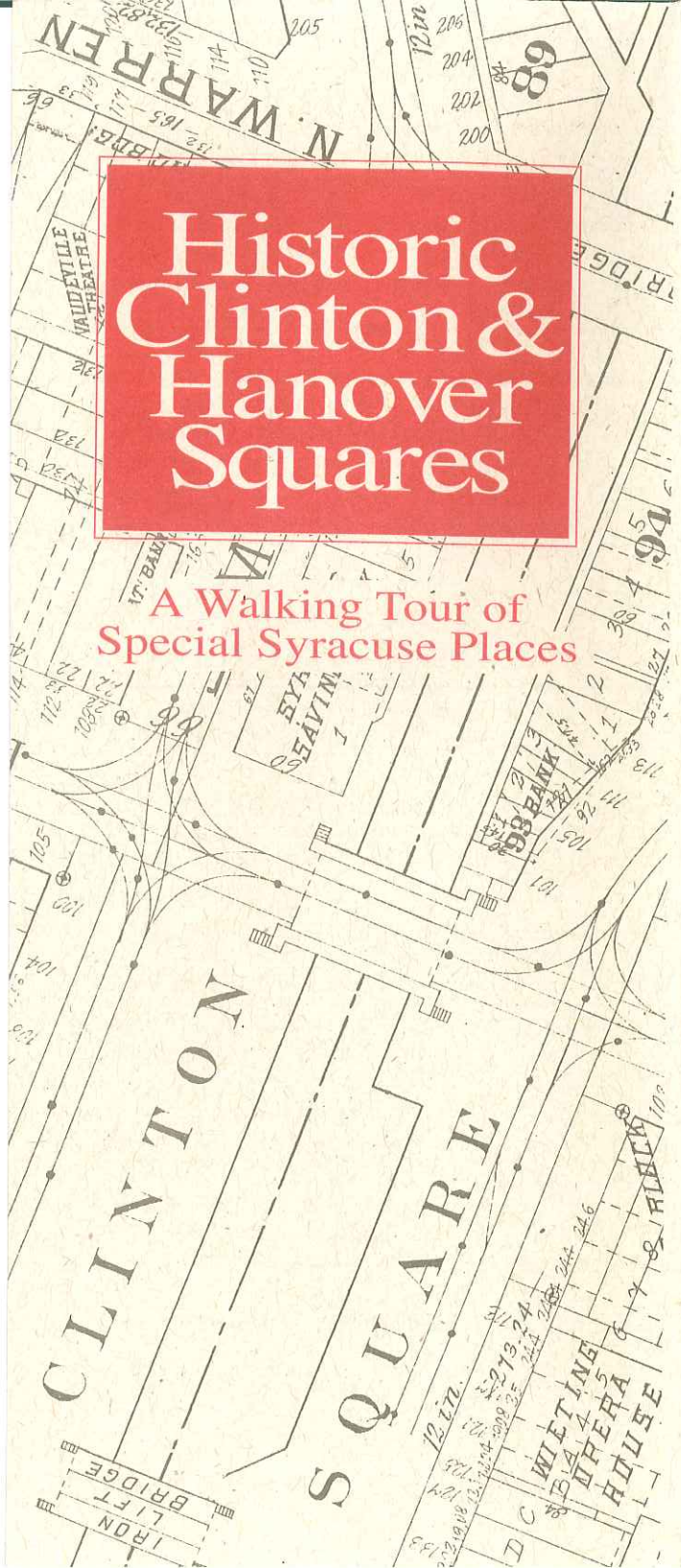


Historic Clinton & Hanover Squares

A Walking Tour of Special Syracuse Places

Begin at the Man and Mule Monument, on the corner of Erie and Oswego Boulevards, across from the UCP Visitor Center at the Erie Canal Museum.

Observe the streets and buildings around you. What do you see? Cars, traffic lights, parking lots, highways, highrise office complexes, and older buildings from another era surround you. How do you think these streets and buildings must have looked 100 years ago? What sights, sounds, and smells might have touched your senses as you strolled along the Erie Canal or down the main street of Syracuse – Salina Street?

Nearby, Clinton and Hanover Squares date to the early 1800s, an era of canals and turnpikes, westward expansion, urban growth, and the building of a nation. Much change has taken place, reflected in the built environment around you. This tour is a walk through time. At each stop, take a moment to conjure up images of that past and the history that is Syracuse.

