

Southold Historic District

The Town of Southold began with the 1640 European settlement along what is today known as the Main Road in Southold Hamlet. It is thought that the area was selected because of its somewhat sheltered landscape from the winter winds and welcomed summer breezes. Land was divided into long narrow farmsteads along the new roadway. As time moved on, in the heart of the hamlet, many of the houses, gradually changed from colonial style homes, to a variety of styles popular after the Civil War.

In the mid-twentieth century the buildings along the Main Road were beginning to change again. Disturbed by the rapid modernization of Southold hamlet, and the loss or heavy modification of many of the buildings in the area; the Southold Historical Society realized that the historic ambiance along the roadway was being lost to the demands of business.

Seeking to preserve the historic atmosphere of town, members of the Historical Society formed a committee and began to identify buildings and spaces that could conform to the rules of New York State's Historic District program. In February 1993, the committee at the society requested and received an application from the state to create the historic district.

Unfortunately, the eastern end of the Main Road in Southold Hamlet was already heavily modernized. While many historic houses still stood, the area was interspersed with modern structures and many of the old buildings had been modified to the point that they had lost their historic look. According to the application filed, "...the downtown commercial area does not retain sufficient integrity to form an historic district."

The Society turned its attention to the west, where the Main Road streetscape was still relatively unchanged with houses ranging from the colonial period through the 1930s. The district had to conform with one crucial rule that limited its size. The historic structures had to be within three lots of each other. The state defined a historic building as having to be at least 50 years old. In 1993, this meant that the houses had to have been built by 1943. The rule put several historic buildings such as the Lazarus Manley house and the Doctor's house out of reach of the district.

Starting from west end of the hamlet, on the Main Road, the district thus began with the 1870s Italianate style, Howard House on the "north side" of the street. Notable houses such as the 1653 Richard Terry house and the 1656/1783 Bayles-Tuthill-Cory House anchored the end of the district. The district stretched along both sides of the road almost up to Wells Avenue, with a Colonial Revival house that was built in 1900 ending the district on the north side and the Presbyterian Church property on the south side.

Unfortunately, because of modernization of several lots the committee was unable to connect the Library, H.W. Prince building or what was the Southold Savings Bank on the corner of Youngs Avenue to the district.

The district was able to encompass, some of the side streets that connected to the Main Road. The north side of Tucker Lane that bordered the railroad tracks, enfolded the 17th century John Budd house into the district. Hortons Lane anchored with the Southold Academy and Oaklawn Avenue with the much moved 1657 John Booth house and the Southold High School were also included.

On October 14, 1997 a notice was sent to Maureen Ostermann, the President of the Southold Historical Society that the district was approved by Commissioner Bernadette Castro and the newly created Southold Historic District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places.

Respectfully submitted

Amy Folk,
Town Historian
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