

Cairo Main Street Strategy Committee Meeting

Town of Cairo Hall, 512 Main Street, Cairo
Monday, December 1, 2008 - 6:00 p.m.

Present: Town Supervisor John Coyne, Greene County Legislator Bill Lawrence, Claudia Zucker, Kathy Proper, Adele Carr

Consultants: Victor and Robert Dadras, Dadras Architects; Warren Hart and Karl Heck, Greene County Economic Development, Planning and Tourism

I. Review of Public Information Meeting

Town Supervisor John Coyne said that the public response to the Information Meeting at Gallagher's was extremely well-received, and people in the Town have been asking if there will be another meeting of this type in the future. Such a meeting will likely occur once there are solid recommendations to present to the public.

II. Presentation of Recommendations/Strategy Update

Victor and Robert Dadras presented their "10 Recommendations" for Main Street Cairo, and noted that the written copy would be available after the committee endorsed the recommendations.

The first is to work to create Main Street Commercial Clusters to give various types of businesses the maximum opportunity for success. It was noted that the recent closing of the store "A Gift is on the Way" may have been locational, as having three gift shops together is probably better for their business than three gift shops in different locations on the Main Street where they struggle to obtain business.

The Dadrases also addressed in detail the three different segments of Main Street, and how those segments function differently. The "eastern section" from Route 23 East to Cairo Elementary School provides most of the service retail in the community, and also has a number of under-utilized and brownfield parcels that the community would greatly enhance the viability of this section of the Main Street.

The middle section, or "historic village," is generally considered to go from Cairo Elementary School to the Shinglekill Creek/Fountain area, generally contains pre-World War II buildings and has a mix of residential and commercial structures. The Town Hall, Elementary School, Post Office and Town Park provide important civic anchors for this section of the Main Street. There is relatively little retail, with professional offices providing another significant component in this section of the Main Street. Connections to activities in the Town Park, and finding ways to welcome tourists to better utilize this area, are challenges that if successfully met, could improve the prospect for Main Street retail.

The "western" section of the Main Street has several large parcels for sale that could be major subdivisions, commercial developments or even an industrial park. Shaping this section of Main Street to be redeveloped more in the image of the existing hamlet should be a priority for the Town, stated Dadras.

Their second recommendation was the creation of a Visitor Center building.

The building at the corner of Routes 23 and 32 is highly visible and has long been considered for that use. It may be possible that the price of the building plus renovations may be coming down into the affordable range for this kind of use, and the Dadrases noted that in their work in Ogdensburg, NY, a similar facility was able to tap into several funding sources by being more flexible in use than a traditional visitor's center facility.

Their third recommendation is to improve the gateways on Route 23, which are the key ways the Main Street can generate increased traffic. Coming down the mountain, there is very little at the gateway to show there is a town off of the road. Coming up from Catskill, the bank buildings provide examples of high-quality architecture of different styles, but the gateway signage is tired and needs an update. At this gateway, you don't really get an idea of the historic village portion of the Main Street either.

Creating a "bed and breakfast" district is a way to utilize some of the historic houses on the Main Street and attract tourists at the same time. In this way, Cairo's mix of residences and commercial storefronts can become an advantage. The bed and breakfast tourists would likely find ways to utilize the outstanding physical setting in the vista of the mountains, and attract new money to ensure the continued maintenance and revitalization of these historic buildings.

Another recommendation of the Dadras report is the creation of an historic area for the Main Street to help ensure the preservation of as many of the historic buildings on Main Street as possible. Their recommendation would include all of the "historic villages" and selected buildings in the other two sections of the Main Street. Though not a recommendation in and of itself, one key point made by both the Dadrases and Warren Hart was that a "positive feedback" loop needs to be created and reinforced that decisions made by the Town Board reinforce and support investments on the Main Street.

The creation of a business and marketing group through the Chamber of Commerce or other organization is another Dadras report recommendation. The group can both support the businesses that already exist on the Main Street, and work to recruit new ones based on the recommendations in the report. The creation of a brochure outlining the opportunities, along with any assistance that might be available from the Town or the County. With enough staff support, a retail incubator might be possible, though it is important to stress that this project takes a great deal of hand-holding to be effective.

The more effective utilization of community gathering spaces is another recommendation of the report. Both Gallagher's as an indoor space, and the Town Park and front lawn of the Town Hall as outdoor spaces were mentioned as areas for events and gatherings. Creating a walkway between the Town Hall and Town Park would allow an effective link to the park and Main Street, and could stimulate foot traffic along the Main Street. Kiosks or other provisional business types could provide seasonal expansion of the business mix in Cairo.

