



There are a large number houses in Willsboro that are considered 19th century vernacular (National Folk). Vernacular style differs from high-style in that there is no architect or professional designer involved in the

planning. These houses are influenced less by popular fashion, and more by local building tradition, and availability of materials and skilled labor. The expansion of the railroad between 1850 and 1890 allowed for lumber and other building materials to be more easily transported, reducing cost, making them more accessible to a wider range of people. The high occurrence of these houses indicates that a significant portion of the population were workers of moderate income. The local dependence on industry supports this conclusion.

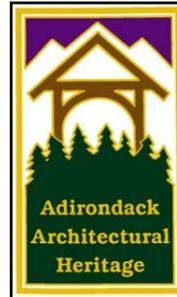
Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the U.C.C. Congregational Church (1834) is historically significant for its continued use for nearly 200 years. It is constructed of limestone locally quarried on Willsboro Point, a material that can be seen in buildings throughout the region. Though dominated by a rectangular central tower, the design does incorporate the graceful elements of the Gothic Revival style such as the pointed arch openings that define the windows and doors. Overall the plan reflects that of a New England meeting house, indicating that the original congregation may have had roots in that area and brought their building traditions with them.



## Architecture of the Champlain Valley



### Willsboro



Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) is the regional, nonprofit historic preservation organization for the Adirondack Park. This tour is one of over fifty events AARCH is offering in our 2009 program schedule. Further information is available by contacting AARCH at 518-834-9328 or by visiting our website at [www.aarch.org](http://www.aarch.org).

*AARCH would like to thank the Willsboro Heritage Society and Ron Bruno, for helping to prepare and lead this tour.*

*For more information about Willsboro history contact:  
The Willsboro Heritage Society at 518-963-4897  
Or visit them at 6 Gilliland Ave.*

*Be sure to see the new exhibit at the Heritage Society featuring the work of Sid Couchey and his depictions of Champ.*

**This tour was made possible by funding from the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership.**



AARCH programs also receive generous support from the New York State Council on the Arts, Architecture, Planning, and Design Program.

Welcome to the Willsboro walking tour. If this tour had been one hundred fifty years ago, you would be touring the Willsborough Falls area or as the locals called it, "The Falls." The town, straddling the Boquet River and extending to the shores of Lake Champlain, was first settled in 1765 by William Gilliland, though it was virtually abandoned during the Revolutionary War. In 1801 the first iron works was established and Willsborough was on the road to prosperity relying on a variety of industries over the ensuing 200 years.

Though the iron industry had significantly declined by 1885, a thriving paper mill was beginning operation and would be until 1965. The town also boasted a saw mill, a grist mill that still stands on the bank of the Boquet, a ship yard, and a quarry on Ligonier Point that provided stone for the Brooklyn Bridge and the Champlain Canal. Agriculture has been another important livelihood as a number of outlying farms are still in operation. The most recent, and only major industry today, is the processing of Wollastonite, a mineral used in ceramics, paint, and road beds.

What you will see today are residential, civic and commercial buildings that were constructed between the late 1790s and 1950s. Many of the buildings that were built during the early to mid 1800's have either been burned or demolished to make way for new buildings. The result is a wide spectrum of architectural styles ranging from the elegance and symmetry of the Federal period, to the nationally popular Craftsman bungalow. The prevalence of certain styles indicates periods of growth and prosperity.

We hope that you enjoy this tour and gain a little insight into what the architectural styles were in this small town during its boom period of the 1800s.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR...

When the Grange Hall was built in 1911 it was touted as the finest grange in Essex County. The distinctive appearance was created by using cast concrete block, a popular, new material at the turn of the century, molded to mimic the look of cut stone. Cast concrete block is also found on St. Phillip's Catholic Church.



Often architectural periods overlap, resulting in houses that incorporate elements from different styles. This example has the general massing of a Federal or Georgian house, 5 bays wide by 2 bays deep. However, Greek Revival influence is present in the front entrance surround, and in the partial return of the cornice on the gable end. Either this was the intended design or there were some alterations.



Commercial buildings have always been an important part of a functioning community. This Greek Revival store probably dates to the 1830's and appears much as it would have at that time. Retail or shop space would have occupied the ground floor while the upper floor would have provided living space for the shop keeper and his family.



## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS, MATERIALS, STYLES, FUNCTIONS, ALTERATIONS

This is one of a handful of houses in Willsboro that utilized the Craftsman style, wildly popular from about 1910-1930. The house features wide overhanging eaves supported by decorative knee braces. Exposed rafter tails were another common option. Facades were generally asymmetrical and plans were compact and functional. This type of house was widely seen in catalogs offered by companies such as Sears and Roebuck, and Montgomery Ward, where customers could order the house they liked right down to the fixtures and have it delivered to be assembled on site. The garage appears to be of a similar vintage and may have come from a catalog as well.



When William D. Ross built a grist mill on the bank of the Boquet River in 1810, it was instantly a valuable asset as the next closest mill was located

across Lake Champlain in Vergennes. Though his first mill burnt down in 1845, he immediately rebuilt, using local stone to create the stylistically simple structure that stands today. The symmetrical, gable front façade and stone lintels over the doors and windows hint at the basic elements of the Greek Revival style, popular during the first half of the 19th century. Of course the purpose of the design is functionality, making it a nice example of early industrial architecture.

C.P.H. Gilbert was an architect of moderate prominence during the beginning of the 20th century. After designing a home in New York City for Willsboro native and businessman, Augustus Paine, Jr., Gilbert was commissioned by the Paine family to create plans for the Champlain National Bank (1921), now home of the Willsboro Heritage Society, and the Paine Memorial Library (1930). Both buildings are excellent examples of the Neoclassical style, which reintroduced elements popularized a century earlier with Greek Revival. Characteristics include a pronounced pediment over the entryway, dentil molding under the cornice, and the use of columns and pilasters. The Neoclassical period was made popular, particularly in civic buildings, following the Chicago World's



Columbian Exposition in 1893, which was designed in the Classical theme.

### *Pilaster*

*A partial pier or column, often with a base, shaft, and capital, that is embedded in a flat wall and projects slightly; may be constructed as a projection of the wall itself.*

