naturally into one another. For these reasons, the Shingle Style has often been considered a precursor of modern design. In the Village, houses at 83 North Grove Street (c.1908), despite being painted bright red, 871 Main Street (1892), and 859 Oakwood (c. 1890) are especially fine examples of the Shingle Style.



83 North Grove Street (c. 1895)



871 Main Street (1892)



859 Oakwood Avenue (c.1890)

Romanesque Revival. Largely due to the example of America's greatest nineteenth-century architect, Henry Hobson Richardson, the Romanesque Style of the 12th-century France, was revived and adapted to all sorts of modern buildings. Richardson's particular version of the medieval architecture came to be called Richardsonian Romanesque. The Romanesque style was characterized by round arched openings and, like the Shingle Style, rather simple brick and roughly cut stone surfaces. It was less prevalent than other revival styles, probably because the masonry materials required were more expensive than wood. The Village of East Aurora has one good example of the style, although it has been badly treated by later generations. The former bank building at 70 Main Street (1890) preserves beneath the surface of modern alterations and paint a modest but skilled Richardson Romanesque facade. The building was designed by the Buffalo architectural firm of Robert and Louise Bethune. Louise Bethune, who fourteen years after the East Aurora bank would design the Lafayette Hotel in Buffalo, was the first professional woman architect in the United States, and the first to become a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.



Former Bank of East Aurora, 706 Main Street (1890; R. A. & L. Bethune, architects)

Vernacular. Houses of less pretensions are usually referred to simply as Vernacular. Many of these handsome Late Victorian dwellings can be seen in East Aurora, as they can in other communities of Western New York. Calvert Vaux illustrated the type in his 1857 book *Villas and Cottages*, where he called it "A Simple Suburban Cottage."



Á Simple Suburban Cottage from Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages* (1857)

Larger versions often feature asymmetrically placed wings, such as the dwelling at 120 Pine Street, and porches, such as the house at 96 Church Street. Roofs often project and are sometimes supported on brackets and windows can be in a variety of styles. The tree bay facade with entrance on one side is common.



96 Church Street (c. 1880)



**97 Pine Street (c. 1880)
Built for Carlton Paine**



25 Park Place (c. 1890)



120 Pine Street (c. 1860)

This house may have been constructed by Francis Nye Spooner, who built several houses in the Village in early nineteenth century.

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period of considerable prosperity for East Aurora. It was during this time that the Village achieved international fame as the home of Elbert Hubbard and the Roycrofters. The presence here of this Arts and Crafts colony brought famous visitors from far and wide to town. It was also the period when the area around the

Village became home to many large estates. These properties, which were owned by well-to-do people from nearby Buffalo, were especially well known as enclaves of equestrian society. One of them, the Henry Knox residence (1917; E. E. Joralemon, architect), is within the boundaries of the Village and has survived into the 21st century as part of a housing development on Buffalo Road. Together with the



Henry Knox house (1917), located within the Village of East Aurora (historic view).

Roycroft Campus, the nearby horse farms provided employment for many Village residents and stimulated local commerce. They also contributed to the architectural heritage of the area. This age of fame and prosperity is reflected in the commercial, industrial, and domestic buildings that went up during this period.

Neo-Classical Revival (Beaux-Arts Classicism). The most influential architectural movement in America at the end of the nineteenth century was the Neo-Classical Revival. Fostered primarily by the great World's Columbian Exposition held at Chicago in 1893, this movement returned to ancient imperial Rome for inspiration. But more than the earlier Greek Revival, the Neo-Classicalists, such as D. H. Burnham, McKim, Mead & White, and Richard Morris Hunt, looked to the monumental buildings of ancient Empire as models to follow. At the time when the United States was becoming a player on the world stage of nations, this grandiose style suited the expanding nationalistic spirit of the day. Banks, institutions, and public buildings in the form of Roman temples, baths, and basilicas sprung up all around the country, giving a sense of

dignity to even the most out-of-the-way Main Street. East Aurora possesses two fine Neo-Classical Revival structures: the Masonic Temple on Main Street, designed in 1906 by the Buffalo architectural firm of Esenwein & Johnson (who planned the Temple of Music at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition) and the nearby Bank of East Aurora (1923), the present First Niagara Bank.



