

Historic Geneseo

Self-guided Walking Tour Around the City Park

The Walking Tour focuses on the city park or “public square”, around which town life moved in the early years of the Geneseo Colony, 1836-1860’s. We’ll note the few original buildings, some adaptively reused. We’ll enjoy the stately homes that occupy old sites. Best call up your imagination!

(1) Geneseo Township Library

212 S. State

Built 1898

The style is Richardson Romanesque, with its hipped roof, with crossed gables, strip windows and round arched entry.

(2) First Methodist Church

219 S. State

Built 1854

Looking across the street, we see the Veterans of Foreign Wars building which fulfilled its original purpose till 1867. Changing hands several times, it was used by the German Teutonia Society as a social hall, and thrilled Geneseoans in the days of silent pictures as the Wigwam, Geneseo’s first motion picture house.

(3) Mrs. Emery’s Millinery

230 S. State

Built 1870

In the days of board walks and gas lights, this frame building had the second story balcony, common on Geneseo’s early business buildings. Mrs. Emery’s Millinery business flourished in the 1870’s.

(4) Central School

115 E North

Built 1856

Looking east on North Street, it is easy to recognize the 130 year old Central School building with its white shutters against red brick. Remodeling was done in 1913. A part of the newly legislated state public school system, Central School served elementary grades from 1856-1890. The old building combines Greek Revival features with elements of Federalistic Style.

(5) First Congregational Church

101 E. Pearl

Built 1855

The church building you see is the Colony Church of 1855. Radical remodeling in 1924 added a new north wing, a new entry, belfry and steeple (built around the old one) and a course of brick on the original building.

(6) The Geneseo Historical Museum

205 S. State Street

Richards-Thede House

The Italianate style home was built by George Richards in 1855. The second adjoining home was in in 1867 by the Wilson brothers. The local landmark became the home of the Geneseo Historical Museum in 1997. The Lincoln bust the once stood at the Chicago Union Stockyards was a memorial gift received in 1997 from the Gifford Zimmerman family. Open to the public.

(7) The Seminary

115 W. Pearl

Built on site in 1848

In 1910 the Geneseo Township High School was built on the same spot. When the building was razed in 2000 it was the site of the Geneseo Middle School. Presently the grounds are an addition to the city park.

(8) Howard Deming House

401 S. Center

Built 1901

The work of Deming's son, Edwin, as a painter of Indian life, has made the Deming name and home locally familiar. The high Victorian home is a delightful example of Queen Anne elements: irregular silhouette, high and multiple roof planes, many gables, tall chimneys, and polygonal porches.

(9) Francis H. McArthur House

409 S. Center

Built 1876

McArthur was a Civil War veteran, an early lawyer in Geneseo, a justice of the peace, and dealt in insurance and real estate. The beauty of the house is further enhanced by the grace and elegance of the curved porch railing.

(10) A. J. Meade Drugstore

411 S. Center

Built 1858 or earlier

This simple balconied drugstore building is a lone survivor on the street once lined with shops of mechanics and tradesmen and bustling with business. Its plan was a common one of the day, business in front and living quarters in the rear.

(11) Milton J. Miller House

421 S. Center

Built 1879

Rev. Miller came to Geneseo as the first minister of the Unitarian Church in 1868 and remained the rest of his life. Both invested their lives in the town. An excellent example of Mansard Style or Second Empire.

(12) John Goss House

425 S. Center

Built 1879

John Goss was a long-time lumber dealer in Geneseo. Formal, orderly, symmetrical, rectangular, the Goss house stands proudly on the corner lot once called Pioneer Corner facing the square. It is one of the very few of Geneseo's fine older homes which has undergone virtually no basic changes over the years.

(13) Claus Heeren House

130 W. Main

Built 1924

The brick bungalow at the west corner of the block south of the park is of a style which in the 1920's took the country by storm. It is a most historic spot, as near this corner the first log cabin was built on the town site. During the first winter it sheltered the two Cone families and the Stewarts, nineteen in all.

(14) Atkinson Hall

108 W. Main

Built 1892

The property on the south side of Main Street, across from the City Park was optimistically acquired by the Geneseo Collegiate Institute in 1889. When growth did not materialize, the lots to the east and the west of Atkinson Hall were sold off. The Murphy house (124 W. Main) was built about 1911, and the others in 1924, 1925 and 1948. The tall Romanesque Atkinson Hall, still standing, and the classroom building on the northeast corner of the intersection, now long gone, were the center for generations of students who preferred a private preparatory school to the public high school across the park.

(15) Geneseo Collegiate Institute

Corner State and Main

Built 1884

The location of the G.C.I. class room building has been a busy corner. It was occupied early by the Perry Spaulding Bank and office building. It was this bank building that underwent a remarkable remodeling to become the three-story school. In the 1930's the building was razed and the premises "improved" with a gasoline station.

(16) C. C. Merriman House

418 S. State

Built 1859

This house is closely tied to Geneseo's colony days. Deacon John Ward built the first frame house here and in it kept the first store, separated from his quarters by a blanket. A succession of interesting persons occupied the location and later this house. In 1859 the buyer sold his Delaware "plantation" to buy this house and "certain household furniture now in the dwelling..." A listing of furniture followed. The character of the house is Greek Revival, the gable at the ends and entrance on the side with sidelights at the door.

(17) Agnes Perkins House

412 S. State

Built 1879

Robert Boice, hardware merchant and an organizer of Oakwood Cemetery, resided here from 1887 until his death. Two-story bays are symmetrically placed on each side of the house. The style is Italianate with wide roof overhang and scroll brackets.

(18) J. A. Sawyer House

408 S. State

Built 1878

The retirement home of J. A. Sawyer, a Henry County merchant, also influential in the establishment of the G.C.I. and a trustee of it for many years. Double doors at the entrance and very long narrow windows add distinction to the house exterior, which is very severe in its simple lines. Considerable elegance is hidden inside.

(19) Attorney Wm. Smith/Woodruff House

400 S. State

This corner property facing the park was the site of William Smith's home and law office from 1860 to 1875. Dr. Robert Antes practiced dentistry next door. The block was lined with small businesses in frame buildings. On this location, in 1909, major additions were made to the building on the south side by the Woodruff family. It is believed a part of Smith's home is incorporated into the present residence.