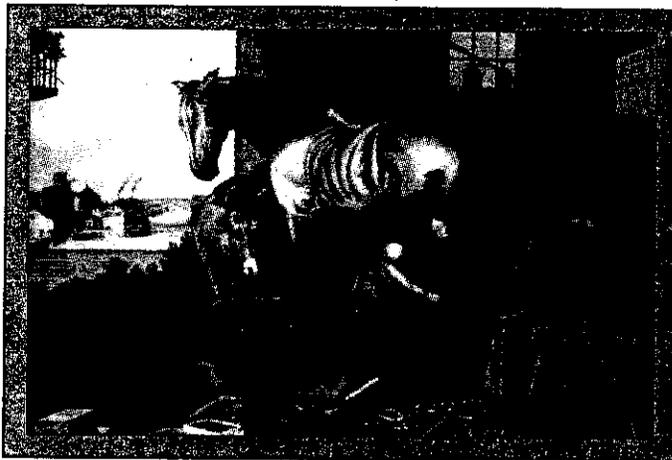


A Thoroughly Wide Awake Little Village

*A Walking Guide to
Keeseville's Historic District*



*Historical research and text by
Virginia Westbrook*

*Published by
Friends of the North Country, Inc.
with support from the
New York State Council on the Arts
Furthermore... The J.M. Kaplan Fund
Publication Program
Fleet Financial Group
Stewart's
Pepsi-Cola Keeseville Bottling Co.
Evergreen Bank*

Acknowledgements

No work of history is created anew. Many organizations and people have contributed materials, research, stories, and perspective to make this publication possible.

Special thanks to Jim Blaise, Bev Hickey and Levi White, Anderson Falls Historical Society; Keeseville Free Library, Reid Larson, Dr. Susan Ouellette and Phil and Sean Reines.

HOW TO USE THIS WALKING GUIDE

In this booklet you will find the following symbols:



The circle with a number in it represents an historical site on the walk. (1-33)



The diamond with a letter and dotted line represents the path you will follow. (A-L)

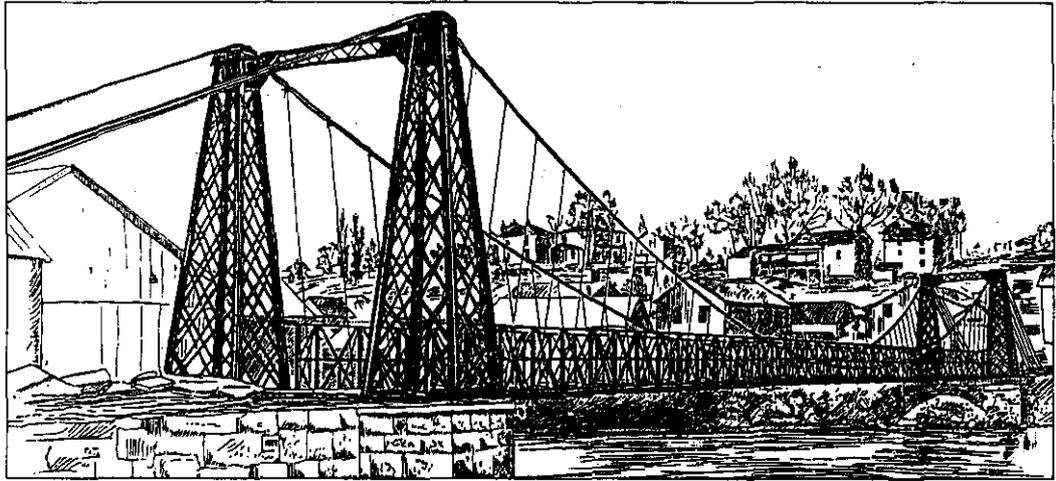
Each site description has a number and each walking direction has a letter. See the reference map on the back inside cover for further information.

We hope you enjoy your exploration and will come back and visit our village again soon!

On the Cover: "Shoeing the Horse" chromolithograph print published by H.D. Dumont, 21 Barclay Street, New York, New York, 1877.

Art Direction/Design: Stuart Rowley Design, Keeseville, New York

Printing: Queen City Printers Inc., Burlington, Vermont



“A Thoroughly Wide Awake Little Village.”

So Seneca Ray Stoddard described Keeseville in his 1874 guide, *The Adirondacks, Illustrated*. At the heart of the Village of Keeseville, midway across the suspension bridge, you can see the layers of its history, and the raw materials that built the community. The AuSable River provided water-power as it flowed over Anderson Falls. The hard Potsdam sandstone of the riverbed fractured easily and neatly into building stone used for many Keeseville buildings.

Captain Jonathan Bigelow first dammed the river at the rapids in 1808 to power a sawmill. Two years later, Robert Hoyle and John Anderson bought him out, expanded the lumber business, and added a grist mill. The budding village assembling around these businesses became known as “Anderson Falls.” In 1812, John Keese bought out Hoyle, and formed the partnership of Keese, Anderson and Keese with his son, Richard. By 1815 Keese family dominance gave the settlement its permanent name. This pattern of rapid business turnover combined with name changes was typical of the development pattern in mill villages throughout the North Country.

Mill construction and business turnover continued throughout the 19th century. The evidence of constant change sur-

vives in layers of stonework flanking the river: parts of dams, penstocks, and factory foundations. During this tour, you can follow the succession of manufacturing that supported Keeseville long after industry disappeared from other river-centered towns. As you move away from the river, descriptions of historic homes, churches and shops will introduce you to the people who worked in the factories and built the village now preserved in the Keeseville Historic District.

Working with Iron and Wood

The two primary resources of the Adirondacks – iron and lumber – provided raw materials which the factories of Keeseville transformed into tools and goods needed by a growing nation as it expanded westward into prairies that had neither ore nor trees. Inside the factories, waterwheels transferred the motive power of the water to drive shafts that ran saws, planers and molding machines in the sawmills. In the ironworks, the waterwheels powered bellows to stoke the fires, hammers shaped the softened metal, and rolling and “slitting” machines flattened and cut. In 1854, S. H. Hammond described the din in a hunting and fishing guide, *Hills, Lakes and Forest Streams: The blows of the trip hammer, the ceaseless rumble of great water wheels, the puffing of great bellows and the clank of machinery are never silent, save on the Sabbath.*

During the first few decades of the 19th century, the rolling and slitting mills of the Keeseville Manufacturing Company and the Eagle Nail Factory worked iron ore from the Arnold Hill iron mine located several miles to the west into “merchant” iron: strips of wrought iron that blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and mechanics could shape into tools, tires, and parts for mills, machinery, carriages and sleighs. The flood of 1856 wiped out many of the mills along the river, and the financial panic of 1857 made it impossible to find capi-

tal to rebuild. Iron manufacturing in Keeseville might have died out entirely, except for the success of the horse-nail machine which gave new life to the industry in the midst of the Civil War.

The lumbering industry evolved over the years from simple sawmills cutting planks and timbers to an international export business rafting lumber down Lake Champlain to Quebec. Changing fashions in architecture called for more and more complicated detailing, which demanded complex planing and molding machinery. Many homes in the village feature brackets, bargeboards, shutters, columns and fancy moldings produced by the local sash and blind factories. Keeseville mills processed other raw materials as well. Several woolen companies and a twine factory helped diversify the industrial base. A tannery near the upper bridge, on River Street, made use of the bark discarded from sawmills to finish hides into leather. A brewery at the end of North AuSable Street filled the local demand for beer, supplemented by a spring-water bottling company in the Beach Street neighborhood.

