Taverns and Hotels in Seneca Falls

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Early Seneca Falls Taverns

Taverns were an important part of the early history of Seneca Falls. Many times they were the focal point for community life, activities, and the political hearings of their days. They were also a "stopping place" for the stagecoach passengers using the so-called Utica or Genesee Road traveling west through the Finger Lakes.

The first person to build a tavern in present-day Seneca Falls was Lawrence Van Cleef. His tavern was erected in 1789 on "the flats" and was a "pioneer structure" fashioned from logs. Ten years before, Van Cleef marched through this county as a member of Col Gansevoort's company and encamped overnight at the back of the former Hoskins house on Cayuga St. He was so impressed with the fertility and beauty of the spot that he decided to return after leaving the army, and to erect a log tavern. It was there—at that tavern--that travelers, following the water routes on their way west to Kanadesaga (Geneva), stopped overnight. It was there that Elkanah Watson, Gen. Philip Van Cortlandt, Jeremiah Van Rensselaer and Stephen N. Bayard were entertained while their boats were being hauled up the rapids. Mr. Van Cleef operated the tavern for five years until 1794 when he sold it to Mr. Parkhurst.

Mr. Pankhurst came here with his family from Connecticut. Mr. Parkhurst operated the tavern for five years and then decided to erect a larger and more comfortable building. He bought a lot on the corner of Fall and Cayuga Streets. and built an imposing structure. It was known as the Seneca Falls Hotel and was opened to the public in 1798. Modeled after a New England inn, the Seneca Falls Hotel was an imposing house with a broad porch with columns in front. This Seneca Hotel would later become the Globe Hotel. About 1858, this Seneca Hotel was torn down and on the site was built the Stanton House.[1] The postcard below shows the Stanton House about 1900.

Stanton House and Fall Street, Seneca Falls, N. Y.

About the same time that Pankhurst had opened his tavern, Jacob Pohfman erected a tavern on a lot later known as the Chamberlain block. Largely because of Pohfman's Dutch ancestry, the structure was a plain Dutch inn in appearance, much simpler than the Seneca Hotel. Deacon Peter Miller was the first landlord and the chief attraction, so the story goes, was his pretty daughter, Betsy Miller. Many young men stopped at the tavern just to get a look at the beautiful young lady whose fame had spread throughout the country. This tavern was operated until 1830 under the management of Col. Van Alystyne and Vincent Matthews. It then passed into the hands of John C. Thayer who used it for a meat market and the manufacture of sausage.

About 1815 Deacon Miller erected a tavern of his own, on the corner of Fall and Mynderse Streets. Miller's tavern was known as "The Red Tavern." The building itself was a plain two-story building. It had a very large bar room and the old-fashioned swing-pole and bucket used to draw water from the well in front. This was operated until 1837 when the property

was sold to Joseph Metcalf and some others who replaced the tavern building with the Wesleyan Chapel. (It was this Wesleyan Chapel that became famous for being the meeting place of the first woman's suffrage meeting.) Later this Wesleyan Chapel was converted into the Johnson Opera House.[2]

New Hotels After 1827

Two significant events happened in the latter 1820s that led to the opening of several hotels in Seneca Falls. One of these events was the completion of the Erie Canal (1825) and it connection with the Cayuga-Seneca Canal (1828). The other event happened in 1827 when the Bayard Company sold its lands and water rights, allowing for enterprising ventures of all kinds to develop more easily within the village. (Up to this point, the Bayard Land Company controlled much of the potential water power of the Seneca River by owning 1,450 acres of land.[3] In 1827, Garry V. Sacket, Ansel Bascom and Andrew P. Tillman made an extensive purchase of land on the south side of the river and cut it up into village lots.[4]) A rapid population growth would ensue. Not surprisingly, a new group of hotels arose.[5]

