

## A Brief Guide to the Buildings & History of Nassau Village

As we look at the village of Nassau today, some imagination and “selective blindness” is needed to imagine how Nassau once was. Modernization, remodeling and the passage of time have effected many of our buildings. Much has been said about the nostalgic lure of the “good old days,” but if period photos of Nassau are any indication, the village was a neat, prosperous-looking place to live.

**Church Street.** *Starting in the center of the village, we will travel first up the northern (odd numbered) side of Church Street.*

**1-3 Church Street Van Valkenburgh Store 1786.** The oldest surviving commercial building in the village, served as a store operated by Jonathan Hoag and Moses Vail, Quakers from Dutchess County who had great influence in the early development of Nassau.

**5 Church Street Jonathan Hoag House 1786.** One of the best and earliest examples of English-style, two-story Georgian frame houses in Rensselaer County. Center hall with end chimneys, eight fireplaces. Home of Civil War General John Ellis Wool who hosted Lafayette and Joseph Bonaparte in 1827. Tradition has it Lafayette planted an elm tree in front of the house and for many years the tree prospered.

**7 Church Street J.M. Whitbeck House 1870-1880.** Three story Second Empire Victorian with front tower and Mansard roof. At the time of construction a Troy newspaper reported builder Charles Husted walked to and from his home in Castleton each day to work on the house.

**9 Church Street Samuel Ludlow Home c. 1820.** Federal style home of local silversmith.

**11 Church Street Harder Harness Shop c. 1815.** Small Federal style one story building served as an early harness shop, store and law office, and finally as a residence.

**15 Church Street Reformed Church Parsonage c. 1866.** Classic example of two story square block Victorian Italianate villa with cupola. Much of the original charm and detail has been obscured by modern siding.

**17 Church Street c. 1833.** Federal style home with Greek Revival influence, early porch removed in the 1940's.

**Nassau Town Hall Smith Griffith House 1815.** An active 80 acre farm until the 1900's with hay fields extending to the rear of Elm Street. Like many of the homes in the village, shutters on the windows were part of the original appearance. This was one of three large Federal style homes facing each other. St. Mary's Rectory, and an earlier home on the site of St. Mary's Church completed the trio.

**St Mary's Roman Catholic Church 1925.** Shingle church with belfry in rear. Site of earlier Federal period Johnson Becker House 1814.

**33-37 Church Street** row of three houses dating from turn of the century. Site of iron foundry active from 1847-1905.

**41-43 Church Street Gersholm Palmer House 1816.** Early home on Church Street, western addition built about 45 years ago. Originally boasted large end chimneys.

**Site of the former Nassau Reformed Church Building 1901**

After several years of contentious debate by preservationists and area residents, the Congregation ordered the building demolished in 2000. In the 1970's nomination to National Historic Register this building was cited as the most outstanding architectural element in Nassau with highly eclectic combination of Queen Anne, Moorish and Romanesque elements. Site of an earlier 1820 church which burned in December 1900. The 1960's cinder block building at the rear of the property currently serves the small congregation.

**25 Albany Avenue John Veder House c. 1840.** Outstanding Greek Revival style. Built by Smith Van Valkenburgh, son of Peter Van Valkenburgh. In July 1844 the elder Van Valkenburgh gave a piece of his land with house and barn “for consideration of \$1.00 and natural love and affection to his son.”

**27 Albany Avenue 1835.** Residence of Nassau Academy headmaster George Conklin. Little changed.

**31 Albany Avenue Nassau Academy.** Remarkable large building built for classroom use in 1830's. On May 11, 1835 the New York State Legislature passed “An Act to incorporate the Nassau Academy.” Financial difficulties closed the Academy in 1895 and the property has been a private residence since that time.

**35 Albany Avenue Laura and Anson Bingham House 1808.** Elegant Federal style home. Small windows on barn at rear give speculation about possible use as early church. Early Presbyterian Church was located nearby, later moved intact to Elm Street.

*On the opposite side of Albany Avenue:*

**32 Albany Avenue Dr. Beckworth House c. 1810-20.** Early Nassau house later Victorianized with a front gable. The crossing of the Valatiekill was once east of the house, later moved to the west of the house.