Commerce followed close on the heels of industry, clustering around the main intersection at Front and Main Street. Modern services have filled in where fire removed older buildings at that corner, but the commercial blocks further down Front Street recall the days when Keeseville was the central place where people came to shop, see a show at the opera house, and bask in the luxury of a fancy hotel.



Begin your tour at the center of the pedestrian suspension bridge. Everyone calls this the "Swinging Bridge" because it sways as you walk on it. Look downstream towards the Stone Arch Bridge.

Bridging the River

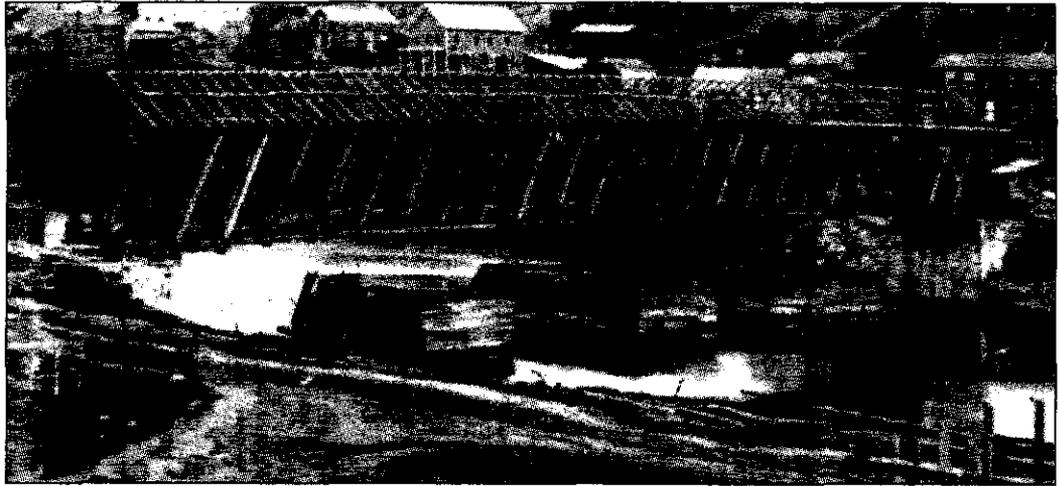
As early as 1805, a wooden bridge crossed the river just below the dam. The river crossing spurred the growth of the area because traffic from the shore of Lake Champlain funneled through here on its way west. By 1840, officials in Chesterfield (on the south) and AuSable (on the north) agreed that Keeseville's industry, commerce, and stage traffic called for the most durable bridge that could be built. They enlisted a master mason, Solomon Townsend, as contractor/builder to construct a single-arch bridge made from the local sandstone.

In spring, 1842, Townsend had thirty men at work, with timber falsework assembled in the riverbed supporting the arch. A sudden shower raised the river nearly to flood stage, and swept away the falsework. The half-completed bridge fell into the river with a shock heard all the way to Port Kent on the lake shore. Townsend and his men began construction again. The following year, they completed the 110' bridge, the second-longest stone span in America today.

The design of the Stone Arch Bridge has proved as durable as anyone could hope for. For over a century and a half, winter ice has broken up and moved harmlessly downstream through the spacious arch. To preserve this classic example of 19th-century masonry engineering, heavy truck traffic was diverted in 1956.



Turn around and face upstream. Just beyond the bend in the river is the second of Keeseville's Landmark Bridges. You are standing on the third. Pause for a moment to appreciate these proud examples of American iron bridge engineering before crossing to solid ground.



All that remained of the original "Upper Bridge" after its destruction in "the freshet of 1856" were three wooden cribs filled with stones, visible in the riverbed. The new wooden Howe truss covered bridge lasted until a very heavy snowfall caused it to collapse twenty years later.

Upper Bridge

Two previous bridges connected River Street with AuSable Street above the upper dam before the present wrought iron bridge was ordered from the Milton, Pennsylvania, firm of Murray, Dougal & Co. in 1877. The Pratt through-truss design was one of the most popular forms. It was used by dozens of independent manufacturers producing "prefabricated" bridges in the second half of the 19th century. The bridge is held together with pins because it predates the invention of pneumatic systems for installing rivets in the field by nearly 10 years.

The Pedestrian Suspension Bridge

Two bridges also preceded the current pedestrian bridge. The first one earned the nickname, "Swinging Bridge," because the footpath, suspended from forged chains, undulated when even one person walked on it. It collapsed in 1842, and was replaced by another which lasted until 1888. The present bridge still serves as the string that ties the community together. The "Swinging Bridge," is one of only a handful of suspension bridges produced by the well-known Berlin (Connecticut) Iron Bridge Company, which

shipped and assembled the parts in a mere two weeks. You can read more about all three bridges in the booklet, *Historic Bridges of Keeseville*, available from the office of Friends of the North Country, Inc.

Industrial Legacy

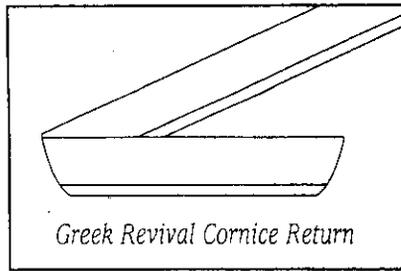
Prominent survivors of Keeseville's early industry still flank the riverbank. To your left as you look downstream, stand the buildings that housed the *AuSable Horse-Nail Company* revived from a previous iron business by the hugely productive Horse-Nail Machine, patented in 1852. The foundation walls flanking the river on the right belonged to the *Prescott Furniture, Sash, Door and Blind Manufactory* which opened in 1864. The five-story stone mill building originally employed a hundred people. At the far end of the park, you can see the outlet for the box flume that originally channeled water through the factory's tub wheels, and later produced electricity.

As the market for building components and furniture grew, Prescott expanded to fill most of present-day Riverside Park, and even spanned the river to take over the abandoned Horse-Nail works. A transport device rigged on a cable carried furniture over the rapids from the assembly plant to the finishing department. Responding to 20th-century market changes, Prescott shifted first to radio cabinets, then to television consoles to remain profitable. The factory building burned in 1968.



Cross to the Town of AuSable (west) side of the bridge. You are now in Clinton County. The tour continues up the iron stairs straight ahead to Pleasant Street.

1



95 AuSable Street
 Stagecoach Inn c.1835-37
 The Riverside Hotel survives from the first era of Keeseville history, marking the coach road that carried

traffic from further up the AuSable River Valley eastward to the shore of Lake Champlain at Port Douglas. It is a simple vernacular Greek Revival style building, with an Italianate porch probably added in the 1850's. As you cross the parking lot toward the Iron Stairs, you pass over the site where W.H. Harper kept stagecoach stables in the 1870's to serve the travelers and stage drivers who stopped at the inn.



As you climb the stairs, pause half-way up to catch your breath and orient yourself to the scene below. These stairs provide direct access from the neighborhoods on the hill, across the pedestrian bridge, to Front Street shops below.

Perch of the Privileged

At the head of the stairs, you come to a neighborhood of historic homes built by Keeseville's wealthier residents. Before you can appreciate the ambience of this mid-19th-century neighborhood, try to imagine away the rush of traffic. This was not a thoroughfare until 1956. The noise and dust of lumber wagons, stage coaches, and buggies followed the main road, South AuSable Street, along the river.



Walk to your right until you come to a brick house.

