

## *2022 Update*

### **AGRICULTURAL CENTER BUILDING ESSEX COUNTY CCE OFFICES Westport NY**



*“This handsome building which will grace the fairgrounds at Westport is a gift to Essex County by Horace A. Moses...” June 26, 1924*

Friends of the Essex fairgrounds  
Westport, New York

## PREFACE

The following report from Crawford & Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners, was prepared for Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds and Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH). The decision to commission a report was stimulated by an out-pouring of support for renovation of the historic building by citizens throughout Essex County: petition-signers and their accompanying written comments; fair-goers during Fair Week; former 4-H participants, Master Gardeners, and other users of the building; former employees who worked in the building; and others throughout the Essex County community. The report was made possible through financial assistance from Cloudsplitter Foundation to revisit and update recommendations and possible costs for renovation that Crawford & Stearns had made in earlier studies of the building in 2005 and 2008.

Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds  
Westport, New York 12993

Adirondack Architectural Heritage  
Keeseville, NY 12944

May 2022



**CRAWFORD & STEARNS**  
ARCHITECTS AND PRESERVATION PLANNERS, PLLC

**HISTORIC PROPERTY ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Date: December 30, 2021

To: Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds, Westport NY  
Adirondack Architectural Heritage, Keeseville NY

Re: Rehabilitation & Reuse of the Agricultural Center Building  
at the Essex County Fairgrounds / Westport, New York

By: Randall T. Crawford / Crawford & Stearns

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The purpose of this report is to provide updated information on the condition of the Agricultural Center Building as well as more current cost estimates for rehabilitation work necessary to return it to useful function.

Crawford & Stearns is particularly familiar with this building having prepared a *Master Plan for Renovation* with both existing and proposed reuse drawings for it in 2005 and a *Proposed Work Scope with Statement of Possible Construction Costs* in 2008 based on the Master Plan. These materials were provided for Essex County and Cornell Cooperative Extension at that time to guide plans for renovation and continued use of this significant local resource.

The building was constructed in 1924 in the Colonial Revival style from the design of noted Adirondack architect Max Westoff and is included with other fairgrounds structures in both the Essex County Fairgrounds and the Westport Historic Districts on the National Register of Historic Places. Occupied until relatively recently by Cornell Cooperative Extension, the building is still commonly referred to as the CCE Building.

Based on our ongoing experience with the structure and its needs, as well as our experience with the successful treatment of hundreds of historic properties, the firm was asked to revisit the Agricultural Center Building and update our observations and recommendations.

As principal of the firm I visited the building on October 13 and 14, 2021 to review current conditions and to meet with representatives of the Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds and Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) to discuss current issues and concerns. Following this visit the firm's earlier recommendations

were updated to reflect the most recent conditions and needs, particularly with regard to possible costs for necessary rehabilitation (See attached). This report offers the most recent suggestions for both.

### **Economic and Social Benefits of Rehabilitation**

It is understandable that rehabilitation would be compared to new construction. In this instance we believe that this historic building can be successfully renovated to full function at roughly the same cost, if not less, than building a new replacement structure and that there would be major benefits to renovation rather than rebuilding.

From a financial perspective, significant public grants are available for the preservation and reuse of historic structures, while public funds used for the demolition of designated historic structures - such as this one - must go through an extensive and rigorous review process as mandated by New York State and the National Historic Preservation Act. In addition, by demonstrating a willingness and an ability to preserve its historic resources, the county would be looked upon more favorably for such funding in the future to assist with the repair and ongoing use of other structures at the historic fairgrounds and elsewhere.

Architecturally and historically, the current building is special and unique. It was designed by a noted Adirondack architect and is part of a distinct and intact assemblage of historic fairground buildings. As the architectural historian Richard Longstreth has noted: "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." If the current building were to be demolished, the value of this special place in Essex County's agricultural heritage, past, present and future, would be substantially diminished.

### **Reuse & Planning**

The current program is based on renovating the building to be much as it was when last occupied, but with numerous improvements such as providing a platform lift (vs. a more expensive commercial elevator) to provide access for the disabled to the second floor, all new electrical, new heating, new air conditioning, new exhaust ventilation, enhanced fire detection and life safety features, restored windows with storms, new insulation throughout for energy conservation, and all new finishes.

At the same time it provides opportunities to reconfigure the interior of the

building to serve its multiple purposes more efficiently, to provide additional office space, and to install a high efficiency/low temperature heat pump system for heating and cooling.

### **Building Code & Energy Code Compliance**

Historic buildings are allowed certain dispensations under applicable New York State building codes without compromising life safety or disregarding the inherent benefits of energy conservation and the rehabilitated building would be fully compliant with these standards.

The insulation existing in the attic appears to be close to and might even exceed current standards and should require little more than adjustment to ensure full benefit. Rehabilitation scopes would include the addition of low profile intakes and exhausts to vent the attic effectively.

The interior face of the exterior walls (including the basement) would be furred out and insulated, thus greatly improving the building's energy efficiency. At the same time, this furring will facilitate the complete re-wiring of the entire building. The underside of the first floor, above the crawl space, will be insulated as well.