It was noted that the support of the various projects that the Town has already completed, such as the Comprehensive Plan and Site Plan Review law, can be built upon for the support of the Main Street Strategy. Now that the Cairo Zoning Commission has finished its work on the Site Plan Review law, it is working on a potential Zoning law with the support of consultant Nan Slotzenburg.

The use of "smart growth" principles for the development of additional parcels in the Main Street area can be encouraged with various land use

regulations. In this case, such regulations would support the existing Main Street as well as further infrastructure development in Cairo. Supervisor Coyne noted that the Town is likely 18 months away from a resolution of its sewer situation, and currently the Town has a consent order with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) regarding the sewer.

A related issue is the creation and utilization of quality parking on the Main Street. Given the winter, having accessible parking for commercial uses is important, as is signing and utilizing the parking resources currently available on the Main Street. Parking issues, whether perceived or actual, are a major source of conflict in many Main Street revitalization projects.

Warren Hart mentioned that the County has prepared a matrix of property conditions for the buildings and vacant lots along the Main Street. Along with having the data necessary in order to realistically assess the conditions of the buildings on the Main Street, it is important to prioritize a list of 10 or a dozen properties that will be the highest priorities for action once the Strategy is adopted.

III. County Planning Department Information

Warren Hart and Karl Heck presented the County's matrix of information. Along with the aerial view shots from Pictometry, County staff photographed each building on the Main Street, and the matrix assesses the site and conditions. Interior conditions are assessed to the extent possible. After reaction from the Committee, it was decided that the County would continue to develop the matrix as part of the overall Main Street Strategy.

The County also prepared a PowerPoint of slides for presentation, and a number of the slides were presented to the Committee. One relatively shortterm improvement that will be recommended is the improvement of gateway signage at both major gateways in Cairo.

Both the Dadrases and the County emphasized that having some "ready-to-go" improvements to build momentum is critical to the overall success of the Main Street Strategy, while at the same time having a plan that can be worked for a number of years to bolster the Main Street. The success of Catskill's effort show that it is possible to steadily build commerce along the Main Street and grow the business and property values.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m. The Dadrases Architects agreed to provide the beginning portions of the Strategy within the week to Greene County Economic Development, Tourism and Planning for review. A future meeting will be scheduled once that information is received and reviewed.

