



# Village of Cobleskill

## Historic District Update Survey



August 2003



prepared by

Neil Larson & Associates  
Woodstock, NY



This project was funded by *Preserve New York*, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State & the New York State Council on the Arts

Final Report

**Village of Cobleskill**  
**Historic District Update Survey**

**August 2003**

prepared for

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**Historic District Review Commission**

by

**Neil Larson & Associates, Inc.**  
**PO Box 1394**  
**Woodstock, NY 12498**  
**845-679-5054**

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## **On the Cover**

The series of photographs on the cover are decorative gable end vent screens (DGEVS) on properties both in and outside of the Cobleskill Historic District.

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## **Project Description**

This goal for this project was to update old and incomplete survey information of properties in the Cobleskill Historic Overlay District, most of which is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A limited inventory was compiled during the 1970's prior to the National Register nomination made in 1978. The local district was designated in 1987. The Historic District Review Commission determined that more a detailed and comprehensive architectural record of the resources in the historic district would enable them to better protect Cobleskill's defining historic features and would reinforce their review decisions.

Existing survey forms were updated and augmented with a data base property list that precisely identifies architectural features. One or more photographs of current conditions were made in both black and white print and color digital formats. A total of 323 properties were inventoried. The digital format will allow the HDRC to search, sort, and augment the data more efficiently as well as provide information to property owners on a computer terminal or via the Internet. This historic and architectural information can also be linked to other zoning and assessor data concerning a property. The HDRC will be able to use this data base to make queries about the number and location of architectural characteristics and apply this information to their planning and decision-making. (A number of queries were made in this report that demonstrate the analytical capabilities of the data base.) When the village develops a Geographic Information System (GIS), the data base will allow historic information to be easily illustrated on maps.

The boundaries of the local and National Register historic districts were reviewed and recommendations have been made for possible increase. Recommendations regarding the local historic district are made in two categories: additions that should be made immediately to add peripheral properties that clearly contribute to the historic district, and additions of areas that would expand the architectural context and period of significance of the district. Recommendations are made regarding a revision of the boundaries of the National Register Historic District to bring it more into alignment with the local district. During the process of reviewing the district boundaries, it became evident that there are other areas in the village, notably the railroad corridor, that warrant survey and further attention of the HDRC. Recommendations have been made regarding these.

Surprisingly, data base inventories are still rare occurrences in New York State. As town governments become increasingly computerized and networked, creating digital records for historic resources is all important. This is a valuable opportunity to integrate preservation planning into local land-use decisions. To this end, we have endeavored to construct a detailed and accurate representation of the properties in the local historic district so that this information can be used effectively by the HDRC and other town agencies to ensure the distinctive characteristics of Cobleskill continue to be preserved.

## The Significance of the Cobleskill Historic District

The writer of the National Register Nomination Form for the Cobleskill Historic District remarked on the “exciting array of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular architecture” that distinguished the core of the village in 1978. She was responding to the unusually large number of domestic and commercial buildings displaying significant amount of decoration there.<sup>1</sup> Little has occurred over the past twenty-five years to alter that opinion. Cobleskill still represents the epitome of rural village development in Central New York during the heyday of the railroad. More than most places, Cobleskill enjoyed a beneficial location where turnpikes intersected, agriculture flourished, creeks provided industrial power, and the railroad blessed it with a station. It was one of scores of small commercial centers dotting the western New York landscape, and the central place for a number of surrounding towns in Schoharie County. The village built up in a grand fashion befitting the prosperity of its merchants and its prominent role in local society. The excitement its architecture creates happens because its diversity and sophistication is unexpected in a village of this size and location. But this good fortune was short-lived. Events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – wars, economic depression, the automobile, and rapid social change – caused great upheavals in rural communities, and small country towns like Cobleskill experienced a prolonged economic decline and have been slow to recover. The train doesn’t stop in Cobleskill anymore, and the village has been bypassed by an interstate highway that connects local people with larger and more distant centers. Fortunately Cobleskill has endured. This is in large part due to the substantial quality and architectural significance of the buildings in the historic district. Their distinction and value have helped the community maintain its identity.

German-American settlers began homesteading in the area prior to the Revolutionary War. They came out of older communities in the Hudson and Schoharie valleys. However, Cobleskill did not really begin to develop as a center until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when settlement in Central New York reached a critical mass and there was constant travel on the turnpikes intersecting there. A major southwesterly route connecting Albany and Schenectady with the Susquehanna River and the Southern Tier (NYS Route 7) met a northwesterly route coming from the Hudson River through the Catskills (NYS Route 145) at what is now Main and Grand streets. By 1800 nine persons were licensed to operate taverns in the town.<sup>2</sup> Other transportation-related services – blacksmiths, wagon makers, wheelwrights and liveries – appeared. Initially, local farmers were required to transport their goods to market overland, and turnpike towns acted like landings where shipping agents collected produce destined for the city and returned with store goods for local consumers. Shops joined inns at the crossroads and a hamlet began to take shape. Businesses naturally congregated in the hamlet where the roads brought people together. A nearby creek was impounded to power saw and grist mills and farm implement works. Churches were constructed there further identifying the hamlet as a central place. Cobleskill grew and developed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Doris Manley is credited with the authorship of the National Register Nomination Form.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Roscoe, History of Schoharie County, New York (1882), p. 395. Presumably most of these were near the crossroads.

manner of all rural centers throughout the United States. In this way, the village is a distinctive landmark in the historic cultural geography of New York State.