The first of these new hotels was the Clinton House, built by Joseph Failing on the corner of Fall and State Streets in 1827. Failing operated this Clinton House as a stage house. Failing was a good hotel manager and the hotel was very popular with its customers. Following Joseph Failing, the hotel was managed by his sons-in-law Brown and West. Still later it was managed by Dr. Mathews. In 1836, a Thompson leased the property. On June 20th of that year he re-opened a renovated hotel, assuring his customers that his Clinton House would "be provided at all times with the delicacies of the season and his bar stored with the choicest wines and liquors." His motto was "attention, good cheer and civility." Evidently Thompson lived up to his motto and assurances, as his hotel business prospered. Then, starting in 1840, a man named Phelps managed the hotel.
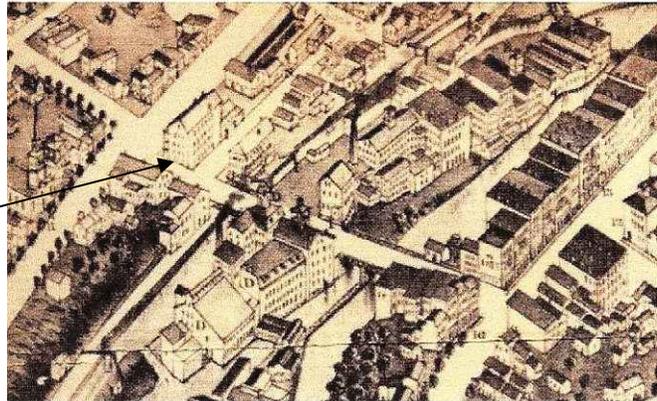

In 1856, Thomas Carr bought and rebuilt the Clinton House, which he renamed Carr's Hotel. The building was hurriedly completed and thrown open to the public on the occasion of a firemen's tournament, which took place sometime during the summer of that year. His hotel and restaurant operated in the old-fashioned way and occupied the State Street part of the building. He rented the store on the Fall Street side of the building to Keith & Taylor, fashionable merchant tailors. In 1866, he sold out to Mr. Milton Hoag. Thomas Carr then became very active in Seneca Falls village affairs, holding various village positions.[6] (The story of the Hoag House will appear below as a separate section.)

The second of these new hotels in the later 1820s was the Franklin House. In 1828, it was built by Joseph Young on the corner of Bayard and Bridge Streets. It had a double-deck porch. This hotel was very prosperous for many years, for some obvious reasons. First, it was part of the so-called Sacket District which was the most prosperous business part of the village at the time. Second, the hotel catered to the stage coaches that ran through the village. These stage coaches tended to stay south of the Seneca River/Canal because these roads were of better quality and did

not have the toll gates that the roads had on the north side. Of course, the hotel lost much of its business once the north side of the river became the commercial center of the village.[7]

The Seneca House on the northwest corner of Ovid and Bayard Streets was built in 1830 and the promoters were Ansel Bascom and others. In its first two years it was managed by Hezekiah Goodwin, and then by a Sheather. In 1850 Isaac Fuller, a well known figure in those days, became the proprietor and ran it as a temperance house much to the amusement of the villagers. Seneca Falls had been caught up in a growing national movement—a so-called Washingtonian movement--concerned about the growing evil of drink. In 1852 the name was changed to "The American" and became the local center of the new American political party. Local American party men met in closed, secret rooms to discuss plans and measures to carry out their faith, the cardinal principle of which was to "put none but Americans on guard." For a time the post office was kept in the basement which helped to make this a point of central interest and a gathering place for the inhabitants of the village. In the late 1860's, the American Hotel was destroyed by fire. The hotel was not rebuilt and the property passed into the hands of the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

(The arrow drawn on this aerial drawing of the village shows the location of the American Hotel.)