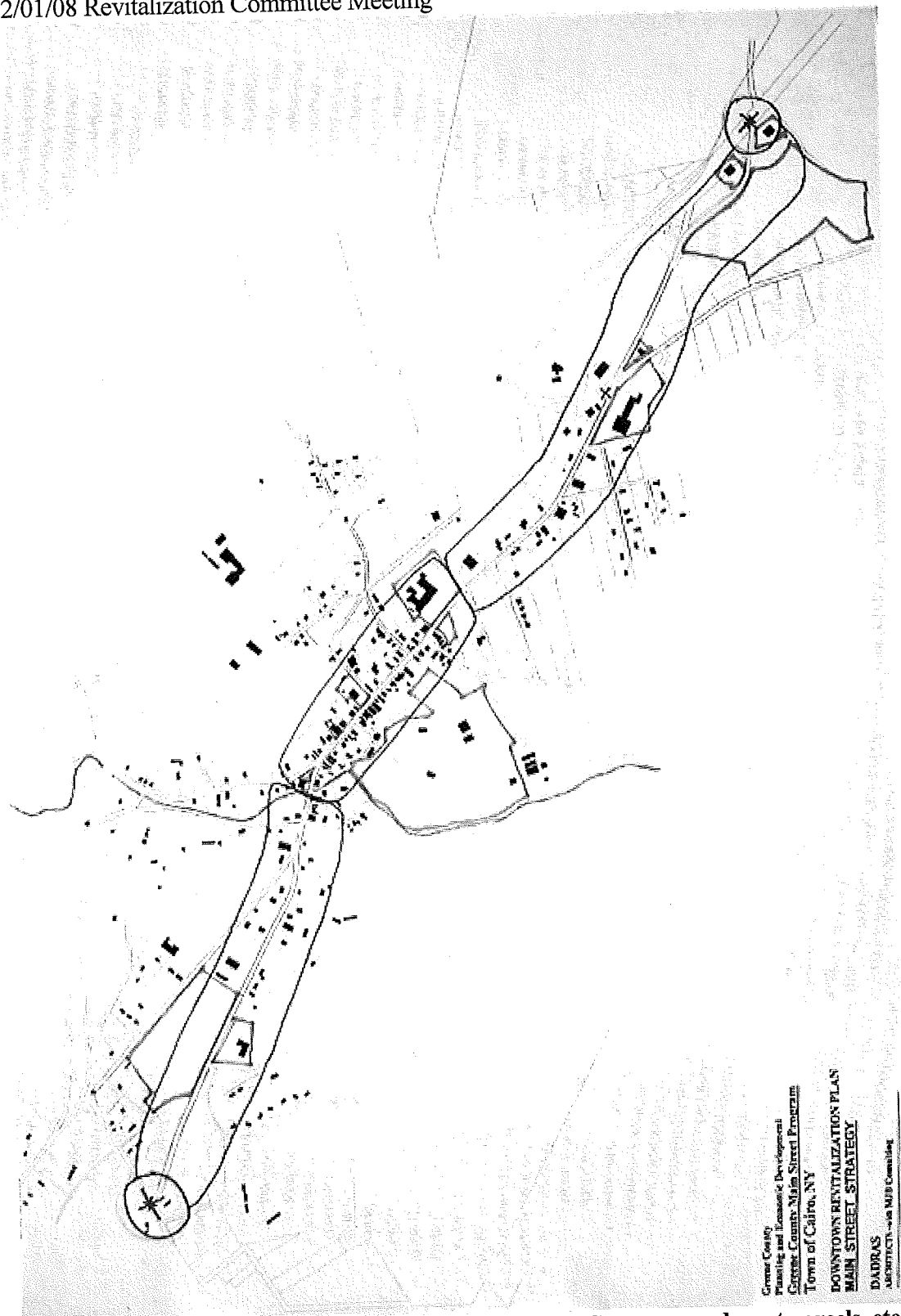
Respectfully submitted,

Karl Heck, AICP
Community Development Specialist

New York Main Street Group

Cairo, NY - *Main Street Strategy: DRAFT -for Preliminary Review only*

*Drawing / Graphic - from PRESENTATION BOARDS ,by DADRAS ARCHITECTS, at
12/01/08 Revitalization Committee Meeting



Cairo Main Street Districts: Figure/Field Analysis - with Gateways, and asset parcels, etc.

New York Main Street Group

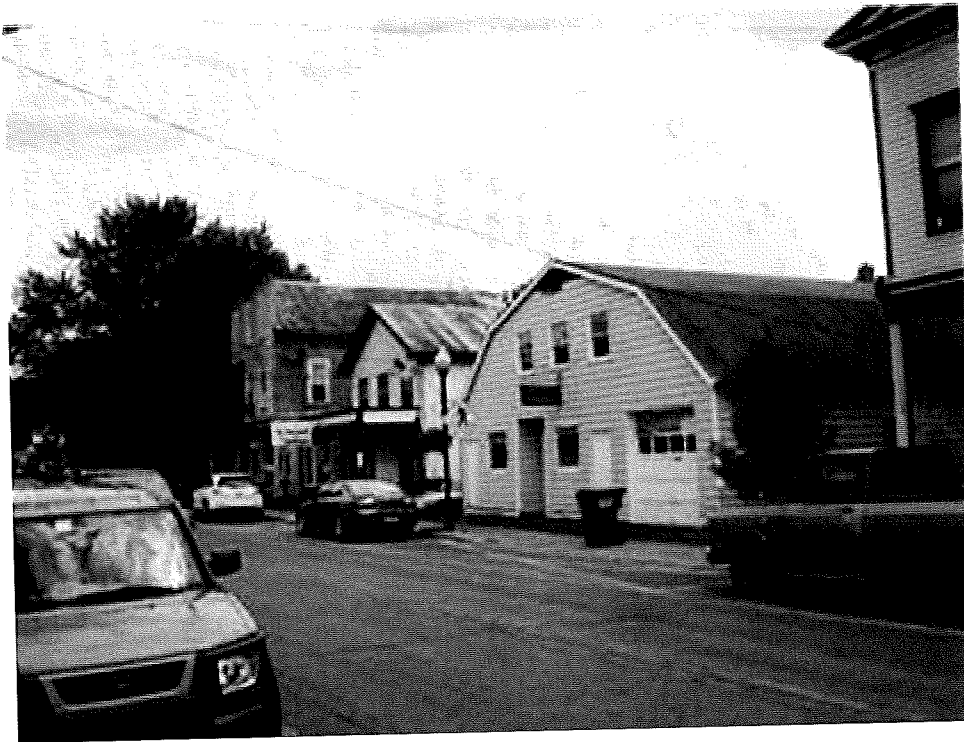
Cairo, NY - *Main Street Strategy: DRAFT -for Preliminary Review only*
September 30, 2008