Stop 1

The bronze sculpture of a mule and young mule driver before you stands on what was once the Erie Canal towpath; 19th century canal boats had no engines and were towed by mules and horses. The sculpture, erected in 1987, is a memorial to the people who built and operated the Erie Canal.

Erie Boulevard was constructed on the route used by the Erie Canal, a 70 foot wide ditch filled with water, stretching east and west as far as the eye could see. The Oswego Canal, from the north, intersected here, and there was a turning basin for 100 foot long canal boats beside the Weighlock Building and behind City Hall.

The Syracuse Weighlock was one of seven canal boat weighing stations on the Erie Canal. Built in 1850, it is the only surviving building of its kind in the world, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a fine example of the Greek Revival style of architecture.

Imagine what it was like here in 1850. Twenty-four hours a day, dozens of boats, lined up in all directions, waited to enter the Weighlock Chamber. They moved like clockwork, one boat in, one boat out, every 15 minutes. Brightly colored boats with men and women busy about their decks moved up and down the canal – horns blowing, whips cracking at teams of weary mules, rugged and impatient canallers shouting and sometimes fighting. The air was thick with the smell of sweat, dampness, wood smoke, grain, potatoes, apples, and other foodstuffs.

Today, the Weighlock Building serves as the home of the Erie Canal Museum and Syracuse's Urban Cultural Park Visitor Center. Visit the Weighlock Building to learn more about the great American adventure story that is Erie Canal history.

Walk west along the former towpath and think about the sound of your footsteps as you would have crossed the bridge over the Oswego Canal, now Oswego Boulevard. Cross Warren Street and stop at the corner of Erie Boulevard and Warren Street.

Stop 2

The row of buildings across from you to the south date back to 1834, only nine years after the Erie Canal opened. These buildings are called the Phoenix Block because, like the mythical bird, they rose from the ashes of a devastating fire.

In the 19th century, warehouses, factories, and retail shops lined the banks of the canal. Barrels and crates could be hoisted off boats directly into these double-fronted buildings; the canal-side or "back door" was plain and the street-sides were ornate to attract customers.

Observe the details of the buildings' canal sides. Note their simple design. The large center openings on the upper floors have not been changed much since the 1800s. Goods were once lifted by block and tackle through these loft doors from canal boats docked below.

Proceed west and cross South Salina Street to Clinton Square. Cross Erie Boulevard and stop at the flagpole in front of you.

Stop 3

Clinton Square is the center around which the city of Syracuse grew. At the intersection of the Erie Canal and the old Genesee Turnpike, it served as both a marketplace and showplace. Its evolution from log cabins to high-rise

office buildings has mirrored Syracuse's growth from frontier crossroad to regional center of culture and commerce.

Here, in 1806, on the site of today's *Herald-Journal/ Post Standard* Building, Henry Bogardus constructed a tavern where the name of Syracuse was chosen. By 1850, hotels, churches, an opera house, county courthouse, and numerous businesses ringed Clinton Square.

By the second half of the 19th century, Clinton Square had evolved into a regional financial center. The profits of thriving industries, together with income generated by canal tolls, brought wealth and refinement to this growing community. The four bank buildings along Salina Street are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and were built in a 30 year period, from 1867 to 1897.

OnBank, to your far right, was the last of the four buildings to be constructed. Built in 1897 as the home of the Onondaga County Savings Bank, this ten-story, Neo-classical building was Syracuse's first steel-frame skyscraper.

The **Gridley Building,** to your right, was built in 1867 as the Onondaga County Savings Bank and is the earliest of these buildings. The four-sided, 100 foot clock tower was originally lit by gas jets, and the clock served for many years as the city's official timepiece. Imagine canal boat captains arriving in Syracuse at night straining their eyes to read the time and judge whether they were on schedule. Syracuse architect Horatio Nelson White designed the building to fit on the narrow block next to the Erie Canal.

Directly in front of you the **Syracuse Savings Bank Building** (now Fleet Bank) was constructed in 1876. Designed by Syracuse architect Joseph L. Silsbee, the building is Victorian Gothic in style, as typified by steep sloping roofs and windows with pointed arches. Exterior walls are finished in tan Ohio sandstone, with red New Jersey sandstone used for trim. Italian immigrant stonecutters carved the ornamentation. At the time of construction in 1876, this was the tallest building in Syracuse and the first with a passenger elevator.

