

\$1 buys a museum!

Jim Richerson • Contributing Writer



Photo by Gordon Hugg

Front entrance to the Cayuga Museum with its commanding Greek Revival style portico sporting banners and flags which promote on-going program activities. This photograph will be offered in postcard format by the museum.

Capital campaign on for Case Mansion

Yes, for the token sum of one dollar Theodore W. Case in 1936 deeded the Willard/Case Mansion at 203 Genesee Street in Auburn to the newly formed Cayuga Museum. A box of cigars was also a part of the deal according to Carmalita Long in a memoir regarding the founding of the museum and her husband, Walter K. Long, the museum's founding director. In 1941, for another dollar Case decided the remainder of the Willard/Case estate to the museum. This included the surrounding gardens, a grand two-story carriage house and Case's research lab. In 1989 the Cayuga Museum received national recognition by being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Willard/Case Mansion History

The Willard/Case Mansion, built in 1836, was originally home to the Sylvester Willard family and, through inheritance, the Case family. Theodore W. Case lived in the mansion from 1918-27. The architecture of the Willard/Case Mansion is a monumental, Greek Revival mansion that was originally designed in a rectangular block. In the 1850s, and again in 1876, extensive changes occurred to the mansion.

Since that time the exterior has largely remained unaltered maintaining most of its 19th century integrity. Directed by Dr. Willard in the 1850s, a two story wing was constructed to the east that included offices and a vestibule for his medical practice on the first floor and a sitting room on the second floor (see c. 1880s photograph). This addition is of the Italianate style popular in the mid 19th century.

The 1876 improvements included a dining room and a library wing built on the mansion's north elevation. These later improvements were executed in the Renaissance Revival style. Ted Bartlett, a historic preservation expert with Crawford and Stearns Architects and Preservation Planners, notes in the mansion's Historic Structure Report: "As a whole, the house read(s) very well with both the c. 1850s and 1870s additions. While clearly expressing the popular design idioms of their period, each were carefully composed to work in harmony with the existing. It is easy to identify the building as an early 19th century house with later alterations. Few examples of such compatible alterations survive that clearly took into consideration the original design of the house and achieved a successful marriage of styles."

Contemporary Revelations and Mysteries

Details in the c. 1880s photograph of the mansion's eastern addition reveals several lost features of the mansion. A careful study shows the original stucco covering the bricks. The stucco is scored to imitate ashlar blocks to further impress upon the viewer the temple-like quality of the structure, as well as, trumpet the high standing of its occupants.

The approximate dating of the photograph, says museum curator Stephanie Przybylek, is aided by the fact that the central window beneath the porch is without the Tiffany window which was not installed until after the deaths of Dr. Sylvester Willard (d. 1886) and his wife, Jane Frances Case Willard (d. 1890). The Willard daughters, Georgina and Caroline, installed the window around the same

time they commissioned the building of the Willard Chapel at Auburn Seminary between 1892-94.

Another lost detail is the grand stone railing and awning on the semi-circular porch above. Finally, one catches a glimpse of a statue in one of the upper niches. It appears to be a Venus or Muse type. Surviving accounts left by the Willard daughters recount their distaste with their fathers choice of such immodestly clothed figures. The daughters had them replaced with the more staid urns which occupy the niches today. The current whereabouts of the statues remain a mystery.

The Museum Today

Today Case's lab is known as the Case Research Lab Museum. The lab documents where, in 1923, Case, with his lab assistant, E.I. Spoonable, perfected the first commercially successful system of recording sound on film. Visitors from Europe, Japan and throughout North America have come to the museum to view Case's experimental equipment and to better understand the genius who brought the world sound on film.

The Willard/Case Mansion, now as the Cayuga Museum serves Auburn and surrounding Cayuga County as a repository of the area's rich history. An enormous collection, embracing thousands of objects, documents local agrarian and later industrial developments.

Some of the highlights of national and international significant material for which the museum serves as steward include: Harlow and Willard Bundy, inventors of the time clock and founders of IBM; E. S. Martin, the founder of Life magazine; Miles Keogh who was killed with Custer in the battle at Little Bighorn; Thomas Mott Osborne, prison reformer and warden of Sing Sing; a Louis Comfort Tiffany window designed specifically for the mansion; as well as other significant national and local histories.

The current exhibition which runs through December, "Emerson Park; Owasco Lake's Coney Island," integrates artifacts from the museum's repository. In 1998 an exhibition drawing from the collections of the museum and community will tell of Cayuga County's role in the development of the woman's suffrage movement. In 1999 the museum will share in the county's bi-centennial with a series of introspective exhibits.



Photo courtesy of Cayuga Museum Archives
East view of Willard/Case Mansion c. 1880's.



Detail view of one of the museum's windows after restoration.

Photo courtesy of Cayuga Museum Archives



Photo courtesy of Cayuga Museum Archives
Detail view of one of the numerous cast iron window hoods at the Cayuga Museum before restoration.

Cayuga Museum: The future begins here

Jim Richerson
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AUBURN — Since 1992 the Cayuga Museum has spent over a half million dollars improving the exteriors of its buildings. The majority of these works were accomplished with a series of state sponsored matching grants, local foundation support and generous bequests. Much remains to be done.

In March of 1997 the museum's board and staff held a retreat at Auburn's Holiday Inn. A self-examination exercise was orchestrated by the consultant Catherine Becker. The event was generously underwritten by Minturn Osborne. The result of this one-day intensive session was the creation of a strategic plan and a consensus among all about how to energize and revitalize the Cayuga Museum. With a collective will, many plans and aspirations grew from that ses-

sion. The strategic plan boils the Cayuga Museum down into five essential areas: buildings and grounds, collections, human resources, programs and finances.

All of these areas must be developed concurrently in order for the museum to truly move forward. Some of those plans have already been realized as can be witnessed by extensive exterior works carried out on the museum's mansion and carriage house.

The accompanying interior floor plans of the mansion show how spaces will be developed. The main features include remodeling more than half of the second floor into exhibition spaces, redeploing the museum offices, archives and multi-purpose areas to the lower level, creating a Cayuga County Orientation Rooms on the first floor and revamping the attic area into a climate controlled collection storage area. Other developments not shown include the renovation of the carriage house to rehabilitate the theater, built there in Case's time, into a museum orientation and performance area.

Renovations on the second floor shall encompass Case's original sound studio and the creation of some additional exhibition and storage spaces. Indeed, this will take several years to complete. It is the will of those concerned to create a campus-like setting on the estate which will include a renovated Willard/Case Mansion, carriage house including the theater, the Case Research Lab Museum and the surrounding gardens restored to their former splendor.

With revitalized facilities, new orientation tools and more comprehensive exhibitions, the museum will establish multiple opportunities for visitors to find personal reflection, enrichment and enjoyment. It is the museum's on-going goal to provide a forum for the community and tourists to understand and appreciate a shared past.

To accomplish this, the museum is on the eve of launching its first capital campaign with a quest of \$2 million. One dollar no longer buys a museum. "To ensure the preservation of our community's past, we need the



Source of plans: Historic Structure Report for the Willard/Case Mansion (Crawford and Stearns) with interior alterations by museum staff.

support of all who value our history and our future," states the Cayuga Museum's capital campaign brochure. I invite everyone to stop in and see how things are changing.

The Cayuga Museum and the Case

Research Lab Museum are open from noon to 5 p.m. Tuesdays thru Sundays. Call for other program details at (315) 253-8051.

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