ADDENDUM to: “II. EXISTING STUDY”

2. documentation of existing conditions

(Additional) Selected annotated photos, of existing conditions / and issues:





f. Center area of proposed Main Street District consists of historic center of Hamlet:

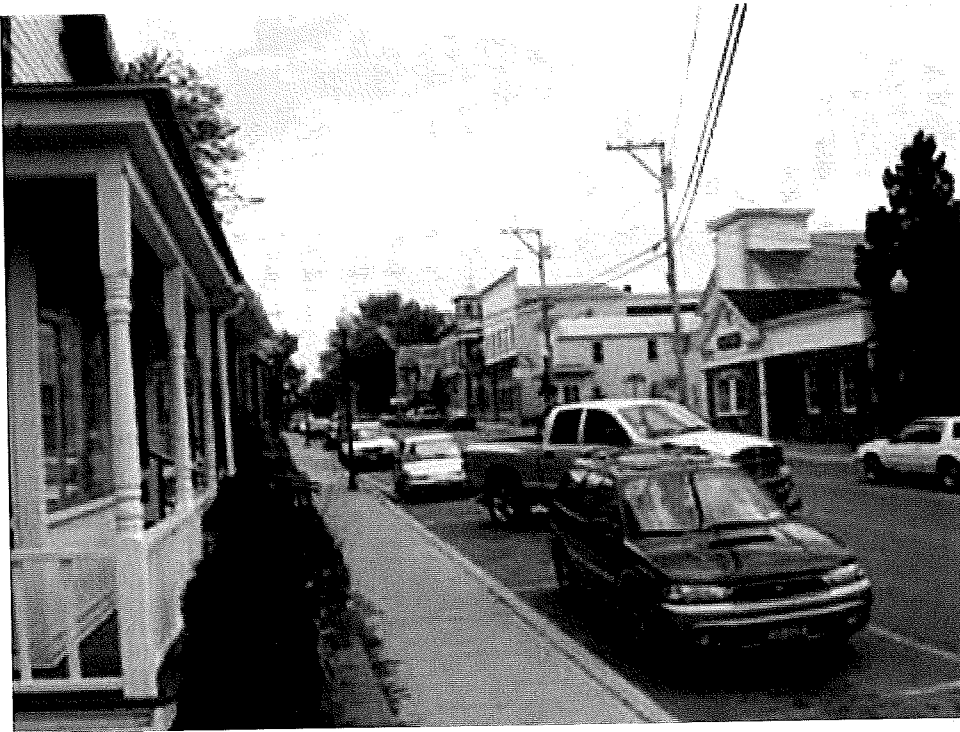


i. Center area of proposed Main Street District consists many Historical buildings, with quality architecture. The setback/front lawn is a more residential streetscape environment.



n. Center area of proposed Main Street District contains many issues which can be improved, including Facades in need of restoration, streetscape improvements, and many "gaps" in the streetscape/fabric which might be enhanced (or re-developed) -but need careful design guidelines - to help assure compliance with the new Cairo "image" and vision).





o. Center area of proposed Main Street District contains many issues which can be improved. Narrow sidewalks, and non-commercial street level uses are an existing issue which must be considered, and addressed - to help assure compliance with the new Cairo "image" and vision).





p. Center area of proposed Main Street District contains many issues which can be improved, including Facades in need of restoration, streetscape improvements, and many "gaps" in the streetscape/fabric which might be enhanced (or re-developed) -but need careful design guidelines - to help assure compliance with the new Cairo "image" and vision).





q. Center area of proposed Main Street District contains many issues which can be improved. These buildings are the “commercial-intense” portion of the historic center, and are in much need of façade and streetscape improvements - to help assure compliance with the new Cairo “image” and vision).





s. Center area of proposed Main Street District contains many issues which can be improved. Existing streetscape (residential in use) creates barriers to pedestrian-friendly environment





Brief History of Cairo

Robert Uzzilia

Cairo Town Historian

(submitted: November, 2008)

