

BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION
ALBANY, NEW YORK (518) 474-0479

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY _____

UNIQUE SITE NO. _____
QUAD _____
SERIES _____
NEG. NO. _____

YOUR NAME: Susan E. Lassell

DATE: May 31, 1992

YOUR ADDRESS: 106 W. Sibley Hall, Ithaca, NY

TELEPHONE: (607)255-6851

ORGANIZATION (if any): Cornell University

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IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME(S): Courthouse Park
- 2. COUNTY: Steuben TOWN/CITY: Corning VILLAGE:
- 3. STREET LOCATION: Lot No. 66, bounded by Pine, First, Walnut & Second
- 4. OWNERSHIP: a. public b. private
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: The City of Corning ADDRESS:
- 6. USE: Original: Public Square Present: Public Park
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes No
Interior accessible: Yes No Explain: Public Park

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL
 - a. clapboard b. stone c. brick d. board & batten
 - e. cobblestone f. shingles g. stucco other:
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
 - a. wood frame with interlocking joints
 - b. wood frame with light members
 - c. masonry load bearing walls
 - d. metal (explain)
 - e. other
- 10. CONDITION:
 - a. excellent b. good c. fair d. deteriorated
- 11. INTEGRITY:
 - a. original site b. moved if so, when?
 - c. list major alterations and dates (if known):
See Continuation Sheet
- 12. PHOTO:
- 13. MAP:

14. THREATS TO BUILDING:

- a. none known [] b. zoning [] c. roads []
d. developers [X] e. deterioration []
f. other: neglect

15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:

- a. barn [] b. carriage house [] c. garage []
d. privy [] e. shed [] f. greenhouse []
g. shop [] h. gardens []
i. landscape features
j. other: County Courthouse, playground

16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (CHECK MORE THAN ONE IF NECESSARY)

- a. open land [] b. woodland []
c. scattered buildings []
d. densely built-up [] e. commercial []
f. industrial [] g. residential [X]
h. other:

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDINGS:

(Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE:

(Including interior features if known):

See Continuation Sheet

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION:

ARCHITECT: R. W. Canfield

BUILDER:

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

See Continuation Sheet

21. SOURCES:

See Continuation Sheet

22. THEME:

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17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDINGS

The park is bounded by W. First street on the north, Pine street on the east, W. Second street on the south and Walnut street on the west. A mix of residential, public and private buildings surround the park; exclusively residential buildings are located on the east and west sides of the park, while the War Memorial Public Library and the Corning Elks Lodge 6071 on the north and the Corning Free Academy on the south interrupt the residential scale. The Stueben County Court House is located on the northeast corner of the park, at the intersection of Pine and W. First streets. The remaining built features of the park, playground structures and picnic tables, are located at the south end of the park. The landscaping includes a three tiered terrace, rising from W. First street, criss-crossing gravel foot paths, and a variety of trees and shrubs.

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE

The original plot map prepared for Ansel Bascom and Bowen Whiting for the laying out of a village in 1836 indicated that block 66 was reserved from sale for ordinary purposes. When, in 1840, Erastus Corning and John C. Fellows assumed the deeds in trust for the Southside area, they continued the use of block 66 as a public square. In 1855 Corning and Fellows dissolved the Corning Company through partition deeds on all unsold lands. In preparation for this they executed a deed to the trustees of the village of Corning block 66 "to be used by the inhabitants of said village of Corning as sites for the erection of the following public buildings, viz: A Court House, Clerks Office, Town or City Hall and a Goal, Churches or places of public worship, for Academies and Union School Houses and for a public park, and for no other purposes and for no other use whatever." Upon the finalization of the above partition deeds, all connection between the Corning Company and the public square was severed.

Within that period, however, at least five known buildings had been built on the public square. In 1841 the congregation of the Christ Church met at a "schoolhouse" to discuss the relocation of their parish. In 1841 the Presbyterian Church was erected on the northeast corner, at First and Pine. The Presbyterians worshipped there until 1868, at which time they relocated on the diagonal corner and gave their old church to the Free Baptist congregation. In 1884 a fire destroyed this church. In 1846 the Methodist congregation erected a church on the park, later the building as a public school. The school operated until the opening of the Corning Free Academy in 1873. In 1849 the Baptist Society built a church on lot number 1 (the corner of First and Walnut). In 1853 the Corning Company gave lots numbered 2, 3, and 9 for the erection of a courthouse and jail.

