

**Reasons That Seneca Falls, NY
Might Well Be The Real Bedford Falls
of the
It's A Wonderful Life Movie**

Karolyn Grimes, the actress who played ZuZu, one of the children of George and Mary Bailey in the movie, thinks that Seneca Falls is the real Bedford Falls. Recalling her first visit to Seneca Falls, she said, "When I came around the corner and saw [Seneca Falls'] main street, I gasped and said, 'This is Bedford Falls!'" Then she saw the steel bridge [Bridge Street Bridge] that flows over the canal and remarked, "This is nearly a replica of the same bridge that George Bailey had grown up with all his life."

- Seneca Falls' claim begins with geography. It's hard to dispute that Frank Capra, who produced and directed the movie, set Bedford Falls in New York State. Rochester, Buffalo, and Elmira are mentioned in the script and referenced as being relatively close. In the movie, George Bailey's friend Sam wants to build a soybean processing plant outside of Rochester. George's sister-in-law's father owns a glass factory in Buffalo. The bank examiner wants to get back to Elmira on Christmas Eve. All three places are an easy drive from Seneca Falls. Also, a reference to Cornell University in Ithaca, just forty miles south of Seneca Falls, was taken out of the script by the studio's rights clearance lawyers.
- Frank Capra visited Seneca Falls in late 1945. He was going to visit an aunt in nearby Auburn and stopped in Seneca Falls and has his hair cut. Barber Tommy Bellissima didn't know who Frank Capra was at the time, but when the movie came out the next year, he recognized the name of his famous patron on the poster. He remembered Capra because the two had talked at length about their lives in Italy and common experiences as immigrants. The name stuck with Bellissima because "capra" in Italian means "goat." Leaving Bellissima's barbershop, Capra would have gone over the steel truss bridge on Bridge Street to get to the main part of town.
- Seneca Falls has a Bridge Street Bridge, a steel truss bridge that is a close match to the Bedford Falls Bridge that George Bailey jumped from to save Clarence, the angel. Also, the Seneca Falls Bridge Street Bridge has a plaque dedicated to the memory of Antonio Varacalli, who died in 1917, when he jumped from the bridge to save a drowning woman.
- Both communities are mill towns on a river/canal.
- One of the streets in Bedford Falls is Genesee Street. While the main street in downtown Seneca Falls is named Fall Street, it is a part of the old Genesee Turnpike that traversed the State of New York.
- Bedford Falls' High School, or at least its gymnasium, was newly built in 1928, Seneca Falls' new, state-of-the-art (at the time) high school facility was dedicated in 1926, although it didn't include an under-the-floor pool.
- The commercial and residential Second Empire Victorian-style architecture in Seneca Falls is a good match to the film's architecture. There is one particular house on Cayuga Street that is eerily similar to the old Granville house where George and Mary Bailey lived.

- Both Seneca Falls and Bedford Falls have constructed post-war housing developments. Bedford Falls' housing development, Bailey Park, was built by the Bailey Brothers Building and Loan Company and provided affordable, decent housing for working class families. Seneca Falls' 19th century industrialist, John Rumsey, built and sold decent, affordable housing for his employees, many of which were immigrant families. The neighborhood became known as, and still is referred to, as Rumseyville.
- Both Bedford Falls and Seneca Falls have had significant populations of people of Italian and Irish heritage.
- The train ran through Seneca Falls, just as it did in Bedford Falls. Seneca Falls' former railroad station, now the Village Hall, is similar to the station featured in the movie.
- The principal of the high school in Bedford Falls is Mr. Partridge. Seneca Falls had a prominent family named Partridge, who actually were bankers and merchants.
- The druggist in Bedford Falls was named Mr. Gower. Seneca Falls once had a druggist named Guion.
- A Seneca Falls businessman named Norman J. Gould owned Gould Pumps, and was one of the richest men in town. He drove his car with license number NJG1. Norman Gould also had great control over politics and economics of the area. Much as Mr. Potter did in the movie, Norman Gould could send someone to fight in the military or retain them for his factory.
- In the movie there is a scene where George runs down a grassy median in Bedford Falls with a movie theater located off to the side. A portion of lower Fall Street, near Trinity Church, once had a median along the street, as in Bedford Falls. There was, also, a movie theater located off the side of the street.
- There are at least a half dozen towns in New York State with "Falls" in their names, but each lacks significant characteristics of Bedford Falls. None of these "Falls" towns has as many similarities to Bedford Falls as did Seneca Falls at the time the movie was made.

[This information has been provided by the Seneca Falls Historical Society and The Real Bedford Falls website.]