

## The Gift of Sunset Park

Beatrice Szekely, Cayuga Heights Village Historian, July 2017

Jared Treman Newman (1855-1937) gave Sunset Park with its view overlooking Ithaca, Cayuga Lake and the surrounding hillsides to the Village of Cayuga Heights in 1928. He and his law partner, Charles Hazen Blood (1866-1938), were the developers of the village.<sup>1</sup> They began buying farmland in the area for real estate subdivision at the turn of the twentieth century to meet demand generated by professors at Cornell. The Village of Cayuga Heights was incorporated in 1915 with a population of 121 persons living on 29 residential properties with a total assessed valuation of \$228,450. A decade later, the population had grown to 370 persons living on 130 properties, and the total assessed valuation had increased to almost \$1.5 million.<sup>2</sup>

By then, Jared Newman was beginning to subdivide the section between Cayuga Heights Road and Sunset Drive; he named it The Western Slope. Sunset Park would sit on a plot of land at the edge of The Western Slope subdivision on top of a steep sand bank that Newman leased for the commercial removal of sand and gravel. He considered selling the lot for housing but recognizing that preservation of the view would make lots on the slope above easier to sell decided to make a small public park instead. Cayuga Heights scarcely needed a large park. Homes and fraternity houses built to date were all on spacious lots with large lawns. Village children had ample playground space at the recently opened Cayuga Heights School. The Ithaca Country Club golf course then located off Triphammer Road provided a vista of green space, and so did the Cornell campus on the other side of picturesque Fall Creek Gorge.<sup>3</sup>

In a letter he wrote in June of 1926 to Charles “Tar” Van Patten Young (1876-1960), Professor of Physical Education and Athletics at Cornell, who was considering purchasing a lot across the way, Jared Newman said he had decided to donate the “...sand bank lot to the public...making the deed of it to the Village...subject to the condition of perpetual care and maintenance which I think should be imposed.”<sup>4</sup> He told Young that he thought he would need “...to spend at least \$1,000 in laying out, improving and beautifying the park.” For its design he was thinking about “...a large and attractive turn around...” with Sunset Drive on

one side and a roadway for cars looping around near the edge of the sand bank on the other. “Next to the sand bank at a safe distance back I conceive of a solid wall of masonry, perhaps 100 ft. long, high enough to guard against the danger of an automobile running off, with one or two openings to go through, and stone seats at perhaps three points (one on the south end looking up the valley, and one toward the north looking up the lake, and one perhaps in the middle looking both ways).” The stone seats might “...replace the wall...” or be built into it. He hoped he would have the services of Cornell College of Agriculture Professor Ralph Curtis (1878-1968) “...to plan it all.” He took pains to say that “The whole park should be planted in such a manner and under such restrictions as should prevent any cutting off of the vistas of the lake and valley from the residences above.” And he concluded that no cars driving through Sunset Park should be allowed to stop to admire the view for more than five minutes “...when any one is waiting behind to pass.”

Six months later, he offered Cayuga Heights “...a deed of the park which I am constructing...” in a letter written to the president of the village—as the office of mayor was then called, Cornell professor of botany, Karl Wiegand (1873-1942).<sup>5</sup> It should, Newman said, “...be held by the village perpetually as a public park, subject only to slight restrictions against trees, shrubs or structures that cut off view from certain lots.” “The unique beauty of the overlook...should be reserved for the enjoyment of the people for all time rather than limited to any private use.” Choosing words that he would one day pay to have inscribed on a plaque there, Newman told Wiegand he hoped “...it may not only be a source of pleasure, but may contribute in some small degree to the love of Truth and Beauty and Goodness.” He also said, “I would like the privilege...of suggesting a name for the park. I have two or three names in mind but have not as yet been able to settle permanently upon any one of them.”

