

A Formidable Grassroots Historic Preservation Project

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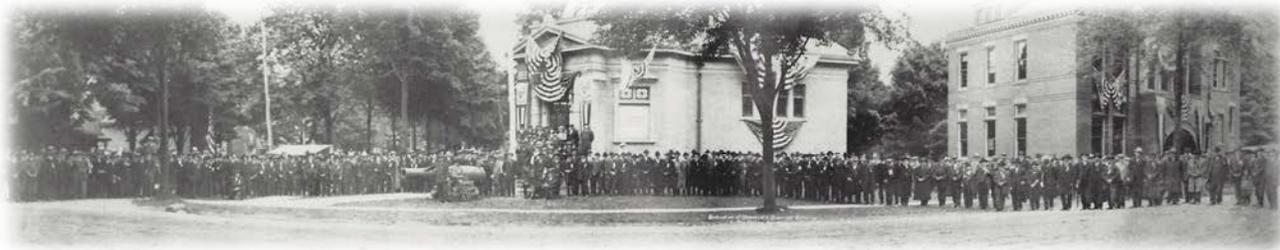


CAMP is the popular name of Citizens Advocating Memorial Preservation, a grassroots group of history lovers that formed in 2014 to stop the destruction of two attached buildings in the heart of Little Valley, New York, the seat of Cattaraugus County in the western part

of the state. One building dates to the mid-twentieth century; it housed the county Board of Elections (BOE). The purpose of the more ornate nineteenth-century brick building is stated in a plaque above its door: "To the memory of its soldiers and sailors in the War of the Rebellion, this building is erected by Cattaraugus County." The Memorial and Historical Building is the county's most significant Civil War monument.



More than two hundred Civil War veterans attended the dedication of the Memorial on September 7, 1914. James S. Whipple delivered the main address.



He was the son of First Sergeant Henry F. Whipple of the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry, who was captured at Gettysburg and died as a prisoner of war at Andersonville. Whipple opened his oration with these words: "One need only to observe the number of people who have assembled here to appreciate

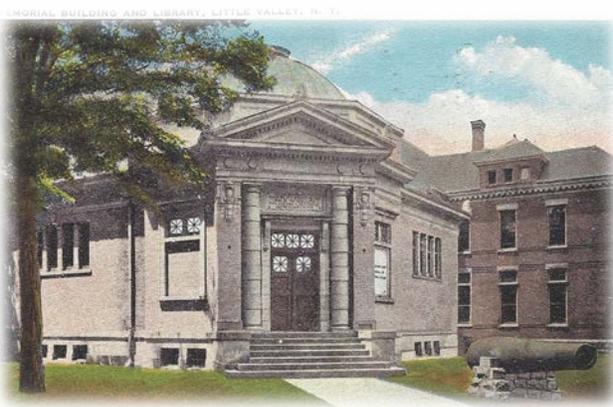


the fact that all of you consider this more than an ordinary occasion. The day, the purpose for which you are here should and will be long remembered.” Fifty years after they had fought in the Petersburg and Atlanta campaigns, the aged veterans present at the ceremony posed for a panoramic photograph in front of the Memorial the county had erected to commemorate their service.

For ninety years the Memorial served as intended, as the county historical museum. But then Cattaraugus County betrayed its trust. In 2004, it moved the museum to the town of Machias. After that, both the Memorial and BOE buildings stood vacant.

Even worse, in October 2013 the county legislature passed an act to use \$125,000 in casino funds to demolish the Memorial and the BOE.

I was appalled when I heard that news. As historian of the 154th New York, Cattaraugus County’s most representative Civil War regiment, the Memorial and Historical Building meant more to me than just a place to do research and study artifacts. It was a memorial to my great-grandfather—a veteran of the 154th who attended the 1914 dedication—and the other 3,000-plus Cattaraugus County men who served in the Civil War. For Cattaraugus County to tear down the Memorial it had dedicated to her soldiers and sailors seemed to me like a sacrilege.



I immediately e-mailed the hundreds of descendants of members of the 154th New York that I had the good fortune to contact over the years and notified them of the county’s plans. As a result, the county legislators were bombarded with messages of protest, and in November 2013 they put the demolition plan on hold. That same month, professional staffers of The

Landmark Society of Western New York (LSWNY) toured the Memorial and recommended its preservation and rehabilitation.

But despite the protests from soldiers’ descendants and the advice of the LSWNY, the county legislature in October 2014 voted to remove asbestos from

the buildings in advance of demolition. That was the catalyst that sparked the formation of CAMP the following month.

In the first few years after its organization, CAMP received a grant from the LSWNY that funded a comprehensive historic preservation plan by Clinton Brown Company Architecture of Buffalo; gained the endorsement of the Civil War Trust, the Cattaraugus County American Legion, and the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War; incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit; spread the word of its mission on its website, in newspapers and blog postings, and on the radio; discovered the building's original plans; and held ceremonies at the building on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

In 2016 CAMP members accompanied county legislators on a tour of the Memorial; most of the politicians had never been inside of it. In late July, the county legislature recommended selling the Memorial/BOE complex. After a lengthy series of negotiations, in 2017 CAMP purchased the property from the county for \$1,079.

Since then CAMP has continued to raise funds; hosted the 2018 annual reunion of 154th New York descendants; dedicated a historic roadside marker on the Memorial lawn; hired Clinton Brown Company Architecture to collaborate on a strategic business feasibility plan; and, in a major step in July 2020, put new roofs on the Memorial and BOE.

With the property now saved from destruction and owned by CAMP, our organization's mission is two-fold: first, to finish the restoration of the complex; and second, to put it to an appropriate use. To learn more about this important historic preservation project, please visit the CAMP website at <http://cattcomemorial.com>.

[Note: All photos provided by the author.]

Mark Dunkelman has written six full-length books, several booklets, and dozens of articles on various aspects of the 154th New York's history. He has also lectured widely on the subject, including four appearances at the Joshua L. Chamberlain CWRT. At his most recent visit to Brunswick, in September 2019, he spoke about the Brickyard Fight at Gettysburg and his mural depicting it at Coster Avenue.