City of Schenectady
HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

A Reconnaissance-Level Survey conducted for the
Schenectady Urban Cultural Park and Department of Development

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Volume 1

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I. INTRODUCTION
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On November 12, 1991, the City of Schenectady's Department of Development and Urban Cultural park issued a request for proposals for a comprehensive, reconnaissance-level survey of the historic resources in the city. The purpose of the survey was to produce an overview of historic contexts related to Schenectady's development, establish an inventory of historic properties and show their distribution within the city. This information would be used for preservation planning by the city's development and engineering departments, as well as the Urban Cultural Park and Historic District Commission. Matching funds were provided by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's Urban Cultural Park Program.

Schenectady is one of the state's oldest cities and is renowned for the architecture and urban plan of its Stockade area. The city is also well-known as the home of Union College, an institution of higher learning with a national reputation and one of the oldest planned campuses in America. But to many, especially to local people, Schenectady is first thought of as the place where the General Electric Company founded its industrial empire in the 1890's. Although labor historians have found Schenectady a treasure-trove of interpretive material about industrial development, union organizing, immigration and politics, architectural historians have not ventured beyond the ancient Stockade or the verdant boulevards along Union Street.

With the history of Schenectady's first century of development documented by numerous published histories and primary materials in local and state repositories, survey research sought to focus on the less prominent, more recent cultural history of the city. Likewise, prior historic designations had created inventories of the older and more stylistic architecture of the city, but tens of thousands of more recent houses and stores had never been evaluated, nor their neighborhoods explored. Every effort was made to provide a comprehensive analysis of Schenectady, not just geographically, but in historical contexts, architectural types and in the full-range of the National Register criteria, as well.
The surveyor would like to acknowledge the assistance and cooperation of a number of people. Karen Engelke, Urban Cultural Park coordinator, David Schmidt, city planner, and Kay Ackerman, director of development, plus the staff of the Department of Development, were very helpful. The City Engineer's Office helped track down a number of maps and compile the survey base map. The Historic District Commission provided comments on early versions of the maps and text of the report. Staff from the New York State Historic Preservation Office, notably Ben Kroup of the Field Services Bureau, and Marsha Osterhout of the Urban Cultural Park Program, reviewed the survey materials and monitored the project.

Research was aided by staff and volunteers at the Schenectady County Library and the Schenectady County Historical Society. Numerous individuals were interviewed and/or called upon to answer questions: Nancy Todd, Francis Poulis, Todd Ferrara, Helena Piotroski, Fred Wetzel, and Bob Seeger, not to mention many people encountered on the street, who were interested in what was going on.
II. METHODOLOGY
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Schenectady is one of New York's oldest cities and has a rich history that touches upon many of the state's principal events and contextual themes, spanning from the early 17th into the mid-20th century. We intend to make this a model survey incorporating the programmatic and technical advances achieved since the state-wide survey originated over 20 years ago. In addition, Schenectady is a New York State Urban Cultural Park, and as both the park and the city planning department are sponsoring the survey, it will be used as both a preservation and an interpretive tool. While this fact may not necessarily expand the scope of the project, it will require that the report be useful and accessible to historians as well as planners and preservationists.

The survey will be conducted in the following fashion.

1. Historic Overview:

Because of the wide recognition of the significance of Schenectady's history, much has been written about it both by local historians and regional scholars. Also, the city possesses a wealth of primary source materials in public and private collections. The history of Schenectady does not need to be re-written for the purposes of this survey. Yet, this history does need to be reviewed and reapplied to provide a context for the analysis of the evolution of the city's plan and architecture. One of the best contributions the overview could make would be to organize a comprehensive bibliography of existing sources and link it to significant interpretive contexts and themes. It is also anticipated that certain themes may be deficient or lacking in the existing record, such as those relating to ethnicity, industrial society and vernacular architecture, for example. Using the outline of themes and contexts created by the National Register of Historic Places (Bulletin 16) and the contexts and study units developed by the New York State Historic Preservation Office, the overview will attempt to go beyond existing themes to provide contexts for evaluation for all areas of the city and the full range of its architecture. Thus, the historic overview will be both a critical essay
using existing historic material focused on the survey objectives and an explication of new themes identified in the course of the research. It will be organized chronologically, but will also summarize themes at appropriate points in the text.

The overview will utilize illustrations much as possible. Maps will be used to show the extent of growth and change at significant periods of Schenectady's history and to isolate particular neighborhoods, functions or themes. Archival and current photographs may be included help visualize historic features and aspects of change. The visual material will be designed with an eye to augmenting the UCP's interpretive programs.

2. Existing Conditions Overview:

In addition to the documentary review and analysis, a comprehensive field reconnaissance study will be made of the city to identify and categorize properties and districts in the city that illustrate distinctive historic events, cultural activities and/or architecture in Schenectady's past. An overview will be written to provide a descriptive assessment of the actual distribution of historic resources and the range of property types inventoried. The distribution of types will be illustrated on maps and the types themselves catalogued with photographs showing variations in scale and period. Here, too, categories introduced by the National Register will be used with additional sub-types added to reflect the intensified detail of a localized study (e.g., the Register's category of "Single Dwelling" will broken down into a number of sub-types to allow the category to more accurately represent the diversity of form, plan and scale that exists in Schenectady). Physical integrity will also be assessed. Existing survey material will be reviewed and incorporated in the new comprehensive document where applicable.

Data from the survey will be organized in a narrative format in conformance with the report standards of the State Historic Preservation Office. This report will be accompanied by an outline typology and supplemented by illustrations: photographs, maps and graphics. Areas of the city where historic resources are concentrated will be recorded in more detail with their own descriptions, maps and illustrations. In addition, the city plans to introduce a computer data base that will provide a system for recording and analyzing data about its historic
properties. Although the information collected by a reconnaissance-level survey is fairly broad, the data base will provide a format for future elaboration as intensive-level surveys are undertaken. A data base would also help the city maintain a disciplined recording methodology as survey projects progress over time so that historians and the UCP could count on reliable data for research and programming. And through the computer, the city could establish an electronic link within its inter-departmental network that would "flag" historic properties in all levels of city planning and permit reviews.

3. Recommendations:

Based on the results of the contextual research and survey, recommendations shall be proposed for future action by the city and the SHPO. These recommendations will include ideas for additional research into themes, contexts or property types, needs for data management and applications, priorities for intensive-level surveys, directions for UCP interpretive planning, archival conditions, historic commission review procedures, potential National Register nominations, and sensitive planning areas. All recommendations will be discussed with city and SHPO personnel in preparation for filing the final report.

4. Final report:

A draft report containing the results of sections 1-3 above will be compiled and, together with supplementary parts, such as a table of contents, bibliography and useful appendices, submitted to the SHPO for review and comment. Upon SHPO approval, a final report will be prepared, duplicated and distributed.

5. Timetable:

- April 15, 1992 submit methodology to SHPO
- June 15, 1992 submit contextual overview to SHPO
- July 15, 1992 submit existing conditions overview to SHPO
- August 15, 1992 submit draft report and recommendations to SHPO
- September 15, 1992 submit final report to SHPO
III. HISTORIC CONTEXT
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Introduction:

As one of New York State’s oldest and more active cities, Schenectady’s published record is well-established; it includes three or four narrative histories, numerous genealogical and biographical compendia, architectural surveys, photographic records and industrial reviews. There is also a long tradition of newspaper columns devoted to local history. Like most urban industrial centers, vast amounts of newsprint and ephemera survive that relate to civic progress, disasters, local politics and planning, community issues, cultural events and social interaction. Municipal and private collections also contain records of the city’s progress from frontier outpost to modern metropolis. The history that follows will not attempt to duplicate the efforts that precede it (although, it will rely heavily on them), rather it will attempt to refocus that material on the single theme of the physical development of the city’s plan and architecture. In this way, a perspective on Schenectady’s history will emerge which can assist municipal and Urban Cultural Park planners to address the preservation and interpretation of the city’s significant historic resources.

Seventeenth Century:

Schenectady was officially created on July 27, 1661 when Arent Van Curler, acting in behalf of himself and fourteen other proprietors and with the concurrence of Peter Stuyvesant, the director-general of the Dutch West India Company, obtained a deed from “certain chiefs of the Mohawk country” for land along the Mohawk River, that contained the area where the city is now situated.¹ The deed defined:

...a certain parcel of land called, in Dutch Groote Vlacte, lying behind Fort

Orange, between the same and the Mohawk country...or Great Flat, called in Indian “Schonowe,” as it is bounded in its contents and circumference, with its trees and streams.²

For the Dutch speculators who figured in the acquisition, it was “the most beautiful land on the Mohawk river that eye ever saw” and an ideal location for a settlement.³ Groote Vlacte was well-known as a bountiful area and was already the home of some European patentees and squatters. The extensive flood plain lay on both sides of the Mohawk River where it meandered into branches, forming numerous islands. Earlier, this area may have been the site of one of the Mohawk nation’s five castles or villages. However, by the time Schenectady’s initial land transaction was made, the growing European presence in the region had begun to drive the Iroquois settlements further inland and force them to abandon their easternmost castles. Schenectady was the Mohawk name of the castle at Schonowa and the name the Dutch proprietors adopted for their patent. In its various early spellings, Schenectady meant “place beyond the pine plains,” an apt appellation since the land was located approximately eighteen miles west of Fort Orange on the other side of Albany’s pine barrens.⁴

European settlement of the Groote Vlacte began well before the 1661 deed was signed. For example, one of Schenectady’s wealthier and better-connected proprietors, Alexander Lindsay Glen, was granted most of the land lying north of the Mohawk River, through a patent he had secured in 1655. Likewise, the old Indian trader, Cornelius Antonisen Van Slyck, had been given a large island in the flood plain by the Mohawks as a gift as early as 1640. And Van Curler, who reserved a rather sizeable farm, or bouwerie, for himself in a prime area along the Binne Kill just west of what would become the fortified core of the village, had been travelling through the Mohawk territory for many years prior to 1661 as an agent for Kilian Van Rensselaer. A letter written by Van Curler to the patroon in 1643 provides a remarkable account of the numerous bouweries that were spreading

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² Deed of sale, location of original unknown, reprinted in Sanders, p. 10 and Monroe, p. 24.

³ Sanders, p. 311

⁴ Austin A. Yates in Schenectady County, New York, Its History to the Close of the Nineteenth Century (New York History Co., 1902) relates that one version of the city’s name came from combining the “Dutch” words of Schoon (beautiful), Acten (valuable) deel (portion of land), however admits the probability of it being a derivation of an Indian name (pp. 2-3).
through the *Groote Vlacte* well before Schenectady was founded. If anything, what the new patent accomplished was to organize and formalize a number of vague and unsanctioned land deals and, perhaps more importantly, define Schenectady as an independent entity free from the interference of Beverwyck’s traders and Rensselaerwyck’s patroon (fig. 1). Director-General Stuyvesant was agreeable to the venture as long as the proprietors transferred title of the land to the Company (they would be repaid the costs “in due time,” according to their leader), confined themselves exclusively to agriculture, and abstained from all trade with the Indians.

Within three years of granting the patent, the Dutch West Indies Company forfeited the colony to the English, who immediately sent out surveyors to map Schenectady’s boundaries in preparation for a new charter. The imprecise definition of the land mass stated in the earlier deed -- simply a reference to a place known as *Schonowe* -- was redefined, consistent with the Europeans’ abstract conception of property, as a rectangle sixteen miles on one side, running roughly east-west and parallel to the river, and eight miles on the other side, which was divided evenly by the river, or four miles each to the north and south. These new patent lines embraced exactly 128 square miles with a boundary line, according to Yates, that:

began on the west where the county line now is, at Hoffman’s Ferry on the Glenville side, extending over a strip about four miles north of the river bank to Aal Plaats (Eel Place) Creek. On the south bank it extended to the hillside, following the line of the highland back to Pattersonville and Rotterdam Junction, the lands of Hon, Simon Schermerhorn, skirting the base of the hills at the residence of the Hon. John D. Campbell, and curving around behind Villa Road, the bowery wood, below Union College Grounds, (then a forest) with “Hanse Janse Eanklu Kill,” a large stream that fifty-five years ago [was] contained in what is now Jackson’s Garden...From thence to the boundary line.6

Land had been allocated among the fifteen proprietors, although not equitably. What was left after parcels claimed by earlier landholders were confirmed and other special allotments were made, was divided up among the remaining fig. 1:

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5Monroe, pp. 31-32.

6Yates, p. 10
fig. 1: Dutch and English Land Grants, 1629-1708.
(from Roderick H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, REMEMBRANCE OF PATRIA, Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776, p. 64.)
patentees in a combination of town and farm lots. The most effective illustration of these initial divisions is a reconstructed map found in Monroe’s 1914 history, *Schenectady, Ancient and Modern* (fig 2). It shows the river and the flats bordered by the surrounding hills, with the beginning of Glen’s holdings identified on the north side of the river, Van Curler’s farm lot to the south of Van Slyck’s Island, the *bouwerie* lots allocated to the ten proprietors who did not receive lots elsewhere, and the square grid plan of the fortified portion of the village.

This town plan is similar to the other three settlements established by the Dutch in the Hudson Valley during the seventeenth century: New Amsterdam (New York City), Wiltwyck (Kingston) and Beverwick (Albany). Historic maps survive for all of them (for Schenectady’s see fig 3); and, not surprisingly, they follow the model of northern European farm towns from the Medieval period. In the ideal scheme, all were laid out with a fortified domestic area at the figurative center of an agricultural landscape farmed either in common or as allocated to individuals in lots; the latter was apparently the case in Schenectady. This type of organization reflects the nature of traditional corporate communities, where the requirements of production and protection were shared to the mutual benefit of its shareholders. With the concern for safety so acute in the New World (this is not to say that the Old World was free from such threats), the fortified village plan was the preferred choice not just in New Netherland, but in English colonies as well.

In this plan, every share-holding family would have a space within the stockade, distributed as part of a proprietary agreement, as it was in Schenectady, or as a leasehold. Technically, since the West Indies Company claimed title to the Schenectady patent (as well as most others outside of Beverwyck, Rensselaerwyck and New Amsterdam), even the proprietors were tenants on their property, paying a nominal quitrent to the company for the privilege of occupying the land. On this space, they would build a dwelling and outbuildings, including a barn, animal pens, sheds, shops and, sometimes, tenant housing. In an ideal setting, there would also be room for gardens and orchards. Each lot would spatially and functionally meet the family’s domestic needs. The town plan would be plotted to accommodate a number of these spaces in as efficient an arrangement as possible. The New Netherland plans came as close to
fig. 2 Schenectady and its Boundaries in 1664
(from Joel Henry Monroe, Schenectady, Ancient and Modern, between pages 24 & 25.)
a grid pattern as the topography would allow, introducing a formality that reflected the systematic thinking being applied in the management of New World real estate. Schenectady's plan was the most precise, but it was also the smallest.

Fortified villages were situated in strategically advantageous settings, either on a promontory, like Wiltwyck was, or against a waterway, as were the remaining three. They were protected by forts because the stockades -- tall posts set firmly in the ground sometimes two or three rows deep -- were considered only as the first line of defense, a barrier against the wilderness that provided a general sense of security. While relations with the Indian and other European nations were fairly stable, there was a legitimate anxiety of the unknown. All of these early Dutch communities had experienced raids of one kind or another, particularly Schenectady. So, within the stockades were even more impenetrable structures that were refuges of last resort, designed for siege, stocked with firearms and periodically manned with soldiers.

The town was laid out precisely in four blocks, 400 Rhineland feet (413 English feet) square, outlined by three north-south and three east-west streets. Its location seemed to coincide with an earlier Indian village or encampment because Indian remains were continually discovered there.7 The perimeter streets were encompassed by the stockade. The north-south street names, beginning on the west side of the stockade, were Handelaers' or Traders' (renamed Washington), Church and Ferry; those running east-west, beginning at the north side of the stockade, were named Front, Niskayuna (later Union), and Albany (now State). This street plan has survived essentially intact for over three centuries. Close examination of the map in fig. 2 reveals that each of these four blocks was divided into four lots. One of these sixteen lots was assigned to each of the fifteen proprietors. The remaining lot, located in the northeast corner of the plan, does not have a proprietor's name associated with it, but its location near the first fort and one of the stockade's gates may explain this vacancy.

Two maps depict the town plan in the seventeenth century, one apparently a period document and the other a recent reconstruction based on deed research done as part of a WPA project in the 1930's. The first map is the oldest known

7Yates, p. 2.
depiction of Schenectady, dating from 1704 or later (fig. 3). It is a very revealing pictorial representation of the town. Not only does it show the boundaries between lots both within the stockade (here at its post-1704 expansion) and immediately outside, it also identifies building sites and landscape features. Many of the interior lots picture trees, some scattered and some in groves, presumably to represent some form of landscape development (lots without houses are left, by-in-large, blank). Multiple buildings on lots may represent barns and other outbuildings (five- or six-sided footprints are probably hay barracks); but since by 1704, a number of the original square lots had been further subdivided, some of these footprints may be for houses. By this period, there is already a spread of house lots beyond the stockade, particularly east along Albany Road, which extends off the upper right corner of the map. The Coehorne Creek, coming into the picture from the middle right side of the page, had been harnessed by this early date to operate a gristmill (7), and right next to it was a brewhouse (8). Remarkably, this mill site remained in operation into the twentieth century, even though this neighborhood on State Street was at the core of downtown Schenectady.