*Returning to the village center, the final portion of this short review will take us to Chatham Street, on the west (even numbered) side of the street.*

**16 Chatham Street Philip Cook House 1812.** Oldest in Chatham Street row, this simple federal style brick house was built by an early landowner. Philip Cook owned southern quarter of village. Well into the late 1800's the area between Chatham and Maiden Streets remained undeveloped pasture land.

**18 Chatham Street Lucas Vandenberg-Husted House 1870's.** Classic Victorian style with elaborate details, matching bay windows. Original roof tower destroyed by 1920's fire. In 1871 this house and 16 Chatham Street sold for \$2,600.

**20 Chatham Street Louisa Husted House 1871.** Victorian with center windows, gable dormer, porch trim, very close to original condition.

**22 Chatham Protestant Reformed Dutch Church Parsonage 1839.** Another of the many buildings used as the Reformed Church Parsonage over the years. Greek Revival style, gable end to road with attic fanlight in gable. Early site of 1795 “Free Church,” church used by several denominations. The current fire house next door once housed the Village School.

This small flyer is designed to give a brief look at Nassau's history and the historic buildings within the village. A much larger work would be needed to tell the entire story of Nassau. The Nassau Free Library offers a fine research section on the history and genealogy of early Nassau. It is hoped through education and interest about Nassau's past, tomorrow's generations may enjoy our unique heritage and preserve it for the future.

This flyer was prepared by Kurt Vincent, chair of the Village of Nassau Historic Preservation Commission. All efforts has been made to provide accurate information as available. Mr. Vincent has been commissioned by Arcadia Publishing to prepare a local history book as part of their “Images of America” series. Work will continue through the summer of 2012 gathering photos and caption material relating to Nassau - town and village, and the adjacent Nassau Lake area. If you have something you might wish to share, Mr. Vincent can be reached at (518) 766-2291 or kvincent1@nycap.rr.com. May 2012

**45 Church Street Rev. Peter Van Buren House c. 1820's.** Center hall, double winged Federal style home.

**51 Church Street c. 1793** Federal style saltbox home, five light transom over door.

**61 Church Street c. 1876.** First of two houses built on the site of the former Reformed Church cemetery in use until 1873.

**65 Church Street 1874.** Rural gothic cottage with jig saw trim. Small pump factory located in out buildings.

**67 Church Street 1850's.** Home with Italiante details, a counterpoint to the more popular Greek Revival style.

**69 Church Street Martin Van Salisbury Home c. 1805** May have once been a tavern, later used as possible Reformed Church parsonage.

*Crossing Route 20, to the south (even numbered) side of Church Street,*

**Grace United Methodist Church c. 1833.** Handsome early church with compatible later alterations. Originally built as a single floor structure, 1923 remodeling added a second interior floor above the first for use as a sanctuary.

**Methodist Church House between 1861-1876.** Large Victorian home with Gothic windows and balcony.

**Nassau Free Library 1835.** Built for Reformed Church as meeting and lecture room. Greek Revival style windows and door trim, fan in gable. Home of Nassau Free Library since 1893.

**12 Church Street Barent Van Vleck House c. 1806.** Federal style, with Palladian window and decorative trim. Built for prosperous land owner and influential member of Reformed Dutch Church, went on to become member of NYS Legislature,

**8 Church Street Thomas Hoag House c. 1808**

Local legend has it prior to the Civil War this house was stop on the Underground Railway, helping provide safe passage for former slaves north to Canada. Reportedly a tunnel in the basement leads under Church Street.

*The second portion of the tour will take us to Elm Street, known as Wall Street and Mill Street in earlier years. Elm Street offers a wide variety of house styles, particularly the Greek Revival, turned gable end to the street to take full advantage of the narrow, but deep lots. Start on the north (even numbered) side.*

**10 Elm Street c. 1812** Home of Nassau cabinet maker Van Salisbury. Originally built by Jonathan Hoag and later used as a millinery shop.

**18 Phoebe Palmer House c 1830 Methodist Parsonage.** One of Elm Street's best example of Greek Revival influence, a twin to 20 Elm Street. Home of wealthy mill owner Fenner Palmer's widow.