2

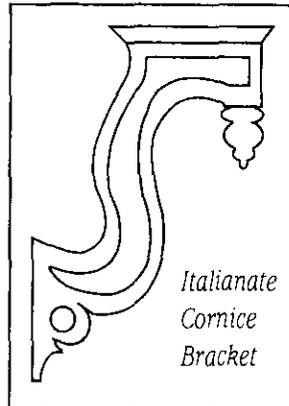


73 Pleasant Street
 This house is an excellent example of the Greek Revival style, so popular between

1825 and 1850 that it has been called the "National Style." The cornice returns, accentuated by the triangular attic

vent, give the gable the triangular shape characteristic of this style. The granite lintels that cap the windows and the location of the doorway are the other signals of this style. The Ionic columns derive directly from Greek temples. The “side lights” flanking the door carry over from the earlier Federal period. The entry porch, decorated with brackets and a great variety of moldings, is a later addition in a more flamboyant fashion.

3



78 Pleasant Street

E.K. Baber House, 1867

Across the street, the Edmund Kingsland Baber house displays Italianate features with a flatter slope to the roof, wide overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets around the cornice, and a rounded attic vent. Built as a wedding gift for

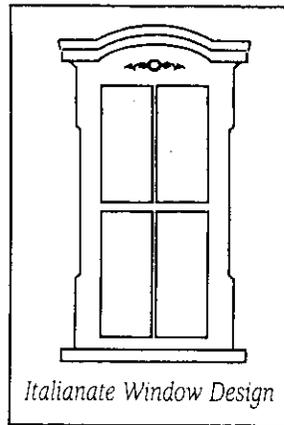
the grandson of Edmund Kingsland, who owned, operated, or had a partnership in many of the most prominent businesses in town, the house had running water in all the bedrooms. In 1870, a two-story outhouse was built, connected to the house by a bridge!

Pleasant Street’s lively architecture tells us as much about the ideology of its residents as it does about their social status and good taste. The Greek Revival and Italianate (or Italian Villa) style chosen by Keeseville’s elite were just two of many forms of classical revival architecture with which successful Americans expressed their belief in the promise of the American Republic as a democracy where equal opportunity would bring material benefits to all who worked hard. The owners of these homes knew it was true, and their houses proved their point!

E

Walk back to the head of the stairs, cross Pleasant Street and Liberty Street and continue to the third house in from the corner on Pleasant Street.

4



106 Pleasant Street

Daniel Dodge House, c. 1860

Daniel Dodge made his reputation as the inventor of the horse-nail machine. This gave Keeseville's industry a much-needed boost just as the Union Army's demand for horse-nails created a huge new market. Dodge clearly invested some of his profit in the

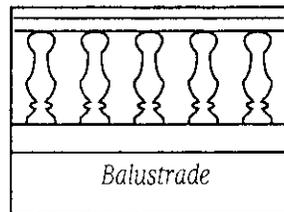
fashionable Italianate detailing of his home.

F



Return to Liberty Street, turn left and follow the sidewalk.

5



37-41 Liberty Street

J. Willard House, c. 1850

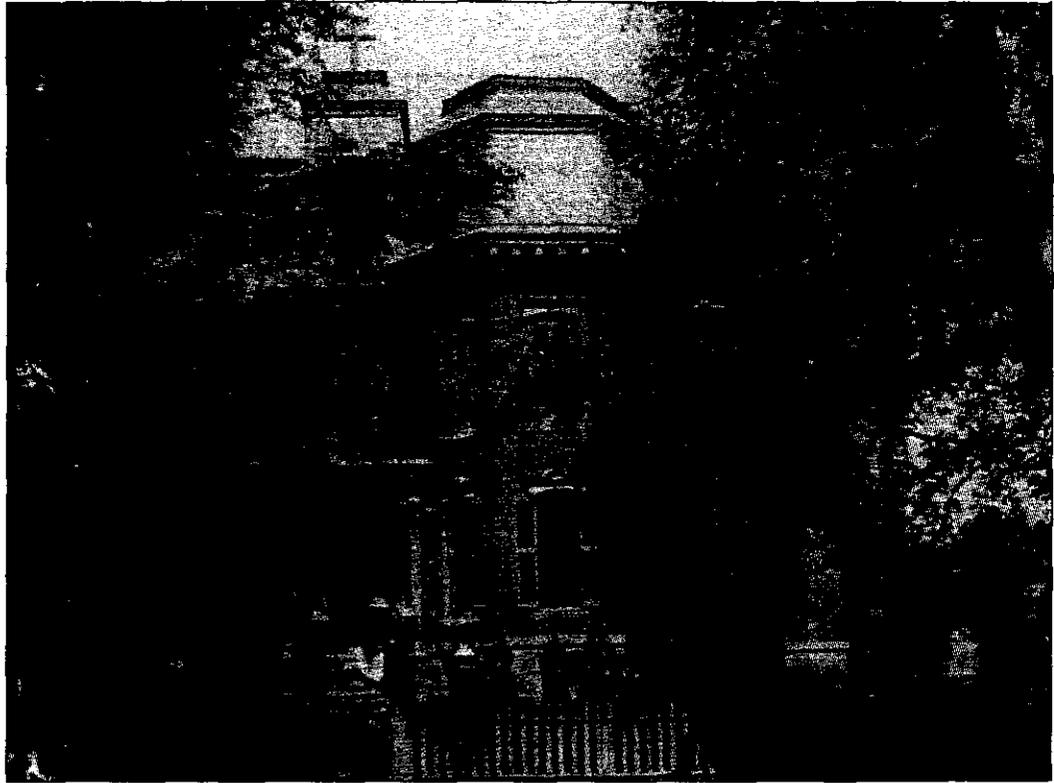
Built by another Kingsland grand child, Mrs. J. Willard and her husband, this house combines the solid

pediment shape of Greek Revival with a center gable design common in Italian Villa forms. Ionic columns supporting symmetrical porches reinforce the Classical Revival feel of this handsome house. The interior detailing reportedly matches the outward appearance. A total of five grand fireplaces exist. None of these connect with the center chimney that was built to balance the design. This chimney only vents the attic. The interior is also enhanced by a spiral staircase.

6

47 Liberty Street

This diminutive building appears on the 1869 map as a "Marble Shop." It could have been a workshop where stone was painted in a "faux finish" to resemble marble. Many homes in town have fireplaces surrounded by such imitation marble. The treatment was very popular in the middle decades of the 19th century, as was an earlier fashion for painted graining which made simple pine look like fancier woodwork.

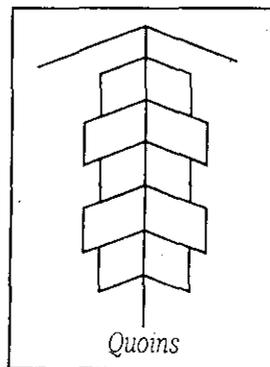


The "missing piece" in this fashionable neighborhood is the former home of Alfred Kingsland. The French Second Empire style home with its Mansard roof was the height of fashion when it was built in 1860. In 1886, it became the home of the McAulley Academy, a boarding school for young ladies run by the Sisters of Mercy. *Photograph courtesy of Anderson Falls Historical Society.*

Village Green

Two churches and three schools flank the common. Their history illustrates growth and change in Keeseville through the 19th and early 20th century.

7



61 Liberty Street Baptist Church, 1825

The Baptist congregation built the first church in the Village at the head of the Green. When their subscriptions failed to cover the cost, the chairman of the building committee, Deacon William Taylor, traveled the east coast seeking additional support. He raised enough money and returned with the promise of a bell from John Brown of

Providence, Rhode Island. The church was dedicated in 1828, just in time to enjoy the benefits of the Second Great Awakening which swept through Protestant communities from New England to Western New York. At one revival meeting, Pastor Conant Sawyer more than doubled the membership of the church.

In the late 1840's, the congregation decided to move down to Front Street and put the old building up for sale. The French Canadian congregation bought the building, but wanted a fancier church, so they "remodeled and improved" it by adding quoins at the corners, Gothic curves and stained glass to the windows, and a spire.

