

CANASTOTA CANAL TOWN CORPORATION

NARRATIVE HISTORY

Canastota Canal Town Corporation (A Not-For-Profit Corporation) was formed in 1967 to promote community interest in the development of the Erie Canal as a historical resource, beneficial to the community, both culturally and economically.

Proceeds from memberships enabled Canastota Canal Town Corporation to engage architects to do a survey and master plan for Canal Town U.S.A. Our first priority was to find a permanent building for a museum, and in October 1969, Canastota Canal Town Corporation purchased the Albanese House directly across from the "Old Erie Canal." To renovate this building, the Board of Directors published a cookbook and sold 2,000 copies. In 1970, after donations and other fund raisers, the museum was opened to the public. Volunteers and a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts made it possible to keep the museum open during the summer months. We received the grant for three years. Then as money started to dwindle, we received a grant from Green Thumb, Inc. in 1977 for workers and repairs. Through various small grants, cookbook sales, etc., we offered classes in crafts, furniture finishing, chair caning, quilting and doll making.

But through all these fund drives, small grants, etc., we did not have enough money to do what we had originally set out to do and that was to restore Canal Street and create housing. Then in 1982 we received an administrative grant from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal's Rural Preservation Program. This enabled us to hire an Executive Director and staff to make a reality of our goals.

Canal Street had deteriorated drastically and most of the buildings were blighted and certainly not fit for human habitation. In the beginning of this venture, Canastota Canal Town Corporation had a difficult time convincing the Village, Town and County that these projects could be done. But with the backing of local banks and the Rural Preservation Program assisting us, we finally started forward.

The first project, Sowter House, was extremely dilapidated. We were given the building for \$1.00. We received a State grant, Village grant and mortgage loan from a local financial institution to complete our first project for low-income rental residents. We continue to manage this apartment building, which has 3 one bedroom rental units.

Then with grants from RARP (Rural Area Revitalization

Program) and the NYS Affordable Housing Program (ARHNY), we built (6) more buildings on Canal Street. They included ten (10) townhouses or rehab for low-income residents that were sold to qualified buyers. An apartment building with two (2) apartments for low-income and two (2) commercial units was created and is still maintained and managed by Canastota Canal Town Corporation. We also received a FmHA-515 loan to build six (6) rental-assisted units (Armstrong Apts.) that included two (2) handicap-equipped units that we also manage.

While Canastota Canal Town Corporation was building and rehabilitating these units, other businesses and landlords were inspired to do the same to their structures. Therefore, the historic street received a complete facelift.

Canastota Canal Town Corporation obtained loan money from FmHA to rehab the last blighted building on Canal Street. The Erie Canal House has six (6) elderly units with two (2) being handicap-equipped. Our waiting list for low-income units is quite extensive as all housing organizations can attest to. We have received rental assistance from FmHA for all six (6) units. We also received a \$30,000 IDDP Infrastructure Grant from the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal for this structure.

With all the housing that Canastota Canal Town Corporation has done, the museum had an Annual Juried Art Show sponsored by Central New York Council on the Arts for 10 years. We have the Community Christmas Party held annually as part of the Village tree lighting ceremony. We donate time and money for the Annual Fishing Derby for our village youth, and have many displays in the museum that show the history of the community. The Canastota school district's fourth grade students tour the museum as part of their New York State history curriculum.