

## Historic Markers in Seneca County, NY

There are many historic markers along roads in Seneca County, especially the stretch of Route 89 between Cayuga Lake State Park and Sheldrake. In a stretch of about thirteen miles there are over a dozen of these blue markers with gold lettering. These historic markers were erected as part of the New York State Historic Marker program that began in 1926. The State Education Department undertook this program to commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the American Revolution. Over 2,800 of the small, cast iron markers were erected statewide between 1926 and 1939. People were able to drive their new automobiles throughout the countryside and read about local history on these markers. By 1939, however, cars had become more sophisticated and were going much faster than the older models. Slowing or stopping to read historical markers was getting especially dangerous. So the program stopped.



In the twenty-one counties of Central New York (Monroe County south to the Pennsylvania line and east to include Otsego County and the upper Mohawk Valley), over a thousand historic markers were erected before 1959. Most are still standing and in good condition. Road widening, accidents, and vandalism have taken their toll, leaving perhaps only about nine hundred today.

A new State Historic Marker Program was established in the 1960s and public funding was restored. These markers are known as Historic Area Markers. With new high-speed cars and



increasing traffic, it was no longer considered safe to erect little historic signs along the edge of the highway. Stopping to read them would be too risky. It was decided that funding would only be applied to larger, more detailed signs placed in various types of rest areas, including those along the New York State Thruway, where motorists could pull off the highway, park, and read the signs safely as their leisure. These larger-type historic markers tended to focus on broadly written descriptions of regional history rather than a particular person

or place.

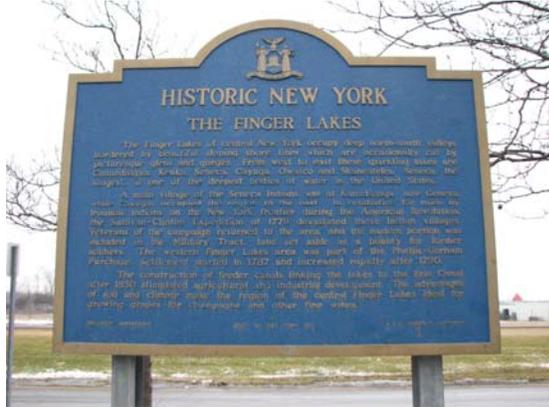
Howard S. Ford, in his book *Sure Signs: Stories Behind the Historical Markers of Central New York*, used examples of certain historical markers to illustrate certain themes in Central New York history. These themes include history of the Iroquois, early missionary efforts; advances in transportation and industry prior to the Civil War; and developments in education and various reform movements, including woman's rights.



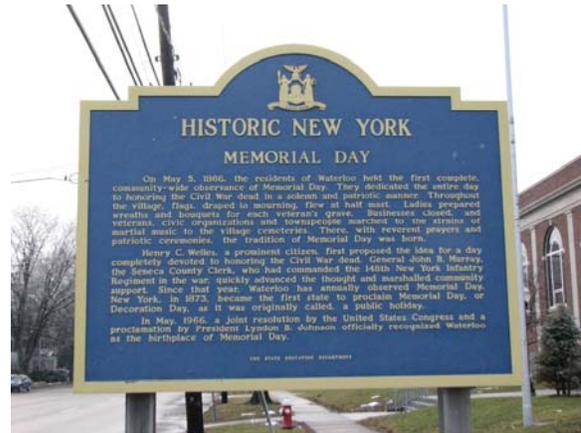
Forty historic markers and two historic area markers were placed in Seneca County as part of this state program, according to the website of the New York State Museum. The historic markers deal with various topics, including Cayuga Lake and its various ferries, Indian



villages, the Sullivan Expedition, birthplaces of certain individuals, and sites important to local history.

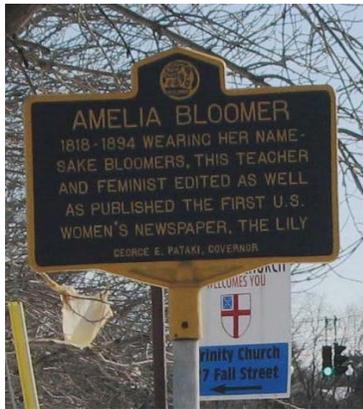


One of Seneca County's two historic area markers is in the Junius Ponds service area of the New York State Thruway and tells about the Finger Lakes Region of the state. Interestingly, an historic area marker with identical wording can be found in the



Clifton Springs service area of the Thruway for east-bound traffic. The other historic area marker in Seneca County is in Lafayette Park in Waterloo and deals with Memorial Day.

During the administration of Governor George Pataki, the state erected a historic marker about Amelia Jenks Bloomer on Cayuga Street in Seneca Falls. This was part of the governor's efforts to promote women's history. Amelia Bloomer was the first woman to own, operate and edit a newspaper (*The Lily*) for women.



Apparently today any individual or organization can put up a historic marker of whatever wording desired without obtaining approval from the state, as long as the placement of the pole meets local and/or state highway department regulations. Such an historic marker can keep the same color scheme and shape as the state historic markers or the sign can be of a different color and shape. An example of a different color scheme would be that of the Tillinghast Manor in the village of Ovid. That marker is green and

was erected by Sally Tillinghast in 1994.

The newest historic marker in Seneca County is for the New York State Agricultural College at Ovid. This marker was dedicated on July 14, 2008, as part of that evening's special commemoration program being planned by the Interlaken, Lodi, Ovid and Romulus Historical Societies. This Agricultural College was the first chartered agricultural in New York State and one of the first in the United States. It opened December 5, 1860 but the next year became the victim of staff and students leaving to serve in the Civil War.