8

Saint John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church Boileau Brothers, 1901; Moses Rabideau, 1926

French Canadian Catholics purchased the old Baptist meeting house in 1851 to form their own congregation, separate from the Immaculate Conception Church across the river. By the turn of this century, Saint John's was ready to build their own church. They moved the old wooden structure in 1901 to its present location in front of the "Old Burying Ground," and hired the Boileau Brothers from Montreal to build a new Saint John the Baptist Church in the Romanesque style with 125' towers to be constructed from local granite. After a fire in 1926, local parishioners rebuilt the church under the supervision of Moses Rabideau.

Academy Hill

Two school buildings flank the Green on the east and north, but the Academy which gave rise to the historic nickname, "Academy Hill," is long gone. Together, they traced the evolution of education in Keeseville. In the 19th century, town government supported several district schools where a single schoolteacher taught children basic reading, math, and geography up through about 8th grade level. Anyone seek-

from Ticonderoga to begin his “higher” education. This education would ultimately include Philips Academy, Harvard College, and Andover Theological School. He remembered his Academy days thus:

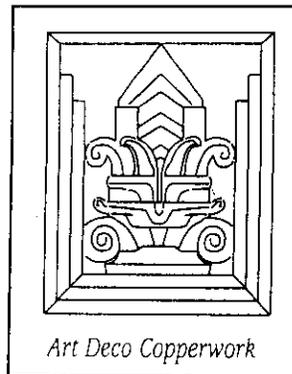
Mr. Beaudry and I used to practice extemporaneous speaking together at Keeseville in the pine groves beyond the cemetery on the high northern bank of the AuSable. We each had, in those days, a passion for extemporaneous speaking. In our unoccupied Saturday afternoons we would write out twenty or thirty titles of subjects on separate slips of paper, shuffle them together in a hat, stand two or three hundred feet apart and oblige ourselves to speak each ten or fifteen minutes on a topic drawn at random from the collection. This taught us fluency no doubt, enlarged our vocabulary and gave us a certain alertness in thinking on our feet.

Cook created a career as a public speaker, organizing the Boston Monday Lectures which earned him a world-wide reputation. His lectures were published in a dozen volumes, and he spent his life on public speaking tours, circling the globe every ten years or so.



Across from the District School No. 8 building is the High School (on Main Street). Public restrooms are available here. Proceed down the sidewalk in front of the High School to descend Academy Hill.

10



Art Deco Copperwork

1790 Main Street

Keeseville Central School, 1936

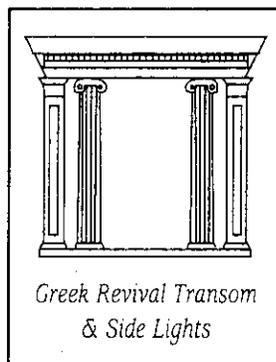
After World War I, improvements in transportation helped spur a move to abandon district schools in favor of a central location. In 1936, Keeseville built a consolidated school for students from kindergarten through high school. It served village students for fifty years until the formation of the AuSable Valley Central School District in

1972. The construction of this building was made with a combination of brick and concrete, popular materials used by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects at the time. The details of the front call to mind English public schools, while the copper work on the east and west sides follow a contemporary decorative style used on commercial "skyscrapers" in New York, Buffalo, and Chicago.

Generations of young people took advantage of this hill for winter sport. Reminiscences published as *Old Keeseville Tales* recall battles fought with snowballs between students of the rival schools, and wild rides on a toboggan. One evening, after choir practice, a group went sliding. The party ended in disaster when they piled into the abutment of the Stone Arch Bridge and two of them died.

As you approach Pleasant Street once again, you can appreciate the way Keeseville grew outwards from the bridge, filling in the lots laid out in the survey of 1820. Commercial buildings and the Congregational Church occupy prime positions near the river, with the homes of prominent citizens nearby.

11



1769 Main Street

Edmund Kingsland House, c. 1832

Seneca Perry, builder

Edmund Kingsland moved to Keeseville about 1832, having sold his interest in an ironworks in Fairhaven, Vermont. In a very short time, he acquired a nailworks at the hamlet of

Boquet, and established a partnership with his brother, Nelson, to manufacture sleighs and wagons here in Keeseville. To these enterprises, he added an ironworks manufacturing nails and rolled iron at both Keeseville and Birmingham Falls (at AuSable Chasm), a few miles down the river.

Edmund Kingsland's substantial brick home stands on the southwest corner of Pleasant and Main Street. This home has all the features of the classic Greek Revival dwelling, from the wide bands of trim at the roof lines, to the elaborate surroundings of the door. Perry gave Mr. Kingsland the entire shopping list of entry decorations: mouldings, side lights, and prominent Ionic columns. The side porch is a later addition.

H  *Cross Pleasant Street, and then Main Street to the Southeast corner.*

12

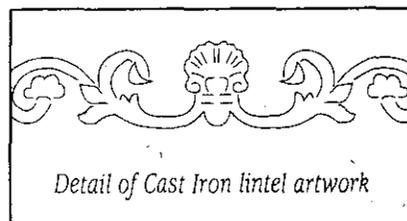
1764 Main Street

Silas Arnold House, c. 1820, 1840

Seneca Perry, builder

Silas Arnold built his Greek Revival home about 1820 with the proceeds from his iron mine at Arnold Hill and from surveying work. By 1840, he had translated his profits into banking and insurance services that would help the region grow, and enlarged the house to reflect his rising stature in town. Rufus Prescott bought the house after Arnold's death in 1879, shortly after his own home and business were consumed by Keeseville's most disastrous fire.

13

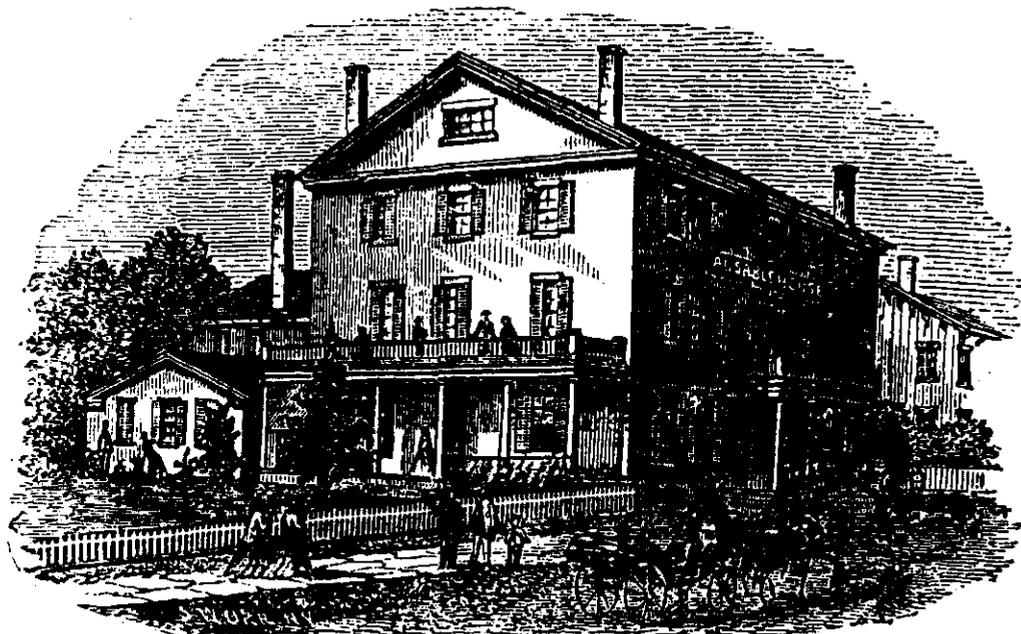


1765 Main Street

Nelson Kingsland House,
c. 1850, Seneca &

Isaac Perry, builders

Nelson Kingsland built on the lot across Pleasant Street, also opting for the permanence of brick construction. He opted for a similar floor plan and overall design to his brother's home, but made use of a new building material in the form of cast iron brackets and lintels over the windows. The latter were cast with a swag design, departing from the austere lines of the classical Greek Revival in favor of curving decorations which characterized later, more romantic styles.