**Masonic Temple, 643 Main Street
(1906; Esenwein & Johnson, architects)**



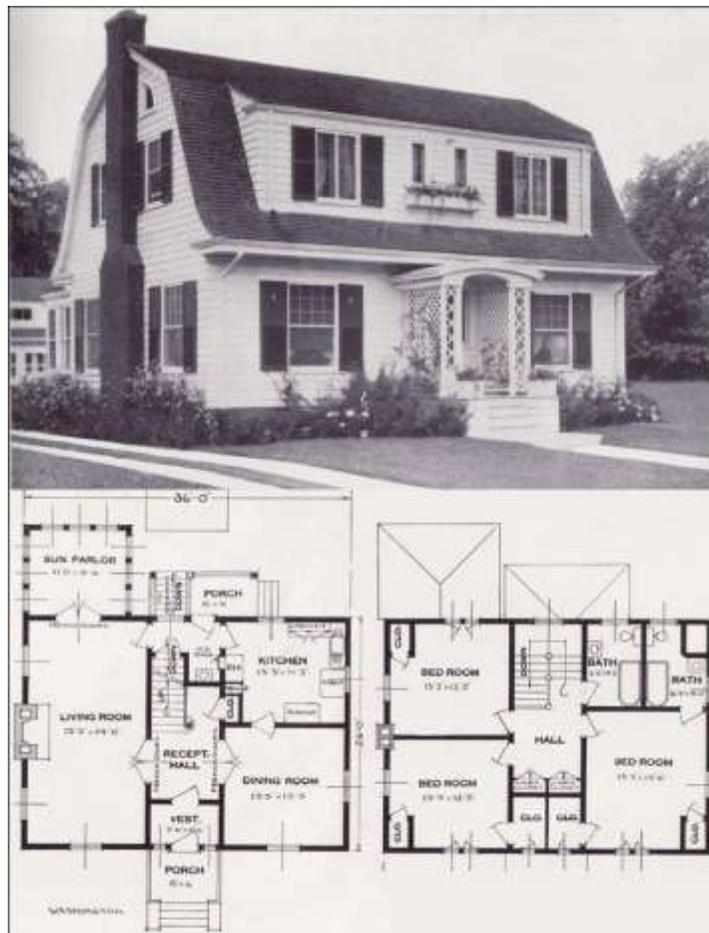
**Former Bank of East Aurora,
649 Main Street (1923)**



**View of Main Street in 1935; former Bank of East Aurora at center,
Masonic Temple to the right, former Aaron Riley house at far right.**

Colonial Revival. The renewed interest in Classicism also gave new impetus to the revival of the Colonial or Georgian architecture of early America. These buildings, which were in the long running Renaissance tradition, could be called "Classicizing," even when they were built of brick rather than stone. This eventually led to the reconstruction of Williamsburg, Virginia, begriming

in the 1920s. Two important public buildings in East Aurora expressed this renewed attachment to America's early architectural history: the High School and the Village Hall. The latter building was designed by a leading traditionalist architectural firm from Buffalo and displays the of red brick fabric and large, evenly spaced white wooden sash windows that were synonymous with the style. In the realm of domestic architecture, many home owners chose to live in houses that recalled the dwellings of the nation's forefathers. Builders derived many of these designs from house pattern books and mail order architectural service firms. People also bought entire homes readymade from such as Sears Roebuck and Company that furnished complete houses in the form of "kits" to be assembled on the owner's site. The gambrel-roofed "Dutch Colonial" homes at 336 Park Place and 141 Pine Place represent a model that was popular throughout the country. They also compare with the "Washington," a design patented by the Standard Homes Company and published in its 1923 catalogue.



