

# Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

## 19 June 2021 tour of Austerlitz and the Hamlet of Spencertown, Columbia County, New York

Today's tour will be our first in-person event since the Maggie MacDowell Lecture of February 2020. It's great to be able to get together once again, although there will be some restrictions.

Please read the following COVID restrictions for this tour:

For the morning portion of the tour, consisting of visits to three private homes, **the owner of the first house that we will visit requires that those touring be vaccinated.** The owner of the second house (the Samuel Shaw house) has requested that we **wear masks while inside.** A safe bet is to **bring your masks and (if you have it) proof of immunization, for the comfort of all!**

For the afternoon portion of the tour, the Austerlitz Historical Society note the following:

**Entry to the Morey-Devereaux House and the Robert Herron House will require visitors to be masked whether or not vaccinated.** In addition, due to the size of the houses, only 4 people can enter each building at any given time.

Severe budgetary shortfalls due to two years into the pandemic unfortunately require us to charge for admission to the Morey-Devereaux House and the Robert Herron House (open to the public this season for the first time in approximately 15 years). Other portions of the site will be accessible, free of charge. Because of the restrictions on the number of people allowed at one time to tour each of these buildings, the Austerlitz Historical Society suggests that those desiring to tour the interiors of these two structures purchase their tickets when we arrive at Old Austerlitz, to facilitate scheduling of entries.

Tickets are \$12 per person so that we can schedule entries. (Individual membership to the Society is \$15 (family/household: \$25) per year which entitles members to free admission as well as a 10 percent discount at the shop. So for a nominal amount, new members will not only make a donation to the Society but will receive the shop discount as well as our newsletters and invitations to events, talks, and workshops. Of course, participants can decide upon the spot whether they would like to become members or simply pay the \$12; cash and credit cards are accepted.

## Tour Schedule

Beginning at 9AM, until 10:30AM

Meet at the History Center in the hamlet of Spencertown. The address for the History Center is 812 Route 203, Spencertown, NY 12165 (phone: 518-392-3260 ext. 306).

Parking is available in the lot separating the History Center from the new Town Hall; roadside parking is available on County Rd 7 in front of St. Peter's Church. The History Center and St. Peter's Church (across the street) will be open until 10:30. The address of St. Peter's Church is 5219 Co Rd 7.

### Directions to the History Center

From points east take I-90 to exit B-3 for the New Lebanon/Austerlitz exit (the last exit in New York when coming from the west of Austerlitz or first exit in New York when coming from east of Austerlitz), proceed south for approximately 5 miles on Route 22 to the hamlet of Austerlitz and make a right onto Route 203, then proceed approximately 4 miles to the hamlet of Spencertown. The History Center will be on your right, after you pass the town tennis court, the Osborn house (1828 - you will later tour it), the Spencertown Academy (1847), a newer house, Gabel Real Estate and an old yellow house (c. 1789), the latter next to the History Center.

From points north take Interstate 87 (Adirondack Northway) south to Albany, then get on I-90 heading east toward Boston. On I-90 you will cross the Hudson River just north of Albany (view to your right) then continue about 12 miles to the end of this I-90, where you will connect with I-90 again (don't ask) via a cup handle, and head east again on I-90 toward Boston. After another 12 miles or so take exit B2 for the Taconic State Parkway. Head south about five miles to Exit 99 -- the Route 203 exit (Austerlitz-Chatham). Then head east on Route 203 toward Austerlitz for about three miles to Spencertown and the History Center as described above.

From points west, head to the Taconic State Parkway, exit 99 (route 203) and proceed as above.

From points south take the Taconic State Parkway north to exit 99 (Route 203, Chatham/Austerlitz) and drive east about three miles, toward Austerlitz, to the hamlet of Spencertown. The History Center is on the left, adjacent to the parking lot that separates it from the new Austerlitz Town Hall (which is the 1836 Methodist Church repurposed). [If you head north from the NYC area on the NYS Thruway you can take the I-84 exit near Newburg, and head east on I-84 to the Taconic State Parkway].