View of AuSable House, published in Stoddard's 1874 guide, *Adirondacks Illustrated*. He described the hotel as, "nicely furnished throughout, beds good, table well supplied, and always clean, fresh and attractive."

Nelson Kingsland expanded beyond his partnership with Edmund to establish N. Kingsland & Son, located near the upper bridge. The foundry employed fifteen men in the production of machinery and castings. A three-story warehouse contained the largest inventory of patterns in northern New York State in the 1870's.

The Perrys: Master Builders and Architects

Nearly all of these older homes were built by the master builder of Keeseville, Seneca Perry, or by father and son after Isaac Perry joined his father in the construction business. The superb craftsmanship evident on the exterior shows up even more clearly in the interior details of door and cornice moulding, and the graceful freestanding spiral staircases. With solid training in wood and masonry construction, Isaac Perry left Keeseville at the age of 30 to study architecture with Thomas R. Jackson in New York. After 25 years practicing in Binghamton, Perry moved to Albany to oversee completion of the New York State Capitol. He supervised construction of Leopold Eidlitz's Senate Staircase (1883-1885).

H.H. Richardson's Court of Appeals and State Library (1889) and redesigned the Great Western Staircase and the Eastern Approach which now dominates the Capitol's main facade.

14

1759 Main Street

The AuSable House stood on this lot for many years, host to travelers, sales people, and campaign speeches. The celebration held here for Martin Van Buren's visit during the campaign of 1840 lived long in local memory. The hotel burned to be replaced in 1885 by this fine example of the Queen Anne style of Victorian architecture. This is the only example on the tour of the "modern" approach to home design where more balloon framing freed a builder to shape the house according to considerations of room use and access to light. The classical revival houses fit the room arrangement into the established rectangular structure. Swag decorations, a porte-cochere, and a broad porch date from 1902-1905.

Connected with the [AuSable] House is the well kept livery of Harper & Tufts, veteran staggers both, who run lines in all directions centering in Keeseville; meeting the boats both day and night at Port Kent, the trains on the N.Y. & Canada Railroad at Peru, and up along the AuSable river to the Saranac Lakes via Whiteface Mountain and Wilmington notch when desired.

— S.R. Stoddard, *The Adirondacks Illustrated*.

15

1760 Main Street

Richard Keese II House, c. 1823

Richard Keese II built his house of "river stone" – the durable Potsdam sandstone quarried from the AuSable River. The style comes straight from the Dutch colonial town houses of the Hudson River Valley, reflecting the family's roots in Dutchess County. The elder Richard Keese served a term in the U.S. Congress, from 1827-28, then returned to Keeseville to help establish the Essex County Bank in 1832. Not surprisingly, he married Silas Arnold's

daughter, thereby integrating the business of the iron mine with those of the bloomery furnace and rolling mill run by the Keese family since 1816.

16

1758 Main Street

17

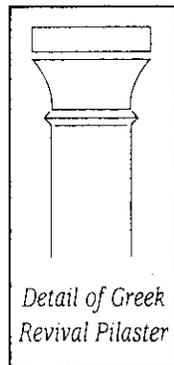
1756 Main Street

18

1753 Main Street

19

1750 Main Street



Detail of Greek Revival Pilaster

This cluster of buildings preserves the form and feeling of an early 19th-century streetscape. The brick building with Greek Revival pilasters (#1758) represented the height of fashion in 1825 when Richard Keese built it to serve as an office. The long casement windows were designed to emit extra light to make clerical work easier. The side entry was added about 1970. The simple vernacular house next door (#1756), built ten years earlier in 1815, is the oldest surviving building in Keeseville. Across the street, *Keese & Hurlburt Store* (#1753), was the first store built on the Clinton County side of the river in 1826. The blue-grey limestone, softer and easier to work than the hard sandstone, was probably quarried on the shore of Lake Champlain. Compare the storefront windows with the store on the opposite corner (#1750), a typical commercial block building built in 1875.

While the buildings survive, the small features of village life have disappeared from the neighborhood. The pump and the hitching post stood among many others a hundred years ago. Silas Arnold's office, in the corner of his lot, became the Lee Memorial Library. When it burned, the library relocated to Front Street. The marble carriage step had been discarded in the back garden after the automobile rendered it obsolete. Even the tree stump in the front

of the Keese house is a local landmark, for the tree was brought to Richard Keese as a host gift by President Andrew Jackson over a century and a half ago.

At the Heart of Matters

All aspects of Keeseville life – work, business, and belief – came together at the intersection of AuSable and Main Street. Along the river stretched an assortment of mills and tradesmens' shops which changed hands and function dozens of times as Keeseville's fortunes ebbed and flowed. Many of these industrial structures fell victim to fire, ravages of time or floodwaters. Many of the commercial and public buildings facing Main Street survive as proud reminders of the bustle and din that filled the streets. From contemporary accounts, we can visualize everyday life in Keeseville's heyday.

20

1746 Main Street

First Congregational Church, c. 1852

AuSable River Lodge No. 149

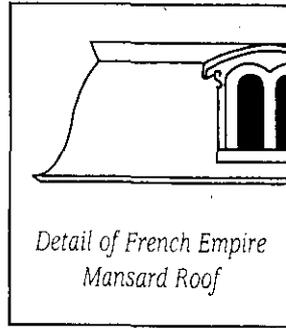
A hefty proportion of the New England migrants to Keeseville thought of themselves as Calvinists first; housewives, mechanics or businessmen second. They met in private homes or the district school for thirty years before building a gothic style church on this site in 1830. Fifteen years later, the congregation shifted their affiliation from the Essex County Consociation to the Presbytery of Champlain. The Presbyterian congregation soon outgrew their first home, and erected this church of local sandstone on the same site at a cost of \$3500.

In view of the present aspect of the temperance cause in this village and the deep and quickened sentiment concerning it throughout the land...we do declare it as our belief that the use, manufacture and sale of intoxicating drinks is contrary to the spirit of God's word....

— Resolution adopted by the

Presbyterian Congregation, April, 1880

21



*Detail of French Empire
Mansard Roof*

1744 Main Street

Evergreen Bank, c. 1870

(formerly Keeseville National Bank)

In 1832, Silas Arnold, Judge Fisk and the Keese Brothers invested their mining and manufacturing money in the Essex County Bank. This "service industry" helped to finance new business and growth, but did not make enough profit to warrant continuing when its charter expired in 1862. Throughout the Civil War, Keeseville had no local bank, a gap which E. K. Baber filled independently when he returned from Titusville, Pennsylvania in 1866. By 1870, recovery from the distraction and disruption of the Civil War was well underway, and Keeseville's growth could support a new effort. The directors built their new bank in the height of fashion, stating the vitality of their enterprise with an exuberant French Second Empire design. In the 1960's, the directors made a similar statement by incorporating fashionable narrow buff brick into the new entryway.

AuSable Horse-Nail Co.

