

RALPH S. LUMBARD MEMORIAL TOWN HALL

RALPH S. LUMBARD MEMORIAL, INC.

A HISTORY

**North Park Row
Clinton, New York**

by

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RALPH S. LUMBARD MEMORIAL TOWN HALL

Most of us walk or drive by it several times each day and each week.

Many of us use it to get a dog tag, pay our property taxes, attend board meetings or hearings, get a building permit, and vote election day.

It is the grand brick building on North Park Row between Kirkland Avenue and Utica Street. Perhaps we all take it for granted but really don't know much about the building, its benefactor, or its exact uses today.

RALPH S. LUMBARD

Who was benefactor Ralph S. Lumbard? Today Lumbard Road runs south from the Dugway Road to the corner of Gridley-Paige Road and California Road in the Town of Marshall.

James Lumbard and family came to this area from Brimfield, Connecticut in the 1830's and settled on today's Lumbard Road, probably unnamed then. He had two wives who were Sherman sisters, and James was father to 12 children. He became a successful farmer and had business interests with Clinton, but mingled socially with those in Hanover, a hamlet in the Town of Marshall

James' youngest child Ralph Sherman Lumbard was born here in 1839 and died April 17, 1918. In 1869 he married Helen Hadcox of Deansboro; they had no children. Ralph succeeded to the family farm and fortune and was "counted a man of considerable means," according to a *Clinton Courier* article at the time of his death.

In 1904 Lumbard retired from farming and moved to a house at 19 Williams Street where he remained the rest of his life, the last survivor of the Lumbard clan.

The civic-minded Lumbard wished to make a significant donation to house permanent village and town offices. Previously the offices were at the homes or offices of various town officials such as the clerks. In the 1890's to the mid-1920's the rear of the Allen Block on Williams Street housed the fire department, and the village clerk was over the bakery of William Lowenberg on North Park Row.

In 1911 Lumbard bought of Mrs. Othniel S.(Delia Avery) Williams the former Park House lot and a brick building housing the Lowenberg bakery and a paint shop on North Park Row. The Park House, built in the early 1800's, was a long-time tavern which had become dilapidated and was torn down circa 1885.

Lumbard had long confided to friends that he had a desire to erect thereon a fine public building to be used as a town hall or civic center. However, no specific plans were announced in 1911.

Within a month of Lumbard's death in 1918 his will was announced. It totaled \$51,415. \$40,900 was left to remove the old buildings and construct a town hall on the site on North Park Row which Lumbard bought in 1911. He also left \$6000 to the Clinton Fire Department for a building and a site. It was then in the Allen Block.

Additionally Lumbard willed a family heirloom, a tall mahogany grandfathers clock, and portraits of himself and his wife to occupy conspicuous places in the new hall.

The clock and the two portraits are today in Town Clerk Diane Tuttle's office on the first floor rear.

Lumbard also remembered in his will the Town Library with books and \$250, Clinton Cemetery Association, and Maple Park Home in Vernon, gave \$700 for a bell for the Deansboro Congregational Church , and gave \$2000 to landscape the new town hall.

THE BUILDING

It took nearly six years before specific plans were drawn for the North Park Row site. A Lumbard Memorial Committee had been set up to receive and manage the Lumbard bequest. The value of the securities fluctuated a bit between 1918 and 1924-5, but by December 1924 the money amounted to \$55,000.

The New York State Legislature passed a law on March 27, 1919 establishing the "**Ralph S. Lumbard Memorial, Inc.**". By Lumbard's will it consisted and still consists of the town supervisor, a village representative, and a third town resident. It owns the building; the village and the town do not. Its income is wholly from rents from the two major tenants the town and the village. Over the years other groups have also rented the building.

At a Clinton Board of Trade meeting in December 1924 Frank S. Griffin, a lifelong friend of Lumbard and the senior member of the Lumbard Committee

spoke about the finances and about the wishes and intents of Mr. Lumbard. Mr. Griffin maintained that the erection of the hall should not be delayed longer than a time when a reasonable amount of money was at hand.