As the Continental Congress was drafting exciting documents of liberation for an emerging America, the central region of Greene County (then Albany Co.), was already occupied by hearty pioneers. Water sources, previously hunted and fished by the Iroquois, Esopus and other native tribes, were now of interest to white settlers. Large tracts of arable land and a sustainable way of life were being exchanged for the new immigrants' money, firearms and spirits. As early as 1751 clear title to the Hardenburg Patent had been obtained and Colonial districts established. At the close of the Revolution, however, a mass migration of mostly Connecticut farmers and tradesmen began. In 1780 Frederick Schermerhorn built a log cabin in the area of present-day Round Top and by 1787 Wessel Salisbury had located just east of Cairo Village on the Mountain Road.

Likely the only settler to improve a large tract of land during this early period was James Barker, who in 1765 brought his wife Elizabeth Wooer and twenty-three tenant families from London and settled along the Catskill Creek. He named the settlement Woodstock after the English manor house in which he

was born. Barker left high social standing as an attorney to begin a new life in a rugged wilderness. Despite relative isolation and many physical hardships, Barker and his group would sustain themselves for many years. The construction of the Susquehannah Turnpike in 1801 created a conduit for goods and people from New England to the interior of New York State and beyond, spurring new growth along the route.

Critical industries emerged, utilizing the water power of the Shinglekill and Catskill Creeks and other tributaries. Enoch Hyde and Benjamin Hall from Litchfield, Connecticut set up an Iron Forge in 1788 at Shinglekill Falls. They used high-quality charcoal iron, shipped from Ancram in Columbia County and forged it into bars to be hammered down by local blacksmiths into horseshoes, wheel "tires" and other useful objects for the fast-growing community.

Many other small but essential businesses followed. The bark of the abundant hemlock tree would provide the tannic acid needed to process hides for tanning leather. Eventually the prosperous tanneries of Daniel Sayre, Ira T. Day and others, succumbed, having exhausted their main resource.

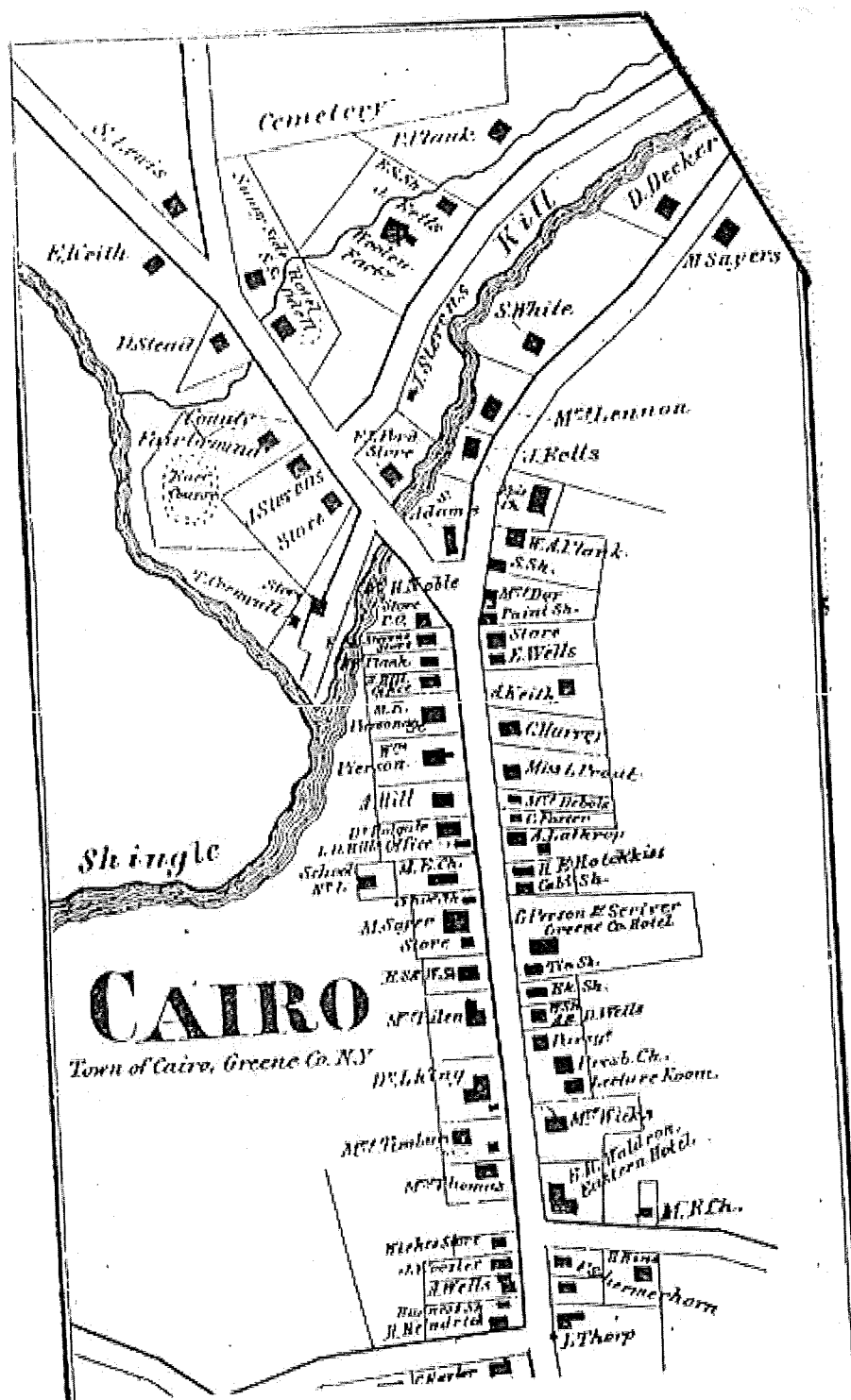
Board lumber and shingle production developed to meet the increasing need for building materials. Additional businesses that sprang up included Montgomery Stevens' distillery (1811), Judge Moses Austin's wool factory (1816), grist mills and factories for producing grain cradles, cut-nails, spinning wheels, furniture, clocks and even sleigh bells.

