

# BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION  
ALBANY, NEW YORK (518) 474-0479

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

UNIQUE SITE NO. 123-08-0001  
QUAD \_\_\_\_\_  
SERIES \_\_\_\_\_  
NEG. NO. \_\_\_\_\_

AUG 03 1978

YOUR NAME: Roger Reed DATE: 5/78

YOUR ADDRESS: 200 Main St. TELEPHONE: 315-536-7318

ORGANIZATION (if any): Yates County Historical Society

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## IDENTIFICATION

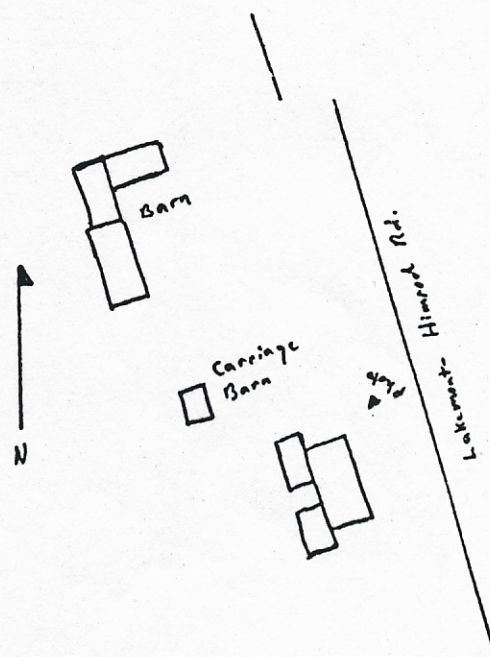
1. BUILDING NAME(S): Dr. Henry Spence Farm  
2. COUNTY: Yates TOWN/CITY: Starkey VILLAGE: \_\_\_\_\_  
3. STREET LOCATION: Lakemont-Himrod Rd.  
4. OWNERSHIP: a. public ☐ b. private ☒  
5. PRESENT OWNER: Robert Spence ADDRESS: Knoxville, Tenn.  
6. USE: Original: residence Present: for sale  
7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes ☒ No ☐  
Interior accessible: Explain Cronin Realty, Dundee, N.Y.

## DESCRIPTION

8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard ☐ b. stone ☐ c. brick ☐ d. board and batten ☐  
e. cobblestone ☒ f. shingles ☐ g. stucco ☐ other: \_\_\_\_\_  
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: a. wood frame with interlocking joints ☐  
(if known) b. wood frame with light members ☐  
c. masonry load bearing walls ☒  
d. metal (explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
e. other \_\_\_\_\_  
10. CONDITION: a. excellent ☐ b. good ☒ c. fair ☐ d. deteriorated ☐  
11. INTEGRITY: a. original site ☒ b. moved ☐ if so, when? \_\_\_\_\_  
c. list major alterations and dates (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

12. PHOTO:

13. MAP:





14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known ☒ b. zoning ☐ c. roads ☐  
d. developers ☐ e. deterioration ☐  
f. other: \_\_\_\_\_
15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:  
a. barn ☒ b. carriage house ☒ c. garage ☐  
d. privy ☐ e. shed ☐ f. greenhouse ☐  
g. shop ☐ h. gardens ☐  
i. landscape features: gravity powered fountain in front yard.  
j. other: pond at rear of house.
16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):  
a. open land ☒ b. woodland ☒  
c. scattered buildings ☒  
d. densely built-up ☐ e. commercial ☐  
f. industrial ☐ g. residential ☐  
h. other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:  
(Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district) The house is in a farming  
community about two miles south of Himrod, facing Seneca Lake.

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):  
Please see accompanying photos for interior and exterior details.  
The first story floor plan consists of a central hall with two large  
rooms on either side, a kitchen in the south wing, and one room in  
the north wing. The second floor consists of about six rooms and servants  
quarters in the south wing.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1848

ARCHITECT: \_\_\_\_\_

BUILDER: Dr. Henry Spence

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: Dr. Spence was born in 1800 in Lodi, N.Y., the same year his parents moved there from Philadelphia. As a young man he first taught school in Lodi, then studied medicine with Dr. Claudius C. Coan, receiving his degree from the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1823. Shortly after he settled in Yates County. In 1824 he married Patty Bordman, daughter of Allen Bordman the first dean of Cornell Law School, and bought 100 acres on lot ten in Starkey for \$1,750.00.

Dr. Spence was a famous surgeon who was one of the first men in the Country to perform cataract surgery. His patients would come to him for operations and remain at his house to recover. He was also a successful farmer, having extensive fruit tree orchards. In 1835 he sold peaches from his orchards to the Oneida Community, a famous New York commune. (Continued on next sheet)

#### 21. SOURCES:

Cleveland, Stafford, History of Yates County, 1873.

Mr. Robert B. Spence

Schmidt, Carl, Cobblestone Masonry, Scottsville, 1966, p. 208.

#### 22. THEME:



Spence Homestead, Starkey, Yates County, continued.