10:40 AM

Travel to the Osborn house, 786 Route 203

11: 20 AM

Samuel Shaw house, 55 Elm Street (number is not on house)

12PM

David Pratt house, 924 Route 203

By 1PM

Arrive at the Austerlitz Historical Society's Old Austerlitz campus for lunch. Lunch will be on the grounds of the Austerlitz Historical Society. The Austerlitz Historical Society will provide tables, chairs, water, coffee and ice tea at no charge. Please bring a bag lunch. Arrange for touring of the interiors of the Morey-Devereaux House and the Robert Herron House (if you so desire) by paying \$12 fee and scheduling your tour in advance of having lunch.

Old Austerlitz is located at 11550 State Route 22 in the hamlet of Austerlitz, NY 12017. For those of you arriving at lunchtime and participating only in the afternoon portion of the tour, directions to Old Austerlitz are as follows:

From points south take the Taconic State Parkway north to Route 203 (the Chatham/Austerlitz exit) and drive east through Spencertown hamlet, 7 miles to Route 22. Turn right, and the site is on the left about a quarter mile south.

From points east or west take I-90 to exit B-3 for New Lebanon/Austerlitz, Route 22 (last exit in New York when coming from the west of Austerlitz or first exit in New York when coming from east of Austerlitz). Drive south 5 miles, past the intersection of Route 203, to the site on the left.

From points north take Interstate 87 (Adirondack Northway) South to the New York State Thruway and then follow directions for East/West listed above.

2PM

Tour of Old Austerlitz, including interiors of the Morey-Devereaux House (c. 1795) and the Robert Herron house (c. 1790 and c. 1810), for those of whom pay a nominal fee. The Harvey House (c. 1765, now known as "The Shop at Old Austerlitz"), the Christian Church ("Art Austerlitz," 1853), the Morey-Devereaux Barn and Carriage Shed as well as the Robert Engel blacksmith shop will also be open, free of charge.

## Information on today's sites

### Austerlitz History Center



The Austerlitz History Center is located in a small building at 812 Rt. 203, which was built in 1915 as the hamlet's first firehouse. Constructed of random-coursed field stone, concrete lintels span window openings and frame a wide opening centered on the front façade meant to contain vehicle doors. Deep eaves having exposed rafter tails with rounded ends distinguish the sides with a verge board of similar dimensions along the front gable. Although not a typical Craftsman building, its appearance at this time evidently influenced the choice of design; the choice of builder and community involvement likely had a role to play (Larson 2018). It is seen on the right-hand side of the photograph, above. To the left is the former Spencertown Methodist Episcopal Church (1836), now the Town Hall. It was constructed by Hiram B. Mather (1802-1895).

The History Center tells the history of Austerlitz in a series of six wall displays covering successive periods of time. The first explores the initial settlement of the area from the 1750s to 1799, while the last covers the twenty-first century to date. Each wall lists the notable events during its era, and includes maps, artifacts or other visual material pertaining to the era.

A dramatic centerpiece in the room is the restored 1915 chemical fire engine, courtesy of the Spencertown Fire Company, which had it beautifully restored a few years ago. The old town hall was in fact built in 1915 principally to house this very equipment, the first fire-fighting apparatus in the town, acquired after the 1914 fire that destroyed the general store and nearly consumed much of the village.

Another important display consists of two sets of portraits of Sherman and Lydia Griswold, donated by the James Rundell family. Sherman Griswold was by far the largest landowner in the town at the height of the sheep boom in the 1830s. The paintings occupy both sides of wooden

boards. On one side are portraits of the Griswolds by Ira Chaffee Goodell, a prolific itinerant artist who visited Spencertown in the early 1830s. On the other side are the Griswolds as painted a few years later, in quite a different style, probably by James E. Johnson. Johnson's iconic painting *Salting Sheep* (c. 1836), showing the Griswolds in their Sunday best feeding salt to their sheep, with their house and barns on Beale Road in the background, is present in the form of a handsome reproduction donated by the Columbia County Historical Society, which holds the original.

The Center also displays the original Proprietors Book of the Spencers Town proprietorship, a Massachusetts-chartered entity which functioned from 1757 until the area was determined to be part of New York in the early 1770s. The book records the meetings of the proprietors, and its contents have been transcribed and annotated. A wall display entitled *Austerlitz Archeology* presents artifacts recovered in the town soil by Max Cane. His findings, from a site on Dugway Road, feature coins and other objects dating as far back as the earliest settlement of the area in the mid-1700s.

The inaugural temporary exhibits in the Center present the histories of the Austerlitz and Spencertown fire companies. Significant events in their histories are presented on boards, and the exhibits also include historic photographs and old firefighting equipment.