Clinton architect Arthur L. Easingwood drew the plans for a Georgian Revival structure according to one source. Another account described it as of colonial design. Easingwood was a local builder, contractor, and justice of the peace. In 1921 he had designed fire house # 1 which certainly resembles Lumbard Hall.

Used in the construction was hollow tile and red tapestry brick with black mortar joints. Indiana limestone was installed at the door jambs, windows, and corners. The building was 52' wide by 77' long. The first floor had 1500 square feet of space, and held the post office in front and the village and town board rooms in the rear.

The basement, which has 360 square feet of space, contained the furnace and utilities' entrances plus a holding cell and a police court. On the second floor was a large auditorium 52' by 65' with a gallery 12' by 42' on the south end and a stage across the north end with a floor slightly tilted towards the audience.

The Lumbard tablet on the south façade was 2' by 7' and made of Indiana stone. The dome was painted snowy white originally. Now it's red. The old fire alarm bell from the Allen Block was installed therein and remains today...very inactive but still there.

Bids were opened on Easingwood's plans in June 1925, and Clinton contractor James Jones was the successful bidder at \$47,264.

The post office for Clinton from about 1900 to 1926 was in a block on North Park Row between the fire house and The Burns Agency. Local officials sought the post office as a paying tenant for the new town hall and negotiations began about a lease.

In May 1925 the post office department approved a lease and plans to vacate the remaining Lowenberg bakery building began. It was demolished and all materials removed.

The village and town papers were housed temporarily in the former Elliott S. Williams office, today's Burns Agency at 1 West Park Row. The village board was to meet in fire house # 1 until the new hall was completed.

THE DEDICATION

Clinton gave a fine ceremony for the new hall in a dedication which lasted from a 1:30 firemen's parade to a free lunch at 5:30 to lantern slides and a dance at the new hall ending at 12 midnight on Wednesday, September 15, 1926.

The parade under the direction of Grand Marshall Fred C. Dawes, assisted by Arnold Schwaiger and Earl Dawes, all mounted on roan horses, formed at 1:30. The *Clinton Courier* reported that the parade made a fine appearance with beautifully trimmed floats, bands, fire apparatus, village and town boards, Boy Scouts, and about 500 school children, each carrying a flag.

Several decorated automobiles carried representatives of the Order of the Eastern Star, the Ancient Order of the Hibernians, and the Clinton Grange and Auxiliary. Many businesses entered floats, too. The line of march was down College Street to Dwight Avenue, back on College Street to Marvin Street,

Chestnut, Williams, around the Park, down Utica Street to Beatty Avenue, and back up Utica Street to the Park.

The chairman for the dedication was Frank B. Griffin, prominent farmer, former master of Clinton Lodge F. & A.M. 132, and a former candidate for state assembly.

Rev. George Shepherd gave the invocation which was followed by acceptances from Town Supervisor J. A. Schwaiger and Village President Herbert E. Allen.

John D. Strain, president of the Board of Trade, and P.M. Hull of the Chamber of Commerce gave remarks. Strain lived on Christmas Knob off Norton Avenue and worked for a manufacturer's association. Hull was a Hamilton graduate who had taught school in Oswego and lived in the Hull family home at 6 East Park Row.

The dedicatory address fell to Dean of Hamilton College and Professor William Harder Squires of the philosophy department who told the gathering that that hall "is the embodiment of a high conception of duty" and that "it was surely economy that finally enabled the donor to do what no other citizen of this community has ever done during the 139 years of Clinton's existence."

Squires extolled Lumbard as "an abiding testimony to the spirit of thrift, economy, and self-sacrifice." F. Stanley Griffin, an attorney, spoke for the firemen.

After the dedication the fire department did an exhibition drill and held a ball game in the Park under the direction of Chief J. William Dawes.

CITIZENS INVOLVED

Several other men besides those already mentioned played parts in the construction of Lumbard Hall.