Additional points of interest are keyed to the legend of the map:

1 - The King’s Fort, located at the base of State Street at the Binnekill. This was a palisaded enclosure with blockhouses at the corners and containing numerous buildings including dwellings, barracks, a barn and Indian longhouses; erected by the British colony after the massacre but gone by 1760 (see fig. 5)

6 - The Church, within the intersection of Church and State

9 - An “old Bornet littel Fort and Palisades made by Collonal Dongams time,” the fort surviving from the Massacre

10 - “An new Provicited [prophesized?] Fort of stone,” superimposed over lots at the corner of Washington Avenue and Front Street

Close examination of areas mapped outside the stockade reveals that the pattern of fields extending along the floodplain of the Mohawk are differentiated to show a range of uses. Since a key does not exist with the map, one can only surmise what uses are represented. However, it is likely that the parallel broken lines superimposed over the flats on the opposite side of the Mohawk River (Glen’s), and on what was probably Van Curler’s bouwerie, on the far right side of
Map of Schenectady in 1690
(from a copy in the City History Center)
the map, were plowed and planted in wheat. The principal crop in Schenectady, as in the rest of the Dutch colony, wheat was a high-yield cash crop that was the mainstay of the New Netherland economy. After wheat, the largest field crop was peas, a staple of the Dutch diet and regional economy, followed by hay and other livestock feed. Another land category was pasturage, which was often shared on common land. Lots with flecks in them were possibly pastures, as trees are present in some of them; and marshland along the northern edge of the Mohawk and the Coehorne Creek is indicated by symbols still in use by cartographers today. A concentration of trees, that can only suggest a forest, extends towards the top left of the map, heading east into the pine woods separating Schenectady from Fort Orange.

By most accounts, Schenectady had developed rapidly by the end of the seventeenth century. A French report of the 1690 Schenectady Massacre placed the number of houses in the Stockade at eighty.\(^8\) This number seems excessive based on the size of the stockade and the number of lots available therein. The 1704 map of "Schenectady Town" shows far fewer buildings, even including the dense concentration within the King's Fort. The victims' accounting of the French-led Indian attack listed the names of sixty residents who were killed and twenty-seven held for ransom, representing approximately thirty families.\(^9\) The latter two documents would seem to present a more accurate picture of the Stockade.

**Settlement period architecture**

While its plan has survived the ravages of time and change, Schenectady's oldest houses have not, and although maps and deed descriptions exist that provide us with some sense of the design and appearance of the town, narrative or pictorial documents concerning what houses looked like are extremely scarce. This is typical of seventeenth century studies. The impermanence of architecture in the tenuous and rapidly transforming communities of the settlement era has left us with virtually no material remains to analyze; and if there were records and


\(^9\) All the published local histories have reprinted all or part of the sad report of the massacre, which they took from *Documentary History of New York*, Vol. 1, p. 304.
accounts describing the early colonial experience, they were long ago destroyed or discarded. Reconstructing an image of Schenectady's original settlement will be an incomplete and somewhat speculative effort, but a valuable exercise, even if it only updates the impressionistic picture we presently have.

Starting with the fact that Schenectady was a seventeenth-century Dutch settlement, we can rely on the knowledge we have about other Dutch settlements to fill in some of the gaps in the records. People behave differently from place to place and most historic events are singular to a locale, but the fundamental organizational structure of communities in a region and the internal network of their civic and social relationships are essentially the same. So, too with architecture. Certain building forms and plans can be identified with the Dutch settlement generally, so if we can identify types of houses in New Amsterdam or Beverwyck, we can have some confidence that similar houses existed in Schenectady. Even though our understanding of life in Colonial New York is quite incomplete, historical scholarship over the past fifty years has increased that understanding considerably. And since little attention has been focused on Schenectady's Colonial history since the publication of Joel Henry Monroe's *Schenectady, Ancient and Modern* in 1914 (and with that, Monroe was mostly restating accounts recorded in John Sander's 1879 history of the city), it is important to begin this architectural history with bringing the record up to date.

The Schenectady Massacre scene painted by Samuel H. Sexton in the late nineteenth century shows a crowded urban street full of brick, stepped-gable houses.\(^\text{10}\) While this fits the romantic image Sexton's period had of both the Dutch and the massacre, the density is exaggerated as is the distinctiveness of the architecture. The crowded background can be construed as artistic license, and the quaint Dutch houses as a visual tableau of the region's cultural past in the guise of the Colonial Revival. Today, this painting is as much a historical artifact as its subject. But while this is still the principal image used to conjure up the idea of Old Schenectady, on closer analysis, this does not provide us an accurate view of the early town. First, it does not correspond with portrayal of the settlement on the 1704 map of “Schenectady Town,” which depicts a plan with fewer houses and more open space. Second, the houses in the painting are Dutch

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\(^{10}\) This painting is in the collection of the Schenectady County Historical Society.
archetypes that have no documented antecedents in the seventeenth century. The large brick houses with their steep gables fronting the street were not common in the colony until the 1720's or 30's, especially in frontier areas like Schenectady.

Dutch townhouses in the seventeenth century were smaller, plainer and made generally of wood. Surviving contracts for houses built in New Amsterdam during this period, describe houses one and one-half stories tall with their gable ends fronting the street.\(^{11}\) The interior plan of these houses was based on two principal rooms on the ground floor, arranged front-to-back, which created the compact rectangular form distinctive to the type (fig. 5). An entrance in the street facade would have led into a common-use room in front that could have also been used as a shop in an urban setting like Schenectady. Old building contracts frequently describe an entrance in a side aisle appended to the house that could have functioned as a passageway from the front to the more private room in the rear. The front and rear rooms would have been divided by a chimney stack servicing hearths or stoves in the adjoining spaces; stairs, or more likely ladders to the garret or basement levels would have been found in the interior corners of the rooms or in the side aisle. If there was a third room, it would have been located in the rear of the basement, keeping the neat rectangular form of the two-room plan intact. Sometimes the headroom in this basement room was raised by elevating the floor level of the principal rear room one or two steps higher than the floor in the front. The garret was left undivided, unheated and unfinished; it was generally used for storage. Each of these rooms could have been, and based on surviving evidence commonly were, built in stages.

In his history of Schenectady, John Sanders recorded a description of a very similar house, which he included to show how negligent the Dutch were in developing the New Netherland colony. He cited his source as an informant of “high authority.” The account was reportedly made in 1656 and described the Beverwyck house of Johannes La Montagne, the Vice-Director of Fort Orange, who five years later certified the deed for Schenectady.

fig. 5  Reconstructed perspective of the Jan Martense Schenck House, 1675
"[The] official's house was an old building situated within the fort, 27 feet long by 17 wide, and two stories high, constructed of boards one inch thick, the roof covered with old shingles, and under this house was a cellar. The first floor was divided into two compartments; at the north end was a room 17 feet broad, and at the south an ante-room 10 feet wide. The space on the second floor was one undivided room, directly under the roof, without a chimney, to which room access was had by a straight ladder, through a trap door. In this room the magistrates administered justice, and this building was the Court-House at Fort Orange 33 years after its permanent settlement."\(^{12}\)

This account describes a house identical to the prototype created from the New Amsterdam building contracts and helps to confirm that a small, rectangular, two-room plan house with an unfinished garret (called "the second story" above) under a front-facing gable roof was a form distinctive to the period. Of the few documented seventeenth century houses left in the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys, specifically, the stone section of the Leonardt Bronck House in Coxsackie, the Bevier-Elting and Abraham Hasbrouck houses in New Paltz, and the Mabie House in Rotterdam, all follow this model, as do a host of second- and third-generation houses from the early eighteenth century. Two notable Schenectady-area specimens are the Abraham Glen House, now the Scotia-Glenville Library; and the Nicholas De Graff House, now demolished but often photographed and long revered as the location of the 1748 Beukendal Massacre).

The Mabie House, although it is made of stone rather than wood (far more common historically, wooden buildings have not survived in nearly the same proportion as their masonry counterparts), is a good example of the type from another perspective (see fig. 6). Like many houses that date to the seventeenth century, it was built in stages, one room at a time over a generation or more of habitation. In its earliest one-room phase, the Mabie House probably best represents Schenectady's first wave of building. Based on the evidence of surviving houses elsewhere in the region, the earliest houses started out quite small and, while two- and three-room plans were the ideal, the strategy was most often to approach it incrementally, as improving resources and circumstances permitted. These houses were very plastic, and as they grew room by room, fig.

\(^{12}\)Sanders, p. 4.
fig. 6  The Mabie House, Rotterdam (c1675)
(from Monroe, Schenectady, Ancient and Modern, between pages 68 & 69)
adding the luxury of space and the diversity of family, work and social functions, they were emblematic of the incremental stages of establishing a settlement and progressing from the bare subsistence of an outpost to the comfort and complexity of a more mature community.

So it can be assumed, based on the maps documenting the division and development of Schenectady within the stockade, that prior to 1690, houses numbered far fewer than the eighty the French reported destroyed and were spread out among the lots indicated on early maps. Also, we can speculate that the houses were small and wooden, and that they probably conformed to the Dutch preference of facing gable ends to the street. Most would have originated as one-room houses with the intention of enlarging the plan as settlement progressed; in the twenty-nine year period between the patent and the massacre, any number of houses could have achieved their full two-room plan with a kitchen either in the basement, a wing or an outbuilding.

The consideration of outbuildings leads us to the planning and organization of individual lots. While the plan of the town was urban in organization, it served an agrarian rather than a mercantile purpose. As such, the intent was to compress the immediate domestic needs of farm families into as manageable and defensible a unit as possible by bringing everything about the farm but the crops, including the cows, sheep and swine, into the confines of the town. The rationale for the large lots in the stockade was that they were expected to accommodate the proprietor’s needs for growing his family’s food (garden, orchard, livestock), managing his farm (barn, granary, hay barracks), performing his occupation (forge, dairy, brewery, shop, mill), and housing his extended family (kitchens for slaves, and houses for independent children). If all the outbuildings were counted, along with the dwellings on the lots of the fifteen proprietors and the lots spilling out the stockade along the Albany Road or at river’s edge, the total number of buildings burned during the 1690 massacre could have easily amounted to eighty in number.

Imagining the stockade area with lots nearly an acre in size holding barns, hay stacks, animal pens, a large vegetable garden, a small orchard, and various other outbuildings does not conjure up an urban picture at all, yet this aptly characterizes the appearance of the village until well into the eighteenth century. Sanders, in retelling the tale of the Beukendal Massacre in 1748, gives the
following reference to what was, based on the date, most likely a Dutch barn in the confines of the plan.

So, with sorrowing hearts and pious care, the afflicted rescuers, before nightfall, collected and removed their mutilated slain, twenty-six in number, to Schenectady, and deposited them in two rows on the floor of the barn of Abraham Mabee, situated on Church street, to be claimed and cared for by their respective kin.\textsuperscript{13}

**The farms**

In the beginning, Schenectady encompassed 128 square miles. Outside of the stockade stretched an expansive flood plain that the proprietors had partitioned into farm lots, or *bouweries*. This area was enveloped by the forested hills that line the Mohawk Valley. Before the close of the seventeenth century, this area had been settled and cultivated; and numerous farms were established by tenants, squatters and the owners, themselves. Farmhouses are known to have followed the form and plan of town houses, though sometimes with facades reoriented to long sides with separate entrances into individual rooms, but sometimes they were conceived entirely differently. Early records indicate that large house-barn units were one option over the discontinuous complex of farm buildings that has been the norm in the New World. Arent Van Curler described one of these buildings, which he was having built in Colonie in 1643. It is mentioned here because it would have been an option in the architectural catalog of Schenectady.

I had, moreover, contracted with Jan Cornelissen, carpenter, for a large farm-house ... He must build for 700 guilders, a house 120 feet long by twenty-eight feet wide; a half-jutting chamber (*een hang-kamer*) for the servants' sleeping room; a small room (*een kooi*) in the farm-house for the farm laborers; an inclosed stable for the studs, and further to make a horse and cow stable, and what else appertains thereto...\textsuperscript{14}

**Eighteenth Century:**

The rebuilding of Schenectady in the aftermath of the massacre, was slow and

\textsuperscript{13}Sanders, p. 228

\textsuperscript{14}Sanders, p. 301
tenuous, and the town found itself in the midst of a crisis over the fate of the New York colony and its Indian policy. The massacre was only the beginning of a long, drawn-out confrontation between the European colonial powers, the New York traders and the Indian nations. Over the next fifty years, the settlement would be mired in the on-again, off-again struggle between the English and the French for control of the northern territory and its highly lucrative fur trade. To the English, Schenectady was first and foremost, a front line of defense against the incursions by the French in Canada. Thus, one of the first initiatives in Schenectady’s recovery was to rebuild the fort. Three months following the catastrophe, the local militia was directed by then Governor Leisler to “build a substantial fort of due magnitude and strength upon that part or parcel of ground called by the name Cleyn Isaacs.”15 Leisler must have been reading a map identifying lots by their owners’ names because Cleyn (klein = small) Isaac, namely Isaac Swits, occupied the lot at the foot of what is now State Street below Washington Avenue (Swits had been taken prisoner during the raid and was given up for lost. He was to return, however, to discover to his great dismay that his land had been confiscated.) This directive relocated the fort from its old site on the high ground in the northeast corner of the stockade to the southwest corner overlooking the Binnekill and Van Slyck’s Island. This fort is well-detailed as “The Kings Fort” on the 1704 map, which also includes the “old Bornet [burned?] littel Fort and Palisades maede by Collonal Dongam’s time,” and ravaged during the 1690 raid (fig. 3). A third fort site is shown on this map. An enormous projected “Fort of Stone” is superimposed over lots at the intersection of Front and Washington, where the Binnekill joins the Mohawk River. It was apparently constructed during Queen Anne’s reign, indicating the magnitude of the planned defensive build-up. Under an order from Governor Cornbury, the stockade was enlarged in 1704, extending down from Front Street and Washington Avenue to the water on its Mohawk and Binnekill sides, respectively.

Since we are attempting an architectural history here, a moment is warranted for recording the design of this fort and its impact on the existing village. Fortunately, a detailed depiction of this new fort was made by the Rev. John

15Yates, p. 59.
Miller, chaplain of the British forces in New York, in 1695 (fig. 7). The fort, according to Miller's description had "a treble stockade with a new block house at every angle and in each block house two great guns." The southeastern blockhouse, the one nearest the fort's main entrance on State Street, served as the garrison's headquarters and was distinguished by a flagpole (4), a sentry box (5), and a spy loft (6). The northwest blockhouse (8) was designed for use as a church. This is noteworthy because it was, perhaps, the first appearance of an English church in Schenectady. The interior of the fort contained a barn (10), pig sties (7) and houses (those numbered 9 and, according to the map's legend, "others like them"). These houses were probably occupied by the garrison and their followers, e.g. carpenters, masons, ferriers, gunsmiths, victuallers, laborers and servants. Of particular interest is the presence of "Indians Wigwams" (3) within the fort's walls. This indicates that despite the massacre, cooperative relations with the valley's Mohawks continued. Within the Mohawk nation, some tribes were allied with the English while others were allied with the French.

As the fort was being erected, the surviving members of the Schenectady community were rebuilding their homes out of the ashes. As the map of Schenectady Town indicates, within ten years of being totally wiped out, the settlement had resumed the appearance of a functioning community. The story of the massacre illustrates the resilience and determination, as well as the vulnerability, of the European colonists. A mill and two brewhouses are evidence of the agriculture that was thriving outside the stockade on the flats. And although trade was forbidden by Peter Stuyvesant, when granting approval for the deed establishing the town in 1661, he surely was unable to enforce such an edict with such inveterate traders as Glen, Van Slyck and Viele in the midst. The influence of the Albany merchants, who feared undue competition from the frontier outpost, was such that it was not until 1727 that the restriction was officially removed. There is a rich lore about the cleverness by which the Schenectady traders undermined the onerous prohibition, and documents attest to

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16 Rev. Miller's map, in the collections of the British Museum, is reproduced in both Monroe and George S. Roberts Old Schenectady (Schenectady: Robson & Adee, [1904]). This map of the fort has previously been confused as representing the entire stockade area.