The Washington model home, Standard Homes Company (1923)



336 Park Place (c. 1920)



141 Pine Street (c. 1925)

Houses at 69 Church and 222 Elmwood Avenue hark back to the Federal Style and resemble the popular Esterbrook model home (1930) sold by the Standard Homes Company and house plans available in the 1920s and 1930s from the Architects' Small House Service Bureau (especially Plan Number 6A17 [1923]).



Architect's Small Home Service Bureau Catalogue (1922)



69 Church Street (c. 1930)



222 Elmwood Avenue (c. 1936)



**Former High School, 430 Main Street
(1917; Harris & Merritt, architects)**



**Village Hall, 571 Main Street
(1929; North & Shelgren, architects)**

Other revival styles that enjoyed popularity in the early twentieth century are less well represented in the Village's housing stock. Two good examples are the Tudor Revival home at 292 Elmwood Avenue and the elegant French Renaissance dwelling at 44 Elmwood Avenue (1937)



292 Elmwood Avenue (c. 1930)



**44 Elmwood Avenue
(1937; Bley & Lyman, architects)**

Late Gothic Revival. By far the most enduring revival style in American architecture was the Gothic Revival, which had begun in earnest in the early decades of the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, it had evolved into Late Gothic Revival and was distinguished by a type of church design known as Collegiate Gothic. The name referred to the preference of designers to follow the model of 15th-century Perpendicular Style English Gothic, a style often associated with university buildings and chapels such as those at Oxford and Cambridge. The style was also known in America as Boston Gothic because its most able practitioner, Ralph Adams Cram, had his office in the New England city. The Baker Memorial United Methodist church (1927; NR listed 2011), which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and St. Matthias Episcopal Church (1928) are splendid examples of the style. The former was designed by the Philadelphia firm of Charles W. Bolton & Son which planned many Protestant churches throughout the East. The latter was designed by Robert North, who also worshipped there. North was a prominent church architect in Western New York where he designed a number of churches for the Episcopal diocese. He was the favored architect of the bishop at the time, Charles Henry Brent, a man who himself possessed considerable knowledge of Gothic architecture and enjoyed a worldwide reputation for his efforts on behalf of religious ecumenism.



Baker Memorial United Methodist Church (1927; Charles W. Bolton & Son, architects)



St. Mathias Episcopal Church (1928; North & Shelgren, architects)

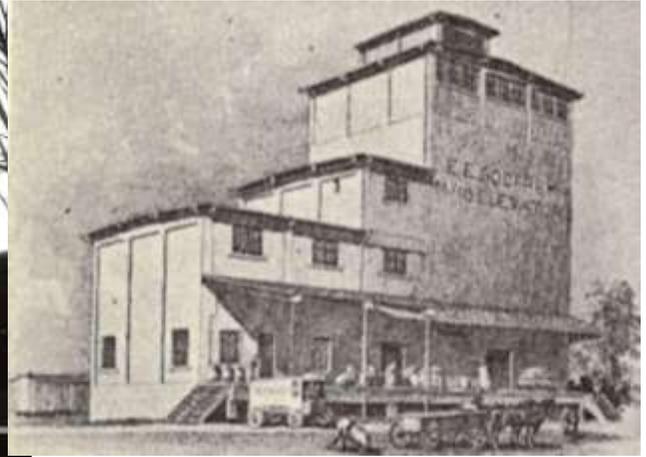
LATE 19TH-AND- 20TH- CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS

Industrial Structures. The building stock of the Village of East Aurora has been throughout its history made up primarily of residences, churches, public buildings, and commercial structures. Nonetheless, there is also a history of light manufacturing taking place here. In the late nineteenth century, the Village industries included saw mills, a woolen factory, a grist mill, a planing mill, a tannery, a felt factory, and an iron furnace. Today, there are several industrial structures that are well known landmarks. The most historic of these is the original Fisher Price toy company complex located at 70 Church Street. The most prominent industrial buildings, however, are the concrete grain elevator and attached daylight factory building at 634 Main

Street and a similar mill at 47 Elm Street. Built in 1917 adjacent to the railroad crossing, the factory and grain elevator at 634 Main Street originally housed the Griggs & Ball Company that sold feed, seed, cement, and bricks. In recent times, has been converted to commercial use. The elevator and mill at 47 Elm Street was built for E. E. Godfry & Co.