The most significant economic development to affect Central and Western New York, the Erie Canal, bypassed Cobleskill by a great measure. Towns along the canal's route grew and prospered to an extraordinary extent, and that corridor has urbanized while towns south of there have remained quite rural. It was not until the advent of the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad in 1864 that these southern towns were effectively linked to inter-regional and interstate commerce. Station towns like Cobleskill improved dramatically; however, they were selected because they were already successful transportation and economic centers. The railroad was built to connect Albany with coal fields in Pennsylvania, but it provided a valuable new trade route for Cobleskill-area farmers and merchants. This event provided a new outlook for the community and four years later Cobleskill incorporated as a village. Commercial development boomed and Main and Grand streets, still the principal avenues, built up quickly. A generation later the entire look of the village was transformed once more. Significant wealth had accrued to the merchants and professional classes and their stores, offices and homes were modernized to reflect this elevated status. The living conditions of the laboring class were also improving and their neighborhoods developed as well. New streets were added and the village expanded, diversified and matured.

A devastating fire that destroyed the National Hotel and other properties on Main Street in 1873 was evidently a turning point for architecture in the village. The Augustan Hotel, built on the site of the National Hotel, was designed in an elaborate and highly decorative fashion. This building set the stage for the creation of the "exciting array of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular architecture" for which Cobleskill is renowned today. The old wood frame shops that characterized Main Street's commercial core were replaced with more substantial and permanent brick edifices. Where small, two-story domestic forms had been the norm, now a more modern and stylish three-story urban commercial blocks were introduced. As Cobleskill adopted the more universal appearance of railroad towns across America, it became distinguished in the local context as an emblem of the rural region's achievements.

Homeowners utilized the wide range of house plans and eclectic decorative tastes popular in the period to participate in a showy competition that defined a remarkable Baroque style in village. The railroad provided builders with access to a large array of prefabricated wood ornament that was applied to house and porch roof edges with abandon. Decorative screens in an amazing variety of patterns were installed in the gables of many of these houses resulting in them becoming a signature element of Cobleskill's domestic architecture. Scores of large, stylish residences distinguish the periphery of the commercial district on East and West Main streets, North and South Grand streets, Elm and Washington streets. Elm and Washington were new streets added to the village plan in this period and contain some of the most distinguished homes in Cobleskill. The main gateways into the village were transformed into elegant, tree-lined boulevards conveying a sense of Cobleskill's prominence to every traveler.

Cobleskill's prosperity and longevity is in a large part due to its working class. As a transportation hub, a railroad stop, commercial core and a farm service center, wage-earners played a significant role in village history. They established their homes in areas that filled in around their work locations, particularly along the railroad corridor. Their housing was typically smaller and more modest, yet it also reflected (and reinforced) the overall design trends in the village. It is in this category of architecture that the more traditional rural and village house forms and plans were preserved while the design of Cobleskill's fancy buildings transcended the local context and responded to new popular styles that were sweeping through the nation. Notable among these traditional forms are the small "upright-and-wing" cottages: two-story, front-gable "townhouses;" and square, hipped-roof dwellings that exemplify an enduring German-American house type in the region.

In 1911 the state established a College of Agriculture and Home Economics in Cobleskill. This introduced a new era of architecture and community development in the village. Large lots were divided creating a more urban density to existing village streets. New construction occurred on the fringes of established neighborhoods pushing out the village limits, predominantly on the west, near the college, and north sides. Perhaps the most notable development in this era was Clinton Circle, which was laid out on vacant land on the interior of the large block formed by West Main, North Grand and Elm Streets. Yet, the significance of this early 20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture was overlooked in the historic district designations in the 1970s, particularly since the designs of the older historic buildings were so much more "exciting." Later, affordable housing was constructed for veterans of World War II on land donated by the local American Legion post. This era and its architecture has now become historic and its significance in this community is considerable.

Still, it is true that Cobleskill is exceptional because of the extent of its transformation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other towns along Albany and Susquehanna Railroad, such as Oneonta and Sidney, developed in a similar fashion, but this does not diminish the historic significance of the village. Augmented by a rare county fairgrounds essentially intact to its c. 1895 date of construction and a dramatic rural setting at the western edge of the Catskills, Cobleskill evinces an increasingly rare sense of old-time country village life.

## An Overview of Cobleskill's Historic District

The entry of the survey information into a spread sheet data base allows for the sorting and analysis of this data in ways that can serve the community's planning needs. The following tables and discussion presents the results of some basic analysis of the information, as well as and explanation of the method of assigning the data to various categorizes.

<b>TABLE 1 Types of Historic Resources*</b>	
Buildings	299
Structures	12
Sites	10
Objects	0

\* Historic resource categories is based on National Register definitions, which can be paraphrased as follows: buildings contain human activities and include houses and barns; structures are constructions such as bridges, well-houses, and parking lots; sites are landscapes (which may or may not include some structures and objects) and include parks and vacant land formerly occupied by a building; objects include items such as historic plaques and public sculpture.

### Buildings

The development pattern of the Village of Cobleskill is generally reflected in the construction dates of the buildings lying within the historic district. (See Table 2, right.) Although, this table documents only extant buildings, it reveals the gradual increase in settlement during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the sudden increase that occurred during the era when the railroad was constructed (1861-1870). The next building boom occurred during the 1880s, which is also reflected in the number of buildings that have survived from this period.

This table does not include those buildings located on the Cobleskill Sunshine Fairgrounds. A separate discussion of these buildings and their significance is included at the end of the Architecture section.

<b>Date of Buildings*</b>	<b>#</b>
Previous to 1841	5
1841 – 1850	15
1851 – 1860	9
1861 – 1870	55
1871 – 1880	33
1881 – 1890	61
1891 – 1900	28
1901 – 1910	24
1911 – 1920	28
1921 – 1930	24
1931 – 1940	10
1941 – 1950	3
1951 – 1960	4
1961 – 1970	5
After 1971	4

*these dates are estimated based on historic maps and field experience.*

## Summary of Major Uses

### *Residential*

Buildings used for single family and multi-family dwellings are identified separately identified in the spread sheet and in Table 3. Of the 95 buildings currently used for multi-family dwellings, only 24 were designed for multiple units. Two former commercial buildings are now used for multi-family housing, leaving 69 houses that have been converted from single family to multi-family dwellings.