### **Hazardous Materials**

In 2018 the County retained Atlantic Testing Laboratories to undertake an assessment of hazardous materials at the Agricultural Center Building. By e-mail on 11/4/21 the Superintendent of the Essex County Department of Public Works indicated that all but two of the materials identified in that report as containing asbestos had been abated in 2020. The remaining materials are roof coatings on the porch and, possibly, electrical wiring subject to additional study. These materials would pose no unusual difficulties or significantly increase costs for a rehabilitation effort as compared to demolition.

### **Structural Soundness**

The supporting structure, including the structural piers in the crawl space, exterior walls, roof framing, foundation walls, and framing above, appears to be sound and secure, and has demonstrated its adequacy by successfully enduring nearly a century of occupancy.

Essex County's consulting structural engineer, Schoder Rivers Associates, conducted a structural review of the building in 2008 and found that it appeared to be of sound construction with the exception of several areas of deterioration caused by poor rain water control. These more immediate needs have been corrected by the county and it is anticipated that a relatively limited amount of

framing repair and reinforcing will be necessary as part of the overall renovation.

## Conclusions

The Agricultural Center (CCE) building is a valuable historic structure and an important contributor to the character and integrity of the National Register-listed Essex County Fairgrounds. Of equal importance, it is also a prominent part of the western gateway to Westport and the streetscape of the recently designated Historic District that includes much of the village.

The building has been studied by architects and engineers and found to be structurally sound. My own current observations as to the condition of the building concur with the observations made by Carl Stearns of this firm in 2005 and 2008, Schoder Rivers in 2008, Fred Keil in 2018, and a prominent local contractor in 2021.

We believe that upgrading the building to meet current needs can be accomplished at no greater cost than that of a new building and, in all probability, at less. Moreover, a new building cannot be built economically with the same level of architectural detail and character. Nor can a new building replicate the personal ties treasured by Essex County residents who have participated in programs at the building, worked in the building, or simply enjoyed its stately presence at the entrance to the fairgrounds.

At the moment Essex County has the opportunity to work actively with organizations such as the Friends and AARCH that are willing and eager to provide their support in the rehabilitation of one of the region's more beloved and significant historic buildings. It is hoped that the information provided here can be of assistance in these efforts.

By:



Randall T. Crawford

RTC/hs

Attached: Proposed Rehabilitation Scopes & Estimates of Possible Costs

**PROPOSED REHABILITATION SCOPES & ESTIMATES OF POSSIBLE COSTS**

December 30, 2021

The following scopes for the rehabilitation of the Agricultural Center Building at the Essex County Fairgrounds have been developed based on prior studies, recent observations, information provided by the Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds, and consultation with Schell McKinley and other local contractors.

The corresponding estimates for possible construction costs are based on numbers developed by Mr. McKinley with additional data from other local construction specialists and adjusted by Crawford & Stearns to reflect applicable prevailing wage rates and conditions. They have been rounded off for convenience and are provided for general budgeting purposes only.

1.	<u>Northeast Porch, Portico, and Roofs</u> : Repair and apply elastomeric coating to northeast porch and portico roofs, spot repair asphalt shingle roof, repair and paint cupola, install attic ventilation, repair/replace/refinish northeast porch interior trim and flooring.	68,750
2.	<u>Basement</u> : Frame, insulate, and drywall interior face of foundation walls.	10,000
3.	<u>Crawlspace</u> : Provide access within crawl space for work, remove existing floor insulation, repair framing as needed, install new insulation in floor assembly, and cover from beneath with fire retardant treated plywood.	37,500
4.	<u>Exterior Facades &amp; Windows</u> : Repair and repaint all exterior trim and siding. Restore and repaint all windows, including larger Palladian-style. Provide low profile prefinished aluminum double hung storm & screen windows for all operable units and equivalent clip in storm panels for inoperable.	323,250
5.	<u>Accessibility</u> : Provide open shaft and lift for access from first to second floor. Provide grab bars and related accessibility aids at second floor toilet room. (See separate references to new exterior ramp, wider doors, and option to improve second floor hallway.)	67,500
6.	<u>Sitework</u> : Lower grade a/o form swales to redirect surface water, provide new perimeter plantings, replace limited walks.	25,000
7.	<u>Interior Improvements</u> : Remove acoustic ceilings, provide new drywall ceilings (furred down at first floor to accommodate new	

	electrical). Fur out, insulate, and drywall exterior walls (extension jamb affected doors and windows. Replace interior doors with wider ones as necessary to improve accessibility. Replace existing flooring treatments.	162,500
8.	<u>Electrical &amp; Fire Alarm</u> : Provide new 400A electric service. Replace all existing wiring, outlets, switches, and light fixtures. Provide all necessary emergency lighting, illuminated exit signs, and fire & smoke detection and alarms. Provide electrical as necessary for new HVAC.	125,000
9.	<u>Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning</u> : Provide new heating and cooling utilizing new high efficiency electric heat pumps with external condensing units. Provide new exhaust ventilation for toilet rooms and kitchen.	130,000
10.	<u>Plumbing</u> : Refurbish existing toilet facilities and related plumbing. (Note that all such plumbing is located above the basement.) Make general repairs to kitchen plumbing and construct insulated chaseway in crawl space below, nominally heated and connected to the basement.	31,250
11.	<u>Kitchen</u> : Renovate kitchen to serve limited building needs (not commercial grade cooking).	75,000
	Subtotal	1,055,750
	Plus General Conditions (12%)	1,182,440
	Plus Overhead & Profit (20%)	1,418,928
	Subtotal	1,418,928
	Architectural/Engineering (10%)	141,893
	Contingency (15%)	212,839
	Total	1,773,360
	Basement + First Floor + Second Floor = 6,708 square feet (sf) \$1,773,360 divided by 6,708 = \$264 per square foot	

END



## **Architectural Consultant Information**

Crawford & Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners, PLLC, was established in 1979, and from its offices in Syracuse, NY, the firm has provided historic architectural and preservation consulting services for a wide variety of projects in New York, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, West Virginia, New Jersey, and North Carolina.

