



HISTORIC PITTSFORD

Spring 2018 NEWSLETTER

WELLS BARN IN PITTSFORD

by Katie Andres

John Talcott Wells (1843 – 1932), a native of the Town of Wheatland, New York, invented and patented an ingenious method of barn building in 1889 that departed from traditional post and beam construction. Instead, he used a system of laminated trusses that balanced inward and outward forces, creating soaring, open spaces allowing access to the interior by horse-drawn wagons. Archival records indicate that the Wells family built at least one hundred of these majestic structures between 1889 and 1946, most of them in Monroe County and Western New York. Today, fewer than fifty of them are still standing.

On April 10th, 2018, as part of an effort to draw “statewide attention to New York’s most important and at-risk historical places,” the Preservation League of New York named the Wells Barns among its 2018-2019 Seven to Save Endangered Properties List. According to the Preservation League of New York, “This Seven to Save designation will bring an increased attention to the significance of Wells barns, as an example of a building type that is threatened and rapidly disappearing throughout New York State.” Over the next two years, League representatives “will work with the Wells Barn Legacy Project to preserve the heritage of this unique barn type in the face of a shifting agricultural landscape.”

Archival research indicates that the Wells family constructed two barns within the Town of Pittsford and played a role in converting a third existing Pittsford barn into a gambrel-roofed barn.

Mendon Center Road:

According to the research of Wells descendent Bob Pratt and his wife Judy Pratt, this 4,000 square-foot barn located on the crest of Mendon Center Road is one of the earliest Wells barns constructed. Built in 1894 under Henry Thornell’s ownership, this barn was built during a time when the signature Wells truss design was being modified.

The barn’s lower level was originally used for boarding horses and as a milking parlor. After that, the barn was used for storing potatoes in the cellar and upper loft areas while the main floor was used for hay storage.

Josh Bruner, the barn’s current owner, purchased the property in 1983. In 2016, Bruner renovated the barn’s basement into a workshop including an area for metal work and fabrication.

Clover Road:

Situated a sunflower field away from Pittsford’s historic Hopkins Homestead, this Wells Barn owned by Historic Pittsford Board member Mark Greene runs parallel to Clover Street. According to a volume from Mr. Greene’s personal library entitled *The History of Rochester and Monroe County*, the first (non-Wells) barn built on this site (sitting perpendicular to Clover Street) was constructed under George H. Barker’s ownership in 1900. Built in 1906, the Wells Barn measures approximately 92 x 36 feet.

Both barns were originally built to accommodate horses. In *The History of Rochester and Monroe County*, it states, Mr. Barker was “engaged in the raising of fast horses” and was “considered an authority on the breeding and breaking of
(continued on next page)



horses for track purposes.” Although they have been removed, the older barn originally included horse stalls. A section of cement flooring suggests that a portion of the Wells Barn was used for washing horse buggies. According to Mr. Greene, roughly 140 acres, the barns, and the former tenant house also constructed on the property in 1903 were acquired by Jared Hopkins sometime between 1923-1924.

During the 1950s, the basements of both barns were converted for potato and cabbage storage.

At one point, a chimney was constructed for a steam engine to run a line shaft for a feed grinder. Today, only the chimney and the line shaft remain. Presently, the Wells Barn is used by Greene for machinery storage and for storing a neighbor’s hay and straw.

To deter further wear and weathering, Mr. Greene put half of a new roof on the Wells Barn and half of a new roof on the adjacent barn this past April.

Thornell Road:

According to owner and Historic Pittsford Board member Shelley O’Brien, the larger three-story barn on her property was originally constructed in 1908.

Boasting several unique features, including an internal silo, it is believed that the laminated trusses in this barn were added at a later date by J.T. Wells and Sons in order to give the barn a gambrel roof. While the trusses in most documented Wells Barns begin beneath the sill, the laminated trusses in O’Brien’s barn begin on a crossbeam and soar upwards meeting at the ridge purlin.

In 2003, O’Brien and her partner, Nadia Rusinovich, purchased their historic home originally built by Joseph Thornell. At that time, the adjacent barns were part of a separate parcel that the New York Water Authority was considering for a pumping station. When the Water Authority’s plans fell through, rumors started circulating that the barns were at-risk for demolition. Determined to rescue them, O’Brien researched what it would take to preserve them and presented her case to the Water Authority. In 2005, the municipality agreed to sell the adjacent land and the barns to O’Brien.

