

PRESERVING PERINTON'S PAST

Can planning and preservation be compatible with development? In 1985, a large Mobil gas station-convenience store complex was built on the corner of Kreag Road and Route 96 in Bushnell's Basin. Concerned that the new gas station might be the precursor of a major strip mall type of building boom in their canal-side hamlet, a group of citizens began to discuss the possibility of developing an historic preservation ordinance. The concept of historic preservation as a function of local government began in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1930 and has been copied more than 1000 times since. New York passed an Historic Preservation Act in 1980, and there are over 100 local ordinances throughout the state.

After nearly two years of study and planning, an ordinance for the Town of Perinton was scheduled for a public hearing in December of 1986 and was adopted in February of 1987. Ironically, it was just prior to the hearing and adoption of the ordinance that the Kreag-Crump farmhouse on Kreag Road was razed without any notice to the community or to the town officials. This was a charming rural farm cottage that had been a favorite scene for photographers and had been used in commercial illustrations. This "blitz destruction," which horrified many town residents, at least two of whom would have moved the structure, was clear proof that the historic preservation ordinance was needed.

The Historic Preservation Law is based on the idea that the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of landmarks and historic districts will promote the economic, cultural, and educational well-being of the community. This law is designed to protect significant landmarks and historic areas from extinction or inappropriate "rehabilitation." Included in Perinton's law are criteria for landmark status. These include possessing special historic importance to the town, such as identity with an important person or event; exhibiting distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or architect; or having a unique location or physical character that represents a familiar visual feature in the town. The law further established an Historic Architecture Commission with the responsibility to identify the significant landmarks and districts and to review applications for proposed exterior changes to any of the designated properties. The Commission has five members and meets monthly.

Owning a home that has been designated as a landmark or living or working in an historic district has its benefits and its responsibilities. Benefits certainly include protection from inappropriate development that could serve to undermine the value of a building or area with historic value. In fact, property values have been seen to rise in those areas that have protected their charm. Responsibilities include maintaining the structure in a way that is historically suitable. This means that a Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained from the Historic Architecture Commission before any exterior work that is visible from a public right-of-way can be done. Normal maintenance, replacement with like materials, and paint color do not require approval. Interior changes and changes that are not visible from a public right of way are not subject to the ordinance.

In 1987, the Commission retained the Landmark Society of Western New York to survey and inventory one hundred pre-1902 structures in the town. The survey was funded by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, the intent being to provide a resource that could be used when designating individual landmarks and districts. That survey continues to be an important reference point for identifying the town's historic and architectural resources, although having been included in the survey does not of itself imply landmark designation.

Over the twenty years of its existence the Town of Perinton has designated five historic districts, twenty-one homes, and six other sites. The districts include Bushnell's Basin, Baird Road (Thomas Creek to the Schoolhouse), South Perinton Cemetery and South Perinton United Methodist Church, the Ranney/Ramsdell farm on Pittsford-Palmyra Road and the hamlet of

Egypt. The homes and other sites are in all parts of the town.

The Historic Architecture Commission works with developers, homeowners, and businesses to insure that their structures are appropriate in style and scale with the existing neighborhoods. In Bushnell's Basin, for example, the Commission worked with developers on the Canal Walk project which houses such businesses as Finger Lakes Coffee Roasters and Abbott's, and the Richardson's Inn area which includes the former Oliver Loud's Tavern and several other buildings. More recently the Commission has worked with Bruegger's Bagelry, the Egypt Fire Department, Tim Horton's, and Great Northern Pizza to insure that the new construction would be compatible with the history and style of the Basin.

In Egypt, the Commission worked with business owners along Route 31 to be sure that both new construction and buildings that were being remodeled would fulfill the needs of the businesses and fit the historic nature of the area. Recently, the Ranney house on Route 31 in Egypt, which is Perinton's oldest frame house dating to about 1818, has been remodeled as an office for Northern Nurseries, who also own the large adjacent barn which itself was once part of the Ranney farm. The result is the preservation of an historic house and barn and the creation of an attractive office. The Commission has also worked with homebuilders in the Egypt area to develop plans that are compatible with the goal of preserving the historic ambiance of the hamlet.

Over the twenty years of its existence, the Commission has issued over 200 Certificates of Appropriateness for projects that cover many, many facets of remodeling and new construction both by individual homeowners and by developers. (Certificates of Appropriateness are required before any exterior work that is visible from a public right-of-way can be done to an individual landmark or a structure within an historic district.)

The goal of the Historic Preservation Ordinance has been to preserve the past, while adapting to the present and the future, by insuring that new construction and remodelings are appropriate and fitting. While this process may take time, the results not only preserve the past, but they also preserve value.