Specializing in the restoration, preservation, and adaptive reuse of architecturally, historically, and culturally significant resources the firm has worked successfully with hundreds of National Register-listed properties, utilizing a wide variety of private and public funding sources, requiring approvals by numerous governmental agencies including State Historic Preservation Offices and the National Park Service. More than seventy five of these projects, in addition to the firm itself, have been recognized with local, state, or national awards for excellence.

Randall T. Crawford is the principal and has been with the firm since its inception. A registered architect, he also holds a Master's degree in the History of Architecture and is qualified under federal 36 CFR 61 standards in the fields of Architecture, Architectural History, and Historic Architecture.

For further information see the Crawford & Stearns website:

<https://www.crawfordstearns.com>

## Public Support

*The outpouring of public support calling for renovation of this historic building is expressed in the 1,681 signatures gathered on petitions during a few months in 2021, and the hundreds of written comments from residents of every corner of Essex County speaking of their love and ties to this building. Here is a small sample of the public's thoughts.*

"Please save this special building. It represents our society, our culture, and our history. Respect for our shared past, creates hope for our future." -- **Westport**

"That structure delights me every time I drive through Westport. The fairgrounds are a testament to a time when architecture reflected timeless beauty and lofty ideals. It would be a tragedy to see such a structure demolished." -- **Jay**

"This is one of the few gems left in the area that tells the history of Essex giving it a sense of place and time." -- **Essex**

"The Junior Achievement (aka CCE) building represents the confidence in an economically prosperous future for Essex County, as envisioned a century ago. It would be most unfortunate to demolish it at a time when the local and organic food moments have spawned an unexpected renaissance in the county's agricultural sector." -- **Crown Point**

"This complex is so historical, so beautiful so functional. We need to preserve this type of ideals that harken back to a communal understanding of gathering folk together to share." -- **Keene**

"Over the hundred years of its existence this beautiful and historic building has seen thousands of Essex County children and adults pass through its doors. While there they learned new skills, met friends from other towns and had fun. Before it was neglected, 17 people had offices in the building. It should be repaired and modernized, but not changed architecturally. It should be brought back to its former glory, so that the community can be proud of its history." -- **Westport**

"This building was beautiful when I was a child and lived in Westport, NY. I went to 4-H and learned to sew in this beautiful building. I hope and wish with all my heart that it will be restored." -- **Keeseville**

"I spent time in that building every fair time for most of my 79 years. My Dad, Charles Nichols, had his office upstairs for around 15 years in the 50's until 1964 as the Conservation and Stabilization Office Agent. The 4H exhibits and meals were always served there. If it will be less expensive especially restoration and continuation of this historic landmark must be considered rather than a modern building. Westport is one of the oldest most historic towns in the County." -- **Au Sable Forks**

"This building was handcrafted and reflects the agricultural history of the area. Such a historic site not only creates a sense of place for those of us living in Westport, but it also brings tourists to the area (especially upon repair and use of the fairgrounds post covid). I understand that repairing the building would cost less money or be comparable to razing and building a new one. I strongly prefer my tax payer monies go to support preserving the historical legacy of place as reflected by the architecture of this building." -- **Westport**

"It makes zero sense to demolish this gem of a building, when it can be restored instead." -- **Port Henry**

"This building adds character and continuity to the whole fairground site." -- **Upper Jay**

"I have been going to the Essex County fair since I was a young child, this building is a big part of many peoples memories and if it can be saved it should be. The workmanship can not be duplicated in todays construction. I understand the building itself is sound and only needs rewiring, newer plumbing, paint and probably insulation. In light of the sharp increase in building materials, it would make more sense to fix this building. What is the increase from when the estimate was given? We are too much of a throw away world today instead of fixing we destroy history." -- *North Hudson*

"I grew up having 4H classes in this building and later visited to attend a gardening class. This building stands for so much community,love, and togetherness that is deeply missing from our town these days. Saving this building is important for the future of our town and the glorious people that spent their lives operating in and out of it as the center piece." -- *Westport*

"I have attended the Essex County Fair many times, even though I live in New York City. One of the things that makes it attractive to tourists like me is this beautiful and historic building. If you tear it down, you will lose a part of Westport and Essex County history, and you will also make the fair and Westport less attractive to people coming from elsewhere to spend money in the town. " -- *New York City*

"Please restore the building. So many fond memories during my years growing up and 4-H was my life. " -- *Lewis*

"I can't imagine a new building could begin to provide the sense of place and belonging that this iconic landmark provides. Restore it!" -- *Jay*