The town board consisted of J. Andrew Schwaiger(a farmer), supervisor, A.L. Easingwood(architect), Charles Ellinwood(a farmer), Howard E. Miller(a farmer and former supervisor), Frank Goodwin who operated the Goodwin Country Store in Clark Mills and who also was an Aetna insurance agent , and John Keeffel, clerk (former businessman).

The village board had Herbert E. Allen(hardware merchant), president, William H. Ford(grocer), Edwin Fuller Torrey(hop dealer), C. B. Van Slyke(ran a garage and an ice cream parlor), Arthur W. Scoones(salesman), and John M. O'Rourke, clerk.

MISCELLANEOUS FACTS ABOUT LUMBARD HALL

- 1- The upstairs auditorium was now available for dances, movies, plays, etc.. In an attempt to gain some rent, the Lumbard Memorial Commission in November 1925 entered into a lease with Nathan Robbins of Utica for \$1000 per year to show movies three times a week. A week later the lease was cancelled.
- 2- Church groups have used the auditorium over the years. In the late 1950's and 1960's Rev. Roger Bates held worship services upstairs for his Gospel Lighthouse. In 1966 Bates paid \$405.00 for the year for Sunday services. Bates had been the minister of the Clinton Baptist Church prior to starting his own services.

- 3- Post office paid rents starting at \$1000 in 1926 and was up to \$2500 by 1971; in 1955 the village paid \$700 and the town paid \$1400 per year for the offices
- 4- The first occupant of the Lumbard jail was held there the night of March 15, 1926. A resident of Utica who had been imbibing too freely of what Judge Buckley recently referred to as "blessed oil" was discovered roaming around the second story of the Payne Block by Nightwatchman Clark and was promptly housed in the new jail. He was transferred to Utica jail on Bleecker Street.
- 5- A fire broke out in the basement in December 1943. A waste paper container in the furnace room attacked the sides of the coal bin, went through a partition, and then burned a two-foot hole through the floor at the entrance to the town clerk's office. The Clinton Fire Department had the fire under control in a short time.
- 6- In the 1980's and 1990's Rev. James W. Boursma of Deansboro held worship services as the Grace Chapel upstairs for \$50.00 a week.. In 2003 to present Mt. Zion Ministries rents the upstairs for church activities.
- 7- Members of the Lumbard Memorial Hall Commission today are Supervisor Annette S. Foley, village representative John Lane, and resident David Burns.

- 8- Additions- two additions have been attached to the southwest front area adjacent to Kirkland Avenue. The post office needed a loading dock so a covered one went up in the 1930's. In 1959 as the post office needed more room, the covered area was demolished and a larger addition was built at a cost of \$14,000. This is used today for town planning offices and records storage.
- 9- The mail volume for the Clinton post office steadily grew and more employees worked there causing a space problem inside. A need for more rest rooms and more sorting cubicles resulted. Outside more parking for employees and customers was desired, according to the Postal Service. In the late 1980's the USPS served notice on the Lumbard Commission that it would seek another building for 13323 code mail. It bought land and built a new post office at 40 College Street on the site of the former Holland Farms Dairy Bar. In 1990 the post office moved in to the new facility. The Lumbard Commission hired local contractors Art Evans and Kevin O'Brien to remodel the first floor for a board room and village offices at a cost of \$60,000.
- 10- Today the village offices, town clerk's office, a police substation, town planning offices, a Clinton Chamber of Commerce office, and a general meeting room take up the first floor. The auditorium has been used in recent years for a youth canteen, church services, and meetings.

Ralph S. Lombard's name has somewhat faded from local knowledge over the years. He had no offspring and died in 1918...some 88 years ago. No one who knew him survives. However, his thoughtful legacy of a municipal hall has stood the test of time and has graced the North Park Row area since 1926. It appears sturdy and just right for a community of our size. It is what a public hall should look like.

With Lombard's bequest Arthur L. Easingwood designed a building that was erected for just over \$47,000. Today could it be rebuilt for less than 2-3 million?

Kirkland and Clinton was indeed fortunate to receive the Lombard funds, and the hall stands as a tribute to a civic-minded farmer who gave the bulk of his estate to secure us a municipal building of which we all can be proud.

2/7/06