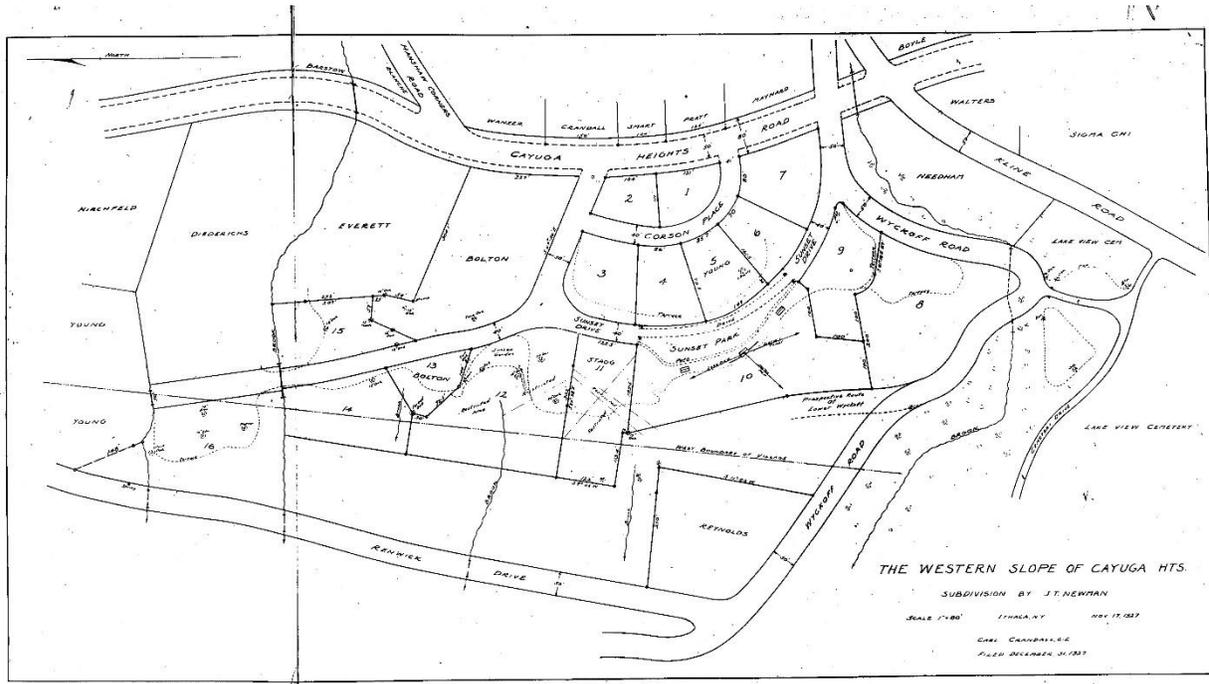
In addition, Newman offered President Wiegand the three roadways he put in on The Western Slope: Corson Place, curving below Cayuga Heights Road, which he named for Cornell English literature professor Hiram Corson (1828-1911); Sunset Drive in front of the park; and Western Slope, which is what he called that portion of present-day Sunset Drive that starts on Cayuga Heights Road and passes Corson Place. The park itself was to take up “...all the level space on the south and west sides...” of Sunset Drive “...between the gate posts which are in the process of erection...together with a strip of about fifty feet in width extending down the slope from the southwesterly line of the level area.” The existing lease to Ithaca

business owner Minos Reynolds for gravel and sand removal from the bank below, he went on, was to remain in place without damaging "...any portion of the present level area." Apparently Professor Ralph Curtis was not available for landscaping because he went on to say that plans he was "...following..." were drawn by Herbert Martin Blanche (1885-1965), a 1920 Cornell graduate who had worked for the Olmsted landscape architecture firm in Brookline, Massachusetts, and recently returned to Ithaca to be the forester of the Finger Lakes State Park Commission.<sup>6</sup> "Water pipes for watering are installed..." Newman told Wiegand, along with a "...walkway along the park." He hoped to complete the park's development "...at my own expense during the season of 1927." The village, he hoped, would assume responsibility thereafter. "It may be that you will want to present the question of its acceptance to be voted upon at the next election."

In January 1927, the village board, made up of President Wiegand and two trustees, put consideration of Newman's proffered gift of "...a strip of land along the brow of the Reynolds' sandpit which he thought would be suitable for a public park..." on the agenda of the annual meeting of residents to be held at the Cayuga Heights School the evening of March 10.<sup>7</sup> By July 2 he must have settled on the name because the board made and passed a resolution to "accept with thanks the deed to Sunset Park and streets described in the letter of December 18, 1926 from Mr. J. T. Newman, in accordance with the expressed wishes of those present at the annual meeting..."<sup>8</sup>