"This historic building is a huge part of local history and some of my favorite 4H memories took place in this building. Please try to conserve and restore this important feature of Westport and the Adirondacks. " -- *Keene*

"It is stunning that this is even being debated. Restore a classic, historic building for less money and less waste than constructing a new one. No brainer... " -- *Wilmington*

"This building is part of the charm and history of Westport and the Adirondacks. These buildings are such hidden assets in drawing outside resources to the region. " -- *Willsboro*

"Preservation of a historic building at a lower cost than demolition and new construction - what's not to love about this approach? " -- *Ticonderoga*

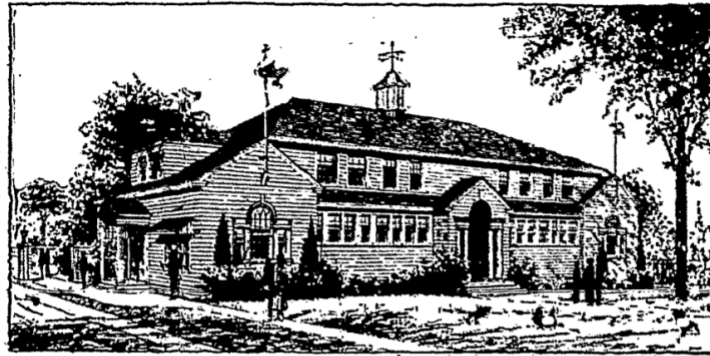
"Have visited the fairgrounds for fairs in the past and I believe it is important to keep this wonderful vestige of character-ful buildings!" -- *Schroon Lake*

"Our historic architecture is irreplaceable! Don't tear it down! " -- *Saranac Lake*

"Rehabilitation absolutely feasible and the best solution! " -- *Newcomb*

"If I, a single woman can resurrect a 68 year old motel... our county can ressurect a historical building at the Fair Grounds... " -- *North Hudson*

## Newspaper Articles and Editorials



PLANNING FOR THE JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT BUILDING AT WESTPORT

### JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT BUILDING AT WESTPORT

#### Now In Course of Construction—Will Be Ornament To Fair Grounds

The New Junior Achievement building, now being erected on the Essex County Fair grounds at Westport is to be a two story building, on the first floor of which will be the permanent office of the Fair Association, where tickets will be sold and the business of the Association transacted; a model kitchen and pantry enclosed in glass, where demonstrations in cooking will be carried on. Adjoining the kitchen is the cafeteria where the foods cooked in the kitchen will be served to the public at a moderate cost.

A portable stage is to be built upon which will appear demonstrations in various projects. A dressing room and lavatory is connected with the stage. Groups of portable chairs are to be provided where an audience may comfortably and quietly observe the results of Junior Achievement work.

The remaining space on the ground floor is to be occupied with exhibit booths and tables and the east end will house the private and public offices of the Junior Achievement Foundation.

On the second floor over these offices will be the living apartments of the director of the work. This comprises a large living and dining room combined, bedroom, bath, kitchen and closets. Opening from this will be the boys and girls dormitories which will accommodate twenty-four boys and girls each. Both dormitories are provided with lavatories and toilets and

double decked beds with springs.

The year round quarters are to be heated by steam, the building is to be lighted throughout by electricity and furnished in the most complete and modern equipment.

The building is to be completed by August 1st and the work is rapidly progressing at the present time. This building will be used for the various activities connected with the Junior Achievement work; training classes for leaders; conferences; boys and girls camp and exhibition purposes throughout the year.

It is the aim of the Foundation to establish clubs in every community in the county and to reach every boy and every girl. If your town is not already organized it will be and you will surely want to be present at the opening of the building on August 20th.

This handsome building which will grace the fair grounds at Westport is a gift to Essex county by Horace A. Moses of Springfield, Mass., whose public spiritedness has made possible an appropriate building for the housing of the various activities of the Junior Achievement in this county.

### MALONE VOTERS REFUSE

#### TO HIRE POLICEWOMAN

At a special election in the village of Malone the proposition to employ a policewoman was voted down 230 to 160, while the proposition to purchase a tripple expansion fire truck was carried by a vote of 216 to 168.

It is estimated that automobiles have increased good roads 87 per cent and bandits 76 per cent.—Jackson Clarion-Ledger.

--From the Adirondack Record - Elizabethtown Post,  
June 26, 1924

# CCE Building has long, storied history

Gift from Horace A. Moses intended to provide opportunity, meeting space for young people of Essex County

Kim Dedam  
STAFF WRITER

**ELIZABETHTOWN** | A county taskforce has proposed to lawmakers a spate of formal options to the Essex County Board of Supervisors regarding the future of the building.

To provide context, the Sun researched the building's history, and found its connection to one of the region's most famous men.

Strathmore paper company industrialist, Horace A. Moses, originally from Ticonderoga, paid for design and construction of the building on the fairgrounds in 1924.

## MOSES' MANY GIFTS

A nationally known philanthropist, Moses also had the Hancock House built to house the New York State Historical Association in Ticonderoga two years afterward.

In the very same year he built the fair-ground exhibit and meeting hall, Moses had the bronze Liberty Monument made and placed in Ticonderoga in front of the spot readied for the Hancock House.

Financial support to his birthplace expanded the local hospital in Ticonderoga to become the Moses-Ludington Hospital.