The former **Third National Bank** (100 Clinton Square), to your left, was designed by Archimedes Russell and built in 1885. An example of Queen Anne architecture, the building's round corner turret is its most distinctive feature.

Turn around and face the large monument in the center of the block.

Clinton Square was one of the busiest spots in the city during the 1800s. The Square teemed with farmers' wagons and peddlers' carts. Filling the air were the voices and music of street merchants, hawkers and entertainers – magicians, ventriloquists, and organ grinders. Canal boats noisily loaded and unloaded cargo. In the summer, excursion boats, complete with band or orchestra, departed from the Square to nearby Onondaga or Green lakes.

This public square played host to a number of events. On New Year's Day 1870, local brewer John Greenway held a "feast for the poor" that attracted 20,000 people of varying economic status. A few years later, Syracusans jammed the Wieting Opera House across the Square for a so-called "concert of telephone and transmitted music."

After the turn of the century, Clinton Square was transformed from a cluttered docking and market place into a public park. The City placed a flower garden in the Square's center, and, in 1909, the cornerstone of the Soldier and Sailor's Monument was laid. The monument was dedicated in 1910 to honor those who fought and died in the Civil War. Take a moment to walk over to the monument to read the words etched into this landmark.

Proceed to Clinton Street. Cross Erie Boulevard to the Jerry Rescue Monument.

Stop 4

In 1850, Syracuse was experiencing the social reform and political radicalism sweeping the country before the Civil War. Orators from their Clinton Square soap boxes exhorted passersby to work, vote, and support change. Syracuse became an important link in the "underground railroad," a secret system of refuges to assist fugitive slaves in escaping to freedom from slavery. The Jerry Rescue Monument commemorates the dramatic rescue of a fugitive slave from Federal marshals here in 1851. Pause to read the account of Jerry's rescue recorded on the back of this memorial.

Step back a few paces and look to your right.

From here you can see the 20th century evolution of Clinton Square. The Erie Canal was officially closed in 1917, replaced by the Erie Barge Canal which by-passed downtown Syracuse. In 1923, the engineering wonder of the 1820s was filled, graded, and turned into a parking lot for Model T's, Tin Lizzies, and other automobiles.

The architecture surrounding Clinton Square also has changed dramatically. Anchoring the western edge of the Square is the **Clinton Exchange**. Built as a U.S. Post Office and Federal building in 1928, it is a far cry from the early days of Syracuse when the postmaster could carry the entire contents of the post office in his hat. Designed in Neo-classical style, typical for public buildings of the time, the building underwent restoration and conversion to office space in 1985.

One block further west on Erie Boulevard is the Niagara Mohawk Building, a nationally recognized example of Art Deco architecture. This headquarters of the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation was completed in 1932. The "Spirit of Light" massive figure over the building's main entrance was one of the nation's first stainless steel sculptures.

To your left is the **Federal Building,** built in 1974. It houses the United States District Court House, as well as offices for a variety of Federal agencies including the FBI, CIA, and IRS.

Just a few steps behind you is a UCP interpretive panel, one of several to be found throughout downtown Syracuse.

After stopping to view the panel proceed along Water St. to Salina Street. Cross Salina Street and walk along Water St. to the benches in the center of the block, known as Hanover Square.

Stop 5

Before you is a smorgasbord of architectural styles: Federal, Greek Revival, Second Empire, Romanesque, Victorian Gothic, Queen Anne, Neo-classical, and Art Deco. Grouped around this historic open space are 17 buildings, the names of which appear on the National Register of Historic Places.

Hanover Square has an important commercial and civic history. For most of the 1800s, this open space was used as a "hack stand" where cartmen and teamsters hired out their wagons to merchants. In those days, pedestrians, especially ladies, complained that they could not safely cross the Square due to standing carts, mud, and moving vehicles.

In the early 1800s, a village well and public drinking fountain were located here. L. H. Redfield, a noted local newspaper publisher, paid for the fountain as his personal memorial to "temperance." He felt that a good source of drinking water might quell the natural inclinations for beer or other intoxicating liquors.