Carl Crandall (1890-1968), Professor of Civil Engineering at Cornell, who had undertaken previous land surveys and mapping for Newman in Cayuga Heights did the same for The Western Slope. The map, or plat, that he drew of *The Western Slope of Cayuga Heights, subdivision for Jared Newman*, dated November 17, 1927 was officially filed with Tompkins County December 31.<sup>9</sup> Sunset Park is shown on the map as it looked by then along with Corson Place, Sunset Drive, Western Slope, portions of Kline and Wyckoff Roads, and a corner of Lakeview Cemetery. Housing lots are outlined and numbered lots with the last names included of the owners of those already sold; lot boundaries are demarcated by round symbols for iron pipes that Crandall placed in the ground as part of the survey. The park land on Lot 10 curves gently for a distance of over 300 feet along the mid-section of Sunset Drive. It is part of the level land on top of the sand bank that also takes in adjacent lots, outlined and labeled by Crandall as "Terrace." The design of the park on the map adhered closely to Newman's 1926 vision. Other

than a single stone seat and slab at the far north end that the village would one day accept as a donation, what Crandall drew is what is seen there ninety years later.<sup>10</sup>



### “The Western Slope of Cayuga Heights”

Carl Crandall, November 1927

The pathway on the map still curves through the middle of the park from end to end. Now a concrete sidewalk, the path superseded Newman’s initial idea of a roadway open to cars. The three stone seats and wall, rendered in small rectangles on the map, remain in place. Each is composed of two walls, one facing the overlook that is three feet tall built of roughly a dozen courses of mortared rough cut gray stone with roughly four feet of flagstones on the ground in front of it and a second, lower wall about a foot tall where the flagstones end. The seating area near the north end of the park is 17 feet 11 inches long; the middle one measures 20 feet 5 inches, and the south end one 18 feet 3 inches.<sup>11</sup> An additional stone wall 70 feet long and two and half feet tall rendered by Crandall on the map extends on both sides of the middle seat. To identify the views afforded by the design, Crandall drew three lines from the center of the middle seating area; they were labeled “Valley View” pointing southwest, “Lake View” pointing north, and “Library

Tower” pointing south toward Cornell. The first two have been enjoyed by park visitors since; the last succumbed to tall trees years ago. Some visitors have simply come to read.

