

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

A Lesson In Preservation

Hexagon House-Lyndonville

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Located on the East Lake Road in the Town of Yates, is an unusual six-sided house owned by Mrs. Cecelia Baun. The house was built around 1840 by Godfrey Tarbox on land which he took up from the Holland Land Company. No doubt, the design of Mr. Tarbox's house was influenced by Orson Fowler who published a book in 1840 entitled "The Octagon House - A Home For All." His theory behind multi-sided houses was that they were easier to heat because of less outside exposure. We are told that this is the only hexagon house of this vintage in New York State. There are however, octagonal houses of this period sprinkled throughout many of the eastern states.

Over the past two and one-half years, Yates-Lyndonville Historian Mrs. Virginia Cooper with assistance from Mrs. Cecelia Baun, has attempted to get this unusual property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Information was researched, written and re-written to satisfy the State Board for Historic Preservation. Letters of support were written by local politicians, historians and the Orleans County Planning Board. Innumerable hours went into the research, planning and compiling of the necessary information required to establish this property worthy of National Register Status.

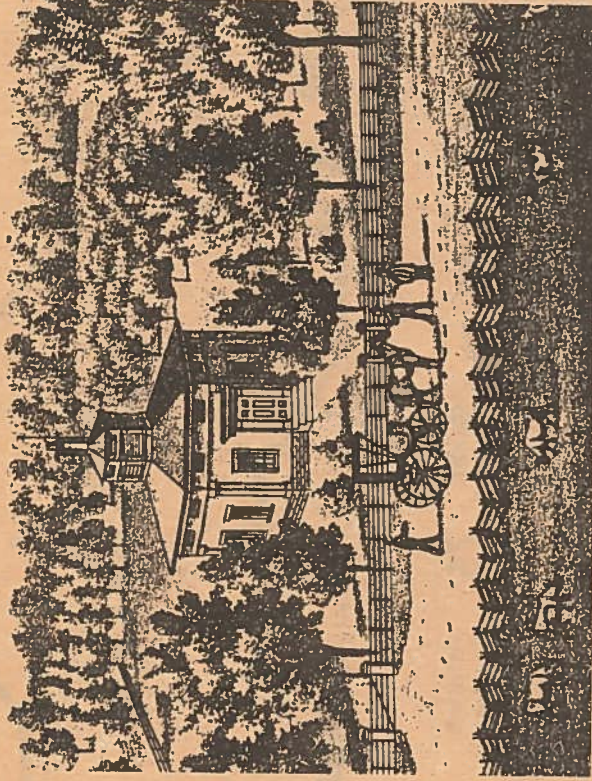
On March 6, 1986 the State Board for Historic Preservation met.

would like to appeal the Board's decision, please call....."

Sincerely,  
Larry Gobrecht  
National Register Coordinator  
Historic Preservation Field  
Services Bureau

Forsooth, there is a lesson to be learned in the disappointment of not getting this property listed on the National Register. It is a simple lesson but one which is seldom ever learned by would-be home improvers. Leave well enough alone! The one basic thing I'd like to say to all people who have an insatiable urge to muddle up beautiful architecture is: Keep your meddling hands off! No detail on an historic structure is too insignificant for preservation. The blasted siding companies in this country are to blame for having destroyed the integrity of thousands of architectural masterpieces with their products which are tacky on historic buildings. It seems to be an American tradition that when we don't like something we cover it up. But by so doing, we inevitably compromise the integrity of whatever it is.

The criterion for getting property on the National Register is becoming increasingly stiff. Buildings which do not retain their original surface treatment, mouldings and other details, no matter how historic they may otherwise be, will obviously not be included. Fewer and fewer structures remain as they were intended, because of intrusions or stupid alterations. Aluminum storm sash, picture windows, paneling and of course, vinyl siding don't belong on historic structures. If you want a new house, that's fine, but for heaven's sake don't spoil an old one. Many old residences have actually been depreciated in value because of the removal and destruction of key architectural parts. I have never understood why, when some people by an older house, the first thing they do is to knock off the plaster and put up dry wall or paneling. In fact, many older homes which have been so-called modernized, are of no interest to people looking for houses of architectural integrity, and I might add, this group is growing in numbers. If you have a fine old home undisturbed without modern improvements, think twice before you make alterations and forsooth you may look at your house with new appreciation and value.



Their decision was forwarded to Mrs. Baun in a letter, the contents of which are as follows:

Re: Tarbox Hexagon House  
Lyndonville, Orleans Co.

"Dear Mrs. Baun,

Following a detailed review, the New York State Board for Historic Preservation has recommended that the property identified above not be nominated to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Board found that the addition of modern vinyl siding has compromised the architectural integrity of the Tarbox Hexagon House and the property no longer meets the National Register criteria. The Board was informed by staff that the original fabric survives substantially intact beneath the siding and agreed that if the siding were removed at a future date, the property could again be considered for nomination.

If you would like further information on the Board's action or