As with Clinton Square, this public space was a center of social and political life. During the Civil War, military recruiting booths covered Hanover Square. Men who signed up on this spot marched through here after the war to be discharged. A huge platform, from which Sunday sermons and patriotic speeches were heard, remained at the center of the Square throughout the war. It was burned by jubilant Syracusans on word of Lee's surrender. Here, too, thousands attended memorial services after President Lincoln's assassination.

The original wooden buildings around the Square were destroyed by fire in 1834. From the ashes rose the **Phoenix Block** to your left whose canal side we saw earlier. Envious property owners on the opposite (south) side of the Square replaced their small frame shops with a similar brick row in 1834 and called it the **Franklin Block**.

Can you identify the buildings that remain from the original Franklin Block? Some have been demolished and others altered, but a few elements of the original Federal-style buildings are still visible. Numbers 120-26, 128, and 132 are the survivors. No. 132, in particular, is the least-altered Federal-style building on the square. It retains its original three-story height, pitched roof, and multi-paned windows with decorative lintels. Other structures on the Square date to the later 1800s, rounding out this "museum of architectural styles."

On the Square's south side, built in 1870, is 134, a good illustration of the Second Empire style in a narrow street facade, while 136, the former Post Standard building, was designed about 1880 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The first issues of the *Syracuse Post* and the present *Post-Standard* newspapers were published here in the 1890s. Note the symbol in the gabled pediment near the roof line. It represents a typesetter's pick, a tool used in preparing type for printing.

Above the entrance to 120, built in 1896, are depicted two sides of a coin from the ancient city of Siracusa, Sicily, for which Syracuse is named. The former Bank of Syracuse building, it was the earliest steel frame structure in the city. Architect Albert Brockway designed the marble Neo-classical facade to be imposing despite its small size.

The **Gere Building**, on the north side of the Square, was erected in 1894. Charles Colton, architect of Syracuse's City Hall, designed this commercial structure. While the ground floor forms a solid masonry base, the upper floor windows are arranged in bands and topped by a cornice of terra cotta panels. The building contains one of the few remaining open screen elevators in the country.

Proceed to the east end of Hanover Square to City Place, the pedestrian mall adjacent to the State Tower Building.

Stop 6

Look at Hanover Square from this vantage point. You can see, to your left, the beautiful Warren Street facade of the **Larned Building** erected in 1869. Do you note any similarities with other buildings of the same period on the Square?

The original mansard roof of the Larned Building was converted into a fifth floor about 1892, but the window treatment still echoes the original Second Empire style. For several decades, the Larned was one of Syracuse's most prestigious office blocks. A fire destroyed the building's interior, and the exterior has been cleverly reused as the facade for a parking garage.

Beyond is Vanderbilt Square, site of the first Syracuse Railroad Depot, built in 1839. The square was originally surrounded by hotels and restaurants to serve travellers. The train tracks came right down Washington Street and through the square until 1936.

To your far left, the triangular **S.A. & K. Building** fills the block on which it stands. First constructed in 1842, the building burned and was rebuilt several times. The present structure dates from 1867. It is now City Hall Commons, an annex to the Syracuse City Hall.

The **State Tower Building** is the only major 20th century addition to the Square. It stands on the site of the Bastable Block, noted for its theater. The State Tower Building was erected in 1927 and is the tallest building in Syracuse. With its geometric ornamentation, it is a fine example of Art Deco architecture.