17 Yates, 59-60
fig. 7  The Fort of Scaneethade, drawn by John Miller, 1695.
(from a copy in the City History Center)
many instances of local folks running afoul of the sheriff. Still, while on the surface the settlement operated under the guise of an agriculture-based economy, like any other of the upstate towns, much of the Schenectady “farmer’s” income relied on the Indian trade. In spite of the threat of war and the admonitions against aiding the French Indian cause, Albany and Schenectady traders had no qualms about crossing political lines to make money. In fact, the Albany traders negotiated a pledge of neutrality with the French in Montreal in 1701 that insured uninterrupted trade even though the colonial powers were essentially at war.\textsuperscript{18} Nevertheless, the tensions of the unstable situation had a deleterious effect on the quality of life in the region. By the close of the seventeenth century, only 1500 settlers remained in Albany County, and its population increased only at a curtailed rate during the first half of the next century.

In 1705, the fort was rebuilt and, presumably, relocated to the northeasterly corner of the stockade, on the Mohawk River, where predicted on the Schenectady Town map. Queen Anne had recently assumed the English throne, so just as the perennial hostilities with the French became “Queen Anne’s War,” Schenectady’s new fort was called “The Queen’s Fort.” This structure was also rebuilt and fortified in 1735. The following description was recorded by Yates as written in 1757:

It is square, flanked with four bastions or demi-bastions, and is constructed half of masonry and half of timbers piled over the other above the masonry. It is capable of holding 200 or 300 men. There are some pieces of cannon as a battery on the rampart. It is not encircled by a ditch. The entrance is through a large swing gate, raised like a drawbridge.\textsuperscript{19}

This circumstance corresponded with the English gaining a larger and decisive foothold in the contested territory. The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht awarded them Canadian territory -- Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Hudson’s Bay -- as well as dominion over trade with the Iroquois; and in 1727, they built a fort at Oswego and opened trading posts at Niagara (1726) and Crown Point (1731). Not only did this ease the threat of attacks somewhat, but it gave a tremendous boost to the

\textsuperscript{18}Ellis et al, p. 53

\textsuperscript{19}Yates, p. 74.
Indian trade by opening up virtually the entire west to merchants in the New York colony. At this point, the fur trade boomed and New York soon surpassed Pennsylvania as the leading supplier of furs to England.  

This period also witnessed the beginning of settlement farther west on the Mohawk. The first people to venture out were the Palatine Germans making an exodus from the Hudson Valley camps. In 1713, a sizeable group of them passed the winter in the Schenectady stockade en route to the Schoharie Valley, where they hoped to establish a colony. To their dismay, however, they discovered soon after their arrival that the land had already been deeded to proprietors in Albany who were intent on granting only leaseholds. Disillusioned by similar conditions in the Hudson Valley, many Palatines chose to migrate west into uncontested lands in the Mohawk Valley. Here, they founded towns at Stone Arabia and Palatine Bridge in 1720 and Herkimer in 1723. Schenectady found itself in the fortunate situation of being on the only route west, making it the benefactor of new trade opportunities. Not only were trade goods destined for Schoharie and the Mohawk Valleys funnelled through the town, but wheat coming out of the settlement, destined for Albany, was shipped through there as well.

Other settlements began appearing in the west as the English governors began to grant more patents and word spread about the availability of productive farmland. Best known of these is the land grant made in 1738 to Peter Warren, who brought his nephew, William Johnson, to New York to manage it. But it is also in this period that Duanesburg, Clifton Park and Cherry Valley appeared on the map. Immediately, Schenectady's location became more pivotal in the new and enormously promising regional transportation and trade network. This was for two reasons: first, the principal land route west along the Mohawk River originated in the town, following the old trail to the Iroquois castles; second, although the Mohawk River was only seasonally navigable, it had potential as a transportation route west of the Cohoes Falls, making Schenectady a terminal for goods portaged to and from the Hudson. Thus, during the opening quarter of the 1700's, Schenectady was transformed from a small farming community and trading outpost to a veritable mercantile center.

As one might expect, this began to alter the organization and the appearance

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20Ellis, et al., p. 53-54.
of the little stockaded town. The harbinger of this shift in the town's economy was the relocation of the fort in the 1750's. At this time, Schenectady's citizens petitioned the governor to build a new fort, restoring it to its first location at the eastern gate of the stockade. Perhaps it entailed the reconstruction of the original "old Bornet littel Fort" that had existed at this exact spot sixty years earlier. It wasn't nearly as substantial as the previous Queen's Fort, as one description put it:

These fortifications consisted principally of a block house formed of squared timbers and sufficiently spacious to afford safety and shelter in the hour of utmost need to the whole population of that day. It thus became dignified with the name of a 'Fort,' although its armament consisted of but several small pieces of artillery and it was better able to resist the encroachment of a savage though inexperience for than to endure the siege of bombardment of more modern and scientific warfare.21

The change indicates a refocusing of the village's attention away from defense and towards other more profitable uses of its waterfront. The fort presented a barrier to shoreline access where Schenectady's first landing would have been located.

Between 1690 and 1720, other than the jockeying of the fort's position, it appears that development in the town remained fairly static. Property owners would have rebuilt their houses, but any additional growth or diversification would have been limited. Beyond a store or two to supply the boers and Indians, little occurred to alter the plan or density of settlement within the stockade. Anyway, because of the restriction, most trade would have still been done secretly. However, as the Germans and English began to infiltrate the Mohawk territory, more enterprises to service their needs would have become apparent. More stores would have opened to accommodate the multiple requirements for supplying new settlements. Warehouses would have been needed to stockpile trade goods; and new categories of craftsmen would have been required, such as wagonmakers, wheelwrights and blacksmiths, as well as the familiar millers, brewers, and tavern keepers.

Up to this point, most transportation of goods into and through Schenectady

21 from Schenectady Reflector, Feb. 19, 1841; quoted in Monroe, 109-110.
was limited to roads. Trappers and traders had traditionally used the Mohawk for transportation, adopting the canoe on the shallow, fast flowing waterway. Unlike the broad, deep Hudson estuary, the Mohawk posed obstacles to transporting anything that could not be carried in a canoe. But as troublesome as carrying freight on the river was, the prospect of road travel was even worse, especially for large quantities of materials. So, initially, most of the goods that were moved to and from settlements upstream were loaded on canoes, which were paddled, pushed and portaged to their destinations. According to Monroe, between 1716 and 1720, there were thirty or more of these craft on the river; by 1724, with the influx of settlers and the expanding fur trade in the west, the number had increased to 323.22

To improve the efficiency of this means of transport, a boat was devised to meet the growing demand for goods upstream. A narrow-beam, shallow-draft, flat-bottomed boat, began being built in Schenectady that was capable of carrying a few tons of load under the propulsion of three to eight men who either paddled, poled or pulled the craft depending on conditions (fig. 8). Called a bateau, thus hinting at its origin among French trappers or military, it was one of various vessels used on the lakes and rivers of northern New York and Canada, each type modified to meet the conditions of particular waterways. Although direct ownership of the idea cannot be attributed to anyone in Schenectady (credit is often given to Samuel Johnson), because the town was the eastern terminus of shipping on the Mohawk, the bateau was adopted there for common use by 1740, and hundreds were constructed there, giving birth to a sizeable boat-building industry. According to legend, the boatyards were located directly on the river north of Front Street, although those accounts relate to memories of the early nineteenth century rather than the early eighteenth and do not address how the presence of the stockade (which was extended to water’s edge along the Mohawk and Binnekill in 1704) affected access to the water. Nevertheless, the village within the fortification, if not the shoreline, would have experienced an intensification of development in this period.

Another factor spurring Schenectady’s economic and physical growth in the early decades of the 1700’s was that as a transshipment point, it attracted land-

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22Monroe, pp. 111-112.
THE BATEAU

In the early ship commerce, this type of boat succeeded the canoe.

THE DURHAM

The later and larger craft of fifteen tons burden.

fig. 8 Historic Mohawk River boats
(from Monroe, Schenectady, Ancient and Modern, between pages 76 & 77.)
based transportation as well as that which was waterborne. Hence, an ever-increasing number of wagons and teams would have needed accommodation as overland traffic increased. Liveries and wagon shops would have made a noticeable presence in the landscape of the village. Because of the influx of goods from the Hudson, the condition of the Albany Road would have been an important issue in this period, but it was not replaced by a modern turnpike until 1802. The old road to Niskayuna (the extension of Union Street) connected eventually with Troy, a linkage that would be important in the nineteenth century as that city rose to prominence. And the old river roads heading east and west from the stockade saw an extraordinary increase in traffic, but more as routes carrying westward travellers. At this time, a ferry ran from the base of Washington Avenue to Glenville linking Schenectady with settlements to the north in Scotia, Clifton Park and Saratoga. As these transportation routes came frequent use, and as the limited space within the stockade was filled, they were the axes along which expansion occurred. The 1704 map shows this beginning to happen along State Street, but the next generation of maps, dating from the 1750’s shows it even more dramatically (fig. 9).

Who were the people filling these lots? While no documentary research has been done to explain this adequately, we can assume that this growth is the direct result of Schenectady’s awakening mercantile and transportation economy. Natural increase in the proprietary families may have accounted for some of this number, but even they would have been involved in the occupations revolving around the expanding trade. Add to their numbers the specialised skills and labor force needed for boat- and wagon-building, the stabling and outfitting of horses, and the distribution of a large volume and wide variety of goods, not to mention the numerous boatmen (remember, each bateau took a crew of up to eight men or more), teamsters, warehousemen and laborers such an enterprise would involve, and we can envision not just a bustling transportation hub, but the internal demands for housing and services a population of such size and diversity would have made.

Schenectady grew in the most logical direction, to the east along its highways through the pine barrens and away from the farmlands. By the time a new map of the town appeared in the 1750’s, quite a bit had changed. First the fort (B) is documented as having been moved from either the foot of State Street or, if it was
in fact moved to the intersection of Front and Washington in 1705, from that location to the eastern corner of the stockade. A number of the corners of the stockade had acquired blockhouses (C), possibly to heed the warning that "[b]ly penetrating the village in attacking it from another point the fire from the fort can be avoided."23 Also, the map gives support to the evidence that the Dutch church was moved from the intersection of Church and State to the intersection of Church and Union, where, more or less, it presently stands. At its old site, it appears to have been replaced with a barracks. Most importantly, the map shows that the plan had doubled in size with the addition of lots on extensions of the stockade's three east-west streets. A new north-south road links them along what is now College Street. The development here suggests the density of an urban plan (compare the spacing of houses to those spread out along the northernmost "Road by the River") and a continuation of the grid pattern established in the stockade. A contemporary account cites that Schenectady had about 300 houses at this time, which suggests that the plan inside the stockade (not detailed on this map) was filling-in more tightly as well.24

Architecture up to 1750

Extant buildings dating from the early eighteenth century, are just about as rare as those surviving from the seventeenth century. If we include examples that exist only as pictures, Schenectady has a handful of houses from this period, but no documentation whatsoever of other buildings: barns, hay barracks and other agricultural structures, warehouses, shops, mills, boatyards, military facilities, or churches. We can only surmise the appearance of the village. There are views of Albany and New York City from the period that provide a perspective on architecture that can be applied to this instance, but only in generalities.

We can assume that as the new century opened, the same small, front-gable, frame houses were still the norm in the colony. But beginning in the second decade of the 1700's, a distinctive regional urban house emerged emphasizing the characteristic Dutch profile and mass. One of Schenectady's two surviving houses from this period, the Abraham Yates House on Union Street, as well as

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23Yates, p. 75.

24Yates, p. 74.
others such as the Arandt Bradt House, once located on State Street, represents this type: a brick, or in these cases, brick-fronted, house with a gabled facade and traditional Dutch ornament such as cross-bond brick pattern, iron tie-rods in decorative forms, casement windows (although none survive), and the ubiquitous stoop entry. The development of this elaborated ethnic type after a century of habitation, with more than half the years as an English rather than a Dutch colony, can be understood as the established, yet threatened, Dutch community reflecting on its past rather than projecting its thoughts towards the future, thereby preserving and dignifying its history as a hedge against assimilation. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Dutch community maintained its cultural identity by keeping certain images and institutions intact. Their architecture was one thing that distinguished the Dutch from the far more numerous English; and in the early 1700's, rather than compromise that tradition, they seem to have chosen to emphasize its intrinsic character. Albany County has been characterized from as early as Washington Irving (1783-1859) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) as a rural Dutch backwater compared to the southern Hudson Valley; and growth and diversification of its population was much slower, but if we acknowledge that the decorated brick style of Dutch houses developed and persevered in a period of dramatic change rather than isolation, even in Albany and Schenectady, then their exaggerated ethnic qualities become all the more significant and emblematic of Dutch-American psychology.

Schenectady has the only surviving Dutch urban architecture from this period. No houses survive in the stockaded parts of Albany, Kingston or New York. The Abraham Yates House is vitally important both as a visual object in the local streetscape and as a study piece of early design and construction methods.

Based on studies of Dutch cultural patterns in the region and elsewhere, it is believed that mercantile shops were originally incorporated into house plans, in the first room of a front-gable house, but craftsmen may have needed the work space of a separate building. Warehousing could have been accommodated in the cavernous open garrets, with their characteristic exterior cargo doors and hoist blocks and, for more perishable foodstuffs, in the basements of these houses, particularly in the early days when the volume of merchandise was limited. As trade grew and more storage space was needed, it is likely that warehouses were erected either on their proprietors' lots or -- as described in all of Schenectady's
histories but never once depicted pictorially -- along the Binnekill west of Washington Avenue in what was to become Schenectady’s first commercial zone. Most likely, these storage buildings took the form of the gable-front Dutch barns used in agriculture. Based on what is known of the period, one visual preference the Dutch did seem to favor was the verticality of a pointed facade, whether on a narrow city lot or in the countryside, and this would have extended to commercial buildings as well. While it is possible that some of these large buildings were built of brick, wood was the more likely material, especially if the warehouses were relatively small scale (compared to the enormity of known examples in New York City and the Netherlands) and based on a barn prototype. Likewise, we can assume that other businesses used gable-roofed structures of various sizes and specialized plans. Wagon shops, liveries and smithies would have conformed to the relative scale and form of the village. Unlike the industries that came much later, the eighteenth century commercial architecture did not overwhelm the village scene or impinge on the overall domesticity of its appearance.

Such was the landscape in the stockade as it began to transform from its medieval town plan, with its one-acre lots and agrarian functions, to a modern commercial and transportation center. By 1750, it had likely been further subdivided and filled in with more houses, businesses and the make-shift spaces that a rapidly developing community would have. The town also changed from being the intimate community of a group of pioneer farmer/traders to a melting pot of classes, trades and cultural groups. Schenectady’s insularity was unravelling; as with the massacre, its unguarded gates were breeched allowing the rough-and-tumble to flow in. Unlike the 1690 raiding party, these invaders dismembered the old town peaceably and stayed. As with the French and Indians, the townspeople were passive in their defense, trusting Providence would direct them. Even though ancient Schenectady was lost in this non-violent scuffle with progress, a significantly new town took its place.

This transformation was slow and deliberate: Schenectady did not yet witness the explosive growth and renewal that was to occur a century or so later; the town expanded its population and services in response to the increase in demands of the westward expansion. This migration was relatively slow and sporadic during the first half of the eighteenth century, but it picked up in numbers and momentum after the threat of war with French Canada ended in 1765. One example of the
tenuousness of the situation was the surprise raid in 1746 on Beukendal, a settlement within Glen's portion of Schenectady Town three miles northwest of the stockade that left twenty-six scalped and killed. So, the lure of trade and settlement in the west was constantly tinged with the fear of the known and unknown perils in the bitterly contested continent.

**Development following the French & Indian War**

The negotiated peace between the French and British in 1765 helped to allay the anxiety of the frontier settlers. Settlement of the west expanded more rapidly from this time. One unexpected result of the English victory was that the Canadians closed the New York merchants out of the Indian trade from their territory, including the Great Lakes region.\(^{25}\) Montreal became the new fur-trading center and Albany revenues declined severely. Fortunately for both Albany and Schenectady, the business of supplying markets in the new white settlements along the Mohawk and beyond compensated for this loss. New York's population increased from around 20,000 to 75,000 during the first half of the eighteenth century; but by the end of the century, the number had risen to nearly 200,000.\(^{26}\) Early in the century, the bulk of the population was concentrated within a few miles of the Hudson River; in later decades, demographic maps show the spread of population westward along the Mohawk River, within Schenectady's market and transportation corridor.

In 1698, Schenectady population numbered fifty men, forty-one women and 133 children.\(^{27}\) Fifty-nine years later, the town had enough people to fill 300 houses and fifty to sixty soldiers in the garrison.\(^{28}\) Its population at the close of the eighteenth century was 3228. The town continued to grow and expand at a steady rate. On October 23, 1765, it was given borough status, which entitled it to membership in the provincial legislature. Regular mail service from Albany had been instituted in 1763. Trade increased progressively and placed more demand

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\(^{25}\)Ellis, p. 55.

\(^{26}\)Ellis, p. 60.

\(^{27}\)Roberts, p. 41.

\(^{28}\)Yates, p. 74
on the town for wharves, warehouses and boats. Transportation innovations were increasingly valuable. Boatmen began modifying the river to facilitate the torturous journey upstream: it could take two days to make the eighty-mile trip to Utica against the current, only thirteen hours for the return. Channels were dug and low dams built to capture more water for the boats and to restrain the river's current. Many people were put to work on the river.