This company's history illustrates both the family nature of business in the 19th century and the complex combinations of manufacturing and merchandising pursued by successful businessmen. Edmund and Nelson Kingsland established a partnership to manufacture sleighs and carriages when they first moved to town. Half a century later, they controlled a dizzying array of financial and merchandising businesses in addition to separate but related iron industries, where the waste from horse-nails was recycled into castings.

22

1749 Main Street

Shipping Office, c. 1856

AuSable Valley Grange No. 973

In this stone building, nails were packed into 25 pound boxes and readied for shipment. The pine for the boxes was cut at the sawmill, just beyond the Upper Dam.

20

Women proved most efficient at sorting and packing nails, so the company hired French Canadian women who came south looking for work. Old timers remember that men complained that the women “stole” those jobs that were more sorely needed by men, even though boys were originally employed at sorting and packing.

The AuSable Valley Grange took over the building in 1903, at the height of the “Granger” movement. The Patrons of Husbandry originally organized in 1870 to advocate farmers’ issues, including freight rate reduction, and later rural electrification and bulk purchasing. This Grange group is still active after more than 90 years.

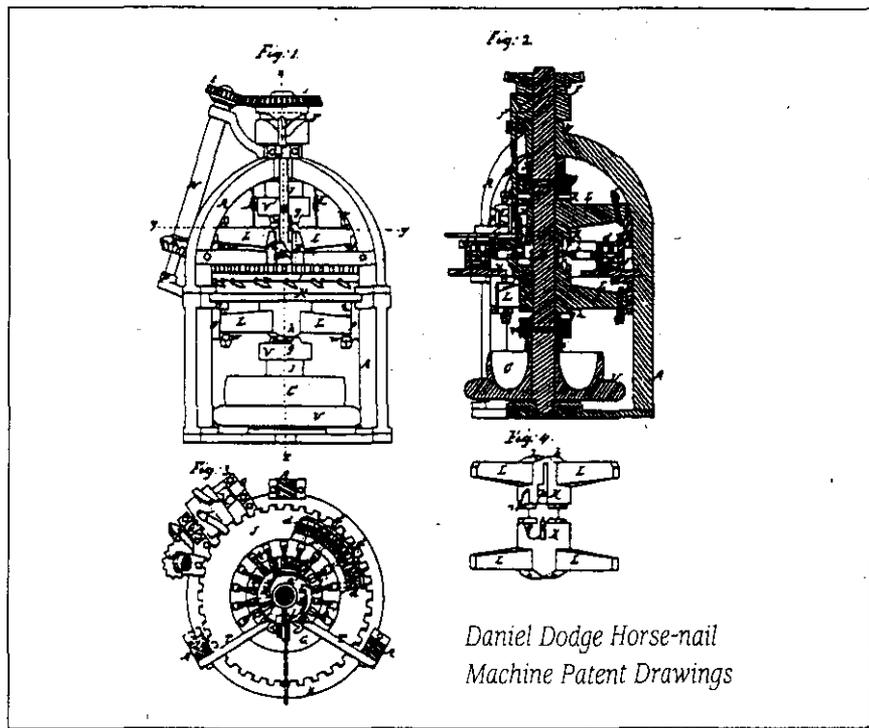
23

1747 Main Street

Horse-Nail Factory Headquarters, c. 1852

The Company headquarters housed a surprising variety of activity. Visitors entering the storefront would have been greeted by one of several clerks busy recording transactions in large ledgers. Upstairs, Daniel Dodge had a workshop, where he drafted his plans and refined the design details of his horse-nail machine. E.K. Baber, grandson of the founder of the company, occupied another room where he carried on an independent banking business for about five years, between the Essex County Bank’s lapse of charter and the formation of the Keeseville National Bank. On Saturdays, the entire workforce would troop in to receive their week’s pay.

The boys employed in these works earn from fifty cents to a dollar and a half per diem, and receive with all the workmen of the company payment in money on every Saturday afternoon. It is pleasant on this occasion to observe their cheerful and contented countenances, when they approach the table of the agent, and as their names are called from the payroll receive the reward of their industry and steadiness. This scene is an infinite improvement upon the system, which formerly existed in many of the manufacturing institutions of the coun-



try, by which the laborers were paid in orders upon a store; or when the merchant's clerk stood ledger in hand at the pay desk to claim and receive his account from the wages of labor. Here the workman is independent and uncontrolled in using the fruits of his toil.

— Winslow Watson, History of Essex County, 1869

Watson chooses not to mention that the Company owners also operate stores in the Village. The employees could surely choose where to spend their pay, but a portion of it cycled right back to the company owners, who - in those days - lived right in town.

Daniel Dodge and his Horse-nail Machine

"My first experiments with the view of producing a machine for making horseshoe-nails were made in 1848, with a model-or miniature machine. In 1849 I build a complete machine of working proportions. It proved but a partial success, producing nails with great repidity, but not of sufficient uniformity to satisfy consumers...At length...I built a series of machines, with successive improvements, resulting

about the close of 1862, in the perfected machine."

*— Interview reported by Winslow Watson in
History of Essex County .*

AuSable Street South

Behind the Headquarters building stretches the long low building erected in several stages, starting with the Eagle Nail Factory in 1841. Once the AuSable Horse-Nail Company took over in 1863, the space held fifty machines, each attended by a boy who supplied his machine with iron rods heated in a small furnace by his side. Each machine produced forty nails per minute, or 150 pounds per day. In the adjacent building, mechanics sharpened blades and adjusted the machines as necessary. A coal house was connected to the works which consumed about 500 tons per year.

24

121-123 AuSable Street

Boule & Rowe Blocks, c. 1860

These three buildings served as tradesmens' shops, with living quarters on the second floor. Conveniently located on the main thoroughfare, they catered to travelers and the village's needs for ironwork and vehicle repair. Keeseville also supported several harnessmakers whose need for leather was supplied by the tannery across the river. Very few examples still survive today of the type of shop in which most independent tradesmen of the mid-nineteenth century plied their trade.

AuSable Street North

25

A detour northward down the residential section of AuSable Street takes you by the Green Apple Inn, which served as a hotel since before the Civil War. Abolitionist feelings ran so strong in these parts that the Baptist congregation wrote



Eight different stores and boarding houses lined this block of east Main Street before Front Street was extended to meet Route 9 across the river.

their anti-slavery position into their articles of faith as being “contrary to reason.” Local history maintains that the proprietors helped runaway slaves bound for Canada because so many old homes along the river supposedly have false rooms.

The pleasant old homes along this street represent the mid-century prosperity of Keeseville. Built by tradesmen or merchants, these modest homes are enhanced with the fashionable decorative details made popular by the prominent families on Main and Pleasant Street.

The old Brewery, now restored as residential units, testifies to the self-sufficiency of Keeseville in the 19th century. With several hotels and taverns in town, all catering to stage and teamster traffic, the Brewery enjoyed a steady market despite the growing power of the Temperance Movement. This movement finally succeeded in enforcing Prohibition.

View from the Stone Arch Bridge: Riverside Park

26

A patchwork of masonry rising from the riverbank suggests the kaleidoscopic change that transformed the eastern shore from one generation to the next. The first sawmills and grist mills lasted only a few years, giving way to substantial manufacturing concerns some of which grew and prospered for decades.

In 1869, the *Beer's Atlas of Clinton County* identified Prescott & Weston's furniture company alongside the dam. A plaster mill, grist mill, and factory machine shop, owned by Arnold and Keese, filled the remaining riverfront. Just a few years later, in 1876, *Gray's Atlas of Essex County* indicates that these last three had merged into the Adirondack Twine Company where twelve thousand pounds of cotton per month were spun and twisted into twine, carpet warp, and candle wicking. All of these factories were driven by water diverted by the dam into a flume and later a penstock which ran through the foundations of the mills. In 1878, a fire started in the old yellow carpentry shop of the Prescott and Weston company. Everything was destroyed along the river except the brick tower of the municipal water supply, called the "art well." This "clean slate" enabled Rufus Prescott to build a new five-story stone factory equipped with "the latest improvements in machinery for making chairs and furniture" and employed 100 workers.