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In 1856, just after the transfer of deed for the entire block to the village, the city erected the first court house. The original court house was designed by the same architect who designed the Tompkins County Courthouse. In a hurry to have a court house, the building committee in charge of supervising the project "concluded not to incur any further delay for the purpose of procuring other plans" even though they were less than satisfied with what was presented. The cost and labor involved with erecting the building on First street, due to the steep slope on that street, forced them to choose a lot at the center of the Walnut street edge, which fostered additional adverse criticism. The foundation and brick work were constructed by Davis and Stafford, and the carpenter work by Charles Clark. The current Court House, erected in 1904, fulfilled the original intent of facing First street.

Decisions and controversies occurring during the period between 1883 and 1905 imparted the greatest influence on the current appearance of Court House Park. On May 23, 1883, the Village Trustees passed a resolution creating a Park Commission to have control and management of the work of grading, laying out and improvement of the park, indicating the Village's concern for the maintenance of the block. A controversial court decision of 1890 determined the future of public structures located on the park. In 1889 Christ Episcopal Church applied for permission to erect a building on three lots facing First street. The application was granted on May 6th, then rescinded on the basis of a petition circulated by Franklin N. Drake. Eventually, the matter was settled in the State Supreme Court, denying the application of the church. The determination that the park was subject to the constitutional mandate that "no county, city or village shall give any money or *property* or loan its money or credit to or in aid of any individual, association or corporation...nor...incur any indebtedness except for county, city, town or village purposes" precludes any further use of the park for ecclesiastical purposes. It did not, however, preclude the city from erecting a new Court House. The historical significance of the current Steuben County Court House can be found on a separate inventory form. At the same time that the new Court House was designed and built, the City Common Council announced plans to redesign and landscape the park. In 1905 the Common Council passed a resolution "authorizing the City Engineer R.W. Canfield, to prepare drawings with estimates of the cost of converting Court House Square into a park. Money for the new park was raised by public subscription, under the direction of a special citizen's committee established by then Mayor Rettig. The following description of the proposed plan, published in the local paper on January 7, 1905, illustrates the enthusiasm for the project:

"City Engineer Canfield's plans embraces three important features, beauty of design, economy of cost, and practicability.

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The northeast corner where is now located the Court House is already graded off making a most slightly corner. The city Engineer's Plans provide for the permanent improvement of the balance of the square.

The design provides for a main entrance of cement steps, broad and wide, facing First Street about opposite the J.B. Maltby driveway. There is a cement landing and then another broad and easy flight leads to the grand plaza 125 feet in width with a beautiful band stand in its center. From this plaza to the right is another entrance from Walnut Street. The approach to the plaza on this corner will be broken by beautiful terraces, this plan utilizing the highest part of the square without much cost for grading. It is proposed to line the entrances and border the plaza with arc lights making it doubly attractive at night.

From the grand plaza to the south west runs a winding path leading to the corner of Walnut and Second Streets. To the south runs a gravelled walk to a 64 foot plaza where a handsome fountain graces the center. Extending almost due east is a pergola leading to another 64 foot plaza which sets off a beautifully designed flower bed. From this plaza runs a winding walk in a diagonal direction toward the corner of Second and Pine Streets.

It is planned to set a clump of Lombardy poplars back of the Court House. This would provide a pleasing perspective. The whole plan provides for winding walks all of which connect making passage across the park rapid and easy. Each of the walks are to be lined with shade trees and park benches. The plot allows three large grass plots and also provides a path running from the court house entrance to the grand plaza."

The fountain was finally installed in 1909, and the original plan for a grand band stand was never realized. After construction was completed, the park was renamed "Canfield Park" in honor of the designer. By the time the park had fallen victim to neglect, and the fountain was removed. In 1990 plans and work by the Recreation Department focused on revitalizing the park.

21. SOURCES

Corning-Painted Post Historical Society Photograph Collection.

Dimitroff, Petie. Personal Interview and private collection

Dimitroff, Thomas P., and Lois S. Janes. History of the Corning Painted Post Area: 200 Years In Painted Post Country. Corning Area Bicentennial Commission, 1977.

Map of Corning. Brewer & Canfield, 1855.

Sanborn Map Company. Maps of Corning, New York. (1888, 1893, 1898, 1903, 1908, 1913, 1921, 1930, 1948)