

Search this site... Search

38° Overcast

- HOME
- NEWS
- SPORTS
- LIVING
- A & E
- REAL ESTATE
- SPECIAL SECTIONS
- CLASSIFIEDS

Home News

# Cayuga Heights: A Century of Elegant Suburbia

Story Comments

Print Font Size:

Recommend 3 Tweet G+1 0

1

Posted: Thursday, June 11, 2015 6:00 am

by Jane Dieckmann | 0 comments



Provided

## Oak Hill

Cayuga Heights home construction in the 1920s.

The village of Cayuga Heights, with its winding streets, spacious properties, and beautiful old homes, will be 100 years old in a few days, soon after its neighbor, Cornell University, with which it has always had very close ties, observed its sesquicentennial. To celebrate this anniversary, the village has been offering a series of talks and events, not only to explore this close town-gown relationship, but also to invite the entire community to participate in better understanding this unique place in our county, described as the quintessential American university suburb.

A major undertaking to mark the centennial is a website called "The History Project," which already has assembled considerable material about the village. An interactive map will be displayed to help people find out about the architectural history of any residence and the story of its past inhabitants. A self-guided tour will take you past homes of famous people who lived in Cayuga Heights and places that played a major role in the village's development. The project is ongoing.

Cayuga Heights became an incorporated village in the town of Ithaca on June 12, 1915, and next Saturday, June 13, is the day to celebrate. A self-guided walk or drive tour of selected interiors and gardens, planned by Historic Ithaca, will run from noon to 4 p.m. Registration starts at 11:30 in Marcham Hall, the village municipal building at Community Corners. In the courtroom are special exhibits, and refreshments will be served. A vintage automobile, a 1913 Overland, will be parked out in front.

The beginnings of the village sound similar to other areas of the town and city. After the turn of the century, farmlands on the hills were purchased and developed for residential use. The Belle Sherman/Bryant Park section of the City of Ithaca, for example, was becoming populated at about the same time as the areas we call Cornell Heights (today within the city limits) and Cayuga Heights (in the town). The Ithaca Street Railway (incorporated in 1884) extended its existing downtown routes up East Hill (the first run was made in 1893), and by 1895 there was a single-track running on the Cornell campus to the present Day Hall.

By 1900 both the bridges on Thurston Avenue by the Triphammer Falls and on Stewart Avenue had been built, accommodating streetcar tracks and carriages. The trolley was then extended to Upland Road. Automobiles were coming into vogue. So the area became accessible for development. Moreover, the typhoid fever epidemic in 1903 played a significant role, as many who lived down on the flats wanted to get away from the poor water supply and flooding issues to a place of safer and more spacious living. Cornell University was expanding as

## Events Calendar

February 2016						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29					

## Submit Your News!

We're always interested in hearing about news in our community. Let us know what's going on!

Submit news

Most Popular Most Commented

Trumansburg Farmer Goes "Living Wage"

Trumansburg Farmer Goes "Living Wage"

Candor Hires Temporary Officer

Missing Newfield Woman Found Dead Near Her Car

## What Do You Think?

Do you commute to work by car?

Yes  No

Vote

View Results

well, and with this came increasing personnel, especially faculty, who desired and could afford larger houses and more property. Not surprisingly, of the 17 village presidents/mayors so far, 13 have been Cornell professors, eight from the ag school alone.

After the completion of the bridges over Fall Creek, two men, Jared Newman and Charles Blood began to develop this area north of the Cornell campus. In 1901 they purchased some 650 acres of land from Franklin Cornell, son of the university's founder, and began to lay out village streets and to sell lots for housing. The street network was laid out following the contours of the land, which might today be called a maze of winding roads. A landscape architect was hired. Newman and Blood established guidelines for architectural styles, and house plans had to get their approval before construction began. In the first zoning regulations, garages had to face the street, and there were to be no piggeries. Many residences featured beautiful and extensive gardens.

Over the years the village grew. By 1953 it had almost quadrupled in population. Following World War II, this "garden park suburb" had taken on more land, adding smaller and more affordable housing including some Tech-built homes, plus apartment buildings and one commercial center, the Community Corners. Development to the north crowded the Lansing line.

In 1954 boundaries were extended to include newly developed areas to the northeast, and the village population voted against annexation by the city, drawing their own plans to build a sewer system. Leading this move was Cornell history professor Frederick Marcham, who after the successful vote was promptly elected mayor. He was the "right person at the right time," according to village historian Bea Szekely. He served until 1988, managing many difficult problems skillfully and diplomatically. The village hall, the former residence of Ezra Cornell's granddaughter Dorothy, built in 1928, is named for him. Totally autonomous today, the village has its own fire and police departments, an elementary school, and, since 1995, a Kendal retirement community on the Savage Farm property once owned by the university.

Through the years the village has had some outstanding residents—prominent Cornell professors such as dairy specialist William Stocking, who was also one of the first village presidents, and novelist Vladimir Nabokov, who lived in six different houses and taught literature courses; many Pulitzer prize and several Nobel prize winners; ten members of the World War II Manhattan Project; former Cornell president Deane Malott, to name a few.

Szekely, appointed in April 2013 following five years as trustee—she has also been deputy mayor since 2010—started planning for the centennial two years ago. With the assistance of Carole Schiffman, who has developed The History Project website, and librarian and architectural preservationist Randi Kepecs, the centennial celebration program with the special house tour was planned. Talks in February were by historian Carol Sisler, who explained the village's residential architecture over the past 100 years, and Fred Cowett, horticulturalist and chair of the village planning board, who spoke about the natural history and the environment. Postponed until this fall is Szekely's talk about the evolution of the village's government. On Sept. 12 at 10 a.m. at Marcham Hall, Christine O'Malley, director of preservation services at Historic Ithaca, will provide information on how to research your home, no matter where you live. All talks are open to the public.

Pat Longoria, who has studied maps, deeds, and other village documents at Marcham Hall, recently joined The History Project. She plans to write a detailed history of the street names in the village.

Saturday's event will provide story maps of the eight homes on the tour. There will be docents at every house to answer questions. There is a special exhibit in the courtroom of Marcham Hall that includes photographed drawings by Jack Lambert and drawings of houses in the village by Sarah Lambert. And don't fail to note the vintage wedding cake chandeliers, found in the attic and now restored and hanging above your head. •

For more information consult

www.cayugaheightshistory.weebly.com.



**Computing Center, The**  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
[Map]  
607-257-3524



Find Local Businesses

Search

Popular Searches | Browse By Category

Recommend  Tweet   1

Posted in News, Ithaca on Thursday, June 11, 2015 6:00 am.

**Similar Stories**

- Candor EMS Honors Members for Service, Dedication
- Hungry Kids Find Advocates in Spencer-Van Etten
- Ovid Town Board Keeps Busy
- Lansing Box Tops Initiative Going Strong
- Schools Address Cyber-bullying

**Most Read**

- Trumansburg Farmer Goes "Living Wage"
- Trumansburg Farmer Goes "Living Wage"
- Candor Hires Temporary Officer
- Missing Newfield Woman Found Dead Near Her Car