**20 Elm Street John W. Hogaboom House 1830-33.** Original lot sold for \$199.04 in 1830, resold shortly thereafter for \$1,225 with house. Constructed by a different builder than the next door Methodist Parsonage, the original portions of the two house are virtual twins. This house still retains fine Greek Revival lines. Porch and French windows added to front facade in 1860's, and large 1870's addition extended the house to the rear.

**24 Elm Street 1827 Old Presbyterian Church.** Used as a Church until 1880's when congregation disbanded, converted into public auditorium and scene of many social occasions - known as Winter's Hall. Private residence since 1920's.

**Corner of Elm and Lake Avenue.** Portions of this now vacant factory may date back to 1792 as one of the 3 grist mills built by Jonathan Hoag who damned Nassau Lake as a reliable source of water power.

**45 Elm Street Sanford Hall.** Turn of the century dance hall.

**31 Elm Street Moses Vail House 1789.** One of the oldest houses in the Village, Moses Vail was born in Dutchess County in 1753 and came to Nassau as a partner of Jonathan Hoag. Vail later moved to Troy and was a NYS Senator from 1791 -1801. In 1964 the gravestone of Vail's wife was found in the Village being used as a doorstep.

**21 Elm Street Presbyterian Parsonage c. 1825.** One of the oldest homes on Elm Street, original chimneys relocated. Used as a parsonage from 1850 - 1890, house and lot sold for \$900 when church disbanded. Carriage barn at rear.

**17 Elm Street c. 1830's.** Outside Chimney and porch added, once owned by William P. Hermance, one of the signers of incorporation papers for the Village of Nassau and founder of the Nassau Academy. Mr. Hermance ran a carriage shop in the Village for 25 years and employed over 40 men.

**Rear of 11 Elm Street.** Former Elgin Creamery of the 1890's. Close proximity to Albany-Southern Railway made shipping of milk fast and economical.

**5 Elm Street Jesse Smith Shoe Shop before 1854.** Jesse Smith was a well-known tanner and shoe maker in this location. Early deeds indicate access to the creek behind the house was vital to the tannery.

Returning to the center of the Village, except for the Church-Elm Street corner, all early traces of Nassau are gone. From the earliest years of Nassau's development a spring of clear water flowed from the center, into the 1930's a public pump marked the spot next to the **Village Band Stand**. At the corner of Albany Avenue and Elm Street Jacob Witbeck's **Nassau House Hotel** stood. Built about 1800, the hotel was a focal point of community life serving as a tavern, court room, stage coach stop and the scene of political meetings and dances. The hotel was noted for its 60 foot ballroom, room-size closets and visits for Sunday dinner in the 1840's by Martin Van Buren. The structure was demolished in 1955 to make way for the now abandoned gas station. The corner of Church Street and Malden Street is said to be the **site of Nassau's First Tavern**, built in the 1770's by Thomas Hicks. It was later replaced by hardware store operated by Spencer Husted, and in 1818 by Thomas Tobias' "storehouse."

Proceeding west on Albany Avenue we continue the tour. At the turn of the century, the village of Nassau was dramatically linked to the modern age by the **The Albany-Southern Railroad Company**. Promoting itself as the largest and best third rail system in the world, the light rail line utilizing a live electric rail between two tracks on the rail bed. The railroad was a boon to rural commuters as a fast route to Albany, as well as a means for factories and farmers alike to ship and receive freight economically. The station was located approximately where the Stewart's Shop is today. Buildings to the rear are former freight houses. The right-of-way is utilized by the power company, with discussion of a future "rail-trail."

One reminder of Nassau's industrial past is the **Roshirt Building**, the long yellow building on the south (odd numbered) side of the street, part of which is currently an antiques shop. Built in 1899 as a bottling works, the building originally sported a cupola. During the 1930's the second story was used as a clothing factory. Another reminder of Nassau at the turn of the century is the **Kosegarten Piano Action Factory**. Located across from the current post office, at its height employed nearly 160 workers, and produced 35,000 piano actions a year. John Street was built specifically for the Kosegarten Works and ran along the upper portions of the Nassau Fairgrounds and route of the electric railway.

**23 Albany Avenue Peter Van Valkenburgh House 1823.** Center hall with Greek Revival trim. Home of influential land holder, store and tavern keeper.