Residential structures also include accessory buildings such as barns, garages and sheds. There are 105 barns, 67 garages and 8 sheds recorded in this survey.

*vacant industrial property*

Single Family Residential	135
Multifamily Residential	95
Commercial	46
Mixed Use - Commercial with Residential or Manufacturing, or Religious Uses	11
Religious	6
Bridges	6
Parks	5
Cultural or Social	3
Civic	2
Educational	2
Parking Lots	6
Industrial	1*
Health-related	1

*\* This is a*

### ***Religious Structures***

Several of the religious buildings are the most prominent landmarks in the historic district, given their tall steeples and/or prominent locations. The buildings categorized as religious are as follows:

- Christian Science Society
- First Baptist Church
- Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement (Catholic Charities)
- St. Vincent de Paul's Catholic Church
- United Methodist Church
- Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

### ***Commercial***

The commercial buildings in the district are clustered in the downtown area along Main Street, West Main Street, Union Avenue, Division Street, South Grand Street, North Grand Street. Many of these buildings include residential use of the upper floors and have been recorded in the data base as such.

### ***Industrial***

What industrial buildings remain within the Cobleskill Historic District have been adapted to new uses. Examples of these include

- Florist Shop at West Main Street, which incorporates an earlier building
- The stone buildings in Golding Community Park
- Property at the NW corner of South Grand Street and MacArthur Avenue that is used for storage and parking

## **Contributing & Non-Contributing Buildings**

Buildings that are have been classified as contributing to the historic character of the district number 285

There are 31 non-contributing primary buildings in the district. Non-contributing buildings are those constructed outside the "Period of Significance" of the Cobleskill District (generally those built after 1950) or which do not match the scale of the historic building fabric. These buildings are also often set back from the established building line of the historic buildings surrounding them. The Advanced Auto Parts store at 478 West Main Street is an example of a non-contributing building. A residential example is the Ranch style building at 119 Elm Street. Finally, those buildings that have been so severely altered that they have lost all semblance of their original historic character, and such loss is deemed irreversible, have been determined to be non-contributing.

### **Altered Buildings**

Many types of alterations can be made to a building. One of the most common is residing. Vinyl clapboard is the most typical type of residing material applied today. However, in years past, historic buildings have been resided with roll asphalt siding, composition clapboard, wood and asbestos shingles, and steel and aluminum clapboard. Buildings that have been resided total 196. Of this number 44 have vinyl siding.

### **Endangered Buildings**

Buildings were classified as endangered for several reasons. The most obvious one is long-term vacancy, which tends to make them targets for vandalism and arson. Neglected maintenance that will eventually create insurmountable structural problems, such as sagging roofs, cracked foundations, and broken windows leaving them open to the elements and animal occupation is another readily visible sign of being endangered. Lastly, insensitive remodeling and renovations by current or previous owners, wherein valuable architectural details have been removed or obscured and incompatible additions made, were placed in this category when the changes resulted in irreparable loss of character of contributing buildings. Fortunately, only fourteen of the primary buildings within the district were categorized as endangered, representing less than 5% of this building stock. Eleven or ten percent of the barns are listed as endangered (indeed one has been demolished before this survey was completed), while only two garages were assigned to this category.

## **STRUCTURES**

### **Bridges**

Of the 12 properties within the category of "Structure," six are vehicular bridges. They are:

- West Main Street Bridge over Mill Creek
- Park Place Bridge across Mill Creek
- Elm Street Bridge over Mill Creek
- Mill Creek Lane over Mill Creek
- Clinton Circle Bridge over Mill Creek
- Railroad Street Overpass over South Grand Street

Two of the above contribute to the historic character of the district—the privately owned Mill Creek Lane Bridge, with its Craftsman-like wood railing and lanterns, and the Clinton Circle Bridge, which has cobblestone piers and wood railings. Presumably both the Village and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) have some oversight of any future renovations or redesign of these structures since all but the Clinton Circle Bridge fall within the National Register District. The new Art Moderne or Art Deco Style of the Main Street Bridge shows that historic designs can be replicated and the process by which this was accomplished should be used as a model. Both the Park Place Bridge and the Elm Street Bridge could benefit from more sensitive design treatments to enhance the historic character of these parts of the district. Transportation Enhancement Funds through the New York Department of Transportation could be sought to accomplish this latter goal.



*Clinton Circle Bridge, c1920*

Two small pedestrian bridges over Mill Creek also lie within the historic district and have been enumerated within the parks that contain them

## Parking Lots

There are six parking lots within the Historic District. All are classified as non-contributing structures since they are all located on sites that previously contained historic buildings.

## SITES

There are ten sites within the Cobleskill Historic District. Three of these are parks:

- Margaret Golding Park
- Clinton Circle Village Park
- Center Park

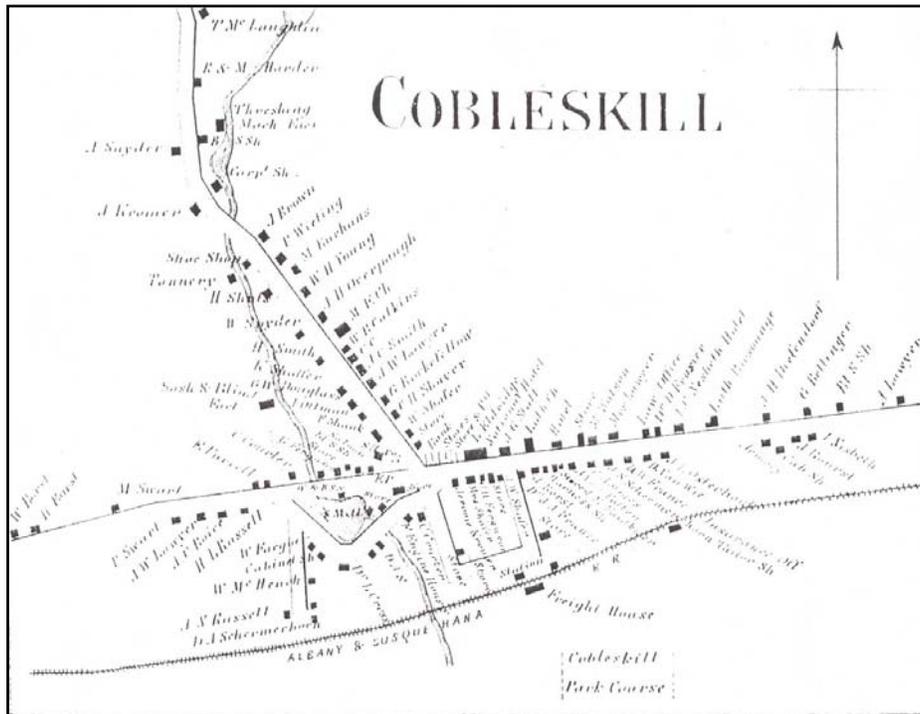
That portion of the High School property fronting on Elm Street is within the Historic District and is listed as a site. The remaining sites are all vacant properties, all of which previously had buildings on them.

## **OBJECTS**

No stand alone objects are found within the historic district; however Center Park contains several, including a statue, a memorial monument, a cannon and a pedestal clock.

# Architecture in Cobleskill's Historic District

Cobleskill's early development occurred along the two main routes through the village—NYS Route 7 (Main Street) and NYS Route 145 (North Grand and Elm streets). It is along these streets that the oldest extant buildings in the district are located. An 1866 map of the community illustrates this pattern, along with two loop streets off Main, Division, Center and Railroad streets, and Park Place/Veterans Drive.



**1866 Map of Cobleskill**

In the sections that follow, the various architectural styles of buildings in the historic district are illustrated. The codes used to represent style in the spread sheet data base are in parentheses and the time frame during which they were popular in Cobleskill listed.

## **GREEK REVIVAL (GR)**



*117 Park Place*

1828 - c1870

There are not Greek temple forms in the historic district. Here the style is identified by symmetrical organization of the front façade, gable ends that replicate the pediments of Greek Temples, massive cornices, wide corner boards with pilaster treatments, and heavy door surrounds that incorporate pilasters or columns with Greek capitals. There are 15 buildings in the district classified as Greek Revival. The earliest example is the former United States Hotel building (1828) located at the corner of Main Street and Union Avenue. Other prominent

examples include the Bulls Head Inn, a portion of which reputedly dates to 1802, but which exhibits a later Greek Revival-style appearance, and the Lavigne Agency building at 552 Main Street.

## ***GOTHIC REVIVAL*** (GO)

c1840 - 1900

The Gothic Revival style is derived from the architecture of the great cathedrals of England and France and so it is frequently the style of choice for religious architecture. Pointed windows, steeply pitched roofs, tall spires, and engaged towers characterize these buildings. Often the buildings are constructed with materials of contrasting colors, such as red brick and limestone.



*Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church at  
615 Main Street*



*267 North Grand Street*

Residential buildings shared many of these pointed features, plus domestic elements such as verge boards, exposed rafters ends, pendants, board and batten siding, scroll-sawn ornaments, decorative window and door surrounds, and porches to heighten the picturesque quality of this style.



*118 Washington Avenue*

Twenty-five buildings in the Historic District exhibit the Gothic Revival style, with the earliest ones located on North Grand Street and later versions elsewhere in the district. There are also several distinctive Gothic cottages on Veteran's Drive immediately adjacent to the historic district that should be considered for inclusion. (See Recommendations and Appendix C with listing of properties recommended for inclusion in the district.)



cornice. The style also  
*280 North Grand Street*

## *ITALIANATE (IT)*

c1850 - 1900

This style is modeled on Italian Villa architecture and when fully realized, is asymmetrical in its massing. A key element that identifies a building as Italianate is lavishly carved brackets supporting a wide overhanging eave of a flat or hipped roof. Highly ornamented window and door surrounds complete the composition. A typical configuration includes a full front porch, sometimes wrapping around to the side, with brackets and braces that repeat those used at the

found widespread favor in application to downtown commercial buildings throughout the country in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Italianate was a popular style with Cobleskill residents—65 buildings of this classification are extant. Although only a few of these closely embody the high style, quite a number show the style adapted to far more modest dwellings with a square plan and low hipped roof, such as those found along North and Lark streets. This was a favorite style of early German settlers and is notable for application in other German communities in the Catskills, Hudson and Mohawk valleys.



*125 Lark Street*



*468 Main Street*

Cobleskill's downtown boasts several Italianate buildings. Mass production techniques begun in this period allowed for inexpensive fabrication of the high relief ornamentation required for the ponderous cornices, while window headers were often cast iron.

## **SECOND EMPIRE (SE)**

c1860 - 1880

**A mansard roof is the defining characteristic of the Second Empire style, usually clad with decorative shingles of either slate or wood. It shares many of its other characteristics with the Italianate Style, such as heavily carved bracketed cornices, towers and ornamented window surrounds.**



***127 Elm Street***



**These distinctive buildings were common but only in small numbers in most towns. Only eight buildings in the historic district, all of them residences, were designed in the Second Empire style. They can be found on Elm, East Main, South Grand and Chapel streets.**

***203 South Grand Street***

## **QUEEN ANNE (QA)**

c1880 - 1905

Queen Anne style houses display multiple roof lines, often have a tower and are epitomized by the wrap-around porch. These buildings are almost always asymmetrical with a plethora of ornamental details, such as shingles of various shapes, scroll sawn brackets and braces, turned columns and spindles.