The History Center also houses the historian's office and files.

### St. Peter's Presbyterian Church





(The following is edited and combined from Peter Shaver's National Register nomination for the church and cemetery, 2002, and Neil Larson's National Register nomination for Spencertown, 2018).

The church was built in 1771, across the road from where it now stands. The hewn, scribe-rule frame of St. Peter's Church was erected by William A. Babcock who, like most of the proprietors, had come from Connecticut. This structure, moved to its present location and embellished with Neoclassical features in 1826, represents the oldest church in Columbia County. The move was performed by Philo Beebee from nearby Canaan, and a two-story, pedimented entrance pavilion with a single, central entrance surmounted by a large window with sidelights, elliptical transom and Neoclassical trim was added to the front of the building after its move. A square tower springs from the front of the roof and supports a two-stage octagonal belfry capped by a small steeple. The entrance acquired a trabeated architrave at a later time, perhaps as late as the 1850s when the interior of the church was renovated. In 2002 it and the cemetery were added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The five-by-six-bay building is two stories high, sided in clapboard. Its gabled roof is topped with a centrally located engaged steeple. A brick chimney rises on the exterior eastern wall. On the north (front) facade, the middle three bays project slightly, topped by a pediment above the eaves. The centrally located main entrance has a molded surround and Greek Revival cornice. There are windows next to it but not at the corners. A Palladian window, with two regular sash windows on either side, is above it. There is also a wheelchair ramp.

The belfry has three stages. The lowest is 10 feet (3 m) square, with clapboard siding similar to that on the church. On three sides it has clock faces with Roman numerals. The next stage is octagonal with green louvers and white segmental arches and corner posts. Above it is a smaller octagon, with green louvered ovals. On the hexagonal steeple is a metal ball and weathervane.

On the rear, one window on the first story and three on the second have been boarded over. Modern fire doors flank the first window on the first story. There is also a small attic window in the gable field. Both sides are fully fenestrated.

Behind the double-entry doors is the full-width vestibule. On either side are paired double-run stairs with their original rails and balusters. An elevator, for disabled access, is on the southeast corner as well. All lead up to a partitioned room where the bell rope hangs through a hole in the ceiling. Off it is the balcony, with a paneled railing. A smaller, narrower stair leads to an attic where king post trusses support the church's ceiling rafters. At the top stage of the belfry is a Meneely bell, with "1858" stamped into it, supported in an iron cage.

Doors in the corners open into side aisles that lead all the way to the elevated pulpit, past white pews with walnut railings. More walnut railings and white balusters extend across the front of the platform. A long, recessed arch is behind it. The windows have simple vernacular Federal style molding. Wall sconces are behind each of them in the gray plaster wall.

### Osborn house, 786 Route 203 [Number 40 on map]

NOTE: On the attached map, the other numbered houses not included on today's tour are discussed in *The Old Houses of Austerlitz*, copies of which, on CD-rom, are available at the History Center for \$20 (or \$15 for AHS members).



The origin of this Federal style house is clear: it was built in 1828 for the Reverend Joel Osborn, the then recently installed minister of St. Peter's. Osborn came from Amenia in Dutchess County. As a condition for accepting the call from St. Peter's he insisted that the church switch denominations from Congregational to Presbyterian. After some controversy, the change was accepted.

Osborn could find a house neither to own nor rent in the village and was thus obliged to build his own. He did so, with some help from the congregation, on a one-acre parcel purchased in 1828 for \$200 from Ebenezer Reed.

Osborn proved a controversial minister, "remembered as being one of the most loved and most disliked ministers of the church." The letters of the Olmsted family reveal both aspects. Early on, in 1831, we read: "There is quite a revival in this church. Mr. Osborn is very much engaged indeed." But by 1835 things appear to have soured:

The Church and Society remain about as usual—I go to meeting very seldom. It seems gloomy and lonesome when I do, so few attend. Wickedness and hard-feelings abound...

With St. Peter's at such a low ebb, it seems not surprising that Osborn's ministry concluded in 1836, and indeed that the Spencertown Methodist Church was dedicated in that year. Osborn did not finally sell his house until 1848, though his ministry had since moved on to Catskill.