Since then, O’Brien has brought new life to the barns by giving tours to school children, by hosting Historic Pittsford annual meetings on-site, and by celebrating family birthdays and weddings inside.

To learn more about New York State’s Wells Barns consider participating in Historic Pittsford’s barn presentation schedule for October 21st, 2018 or visit: <http://wellsbarnhistory.com> and <https://www.preservenys.org/seven-to-save---2018-19.html>

(Photos courtesy of Dick Thomas)

ARCHITECTURAL SCAVENGER HUNT

(Do you enjoy being a sleuth?)

Pittsford Village is composed of many diverse architectural styles and details. Some of them were original to the building when it was created and others come from additions of rooms, windows or wings. Most of the time we walk or drive by noticing the color, the materials or the design, but we don’t always see the smaller details that work together to create the beautiful architecture found in Pittsford.

Historic Pittsford is sponsoring an intriguing contest. Pick up an Architectural Scavenger Hunt poster at the Pittsford Community Library, Historic Pittsford’s Little House (18 Monroe Avenue) or download it from Historic Pittsford’s website (www.HistoricPittsford.com). Take a walk in the village and



see if you can identify the addresses of the structures shown in the photos on the scavenger hunt poster. Once the addresses are all recorded, return the poster by May 30 to Historic Pittsford’s Little House or to the Pittsford Community Library in the box on the reference desk. Just a quick hint...the answers will be found on or around buildings in the village within a two-block area.

Pittsford Town and Village Historian Audrey Johnson will host a program at the Fisher Meeting Room in the Pittsford Community Library on Sunday, June 3 at 2:00 p.m. All the structures on the poster will be discussed, and the winner(s) of the architectural scavenger hunt will be announced at that time.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER - PRESERVATION MATTERS

Spring Greetings from Historic Pittsford (HP), marking our 53rd year as advocates for the preservation of our community's historic resources.

Historic Pittsford has been extremely fortunate to have had a committed, supportive membership that understands the significance of historic preservation for the future of our community. Some members have been with us from the beginning in 1965. Others, like me, have come to HP later in the game; and with that later entrance comes a learning curve of what it really means to be committed to historic preservation. The HP Board of Directors remains committed to the mission that requires constant effort and vigilance, persistent public education of the value of historic preservation and on-going recruitment of new members.

Historic Preservation is at an important crossroads in Pittsford. Both the Town and Village have embarked upon updates of respective comprehensive plans. Both have committed conceptually to 'historic preservation' as an important core value for the present and the future. Both seem to understand there is a direct economic correlation between historic preservation and higher property values. But, as always, the devil is in the details.

Via its comprehensive planning process, the Town is in an ideal position in 2018 to dramatically improve its historic preservation ordinance by, at a minimum, restoring the ability to designate historic districts. Thirty years ago in 1989, Historic Pittsford supported the town's passage of a Historic Preservation Ordinance, which at the time was a model for New York State. Twenty-four (24) years ago, the town board removed historic districts from its code in an effort to 'simplify the process'. Unfortunately, over this period, several neighborhoods have been compromised enough that they are no longer eligible for designation as an historic district. It is time to review that decision and restore that capability to be able to protect vulnerable older or unique areas of our community. (Please refer to the HP website archives for Brighton-Pittsford Post articles about these efforts.)

The Town might also review its new Residential Neighborhood (RN) zoning code and design guidelines, implemented 6 years ago. While strengthening the architectural review of existing and new properties through creation of a new Design Review Historic Preservation Board (DRHPB), a key piece of this legislation dissolved the town's independent Historic Preservation Commission (appointed in 1989), thus further weakening our community's capacity to protect irreplaceable historic resources.

Regarding the Village, **having recently been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Village is in the process of revising its Historic Preservation Code** to more closely track with the new Model Historic Preservation Code prescribed by the NY State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The entire Village is an historic district thus

subject to a layer of protection other communities do not have.

As many have said, our community, with its centuries-old farms and residences and historic village, did not happen by accident. The challenges to both village and the town preservation matters are perhaps more educational in nature. As our community grows and changes, there is a continual need to inform our public about how Pittsford evolved to its present state. And how can Historic Pittsford better support a continual educational process that enlists our community's support in protecting our important historic and cultural resources?

How do we enlighten the community to the reasons why historic preservation is important? Why have an Historic Preservation Code and Commission? Why is it often better to 're-purpose' a historic property rather than destroy and replace it? What happens to communities that do not hold to these values?