And he also gifted the Ticonderoga Community Building, also called the "Headquarters Building" in downtown Ti. It is a stately neo-Georgian style granite edifice that serves to date as the town hall.

Most of the iconic structures Moses gave to Ticonderoga in the mid- to late-1920s are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and approaching centennial celebrations.

## A \$21,000 PROJECT

The CCE building in Westport was designed for a program called the Junior Achievement Bureau, a youth club he helped establish with two other industrial era philanthropists.

Their effort was deemed to inspire and entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic among children of that era.

The Adirondack Record-Elizabethtown Post reported on May 8, 1924, "Bids were last week opened at Westport for the construction of the Junior Achievement building on the Essex County fairgrounds at that place and the contract was awarded to Prescott & Son of Keeseville for \$21,000. The ticket office of the fairgrounds is to be located on

the ground floor of the new building."

Corrected for inflation, the contribution equivocates to \$300,292.63 in 2017.

Work began in earnest then to finish before the four-day fair opened on August 19, 1924.

By May 29, newspapers reported that Junior Achievement building foundations were in and timbers for the first floor were up.

On June 26, 1924, The Record-Post exclaimed, with a drawing of the building, that it would be "an ornament to Fair Grounds."

It was "to be a two story building, on the first floor of which will be the permanent office of the Fair Association, where tickets will be sold and the business of the Association transacted; a model kitchen and pantry enclosed in glass, where demonstrations in cooking will be carried on. Adjoining the kitchen is the cafeteria where the foods cooked ... will be served to the public at a moderate cost."

Amenities in the then new building were designed with a stage and seating area for Junior Achievement presentations and award ceremonies, along with a second floor living space for Junior Achievement directors.

The second floor also provided separate dormitory space for boys and girls to attend the three-week Junior Achievement camp held for many summers at the fairgrounds.

## DEDICATED TO YOUTH

On Aug. 20, 1924, the building was dedicated to the "welfare of the boys and girls of Essex County," according to the Aug. 21 edition of the Ticonderoga Sentinel.

The building formally opened amid ceremony and fanfare, on schedule, between horse races and baseball games at the fair.

The Ti paper reported speakers "in which figured the donor, Horace A. Moses, prominent New England manufacturer, banker, farmer and philanthropist, who was born and raised on a farm near Ticonderoga."

News accounts for years chronicled continued use and attendance of county youth as hundreds of children participated in Junior Achievement events, courses and recreation. The summer camp was well-attended for over a decade.

But by June 29, 1939, the Ticonderoga Sentinel announced a Girls Only Junior Achievement Camp for its 15th season, which ran for three weeks, starting July 2.



## 4-H CLUBS ORGANIZE

The next phase of use moved Junior Achievement Bureau organization toward 4-H Club programs centered more on farm, field and home economics rather than industrialist job training skills.

On Oct. 11 1940, the Lake Placid News announced an Oct. 16 meeting scheduled at the Whallonsburgh [sic] Grange Hall "to discuss plans for organizing a 4-H Club in Essex County."

"This movement is to be sponsored by the grange but everyone who is interested should attend this meeting. Mr. (Horace A.) Moses has promised to give the Junior Achievement building to the county for agricultural purposes if a 4H Club can be organized."

On May 22, 1941, the Record-Post reported that the "Deed for the Junior Achievement building at the county fair ground at Westport was received by the board (of supervisors) and arrangements made for its lease by the 4-H Club organization."

The building has provided continued use by local 4-H Clubs in the years since. There are over 200 youth involved in local 4-H groups throughout the county today.

Moses conducted his work for American youth with national reach, giving often to Junior Achievement, 4-H, Boy Scouts of America and the Boys and Girls Clubs.

The National 4-H History Preservation Program records "The Moses Trophy" was created and given as the top among 4-H Leadership awards at National 4-H Congress annually for years.

## JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT BUREAU

Junior Achievement programs are in existence today, but have trended toward urban areas.

Moses, the Strathmore Paper Co. leader, became president of the Junior Achievement Bureau in Oct. of 1920 and served in that role for 27 years.

In addition to the building donated for young people in rural Essex County, he built an Achievement Hall in Springfield, Mass., which historic records suggest was "a central institution for all Achievement Club activities in the Northeastern states."

Between 1925 and 1927, Moses spearheaded a funding drive and gave \$100,000 of his own money to Junior Achievement programs.

By 1941, on the brink of World War II, Junior Achievement companies got involved with the war effort manufacturing items such as pants hangers for the U.S. Army.

In a similar vein, the rural-focused 4-H Clubs focused efforts on growing food at home and in public Victory Gardens.

On August 27, 1942, Moses and his Junior Achievement board resigned, giving the post to New York City businessman Charles R. Hook.

A U.S. stamp was dedicated to Moses in 1984, commemorating his founding of the Junior Achievement Bureau.

The first prints of the stamp are pretty valuable as they misprinted his birth year as 1862.

Moses was born Sept. 21 in 1863 on a farm on the Hague Road in Ticonderoga. He died April 22 in 1947. ■

An illustration of the Junior Achievement building then under construction at the Essex County Fairgrounds shows little has changed in its exterior appearance since that time.