In spite of all the obstacles posed by the river, roads must have been worse still worse, or else why put up with it? One road, above all others, was a critical link in the trade route: the Albany Road. There was no alternative to get goods to and from the Hudson corridor. If any land route required attention, it was this important artery. Originally, this road followed a more southerly route than its successor (Albany Street) along what is now King's Road, but most of it has been obliterated by the New York State Thruway and development in the Pine Bush. More-direct Albany Street was built as a turnpike in 1802; but it, too, was later replaced by arrow-straight State Street-Central Avenue. Schenectady's link with the north side of the Mohawk was improved in 1768, when an additional ferry slip was opened at Ferry Street to compete with the one that had been running from Washington Avenue. According to Monroe, it was at this time that Ferry Street was opened between Front Street and the River. By 1797, there were three ferrys, designated as upper, middle and lower, one from each of Schenectady's northbound streets. The first bridge across the Mohawk River was begin in 1797 from the foot of Washington Street; it collapsed in a windstorm during its construction and another was not attempted until after 1800. And the road to Mohawk territory saw increasing traffic from the early migration of the Palatines to the stream of Yankees that followed the Revolution.

ARCHITECTURE, 1750-1775

In spite of the influx of new people from different areas, Schenectady's architecture maintained its decided regional character. By 1750, the appearance of the town must have been very Dutch, much in the same way Albany kept its Old World, Dutch ways. Even though communication with other parts of the

29Monroe, 114.
30Ibid.
colony and other colonies was common in Albany and Schenectady, their position 150 miles away from the ocean made them more remote and less pressured to change than, say, New York. A Dutch hegemony still controlled trade and cultural life in the two towns. The English only presumed to interfere in broader matters of governance and even then through the Dutch establishment. As mentioned above, this society sought to preserve their living patterns and visual environment to maintain their identity and control. Once newcomers began to arrive, the towns grew and began to lose some of their uniformity.

A well-known description of Schenectady of this period, in a 1769 journal entry written by traveller Richard Smith, later published as A Tour of Four Great Rivers, confirms this impression:

The Town according to our Conjecture counts about 300 Dwelling Houses besides Out Houses, standing in three Principal streets nearly East and West; these are crossed by four or five other streets. Few of the Buildings are contiguous, some of them are constructed in the old Dutch taste generally of Wood but sometimes of Brick and there may be six or seven elegant Mansions without including a large Dutch Church with a Town Clock, a Presbyterian Meeting House and a neat English Church now finishing off, containing a particular pew for Sir Wm. Johnson, adorned with a handsome Canopy supported by Pilasters. There are no wharves but a public Landing or Two at the Ends of the streets where the Bateaux bring Peltry and wheat from above. These Bateaux which are built here are very large, each end sharp so that they may be rowed either way.

The Townspeople are supplied altogether with Beef and Pork from New England most of the Meadows being used for Wheat, Peas and other Grain; however, there are certain choice Grass Meadows about the Place and yet at the End we entered, the Sandy Pine Land approaches within 300 yards of the Buildings...The inhabitants are chiefly the Descendants of the low Dutch, a few Irish and not so many English. We did not observe any Orchards or Gardens worthy of Attention...Numbers of people from New England and elsewhere have travelled this way during the last Winter and this Spring looking out for settlements: there is yet remaining in Schenectady a small wooden Fortress having 4 Towers at the corners.31

The most significant architectural change in the period following 1750, and a change that has had an extreme effect on our understanding of New York's early architectural history, is the introduction of the gambrel roof. A few houses survive

in the stockade district today (notably the Teller House on Front Street) with this definitive "Dutch" feature and more surely existed at the end of the eighteenth century. Ironically, though many architectural treatises written in the late 1800's and early 1900's identified the gambrel roof with Dutch architecture, it did not appear in the Dutch towns of the Hudson Valley or Schenectady until they came under English influence and became more cosmopolitan in population. Gambrel roofs are known to have existed throughout the English colonies, and they continue to exist there in even greater quantities than in New York. Today, most architectural historians agree that the gambrel roof crosses ethnic boundaries and cannot be attributed to any one settlement group, or to settlement-era architecture for that matter.

The roof type begins to appear in the last half of the eighteenth century, seemingly most often in the maritime areas of the northeast, Hudson Valley included, and appears to have been popular more for functional and technological considerations -- increasing interior space and roof span -- than for aesthetic expression or cultural identification. The gambrel roof did assume different proportions in different regions and in different applications. The Dutch in the Albany region designed the roof differently than elsewhere in the Hudson Valley. The tall, steep pitch of the lower planes and shorter, flatter upper planes of the Teller House coincide with the tradition of narrow floor plans in Schenectady houses and the taste for pointed gable roofs. This is similar to what occurred throughout Albany County and is quite unlike the gambrel roofs conceived for the culturally ambiguous stone houses of Ulster County or houses deeper in plan in southern New York. Another important factor in the consideration of gambrel-roofed houses is that they were typically not oriented with their ends to the street. Thus, when they were introduced to Schenectady, as well as elsewhere, their long side became the front, dramatically changing the traditional appearance of the streetscape. Gambrel-roof houses did not replace their more common gable-roof cousins. In fact, they were unusual in their period, probably representing the avant garde of the wealthy classes in the community.

The traditional one and one-half story gable-roof house, with its gable either facing on or away from the street, continued to be the house of choice in Schenectady for the entire eighteenth century. The house could vary in many ways. It could range in size, from the small house of a poor laborer to the more
spacious abode of a merchant or proprietor. The houses could have additional rooms in wings (which could provide two fronts for the house on a corner lot), outbuildings (summer kitchens) or second stories. Materials could range from rough planks to planed and beaded weatherboards to stone or brick. The quality of masonry could vary from rubble to cut stone or in the degree of brick patterning; and wood houses had options of paint colors and decorations. Levels of interior decoration, measured by the size of the characteristic ceiling beams, details of window and door trim, amount of window glass and extent of furnishings also helped make distinctions within the house type. While most of the houses were fundamentally the same, they all differed through subtle variations familiar to those living in them.

The gambrel roof was a dramatic departure from the gable roof, but it was more traditional than the other house form that appeared in Schenectady in the same period: the two-story side-gable townhouse, either with three bays and a side entrance or five bays with a central entrance. This introduction of formal, Renaissance architecture into the Schenectady skyline represented the maturing of the colonial culture, its declining provincialism, the beginning of the end of ethnic homogeneity as a defining point of a community, and the emergence of a broader mutual identity for the American colonies. It would, in part, be through the adoption of a more uniform architectural typology that the coalescing new nation would universalize its experience and integrate it with contemporary European culture. This architectural process was interrupted briefly because other, more violent changes took place to secure the place of the American colonies in the rapidly changing social organization of the Western World.

SCHENECTADY AND THE REVOLUTION

No sooner did the hostilities with the French and the Indians subside than the colonists entered into their struggle for independence from the English. The costs, both economic and political, of subservience to a distant government became too onerous for many to support any longer. The history of the American Revolution does not need to be recited here other than in regards to the impact it had on Schenectady and its development. In light of the town’s still vulnerable location, it may be considered remarkable that it escaped any direct consequence of the
rebellion. The war came close to its doorstep. The Mohawk Valley was subject to Indian and Tory raids as exiles loyal to the British tried to regain their lands and estates as well as cause havoc in the Continental Army's "bread basket." With skirmishes occurring at Cherry Valley, Johnstown and Stone Arabia, the British advanced as near as Oriskany on the west and Saratoga on the north. Because of its location, Schenectady served effectively as a supply depot for the rebel troops and a hospital; many of its citizens participated in the struggle for independence. However, after being harassed, massacred and burned-out during the previous century, the town escaped the colony's biggest crisis unscathed. Other than bringing settlement and development to a standstill for a little more than a decade, the war brought no notable change during this period other than setting the stage for the dramatic changes that followed.

SCHENECTADY AFTER THE REVOLUTION, 1785-1825

The forty years between 1785 and 1825 included some of Schenectady's most exciting achievements and greatest disappointments. As with all old colonial towns throughout the new republic, complicated changes occurred to address the need to create new governments (Schenectady was chartered as a city in 1798), economic systems and political interrelationships. The need to restructure traditional communities to conform to the new network of regional, state and national relationships contributed mightily to the demise of provincialism and to a growing conformity in town planning and architecture. The revolutionary struggle itself helped this unification, as people from all walks of life joined in the enthusiasm of the age with its heady promise of individualism, democracy and equality. In the years immediately following the war, everyone pitched in to help get business in the new nation off the ground. Clearly, winning the war had left an enormous undertaking, but one reason it worked as smoothly as it did was that the demands of the expanding nation still exceeded the ability of its systems to supply them. More of everything was needed, and it was needed more quickly and in more places.

Schenectady's position as a transportation and market center before the Revolution was even more important afterwards. Westward expansion continued at an increased rate following the war as people resumed a concern for their own
aspirations and additional Iroquois lands were opened to settlement in central and western New York. The Mohawk Valley was all the more crucial as a transportation corridor. One of the first things to occur was efforts to further improve the water route. Historian Austin A. Yates describes what happened:

General Philip Schuyler, that far-seeing statesman of Revolutionary fame, who as major-general rendered his country invaluable services in her most trying periods, who had been United States senator and was then surveyor-general of the State of New York, succeeded in forming a corporate body known as the "Inland Lock Navigation Company," of which body many citizens of Schenectady and vicinity were members. With such capital, General Schuyler, under his immediate supervision and direction, constructed a dam and sluice, or short canal, at Wood Creek, uniting it with the navigable waters of the Mohawk; and also built a short canal and several locks at Little Falls; in both cases obviating portage, or the necessity of unloading the vessels. Those works were completed in 1795, and from that date, or soon thereafter, those enterprising forwarders erected additional wharves, docks and large storehouses on the main Bennekill, and the commerce of Schenectady, with the increased facilities of navigating the Mohawk, was largely extended.32

At this time, a larger boat, called a Durham, which had the carrying capacity of fifteen to twenty, was introduced to the local flotilla. The Durham was constructed on the lines of a canal boat, with a flat bottom, decks fore and aft, and a large open cargo bay midships (fig. 8). To match its substantially larger capacity, the Durham required more power, using a larger sail and more men to pole and pull.

The expanding Mohawk traffic had a big impact on the appearance of the old town, where everything expanded, too. Along the edge of the Bennekill, the stockade was finally ripped down and replaced with warehouses and wharves extending west from Washington Street, where trading houses had already assumed a dominating presence. Regretably, no pictorial record has been found that gives a factual image of the town in this important period; and all physical evidence has been lost. By comparing various published accounts, it can be deduced that businesses were centered in the "West End," along Washington Avenue, with warehouses and wharves behind on the Bennekill. Following the war, these trading concerns were no longer solely of local ownership, but included many

32Yates, pp. 122-123.
New York City firms, some with offices worldwide. Joining the Glens and the Yateses in commerce were New York City traders like Stephen N. Bayard and Jonathan Walton. International trading houses, such as Findlay & Elias or John Duncan & Company had offices in Schenectady, as well as in London, Montreal and Detroit. The presence of all this trade encouraged stores and related services to proliferate. Today, Washington Avenue's dignified residences belie its heyday as Schenectady's thriving Main Street. At the close of the eighteenth century, we would have seen multistoried commercial structures, most of them following the traditional front-gabled forms, but with an increasing number of flatter-roofed side-gable edifices that would become so common in the coming years.

Nineteenth Century
The Mohawk Bridge

In 1809, Washington Avenue was opened up on its north end with the construction of the remarkable Mohawk Bridge. The 900' four-span wooden suspension bridge is one of Schenectady's lost historic structures worthy of mention here. It succeeded where its planned predecessor, a double-span wooden suspension bridge did not; that overly-ambitious bridge collapsed during construction in the previous year. Designed by bridge engineer Thomas Burr, the four-span replacement relied on three enormous 1' x 3' wood "cables" fabricated by layering 4" x 12" planks 14 feet long.33 Roadways were suspended by iron hangers bolted through the cables; they ran in-between the three cables, creating two divided lanes for traffic. As the bridge aged and the cable began to sag, stone piers were built underneath to bolster the spans, giving the bridge the look of a string of small covered bridges. It is believed that the enclosures came later, explaining the patchwork appearance that survives in period photographs, and that originally only the cables were roofed for protection from the weather. The bridge was built to connect Schenectady with the new Mohawk Turnpike to Utica, the western terminus.

Front Street, between Washington and Ferry (from whence it "dwindled to a

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33Roberts, pp. 121-128.
cow path"), also transformed with the increased demand for more bateaux and the bigger boats of the Durham class. Just as the wharves on the Binnekill grew once the city was freed from the stockade, boatyards would have begun to appear on the Mohawk at north Front Street. They were serviced on a strand along the river, giving more direct access to the work yards there. According to Yates, Schenectady’s boats were commissioned for other lakes and waterways in the north country. He wrote that it was not uncommon to see "twenty-five to 100 boats on the stocks at the boat yards...The boats that conveyed the army of General Wilkinson down the St. Lawrence [during the War of 1812] were all built at this place."34 The boat builders, notably the Van Slycks, Veeders and Peeks, were also residents of Front Street. Unlike Washington Avenue, Front Street has remained fairly stable functionally throughout the stockade’s physical and social fluctuations. Consequently, a number of eighteenth-century houses remain, providing an indication of the changing look of the community. Today, we can identify the transition from the seventeenth-century front-gable prototype, through the introduction of the gambrel roof and the orderly, balanced facade of the Renaissance designs of the mid-eighteenth century, to the trim, neoclassical reinterpretations of these conventional forms and ornament at the turn of the century.35

From the perspective of traders and transporters in Schenectady, the marked annual increase in business and the civic improvements that it facilitated were most fortuitous. Their success contributed to a general prosperity in the town. Farmers had new markets for their grain; mills and breweries were busy; laborers found a demand for their work; tavern keepers had many travellers to keep them active; and tradespeople found a ready market for their goods. Traffic between Schenectady and Albany, having begun with packhorses, was facilitated by carts and wagons on the new turnpikes to Albany and Troy. By the opening of the nineteenth century, the livelihoods of at least 300 of Schenectady’s families

34Yates, p. 121.

35Research and tour literature about the Stockade provide well-illustrated references to the range of architecture there. The Stockade Association and Schenectady County Historical Society, which is located on Washington Avenue in the Stockade, have most of this material on hand, as does the Schenectady Urban Cultural Park Visitor’s Center. Recently, the Colonial Schenectady Project has published a new walking tour brochure that brings the Stockade’s architectural history up to date.
depended on the transportation of goods between the two places. By all accounts, it was a heady and prosperous era for the little inland port. In the early nineteenth century, it appeared that as long as westward growth continued and the new nation's economy continued to build, the old town had unlimited prospects. However, a few things happened that eventually stalled Schenectady's skyrocket. First, the War of 1812 caused a serious interruption in trade throughout the state, not to mention the threat of violence once more. Then, more devastating than any effect of the war, a sweeping fire destroyed the wharf area of the village in 1819. The final blow to Schenectady's prominence as a Mohawk River port was the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, which corrected the flaws of the Mohawk's course and current and finally allowed boats to pass directly into the Hudson River. Schenectady became just another stop along the way and fell into the shadow of its mother city, Albany, once again.

The Great Fire of 1819

In November 1819, fire virtually wiped out the business core of Schenectady. It began in Isaac Haight's curry shop on Water Street and spread to the warehouses and businesses on Washington Avenue and along the Binnekill. Travelling east from there, it consumed most of the buildings along State, Union and Front up to the west side of Church, leaving much of the stockade area in ashes. One Schenectady newspaper, the Cabinet reported that the number of buildings destroyed, including barns and outhouses, numbered about 160, of which at least ninety were houses, stores and offices. Not only did it cause an enormous setback for a number of businesses and hardships for many families, but it forever altered the face of the expanding urban community.

At the same time, the Erie Canal was being planned to connect the Hudson River with the Great Lakes in the largest civil project ever attempted in the United States at the time. The city's merchants had been lobbying for routing the

36 Sanders, p. 244.
37 Schenectady Cabinet, Nov. 24, 1819; reprinted in Yates, p. 154.
38 Sanders, p. 243.
Schenectady section so that it would enter the Mohawk at the Binnekill rather than where it ultimately joined the river farther downstream. This would have kept the businesses already involved in the Mohawk River trade aligned to the new waterway. After the fire's destructive work, there was little to dissuade the canal planners from following their preferred route bypassing the creek. When the canal opened in 1825, it slashed diagonally through the late eighteenth century portion of the grid south of College Street, leaving the old stockade cut off from the rest of the city. Although the area rebuilt, its days as a commercial entrepôt and focal point of the city were over; houses, rather than stores, offices and warehouses, dominated the scene.