Farming was, of course, the predominant occupation. The Greene County Agricultural Society established a County Fair here by 1819, with horse racing the main form of entertainment to supplement the judging of livestock, produce and baked goods.

Greene County, comprised of the townships of Freehold, Coxsackie, Catskill and Windham, was formed March 25, 1800 from a southern portion of Albany County and a northern portion of Ulster County. In 1803, Greene County redrew boundaries, creating new townships of Canton and Greenfield from the lands of Freehold, Coxsackie and Catskill. On April 6, 1808 Canton was re-named Cairo upon the suggestion of Ashbel Stanley, a prominent merchant, who had removed from Coventry, Connecticut about that time. Though the name was originally pronounced to mimic its' Egyptian namesake, the local version has since been Anglicized to "C-air-o" (Just remember to keep the air in the middle of Cairo.) Theories differ on the choice of the name. Some believed that the profile of the Blackhead Mountain Range resembled the appearance of the mighty pyramids. Others believed it was simply a popular idea to name early towns after ancient cities of prominence. Cairo's original name of Canton might have been inspired by the Chinese city famous for its export tableware to the American market. Speculation on

why the name of "Canton" required change suggests the attempted establishment of a post office here revealed an existing "Canton" in St. Lawrence County, already established in 1805. With a scattering of about two-hundred early settlers, New England families such as the Allertons, Brewsters and Olmsteads became influential. The town quickly grew to over two thousand inhabitants by 1810. The education of our early settlers was limited to a few months a year in a primitive village facility built in 1795. Religious services and town meetings were held in private homes until structures were built for each of these functions. A post office was established in Cairo village in the early 19th century near the present-day Memorial Fountain. Original officers elected by the townspeople include Daniel Sayre the first Supervisor and James Gale, Town Clerk. The town's first annual meeting took place at the home of Widow Mary Carbine on March 26, 1803. By 1825 Cairo, because of its central location and available land, became the chosen location for a county-run Poor House.

Despite the early success of small manufactories, farming in the fertile lowlands continued to dominate local commerce well into the 19th century. Eventually the technological advances forged from the Civil War allowed the rapidly-growing rail industry to encroach west from the Hudson River shoreline. Although the pioneer Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad brought small numbers of passengers and freight near the village from about 1838-1840, mechanical limitations, competition from Albany interests and subsequent lack of financial support caused its premature demise.