Of the 16 owners to date subsequent to Osborn, by far the longest tenured were the Reverend Arthur C. McMillan and wife Virginia, from Westchester County. Virginia took title in 1901 and sold in 1951, Rev. McMillan having died in 1947. McMillan was never the installed minister at St. Peter's, but was an occasional supply minister. He also compiled in 1941 the first history of St. Peter's. This house was a weekend retreat for the McMillans. They called it "Tranquility."

Owners since the McMillans have included Robert and Elaine Ingham (1954–68), Ruth Benson (1968–77), Edward L. Hoe Jr. (1985–98), Melissa L. Hartka (1998–2017), and current owners James Lestelle and John M. Stephens, who moved here from New Orleans. The house was painted a striking pink color for a few years after 2000, but is now back to a traditional white hue (Moreland 2018).

Just about every house built in the years following the completion of St. Peter's renovation (in 1826) presents a pedimented facade to the street, which creates an unusual unity of design in the hamlet. To achieve this, house plans were turned with an entry and stair hall on one side offset by two principal rooms arranged front-to-back on the other side with a chimney positioned in the partition between them. A small room was located behind the stairs and the kitchen was located in a dependent wing attached to one side or the rear end. Either two stories or a story-and-a-half in height, the house form was modeled on urban dwellings designed for narrow lots, although the addition of large kitchen wings were a rural modification. The house



built for Rev. Joel Osborn in 1828 exemplifies the type and carries modest Neoclassical elements in its front pediment and porch colonnades (Larson 2018).

**Samuel Shaw House, 55 Elm Street (number is not on the house, which is painted white and located 0.25 of a mile up Elm Street from Rte 203, on the left) [Number 60 on map]**



This house on the north side of Elm Street appears to be that of Samuel Shaw, who mortgaged land on Elm Street in 1797. Shaw's dwelling house is first referenced in an 1805 deed, but it is undoubtedly older than that. It is believed that Shaw acquired the property in 1797 when he obtained a mortgage loan on it from a Peter Van Ness. But there is a 1792 deed to another property which suggests that Nehemiah Spencer owned a house on this site in 1792. There is no record of how or when Spencer acquired the property or when he sold it. No evidence for a sale from Spencer to Shaw has been found.

A small upstairs room in this house has been variously described as a hideaway for slaves on the Underground Railroad or as living quarters for slaves. The 1790 and 1800 censuses do show that Shaw owned one slave.

Shaw died in 1825, his house and farm passing to son Smith Shaw. Smith Shaw at his death in 1878 owned this Samuel Shaw "Homestead Farm," which he had enlarged to 143 acres on both sides of Elm Street, and the adjacent Wooley Farm of 170 acres he had purchased from Sherman

Griswold. By Smith Shaw's will, the Homestead Farm was devised to great-nephew James Lamphere, while the Wooley Farm was devised to Alexander Chace. A dispute between these two devisees, over ownership of 27 acres of the Wooley Farm that Lamphere had used for some years as pasture, resulted in probably the only Austerlitz litigation to reach New York's highest court: Chace v. Lamphere, 148 N.Y. 206 (1896). Chace prevailed.

After James Lamphere's death in 1901, long-term owners of this house included the Seymour and Nellie Oles family (1902–24), Caroline Pulver (1924–39), and Robert and Constance Sprague (1939–64). Current owners Richard and Barbara Iverson purchased in 1978 (Moreland 2018; Larson 2018; Moreland 2021).

Initially, the Federal style's impact on Austerlitz was confined to a simple change of proportions from the preceding Georgian style, and then only on elite houses. The former stolid and boxy houses built during the Georgian era became slightly elongated. The new emphasis was on height and attenuation. Classical elements still defined the basic exterior ornamentation—but were reinterpreted by the new style.

The style seems to have had little impact on most vernacular houses. The Shaw house is an exception. Although retaining the "saltbox" form of many early vernacular dwellings, the house was substantially modified in the nineteenth century, at which time it incorporated elements that usually characterized more elite houses. These include its Federal/Greek Revival entrance surround, the removal of its original central chimney, and the incorporation of a central hall and the building of new chimneys, featuring Federal style fireplace surrounds, on its gable ends (Rebic 2018).