The Erie Canal and changes in the city's plan

Nicholas Swits's map of Schenectady, drawn in 1830, provides an informative depiction of the city just after the canal was constructed (fig. 10). The stockade area, increasingly referred to as the city's "west side," is situated at the top of the map. The stockade was finally taken down after the Revolutionary War, along with the remains of the old fort, located between Front, Green and Ferry streets. The fort was dismantled during the war and its logs used to construct barracks, which were also gone by the time of the Swits map. Washington, Church and Ferry streets had been extended from Front Street to the river. The status of the boatyards is not clear at this point, but it would seem that business would have been curtailed with the advent of the canal and its specialized boats. (Curiously, in spite of the high reputation of its boatbuilders, Schenectady yards are not known to have refitted to produce canalboats.) The 1760 addition to the plan, contained by State, Ferry, Green and College streets, remained intact with the addition of Liberty Street between State and Union and the canal cutting through its southeast corner. In the seventy years in between the two maps, the grid had advanced only two blocks east, adding Maiden Lane and Jay Street/Fonda Street. At this point, Schenectady's population had not multiplied unduly. Other items of interest are that Union College had relocated to its present property on Prospect Hill, new turnpikes to Albany and Troy are so identified, the poor pasture became a fixture on the flats east of the city along the river, and a cotton factory had appeared in Veeder's Hollow along with a string of workers' houses. Also, fig. 10 A
fig. 10
A Map of the Limits prescribed for the City of Schenectady...
Surveyed
March 1830 per Nicholas Swits.
(from a copy in the City History Center)
cemeteries were plotted in the Alms House Lot on a hill south of the city.

Architecture in the canal period

Following the Fire of 1819 and the construction of the Erie Canal, the city shifted its focus away from the river and towards Clinton’s Ditch. The rebuilding of warehouses and trading firms took place along the canal, between State and Front streets. State Street, which had already been trade-oriented as the terminus of the Albany Road, became the new commercial axis in its sections closest to the canal, between Church Street and Maiden Lane. Photographs from the 1860’s and 1870’s show streetscapes as they would have begun to develop in the 1830’s: two- and three-story, wide-front brick buildings with low-pitch, side-gable roofs in contiguous rows forming uniform walls at the sidewalk. They were designed in the then-common plain brick facades relieved by stone lintels and sills and restrained cornice ornament. Fire walls protruded above the roof lines carrying chimneys that rose yet further. Ground levels contained storefronts with large display windows, often covered by deep wooden awnings extending fully across the sidewalk to the street. Upper stories had regularly spaced sash-window bays that roughly aligned with those in connecting buildings. The overall design of these buildings ranged from the crisp restraint of the dwindling neoclassical taste to the trabeated features of the increasingly popular Grecian mode.

Along the canal, more functional architecture was the norm. Many of the warehouses would have maintained the gable-front barn-like forms of their Binnekill predecessors, especially the wooden ones, although the larger flatter-roofed brick industrial forms would appear in increasing numbers until the traditional type was finally replaced. Since Schenectady was no longer stockpiling and trading in consumer goods to the degree it once was, much of the new construction was oriented to manufacturing enterprises or canal-related services of a more local nature. The 1850 Dripps Map of Schenectady not only shows how intensively State Street developed in the twenty-five years following the opening of the canal, but also shows the nature and distribution of businesses along its route (fig. 11). The section densest with warehousing is close to State Street. Flanking it on the west are grain and plaster mills and an undescribed
Map of the City of Schenectady
published by M. Dripps, 1850
(from an original in City History Center)
manufactory; on the east are a foundry, a lumberyard, and a hollow-ware furnace. Beyond that is a dry dock, an expected canal feature.

The most important intersection in town was State Street at the canal. Washington Avenue did not wither away; it was still the route leading across the river to Glenville. But, referring again to the Dripps Map, the density of the city plan in this section did not increase north of Church Street. The scale of buildings remained small and domestic. A small, one and one-half-story, frame store that survived on the corner of State and Washington long enough to be photographed, when compared to the substantial, brick commercial rows just a block east, indicates the degree to which this area found itself on the fringe of redevelopment. Newer nineteenth-century houses were introduced along Washington Avenue, as well as on Union and Front -- some detached, some in rows -- which secured the transition of the neighborhood into a residential enclave. Its novelty probably attracted newcomers who, together with the more established landowners (some which were descendants of the original proprietors), rebuilt the stockade area with respectable, often substantial buildings. One holdout to the earlier age built and operated a broom factory on the Binnekill at the bridge. Brooms were a popular commodity in the region, with many farmers growing a special broom corn for that purpose; this factory appears to have been the only one in the city limits at the time.

Industry in the canal period

Schenectady's reputation as a transportation and trading center was, in part, a factor of its meager industrial development during the canal era. Only one manufacturing venture is prominent. In 1812, Garret S. Veedcr conveyed land and water rights to the Schenectady Manufacturing Company, upstream from his mill located at the foot of Pleasant Valley.40 Archibald Craig, who had converted the century-old flour mill on Mill Lane in the Stockade to produce cotton yarn, formed Schenectady Manufacturing and broadened his operation to include weaving with the expansion. In those days, Pleasant Valley (now the route of I-890) was known as Cotton Factory Hollow and, based on Swits's 1830 map of

40William B. Efner, "Homespun Days or the Transition of Industry from Home to Factory," read before the Schenectady County Historical Society, Schenectady. 11 October 1938; typescript in the Efner Collection, City History Center, City Hall, Schenectady NY.
Schenectady, included worker housing along the north rim of the gorge. The 1835 New York State Census documents the singularity of this venture, listing the following industries for the city.

12 gristmills
29 sawmills
4 fulling mills
4 carding mills
1 oil mill
1 cotton factory
3 ironworks
1 ashery
9 tanneries
1 brewery

From this record, there is little to indicate that manufacturing played a significant role in Schenectady’s economy in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

The Mohawk and Hudson Railroad
The introduction of steamboats on the Hudson in 1807 increased expectations for both speed and reliability in transportation. About this time, James Duane’s English son-in-law, George W. Featherstonhaugh, began to promote the idea of land-based steam-powered transportation between Schenectady and Albany. The reality of railroading took nearly twenty more years to come to fruition, but thanks to Featherstonhaugh’s persistence and position, Schenectady boasts as having been the source of the first steam railroad in the nation. He and his partner, Stephen Van Rensselaer (through whose land much of the line was to extend) were granted a charter from the state legislature in 1826 on the weight of the importance of linking New York’s two great waterways; it was argued that the volume of freight that was then being transported would provide a good test of the practicality of rail transportation. While the railroad is best remembered as a passenger line because of all the pictures commemorating its inaugural run, it is significant that it was by-in-large justified in its charter application for its potential in facilitating the growing western trade.

When the sixteen-mile long Mohawk and Hudson Railroad finally began

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41Cited in William B. Efner, "Schenectady - The Beginning of the Factory System in the City," a typescript of a lecture, Efner Collection, City History Center.

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carrying passengers in 1832 (no freight was transported in the first year), from the top of Prospect Hill in Schenectady to the top of Lydius Street in the western suburbs of Albany, it took a little more than a half-hour to make the trip. Initially, travellers transferred to horse-drawn stages at hilltop terminals to enter the core of the villages; later they were shuttled to the low-lying riversides by gravity railroads; by 1841, the line was rerouted in Schenectady so that the train could reach a depot on State Street under power of its locomotive.\textsuperscript{42} The opening of the Erie Canal in the years intervening the conception and the realization of the project diminished much of the impact of the Hudson-Mohawk line as a freight route. However in 1839, the company claimed a sizeable profit and the following assets in its annual report:

- 24 “gothic” coaches with a seating capacity of 20 passengers each (at a cost of $800 per coach)
- 15 coaches (presumably plainer and less costly)
- 5 baggage wagons (2 of them “old”)
- 35 covered freight wagons
- 46 “hulk” wagons (probably meaning “bulk” or hopper cars)
- 15 stake wagons (for maintenance)
- 32 balance wagons for the inclined planes (15 in Albany and 17 in Schenectady)

In addition to its depot, the company owned nine buildings containing thirteen tenements, which were occupied by the superintendent and working men, as well as lots on the canal basin. Freight earned the company virtually no profit, but passenger service -- collecting 153,100 first class and 13,600 second class fares in 1839 -- profited nicely.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Other Railroads}

A second rail line was opened in 1832, a year after the Mohawk and Hudson, connecting Schenectady with Saratoga Springs. It was made possible by the construction of a new lift bridge at Church Street, and established the first passenger connection with the developing spa as well as a freight connection to

\textsuperscript{42}Monroe, p. 221
\textsuperscript{43}Mitchell, pp. 150-152.
the canal. Additional rail links were made in rapid succession. In 1835, the Utica and Schenectady Railroad was built, also using the Mohawk bridge across the river. A line to Troy was completed in 1843. In 1853, these three lines consolidated with other regional lines to form the New York Central Railroad. New York Central’s main competitor in the area, the Delaware & Hudson Railroad, was linked with the city in 1873 by the Schenectady-Duanesburg Railroad, which joined with the Albany and Susquehanna. So, even if the canal robbed the city of some of its lustre as a central place, the proliferation of railroads, which soon eclipsed the waterway as the freight and passenger carrier of preference, helped keep Schenectady moving ahead in this period.

City development after the railroads

The railroads had a significant impact on Schenectady’s plan in the nineteenth century. To make the descent into the city, the Albany and Schenectady was rerouted to enter from the far side of Mont Pleasant, then undeveloped farm- and woodland in the Town of Rotterdam. Once around the hill, the train crossed the city limits from the west, running parallel and south of the Erie Canal to a depot on State Street, located approximately where the train station is today. From there, it joined the Utica and Schenectady Railroad and, crossing over the river, continued west along the north side. By 1850, a new bridge for the line was constructed that spanned the river from a point just east of College street. That crossing still exists today. The Utica and Schenectady Railroad Company put their maintenance yard near the crossing between the tracks and John Street (see fig 11). The line to Troy branched off from this trunk at Union Street to follow the river and the canal east out of the city. In doing so, it veered diagonally across Fonda, Romeyn (now Jay) and Park streets, just clipping the northeast corner of the new Union College campus. Finally, the route to Duanesburg began parallel to the Albany line but continued westerly as the New York Central tracks turned south around Mont Pleasant and followed the southern edge of the Great Flats towards its destination. As a result, the railroads pared up the city, reinforcing the rifts created by the canal and establishing others.

Rail routes never created prime residential real estate, and where the trains ran in the city, the neighborhoods developed either as industrial, commercial or
lower-class residential zones. Like the canal, the trains created new industrial zones, which were ultimately to bring a tremendous benefit to Schenectady, but they further isolated the old stockade area and contributed to its continued decline as the city center. The trains and the industry they brought spurred growth out from the old part of the city, leaving the stockade area on the fringe where it atrophied for a while. Dripps's 1850 map of the city shows its gradual growth southward. More new streets emanated from State Street to connect with Union Street. The developing canal/rail transportation corridor also began to stretch the city to the east and west. Commercial development continued south along State Street, but the most dramatic growth was in new residential areas south of Maiden Lane. Unfortunately, very little of the mid-nineteenth century architecture in this area has survived successive redevelopments. Scattered examples of the more ornate mid-century design taste still exist east of Union (Jay, Barrett and Warren streets) and west of State (Hamilton Street). Aside from the survival of new construction and renovations from this period in the stockade area, Schenectady is quite devoid of architectural evidence from this era.

The Schenectady Locomotive Works

The railroads introduced heavy industry to Schenectady in a more direct way. Soon after the appearance of this rail system in the city, The Norris Brothers, who were manufacturers of locomotives in Philadelphia, opened a works in Schenectady. In 1849, they began to build an engine called the "Lightning," which was to revolutionize railroad locomotion; but it failed, taking the company with it.44 Local stockholders stepped in and the works came under the direction of master mechanic John Ellis, who produced the McQueen, one of the most serviceable engines of the era. With the success of the McQueen and susequent engines, the Schenectady Locomotive Works became one of the nation's leading producers. Other railroad businesses opened in Schenectady in this period, notably the Jones Car Works, which was a branch of its Green Island factory. There was also the Gilbert Car Works.

Merging under the American Locomotive Company in 1901, the engine works were a mainstay of Schenectady's growing population and economy for over a

44Yates, p. 173.
century. At the time of the merger, Alco was Schenectady’s largest employer with over 4000 men, although the primacy of that number was to be later eclipsed by the ballooning General Electric labor force.\textsuperscript{45} The locomotive works were always located on the east side of town, beginning on Fonda (or Jay) Street and gradually expanding north into the old pasture area along the river (see fig. 11). As such, they could claim most of the residential areas that developed east of Union Street and later, Nott Street, as their own.

**Westinghouse’s farm implement works**

George Westinghouse, Sr., (the father of the air-brake inventor) moved his farm-machinery shop from Central Bridge in the Schoharie Valley to Schenectady in 1856, contributing to the city’s growing industrial activity. He located his new works on the canal and the section of Washington Avenue then west of State Street leading to Rotterdam. The basis of his business was a threshing machine of his own invention, which sold in great quantities with westward expansion. The canal and the railroad were instrumental in his success. Nowhere near the size of the locomotive works, Westinghouse was nevertheless a sizeable employer (the second largest in the city). At its peak, the firm employed a few hundred workers.

**Labor: early immigration into Schenectady: the Irish and Germans**

The growth of industry and the labor forces it required brought new people into the city by the thousands. Earlier, the sources of population growth were local rural areas or other sections of the country, particularly New England and New York City. Towards the middle part of the century, increasing numbers of people were arriving directly from Europe. The first immigrants were the Irish, who came to build the canal and the railroads and then to work in their operation. British immigration was usually taken for granted since the newcomers spoke English and usually had long-standing familial ties in the former colony. Nevertheless, the Irish came to fill a laboring role that had not been in such demand until the American economy became diversified and industrialized. Prior to the Irish, the Blacks filled these menial jobs, but more were needed. The Irish

\textsuperscript{45}The Second Annual Industrial Directory of New York State for 1913, (Albany: State Department of Labor, 1915).
soon became a fixture in the city. Many also worked in the locomotive and agricultural implement works.

In the 1850's, Schenectady became a destination for many of the tens-of-thousands of Germans emigrating from their strife-torn fatherland seeking decent livelihoods. Many gravitated to farms in the west, but equally many joined the population of the industrial cities. Urban Germans tended to have skills in commerce or crafts and entered both factories and shops. Some of the earliest German speakers to arrive in Schenectady were Jewish peddlers who were working the canal in the 1840's; as others Jews came, they worked as clothiers, grocers, butchers, merchants and tailors.46

Blacks in Schenectady

Blacks have always played a significant role in the New York labor force. During colonial times, both as slaves and as free men and women, Blacks performed many of the skilled tasks of rural and urban occupations. In the country, they were farmhands, dairy workers, builders, smithies and millwrights; in the cities: carters, peddlers, domestics, laborers and more. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Blacks numbered more than 15% of New York's population. By the time of the 1790 census, this proportion had dropped to 7.6% statewide, but Schenectady still counted Blacks as nearly 12% of its population.47 Although the city's growth at that point may not have been as dramatic as the state's overall, its commercial economy required a good amount of labor for which the Blacks were qualified, such as curriers, carters, boatbuilders, boatmen warehousemen, and domestics. In 1836, the minister of the Reformed Dutch church made his own census of the city's Blacks and listed 259 persons in forty-three families. Of these people, eighty-nine had been slaves (emancipation had occurred in New York in 1827). Based on this survey, the accuracy of which can be questioned, the Black population had declined both in number and proportion. In the 1850 census, all the Blacks enumerated were identified as laborers with the

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exception of one clerk, a barber, two cooks, a clothier and a driver, indicating a decided drop in their job status.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{The social organization of the city in the mid-nineteenth century}

It is not clear where these immigrant groups concentrated themselves. The original Jewish settlement is said to have been in the block defined by Ferry, Front, College and Union streets; later, they moved to Broadway and Center Street west of State.\textsuperscript{49} Whether Christian Germans also gravitated here is not known. Likewise, an Irish neighborhood has yet to be identified for this antebellum period. The Blacks had a church on Jay Street, although it is not clear that they lived in this area of the city. As incoming, lower-class populations, we could guess that the immigrants stayed close to factory and commercial areas along the canal and railroad where they worked and where living costs would have been cheaper. Based on the size and elaboration of houses in the core of the old stockade, it appears that wealthier and better-established parts of the population lived there, except perhaps for the older, plainer houses along Front Street. The well-to-do seem to have moved into newer residential areas flanking State Street south of the downtown. However, as the city was expanding eastward along the Albany Road, the extreme fringe of the city may have been initially settled by the poorer classes, living in shanties before more organized development took place. While the city plan remained relatively compact, there is no particular evidence of discrete ethnic neighborhoods forming at this date.