Eventually, the more modern Catskill Mountain Railroad established a branch running from Catskill Landing west to Cairo. The directors of the railroad saw the Cairo extension as a means of tapping business in bluestone, hay and fruit. While the line opened for business in June 1885, sustaining business did not arrive until 1894 with the formation of the Catskill Shale Brick Company. The shale rock would come from sidings

near Cairo and represent a major portion of the CMRR's freight revenue until the shale brick plant closed in 1914. This improved transportation mode lessened the time distance between the New York City area and the Catskills. Tourism increased as a result. The area already made famous by artists, poets and writers would begin to see seasonal prosperity to supplement the agricultural base. Many hotels and boarding or "rooming" houses were either established or expanded during the post-railroad era. Henry Whitcomb could accommodate 60 guests at the Winter Clove House in Round Top and Elisha Blackmar welcomed as many as 50 at his Catskill Creek House on the Susquehannah Turnpike in South Cairo. This pattern continued until the early 20th century saw the gradual decline of horse-drawn transportation and replacement by the automobile. The "horseless carriage" would forever change the way Americans lived and Cairo would see much growth from this newfound mobility.

But this situation proved fatal to the railroad industry as mounting financial losses brought about by improved "auto" roads, forced the termination of service on the Cairo line following the end of the 1919 season.

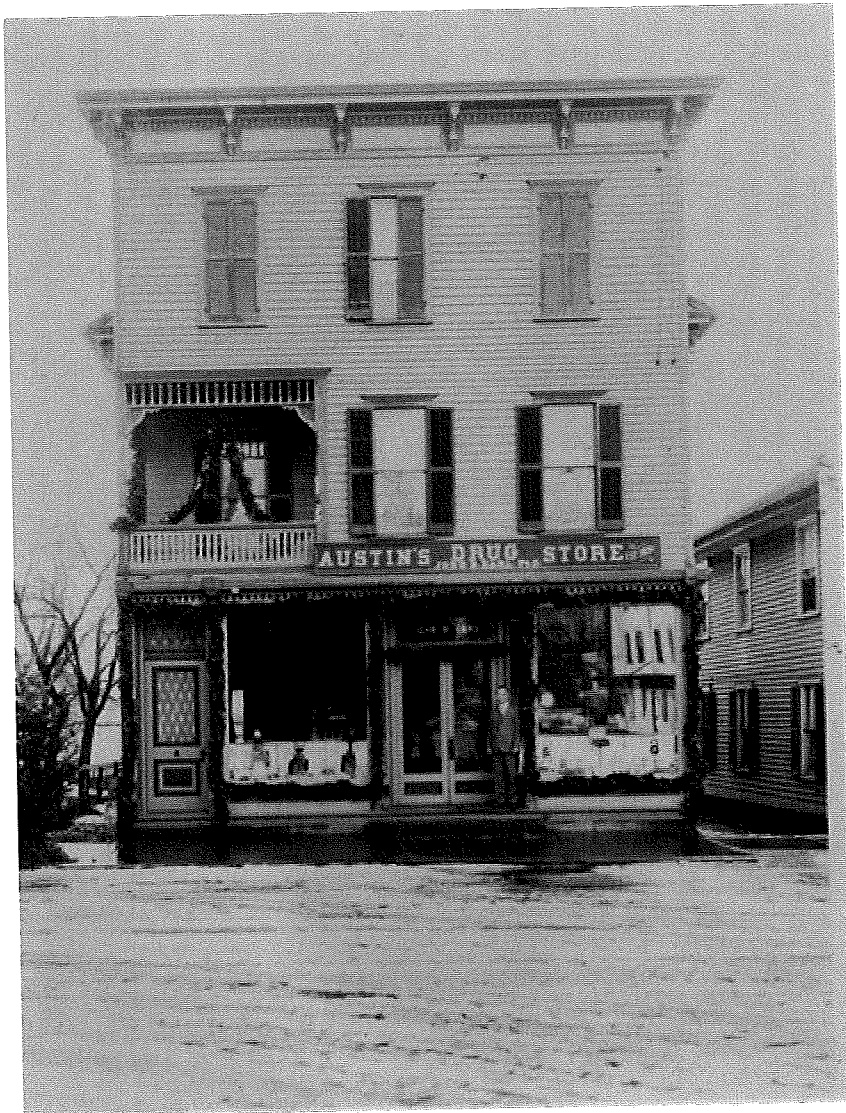
Tourists now arrived in individual cars, spawning the growth of filling stations and roadside souvenir stands. During the summer months the long-established Cairo Fair continued to draw the crowds. Farmers, while still active in their agricultural pursuits, were finding the additional income from providing boarding space beneficial, and some eventually gave up farming altogether, expanding into full-fledged resorts, such as Glenbrook Farm in the hamlet of Round Top.

