

***Documentation, Part 2***  
*248 Main St, accessory structure:*  
*Walter Wood Law Office/Post Office*

This continues my documentation of the history of this building as the law office of Walter Wood, and the first post office west of Canajoharie, with notes on preservation practice.

***Further Work on Significance.*** This building and the house that shares 348 Main St., the original Scipio Lodge building known as the Chimney Corner, together represent one quarter, 25%, of a special resource: buildings in Aurora that can be documented to have been present in 1805-1806. To that history I add further evidence for this building dating to 1795. The 1795 map, drawn by Benjamin Ledyard in February of that year, has in pencil a small building on his property near the street (correct location), that fits. As County Clerk, he would require mail service.

This building is therefore one of just five (5) in Aurora that are so far known to date to the 1790s. An informal survey of municipal historians in Cayuga County a few years ago of buildings dating to that decade revealed very few. To have five in one village is astonishing and worth preserving.

***Recent History.*** This property was purchased by Pleasant T. Rowland, LLC, in December of 2016 and the “Life Use” purchased as well in October 2017, both from prior owner Tracy Leffingwell.<sup>1</sup> It is important to establish that the prior owner’s involvement ceased at this time.

Katherine Waller, Pleasant Rowland’s close associate, has written in an email to me,<sup>2</sup> "In pictures documenting the condition of both the law office and Chimney Corner, the condition of both buildings while still owned by Tracy Leffingwell was poor and, to our knowledge, Tracy was

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<sup>1</sup> Deeds available on <https://imate.cayugacounty.us/index.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> From Katie Waller, Wed, Jul 30, 3:40 PM  
“Linda –

Let me first assure you that Sue Edinger has consistently kept Pleasant and me in the loop regarding actions involving the Village – and has gotten approval from Pleasant directly before IOA takes any action. Hopefully, this addresses your questions about “which decisions are made locally and which are at the Madison end” and whether Pleasant and I “are insulated from local developments.” I’ve copied both Sue and Corey on my reply here to maintain that high level of communication.

As far as the law office goes, it was Pleasant who directed Sue to start the demolition process for this building. In pictures documenting the condition of both the law office and Chimney Corner, the condition of both buildings while still owned by Tracy Leffingwell was poor and, to our knowledge, Tracy was never asked to correct. In other words, this is not a new problem.

One further correction: Leffingwell House is in fact part of the Inns of Aurora, LLC and is not a property in Pleasant’s name.

Should you have any further questions, please let me know.  
Katie”

never asked to correct.” As you know from the pictures in your packet, in 2018 the condition of the Law Office, an accessory structure, was poor but easily repairable. The condition of the Chimney Corner was *not* “poor;” there was no gaping hole next to the dormer. Both Ms. Leffingwell and her visitors can vouch for the condition of the house as good, not poor. Also, there was no Affirmative Maintenance requirement in the local law until 2024.

Between 2018 and now - pictures from July 2025 - deterioration of this historic building has been catastrophic. The owner, Pleasant T. Rowland LLC, has refused to make repairs to either building on this property, and there was indeed correspondence on this issue, most recently in 2022.<sup>3</sup>

A question that is still open concerns the rerouting of water from all the Leffingwell House downspouts into an underground pipe across the driveway, between the Chimney Corner and the Law Office/Post Office, about 6’ from the latter). This emptied into a catch basin, now plugged, in the little creek on the north edge of the property, alongside the house. This project was undertaken at Ms. Rowland’s initiative.<sup>4</sup> What effect this has had on either or both buildings is currently unknown, but should be researched through the original permits for Leffingwell House. It is also important to know if heavy equipment can damage the drainage pipe.

***The Role of Affirmative Maintenance.*** In many area communities, including Auburn NY, the Local Law defines such deterioration as “Demolition By Neglect.” The owner’s intent to let the property decline was clearly stated in the Inns of Aurora GEIS (2020), which earmarked this property - specifically the house - as follows: “will be restored, moved or demolished,” with no plan for the site. No “restoration,” though briefly planned,<sup>5</sup> was ever undertaken, including at a time when Rowland/Inns were actively engaged in many restoration projects, including restoration of the garden house (“playhouse”) at Taylor House by Rick Lazarus and Seth Brewster.

A review of the literature on “demolition by neglect” concluded that the best tool for preservation in such circumstances is a requirement for Affirmative Maintenance that states

- the specific building features in which deterioration may be evident (7.14),
- a procedure for claiming economic hardship (7.13), and
- a penalty structure (7.17 and 18.11).<sup>6</sup>

Aurora has that tool, as the citations indicate.

Affirmative Maintenance defines and addresses the problem as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> See your packet for the letter from the Village Board; in addition, there was a letter signed by more than 53 people against demolition of the Chimney Corner.

<sup>4</sup> Oral information from David Reynolds, who dug and installed the line.

<sup>5</sup>Text from Tracy Leffingwell recounting conversation with Monica Pitman, 8/4/25, formerly of Inns of Aurora

<sup>6</sup> <https://repository.upenn.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/5fe4460c-4abe-46f7-bebd-034bddcd3772/content>

In general, affirmative maintenance obligations within a community's local historic district by-law ensure that (1) the beauty and function of contributing historic resources is maintained, (2) property owners routinely maintain their historic resources responsibly, following guidelines established for the district, and (3) the character and context of the neighborhood or area is preserved. By disincentivizing owners who might otherwise intentionally allow their buildings to deteriorate, affirmative maintenance regulations can be an effective tool in a community's arsenal to minimize demolition by neglect situations.<sup>7</sup>

"Disincentives" include, of course, fines. At \$250/day (Zoning Law 18.11) a failure to remedy can add up quickly. The existence of penalties is important to show that the law considers neglect to be serious.

***Practical Approaches.*** At your last meeting we reviewed and discussed the Four Treatments for Historic Properties in accord with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. In this case, they would be some combination of Preservation and Reconstruction, using original material where possible. I have consulted timber framer Rick Lazarus (who examined the building a few years ago as well) and restoration contractor Jeffery Koehn. Both of them identified a fair amount of original material remaining as well as beams needing replacement. Both also discussed a stepwise course of taking apart, storing, and reconstructing the building. I have asked the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for a consultation as well, which can be useful in identifying sources of support. Preservation/Reconstruction is a feasible strategy for this building. In addition to the Aurora Ledyard Historical Society, Scipio Lodge and the Aurora Masonic Center have demonstrated interest.

These additional points merit your attention:

- The applicant needs to show responsibility to help remedy the situation for this building. With a good Affirmative Maintenance law such as Aurora's, this requirement is not a "taking," especially in a case of self-induced economic hardship. You cannot impose conditions, but you can recommend and define them.
- Your determination on this little building sets a very large precedent. If you were to vote to approve demolition, an application to demolish Chimney Corner itself will rapidly follow. The future owner of the Wells College campus will also be attentive to the result, and that owner could be Rowland/Inns of Aurora by Right of First Refusal.<sup>8</sup>

***Summary.*** Demolition of this ca. 1795 Post Office is neither desirable nor necessary. There are practical approaches to saving this significant early structure, and taking a few additional weeks can clarify a course of action.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.preserveri.org/demolition-by-neglect>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wellslegacysociety.org/news/campus-sale-plans-presented-by-college?rq=ROFR> and citations therein