Outside of the village limits, there were several taverns and hotels and their story helps us to understand more about life in the first half of the 19th century. To begin, six taverns were erected at Bridgeport (West Cayuga) soon after the completion of first Cayuga Lake Bridge in 1800. In that year, James Bennett, an old Cayuga Lake ferryman, was granted a license to keep an inn. He was regarded as the pioneer tavern keeper of his time. Christopher Baldy erected a tavern just north of the bridge toll-house. Gilbert Roberts built a tavern near the end of the bridge. It was at his tavern that the town meetings were held in 1812, 1813, and 1814. On the hill east of what was called the "Big Hollow," Col. Daniel Sayre operated a tavern. Henry Moses bought this Sayre place and operated it as a tavern. Nearby the Moses house, Judge J.L. Larzelere kept a tavern. From 1820 to 1827, Joseph Failing operated a tavern at Bridgeport. Then he moved into the village of Seneca Falls and operated the Clinton house. In 1829, Jacob Stahl kept a tavern at Bridgeport. It needs to be pointed out that Bridgeport at this time had more residents than both Seneca Falls and Waterloo combined.[8]

On the turnpike road west of Seneca Falls, there was the community of the Kingdom. Starting in 1800, Stephen Hooper was keeping an inn there on the south side of the Seneca River. Lewis Birdsall operated a tavern on the north side of the river. The Kingdom for many years had a reputation as a place for stagecoach travelers to have a really good time of drinking and amusement. This perhaps helps to explain the origin of the name for this community—the "devil's kingdom." Like Bridgeport, for many years the community of Kingdom had more settlers than Waterloo and Seneca Falls villages combined.
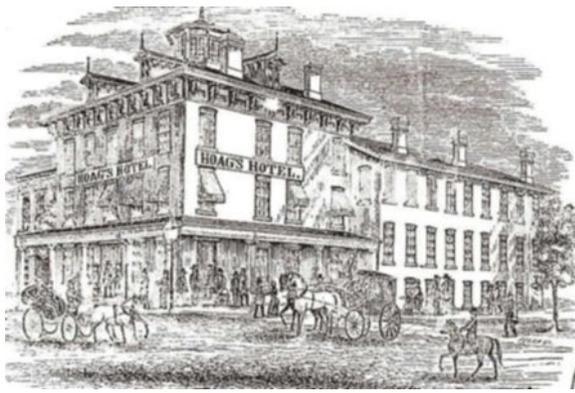
"Dutch Tavern" on the Free Bridge road was one of the most popular stopping-off places. It commanded a fine view of Cayuga Lake and in the early days was the headquarters of the

drivers.[9] Travelers would frequently use this Free Bridge route to avoid the tolls of the Cayuga Bridge and the Genesee road.

By late in the 19th century, many of these taverns and hotels were gone. Some, like the American Hotel, were destroyed by fire and not rebuilt. Others simply went out of business. Men who started out from Albany in 1800 were "on the road" for weeks on the way to Buffalo. A tavern, inn, or hotel was needed every few miles. By the latter 1800s, however, the new means of transportation—railroads—made it commonplace for that same distance to be covered in a few hours. Hence, the "traveling trade" no longer brought the business that it once did. The hotel in any village now needed to rely more than ever upon local support. What tended to result was a much smaller number of hotels but these fewer hotels were more "upscale" in their nature.[10]

Hoag's Hotel and The Hoag House

As has been discussed previously, the corner of Fall and State Streets has been the location of a tavern/hotel since the earliest settlers along the Seneca River in what is today Seneca Falls. The first such tavern was the Clinton House. The Clinton House was remodeled and became Carr's Hotel. It was in 1866 that Milton Hoag purchased Carr's Hotel and spent a

large sum of money in greatly improving the building which was known as Hoag's Hotel.[11] (The picture at left is from an1883 piece of hotel stationery. Note the contrast in shape from the picture below of the new Hoag House built after the 1890 fire.)