#### David Pratt house, 924 Route 203 [Number 78 on map]



This Georgian style house is the oldest documented dwelling in Austerlitz by virtue of the surviving contract for its construction in 1777. Colonel David Pratt contracted with carpenter David Basset and mason Thomas Beebe of New Concord to do all the mason work. It was modeled after Connecticut houses built during the late 18th century with a large gambrel roof and a center hall running between front and rear rooms on either side with fireplaces sharing chimneys centered on the dividing walls. It also was identical in form and plan to the house John Griswold had built on Pratt Hill south of the hamlet in 1795, which was demolished in 1922.

Col. David Pratt, an early Spencertown settler, owned a 240-acre farm extending from this site to Beale Road. He was an important figure in early Spencertown. He was one of the lead petitioners on several petitions to the colonial New York authorities in the early 1770s pleading the cause of the settlers against the Van Rensselaer and Westenhook claims to this area. He fought in the Revolutionary War. In 1791, he sat as one of the judges presiding over the prosecutions of the alleged murderers of Sheriff Cornelius Hogeboom, one of the most violent episodes of the anti-riots. Of great importance, in 1792 he led the effort, successful in 1793, to obtain legislation confirming the land titles of all in possession of land north of the Van Rensselaer claim, i.e., in most of today's Austerlitz. He was one of the original 1789 trustees of the St. Peter's Church, and in 1803 one of its incorporators. He was one of the incorporators of the Hillsdale and Chatham Turnpike in 1805.

After Pratt's death in 1828, at the age of 90, the property was acquired by a grandson, David R. Pratt. He died in 1832. His widow Christian married Milton Niles, and it is Niles who appears as the owner on the town maps of 1851 and 1858. On the 1873 map the property is attributed to J. [James S.] Griswold, and on the 1888 map the indicated owner is J. [John] Akin. We have found no recorded deed or mortgage documenting how Griswold or Akin acquired title. John Akin also owned the gristmill and house 77, located across the road from this house.

After Akin's death in 1897 this property, then 80 acres, passed to his two grandsons, John A. and James W. Smethurst. By 1923 James was the sole owner, and in that year he sold to the brothers Elvin and Ray Barden. The Bardens made the house a two-family affair—Ray and Eva, and Elvin and Myrtle—dividing it for their convenience. Ray and Eva made and sold ice cream out of the house for many years. Ray died in 1965, and widow Eva conveyed her interest to Elvin and Myrtle. They sold the property in 1968 to Lloyd and Marion Goodrich, who sold to current owners Ronald and Rita Van Alstyne in 1978 (Moreland 2018; Larson 2018).

Employing planking as part of its structural system, classical modillion blocks mark its broad cornice which also features Greek key fretwork. This house, however, abandons the older hall-and-parlor floor plan for the more modern central-hall plan favored by the upper classes of the period. The massive central chimney typical of those earlier houses is here replaced by internal chimneys situated between the front and back rooms that flank the center passage.

By the time the David Pratt house was built, the widening economic gulf between the elite and the yeoman farmers who composed most of the middle class during the era was becoming increasingly apparent, not only by the size of the houses each put up but also by the choice of

floor plan. The extravagant use of wasted space of the underscored a heightened desire for privacy among this group. These houses also often featured wings, as central hall plan favored by the gentry was not only an outward sign of conspicuous consumption but cooking and other domestic chores were increasingly segregated into the rear of the house.

By the late eighteenth century as the middle classes were building their traditional hall-and-parlor houses, the local elite were becoming increasingly conscious of the changing architectural fashions in the larger world. By the end of the eighteenth century, Georgian style houses built in rural areas such as Austerlitz had already gone out of fashion among the well-to-do in urban centers (Rebic 2018).

## Old Austerlitz

We will lunch on the grounds of Old Austerlitz, which is operated by the Austerlitz Historical Society. Please visit their website for more information: <https://oldausterlitz.org/what-to-see/>

Highlights include:

### Morey-Devereaux House circa 1794

Characteristic of dwellings built in architecturally-transitional areas (such as Rensselaer and Columbia counties) where both “Dutch” and “English” building traditions melded, the house’s exterior form and internal room arrangement reflect “English” building practices while its primary structural system employs traditional “Dutch” construction techniques.

The current appearance of its interior and exterior reflects extensive renovation, alteration and restoration undertaken after its reconstruction at Old Austerlitz in 2008. These changes were designed to portray the late eighteenth-century dwelling, and later additions to the house were removed.

Originally, the house was divided into two sections: the western-section devoted to domestic use and the eastern-section used as a tannery. Later, it served both as a residence and a tavern, and then, primarily as a residence. This house is significantly larger than the majority of houses from that era.