The 1866 Beers Atlas does not indicate much development within the city in the sixteen years since the Dripps depiction, other than a few new streets off of State and Union streets and a noticeable increase in houses along Lafayette Street and Veeders Avenue (fig. 12). By 1866, tight rows of buildings were appearing on both the turnpike and the old road to Albany. Crescent Park is delineated on the new map where it is undefined on the previous one. According to historic subdivision records in county and municipal archives, lots had been plotted along the south side of Veeders Avenue on lands labeled as the “African Cemetery” on Sand Hill; and just south of there, Henry Ramsay had surveyed lots in the area.

\textsuperscript{48}All these statistics taken from Reynolds’s article.

\textsuperscript{49}Yetwin, p. 16.
Map of Schenectady, 1866
(from Boer's Atlas of Schenectady County, N.Y.)
containing Summit and Germania avenues between Albany and Hamilton streets.50 Over on the Union Street side of the vale that separated the routes to Albany and Troy, a subdivision of 107 lots was made by Robert Miller in 1852 on lands west of the old Niskayuna Road, formerly belonging to Union College. Prospect Street was added to the map, along with, farther to the south, DeGraff and Irving streets (shown but not labeled) and Paulding and Walnut streets (not shown).51 Based on the small lot sizes and the architecture that eventually appeared in both these areas, it would appear that the intent was to provide affordable lots to accommodate Schenectady's growing work force.

Vale Cemetery

Another important development occurred in the vale mentioned above. Even though it is not evident on the 1866 Beers map, in 1857 a new cemetery was opened in the wooded area south of Nott Street where the old Coehorne Creek entered the city. Yates describes it as follows:

Far beyond the compact part of the city was a beautiful glen, that at the early part of the century was the best partridge feeding and homing ground anywhere near here. After long dispute, the Vale, as it was called and known, was selected [for the site of a new cemetery]. It was purchased by a cemetery association of which the late Edward Rosa was the moving spirit. The lovely brook was halted into a succession of miniature lakes and the whole ground laid out and formally opened and dedicated in 1857.52

In the same passage, Yates relates the fate of a Revolutionary War burial ground that was discovered at about the same time by workmen digging to extend Lafayette Street from Liberty to Union. The area had reputedly been the site of an army hospital. The remains of about fifty-seven men were found on the spot and moved to the new cemetery in the vale.53

50City History Center, Map Files, "Map of lots for the City of Schenectady on land formerly the African Cemetery," 1861, Item 43d; hereafter referred to as City Map Files.

51City Map Files, "107 Building Lots Part of the Estate of Robert Miller, Esq., in the 4th Ward of Schenectady," Item 43e.

52Yates, pp. 190-191.

53Yates, p. 191.
Gradual and deliberate growth into the 1880's

In 1880 a new atlas was published for the city (fig. 13).^54 By comparing it to the 1866 Beers map (fig. 12), the city's growth in the intervening period can be measured: most visible is the persistent expansion to the south. The Rotterdam border is tight on the west side of the city, pressuring expansion in other directions. At this time, there would have been no urban development envisioned beyond the city limits. A new subdivision is dotted in among the railroad's tentacles (the Duanesburg line of the D & H line appeared for the first time on this map) at city's edge northwest of Centre Street. This was plotted by Garrett Veeder, whose family had controlled Cotton Factory Hollow real estate since the seventeenth century. West of the hollow, in an open space at the southwest corner of the city, was the Chrisler farm. On the east side of Schenectady, the boundary extended well past the built-up part of the city to include what was mostly still farmland. G.W. Van Vranken had laid out some streets east of Nott Street and the Union College grounds (Van Vranken Avenue and avenues A, B, and C) and created lots for housing; the area has become known as Goose Hill. Its proximity to the locomotive works pointed growing housing needs in that direction. This overall map of the city belies the bucolic tranquility of the city's east side, because the detail maps for this zone (keyed as "P" and "Q") reveal that, even though the space remained open, it had already been parceled off to speculators.

Paigeville

One of these parcels, just south of the Van Vranken subdivision on Nott Street, was owned by the estate of Judge Alonzo Paige. The 1866 Beers map identified him as the owner of a suburban house or farm there; it later became the Northern Plot of the Schenectady Realty Company. The Paige family speculated in Schenectady real estate and laid out one of the city's most important developments on Sand Hill (now Hamilton Hill) between Hamilton Street and Cotton Factory Hollow. Recorded with the city in 1869, "Paigeville," as it was then called, appears on the 1880 map in the outlined area containing Summit,

Mumford, Paige, Schermerhorn and Hamilton streets. By 1880, Paigeville was still only spottily developed. Interestingly, most of the lots showing buildings in the more detailed Map G of the atlas were owned by Paige, suggesting that, at least initially, houses were built either on speculation or for tenants. By the end of the century, this plot was to become Schenectady’s principal German neighborhood.

The east side of State Street was also mapped out by this time, adding a series of streets up to the edge of Vale Cemetery, which is clearly delineated along with the adjoining Catholic Cemetery (which must have been planned to accept the burials from the old Catholic Cemetery on Hamilton Street at Summit) and a separate Methodist Cemetery opposite its entrance on State Street. Typical of the period, the old burial grounds were considered a health hazard as well as a waste of valuable real estate. Their relocation farther south reflects local planning; however, it also illustrates Schenectady’s inability to predict its own future extent. Apparently, the city was not expected to expand much beyond Brandywine Avenue. On the east side of the cemetery, the area of Miller’s 107 building lots is also more clearly defined than it was in 1866. Note that Eastern Avenue is called Liberty Street at this time.

South of Paigeville, the map shows an area plotted with streets such as Vrooman, Stanley, and Emmett prior to their development. This was county property; home to the fairgrounds and racetrack at the northern, and the poor house and its farm at the southern end. Perhaps the most dramatic development on this map was the large parcel south of Brandywine Ave, that broke through the city boundary into the Town of Rotterdam. Robert Furman, one of the city’s best-connected businessmen, railroad promoters and politicians, charted the largest subdivision that had yet been proposed. Doubtless, he, more than any other, understood and anticipated Schenectady’s potential for growth in this period, and he was also savvy enough to reap the eventual benefits.

Architecture after 1850

As in previous eras, there are two gauges to changes in the city’s architecture. One is the alteration to existing buildings and replacements within existing

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55 Schenectady County Historical Society, Nineteenth Century Map File, “Map of lots belonging to heirs of Alonzo Paige, lying in the 5th Ward of Schenectady,” Oct. 1, 1869; hereafter the repository will be referred to as SCHS.
neighborhoods, and the other is entirely new areas of development. In the first instance, we can look to the old stockade area, or rather the entire zone north of the canal including State Street, and see the layers of three-dimensional, Renaissance-revival ornament applied to older, cleaner neoclassical and Grecian buildings. Of course, in the aftermath of the 1861 fire, many of the buildings were new or substantially rebuilt. Ironically, this increased articulation of roof-lines, entryways and fenestration provided the old neighborhood with a cultural dignity and pretention of age. Never mind if the place itself was 200 years old at the time.

State Street, north of Maiden Lane, experienced a similar transformation. There are Civil War-era photographs of this section showing what are clearly early nineteenth-century buildings elaborated with more recent and robust cornices, window lintels and storefronts. The block of State Street between Maiden Lane (which became Center Street and is now Broadway) and Lafayette obviously changed from a residential to a commercial use, based on the difference between Dripps’s 1850 depiction and Beers’s in 1866 (figs. 11 & 12). Other than photographs of this stretch of State Street (if they exist), there is nothing to tell of this change since it has changed again since then -- a couple of times. The canal-based industries also built up in this period; again, photographs are our only reference. These were plain, functional structures, but significant nonetheless in the context of their types and functions. Mostly brick construction, they were large, boxy and well-engineered, gaining architectural interest from their clean forms, expansive wall and roof planes, and precise patterns of windows and doorways. A good example from this period of factory architecture is the Westinghouse farm-implement works for which numerous photographs survive. Most of those show the new GE shops in the background, giving a good indication of their place in the ever-increasing scale of industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

New developments in housing are difficult to represent conclusively, since the 1850-1880 vintage domestic architecture has become equally overwhelmed by the huge wash of houses that came later. Aside from new houses in the stockade and in sections of the already established residential zone between Broadway and Lafayette (where examples only survive now on Union and Hamilton streets), the vast majority of new housing was built for the working class. The upper classes
built usually of brick and in a range from the grand Italianate Ellis mansion, at Union Street and Nott Terrace, to more modest attached and detached townhouses, such as can be found on Hamilton and Smith below Veeder. These houses had the pronounced Picturesque taste for Romantic revival features from Britain and Italy but, not yet, from the city’s Holland roots. Farther up Albany Street, past Veeder, there are still some small commercial buildings surviving from this period, although one needs to look for them; and back in and along Summit, Germania and Paige streets, a smaller two-story, front-gable house form, built in wood, can be found that preceded the rows of later two-family dwellings that now dominate the streetscapes there. This type appears to be the architectural norm for the lower end of the socio-economic ladder, a village vernacular applied in the urban-industrial context as affordable housing. These houses can be found in older residential areas of the city along Strong Street and the Factory Vale, along what’s left of the east end of Broadway, on Front Street near the canal and around the old locomotive works.

Sixty years following the opening of the Erie Canal, rather than experience economic ruin with the destruction of its monopoly on Mohawk River trade, the city was fortunate to ride railroading into the emerging industrial age with its dignity intact, if tattered. In spite of the morose conditions decried by its historians (some with the benefit of post-G.E. hindsight), the city had totally transformed in regard to business, population and plan. The Dutch oligarchy had disappeared. The new industries and businesses did not include them in their numbers. The old part of the city had been substantially damaged in two vicious fires in 1819 and 1861, and the new city taking form south of the canal attended little to the ancient histories of the stockade and the river trade. New people, from all parts of the nation and world came to Schenectady to find work there, changing and diversifying its face forever. New houses were in tremendous demand each year as the economy grew: and the city advanced to the east and south; its commercial and industrial core, squeezed along the tight canal/railroad corridor, became denser and more congested. Schenectady was starting to experience some growing pains. But this was only the beginning.
Twentieth Century

Edison General Electric Works

The Jones Car Works had gone into receivership and put its real estate up for sale in 1888. At the same time, the Edison Machine Works in New York City was looking to relocate, and Schenectady's transportation advantages and favorable property values made the Jones site attractive. Even so, it took the financial support of local subscribers to come up with the difference between the amount the receivers wanted and the price the Edison Company was willing to pay. The Edison Machine Works came to Schenectady to make electric light bulbs.

In 1914, historian Joel Henry Monroe provided this summary of the genesis of the General Electric Company:

About 1882 or 1883 Thomas A. Edison began the manufacture of electrical apparatus in New York City under the corporate name of the Edison Machine Works; the output consisted of Incandescent Lamps, Generators and Engines. Two years later the American Electric Company with Elihu Thomson as its head, established a factory at New Britain, Conn., for the manufacture of Arc Lamps, Generators, etc. The apparatus was crude and the output of the factories small compared with present day production, but it marked the beginning of a world-wide business, and a new era of manufacturing in the United States.

Later the Edison Machine Works was succeeded by the Edison [General] Electric Light Company which in 1886 established a manufacturing plant at Schenectady, N.Y. In 1882 the American Light Company was moved to Lynn, Mass., and was succeeded by the Thomson-Houston Electric Company. In 1892 a consolidation of the Edison General Electric and the Thomson-Houston Electric Companies was effected, the new company being known as the General Electric Company....

In 1892, when the consolidation of the great corporations took place Schenectady became the headquarters of one of the greatest manufacturing industries of the world -- in fact, of its line, the greatest of the world. From a few small buildings at the beginning in 1886 the plant has expanded into more than a hundred buildings, some of them the largest and best equipped of any industrial establishment in the United States. Also from a few hundred men employed in 1886 the number has increased yearly until in 1914 eighteen thousand are employed in the various departments of the plant, with a weekly payroll exceeding three hundred thousand dollars.

Electrified and vitalized by this power and the ever expanding

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56 Yates, pp. 194-195; Monroe dates it at 1886 (p. 277)
in institution in control Schenectady has grown from an almost silent way station to an energetic and progressive city. Thus for the second time in its history Schenectady is one of the important towns of the country. In the first period it was the city of ship commerce; now it is the Electric City. 57

General Electric brought change to Schenectady at a magnitude few cities ever experience. In 1914, more people worked at GE than had lived in the entire city before the company was created in 1902. The mail delivered just to GE in 1900 exceeded that delivered to the entire city in 1880. The magnitude of difference in the decade between 1890 and 1900 was mind boggling. But it was only minor to what was to occur by 1920. Census figures cite Schenectady's population as 31,682 in 1900; however, this number does not include the areas outside the city limits in Rotterdam and Niskayuna that were rapidly developing. 58 Yates estimated that the population of "greater" Schenectady (including parts of Rotterdam, Niskayuna and Glenville) was close to 60,000 by 1900. 59

The turn-of-the-century housing boom

Neither General Electric nor American Locomotive (Alco) owned or built company housing. The paternalistic model of the company town had largely run its course by this time and the corporations did not seem to want to take on the costs and complications of that much involvement in their workers' domestic life. (Of course, this led either directly or indirectly to employee unionization, but that is another story.) Thousands of new workers were left to their own devices to secure affordable housing; and dozens of speculators in real estate and house construction prospered. And, presumably because of the influence of the late nineteenth-century suburban movement, together with the fact that Schenectady's environs still enjoyed an essentially rural setting, the option chosen was not to build upward within the old city, but rather to build outward into the adjacent countryside. One other factor possibly played a role here. For the

57Monroe, p. 277-279.
58Census data cited in Ellis, p. 473.
59Yates, p. 197.
numerous speculators who were partitioning up a jigsaw puzzle of parcels in places with names like Mont Pleasant, Bellevue, Goose Hill, Edison Park, or Woodlawn, it was less complicated and profitable enough to just sell lots (and sometimes to then contract to build a house with the owner) than conceive, develop and manage an urban, multi-unit residence. Later planning initiatives implied that the city government was naïve about the long-term impact of such massive, uncontrolled growth. However, in many cases municipal officials were powerless, since building took place in areas that were outside the city limits at the time. It should be noted, too, that in 1910 the idea of city planning and zoning was not as sophisticated or widespread as it is today. Schenectady had neither planning nor zoning in 1900.

By 1900, most of the remaining land within the city had been parceled out and a patchwork of small subdivisions recorded in outlying towns along the major roads entering Schenectady, such as Broadway, Guilderland Avenue, Crane Street, and Van Vranken Avenue; in addition, Union Street/Eastern Avenue and State Street/Albany Street continued to expand the city southward. A motley pattern of parcels appeared, explaining the origins of the organic plan that the city has today. Not too surprisingly, these parcels found their way into the hands of Schenectady's political and monied establishment. Lawyers and judges, like Robert Furman, Alonzo Paige, G.W. Van Vranken, Henry DeForest, and Edward D. Cutler top the list of speculators; businessmen are also numerous, such as Charles F. Rankin, Richard Rosa, John C. Myers, A.J. Quackenbush, and Garrett Veeder. Also, those with large farm holdings just beyond the city limits, with names still prominent on Schenectady maps -- Van Voast, Consaul, Maxon, Chrisler, Clute and Ford -- also found themselves right in the middle of a land boom. Only two development companies appear on the scene: the Schenectady Land and Improvement Association and the Schenectady Realty Company. The Schenectady Car Company, which operated the local trolley, owned a tract in Mont Pleasant; but it appears that they acquired it for speculation in anticipation of the Crane Street trolley line, rather than with an intention to develop it themselves.

The development of the Town of Rotterdam

Edwin Conde's c1895 map of the city illustrates the extent to which the city of
Schenectady grew in the twenty years since the previous street map was issued. With the advent of General Electric, new areas to the west of the city in the Town of Rotterdam virtually appeared out of nowhere in the 1890's (fig. 14).

The Mont Pleasant neighborhood originated on the hilltop west of Crane Street and east of the vale that carried the New York Central Railroad line from Albany. It was essentially created from five major subdivisions recorded between 1889 and 1891. The largest belonged to the Schenectady Car Company (1889) and was bounded by Congress, Fourth, Eighth and Chrisler streets.\(^6^0\) Another one north of there, between Fourth and Broadway, was recorded in 1889 as belonging to Quackenbush and Vedder.\(^6^1\) West of Congress Street was a long plot in the bend of the hill above the tracks submitted for recording in 1890 by A.G. Davis. The fourth filled the remaining space on the hill south of Eighth Street; it went through a number of owners in 1890 and 1891, the remaining lots finally ending up with Nicholas Clute in 1898.\(^6^2\) A large open area east of Chrisler and north of Brandywine was the Chrisler farm. This tract would remain undeveloped until the 1920's, but Henry Chrisler cut off a portion of his holding in the triangle between Chrisler Avenue and Crane Street and subdivided it in 1891.\(^6^3\) So, it took only a couple of years for Mont Pleasant to be created on subdivision plans, and within the next decade it had actually risen up out of the cornfields.

