

A LOOK AT CORNING'S PAST

The evolution of Canfield Park

In the mid 1830s the Corning Company, led by Erastus Corning of Albany, developed a plan for the City of Corning.

In the plan Block 66 was set aside as a place for the use of the residents of Corning. Additionally, Block 66 could be used as a site for churches and government buildings.

It didn't take very long before buildings began to appear in Block 66. By the 1850s, Block 66 included the following buildings: a Baptist Church of Lot 1, a Methodist Church on Lots 3 and 4, a Presbyterian Church on Lot 8, a small schoolhouse on Lot 16 and a bigger schoolhouse on Lots 4 and 8.

In 1853 the Southern Jury District of Steuben County, designated Corning as the second seat. This meant Corning would need a courthouse. The following year, work began on this building.

Corning's first courthouse occupied Lot 2 and 20 feet of

the western section of Lot 3. The courthouse was completed in 1856-57. A jail was constructed on Lot 9.

All in all, Block 66 was beginning to be a busy place. It is the presence of a courthouse that caused many to later refer to Block 66 as courthouse park.

Before long, changes began to appear to some of the earlier buildings built on Block 66. In the spring of 1862, the Afro-American Community purchased the schoolhouse located on Lot 16. They used the building as a Zion Church.

The Free Baptist Society of Gibson bought Lot 8's Presbyterian Church and it owned and operated this church until 1883 when the Salvation Army used it for just a few weeks.

The Episcopal Society sought permission to build a church on the northeast corner of Block 66, also known as Lot 8.

The Village Board

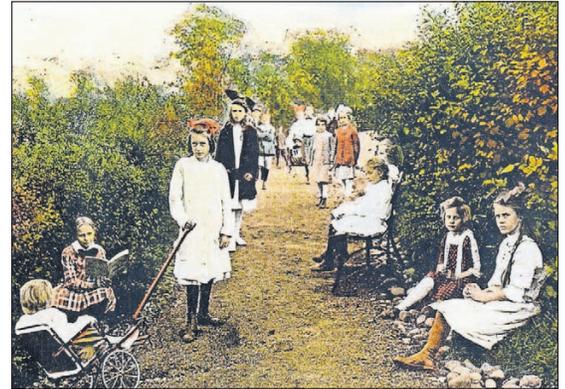
of Trustees gave the Episcopalians their permission. However, soon, the Board of Trustees changed their opinion and turned the request down.

The Trustees did this because a new state law had been passed defining the uses a municipality could make of property it owned. The law did not include churches. Ultimately the Episcopalians were forced to cease their building and find another site for their new church.

The church was eventually build on the northwest corner of First and Cedar streets.

The next major occurrence affecting Block 66 was the building of a new courthouse. The project was approved by the County Board of Supervisors in 1902. The Supervisors approved that \$25,000 could be spent on the new courthouse.

Foster Warner, a well-know Rochester architect



An old postcard shows children using Court House Park in Corning. [PROVIDED]

was chosen to design the new courthouse which would be erected by Drake and Company on Lots 6,7, and 8. This same year, Corning's City Engineer resigned. Robert H. Canfield was chosen to be the new city engineer.

On January 7, 1905, the City of Corning ordered Canfield to prepare estimates

and drawings of a plan to change Public Square (Lot 66) into a park. Canfield did this assignment completely with great skills.

Next week, Canfield's plan.

(The source for the information about Canfield Park is Historic Landscape Report: Canfield Park; Denison Park, Corning, New York)