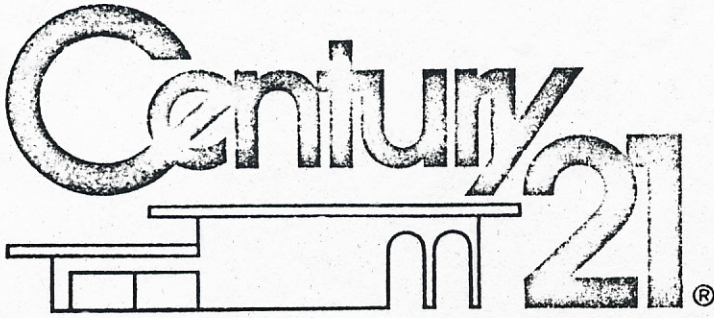
20. In 1841 he was elected to the Assembly in Albany, and some 15 years later participated in the founding of the Republican Party in Yates County. His family has remained to this day loyal Republicans.

Dr. Spence died in 1866. His eldest son, Byron, was born in 1825. He was one of the first students of the Starkey Seminary, and graduated from New York University in 1850. Like his father, Byron was also a doctor. He served as a Union officer with a New York regiment during the Civil War, and continued the family tradition of farming. The success of the family as farmers was such that Dr. Henry was the first president of the Yates County Agricultural Society, and his great grandson, Robert, achieved the national seven day milk record for a two year Holstein heffer in 1913.

Dr. Spence built the present Creek Revival cobblestone house in 1843. He brought down from the Rochester area Irish masons who had worked on many of the famous cobblestone houses in that area. The house was built of small stones from Lake Superior and Lake Ontario, shipped down from Sodus Point to Starkey Point on Seneca Lake, then hauled inland by ox team. The windows, lintels, sills, and quoins are grey limestone. The house remained in the family until 1972, and reverted back again to Robert Spence in 1978.

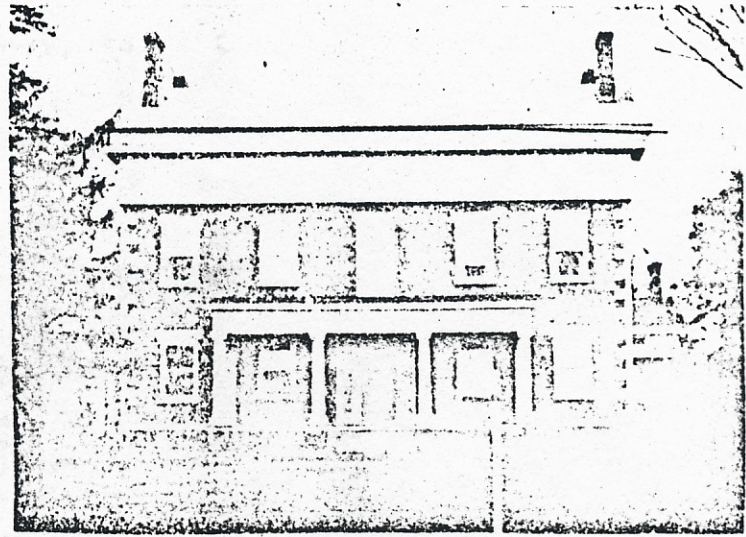
This is an unusual example of Creek Revival architecture with its very heavy entablature<sup>and</sup> four bay width on the gable ends. For further information on the architectural and historical importance, please see the accompanying Real Estate sheet.





CRONIN REALTY

5 WATER STREET  
DUNDEE, NEW YORK 14837



#### THE SPENCE HOMESTEAD

This cobblestone house was completed by Dr. Henry Spence in 1848. The cobblestones on the front were from Lake Superior and the sides and rear were from Lake Ontario.

The masons were Irish who had previously worked on the Erie Canal and turned to building houses when the canal was completed. Most of these houses were built in the Rochester area between 1825 to 1860. This house is about on the Southern limits of their existence.

The Mortar is water-lime cement and was compounded on the site as portland cement was not invented until 1860. The art of mixing the water-lime died with the passing of the old masons and remains a mystery at this time.

The interior architecture is severe masculine in character, probably influenced by the fact the Dr. Spence was a widower at the time. All the woodwork was made on the site. The doors are called Christian as there are two crosses in the panels.

The four large chimneys on the house each have three separate flues. Thus each room upstairs and down has its individual flue for a stove. Stoves were then the popular means of heating. In Dr. Spence's office and study was the only fireplace except a baking fireplace in the basement. The Italian marble fireplace still exists in the former study.

Dr. Spence graduated from New York Medical College in 1822 and was a pioneer in cataract surgery. The operations were performed in the house and the patients remained to recover for a few days in the house. His practice extended from the Southern border of New York State to Lake Ontario and many miles from East to West.

The water system was an early accomplishment to provide water by gravity for domestic use as well as the fountain in the front yard. The original wooded pipe has been replaced with iron. A water wheel was used to operate a churn from this same source.

The site was well chosen to protect the house from the prevailing winds from the South and West. The water supply and nearness to Seneca Lake combine to temper the harshness of the cooler seasons.

The stone walls are 32 inches thick and thus have the advantage of accumulating the summer heat to help temper the winter cold. In the Spring, the cool stones have the reverse effect and make a pleasant retreat from the torrid sun.

LOCATION: Himrod - Lakemont Rd.  
(2 miles south of Himrod or 4 miles north of Lakemont)