Likewise, the core of Bellevue was plotted out along its three major axes -- Guilderland Avenue, Broadway and Campbell Avenue -- around 1891. Alexander J. Thompson, who had a country house out on the farther reaches of Broadway had filed a subdivision plan with "76 Villa lots 1 1/4 miles from the City of

\(^{60}\)City History Center, *Copies of Maps in the Town of Rotterdam,* "Map No. 3 of Building Lots belonging to Schenectady Car Co.," May 6, 1889, pp. 60-61; hereafter referred to as *Rotterdam Maps.*


\(^{62}\)Rotterdam Maps, "Map of lots in the Town of Rotterdam belonging to A.G. Davis..." September 2, 1890, p. 20; also "Map of building lots belonging to Charles M. Gibson situated at Mt. Pleasant..." Dec., 1, 1891, pp. 39-41; "Map of Building Lots belonging to the Western New York Addition to the City of Schenectady," Dec. 13, 1890, pp. 80-81; and in the City History Files, "Map of property belonging to Nicholas J. Clute...", 1898, item 28g.

Schenectady” as early as 1871.64 He revised the subdivision in 1889; in 1891, he
sold a portion of it to the Schenectady Land and Improvement Association (the
triangular space captured by the intersection of Guilderland Avenue and
Broadway); in 1897, heresurveyed and refilled yet again.65 This parcel covered
most of the land between Fairview Avenue on the north and Guilderland Avenue
on the east. The rest of the Bellevue real estate, was controlled by a syndicate
headed by Messrs. Campbell and Meyers. Their land flanked Campbell Avenue
from Broadway to the present city limits.66 The westernmost section of this
holding was later transferred to the Schenectady Realty Company and became
their Western Plot.

Mont Pleasant and Bellevue accommodated many of the 18,000 G.E.
workers and their families that had arrived in Schenectady by 1914. In 1901,
both areas were serviced by streetcars, which were essential to expansion into
these outlying areas. A third, smaller development appears on the Conde Map
north of Broadway on the flats labeled Edison Park. Laid out sometime between
1890 and 1892 by C. Van Slyck, Lewis P. Garnsey and Wallace P. Garnsey, it was
entirely wiped out by 1900, when General Electric expanded into the area.67 The
city annexed this entire portion of Rotterdam in 1902, swelling its jurisdiction
considerably.

Of the two, Mont Pleasant was made up of less-orderly subdivisions that
contributed to a complex mix of smaller enclaves. Bellevue, with its progression of
numbered streets running perpendicular to the scenic bluff at its northern edge,
was a much neater development. Because of this distinction between the
neighborhoods, as well as a number of others -- such as a treacherous ascent from
the factory up the Mont Pleasant hill, either along Craig or Congress streets or up
makeshift paths and stepways from Cotton Factory Hollow, and more restricted

64SCHS, Nineteenth Century Map File.

65SCHS, Nineteenth Century Map File; also Rotterdam Maps, “Revised map of Building lots...,”
pp. 68-69; “Map of lots...belonging to the Schenectady Land and Improvement Assn.,” pp. 62-63.

66Schenectady NY, Schenectady County Clerk’s Office, Plat Cabinet B, maps nos. 310, 311 &
313, “Map of proposed improvement of certain lands called Bellevue, Rotterdam, New York belonging
to Campbell, Meyers and others,” Dec. 21, 1891.

67City Map Files, item 35b.
trolley service -- land values in Bellevue and Mont Pleasant grew apart, with Bellevue lots being more expensive. As a result, workers building houses in Bellevue were generally at a higher economic and skill level than those opting for a lot in Mont Pleasant. Of course, this was not universal and pockets of the socioeconomic “other” can be found in each of the neighborhoods. Even though local industry did not directly construct a socially hierarchical housing pattern, as it might have in an earlier time, it appears that the workers themselves tended to choose areas of the city housing their occupational peers. Economic reasons had become more prominent in their decision than overt class distinctions.

Social Organization

General Electric did have a hierarchy of workers. Highest on that list was management. In 1913, the company had 925 office workers on its rolls.68 Other than clerical workers, these were managers who lived in the more expensive areas of the city. Some moved into existing housing in the Union Street corridor, which had already emerged as the city’s “classy” street. Others bought lots in areas that were developing on crossroads along the street. Schenectady’s best known enclave of top-end housing of the period is the Schenectady Realty Company’s Eastern Plot, now called the G.E. Realty Plot because a large number of its subscribers were managers in General Electric who could afford the required $10,000 minimum for a house. This was their part of the city. Next on the corporate ladder were the foremen and assistant foremen, who were somewhere between workers and management. As their numbers expanded, they populated the Union Street area along those side streets and boulevards with larger lots and more street amenities. Some foremen went west into Bellevue and bought the choicer lots along Fairview and Campbell avenues. Last and most numerous, the workers were divided into two basic categories: skilled (machinists, toolmakers, diemakers, carpenters) and unskilled. Skilled workers populated much of Bellevue, Hamilton Hill and the Brandywine area. The laborers generally made the long trek up Mont Pleasant, out Guilderland Avenue to Hungry Hill, well beyond the reach of the trolley line, and into tenements and boardinghouses in the declining

areas of the old city.69

The American Locomotive Company had the same kind of labor structure and laissez-faire social policy. Their upper-level and craft-level people mingled in the Union Street/Boulevard area; thousands of their laborers lived downtown or up on Goose Hill along Van Vranken Avenue. Some moved into a new area depicted on the 1895 Conde map at the city's eastern limits, where the Maxon family had subdivided a portion of their farm to cash in on the housing boom. The population of these new areas was rounded out by members of Schenectady's ever-growing service community, which was expanding apace with housing as the demand for clothing, furnishings and provisions rose. Each neighborhood had its shopping street: Crane and Congress streets in Mont Pleasant, Broadway in Bellevue, State and Albany streets in Hamilton Hill, Van Vranken Avenue and Rosa Street on the east side of town, and the south end of Union Street in the Boulevard neighborhood. This merchant class tended to rise from within the subgroup prominent in its neighborhood, be it economic or ethnic.

**Ethnic groups**

The city was divided along ethnic lines. Often the divisions between classes were outweighed by the comfort ethnic groups found in bonding together, especially at the lower end of the economic hierarchy. Some research has been done in Schenectady relative to ethnicity and the industrial work force, but the details of ethnic histories and cultural patterns have not been sufficiently recorded. Nevertheless, it is clear that ethnic groups in the city created enclaves that cannot be fully explained any other way. The principal groups having a recent impact on the definition of Schenectady's neighborhoods are: the Germans, who concentrated first in the Lafayette Street area and later up on Hamilton Hill (Paigeville); the Poles, who gravitated to two areas, one at the base of Crane Street on Mont Pleasant and another along Eastern Avenue; the Jews, first from Germany and, later, from eastern Europe, who concentrated in the old section of town along Broadway and College Street; the Lithuanians, who moved into the downtown area abandoned by Jews (converting a synagogue to a Catholic church)

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69Most of the impressions here were learned from Francis Poulin, a local historian familiar with neighborhood history of the period.
and out along the alphabet avenues in North Schenectady; the Italians, who finally became so numerous, they carved out sections in Bellevue, Mont Pleasant and Goose Hill; and the Irish, who also made their presence felt throughout the city. Blacks were not as prominent in the population following the great build-up of other immigrants in the early twentieth century. Until fairly recently, these groups kept up a number of their cultural traditions and art forms (for example, St. Mary’s Church on Eastern Avenue for a long time offered an annual program of Polish choral music) and, perhaps most importantly, their foodways and language. With the aging and decline of the immigrant generation, ethnic ties become more diffused among their children and grandchildren; no longer part of their active memory, the dual identity of the foreigner, for better or worse, was lost. Today, only a century after the immigrants came, it has become difficult to reconstruct what their experience was all about.

Religion

Most of the ethnic neighborhoods and enclaves had churches as their focal point. The German community was religiously diversified, having Catholic (St. Joseph’s), Methodist, and various Lutheran churches in the Lafayette Street area. The Polish community supported two large Catholic churches: St Adelbert’s on Crane Street and St. Mary’s on Eastern Street, as well as smaller parishes, such as the Polish National Holy Name of Jesus Church in Mont Pleasant. Italian, Irish, Lithuanian, Slovak and Russian Catholics have churches in the city as do Greek Orthodox, Unitarian, Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, AME Zion, and Jewish congregations. Schenectady’s ethnic patterns can be mapped through churches and other cultural centers, such as social, political and labor clubs, fraternities, service organizations, specialty shops and establishments for food and drink.

Architecture 1880-1915

It is fortunate that the social and religious interrelationships between occupational classes and ethnic groups are still close to the surface in many of Schenectady’s communities, because one of the principal indicators of such expression, architecture, is difficult to interpret in such a broad cultural manner. One reliable carrier of ethnic tradition are houses, and our analysis of
Schenectady's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architectural development relied heavily on an understanding of Dutch and British house forms and building practices in that period. However, as the twentieth century building boom in the city hit its stride, everybody was building fundamentally the same house. Two choices of domestic architecture predominate: the two-story, front-gable single-family house and the two-story, two-family house; and whether a Pole, an Italian or a German Lutheran built one or the other, it appears to have made no real difference in design. In this period, we can safely say (barring any obscure discovery at some later intensive level) that house design did not consciously carry ethnic meaning. The only possible exception to this is in the case of German houses and commercial buildings on upper State and Albany streets and farther into Paigeville. While in form and function, these buildings maintain the uniformity of their types across geographic, class and ethnic lines, ornamentally, they are quite distinctive in the Schenectady context. The persistent texture and dimensionality of their facades, with deep porches ripe with Romanesque details equally popular in Germany, is not repeated in any other section of the city.

The thousands of houses built between 1890 and 1915 were conceived on a whole other level, one determined by the real estate market (cheap, profitable house lots on which to build) and the builders' market (selling affordable housing). This applied to both middle- and lower-class developments. The history of domestic architecture in Schenectady is closely associated with twentieth-century trends of suburban growth and planned mass-production house building. The homes in Bellevue and Mont Pleasant are what we now call "builders' houses." Following prototypes designed by architects, found in builders' magazines, published in local newspapers, created out of habit after erecting vast numbers, these houses were promoted as the ideal affordable type (the raised ranch of their time) and valued for their space efficiency and no-frills economy. As far as working-class housing was concerned, these spacious, healthy houses were a matchless improvement over industrial living conditions only a generation before.

People commissioned the houses, at builders' suggestions, because that was what everybody else had; or they bought them because a developer had constructed a nice, neat row of them attractively along a street. They were family houses (whether holding one, two or three of them), they were working people's houses, they looked like they should look (because they looked like everything else
and no worker was going to build out of his means or defy the unity of his class). A workingman's house, was an individual entity in a huge brotherhood of other similar individual houses; it was a symbol of the worker's own presence in the sea of thousands that flowed in and out of the factory daily. Moving off the hills in the morning, first in small amounts from the farthest distance, gaining volume and momentum each block until, reaching Broadway and then flooding through the G.E. gate, the workers left their houses on the hills as markers to hold their place in the world outside of work. Returning at night, first as a crowd but soon thinning out as the last houses on Broadway or Chrisler were filled, the neighborhoods came alive once more. These neighborhoods and houses are rich in meaning as landmarks in complex economic, social and cultural landscapes that were shaped by many forces and that embody the remarkable experience of Schenectady's transformation from a tired old canal town into the Electric City.

The two-family house

Due to the extraordinary demand for housing for its exploding factory population, Schenectady is distinguished by a modern, working-class house type: the two-family house. Studies conducted in the 1940's showed that the city had a disproportionately high percentage of this housing when compared to other industrial cities. The highly visible sections of Schenectady: the venerable Stockade, the enfeebled but imposing downtown, and the comfortable boulevards along Union Street belie the far more pervasive character of the city, which is street-after-street of factory worker housing; housing dominated by the two-family house.

The two-family house is an amalgam: it is neither house nor apartment. Designed for narrow-frontage city lots, it paired commodious dwellings for economy, giving working-class people the opportunity to live decently and independently. Long and narrow like the tenement flat, the detached two-family house solved the urban flat's chronic problems of inadequate light and ventilation. Flats in two-family houses were also larger and better appointed, with more rooms for dividing functions and providing for privacy. Occupants, whether owners or

tenants, enjoyed more comfort and autonomy than in the cramped quarters of older industrial neighborhoods, which served to dramatically elevate their status. By the time the twentieth century had arrived, a factory worker could conceive of owning a home; and the two-family house was the most economical. Although paying more up front for two living units, the home-buyer could either collect rent to defray the costs of a mortgage or share expenses with another family member. There were absentee owners; however, whether they came from within or without the neighborhood or social group is a subject for future study.

The success of the house relied on the inexpensive real estate surrounding small, expanding industrial towns, that is, the availability of peripheral suburban or rural space to sprawl out to. While the house type was, in part, a result of social and hygienic improvements coming out of turn-of-the-century reforms in lower-class housing, it responded equally to the land-use and architectural ideals of the suburban experience. Schenectady's new neighborhoods on Hamilton Hill and Mont Pleasant and in North Schenectady inserted this progressive and less crowded housing type into urban lots of larger dimensions for detached houses, front set-backs and rear yards.

In many neighborhoods, two-family houses were inserted in existing lot plans; in others, whole streets or plots were developed using the house type. Also, many categories of older, one-family, working-class houses were replaced with two-family dwellings. Far fewer of the small, one-story front- or side-gable cottages built between 1850 and 1890 on the periphery of Schenectady's downtown survive because of the proliferation of the two-family in the following years. The size and features of the two-family house responded to the available space and economic or, possibly, ethnic composition of the area. For example, there are small examples in the Polish neighborhoods of Mont Pleasant (Davis and Chrisler Plots) and buildings nearly twice their size on Hamilton Hill. Many of these huge two-families along State and Albany streets are elaborately ornamented in a way unique in the city, which suggests a neighborhood (German?) identity being expressed. Likewise, the small, compact hipped-roof two-family houses distinctive in the Chrisler Plot, may reflect a unifying design theme among the Poles there. Further speculation about discrete interpretations of the architectural form, whether based in class, ethnicity, the building trades or market conditions, must wait for more intensive research and analysis. Nevertheless, it is clear that a
major chapter of Schenectady's architectural history revolves around the two-family house.

Single-family housing

Although more varied in their choices and more charming in their setting, the single-family, middle-class houses that began making their appearance along the roads and boulevards off Union Street were inevitably drawn into the overall housing equation. These houses were completely suburban in their conception, and other than being on more constricted city lots, there was little to distinguish them from their cousins farther out in Niskayuna, Rotterdam or Glenville. The houses were larger, more ornamental and more diverse than the workers' houses: at this level of social aspiration, complete conformity (at least outward expressions of it) was not valued. Middle-class houses could be distinguished one from the other; a little more attention to detail here would set one apart, like the division of labor within the workplace and individual opportunities for getting ahead. This was different from the worker's attitude where conformity was reassuring and solidarity paid off; and it showed in the subtle differences and competitiveness among middle-class houses, yards and furnishings. Their isolation from workers' housing is also symbolic: the middle-class houses, in their four-square, cottage, cape and up-and-coming Bungalow forms and all their clever designs, reveal the nature of work and life in Schenectady.

The streetcar service up Union Avenue went right through the Eastern, or G.E., Realty Plot. This enclave got all the city's best services, even though it probably needed them the least. Its serpentine roads and spacious plan, shown on Conde's 1901 map (leaving the Vale Cemetery aside) contrast with the patchwork of the rest of the city (fig. 15). To an experienced cultural geographer's eye, these features would be enough to locate the secure area of town. The lots are big because the houses are big, the houses are big because their owners can afford the luxury of space, the owners can afford the luxury of space because they are the ones in control, and so on. Although not consciously laid out as an industrial village, Schenectady could not avoid developing that way. The social and economic order of the work place influenced the town, not vice versa. But unlike towns like Pullman (and unlike the old stockade), this new Schenectady was
not planned at all, and it showed it after thousands of new people tried to function in it for a while.

Commercial architecture

Commercial patterns changed significantly in Schenectady as it rapidly expanded beyond its early margins into the hills surrounding it. State Street, already well-established, remained the core business axis of the city and stretched its shops and services ever-eastward, constricted by the older downtown residential neighborhoods and drawn to the newer developments on Hamilton Hill and around the Vale. In the early 1900’s, many businesses moved uptown. Civil offices and financial institutions also relocated to upper State Street, forsaking the aging and congested Stockade area for more modern facilities and prominent locations up on the hill. The canal became the demarcation between old and new, and the city’s historic core began its decline to a slum. Both sides of State Street, east of Broadway, transformed into solid walls of commercial blocks and hotels with twentieth-century edifices (many facades added to older buildings) dominating the scene. From the elite classicism of Proctor’s arcade to the streamlined economy of Woolworth’s, this stretch of State Street was the preferred address. The streetscape culminated at a green space, Crescent Park, distinguished by two of the city’s more substantial church buildings and a new, monumental county courthouse. A new state armory enclosed the easterly view from its prominent site on Nott Terrace at the junction of Albany and State streets.

