
TOMP KINS REALTY

THE HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON STREET ROW HOUSES

National Register Record Number 401317

Registered October 4, 1985

Written by Carlie A. Fishgold

It seems no coincidence that the pair of row houses at 30 and 32 North Washington Street function, unified, as a twofold rarity. Built in 1840, the two-story, three-bay brick structure is designed in the Greek Revival style and is architecturally significant in that it is the only surviving example of row houses built in the second quarter of the nineteenth century in Rochester. Original stairways, doors, moldings, and floor plan are currently intact. The property was likely designed as a middle-class house built toward the end of the residential population expansion in the First Ward district. While no builder is attributed, Jason Bassett was known to have built many of the smaller Greek Revivals in and around Rochester between 1840 and 1850 according to Carl Schmidt's *Greek Revival Architecture in the Rochester Area*.

Built on the original Hundred Acre Tract of land purchased by Colonel Nathaniel Rochester in 1803, these row houses serve as a memorial to the very first generation of middle-class residential development in Rochester. Perhaps most historically intriguing is the tenancy of women's suffragist, Spiritualist, friend to Susan B. Anthony, and "sex radical", Laura Cuppy Smith. Smith lived at No. 32 (the row house at left), four blocks from Anthony's home on Madison Street and she emigrated by herself at just fourteen years old from Great Britain. She was an impressive traveler, showing up in newspapers across the country as she toured the national lecture circuit campaigning for women's rights, organizing suffragist societies, and went on to win a pardon for Comstock Act perpetrator Ezra Heywood from the President of the United States. After her husband committed suicide, Smith uprooted her family to San Francisco and was recognized by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as the "acknowledged leading champion of Radicalism on the West Coast." She went on to support Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for President with Frederick Douglass as her Vice Presidential candidate, bringing her food in jail as she awaited trial. This extraordinary woman singlehandedly replanted the doctrines of Susan B. Anthony and suffrage on the West Coast, but more importantly, she used Rochester, New York and her Washington Street Row House as her launch pad.

The Great Flood of 1865 submerged ninety percent of the First Ward, and one would imagine that the raised stone foundation, with its projecting tooled stone water table, helped preserve the integrity of the structure from the eight feet of water. Today, a bracketed door hood with shallow pediment extends over both entranceways, typical of the Italianate style and likely a product of repairs that followed the flood.

Finally, over a century later in 1985, Robert Lipshutz registered the building with the Landmark Society of Western New York. It appears in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), fulfilling all four criteria for support and protection by the Department of the Interior. Clearly, the Washington Street Row Houses present a myriad of possibilities for historical and sociocultural recognition, and will serve to enhance Rochester's understanding of local history.