In 1877, Mr. Hoag took personal charge of his Hoag's Hotel. He managed it until it was burned in the big fire of July 30, 1890, which swept away a large portion of the business section of Seneca Falls, and in which Mr. Hoag lost over $55,000 over and above all insurance for the several businesses he owned in Seneca Falls.[12] *The Reveille* reported the Hoag's Hotel losses (including contents) at $30,000, with insurance coverage of $7,600.[13]

A new Hoag House was built in 1895. Given its location on the trolley lines connecting Geneva, Waterloo, and Seneca Falls, with cars operating every half-hour, as described in *Grip's Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls,* the Hoag became a favorite of "the transient trade, catering as it does exclusively to that class, and is generally made the headquarters for traveling men having business in those three towns."[14]
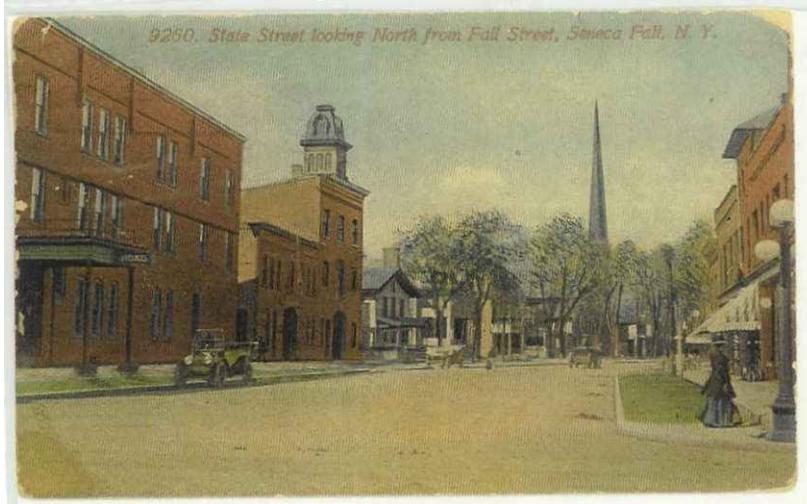

This new Hoag House "stood on a level with the best appointed and most ably constructed of hotels, and possessed all modern improvements."[15] It was an imposing three-story brick building with stone trimmings and entrances on two streets—Fall and State. The interior was finished throughout in oak wood. The main floor was laid with tile. The office, lobbies, vestibules, writing room and barber shop were lighted with plate glass windows.

There were fifty rooms in the hotel and a seating capacity of one hundred in the dining room.[16]

A Mr. C. M. Bills of New York City took over as proprietor on August 1, 1903. *Grip's Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls* described him as having "the faculty and good sense to keep a competent office staff and the best help throughout the house." Grip's publication goes on to say that "Seneca Falls which in the beginning contributed so liberally to secure the erection of a first class hotel building has not been disappointed in getting the man who was needed to make the house what the traveling public wanted."[17]

In late December 1905, a new bowling alley at the Hoag House opened for business. It was described as one of the finest professional alleys in Central New York. It was built by R.A. Shindel, clerk of the Hoag House.[18]

[This 1913 postcard shows the D.M. Kellogg Livery and Sale Stables next to the Hoag House on State Street.[19])

In late May 1912, the Hoag House, which for nine years had been under the management of C. M Bills, was acquired by Louis Stauff of Geneva. Stauff purchased the building from Charles McKevitt.[20]

The Seneca Falls Historical Society has a copy of the nicely printed menu for Thanksgiving Dinner in 1916 at the Hoag House. The full turkey dinner with choice of dessert cost $1.00![21]

Tragedy struck on Thanksgiving morning in 1918, when a fire began in the basement of The Hoag House. By noon the building was a total loss, with nearly all of the equipment destroyed. Four blackened walls stood where the hotel had stood just six hours before. Villagers declared that this was the end of the hotel business in Seneca Falls. This was not the case, however, because the Goulds Manufacturing Company stepped forward. Desirous of having a good hotel facility for its business use, the Goulds company furnished the $250,000 capital needed to build a new hotel. This new hotel, appropriately named the Gould Hotel, opened on February 11, 1920. The Hoag House was gone, but it was replaced by a magnificent new facility.[22]

The Gould Hotel

This new Gould Hotel was described in the Syracuse *Journal* as "the most complete and perfectly equipped of the smaller hotels of New York State. Four stories in height, absolutely fireproof in construction and equipped in perfect taste and convenience, it is scheduled to become the mecca for travelers and autoists between Rochester and Syracuse."[23]

The plans were drawn up by George B.