Cross the bridge and continue to the intersection with Front Street.

“**B**usiness is lively.”

John W. Stearns exclaimed in a letter to his parents in 1830. *You would think you were in a city, teams so thick in the streets that you can hardly pass. There is more business done here in one week than in all Sullivan County in a month.* Stearns taught school for two years in Keeseville before he “traded a ruler for a yardstick” to go to work in a dry goods store.

If you had crossed the Arch Bridge in 1900, you would have passed the Commercial Hotel on your left, its four-story brick wall making the river embankment appear twice its height. Inside, rich drapery glowed in the light of crystal chandeliers, as the proprietors catered to a daily round of businessmen, lawyers, and prosperous travelers. H. O. Matthews kept a store next door known as “the headquarters for stoves and tinware,” diagonally across from his substantial stone house.

This side of the river has changed more profoundly than the other. No original structures survive. Everything you see replaces something older, but each has its chapter to contribute to the story of the Village’s past. The presence of a vintage gas station and a recent Stewarts identify this as the village’s commercial center, and the spot that has seen the most change.

27 A

92 Kent Street
Keeseville Mineral Spring, 1871

Further up Main Street, this lovely French Second Empire style building used to house the Keeseville Mineral Spring, discovered in 1824. The mansard-roofed “pavilion” matches the former sanatorium next door. Both were designed by John B. Wills in 1871 to serve a growing clientele who came to find a cure in the brackish spring water. In 1919, the Merkel Bottling Company in Plattsburgh began marketing the springwater under the name Dietaid. Pepsi-Cola

27 B

acquired the business and moved the bottling plant south of the village in 1960.

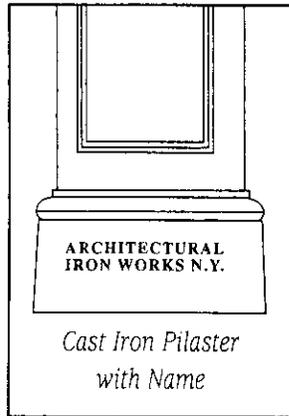
The Mineral Spring Pavilion is now the home of Adirondack Litho Inc., carrying on a long tradition of printing in Keeseville. F.P. Allen published the first newspaper in the village in 1825 under the bannerhead of *The Keeseville Herald*, which continued, with a few interruptions, until 1841. Although lively political squabbles consumed lots of ink, newspaper publishing was always a shaky business. In Keeseville, a series of "sheets" vied for an audience, including *The Keeseville Argus* (established 1831), *The Essex County Republican* (1839), *The Ausable River Gazette* (1847), *The Old Settler* (1849), *The Northern Gazette* (1851), *The Northern Standard* (1854), and *The Keeseville News* (1879). The papers that survived more than five or six years generally did so under a series of owners. The only one still publishing is the *Essex County Republican*, one of the Denton Publications family of papers.



*Return to the intersection of Front and Main Street.
Proceed south on Front Street.*

Front Street

Front Street's earliest commercial establishment, run by John Anderson, was built to serve the needs of the American militia units who patrolled the territory to the west of Lake Champlain during the War of 1812. Service in the army gave many young Vermonters their first glimpse of the opportunities here. Anderson's place stretched from the Stewarts Shop to nearly the library in order to house its functions as tavern, store, and hotel. Anderson "kept a good house" and was remembered as a generous fellow and a great singer.



1729-1733 Front Street

Mould Block

The Mould Block, which replaced Anderson's in 1868, brought to Keeseville the Post (Civil) War equivalent of the modern shopping center: a complex designed to accommodate storefronts at street level, offices, warehouse space, or residential apartments

on the upper floor. Seven different businesses occupied the block in 1869, from Dr. Howard's practice to Henry Prescott's jewelry store, to J. Appleyard & Co. Like most of the stores in town, Appleyard's resembled modern department stores, carrying "more or less of nearly everything required for town and country trade," according to one reminiscence in *Old Keeseville Tales*.

Look up to find where one block ends and the next begins. At street level, layers of changes may obscure the original structure, but the cornice, just beneath the roof, is harder to reach and remodel. Decorative elements were fashioned out of pressed tin, terra cotta, and cast iron, as in the case of the pilasters on the Mould Block. In larger cities, whole storefronts were made up of cast iron, but this example made in New York is a typical of this 19th-century example of prefabricated building material.

Mould & Son deserves especial notice for their Yankee push and enterprise...Their store is a wonder in its way, a curious mixture of city elegance and country heterogeneousness; there are found railroad tickets and perfumery, periodicals and prescriptions, real estate and fishing tackle, black-fly ointment and works of art.

— S.R. Stoddard, *The Adirondacks Illustrated*

1721 Front Street
Keeseville Public Library

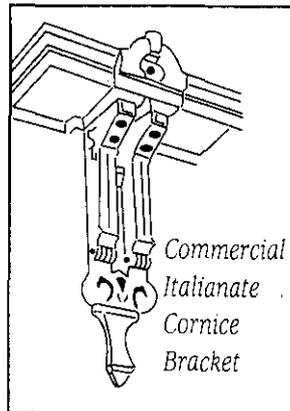
The Keeseville Public Library sits on a lot once owned by Prescott and Tomlinson whose early "block" gave way to the village bandstand. The library's modest Colonial Revival style gained great popularity in the 1920's and 30's. The library moved to this side of the river after losing its home on Main Street across the river. A generation earlier, in 1900, the Ladies Library Association raised funds by holding a series of local history programs, where people shared their recollections of early days in the village. So many people wrote to say they wished to be there, or sent their contributions so late, that the library association published the correspondence in *Old Keeseville Tales*. This volume has furnished much of the color reprinted in this tour, although anyone will caution that the words cannot be taken as "Gospel."

Spencer & Adgate's Store occupied Prescott & Tomlinson's building, here, on the momentous day in 1842 when the New York State Militia held its general muster in Keeseville. W.C. Watson had come with his father and brother from their home in Port Kent to "see the training." Elkanah instructed the boys to wait on the sidewalk in front of the store while he crossed the street to Forsythe's Hotel. The boys minded their father, in spite of the temptation to follow the marching soldiers, trailed by a crowd of children.

"My father had taken my older brother and me up to see the training and had left us standing on the sidewalk in front of Spencer & Adgate's store and had gone across the street to Forsythe's Hotel...with directions to stay right there till he came back....Soon we heard the fife and drum and marching feet of a little company of the soldiers, followed by the usual crowd of village boys in motley....The fifes screamed, the drums rolled, the gay company laughed and shouted. They

reached the swing bridge; forty people were on it; the strain of the measured step of the troops was too much for its strength; the upper chains gave way; one scream arose, and all the people were in the foaming river."

30



1713-1715 & 1705-1709 Front Street Kingsland Blocks 1868-85 & 1900

The northern section of Kingsland Block took the place of storefronts owned by Arnold and Keese and W.W. Tabor whose mills stood behind the stores along the river. In the original survey, the lots extended to Front Street, which gave the manufacturing

concerns a street-front location as well.

This grand row of storefronts, some with original cherry cabinetry still intact, replaced an earlier Kingsland store in which E.K. Baber learned the ways of business and book-keeping as a clerk. Businessmen tended to keep business in the family, so Kingsland had made his son-in-law, Baber's father, a partner in his general store operation. After young Edmund learned to clerk and keep books, he moved on to the Essex County Bank to learn the banking business. By the time his grandfather died, in 1884, he had all the skills necessary to take over Kingsland's position as President of the Keeseville National Bank.