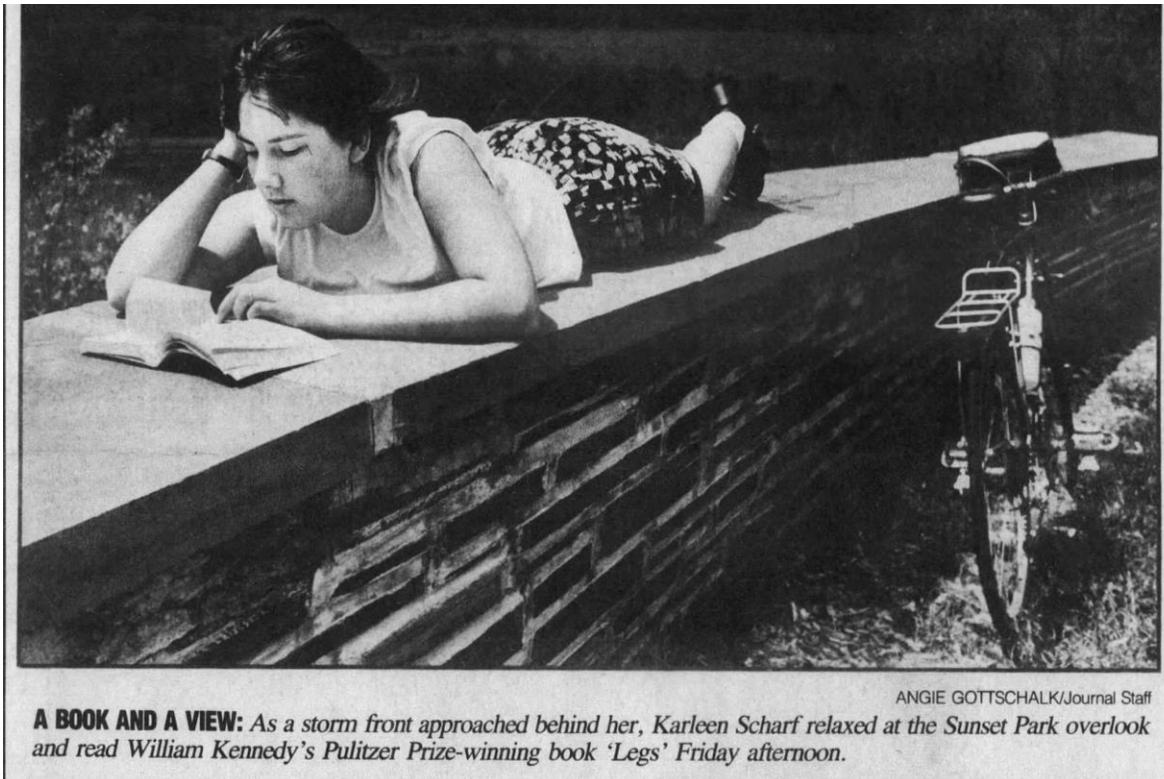


Photo from *The Ithaca Journal*, May 14, 1988

The indenture, or deed, conveying Sunset Park “...located in the Village of Cayuga Heights, Town of Ithaca and County of Tompkins...designated as Lot 10 on the map of ‘The Western Slope of Cayuga Heights’” to the Village of Cayuga Heights subject to its “...ordinances and regulations...” and the three roadways, Sunset Park, Corson Place and Western Slope was executed January 9, 1928.<sup>12</sup> Additionally it conveyed ownership of “...seats, seat covers for winter protection, tool box, lawn mower, hose and all other tools and equipment...” that had been purchased and used in the park installation. Further, a clause stipulated that until February 1934 Minos Reynolds could hold the lease for sand and gravel removal below “the top of the slope as now delimited and planted” maintaining an incline “...at least two feet horizontal to one foot perpendicular....” Jane Williams Newman (1857-1950) signed the deed with Jared Treman Newman as a “party of the first part” having used money inherited from her father, the prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century Ithaca banker Josiah Williams (1810-1883), to help finance her husband’s

real estate career. It was notarized by their son Charles Hardy Newman (1891-1963), in law practice with his father, who printed in ink that "... Jared T. Newman and Jane E. W. Newman..." were "...personally known to be the same persons...who executed the within Instrument...."

The deed recorded the locations and measurements of the four sides of Lot 10 in degrees and feet referencing the boundary pipes placed in the ground by Carl Crandall. First, the 300-foot-long boundary on the east side of Sunset Drive, the roadway itself being included in the lot. Next, the roughly 250-foot-long south boundary formed by three oblique angles bordering lots 8 and 9. Third, the 513-foot-long west boundary line below the park toward Wyckoff Road. Finally, the 185-foot-long north boundary on the south side of lot 11. The two pairs of square stone gate posts installed by Newman at the entrances to the park on Sunset Drive, each over seven feet tall, are referenced as well. The land inside Lot 10 allocated to the park varies in its depth from Sunset Drive from roughly 50 feet wide at the south end to 125 feet wide at the north end and about 75 feet in the middle.

Restrictions intended to preserve the views of future houses built on The Western Slope were spelled out beginning with terms applying specifically to Lot 5 sold to "Tar" Young in 1926 directly across Sunset Drive from the middle of the park. Its "...unobstructed vistas of lake and valley..." were to be maintained "...with the further provision that a few trees may be located upon the park area...at such points as may be mutually agreed upon..." Within the park itself "...no building for park purposes that will impair the view..." should be erected, and "...no residence or commercial structure of any kind..." Crandall's map was referenced regarding "restricted" areas where no construction could take place on either Lot 11 or Lot 12, which was sold in 1926 to Jared Newman's former junior law partner and former Cornell law professor C. Tracey Stagg (1878-1939), who was founding president of Cayuga Heights. In sum, the intent was "...to avoid the planting of tall trees directly in the line of the best views, but not to prevent altogether such park planting as may be desirable and may be mutually agreed upon taking into account the needs for the park and the conservation of beautiful vistas from said lots." The document ends with "...Jared T. Newman covenants..." that the village "...shall quietly enjoy the said premises."

On January 11, 1928, at a regular monthly meeting of the Cayuga Heights Board of Trustees a letter was read into the minutes from "Mr. Jared T. Newman" "...transmitting to the Trustees a map of 'the western slope of Cayuga Heights'

together with a deed to Sunset Park, Sunset Drive, Corson Place and the unnamed street running west from Cayuga Heights Road south of the Bolton property, to be known as Western Slope, which he tendered to the Village for acceptance.” By resolution, it was recorded that the board with “...deep appreciation...” accepted the roads in question, and the parkland became public property. Mr. Newman, it was understood, would manage the park during the 1928 gardening season “...and make such improvements thereon as he may desire, subject to the approval of the Board.” He would turn its maintenance over to the village after that.<sup>13</sup>