Post and Son of New York City, and provided for a building of four floors, with a main entrance on State Street. Stores would be located on the Fall Street side of the building. Actual construction work was done by the Amsterdam Building Company, starting in the winter of 1919. The new hotel building was of concrete and steel construction throughout. The door and window sills and the picture moldings were the only things of the building itself that could burn. In addition to the large lobby, the double dining rooms and a well-arranged kitchen, the hotel itself had 72 rooms and 8 apartments. Fifty of the rooms were equipped with baths, including hot and cold water, and telephone connections.[24]

 L.J. Stauf, who had operated the Hoag House, was given a contract to manage the Gould Hotel for 10 years. In an experiment that other hotels might have adopted if it had proved successful, Stauf operated a laundry which, besides doing primarily the hotel's laundry, also did commercial work. Mr. Stauf also operated a candy store, catering to the hotel trade and the Seneca Falls community. H.E. Moyers operated the barber shop. The Auto Club, which had had offices in the Hoag House, opened an office in the new Gould Hotel building.[25]

 A feature of this hotel, which no other small hotel establishment in all of New York State had, was a ground level promenade. It consisted of a walled-in court at the rear of the building, with landscaping in the form of a formal garden. This promenade had direct access to the dining and dancing rooms, and was used for summer parties.[26]

 The dining rooms were so arranged that they could be one big room for banquets or separate so that one could be used as a ball room and the other for dining. The dining room décor was colonial in style, with the walls painted café au lait and ivory white ceilings and Windsor mahogany chairs and tables.[27]

 There was also a third room with a seating capacity of 30 people. This private dining room could be set up as one long table or a group of small tables. This room had a dark green rug and pearl gray walls and velour drapes. Both the woodwork and the furniture were Jacobean in style.[28]

 The lobby had a Spanish-style appearance, with the furniture covered with heavy morocco leather. Heavy rugs covered the lobby floor, with table and floor lamps adding a quiet but luxurious feeling. The walls were finished in imitation Caen Stone and velour drapes.[29]

 There were reading and writing rooms which opened off the lobby. These rooms were equipped with wicker ware and the walls were hung with tapestries. Eight desks were provided for the use of hotel guests.[30] The guest rooms had a mahogany dresser, desk, straight and rocker chairs, and portable and fixed lamps. The Simmons' beds had fine hair mattresses.[31]

 The hotel promoters were especially proud of their kitchens. They were equipped by the Brumball Dean Company of New York City. There were three large gas ranges, with broilers, roasters and grills along one side of the room. Steam tables were arranged so that the foods could be prepared and kept hot and still be ready for instant service. On the other side of the room a large battery of coffee urns. There were large ice boxes where entire halves of beef could be kept in such a way that kitchen help could do their carving without bringing the meat into the kitchen proper. The Jewell Refrigeration Company provided these large ice boxes. The Hoag House had enjoyed a reputation throughout the state of fine cuisine and Mr. Stauf promised to maintain that reputation.[32]

 The hotel was immediately adjoining two of the

FISHER THEATRE AND BOYCE GARAGE, SENECA FALLS, N. Y.

larger garages of the town, namely the Boyce Garage and the W.D. Kellogg service station. This became important for the Gould Hotel, as an increasing number of guests each year were to come by their own cars.[33] [The postcard shows the Boyce Garage and Fisher Theater, both of which were on Fall Street just west of the Gould Hotel.]