Former Griggs & Ball Mill, 634 Main Street (1917; A. E. Baxter, architect and engineer)



Former E. E. Godfry & Co. Mill (1912), 47 Elm Street.

Nearby is the steel railroad bridge put in place by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1934 when the at-grade crossing was removed and Main Street traffic was allowed to pass beneath the busy tracks. (Beginning in 1937, asphalt was placed over the pavers on Main Street.) The bridge is a well preserved example of such structures of the time. Special interest is attached to it, however, because the architect Frank Lloyd Wright had been asked to prepare a design for it. In a long letter to Wright, William Heath, an executive of the Larkin Soap Company in Buffalo and a client of Wright's, proposed the Chicago architect submit a design for the new bridge. His remarks are pertinent because they provide a glimpse into the life and civic pride of residents at the time. He wrote to Wright:

Under the recent New York law for eliminating grade-crossing, the Pennsylvania [Railroad] are going to elevate their road through our Village. There will be viaducts at four points, passing up three of them, one is the main street of the town. We are now on the main highway from Buffalo to New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington. Our Main Street is about as busy as Main Street in Buffalo, thousands of cars passing both ways every day.

The original idea was that we were fortunate to get this improvement without overtaxing the Villagers, and quite abandoned the idea of architectural effect. However, the matter has been stirred up somewhat and finally a committee of three architects all living in town--Robert North--Aaron Merritt--Fred Backus--were appointed to take up with the railroad the architectural features.

Robert North has made a sketch which I believe his associates have accepted as the only solution. They do not see much chance of ornamentation in the span that would go across the street, it being desirable to preserve as much width as possible. There is not much to do except to sketch an I beam across, the ornamentation being in the abutments and the approach to the station.

I have argued that the thousands of people going through East Aurora will remember the town as having an ugly subway in Main Street, or as having the most beautiful bridge they have ever seen, and that some investment in ornamentation is quite worthwhile. I think considerable backing has been secured for this idea. . . . just what your ideas would be for the Village I cannot imagine, but I am sure you could make a worthwhile contribution even after the other three architects have concluded. What do you suggest?¹⁰

Wright apparently never responded to this request for a "signature" design. The present bridge, presumably, reflects the thinking of North, Merritt, and Backus. The plan included a stairway at the northwest corner to give pedestrian access to the station nearby on Riley Street.



Pennsylvania Railroad Main Street Bridge (1934). Stairway and original metal railing details designed by architects North & Shelgren.

¹⁰ Heath to Wright, September 27, 1927, quote in Jack Quinan, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Buffalo Venture: From the Larkin Building to Broadacre City. A Catalogue of Buildings and Projects* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, 2012, 202-203).

Early Commercial Style. The Village of East Aurora has for a long time been the commercial center of this part of Erie County. Main Street in particular possesses a number of simple commercial style stores and shops that are both well preserved and still functioned for the purpose for which they were built. These are modest, one-and-two-story, flat roofed structures with store fronts on the ground level and office or living space above. Buildings like these can be found in small towns and urban neighborhoods all around America. The building type was immortalized by artist Edward Hopper in his 1930 painting, *Early Sunday Morning* (in the Whitney Museum of American Art). These modest, work-a-day buildings are eloquent of the busy, small town pace of life that William Heath described in his 1927 letter to Frank Lloyd Wright and which still exists here, where "big box" stores and malls have yet to disturb more traditional ways of shopping.



