

PREFACE

Located on the east bank of the Hudson River, about 150 miles north of Manhattan and near the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal, Troy once was an industrial giant. It led the nation in iron production throughout much of the nineteenth century, and its factories turned out bells and cast-iron stoves that were sold the world over. A Troy woman's ingenuity gave birth to what became a booming shirt-collar industry, earning the city its enduring moniker, the "Collar City." By the mid-1870s rail lines radiated from Troy, providing cheap transportation for raw materials and manufactured goods and facilitating travel that fostered new ideas, technologies, and styles. Its population was both enterprising and civic-minded.

Along with Troy's economic success came the public, commercial, educational, residential, and religious buildings to prove it. Stores and shops, banks, churches, firehouses, and schools, both modest and sophisticated, sprouted up in the latest architectural styles, all contributing to a lively and fashionable downtown. Carefully scaled and detailed factories and warehouses harmonized with their neighbors. At least three multi-story buildings had cast-iron facades. In between, row houses built for the middle class, as well as for the wealthy, rivaled those in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

During the twentieth century, the manufacture of iron and steel industries migrated west, and the collar industry would become extinct soon after World War I. With its economic lifeblood drained, Troy dwindled in both prominence and population. As families left for suburbia in the 1960s, downtown stagnated, leaving building facades and interiors untouched, often for decades. A late-blooming urban-renewal program demolished many blocks of buildings, but preservationists fought back. More recently, reinvestment has accelerated, and Troy now boasts what the *New York Times* has called "one of the most perfectly preserved nineteenth-century downtowns in the United States."¹

It is my hope that the publication of this book will help bring forgotten aspects of Troy's history to the forefront, stimulate more investment in downtown Troy, and build an educated constituency for the preservation of the city's unrivaled collection of historic properties.

I began the research for this book in earnest in 2007, although for many years I had been assembling files on the work of two local architects, Marcus F. Cummings and his son, Frederick M. Cummings. As I began investigating Troy buildings designed by other architects and their firms, it soon became apparent that Troy residents had regularly enlisted talented Albany architects and, even more frequently, top designers based in New York City. Early examples of this trend included James H. Dakin, Alexander Jackson Davis, and Richard Upjohn. In the case of the first Troy Union Railroad Depot, opened in 1854, the architect, Eugene Bonnet, was a Frenchman. Later out-of-town architects included Frank Wills, Henry C. Dudley, Frederick

Diaper, Robert W. Gibson, George B. Post, Leopold Eidlitz, J. Cleveland Cady, H. Langford Warren, T. F. Schneider, Barney and Chapman, and Mortimer L. Smith and Son. In some instances, these were the “starchitects” of their day, but in several cases they were still young men, just launching their careers (alas, no women were identified as designers, but several were clients).

This pattern of hiring outstanding architects from beyond Troy continued into the twentieth century, with major buildings by designers from Albany, including those by William L. Woollett and his brother John W. Woollett and by Marcus T. Reynolds. Increasingly, though, commissions were awarded to well-known architects who specialized in a specific building type, such as Reed and Stem (railroad stations), Goldwin Starrett (department stores), William J. Beardsley (jails), Arland W. Johnson (theaters), George H. McCormack (banks), Clarence L. Harding (hotels), and McKenzie, Voorhees, and Gemlin (telephone buildings).

These and other trends emerged from years of painstaking research in original source materials and thousands of newspaper accounts. Many of the images and documents relating to major buildings and local architects were found in Troy (in church archives and in the collections of the Rensselaer County Historical Society and the Troy Public Library) or in Albany at the New York State Library. In other instances, documents were located at the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, and particularly the New-York Historical Society, which holds important materials from the office of George B. Post.

In many cases, accounts in contemporary newspapers were critical to dating buildings and discovering the names of their designers. The scans of local newspapers posted on the Fulton History website over the past decade provided access to invaluable accounts that otherwise would have taken too many hours or days to search out in microfilm copies of the papers; on the other hand, accounts available at Fulton History regularly proved too tempting and materially delayed completion of the manuscript.

Newspapers proved especially important to identifying the contractors (some of whom also acted as architects), tradespeople, artisans, and suppliers of high-quality building materials, whose essential roles are often overlooked in books like this. The newspapers also supplied a wealth of information on construction practices and technologies. Thanks to local news reporters, for instance, the problems of securing granite for the Troy Savings Bank, the many delays in erecting the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, the on-the-job injuries and deaths of construction workers, and the details about elegant interior finishes were all available. The newspapers also identified specific structures destroyed in major fires and then, in time, block-by-block accounts of the rebuilding.

While most of the buildings mentioned in the book are still standing, others that no longer survive have also been included in order to tell a fuller story of the city’s architectural development. On the other hand, it was necessary to be selective when deciding which existing buildings to include; this is not an encyclopedia of downtown structures, and there was not

enough time or space to document all that survive. Initially, the plan had been to deal with just nineteenth-century buildings, but once the very interesting stories behind early twentieth-century buildings began to emerge, it seemed important to include some of them as well, if only in a more abbreviated format. Hopefully, the buildings not included in this book, especially the scores of fine row houses, will prompt others to investigate them and share their stories. For the purposes of this book, downtown is defined as the area bounded on the north by Federal Street, on the east by the skyline above Sixth Avenue, on the south by Adams Street, and on the west by the Hudson River. Similarly, downtown is only a small part of Troy, and there are many buildings in other parts of the city that are very worthy of study.

In the decade that it took to produce this book, I have been very fortunate to have had the exceptional insights and assistance of Stacy Pomeroy Draper and Kathy T. Sheehan of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, Douglas G. Bucher, and the expert staff at Mount Ida Press—most recently Elizabeth Marsh and Laura Colaneri. My husband, John G. Waite, supported the idea of the book from the beginning, lent his expertise, and then endured the many weekends that I devoted to it. The many others who participated over the years are listed in the acknowledgements.

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