This year, Historic Pittsford has co-sponsored a series of speakers called the 'Village Topics Speakers Forum' where subjects of importance to the Village Comprehensive Plan Committee are aired. There have been three so far (including speakers from the Landmark Society, Community Design Center Rochester, and the Genesee Transportation Council) and you can view them on HP's website (<http://www.historicpittsford.com/links.htm>) or on the Village website (www.villageofpittsford.com). All in the series are open to the public and have been very well attended.

The fourth in the series is entitled "Rebooting a Vibrant Economy" and it will take place on May 21 at 7:00pm at the Pittsford Community Library. This will be a panel discussion of representatives from other villages that have successfully grown their business / commercial sectors.

On the very local level, we are doing some 'historic preservation' of our own. Next year will be the 200th birthday of the Little House (as well as the Village). Because of that (and because it needs a major facelift) the Historic Pittsford Board will be launching a capital campaign to restore our iconic property. We are restoring the exterior: all four columns, the original windows, signage, storm windows, paint and shutters, etc.

You will hear more about the Little House project and others at our Annual Meeting in the older section of Monroe's (the former Spring House) on Sunday July 22 from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. Hope to see you there.

Best,

Peggy Caraberis Brizee
President, Historic Pittsford
historicpittsford@gmail.com

Historic Pittsford to Launch Campaign to Raise \$25,000

The Little House Needs a Little Help. With that as our rallying cry, Historic Pittsford will seek to raise \$25,000 for the restoration, repair and maintenance of the Little House. Serving as Historic Pittsford's office, welcome center and mini-museum, the Little House will celebrate its 200th birthday in 2019. While it has aged well under the care and stewardship of Historic Pittsford members, it is now in need of significant work requiring professional assistance. The major work includes window restoration and repair, restoration of the four distinctive columns, exterior and interior painting, and the purchase and installation of shutters to restore the Little House to its original appearance.

The fund raising campaign will kick off officially in July 2018 and conclude in July 2019 coinciding with the Little House 200th birthday. Historic Pittsford hopes to engage its members and the entire Pittsford Community in this effort. Watch for banners, special events and opportunities for on-line donations. Together we can provide the "Help" needed to restore the Little House and ensure its preservation for another 200 years.



John Parker

1935 - 2018

This past January, Historic Pittsford lost a good friend and long time advocate for historic preservation, John Parker. A Pittsford native, John served on the Board of Historic Pittsford as both President and Treasurer and later as a member at large. He gradually became Historic Pittsford's "go-to guy": taking bulk mailings to the post office, procuring the Christmas tree, arranging for the large flower vases that grace our front porch each summer, putting up Patriotic decorations and so much more.

John had a great love of and devotion to Pittsford and we miss him very much.

SAVE THE DATE

Architecture Scavenger Hunt (Do You Enjoy Being a Sleuth?)

Sunday, June 3: 2 pm - Pittsford Library

Did you try your luck at our Architectural Scavenger Hunt? Find out more about the architecture featured on our scavenger hunt. Pittsford Town and Village Historian Audrey Johnson will discuss the structures and the winners of the hunt will be announced on June 3! Come join the fun! This program for all ages is sponsored by Historic Pittsford. No registration.

Annual Meeting

Sunday, July 22: 4-6 pm

Monroe's Restaurant (the historic Spring House)

Details to come.

Presentation of Carol Schoen's book

Sunday, September 16

Pittsford Community Library

Details to come.

Program about Wells Barns

Sunday October 21

Location: Hopkins Farm

Details to come.

"Like" us on Facebook!
Visit us at: www.historicpittsford.com

Little House Office and Museum

18 Monroe Ave., Pittsford, NY 14534 / 381-2941

Open: Wednesday and Saturday 9am-12noon

www.HistoricPittsford.com

Dorothy Meusburger, Secretary



18 MONROE AVENUE
PITTSFORD, NY 14534

2017/2018

HP Board of Directors

President: Margaret Caraberis Brizee

Vice-President: David Minor

Secretary: JoAnne Shannon

Treasurer: Suzanne W. Shaw

Members at Large:

Katie Andres, Lanie Bittner, T. Peter Brizee,

Mary Ann Clark, Mark Greene, Karen Hultz,

Audrey Johnson, Shelley O'Brien, Vicki Profitt,

Deborah Resch, Bonnie Salem