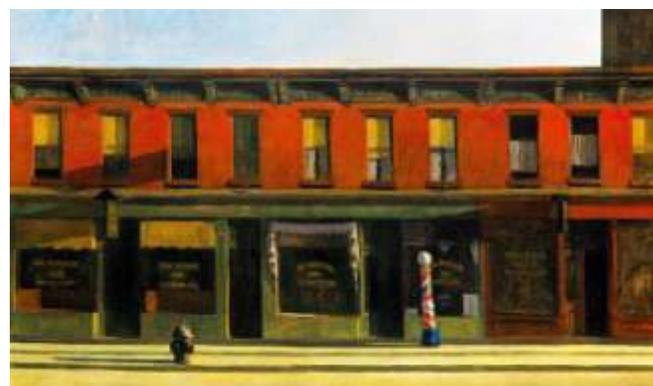
Block of Stores, 652-6 Main Street (c1930)



Store, 653 Main Street (c. 1930)



Commercial block 660-8 Main Street (c. 1910)



Edward Hopper, Early Sunday Morning (oil on canvass, 1930)

American Four Square. In the 1890s, a movement that ran counter to the Victorian taste for ornament and historicism developed in American domestic architecture that for want of a better term has been called the American Four Square style. Loosely based on Georgian models, Four Square dwellings were usually two-and-a-half stories tall and characterized by square, "boxy" proportions. More often than not, these plain looking buildings have a large front porch and a centrally placed dormer. Roofs resemble lids and are often hipped. Internally, the plan normally displayed four squarish rooms per floor. Houses like this remained popular until the Second World War. As was the case with other types of dwellings, American Four Square style plans could be obtained from house plan companies and national mail order firms, such as Sears, Roebuck and Company.

The CASTLETON **Honor Bill** **\$1,989⁰⁰**
 No. 227 Not Cut or Fitted.

At the price quoted we will furnish all the material to build this eight-room house. Price does not include cement, brick or plaster.

First Floor Four nicely arranged rooms on this floor, well lighted, and with plenty of room for furniture.

Second Floor Four bedrooms, bathroom and linen closet on this floor.

Height of Ceilings The basement has concrete floor and is 7 feet from floor to ceiling. The first floor is 9 feet from floor to ceiling; second floor, 8 feet 6 inches from floor to ceiling.

We furnish our best "Quality Guaranteed" mill work, shown on pages 118 and 119. Interior doors are fire-cross panel, with trim and casing to match, all yellow pine, in beautiful grain and color.

Paint for three coats outside, your choice of color. Varnish and wood filler for interior finish. Chicago Design hardware, see page 120.

Built on a concrete block foundation, excavated under the entire house.

Our Guarantee Protects You—Order Your House From This Book. Price Includes Plans and Specifications. For prices of Plumbing, Heating, Wiring, Electric Fixtures and Shades see page 115.

OPTIONS
 Wood Siding on second story, \$70.00 extra.
 Sheet Plaster and Plaster Finish to take the place of wood lath, \$135.00 extra. See page 114.
 Oriental Asphalt Shingles, instead of wood shingles, \$22.00 extra.
 Fire-Chief Shingle Roll Roofing, Red or Sea Green in color, instead of wood shingles, \$6.00 less.
 Floors, Trims, Doors, etc., for living room, dining room, hall, den and stairs, furnished in clear red oak for \$142.00 extra.
 Clear Maple Flooring furnished for kitchen, pantry and bathroom, instead of yellow pine, no extra charge.
 Storm Doors and Windows, \$88.00 extra.
 Screen Doors and Windows, black wire, \$60.00 extra; galvanized wire, \$53.00 extra.
 If Mantel is not wanted, \$53.00 less.
 Should be built on a lot about 35 feet wide.

See Description of "Honor Bill" Houses on Page 7.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Advertisement for an American Four Square House from Sears and Roebuck (c.1915)

Many good examples of these straightforward, "honest," if unprepossessing, houses can be found along the residential streets of East Aurora. Those at 831 East Fillmore Avenue (1910), 323

Girard Avenue (c.1910), and 140 Pine Street (early 1900s) are representative of this widespread group.