Pause at the end of the block before turning to the right down Clinton Street.

This corner was devastated by the fire of 1878, when about 21 buildings burned between here and the river. The losses included the Methodist Church on the corner, a stone schoolhouse, three storehouses of grain, and several tenement houses. The presence of many churches indicates

that this was the operational heart of the community – where the pedestrian path over the “Swinging Bridge” met Front Street, and work life, commercial life, and religious life thrived in mutual ease.

31

1697-1699 Front Street

Methodist Episcopal Church, 1878

The Methodist Episcopal Church anchors the southern end of the most historic block of Front Street. The first home of their “station,” was a wooden meeting house at the top of the Clinton Street hill. The people who predicted that the winter wind would soon drive them out were correct. In 1831, the society contracted with a mason to build a stone meeting house for \$740. Carpentry cost them \$640, with the old building thrown into the bargain. Following the fire, the present Gothic style church was constructed of local limestone accented with brownstone courses.

The Methodist Society recently expanded into the adjacent storefront and remodeled the street facade with Gothic details intended to blend with the design of the church. This church provided a counterpoint to the Baptist Church which stood in the middle of the block across the street from 1851 until 1964.

32

107 Clinton Street

Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church, 1853

In a town settled by Yankees, Irish, and French Canadians, the Episcopal church was a late-comer. In 1853, Oliver Keese and T.W. Thomlinson donated the parcel on Clinton Street where the Episcopalians erected a fine example of rural Gothic style executed in wood. A belfry and bell were added in 1877. The original altar survives today along with carvings by local craftsmen.

1660 Front Street

Church of the Immaculate Conception, 1835

At the top of the hill to the south stands the "Irish Church," the first Roman Catholic church in Keeseville. The Catholic congregation met in homes and schools, served by traveling priests, until 1835, when they purchased a large lot for church and cemetery. This simple country church with gothic details is the oldest active church in the village. The bell tower and steeple were added in 1875. Between this corner and the church, Front Street is flanked by a combination of modestly elegant tradesmens' houses and simple, solid workers' homes.



Conclude your tour by turning right down Clinton Street to the Riverside Park overlook, where Prescott Manufacturing stood until 1968.

The AuSable River flows unrestrained now through the Village of Keeseville, as it did before white settlers penetrated the Adirondack wilderness to establish a cluster of civilization around the falls. The layers of evidence that rise from the riverbed represent ten generations of changes to a hard-working landscape where the vagaries of flood, ice, and drought tested the spirit and fortitude of millwrights and hydro-engineers whose success dictated the livelihood of factory workers, shopkeepers, school teachers, and all the others who depended on the village economy for their livelihood.

As you consider the history recounted here, reflect with Winslow Watson on the inevitability of change, and the constancy of the river in the life of this village:

Of a summer night I can still hear the murmur of the AuSable River...It seems to me on such a night our dear dead, sleeping in Evergreen Cemetery, ought still to be able to hear it. But such is not always the mood of the AuSable. Visions of broken booms, of floods of ice, of wrecked barns and mills and homes...whirling under the great arch of the bridge, and the marble table there showing how high the river once rose in its wrath, tell a different tale.

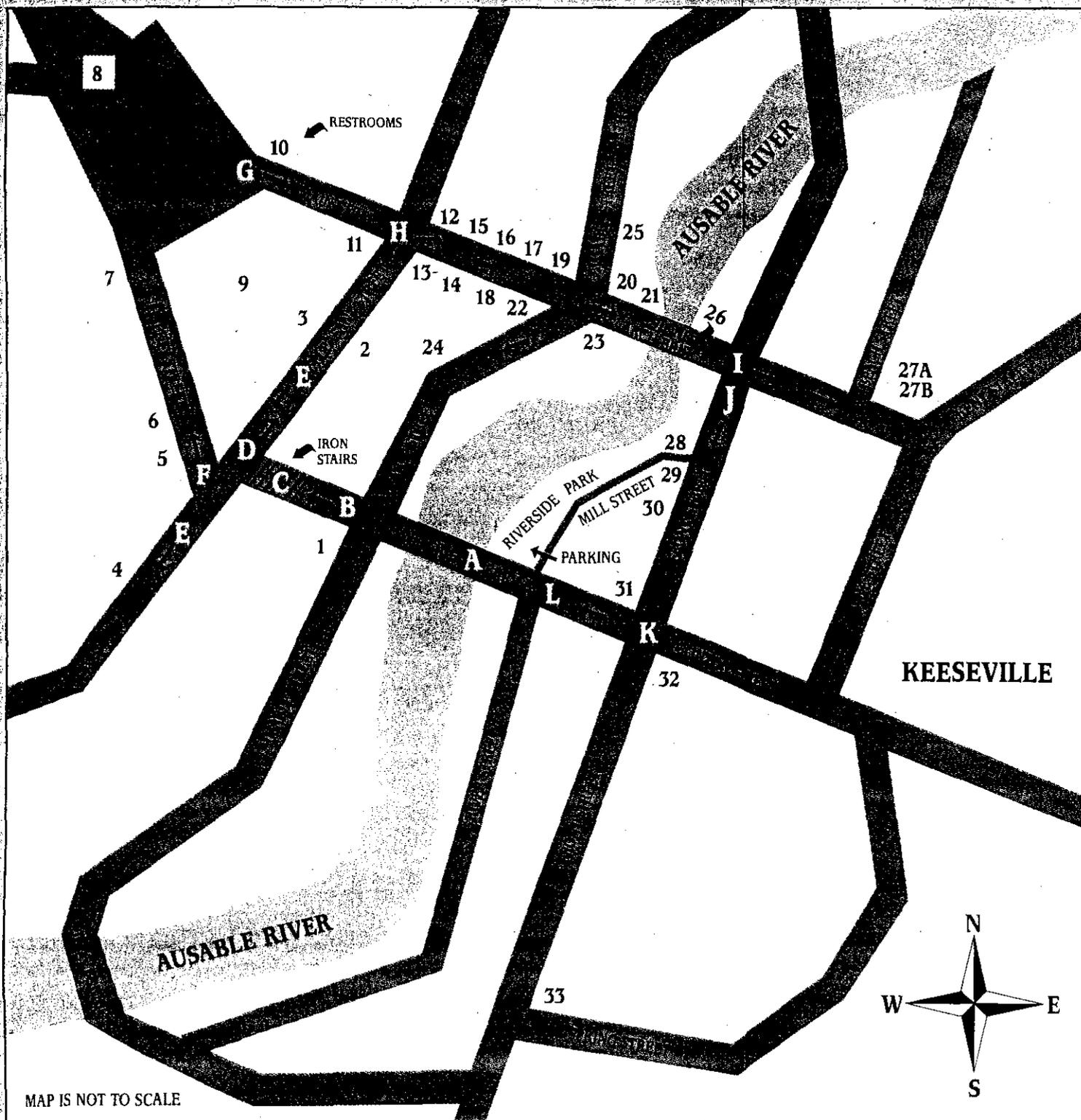
This park and tour booklet represents the most recent efforts to reawaken this delightful village to the energy and enterprise that are their legacy.

Reference
Map of
Keeseville's
Historic
District

Map and Booklet Page Reference Key

Walking directions are listed below and on the map as letters A-L. Site locations are listed as numbers 1-33. Use the list below to find the corresponding pages in the booklet that give you a description of the site and information about the walk.

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MAP IS NOT TO SCALE