***425 West Main Street***

This was an extremely popular style in Cobleskill reflecting the village's late-19<sup>th</sup>-century boom period with 52 buildings in this category. All are residential except the Railroad Depot. A few early buildings show evidence of being remodeled in the Queen Anne style. Many Queen Anne style houses were constructed on Washington Avenue, as this street was only developed after 1883, as indicated by the Birdseye view of the village dated that year. Prospect Street is another street with outstanding examples of this style.



## ***ROMANESQUE*** (ROM)

1886 - 1893

Massive brick structures with round Roman arches and corbelling are typical of this style which first began to be used in this country in the 1840s and 50s for churches and civic buildings. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Henry Hobson Richardson interpreted the style with the use of heavily rusticated stone and the asymmetry of Queen Anne architecture.

*451 West Main Street*

Four notable buildings in Cobleskill exhibit the Romanesque style of architecture. Two are church buildings, the Methodist Church on Chapel Street and the former Dutch Reformed Church at 451 West Main Street. This latter building has columns and a Greek entrance surround with two-story columns added to the tower portion of the building when it was converted into a Masonic Temple in 1919. A school building on Union Street, now the location of the public library, incorporates the arched elements of the Romanesque style.



*584 Main Street*

Cobleskill's most elaborate commercial building, the Newberry Block, is highly stylized but also conveys a strong sense of the Romanesque with its arcaded brick façade.

## ***CLASSICAL REVIVAL (CL)***

c1860 – 1930

Classical Revival style buildings have a more restrained traditional appearance than the foregoing elaborate styles, although many elements are similar. Columns, pediments, arched windows, quoined corners, brackets and modillions can all be found on Classical Revival buildings, but they are used more sparingly and in more sedate compositions. This style was particularly favored for public buildings for which a timeless architectural expression was desired. Commercial buildings such as banks were also frequently designed in this style. In residential buildings, the application of the style was widely varied, from the most pretentious mansions to the humblest of abodes.



*130 Lark Street*



*642 Main Street*

The style had an enduring attraction, revealed by its very long period of construction in Cobleskill. However, around 1910 is when their popularity peaked. The Village has 39 buildings in the Classical Revival style, quite a few of them commercial buildings. The most modest of the residential examples have minimal references to the style, as the ones shown above, having balanced proportions, simple window and door surrounds, a front porch and usually a single ornamental opening in the attic gable.

## ***COLONIAL REVIVAL (CLR)***

c1880 – 1940



Other common *616 Main Street*

The Colonial Revival style was spurred by the Centennial of the Declaration of Independence and founding of the United States. It was a celebration of the nation's past, reintroducing Colonial architectural motifs, especially as the popularity of "imperialistic European styles" began to wane. The New England village provided a model, particularly in New York. Axial symmetry is a key feature of the style, with a center passage plan and a prominent entrance embellished with sidelights, fanlight transoms, pilasters and broken pediments. architectural elements include

decorative swags and garlands, Palladian (Venetian) windows, and shutters. Components from English Georgian architecture were also incorporated—strong horizontality, five-bay facades, huge two-story porticos, and balanced, symmetrical chimneys. Colonial Revival elements were also incorporated into Queen Anne architecture. Late in the period, village and suburban homes incorporated simplified colonial motifs. In these more modest homes, the front door was the focus of architectural expression.



*120 Clinton Circle*

There are only eight Colonial Revival style buildings in the district (18 if you include Dutch Colonials and Cape Cods discussed below), and they span a 60-year time frame. There are several large and impressive examples, which are the older houses, as well as more recent ones resulting from a second wave of popularity of the style in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

A distinctive application of the Colonial Revival style is found in the ***Dutch Colonial*** house. (DC)

Dutch Colonial homes share many of the architectural characteristics noted above, but it is distinguished by its use of a gambrel roof. There are seven of these houses in the historic district, six of which date to 1925 and 1930. The houses are actually constructed with false gambrel roofs that use a pentice to effectively give a two-story house the appearance of having a gambrel roof with shed dormers.



*142 Elm Street*

The seventh building is the Key Bank building, c1960, which, without a gambrel roof, is a more accurate replica of the form and design of Dutch homes built in the Hudson Valley. The steep gable roof and raised parapet end walls is a closer expression of the style. This is an important commercial building designed to reflect historic architecture.



*117 Veteran's Drive*



137 Washington Avenue  
historic

The **CAPE COD (CA)** house is another variant of Colonial Revival style, which has its antecedents in New England, particularly its namesake Cape Cod. This style was revived in the 1920s and continued to be popular into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Capes are small and square with large gable roofs, often with gable dormers. They were typically clad in either wood shingles or clapboard. Cobleskill has only three buildings of this style within its

district ranging in dates from c1940 to 1970. However, many more Capes were built in post-WWII subdivisions elsewhere in the village that are becoming historic in their own right.



151 Elm Street  
up

## AMERICAN FOUR SQUARE

c1910 – 1920

The box-like American Four Square is a practical style which maximizes usable space with the minimum of materials. The classic Four Square is identified by a cubic shape, hip roof, often with dormers, and a full front porch. The house can be dressed

or down with the various additions such as bay windows and side porches and the application of any number of architectural details in Classical Revival, Colonial Revival or Craftsman styles. On Elm Street a series of them adorn its streetscape. There are a total of 17 in the entire historic district.

## BUNGALOW (BUN)

1915 – 1930

Bungalows represent another 20<sup>th</sup> century style that provided an alternative housing type to suit the post-Victorian era. A large side gable roof extending across a full front porch with a prominent second story dormer are the defining features of this style. It also has exposed rafters and an open floor plan. Cobleskill has four excellent examples of the Bungalow style within the historic district.