831 East Fillmore Avenue (1910)



323-5 Girard Avenue (c. 1910)



140 Pine (early 1900). The home of Arthur and Allie Mitchell, friends of Elbert Hubbard.

Bungalow/Craftsman Style. East Aurora's most famous citizen was undoubtedly Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915) After having made his fortune as a soap company executive in Illinois and Buffalo, Hubbard settled in East Aurora in 1893. The following year, he traveled to England where he met William Morris, the father of the Arts and Crafts Movement. On returning to East Aurora, Hubbard, who had a flare for self promotion, went into business producing various goods that relied on simplified interpretations of English Arts and Crafts design. Like Morris, Hubbard hoped to improve the national taste in furniture, household goods, and book design. He

also devoted himself to writing and founded in 1895 the Roycroft Press. His series of books entitled *Little Journeys to the Homes of the Great* (1895–1909) and his magazine *The Philistine* (1895–1915), a journal in which he preached his populist philosophy, were popular with readers around the country. The press eventually evolved into the Roycrofters, a community of craftsmen who espoused Medieval handicraft methods of production and the apprentice system of instruction rather than the impersonal industrial factory model. The Roycrofters started to make furniture in 1901. Soon they were also turning out leather, metal, copper and wrought iron items. In 1903, Hubbard opened the Roycroft Inn on the site of his earlier residence. It became the focal point of the Roycroft movement and the heart of the "campus" of shops and ateliers. Here the Sage of East Aurora held court and hosted many famous men and women of the day. "The love you liberate in your work is the love you keep" still admonishes all those who push open the large oak door that still serves as the main entrance to Hubbard's commodious inn.



Roycroft Inn

The numerous craftsmen who came to work for Hubbard's enterprise often built homes in the Village. They seem quite naturally to have favored the Arts and Crafts style bungalow over other popular architectural styles. The Arts & Crafts style dwelling that George and Gladys Scheidemantel built for themselves is included along with the inn and shops in the National Historic Landmark designation for the Roycroft Campus. Roycrofters John Kerr and Alice Charlesworth erected one such house known as Harmony Castle at 819 East Fillmore Avenue.



John Kerr house, 819 East Fillmore Avenue (1915)



Frederick Kranz house, 107 Center Street (c. 1911-1914)



73 Center Street (c.1920)



244 Walnut Street (c. 1910)

Likewise, Roycrofter Frederick Kranz, who headed up the leather shop, built the Arts & Crafts bungalow at 107 Center Street in c. 1911-1914¹¹. The Village of East Aurora is particularly rich in homes of this style. Further research is likely to determine that other Arts & Crafts style homes had been built or lived in by Roycroft crafts persons. The Roycroft enterprise survived Hubbard's death on the Lusitania and continued to operate until 1938. One of the great legacies of the Roycroft, in addition to the National Landmark campus now undergoing extensive restoration, are a large number of exceptional Craftsman style homes remaining in the Village.

¹¹ The date was furnished by Mark Warren, the current owner of the property, from his title abstract.

MODERN MOVEMENT

In the early 1970s, the East Aurora Expressway, Route 400, opened and replaced the railroad as the chief transit connection to Buffalo. The new highway accelerated the suburbanization of East Aurora. The community was, however, able to maintain its Village character. Most of the commercial district remained intact, so that fewer new commercial buildings were constructed during this period than in earlier years. Generally speaking, the modern movement is sparingly represented in the Village, although there are some good examples of post-war design.

International Style. The International Style, which was based on modern industrial materials and forms and identified with such architects as Le Corbusier in France and Mies Van Der Rohe in Germany, became identified after the war with corporate America and *avant garde* design. It is represented by three modest examples in East Aurora: 307 Elmwood Avenue (c.1954), 401 Main Street (c. 1956), and 33 Center Street (c.1960).



