

The Historic District of the Hamlet of Hillsdale, New York

In November 2007, the Historic Preservation Committee began work on a project, which culminated in the creation of the Hillsdale Hamlet Historic District now listed on the State and National Register.

Earlier that year, the firm of Larson Fisher Associates was retained to conduct a general survey of the area concentrating on these landmark buildings: the Methodist Church at the Route 22 and Route 23 intersection, the Aubergine building at the same intersection and the Hillsdale Library building on Route 23. Grants from the Preservation League of New York State and the Berkshire Taconic Foundation paid for the survey.

Intensive documentation During their work, Larson Fisher identified 85 buildings that appeared to have architectural significance and contributed to the historic character of the Hamlet and Town. Detailed surveys were conducted on 44 of the properties. This intensive documentation constituted the second phase of the project and had two goals: first, to document detailed descriptions of the architectural features of the selected buildings, including field observations and follow up examination with photographs; and second, to document the history of the buildings, relying primarily on deed research to obtain names of prior owners and Federal Census data and local histories to establish their significance.



A compelling history The end result constitutes a compelling chapter in the history of the Hamlet of Hillsdale, with insights into the lives of the residents who came to Hillsdale and established the Hamlet in the late 1700's. Parla Foster, one of the first settlers and landowners, moved to Hillsdale with his parents and family after he returned from the Revolutionary War. Parla established a large, 160-acre farm, located at what is now the intersection of Route 22 and 23 and extending north toward North Hillsdale and south to Copake. The Foster family donated the land for and built the first Methodist Church on the corner of Pill Hill. When this structure burned down, Parla's son, Seymour, donated new land and the new church was erected in 1845 on the current site.

The brick building at the intersection in the Hamlet, the former Aubergine restaurant was built



by Parla Foster in 1790 and was used as the first meetinghouse. Refine Latting, another early resident and landowner, had farmlands that extended west and south. He established himself in the Hamlet's second brick



building, now the Hillsdale House, built around 1810 and having served continuously as an Inn to present day.

Architectural diversity These lands and others were subsequently sold and the Hamlet continued to develop. The majority of the historic hamlet structures were built before 1900. By and large, these were residential homes that retain their historic character and architectural detail to this day. The buildings represent many different architectural styles, including early republic Federal, mid-century Gothic Revival and Greek Revival, Victorian Italianate and Picturesque and late Victorian “second empire” style.



In addition to the historic houses, numerous outbuildings within the Hamlet illustrate the range of domestic and farm barns common to rural communities during the 19th century. An example is the style of the Foster barns on the site of the former Aubergine restaurant, which evolved from the traditional English barn form originating in the Colonial Era New England and were used to house farm animals. More prevalent in the Hamlet are the carriage barns associated with some of the larger properties.

On January 10, 2009, the Historic Preservation Committee hosted an event at which Neil Larson and Jill Fisher from Larson Fisher presented the results of the survey. William Krattinger, New York State preservation specialist, and Erin Tobin of the Preservation League attended and discussed the recommendations and future steps that should be considered to preserve Hillsdale’s heritage.

A landmark designation The completed survey and documentation was submitted to the State for designation. In September 2009, at a meeting of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (SHPO), the district was listed on the State Register and property owners were notified. The State then forwarded the application to the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service for nomination as a district on the National Register of Historic Places. On January 27, 2010, the Hillsdale Hamlet Historic District was placed on the National Register.

There are many benefits to being listed on the National Register. Among the most exciting, enacted in January this year, is a provision that owners of historic properties within the district are eligible for New York State and Federal rehabilitation tax credits. Further information about the tax credits is available at www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/register.

The committee is planning workshops in the coming months to assist owners with their applications for these credits.

2009 Historic House Tour The first Hillsdale House Tour took place in August last year. It was a very successful event spearheaded by the House Tour subcommittee, attracting more than 150 attendees who enjoyed a picnic lunch and tour of three of the homes, and the Methodist Church and Aubergine at the Hamlet intersection, all of which were part of the original Foster farm. The tour culminated in a reception for the sponsors and patrons of the tour in honor of the historic home owners.

2010 Cold Water St. Tour This year, the historic tour will feature structures on Cold Water Street. This street boasts of 19 listed historic properties, with two of the buildings dating back to 1825. Many of these structures were owned by residents who were prominent in Hillsdale Dimmick family, who owned the General Store in the center of the village; the Mallery family, who owned the Plow works and the Aubergine building (Elmwood Inn); and Russell Dorr, a New York State Attorney General.

The proceeds from the tours go towards the continuing work of the committee.

Books containing the surveys are available for reference at the Town Hall and the Roe Jan Library.



Volunteers welcome The committee is comprised entirely of volunteers from the Town, if you are interested in joining or need further information please email: Historichillsdale@gmail.com.