Photo by Adirondack Record-Elizabethtown Post, June 26, 1924

# THE SUN

suncommunitynews.com

May 15, 2021

## Supervisors on track to demolish, replace, historic ag building

BY Tim Rowland

STAFF WRITER

**ELIZABETHTOWN** | Essex County supervisors took a step toward

demolition and replacement of a century-old fairgrounds building Monday (May 3), over the objection of Westport historians who want to see the building preserved.

The vote was to pursue a \$1 million federal grant through the

office of Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-21, made possible by congressional Democrats' restoration of earmarks, which had been scuttled a decade ago.

Arguing that the existing building can be saved, Westport

Supervisor Ike Tyler and Essex Supervisor Ken Hughes voted against the plan, and other supervisors voted yes, reluctantly.

"I have to say, I'm really conflicted," said Davina Winemiller, supervisor and former Town

Historian for St Armand. "From an emotional standpoint, I'm leaning with (Tyler). But I understand too how new construction might fit the grant requirement better. This is a tough one."

SEE AG BUILDING, A2

### CONT FROM AG BUILDING, A1

The money would go toward the \$1.8 million costs of rebuilding the decorative but poorly maintained Cornell Cooperative Extension building with a new agricultural facility with a greenhouse and modern kitchen. It would resemble the nutrition building at the other end of the fairgrounds, which is similar in color scheme to other fairground buildings, but lacking in most of the CCE's distinctive architectural features.

Tyler, and a group of Westport historians, said the existing building could be rehabbed for \$1 million, and believe a dormant, \$500,000 state grant for that purpose could be revived. The supervisor also said he believes the \$1 million earmarks could qualify for rehab work, a position that was disputed by Supervisors Chair Shaun Gilliland.

Westport did much the same rehab work on its current town offices, fashioned from an old grange hall, a structure that was "in a lot worse shape than the CCE building," Tyler said. "I know it can be done, I sit in it every day."

But other officials were skeptical of cost estimates to rehabilitate the old building, noting that, for instance, the county Public Works Department had estimated \$107,000 for plumbing, while Westport representatives said it could be done for \$15,000.

"Renovation costs never

come out the way you expect," said County Manager Dan Palmer. "Do I think you can do plumbing in that building for \$15,000? Not a chance."



Essex County supervisors are proposing that the Cornell building at the fairgrounds be replaced with a facility similar to the Nutrition Center pictured here.

Photo provided

Supervisors also said the need for a modern facility is heightened as agro-tourism becomes more of an economic draw. And there was also general agreement among the majority that rehab projects always wind up costing far more than original estimates.

But Bill Johnston, a Westport historian, said that while the building's peeling paint gives it a shabby appearance, its underpinnings are still solid. And the discrepancies in costs are explainable because the town's rehab plan would only replace areas in need of fixing, instead

of replacing entire systems.

The Westport Town Hall project also came in well below what the experts thought, because the board was able to tap into inmate

should be protecting."

Essex Supervisor Hughes said that after the vote, he arranged a tour of the CCE building and found it to be in much better structural shape than he was expecting.

"The value of the CCE building to our county, to Westport, and to the state organization is far greater than the price tags that we have been presented with by our local experts," he said. "I'm hopeful that my colleagues at the Board of Supervisors can consider their own historic or important structures in their towns and ponder how the demolition of that structure would affect community cohesion and morale."

In a letter to the town, Richard Longstreth, a seasonal Essex County residents and past president of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, said the fairgrounds represent "a remarkable assemblage of 19th and early 20th century buildings, making the complex unique in the Adirondacks, and indeed a rare example of its kind in the Eastern United States." He called the extension building "an integral component of that complex."

Tyler said he fears his fellow supervisors are intent on building new, although Johnston said he still has some hope if the community can come together and make one final push for preservation. ■

labor from Moriah Shock and because volunteers did a lot of simple but time-consuming work, such as painting and caulking.

That energy could be harnessed again with the ag building, they believe because it is seen as a community icon. Historians said they are also dubious about county claims that a new building would be similar in appearance to the current CCE building.

"I don't think the county understands how special this building is," said former board member Nancy Page. "It's something they



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# Opinion

## Before bringing the wrecking ball

The Cornell building is a standing textbook of early 20th century creativity, and it says something about Westport's agrarian roots

The hamlet of Westport is blessed with two distinctive buildings that greet travelers arriving from the Northway, the rail station that is home to the Depot Theatre and what's generally referred to as the Cornell building at the entrance to the Essex County Fairgrounds.

It is buildings such as these that give historic towns their sense of presence and generate favorable first impressions among newcomers.

Yet the Cornell building is threatened with demolition, as Essex County supervisors move ever closer to replacing it with a modern but painfully nondescript office space that will mirror the regrettable architecture of the health building at the other end of the fairgrounds.

We understand the supervisors' position. For 20 years or more, there have been efforts to refurbish the Cornell building, all of which have come to naught. All this time, the condition of the artful building with its distinctive architecture has gotten worse and

worse, to the point it is more embarrassment than asset.

The supervisors cannot be blamed for wanting to put an end to the foot-dragging. Nor, in a practical sense, are they incorrect about the relative durability and efficiency of new construction. And finally, there appears to be grant money that would pay a significant part of the freight for a new building, which is always a plus.