307 Elmwood Avenue (c. 1954)



**33 Center Street (c. 1960)
Demolished Sept. 25, 2013**

Ranch Style (California Style). Much more common than the International Style is the popular post-war home type known as the Ranch Style house. These low, one-story, rambling dwellings devoid of ornament took inspiration from the farm or ranch houses of the American West, which many regarded as symbolic of a promised land of the good life. The Ranch Style redefined the landscape of many American neighborhoods since they first appeared in the late 1920s. They grew in popularity especially after World War II and continue to enjoy favor with many American home owners. For the purpose of this survey we have chosen examples that are 50

years old. Among these are the classic Ranch Style dwellings at 835 Main Street (1956) and 260 Cazenovia Street (c.1958).



835 Main Street (1956)



260 Cazenovia Street (c. 1958)

. . .

784 Chestnut Hill Road (c. 1928) James Marcus Schuyler House. This house appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for both architecture and history.



784 Chestnut Hill Road (c. 1928)

The modern American poet James Marcus Schuyler, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1981, lived and wrote at 784 Chestnut Hill Road. The following discussion of Schuyler's importance for modern American literature comes from the web site of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography 169: American Poets Since World War II* (http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~jconte/James_Schuyler_DLB.htm#MainEssaySection):

James Marcus Schuyler was born in Chicago, the son of Marcus James (a reporter) and Margaret Daisy Connor Schuyler. The family moved first to Washington, D.C., and then to East Aurora, New York, outside of Buffalo. His mother and brother settled in this small town (known for its Roycroft crafts guild and retaining something of the air of nineteenth-century gentleman farming), and it figures as a locale for "The Morning of the Poem" and "A Few Days," an elegy for Schuyler's mother. As Schuyler recalled in a 1981 interview, he experienced an almost Wordsworthian calling to be a writer "while in my tent in East Aurora, New York, when I was about fifteen." Reading an account of how a visit by Walt Whitman inspired Logan Pearsall Smith to literary ambition in his *Unforgotten Years* (1939), Schuyler says that "I looked up from my book, and the whole landscape seemed to shimmer." The personal epic of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and the vital force of landscape become major concerns of Schuyler's mature poetry."

. . .

During a period of several years he collaborated with [John] Ashbery on a novel, *A Nest of Ninnies* (1969), satirizing the uneventful lives of two families in a suburban New York town, an experience that Ashbery, from Rochester, New York, and Schuyler, who spent his teens in East Aurora, New York, knew well.

. . .

The sixty-page title poem of *The Morning of the Poem* [1981] is certainly his masterwork and among the best long poems of the postmodern era. Schuyler explained in the spring 1992 interview that the poem is written in "very much the style of my letter writing" to Ashbery, Joe Brainard, and Darragh Park--an intimate, gradual account. There is no grand structure: "I never have a plan beforehand. I had no idea when I sat down to the typewriter that morning what I was going to say, beyond the title." In retreat at a family home in East Aurora, Schuyler administers a poet's own best treatment for the breakdown of mind and body. It is a poem of recovery--of the self, of one's family and friends, of a meaningful existence--and as such it must be slow, and tender, and caring.

ARCHITECTS AND EAST AURORA

"Society needs a good image of itself. That is the job of the architect." (Walter Gropius)

Several major Buffalo architects designed buildings in the Village of East Aurora. Notable among their works are Milton E. Beebe's Methodist Episcopal Church (1877; now incorporated in the Baker Memorial Church at Main and Center Streets), Robert A. & Louise Bethune's Bank of East Aurora (1890) at 706 Main Street, and Esenwein & Johnson's Blazing Star Lodge (1906) at 643 Main Street. For Henry D. Knox, Edgar E. Joralemon designed in 1916-1917 one of the large country seats that Buffalo's elite erected in the area around the turn of the twentieth century. The largely intact mansion still stands within the Village boundaries at Buffalo Road and Avenue, however, the once wide open grounds are now home to a modern apartment complex.

