

26 April 2021

Michael Tyler, Supervisor Town of Westport
P.O. Box 465
Westport, New York 12993

Dear Supervisor Tyler,

I am writing in strong support of efforts to preserve and rehabilitate the former Junior Achievement Foundation building, most recently occupied the Cornell Extension program, in Westport. I write as an architectural historian, who for over fifty years has focused on work throughout the United States. I have taught undergraduate and graduate students between 1976 and 2018, and directed a graduate program in historic preservation for most of that time. I am a Fellow and past president of the Society of Architectural Historians, the oldest and largest organization of its kind in North America. I currently serve on the executive committee and am past president of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy and am a board member of the Fort Ticonderoga Association.

I also write as a seasonal resident of Essex County since 1978. My wife's extended family's roots (in Elizabethtown) date to the mid-nineteenth century. I have had the opportunity to study many aspects of architecture across in the Adirondacks and was delighted to be able to prepare an extensive guide to that subject for Adirondack Architectural Heritage several years ago.

The county fairgrounds at Westport represent a remarkable assemblage of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings, making the complex unique in the Adirondacks and indeed a rare example of its kind in the eastern United States. The Extension Building is an integral component of that complex, complementing older structures in appearance and function.

While I have long admired the whole group, I did not realize until recently that the Extension Building was funded by Horace Augustus Moses, a Ticonderoga native, who made his fortune in Springfield, Massachusetts and later in life bestowed his home town with major landmarks: the Community Building (1927-28), the now demolished Moses-Luddington Hospital (1923), and the replica of the long-gone Hancock house in Boston (1925-26), to which he lured the New York Historical Association.

The architect for all these buildings and, I have also recently discovered, for the Extension Building was Max Westhoff, one of the most prominent and accomplished architects to practice in the Adirondacks during the first half of the twentieth century. Westhoff began his career working for William Coulter in Saranac Lake – in the first Adirondack-based architectural firm. Westhoff quickly rose to assume a leading position in the firm and became its head following Coulter's untimely death. While Coulter and Westhoff are perhaps best known for the imaginative rustic designs for private camps, they prepared plans for buildings of all types. Their cumulative impact on the region's architecture was unmatched. Westhoff left Saranac Lake for Springfield, Massachusetts, after World War I, and it was there, apparently, he established ties with Moses. His Ticonderoga and Westport buildings are a fitting culmination of a distinguished career that spanned three decades.

I understand that you are exploring ways to rehabilitate the Extension Building in a way that does justice to its design and that is economically viable. My many years of experience in the preservation field have led me to believe that such solutions can be found in a great majority of cases. Sometimes finding that solution takes more time and effort, but the results can lead not only to optimal, they often prove to save money in the long term. This building is significant enough to warrant that extra investment of time and energy. I wish you every success. And if I may of any further help, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Yours very sincerely,
Richard Longstreth
Professor Emeritus, George Washington University