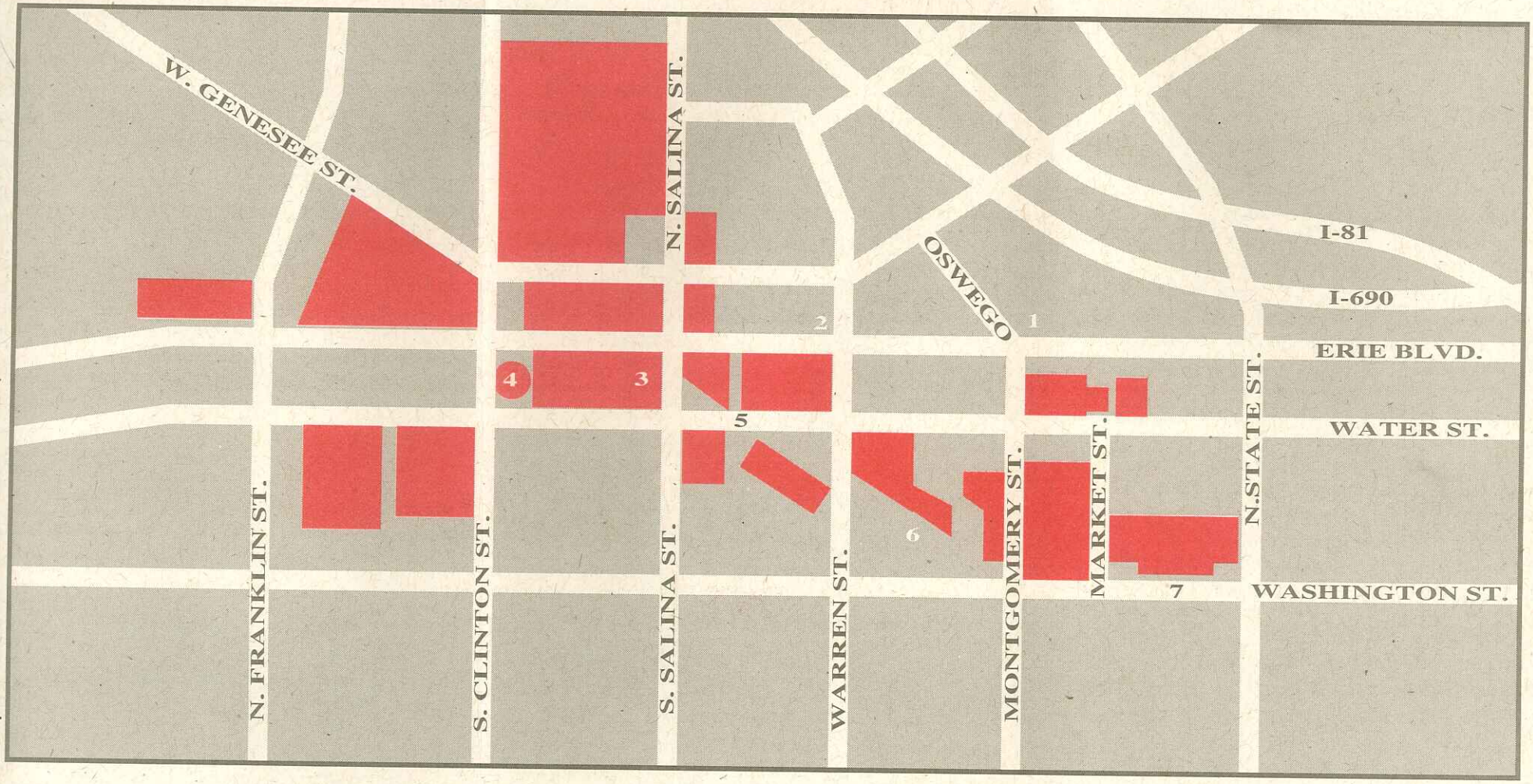
Proceed to the corner of Washington and Montgomery Streets and cross Montgomery St. to stop in front of City Hall.

Stop 7

You are standing at the location of two important Syracuse structures, **City Hall** and the **Courier Building**. Imagine that the year is 1850 and a large crowd is gathered on the grounds of Market Hall, where politicians often delivered public speeches. The crowd's attention is focused on the triangular-shaped **Courier Building.** From a second floor wrought-iron balcony on the Montgomery Street side of the building, the famous Daniel Webster speaks. He warns local abolitionists that the Fugitive Slave Act, which permitted Federal marshals to pursue slaves fleeing the South across state lines, would be enforced and that defiance of the federal law would be considered treasonous.

A few short months after the speech, the Jerry Rescue occurred, showing just what Syracusans thought of Webster and the Fugitive Slave Act. The balcony from which he spoke is still visible on the **Courier Building**, which was constructed in 1844. Today, Market Hall is gone, and standing in its place in front of you is Syracuse's **City Hall**, opened in 1892. Designed by Charles Colton, this structure is typical of the Romanesque style. It is constructed of Onondaga limestone, carried to the site by canal boat.

Proceed north along Montgomery Street to the UCP Visitor Center where you began your tour.



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Syracuse Urban Cultural Park

URBAN CULTURAL P·A·R·K PROGRAM