Outside of the Village boundaries, other well-to-do families created large estates. Edward A. Kent, Green & Wicks, and Marling & Burdett together with Meade & Hamilton of Cleveland and John Russell Pope of New York were some of the notable Buffalo and national architects who designed grand houses set within extensive grounds. Most of these were located along Buffalo Road. One of the largest was the Seymour H. Knox, Jr., estate, a portion of which is within the Village limits. This property is now open to the public as Knox Farm State Park.

Several important Buffalo architects were actual residents in the Village of East Aurora. Their residency undoubtedly led to important commissions here. Perhaps the most significant was Aaron R. Merritt, whose family had a long history in the Village. Named for his distinguished local forbearer Aaron Riley, Merritt was educated at the local high school and at Yale. In 1927-1928, he served as president (mayor) of the Village. In 1911, Merritt entered into partnership with Thomas W. Harris of Buffalo. The firm of Harris & Merritt lasted until 1922, after which Merritt practiced under his own name until his death in 1943. Among Harris & Merritt's work in the Village are the Slossom House (1911) at 800 Chestnut Hill Road, the East Aurora Country Club (1916), and the East Aurora High School (1916). In 1927 and 1933, Merritt alone designed additions to the school. He also was responsible for the design of several commercial buildings on Main Street. Of the importance of the architect to society, Merritt was on record as subscribing to a point of view that seems most appropriate to the purposes of this survey: "Many

buildings mellow and grow more beautiful with age . . . it should be remembered that none of the beautiful buildings anywhere merely happened--they are the results of an architectural mind."¹²

Another prominent Buffalo architect who lived in East Aurora was Robert North. A native of Batavia who studied architecture at Cornell, North opened his office in Buffalo in 1907. Four years later, he took up residence in the Village. In 1919, North formed with draftsman Olaf W. Shelgren, Sr., and engineer Frank R. Swift the partnership of North, Shelgren & Swift. They were responsible for the Talbot House (1915) at 835 Chestnut Hill Road and the East Aurora Theater (1925). Swift, who also resided in the Village, withdrew from the firm in 1925. Subsequently, North & and Shlegren planned St. Matthias Episcopal Church (1928; North was the principal designer), the Village offices (1929), and the reconstruction of the Presbyterian Church (1935; now significantly altered.) Though North retired during the war, he continued to reside in the Village for another two decades. His home was the fine Greek Revival house at 194 Olean Street, now sadly altered. (Swift was a close neighbor at 156 Olean Street.) North's former firm continued as Shelgren & Whitman. In 1955, they designed the Immanuel Lutheran Church at Pine Street and East Fillmore Avenue.

Other notable Buffalo architects who were citizens of the Village included James B. McCreary, who lived here before beginning his own practice around 1905, and Frederick C. Backus, a resident for over a decade. John G. Schwartz, a draftsman for Bley & Lyman, lived here as well. He was the local supervisor for that firm's work in the Village and environs, which included Hubbard Hall, the residence of Elbert Hubbard II. A more recent local architect was Clarence E. Donath, who designed the public library and the extensive alterations to the East Aurora Christian Church, both in 1963.

Evidently, East Aurora lacked sufficient work to sustain an architect's office in the Village. Rare were such people as Carl Bayer, who called himself "architect and superintendent," who advertised in the *East Aurora Advertiser* from November 1911 through May 1912 and architect B. P. Eldridge who placed advertisements in the same paper in April and May 1915. Unfortunately, it is presently unknown if they designed any buildings in the Village. Most of the buildings in the Village were built, and most were designed, by local resident builders. James Cadzow, James C. Castle, Albert O. Zink, William H. Roth, Luther Regan and James F. Cleary were among the most prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

¹² "Aaron Riley Merritt," *Erie County Independent* (Hamburg, NY), May 7, 1931.

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