635 Main Street



## **CRAFTSMAN COTTAGE**

1915 – 1930

Generally Craftsman Cottages are small, one-story front gable houses. Like the larger and more elaborate Bungalow, they have front porches, exposed rafters, and other architectural features that emphasized their Craftsman style. Cottages could be designed to a larger scale and with distinctive styling, which is what is found with most of the 11 Craftsman Cottages found

in the  
*184 South Grand Street*

historic district.

## **TUDOR REVIVAL**

c1925 – 1940

The Tudor Revival style is based on English Country houses and is used both for large estates and small single family houses. The style is recognizable by the use of half-timbering, steeply pitched roofs, dormers, Tudor-arch openings, and casement windows, often with multiple small panes. The small house became popularized with the advent of suburbanization in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Plan books and builders alike offered an array of traditional styles such as Tudor, Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial, and Capes because they gave more established feeling to brand new subdivisions. In Cobleskill, Clinton Circle displays just such a mix. There are five Tudor Revival houses in the historic district, all built c1925 – 1940.



*104 Clinton Circle*



## **RANCH**

*c1940 – 1970*

Ranch buildings are generally outside the time period of Cobleskill's historic district – but there are five within its boundaries. Not only do they have a different form and massing from other buildings in the district – long, low (1-story) and rectangular rather than narrow and vertical (2-

stories), they are typically set further back from 128 Clinton Circle the street front thereby creating a break in the established streetscape. Also, Ranches are generally devoid of architectural ornamentation in sharp contrast to the more highly decorated 19<sup>th</sup>-century styles found in the district.

## ***MODERN (MOD) & Other Recent Buildings***

There are no pure Modern style buildings within the historic district. However, there are three properties that fall into a more general category termed "modern" for lack of a better description. Two are actually separate remodelings of the former Opera House Block that is now divided for tax purposes. The third is the Verizon Building on North Grand Street, which is the only one that actually embodies the style in a recognizable way. The dates of these buildings are set at c1960. There are six other buildings, none of which are contributing, that have been built within the last thirty years or so. These have been labeled with common late 20<sup>th</sup> century terms and include: Roadside Commercial, Big Box, Mobile Home (Streamlined), Raised Ranch, Split Level, and Modular. The newest building in the district, the Cobleskill Fire Station reflects a recent trend in architecture of adapting traditional styles to new forms with a Colonial Revival style.

## *UNDETERMINED STYLE*

Seventeen buildings in the Historic district have been assigned this classification. This determination is made for two basic reasons. The first is that some buildings have been so modified that it is impossible to decide what the style was originally or what it is now. The second reason is that certain buildings are purely functional and no style was intended.

## *PLAN TYPES*



*Center Passage*

This basic floor plans dates back to Colonial architecture. The plan is represented by some of the earliest houses extant in the village as well as later Colonial Revival style residences. Twenty-three buildings in the historic district exhibit this plan type.

*603 Main Street*



*Side Passage*

This is a plan type found in many buildings from an early period. There are 24 residences with this layout in the historic district.

*253 North Grand Street*



### *Upright & Wing*

This type has its roots in Greek Revival architecture. The form begins to show up in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural pattern books and has been an enduring village house plan. There are 28 of these plan types identified in the historic district

*159 Elm Street*



### *Townhouse*

This plan evolved because of narrow urban frontages. The plan orients the gable ends to the street and concentrates all the architectural details on the front façade. Cobleskill has six houses with this plan in the historic district.

***116 Chapel Street***

### *OTHER BUILDING TYPES*

One building type that should be noted is the duplex or two-family house. Only 25% of the multi-family residences in the district were originally designed as such. The rest—71 out of 95—have been converted from single family dwellings. Several of the original two-family homes can be found on South Grand Street, a few are located on Elm Street, with others scattered throughout the rest of the historic district. Interestingly, no three- or four-family units were identified.



*Two-family Flat at 242 North Grand Street*



*Side-by-side at 186 South Grand Street*

# Outstanding Aspects Of Cobleskill's Historic District



## ***Decorative Gable End Vent Screens***

Thirty-seven residential buildings in the historic district feature decorated gable end vent screens (DGEVS), 25 of these are on homes dating to the period 1880 through 1890. Because of the large number of dwellings built during this time period, others have probably had theirs removed. In addition, eight accessory buildings also have DGEVS. Only two of these match the DGEVS on the house they belong. Thus, a total of 43 properties

to which *192 South Grand Street* (approximately

18%) display this feature—a distinction that sets Cobleskill apart from other historic New York communities.

## ***Barns & Garages***

One of the most remarkable aspects of the historic district is the degree to which accessory buildings, barns and early garages remain intact. With the advent of automatic garage door openers and the ever increasing size of automobiles, property owners in many communities have tended to tear down and replace outmoded accessory buildings, resulting in a substantial loss of historic character. As reported previously, there are 105 barns, 67 garages and eight sheds within the district. By definition, all the barns are contributing, but what is more amazing is that of these 172 accessory structures, 160 are contributing, 93%. There are only 12 non-historic garages! This is certainly a development pattern that has a strong visual impact and greatly enhances the historic character of the district. However, a number of these buildings are endangered—two garages and 11 barns.



429 West Main Street  
106 Washington Avenue



109 Washington Avenue



*429 West Main Street*

## **Downtown Cobleskill**



*Hotel Augustan at 561 Main Street*

*131 Lark Street*

The three-story commercial brick architecture spanning the last four decades of the nineteenth century located in downtown Cobleskill represents the commercial success of the village in that period. While such groupings of brick commercial buildings are common in all the major rural communities, Cobleskill's remaining building stock is remarkable for the scale and decoration of its intact buildings. Notable among these are a row of six three-story buildings built in the 1860s extending eastward along Main Street from North Grand. Other buildings, the Newberry Block, the Commercial Block, and the Mann Block, with their

highly decorated brick facades, are also highlights of the district. The Hotel Augustan is a rare surviving example of a large hotel in a small village. This collection of buildings provides visual testimony to the evolution of the brick commercial style from small three-bay buildings to fully-developed blocks executed in high Italianate and Romanesque styles.