After victory in the Second World War, soldiers returned to a robust and growing home front. Larger families were raised during this prosperous period. This led to expansion of services from an improved tax base. Even the small hamlets of South Cairo, Acra, Purling, Round Top and Gayhead remained active during this period, enjoying the benefits of a summer population that was often double the norm. Many boarding houses were built during this period to meet the demand. An influx of Italian and German proprietors gave the resort community an international flavor. A Chamber of Commerce was established and prospered with many members and a strong voice in local affairs. Two all-night diners, a movie theatre, department store, shoe store, meat market, fish store and other specialized outlets all shared the economic success of the period. Even after a small shopping center was built on the edge of Cairo Village in the late 1950's, economic equity continued during the 1960's and early 70's. A wide, divided state highway project was completed in the mid 1960's, paralleling the original State Route 23 (now 23B). Some

applauded the removal of sometimes heavy truck traffic through the village. Others declared it the death knell for the community's businesses.

Hindsight now tells us that outside forces, such as the influx of large franchise retailers, were working to diminish the effectiveness of the "mom and pop" store on a national level. Also, the face of tourism was changing. Contemporary visitors wanted more value for their dollar. Their vacation options increased in quantity and quality, with competitive travel rates, the establishment of large amusement parks, casinos and other attractions.

Constant during the last 200 years has been the outstanding natural beauty of the town and the friendly nature of its inhabitants. It is with optimism we endeavor to maintain these assets while continuing to balance improvement and growth.



A STRATEGY FOR CAIRO'S ECONOMIC GROWTH:

-by Joan Geitz, Cairo Resident, Greene Council of the Arts
(*received via e-mail , October 30, 2008)

These are my ideas for a collaboration between Cairo and the Greene Council of the Arts, regarding the Angelo Canna Town Park and the Shinglekill Creek. A region's economy cannot remain strong when it loses its residents, visitors and tourists. The question to ask is would you want to stop to explore, eat, shop and be entertained in Cairo. The answer is a cacophony of "NOs".

The other questions is what can Cairo do to attract desirable individuals to Cairo, and what constitutes a "desirable" individual? My definition of desirable individuals would be people who want to expand their interests which would include an education in a myriad of disciplines through schooling, life experiences and entertainment.

So the following is just one idea of how Cairo can capitalize on its major natural resource, Shinglekill Creek running through its Angelo Canna Town Park.

When entering the park from Cairo's Main Street (Rt. 23B) the creek is on the right. During the fall and winter you can see the creek but in the spring and summer the creek is blanketed with excessive weeds and shrubs and most new residents and visitors don't even realize it exists. And that's a damn shame!

That creek is one of nature's beautiful phenomena that can take your breath away which is exactly what most writers, artists and creative thinkers seek throughout their lifetimes. And these are some of the "desirable" individuals that will put Cairo back on the map:

A. Firstly, the overgrown weeds and shrubs must be cleared during the spring and summer:

To do this, so that the Town does not have any added expenditures to its budget, would be to promote the major businesses and banks in the Town to adopt a plot (size to be determined-maybe 10-12 ft wide) and take the responsibility to clear it. Then they could put up a plaque with the name of the business (E.G., BANK OF AMERICA SUPPORTS THE SHINGLEKILL CREEK).

B. Secondly, the Town can work with the Greene Council of the Arts:

After the businesses and banks clear these plots the Town can work with Greene Council of the Arts to start a program that offers struggling artists, or students of various art colleges, to present a theme using the creek in some way (E.G., ENVIRONMENTAL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL ETC.) and to create their art form (PAINTING, SCULPTING, ETC.) on each plot from June through August. They would be given a stipend to help them rent a room in Cairo while working on their project in Cairo.

At the end of August their works would be evaluated and given an award in some form (to be decided by the Council).

C. Thirdly, a Town celebration in September:

There could then be a Town Park celebration which could be videotaped and viewed simultaneously in their schools of origin, and even downloaded on YouTube. Their works would then be viewed on Cairo's Main Street in an available storefront (or NEW art gallery) all winter long.

D. Lastly, this can be an annual event:

imagination--create all kinds of interesting businesses (E.G., THE MUDDY CUP, which hosts a myriad of interesting events that are of an interactive artistic nature).

SO JUST THINK OUT OF THE BOX, and I'm sure you can see how beneficial this could be to the Town of Cairo!