Other buildings associated with the Morey-Devereaux House located on the grounds of Old Austerlitz include a barn and carriage shed.

Named for the two, inter-related families who owned and occupied it for five generations in the Town of Nassau (Rensselaer County, New York), the house was given to the Austerlitz Historical Society in lieu of being razed in 1999.

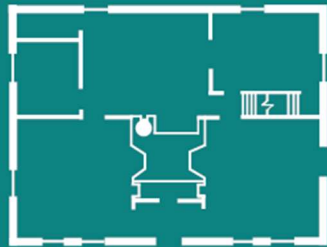
Today, the house is used to display early American furniture, for exhibition and library space and as the administrative headquarters of the Austerlitz Historical Society.

# Harvey House circa 1775

Typical of middle-class houses built throughout the northeast at the time, this dwelling is characteristic of late eighteenth-century vernacular houses as they began to adopt the symmetrical facades that had formerly been associated with more refined dwellings. The home was built as a farmhouse by relatively prosperous farmers of English descent.

The interior-plan featured a central-chimney and was flanked by rooms to either side as well as rear service areas (i.e., kitchen “buttery,” etc.). Its plan would have been typical of the “hall-and-parlor” houses introduced to England in the late medieval period and brought to New England by early settlers.

The “hall” was the primary domestic work space and the “parlor” often served as the “best bedroom” and was also used for receiving important guests.



The incorporation of gable-end windows in the garret during this period reflects the increasing use of attic space as secondary bedrooms.

In Austerlitz, a great number of similar houses remain and—as with many early dwellings of this type—their main façades were usually oriented to the south to take advantage of solar heating. Its structural system is typical of “English” buildings.

Originally from East Canaan, Litchfield County, Connecticut, the Harvey House was relocated to Old Austerlitz in 2001.

# Robert Engel Blacksmith Shop circa 1850's

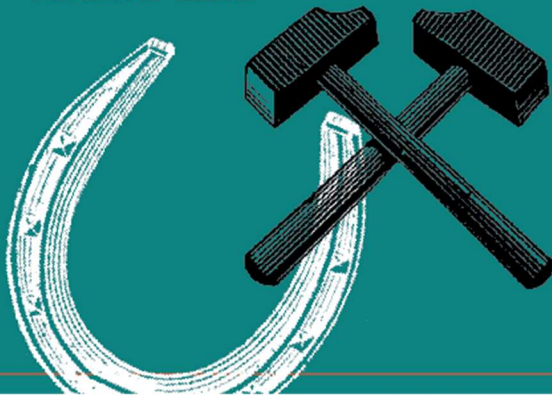
Blacksmiths were long a vital part of Austerlitz until the early twentieth century and provided a wide variety of necessary products and services: from kitchen utensils to building and carriage hardware, tools and the making and repairing of farm equipment. In smaller communities, such as Austerlitz, blacksmiths also served as *farriers*, that is makers and fitters of horseshoes.

Eliada Cole (1765-1831) was among the early settlers in Austerlitz and established one of the first blacksmith shops in the town. Despite Austerlitz's decline in population in the mid-nineteenth century, the 1870 Federal census attests to the trade's importance, noting that six blacksmiths were in residence in the Town of Austerlitz, which at that time had a population of only 1,442 people comprising 337 households of which 194 were listed as "farmers."



With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, tools, farm equipment and household items began to be mass produced and the blacksmith spent less time making these items and more time repairing them.

Named for Robert Engel, who helped to re-establish the art of smithing at Old Austerlitz, this modest 1850's building was relocated from Ghent, NY and re-purposed as a blacksmith's shop. Its current interior configuration incorporates both period and later technology and materials to enable it to function for demonstrations and workshops.



Compiled by W. R. Wheeler from National Register nominations written by Peter Shaver and Neil Larson, Tom Moreland's *The Old Houses of Austerlitz* (Austerlitz Historical Society, 2018), Michael Rebic's article in the same publication entitled "The Architectural Landscape of Austerlitz," and information supplied by Austerlitz Town Historian Tom Moreland. Footnotes used in these sources have not been copied but should be consulted for additional information.

AUSTERLITZ MAP | SECTION TWO

# PLAN OF SPENCERTOWN

Scale 30 rods to the inch.