But before they apply the wrecking ball, we hope they will give the situation further thought.

Most obviously, structures such as the Cornell building do not grow on trees. Its design is beautiful and interesting and comes with an architectural pedigree that makes it worthy of preservation not just in a historic and aesthetic sense, but in an educational and emotional sense as well. The Cornell building is a standing textbook of early 20th-century creativity, and it says something about Westport's agrarian roots, giving the hamlet a unique spot in hearts and

minds of visitors and locals alike.

Advocates of new construction say it is ultimately cheaper than refurbishing an old building, which in reality, is a strong argument for, not against, preservation.

For the last half-century, there has been the notion that the cheapest construction is the best construction, and the result can be seen everywhere in boxy strip mall pharmacies, vinyl-sided branch banks and school buildings with facades as blank as a refrigerator door.

Featureless buildings have led to featureless towns indistinguishable from one another from coast to coast. Many of these cookie-cutter towns would treasure a building as inspiring as the Cornell building since their own architects seem to have studied at the School of the Lowest Bidder.

A historic building speaks to a community's past, but it also speaks to its community present. Do its leaders have the vision, creativity and sense

of place it takes to keep its historical assets in good stead?

No one said historic preservation is easy. But is it worth it? A hundred years from now an agriculture building built to resemble the current health building may still be standing. But the best you can say for it is that no tears will be shed at its demolition.

— The Sun Editorial Board ■

### Letters

#### Please no wrecking ball

To the editor:

It made me sad to read that we may lose another historic building in the area. The Cornell Co-op Building in Westport is one of a collection of historic buildings on the county fairgrounds.

Tearing down this building would be a crime. It is misleading to tell the public a new building can be built similar to this historic building. New construction would leave out the beautiful details.

People just don't build like they used to. Cosmetically it hasn't been painted in years. It might need some replaced wood, roofing, window sash and doors, but in whole the structure is sound. Of course, mechanics will be upgraded to accommodate codes and the new uses of the building. Don't forget the extensive cost of tear down, removal and clean up. Site work and new concrete foundations are also very expensive. This building cannot be replaced, instead, I believe it should be restored.

— Livingston Bailey, Essex, New York ■

To the editor:

With regard to your diplomatic article, "Before bringing the wrecking ball", there are a few additional considerations that need to be pointed out. The building has been deemed structurally sound by a coalition of architects, contractors, and preservationists who have quoted a price of 1.5 million for renovation, less than the quote for a new building. Another consideration is that renovation is the "greenest" way to go. Kindly see the attached letter that I sent to the board of supervisors in May. It is my understanding that a number of supervisors, by their own admission, voted for demolition without having seen the building, a dereliction of duty. Now that some have seen it, one can only hope that they will reconsider the uninformed decision.

— Simone Stephens, Westport, New York ■

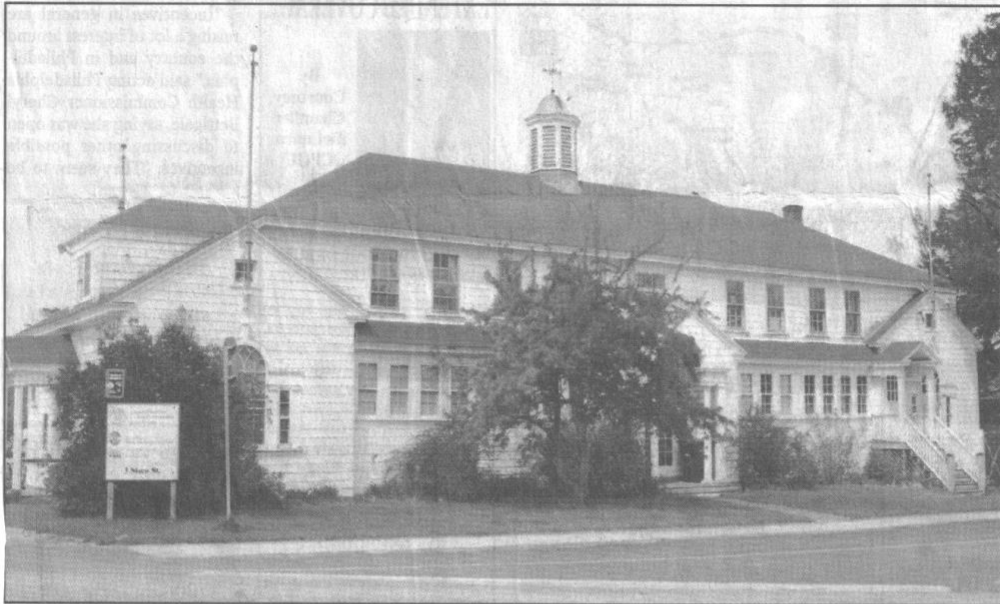
#### Crown of Essex County

To the editor:

Thank you for your editorial supporting the renovation of the Cornell Building. I take issue with only one point. In the title and elsewhere, you note that the historic building "blesses Westport". That it does, but it also blesses the entire County of Essex. It is owned by the county, is situated on county land, and is viewed, if not used, by thousands of people from Essex County and beyond who attend the Essex County Fair. If the Cornell Building is the jewel of Westport, it is the crown of Essex County.