In addition to the distinguished brick building stock, early wood frame buildings in the downtown add depth to the area's significance. Several of these were originally built as dwellings and survived because they were adapted for commercial use, including the Greek Revival building, now housing the Lavigne Agency, and the Bulls Head Inn. The former United States Hotel on the corner of Main and Union is another rare landmark representing an early tavern and inn. Their continuing presence among the grander brick facades creates a diversity that provides valuable clues to the stages of the community's long history.



*552 Main Street*

# ***Cobleskill Sunshine Fairgrounds***



The complex of approximately 24 buildings and structures that constitute the Cobleskill Sunshine Fairgrounds are a unique asset for the entire region, highlighting its traditional agricultural economy. Already in use as a "Park Course" by 1866, as indicated by a map of the same date, the fairgrounds evolved in tandem with the community. The architectural style of the resources contained within the fairgrounds, most of which date to c1895, are an exuberant

expression of both the rural roots of the community and the expanding vitality of the community in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Gothic Revival style architecture is adroitly blended with the functional needs of the fair buildings. Both old and new buildings are painted a unifying red with white trim, enhancing the historic

ambiance of the entire complex. This is an invaluable historic resource that greatly benefits the Cobleskill community, and it will only become more precious with the passage of time.



NOTE: The resources within the fairground complex have been listed on a separate spreadsheet from the rest of the Village historic district resources so as not to skew the results of the data analysis.



## Final Thoughts & Recommendations



Cobleskill's historic district has several key aspects that contribute to its cohesive character and distinction, which the foregoing report has identified. With this background in mind, a primary goal should be to understand the nature of the "forest" and not only the individual "trees." This is to say that the issues of maintaining streetscapes and the established development pattern of front house - rear barn/garage in the residential areas should be kept uppermost in mind when reviewing individual applications.

The fact that so many early barns and garages are still extant and intact, suggests that they be given special consideration. Their protection and enhancement may require the Historic District Review Commission (HDRC) to champion cutting edge programs to help property owners maintain these buildings.

The observation of an extraordinary number of decorative gable end vent screens (DGEVS) suggests that there may be many more that have been removed over the past hundred years. A public awareness project to help property owners find out if their homes once displayed DGEVS, could lead to positive restoration efforts throughout the community.

The HDRC should also investigate how it can increase its influence on the design and development of the public spaces within the historic district. These include bridges and parks, sidewalks and roadways. Taking into account the overall historic character of the district in the selection of lighting, park furniture, railing details, etc. is critical to not degrading the historic resources Cobleskill has managed to preserve. Protection of bluestone walkways and support walls, reintroduction of street trees to regain the ambience the village once boasted has the potential to enhance the environment in a way that both residents and visitors will greatly appreciate. Such work will undoubtedly necessitate working in cooperation with other agencies, departments, organizations and boards, as well as elected officials. Such contacts should be sought out and fostered.

Expansion of Cobleskill's National Register District to coincide with the current and hopefully expanded future local district boundaries (per recommendations listed below) should be a priority for the community and the HDRC. This will acquire some added protection against possible road improvement projects—for example the replacement of the Clinton Circle Bridge. It could also strengthen the ability to obtain Transportation Enhancement Funds for special aesthetic treatments the community finds desirable.

### ***BOUNDARY RECOMMENDATIONS:***

Based on observations made while updating the survey of the historic district and a windshield survey of the remainder of the Village, the following areas are recommended for inclusion in the district. See Appendix C for a listing of these properties by address and tax identification numbers (Section-Lot-Block).

1. Important properties that would serve to solidify the district or protect rare resources, including:
  - East Gateway/East Main Street
  - North Gateway/North Grand Street
  - Civic area at Lark Street and Union Street, (U. S. Post Office)
  - Veteran's Avenue (Gothic Revival Houses)
  
2. Areas that should be carefully considered for possible future inclusion in the district because the buildings date to the same period as those in the designated district and/or share nearly identical architectural features.
  - Union Street
  - Rose Street/Harder Avenue
  - West Gateway/Elm Street
  - North Gateway/North Street
  - France Lane
  - 1931-33 Central School Building

***OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:***

- Conduct a study of how to convert existing barns to modern garage uses (possible CLG grant).
- Become educated about the historical significance of Post-WWII housing and subdivision developments. Seek funding for a survey of the Legion Drive area.
- Seek funding to conduct a reconnaissance-level survey of all railroad-related properties, particularly those located immediately adjacent to the D&H RR/MacArthur Street area.
- Keep tabs on Federal and State lead paint removal programs, which tend to result in the replacement of original windows with vinyl-covered sashes. Investigate alternative ways to achieve lead abatement and seek Federal grants to implement.
- Conduct a campaign to make residents aware of the aesthetic and environmental problems with vinyl siding. Consider sponsoring a showing of the file *Blue Vinyl* (see [www.nextwavefilms.com/bluevinyl/](http://www.nextwavefilms.com/bluevinyl/)).
- Work with the building department to ensure that repairs to porches do not result in replacement of intact railings. Original railing heights should be maintained whenever possible. Develop a source list for historically accurate architectural elements of the correct size and scale to inform people where these can be purchased.
- Institute a public relations program that will recognize those property owners who invest wisely in their historic buildings and encourage them to be advocates for historic preservation programs in the community. An annual award program held during National Preservation Week is one model for achieving this goal.