Because of the fireproof construction, Mr. W.E. Dickey, the sales manager for the Goulds Manufacturing Company and who had leased the main apartment on the second floor, now felt safe to hang his collection of valuable paintings (valued at about $30,000) on the walls of his apartment. Fortunately, he had not felt the Hoag House was safe from fire, so these valuable paintings had not been lost in the fire which destroyed the Hoag House in 1918.[34]

HOTEL GOULD, SENECA FALLS, N. Y.
"A Pride of the Community"
The beautiful Heritage Room, outstanding in the Finger Lakes for excellent food and beverage service; main dining room of HOTEL GOULD.
One of the attractive, modern bed rooms with homelike conveniences. FIREPROOF, Free radio, TV, lighted parking, Family Plan. AAA

THE ALPS RESTAURANT — SENECA FALLS, N. Y. — Finger Lakes Region's Smartest Eating Place

The Gould Hotel flourished for many years. Its Alps Restaurant was widely advertised. The hotel had another dining room called the Heritage Room. The menu for Thanksgiving Dinner in 1963 had full dinner entrée choices of turkey ($2.50), ham

($2.50), seafood platter ($2.75), prime rib ($3.50), or NY strip steak ($4.75).[35]

For many years, starting in 1959, George Bantuvanis owned the facility. In 1980, he sold it to the GPM Corporation. Later it was owned by psychic and mortician Phil Jordan. The Bedford Falls Enterprises acquired this property on August 31, 2007. Currently this company is renovating the building to be re-opened as the Clarence Hotel, named after the angel in the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*. The Seneca Falls community looks forward to having a thriving hotel and restaurant on this corner of Fall and State Streets.

[1] Harrison Chamberlain, "Early Taverns of Seneca Falls," The 1903 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, pp 69-71

[2] Harrison Chamberlain, "Early Taverns of Seneca Falls," The 1903 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, pp 71-72.

[3] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 40

[4] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 64

[5] Harrison Chamberlain, "Early Taverns of Seneca Falls," The 1903 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, p 72.

[6] "Thomas Carr," The 1906 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, p 106.

[7] Harrison Chamberlain, "Early Taverns of Seneca Falls," The 1903 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, pp 73-74.

[8] Harrison Chamberlain, "Early Taverns of Seneca Falls," The 1903 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, pp 75-76.

[9] 'Taverns Important in Early Seneca Falls History" *The Geneva Times*, May 15, 1954.

[10] Harrison Chamberlain, "Early Taverns of Seneca Falls," The 1903 volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, pp 74-75.

[11] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 91

[12] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1991 reprint by the Seneca Falls Historical Society of the 1904 publication by Grip Publishing in Syracuse, NY, p 90

[13] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 123

[14] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 135

[15] "The Hotel Corner," a brochure about the Hotel Gould's history prepared by owner George Bantuvanis in the 1970s.

[16] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 136

[17] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 136

[18] *The Syracuse Journal*, December 23, 1905.

[19] *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 138

[20] "Hoag House Changes Hands," *The Auburn Citizen*, May 31, 1912.

[21] Thanksgiving Day Dinner Menu for the Hoag House, part of the Seneca Falls Historical Society's collection of hotel artifacts and memorabilia.

[22] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel, *The Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[23] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[24] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[25] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[26] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[27] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[28] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[29] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[30] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[31] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[32] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[33] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[34] "Seneca Falls Opens $250,000 Hotel," *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.

[35] Thanksgiving Day 1963 Dinner Menu for the Heritage Room, Hotel Gould, part of the Seneca Falls Historical Society's collection of hotel artifacts and memorabilia.

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1. The postcards scenes are scanned images of postcards from the collections of the Seneca Falls Historical Society, Seneca Falls Village Historian Roberta Holden (available to the public at the Seneca Falls Library), and Kay Irland.
2. The pictures of the interior of the Gould Hotel, including the Alps Restaurant, are courtesy of the Seneca Falls Historical Society.
3. The picture of Carr's Hotel is taken from the 1859 Dawson map of Cayuga and Seneca Counties.
4. The drawing of Hoag's Hotel is a scanned image from hotel stationery in the collection of the Seneca Falls Historical Society.
5. The aerial drawing showing the American Hotel is taken from *Discovering the Underground Railroad, Abolition, and African American Life in Seneca County, New York, 1820-1880*. This report in its entirety is accessible online at www.co.seneca.ny.us