— Lyn Barrett Bussian, Westport, New York ■

# Group seeks to save old Cornell building



**PHOTO PROVIDED**  
The 1924 Cornell Cooperative Extension Building in Westport is in bad structural condition and county officials may tear it down. A group has formed to try to save the edifice.

## Officials call for demolition, say cost of renovation too high

**BY LOHR MCKINSTRY**  
Press-Republican

**WESTPORT** — The Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds has formed to try to save the historic former Cornell Cooperative Extension Building.

The two-story woodframe structure at the Essex County Fairgrounds in Westport is slated to be torn down as unsafe, but the group believes a \$1.5 million investment by the county will bring it back to life.

But county officials say the estimates the group is using are much too low and the work would cost closer to \$2.5 million.

### REGISTER-LISTED SITE

Adirondack Architectural Heritage (ARCH) Executive Director Steven Engelhart said

the loss of a historic structure like this could negatively affect the community.

"The 1924 National Historic Register-listed Cornell Cooperative Extension Building at the Essex County Fairgrounds is in need of extensive renovation," he said by email. "An estimate of \$2.3 million is being used to justify its demolition. But by eliminating unnecessary project components and modifying the approach to its renovation, the entire building can be renovated for less than \$1.5 million.

"And this renovation and restoration project will provide more space and have greater community value, too."

ARCH estimates \$740,000 for the base contract, additional public works project cost of \$400,000, overhead of \$228,000 and construction

## TO GET INVOLVED

The Friends of the Essex Fairgrounds has formed to preserve the county's historic fairgrounds. To support the effort, visit <https://tinyurl.com/9dw5y4kj>. For more information email: [friendsoftheessexfairgrounds@gmail.com](mailto:friendsoftheessexfairgrounds@gmail.com)

planning for \$100,000, for a total of \$1,468,000.

### 'PROBLEMS WITH THEIR NUMBERS'

Essex County Board of Supervisors Chair Shaun Gillingham (R-Willsboro) said the cost estimates ARCH is using are off.

"They came up with some numbers," he said. "They presented at the Board of Supervisors. Every supervisor with contracting experience pointed out the problems with their numbers."

No State Office of Historic Preservation grants are available to renovate the building, he said. The county did get \$500,000 through the State Department of State and \$50,000 as a member item

from then-Assemblyman Dan Stec (R-Queensbury).

Work began to renovate the Cornell Cooperative Extension Building, he said.

"We started with asbestos removal, electrical. The money was eaten up with the pandemic. We have certified engineering estimates of \$2.5 million. There is no real foundation, just piers. It was a three-season building. The building is not ADA compliant."

The building was winterized simply by adding heaters, he said.

### FUTURE CORNELL SITE

The county already built another building at the fairgrounds, the Essex County

SEE CORNELL, PAGE A4



## CORNELL...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Nutrition Program Kitchen, so it has some experience with similar work.

The engineering comparison of renovation versus a new building showed \$2.5 million for renovation versus \$1 million for a new structure.

Essex County Cornell Cooperative Extension, which relo-

cated temporarily to Lewis, said it needed meeting rooms, offices, a commercial kitchen, and maybe a greenhouse.

"Why not have a (new) building that's big enough to use the facilities 12 months a year?" Gilliland said.

### ADDED FUNDING

Congresswoman Elise Stefanik (R-Schuylerville) told county officials she might be able to help, and they provided her with a plan for a new building at the fairgrounds

that would cost \$1 million to construct.

The county is also getting \$7.2 million in national recovery act money and might be able to use some of that, he said.

"We need to strike while the iron is hot," Gilliland said. "We need a community facility there for the residents of the county that will be affordable down the line."

The CCE Building is also known as the Westport Junior

Achievement building and is an example of a Colonial Revival agricultural building. It was paid for by Ticonderoga philanthropist Horace A. Moses, designed by Adirondack architect Max Westhoff in 1923, and completed in August 1924.

### ARCHITECTURE HISTORIAN

George Washington University Professor Emeritus Richard Longstreth is an architectural historian and a seasonal resident of the county, and he

wrote to Westport Supervisor Michael Tyler to ask him to help save the CCE Building.

"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," Longstreth said. "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."

"This building is significant

enough to warrant that extra investment of time and energy."

Gilliland said even if they spent the money on the old Cornell Cooperative Extension Building there could be more structural problems in a couple years.

"I personally think this building is too far gone."

The next step will be for the County Board of Supervisors to vote sometime this summer on how to proceed.

## Renovate, don't destroy CCE building

### To the Editor:

Last week's editorial board in their published opinion made it seem like the handsome Cornell Cooperative Extension Building is falling apart. They seemed extreme in their details about officials noting a few problems about the building. Their thinking seemed to be that it is inevitably falling apart (basically giving up on that building and getting ready to replace the offices into a new most likely generic building).

Towns should come together in keeping the public buildings that were built proudly and keep the pride by fixing them up and preserving them. The amount of money that was stated to build a generic building could be put into that great looking building.

With the appropriate work done by local craftsman, builders and landscapers (and a more appealing sign) that building could be a long lasting beautiful little

gem of a gateway to the picturesque entrance to the historical fairgrounds. Westport residents and visitors could then keep enjoying the beautiful aesthetics of that built asset for years to come.

Mark Wilcox

Essex