With ownership the village assumed responsibility. In the summer of 1928 the board of trustees passed a law making it a disorderly conduct violation with a \$25 fine to drive or park cars on any “public park or grounds...” in the village, to litter or “...to pluck any leaf, branch, or flower from, or to injure any plant, tree, or shrub therein.”<sup>14</sup> Newman turned maintenance of the park over to the village the following year. He sent instructions to Mayor Walter L. Williams (1856-1945), a professor at the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell, about cultivating and weeding around the shrubs he had planted and recommended hiring one of two men who have worked for him to take over mowing and upkeep at a cost not to exceed \$125 per season.<sup>15</sup> “He told the mayor that he hoped to finish planting “...the entire West Slope...with something that would make a ground cover...” and that “...a trail up from the bottom...” was nearly complete. In 1933 the village installed ornamental lamp posts costing \$160 on the two gate posts close to the park at the entrances on Sunset Drive.<sup>16</sup>

Jared Newman wanted to be remembered for the gift of Sunset Park. His name and that of his wife are inscribed on the plaque they placed on the middle seating area wall underneath the wish that “Here may you too find the love of beauty, goodness, truth.” In 1930, at the onset of the Great Depression when he was facing financial difficulties that would lead to bankruptcy before his death in 1937, he told Carl Crandall that he might like to have adjoining Sunset Drive, which he had so named originally, renamed after him.<sup>17</sup> “I think it proper to say to you confidentially what I have not said to anyone else, not even to Charles, that the only road which I have ever had a part in the construction of that I would be interested in having ultimately bear my name is this road...commencing at Wyckoff and extending northerly as far as it is to go.” But not in his lifetime, he told Crandall. “I mention it to you merely because you have been so ready to recognize and appreciate whatever I may have accomplished, even more perhaps than I deserve.” The renaming, however, was not to happen. The roadside marker

placed by the Town of Ithaca in 1996 at Marcham Hall, the Cayuga Heights municipal building, recognizes Jared Newman as a creator of Cayuga Heights with Charles Blood, but nothing in the village is named after him. What was is the eponymous golf course at Stewart Park in the City of Ithaca where he was mayor in 1907 and 1908.

Over the course of the eight decades since he died, the government of the Village of Cayuga Heights has made periodic repairs to the three stone seats and wall and accepted the stone bench and slab that was donated in 1998. Otherwise it has maintained Sunset Park in much the same state Jared Newman left it. Not that Village maintenance has not been without effort. In 1963, because of "...beer and pizza parties being held in the park, and litter and destruction there," twenty-six residents in the area of The Western Slope represented by Cornell emeritus professor Morris Bishop (1893-1973) successfully petitioned the village government to update the 1928 law protecting the park by instating a 9 p.m. closing in the winter and 10 p.m. in the summer and increasing the disorderly conduct fine to \$50.<sup>18</sup> The Newman plaque, Professor Bishop brought to the attention of the board, had disappeared signifying that "...many present users of the park are not in search of goodness, beauty, truth." In 1974, rock gardener Nina Lambert (1932-2010), who was married to Cornell professor of freehand drawing Robert J. Jack Lambert Jr. (1928-2014), declared the park area neglected because trees and shrubs marring the view on the slope needed pruning. With support from the board of trustees village adults and children participated in two well attended fall work parties during both of which Professor Frederick G. Marcham (1898-1992), village mayor from 1956 to 1988, felt called upon "...to mediate among the many persons who wished to preserve this or that tree or shrub."<sup>19</sup> In the same year, at the instigation of artist and wife of Morris Bishop, Alison Mason Kingsbury (1898-1988), the plaque was replaced. Having disappeared again, it was replaced a second time in June of 1986 and dedicated in a ceremony that was presided over by Mayor Marcham and attended by Jared and Jane Newman's granddaughter Margaret Thomas. The plaque may be found today in the center of the stone work at the middle seating area where it was remounted just a few months after the second reinstallation at the urging of photographer and village historian Louise Boyle (1910-2005).<sup>20</sup>

From time to time, in order to preserve their scenic views, some residents of the neighborhood Jared Newman called The Western Slope have felt the need to call attention to easements that were written into the deeds to their properties in order

to protect the views.<sup>21</sup> Yet overall, Sunset Park has remained the place of peace and quiet for which it was intended, cared for by Cayuga Heights public works employees and watched over by village police. Typically enjoyed by no more than a few visitors at a time, as Newman wished, surely he would have no objection to the crowd that comes to sit and watch 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks set off from down below at Newman Municipal Golf Course.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol U. Sisler, “Newman and Blood, Developers of Cayuga Heights,” *Enterprising Families, Their Homes and Businesses* (Ithaca, New York: Enterprise Publishers, 1986), 96-122.

