

SCHENECTADY'S HISTORIC STOCKADE DISTRICT- - A UNIQUE PLACE IN AMERICA

History

Founded in 1661, Schenectady is one of the oldest cities in America. To protect the new settlement, a timber stockade wall was built by 1664 and embraced four blocks of the current boundaries of what is now called "The Stockade" neighborhood.

The Stockade played a significant part in the four wars of the Colonial Period and in the Revolutionary War. George Washington visited a house here.

In 1795 Union College became the first college chartered in Upstate New York and was first located in The Stockade.

Schenectady was incorporated as a city in 1798, and the first mayor was Joseph Yates, who in 1823 became governor of New York State. In 1823, the Marquis de Lafayette was a guest at his Stockade house, which is still a residence.

Wharves, warehouses, and boat building shops serviced traffic along the Mohawk River during three wars, but they were destroyed by a disastrous fire in 1819. When businesses relocated closer to the Erie Canal, The Stockade became mainly residential.

After a period of decline in the early 20th century, a group of homeowners began a process of restoration without government or outside help. Residents organized The Stockade Association in 1957 to help preserve the neighborhood, and four years later started to publish the newsletter "The Stockade Spy." Both the Association and the publication continue to this day.

In 1962 the Schenectady Stockade became the first Historic District in the State of New York. The City established it as a legally protected historic zone under a state enabling act.

The State Supreme Court approved a Certificate of Incorporation for The Stockade Association in 1973, empowering it to "encourage a concern for The Stockade area."

The Stockade Historic District was declared a landmark in 1973 when it was entered into the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Architecture

A residential community for over 300 years, a portion of a Stockade house is believed to date before the massacre of 1690. A residence built in the early 1700's is the only Dutch urban-style house in the country that still has the original brick façade largely intact. There are more than 80 historic buildings in The Stockade, of which about 24 predate the Revolutionary War. There are several landmark churches, one designed by the "Master Builder" Samuel Fuller, who left his mark on early American architecture.

Architectural historians say that the several hundred buildings in the Historic Stockade District represent a unique collection of early and intermediate styles. Many historic areas are of a single architectural period, but houses here span three centuries, providing a total history of domestic architecture in America. The Stockade has been called "a living museum" for unlike other historic sites, houses continue to be lived in.

Maps are available at the Schenectady County Historical Society on Washington Avenue for self-guided audio walking tours.

Jean B. Zegger, 1996
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SCHENECTADY STOCKADE MONUMENT INSCRIPTIONS

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The Schenectady Stockade is one of the oldest communities in America. Founded by the Dutch on land purchased from the Mohawk Indians in 1661, it came under English rule three years later. From the earliest days a timber stockade wall protected the settlement; however in 1690 a massacre and fire destroyed the village in the first of the Colonial Wars. With the help of the Mohawks, some undaunted settlers rebuilt before the new century.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The village thrived with farming, fur trading, and boat building on the Mohawk River bank. It became a commercial, transportation, and military center. Schenectadians contributed significantly to the development of the West. They played an important role during the Colonial Wars and the Revolutionary War, after which the third stockade wall was removed. Union College, founded in 1795, was first located in The Stockade.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Two events changed the commercial life of The Stockade. In 1819 a disastrous fire destroyed businesses near the Mohawk River, and several years later the Erie Canal provided water transportation outside the old stockade boundaries. Businesses rebuilt in a new part of town. Community life still centered in The Stockade; but the area continued as mainly residential, retaining a diverse architectural legacy of houses, churches, and public buildings.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1962 The Schenectady Stockade became the first Historic District in New York State. The City established it as a legally protected historic zone under a state enabling act. In 1973 the United States Department of the Interior entered The Stockade on the National Register of Historic Places. The national recognition affirms the historical and architectural significance of The Stockade and encourages the preservation of this important part of America's heritage.