



**Preservation
League of NYS**

Willard State Hospital One of New York's "Seven to Save"

This biennial list from the Preservation League of NYS highlights the most at-risk historic places across the state

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Seneca County, NY, 05/16/2022 — Since 1999, the Preservation League has highlighted New York's most endangered historic sites through its Seven to Save program. The League works closely with local advocates over the course of the two-year listing and beyond, raising visibility, assisting with advocacy, and providing extensive technical services. **The League is thrilled to include the Willard State Hospital complex on the 2022-2023 Seven to Save list.**

"The historic buildings and grounds of Willard are an opportunity to better understand far more than our rural local history," said **Margaret Ellsworth, President of the Romulus Historical Society Board of Trustees**. "They are tangible reminders of social themes such as mental health that are universal. The Asylum came here with the appreciation of its beautiful location on the shores of Seneca Lake. That same magnificent location now offers the opportunity to repurpose these buildings and their history in a direction that will benefit our local economy and create a new destination in the Finger Lakes."

Willard State Hospital has defined the physical landscape and cultural environment of its rural corner of the Finger Lakes region for nearly 175 years. The hospital complex was the largest of its kind in the 1870s, with dozens of buildings, open space, and working farms. Once comprising over 1,000 acres, its current size is about 400 acres including a mile of Seneca Lake shoreline and an institutional cemetery containing approximately 6,000 burials. Despite the loss of several architecturally important buildings, about 70 buildings still stand today. Exhibits and other public programs on the Willard suitcases have documented the personal possessions of some 400 former Willard patients and have brought international attention to this historic site.

After the hospital closed in 1995, the facility was repurposed by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), who refurbished several historic buildings while allowing others to fall into a state of disrepair. In November 2021, DOCCS announced that it would be closing its Willard State facility and vacating all buildings in March of 2022, with ownership remaining with the Empire State Development Corporation. The sudden announcement included no plans to secure the buildings for future use. Basic maintenance, including heat and water service, must be addressed to avoid costly and irreparable damage.



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State hospital complexes like this one pose a particular set of challenges and can be seen mirrored at similar locations across the state. Considering the future of Willard now is vital to preserving an important part of New York State history before long-term vacancy causes the remaining buildings to deteriorate past the point of no return.

“Alleviating threats and in some cases outright saving these seven sites from demolition will make for challenging approaches,” said **Preservation League Seven to Save Committee Chair Caroline Rob Zaleski**. “The Preservation League staff are up to the task, as has been shown with the Seven to Save program’s remarkable 20-year track record in forming partnerships to help save and protect historic resources in New York State. Our selection committee chose to feature a diverse range of sites: a small African American church reflecting optimism and ingenuity; a Frederick Law Olmsted park during Olmsted’s bicentennial year; three urban districts – rife with history and varied important architecture; a recently closed 400-acre State hospital complex on Seneca Lake; and lastly a wooded site in Eastern Long Island, where the extant studios of two important Abstract Expressionist artists wait to be restored for public view.”

“The individual sites included on this year’s Seven to Save list embody key preservation issues affecting places across New York State,” said **Preservation League President Jay DiLorenzo**. “From the negative environmental impact of senseless demolition to bringing little-known, but important, histories to light, the League is excited to work alongside on-the-ground advocates to save each of these seven at-risk places.”

2022-2023 Seven to Save List

- **Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church, Watertown, Jefferson County**
Threat: Deterioration; Demolition
- **Genesee Valley Park, Rochester, Monroe County**
Threat: Demolition; Development Pressure; Lack of Public Awareness; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity
- **Proposed South of Union Square Historic District, Manhattan, New York County**
Threat: Demolition; Development Pressure; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity
- **Penn Station Neighborhood, Manhattan, New York County**
Threat: Development pressure; Demolition
- **Downtown Oneonta Historic District, Oneonta, Otsego County**
Threat: Demolition; Deterioration; Lack of Public Awareness; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity; Vacancy
- **Willard State Hospital, Romulus, Seneca County**
Threat: Demolition; Deterioration; Development Pressure; Lack of Public Awareness; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity; Vacancy
- **James Brooks / Charlotte Park Home & Studios, East Hampton, Suffolk County**
Threat: Demolition; Deterioration; Lack of Public Awareness; Vacancy

The League collaborates with property owners, elected officials, and other stakeholders to craft preservation strategies and put these plans into action. Through partnerships with groups and individuals, threats to dozens of at-risk buildings, landscapes, downtowns, and neighborhoods



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have been reduced, and in many cases, eliminated by the Preservation League's Seven to Save listing and subsequent actions

For more information about the Seven to Save program and this year's list, please visit preservenys.org/seven-to-save

Interviews with representatives from the Preservation League and all the Seven to Save sites are available by request.

About the Preservation League of New York State

Since its founding in 1974, the Preservation League has built a reputation for action and effectiveness. Our goal has been to preserve our historic buildings, districts, and landscapes and to build a better New York, one community at a time. The Preservation League of New York State invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth, and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development, and education programs across the state.

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