*Go to "Cobleskill Historic District – Historic Resource Inventory"*

## Appendix A

### Cobleskill Historic Structure Database KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS Page 1 of 3

In all categories: na = not applicable U = unknown or undetermined

#### PRIMARY STRUCTURES

**Type** B = Building ST = Structure (e.g. bridge) SI = Site (property without buildings or structures) O = Object

**Present Function** C = commercial IN = industrial MFR = multifamily residential  
PK = park REL = religious SFR = single family residential  
VAC = vacant

**Historic Function** DOM = domestic C/T = commerce/trade [SEE EXPANDED KEY ATTACHED FOR ADDITIONAL HISTORIC FUNCTIONS & SUBCATEGORIES]

**Historic Function Subcategories** SS = secondary structure SD = single dwelling  
MD = multiple dwelling IN = industrial

**Style** A4 = American Four Square  
BIGB = Big Box Retail  
BUN = Bungalow  
CA = Cape  
CC = Craftsman's Cottage  
CO-GOTH = Collegiate Style Gothic Revival  
CR = Classical Revival  
CLR = Colonial Revival  
DC = Dutch Colonial Revival  
F = Federal  
GO = Gothic Revival/Cottage  
GR = Greek Revival  
IT = Italianate  
MH = Mobile or Modular Home  
MOD = Modern  
QA = Queen Anne  
RA = Ranch  
RDS = Roadside (gas stations, strip development)  
RR = Raised Ranch  
ROM = Romanesque  
SE = Second Empire  
SH = Shingle Style  
SPL = Split Level  
TR = Tudor Revival  
U = undetermined

**Date** 18XX without c means documented date c18XX means "circa 18XX" indicating an estimated date

## Appendix A

### Cobleskill Historic Structure Database KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS Page 2 of 3

<b>Stories</b>	actual # of stories is indicated (defined as up to the roof plate/eave)
<b>Plan Type</b>	CP = center passage L = L-shaped N = nave SP = side passage SQ = square UPW = upright & wing TH = town house SPL = split level O = other
<b>Wings</b>	RE = rear ell SE = side ell (with - & N, E, S or W noting side of bldg. & - # indicating number of stories)
<b>Additions (Add)</b>	H = historic addition NH = non-historic addition N= none (see notes for description of shape, location & estimated date)
<b>Construction Method</b>	WF = wood frame L = log M = masonry S = steel
<b>Siding block</b>	B = brick BB = board & batten (wood) CN = concrete  COM = composition material PM = pressed metal STO = stone STU = stucco VC = vinyl clapboard WC = wood clapboard WN = wood novelty WS = wood shingle O = other U = unknown
<b>Resided?</b>	AS = asphalt siding ASB = Asbestos shingles COM = composition material MS = aluminum or steel siding PA = painted (brick or stone) PS = perma-stone VS = vinyl siding (clapboard or other) STU = stucco W = misc. wood siding N = not resided
<b>Foundation (Found)</b>	B = brick CL = cut limestone CB = concrete block COB = cobblestone LIM = limestone RFC = rock face (molded) concrete block PC = poured concrete S = siding extended TC = terra cotta U = unknown (-alt added when altered)
<b>Roof Type</b>	FG = front gable G = side gable CG = cross gable FL = flat GAM = gambrel CGAM = cross gambrel FGAM = false gambrel H = hipped CH = cross hipped M = mansard S = shed
<b>Roof Material (Roof Mat)</b>	A = asphalt shingles S = slate SSM = standing seam metal WS = wood shingles O = other U = unknown
<b>DGEVS</b>	(Decorative Gable End Vent Screen) Y = yes N = none
<b>Dormer (Dorm)</b>	OR = original A = added H = historic (added early) N = none
<b>Windows (Wind)</b>	INT = intact ALT = altered REP = replaced MIX = mix between orig. alt. & replaced
<b>Doors</b>	INT = intact ALT = altered REP = replaced MIX = mix between orig. alt. & replaced

## **Appendix A**

### **Cobleskill Historic Structure Database KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS Page 3 of 3**

<b>Porch Type &amp; Locations</b>	F = front (partial) FF = full front FE= front entrance FWS = front wrap-around to side S = side R = rear (more than one letter indicates multiple porches)
<b>Porch Condition (Porch Cond)</b>	INT = intact ALT = altered ENC = enclosed REM = removed REP = repaired (implies original configuration kept, but elements changed)
<b>Overall Integrity (Integ)</b>	INT = intact ALT = altered
<b>Contributing (Contr)</b>	Y = yes N = no
<b>Endangered (Endan)</b>	Y = yes N = no
<b>Description of Decorative Features &amp; Notes on Condition</b>	verbal description provided

### **ACCESSORY STRUCTURES**

<b>Type</b>	N = none B = barn G = garage SH = shed O = Other
<b>Match</b>	(Does it match the style, material and decoration of the house?) Y = yes N = no E = earlier period
<b>DGEVS</b>	(Decorative Gable End Vent Screen) Y = yes N = none
<b>Integrity (Integ)</b>	INT = intact ALT = altered
<b>Contributing (Contrib)</b>	Y = yes N = no
<b>Endangered (Endan)</b>	Y = yes N = no
<b>Description &amp; Notes</b>	See abbreviations under primary structure for construction & cladding details; o.h. = overhead door

### **LANDSCAPE FEATURES**

description of notable features provided

## **Appendix A**

### **Notes & Terminology**

The number of stories of a building is recorded as up to the eave of the roof; e.g. Second Empire buildings are listed as 1-story buildings because the 2<sup>nd</sup> story is technically the attic, also Cape Code style homes are listed as 1-story.

“Blinds” are louvered shutters; the term “shutter” is reserved for solid wood exterior window enclosures.

circa dates are conservative

Barns & garages – “Match” if they are contemporary with the house & repeat architectural decoration on the house (wood clapboard is most common match between house & garage); If architectural style matches but the garage dates to either an earlier or later period, it is recorded as not matching.

## **Appendix D**

### **Sources**

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