State Street businesses could not serve all the needs of the expanded city, and its development focused on centralized functions. Everyday needs and more personalized services were fulfilled by commercial strips in Schenectady’s proliferating neighborhoods. Groceries, bakeries, butcher shops, laundries, tailor's shops and clothiers, taverns and branch banks could be found in each neighborhood: Albany Street on Hamilton Hill, Crane Street on Mont Pleasant, Broadway in Bellevue, Nott Street and Van Vranken Avenue in North Schenectady, Eastern Avenue along the Vale, and upper Union Street among the Boulevards. Many of these businesses found space in existing houses that were converted to their new functions. Schenectady was without zoning at this point, and there was nothing to direct or limit business incursions on these residential streets.
Sometimes new fronts were created with signs and display windows common to such establishments; other times, when frontage allowed, entire shop spaces were appended to the front of the house. Many store buildings were erected. On the older streets, such as Albany and Eastern, a few small, frame, one-story, shops survive to represent the earliest commercial type in these late nineteenth-century areas. Upper State (east of Nott Terrace), Albany, and Crane streets also contain large two- and three-story, mixed-use buildings that were designed with shops on the ground levels and housing units above. These are generally found at intersections in (or what were) residential areas, with the designs evincing the residential character of the neighborhood. In the twentieth century, shop design shifted to larger, blockier, masonry building types. On Crane Street, there is a group of two-story, masonry blocks that are good examples of this more sophisticated, modern type of store.

As with the residential architecture of Schenectady's expansion neighborhoods, commercial buildings become more recent, the farther away they are from the core of the city. Streetscapes along Broadway, in Bellevue, and State Street simply disintegrate and dissolve into the undifferentiated suburban sprawl of neighboring Niskayuna. Union Street's shopping strip out at the city line is more compact. The twentieth-century era of development in the Boulevards area is evident in the commercial zone. Many of the shops are converted houses; newer houses, however, than in the other neighborhoods. Some of the more contemporary store architecture is found here.

The first attempt at city planning, 1912

One of Schenectady's more interesting historical chapters was the 1911 election of the Rev. George R. Lunn as mayor on the Socialist ticket. The fact that he ran as a Socialist because he did not get the endorsements of the major parties was forgotten and he actually made valiant attempts to address the social problems of the city. In terms of the city's physical plan and architecture, Lunn did a remarkable and farsighted thing. Perhaps at the suggestion of fellow-socialist and newly appointed commissioner of parks and planning (Schenectady had no parks at the time), G.E.'s electrical wizard Charles Proteus Steinmetz, he commissioned Cambridge, Massachusetts landscape architect John Nolen to review and make recommendations for improving Schenectady's quality of life.
Nolen was prominent in the emerging group of professional city planners in the United States. His plan for Schenectady reflected his background in landscape architecture and the City Beautiful Movement. It also recognized the fact that the city had expanded at an extremely rapid rate, creating neighborhoods that were congested, without the benefit of parks and open space, particularly around schools, and connected only through the constricted Broadway axis.71

One of Nolen's attractive, hand-colored presentation maps is in the collection of the Schenectady Historical Society. It shows a parkway encircling the city, including, rather unrealistically, a portion along the south side of the river and across Van Slyck Island. It also includes large parks connecting to this parkway and enlarged schoolyards and play grounds for all of the city's schools. Other internal roads are improved for easing congestion, and a large sweeping bridge is proposed across the river into Scotia. The plan received due attention when it was announced, but after the socialist period it was seldom referenced as a planning document. The city does not even have a record of it in their archives. Nolen focused attention on two bothersome features of the city: the inaccessibility and vulnerability of the old Washington Avenue bridge (an 1877 replacement of the 1809 wooden suspension span) and the need for a public park. Although no one credited Nolen, the Great Western Gateway Bridge was proposed the following year, 1913, in virtually the same location and configuration found on the Nolen map. The bridge took twelve years to finally get built. Also in 1913, the city finally bought land to make a public park. In this case, the Nolen plan seems to have been not simply unacknowledged but ignored. Central Park was not in the place or shape Nolen proposed, and it was not central. It seems that the city received a favorable deal on the land, and the park's setting was wonderful, but there were a series of complaints at the time concerning its remoteness from the large populations of Mont Pleasant and Bellevue. Purportedly, special interests were at work, indicating that divisions among neighborhoods were a real issue.

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III-77
FURTHER GROWTH AND EXPANSION, 1915-1930

Between 1910 and 1930, Schenectady’s population increased another 23,000 from 72,826 to 95,692. During this period, the “old” Bellevue and Mont Pleasant neighborhoods filled out their plans to the topographical limits of their hilltop plats. Lots on the far western streets of Bellevue (11th - 17th), now under the proprietorship of the Schenectady Realty Company and called their Western Plot, began to fill in with neat streets of little one-story Bungalows. The old Chrisler farm on the south side of Mont Pleasant between Altamont, Chrisler, Norwood and the hollow became Westminster Heights, one of the city’s larger planned housing developments. Like the Western Plot, Westminster Heights comprised streets of little one-story Bungalows. But additional subdivisions were being made on the east side of the city as well, particularly north of Union Street along a boulevard called The Plaza, around Central Park -- which had become a major attraction for recreation and housing -- and farther and farther east along State Street into what would become known as the city’s Fourteenth Ward. The Union Street side of Central Park developed with an eclectic selection of attractive Colonial Revival and Craftsman style middle-class homes to grace the spacious boulevards. Neighborhoods around the Plaza and in the Fourteenth Ward grew very slowly and incompletely, especially an enormous subdivision known as Woodlawn.

Downtown Redevelopment

Downtown Schenectady changed more dramatically. The Great Western Gateway Bridge was finally completed in 1925, linking State Street with Scotia for the first time. The long drawn-out effort to get the bridge financed and built had created quite a hullabaloo. Coinciding with this critical local development was the opening of Erie Boulevard. The old Erie Canal, after 100 years of flowing through the heart of the city, had been bypassed by the newer New York State Barge Canal System, which used the Mohawk River rather than Clinton’s Ditch. Ironically (and about 100 years too late) boating was restored to the Mohawk side of the city and the route of the Inland Locks waterway. The railroads and, by the 1920’s, interstate highway trucking had rendered the canal close to obsolete economically; the Barge Canal became more of a local route for bulk freight and recreational boaters. Erie Boulevard’s extreme width immediately designated it
the main north-south thoroughfare in the city, and a focus of needed commercial expansion as State Street had grown crowded with shops and services. One major change brought on by the new intersection was the renovation of the Masonic Hall.

The commercial buildings experienced another stage of architectural evolution in this period as they were erected or renovated to reflect modern design tastes and the increasing local prosperity. With most of its buildings dating from the nineteenth century, State Street had become old-looking; it did not evince the progressive spirit of the city at all. Highlighting this period was the addition of three huge movie theaters to the streetscape: the Barclay (1921), the State (1922) and Proctors (1926); only Proctors survives today. Also, the new river crossing gave life to lower State Street and the Van Curler Hotel (1924), and a new Y.M.C.A. rose to frame the “gateway” to the west.

1924 Planning Commission Report
The growth of the city in this direction, at least on the map, led the city to expand its boundaries once again in 1923 to include the Fourteenth Ward and the subdivisions marching eastward north of Union Street. The increasing size and density during the previous decade had brought pressure on the city’s transportation and service infrastructure. Schenectady seemed destined to remain fragmented and congested. The city planning commission hired city planner and engineer Harland Bartholomew of St. Louis to prepare a report. In his submission, Bartholomew lamented the “topographic difficulties” and criticized the “lack of control and direction” on the part of the city government.72 Since the growth projections for Schenectady were virtually off the scale, based on the experiences of the previous three decades, Bartholomew recommended the city prepare for a population exceeding 100,000 by 1930 and 200,000 by 1960. In addition to providing guidelines for future siting and planning of municipal services, such as schools, firehouses, parks and roads, the consultant suggested some “corrective improvements” to be made immediately.

Like Nolen before him, Bartholomew cited problems of inner-city

72 Harland Bartholomew, Preliminary Report on Major Streets, Transit, Parks and Playgrounds (Schenectady, City Planning Commission, 1924), no page numbers.
transportation as the major obstacle to municipal efficiency. He identified the large areas of the city unserved by streetcars and streets with narrow widths, dead ends or jogs (figs. 16 & 17). He then proposed a new street plan, identifying streets to be widened or to be built to accommodate the enormous growth he projected (fig. 18). In addition, Bartholomew listed seven recommendations for more immediate corrections to downtown traffic congestion. The city planning commission must have found the proposal more daunting then it appears today. Commission chairman Richmond D. Moot stated somewhat equivocally in his cover letter to the report: "The development of the city along the lines of the excellent plans prepared by Mr. Bartholomew, which will necessarily require a long period of years in their execution, will necessitate wide knowledge on the part of the public and on the part of successive city administrations concerning the general features of the plan and the feasibility of carrying out its details in proper sequence."

THE DEPRESSION, WORLD WAR II AND THE END OF GROWTH, 1930-1950

Schenectady survived the Great Depression better than many industrial towns. G.E. and Alco had contracts that kept them open, if at reduced levels, through the troubled economic period. Unemployment rose, but mass layoffs and bank panics were avoided. Nevertheless, the hard times stalled what was originally believed to be the endless potential for growth of General Electric and the Electric City. Neither increased in size much after that.

As in other places, building construction came largely to a halt, and the large subdivisions plotted in the Fourteenth Ward and out in the Plaza neighborhoods north of Union Street never really got off the ground before the bottom fell out of the housing market. What construction took place was essentially funded by the U.S. government. A new City Hall was begun in 1929 and completed in 1931; Mont Pleasant High School also opened in the fall of 1931. The Post Office on Jay Street was more than doubled in size in the 1930's as a Works Progress Administration project; and the Schonowe Housing Project was built on Veeder Street, also with federal assistance. One of the more unusual WPA projects in the

73Ibid.
fig. 16  Street Car Lines, Areas Served and Population in 1924
(from Harland Bartholomew, Preliminary Report on Major Streets, Transit, Parks and Playgrounds, 1924.)
fig. 17  Streets 66 Feet Wide and Over, Jogs and Dead Ends in 1924
(from Harland Bartholomew, Preliminary Report on Major Streets, Transit, Parks and Playgrounds, 1924.)
fig. 18
Proposed Major Street Plan for Schenectady, New York
Harland Bartholomew, 1924
city involved what became known as the Klondike stairs, which provided an improved pedestrian route for G.E. workers between Mont Pleasant and the hollow. Some old commercial landmarks disappeared during the Depression years, such as the Edison and Vendome hotels on State Street, which were no longer viable in the declining economic market or in competition with the Van Curler. The Vendome was replaced by Woolworth’s five-and-dime store. The state injected some funds into the city’s construction industry and responded to militant trade unionism by erecting a new armory on Washington Avenue.

The fortunes of Schenectady’s two industrial giants revived significantly with the advent of World War II. By 1940, both General Electric and American Locomotive were producing war supplies for Great Britain and meeting the developing American preparedness effort. Alco shifted almost entirely to tank production; General Electric supplied bombsights, generators, plane and ship engines, radar and sonar devices, and other crucial war materiel.74 Hirings rose and, for the first time in Schenectady’s history, a recruitment program began to look well beyond the city’s borders for workers. This was due to the many workers facing military service. Where once General Electric was seemingly oblivious to the demographics of employment, managers were now drawing from a population living sixty or more miles from the factory. Improved transportation systems helped make such a commute a consideration, and the automobile had a tremendous impact on the geographical range of G.E. employment.

At the close of the war, life in Schenectady attempted to resume its pre-Depression stability in a peaceful world. However, rapid changes in the economy and lifestyle placed the viability of the city in doubt. While the General Electric Company was thriving, its aging Schenectady facility was just one in a growing number of specialized plants it opened throughout the state, the nation, and the world. Railroading was declining in the United States and so were the prospects of Alco. Furthermore, the expansion of G.E.’s workforce, together with the postwar exodus to the suburbs, diluted Schenectady’s worker concentration. Through the Veteran’s Housing Bill, every class of worker -- manager, craftsman and laborer -- was enticed into the suburbs, some of which were no more planned than Mont Pleasant or Bellvue. And as the people went, the stores followed, abetting the

inevitable decline of State Street and the smaller neighborhood commercial strips. The trolley system was removed from the streets in 1946 and the automobile became the focus of transportation. All the systems that had once entwined the factory, the stores, and the neighborhoods had disintegrated, and the city was incapable of doing much to prevent it. There was little the city could change because its very definition relied on all these structural, economic and social relationships. By freeing the worker from these commitments, Schenectady, as well as every other old industrial city in the northeast, fell on hard times.

In 1948, the city planning commission called Harland Bartholomew back to revise his 1924 recommendations and present a comprehensive city plan. After predicting in 1924 that Schenectady would have close to 175,000 people by 1950, in his 1948 report, Bartholomew forecast a 109,350 figure for 1970, remarking that the United States was experiencing a downward trend that would bottom out between 1960 and 1980. He recognized that the suburbs had been growing at a more rapid rate than the city in recent years, marking a trend towards decentralization. Also, the lack of good design and utilities in vacant areas of the city had left them underdeveloped and “blighted.” The planner noted that little residential construction had occurred since 1930; virtually all new houses built during that time were outside the city limits, and what new housing there was in the city was represented by one private and three public housing projects. He predicted that areas of high density would decrease, areas of medium density increase moderately, and areas of low density remain so. The central districts of the city had lost population steadily after 1920 (with the exception of the war years). The Stockade and the old Lafayette Street neighborhood had declined and become blighted. Bartholomew’s diagnosis was not encouraging.

With the report, Bartholomew prepared a map of land-use patterns (fig. 19). It was the first to appear for the city, graphically depicting the vacancies alluded to in the Fourteenth Ward and the Rosa Road area. Both of these areas contained large subdivisions where tax delinquencies had exceeded ten years. Bartholomew’s

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76 Ibid., p. 13-15.

77 Ibid., p. 13.
fig. 19  General Land Use Pattern in 1946
recommendation was to entirely re-plan the areas with adequate services and more open space. It does not appear that the plan was ever adopted by the city (street and lot patterns have not changed significantly), but in one area of the Fourteenth Ward, a large subdivision along Consaul Road, land was taken to expand Central Park and create the Crosstown Expressway. It was also suggested at this time that the Thruway spur be brought down Cotton Factory Hollow.

The city plan also assessed the general needs of the neighborhoods. The Stockade, Hamilton Hill and Mont Pleasant were identified as blighted and in need of rehabilitation. Bellevue and the Central Park areas of the city were labeled as needing vigorous action by neighborhood improvement organizations. Only the traditionally upper-class areas north of Union Street were deemed stable. This hierarchy of need understandably reflects the economic and class histories of these neighborhoods. The underdeveloped areas noted above are also coded on this map for “resubdivision.” City Hall’s neighborhood, the second oldest part of Schenectady, was blighted and required, according to Bartholomew, major clearing and redevelopment. This planning recommendation has been largely carried out.

With this planning document, Harland Bartholomew also proposed the city’s first zoning districts.\(^78\) Essentially based on existing conditions, the consultant provided a district map showing use, height and area districts. The statistics of this report support the visual impression one soon develops upon surveying the city’s architecture. Single-family dwellings occupied 15.8% of the total city area, a proportion well below that of most cities (21.8%).\(^79\) It was a number that was expected to grow as new property was made available, since single-family residences were then (1946) in greatest demand. The percentage of land used for two-family residences (9.8%) was found to be several times above that of the average city.\(^80\) This is very evident. Bartholomew recommended countering the conversion of two-families into three- and four-family dwellings by limiting occupancy in areas where they predominated. Also, consistent with historic


\(^79\) Ibid., p. 9.

\(^80\) Ibid., p. 9.
evidence, the zoning study found no areas in Schenectady occupied exclusively by apartment buildings.81

Much in contrast to a century ago, change has been slow and deliberate in Schenectady since Harland Bartholomew's 1946 report was published. New houses have appeared in the underdeveloped areas he mentioned along Rosa Road and in the Fourteenth Ward; the highways have been cut through; and the City Hall area has been cleared and redeveloped. The Stockade has been rescued from blight and oblivion with the onset of the historic preservation movement; and the middle-class neighborhoods along Union Street and Central Park have maintained their value. Bellevue remains a stable, intermediate residential area; and Mont Pleasant continues, as it began, as the place where lower economic groups find affordable homes. Hamilton Hill has experienced the most dramatic shift in fortunes; beginning as a prosperous community of German craftsmen and merchants, it has become the city's blighted area, housing its poorest population in the "converted" two-family houses Bartholomew warned about. Schenectady's downtown has been hit hard by the suburban exodus, a declining industrial economy, and competition from shopping malls. Redevelopment efforts were made there in the 1970's without much lasting success. Alco went out of business, and G.E. has been steadily reducing its workforce and its commitment to the city it created virtually overnight. But, despite its recent problems, Schenectady's architecture has changed little since its growth peaked in the 1920's. As such, it remains a significant material document of 330 years of community life, and eloquently relates the American experience.

81 Ibid. p. 10.