<sup>2</sup> *Village of Cayuga Heights Assessment Roll, 1915 and 1925*. A quarter of a million dollars in 1915 had the buying power of almost six million dollars in 2015, and one and half million in 1925 had the buying power of almost twenty-one million, according to: <http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=250000&year=1915>.

<sup>3</sup> “Superfluous” is the word Cornell history student David Jaeger used regarding any need for a large public park: “Green Space,” *Cayuga Heights and the American Suburb*, a term paper written in 1983 for History 333 taught by Professor Stewart Blumin.

<sup>4</sup> Jared Treman Newman to Charles Van Patten Young, June 11, 1926, two-page copy by Newman of part of a letter, *Jared Treman Newman Papers*, collection 2157, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections (DMC), Cornell University Library (CUL).

<sup>5</sup> Jared Newman to “Dr. W. M. Wiegand,” December 18, 1926, three-page typed letter, “Correspondence Charles Blood- Jared Newman, 1916-1937,” folder 5, *Cayuga Heights Collection*, V-61-1-1, The History Center in Tompkins County. The village mayor was called “president” until 1928.

<sup>6</sup> “Key Aide Reviews Finger Lakes Area, Area’s State Parks Expanded widely Under H. M. Blanche, Retiring After 30 Years,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 1955; and “H. M. Blanche Dies; Was Park Director,” *Ithaca Journal*, December 7, 1955.

<sup>7</sup> *Minutes of the Village of Cayuga Heights Board of Trustees Meeting*, January 10, 1927.

<sup>8</sup> *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, July 2, 1927.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Crandall was also the first appointed engineer of the Village of Cayuga Heights and of the Finger Lakes State Parks Commission. In the latter position he may have recommended Herbert Blanche to do the landscaping in Sunset Park, although the chair of the park commission who was Newman’s second cousin, Robert H. Treman (1858-1937), may have as well: Beatrice Szekely, “Village Engineer Carl Crandall,” *Cayuga Heights History Project*: <http://www.cayugaheightshistory.org/carl-crandall.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “Resolution 4901—Permit McClafferty to Erect Memorials in Sunset Park,” *Minutes of the Organizational Meeting of the Board of Trustees*, April 6, 1998 and *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, June 15 and July 20, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Measured June 27, 2017 by Fred Cowett.

<sup>12</sup> “Jared T. Newman and wf. To the Village of Cayuga Heights,” January 9, 1928, typed on one double-sided sheet of 11” x 16” paper, *Tompkins County Book of Deeds 213*, 315-317.

<sup>13</sup> *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, January 11, 1928 and “‘Sunset Park’ Given Cayuga Heights by J. T. Newmans,” *The Ithaca Journal*, January 28, 1928.

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- <sup>14</sup> *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, August 13, 1928 and Village of Cayuga Heights, *Ordinances*, 1938, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> Jared Treman Newman to “Mr. Walter L. Williams, Mayor of Cayuga Heights,” April 12, 1929, “Correspondence Charles Blood- Jared Newman,” folder 5, *Cayuga Heights Collection, 1916-1937*, V-61-1-1, The History Center in Tompkins County.
- <sup>16</sup> *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, November 21, 1933.
- <sup>17</sup> Jared Newman to Carl Crandall, August 13, 1930, “Correspondence Charles Blood- Jared Newman, 1916-1937,” folder 5, *Cayuga Heights Collection*, V-61-1-1, The History Center in Tompkins County.
- <sup>18</sup> “Not Seeking ‘Goodness, Beauty, Truth’ ... Sunset Park Hours Set,” *The Ithaca Journal*, January 22, 1963; and *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Organizational Meeting*, April 1, 1963.
- <sup>19</sup> Village of Cayuga Heights, “Report of the Mayor,” *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, October 1974.
- <sup>20</sup> “Sunset Park Gets Rededication,” *The Ithaca Journal*, June 20, 1986 and “Resolution 3743—Authorize the Remounting of Plaque in Sunset Park,” *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, September 15, 1986.
- <sup>21</sup> For example, *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting*, April 4, 1988 and March 16, 1992.