

2018 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

Early Settlement-era Buildings, Geneva

Structures built within the first 15-20 years of the settlement of a community are increasingly rare historic resources, especially in suburbanized communities that have experienced constant growth over long periods of time. Understandably, the fate of such structures is threatened due to condition issues, as well as continued development pressure.

The first Eastern United States and European settlers arrived in Geneva as early as 1833. In 1836, Geneva was named the county seat of Kane County and the original town was platted the following year. Harnessing water power from the Fox River provided economic opportunities, making Geneva a productive hub for manufacturing. Early products included lumber, furniture, agricultural equipment, cheese, butter, milled grains and packed meats. By 1840, the east and west banks of the Fox River were the center of industrial development, while homes and businesses were established on a rise “upwind” of the river. By 1853, railroad lines continued to advance Geneva as an industrial powerhouse, bringing numerous manufacturing businesses to the area.

The buildings in this listing represent both commercial and residential development during Geneva’s early years. Humble in nature, these buildings exhibit the vernacular architecture being constructed by Geneva’s first Eastern United States and European settlers. Also, this year’s Bicentennial celebration is an excellent opportunity to highlight structures from the first decades of the founding of Illinois.

Mill Race Inn

- **Location:** 4 E. State St., Geneva, Kane County
- **Built:** 1846
- **Architect:** Unknown
- **Current owner:** Privately owned
- **Historic significance:** One of the oldest surviving commercial structures in Geneva.
- **Why it is endangered:** The building faces a demolition threat.



Credit: Rich Hayhurst

This one-story, limestone utilitarian building is one of the oldest surviving commercial structures in Geneva. Located on the Fox River's east bank, this structure was built circa 1846. Early on, it was associated with the Alexander Brothers' Blacksmith Shop. It is worth noting that blacksmiths shops were one of the most important businesses in early settlement communities. The building's affiliation with the blacksmith shop suggests that it was possibly used either as a foundry, or as a mechanics or wheelwright shop. Around 1868, the building became part of the Rystrom Carriage and Wagon Manufacturing complex. A second story was added at this time for use as Rystrom's painting workshop. Later, the building housed the C.E. Mann Cooperage, which produced barrels, as well as butter and cheese boxes. The building went on to house many different businesses until 1933 when it was remodeled as the Mill Race Inn restaurant.

A popular destination dining spot in the western suburbs for nearly eight decades, the Mill Race Inn restaurant closed in 2011. Investigation of the remaining 1846 portion of the building began in 2013. In 2016, the owner removed numerous additions to the original building in order to expose the historic structure. As of now, the owner has applied to demolish the historic structure in order to redevelop the site.

Currently, the property is moving through a controversial landmark designation evaluation. In March, Geneva's Historic Preservation Commission voted in favor of recommending the circa 1846 building for landmark designation to the City Council. A full City Council meeting is scheduled to discuss landmark designation on May 7, 2018. If designated, the early industrial building would be protected under the Geneva Historic Preservation Ordinance, making any exterior alteration, construction or demolition subject to review by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Amasa White House

- **Location:** 757 E. Fabyan Parkway, Geneva, Kane County
- **Built:** 1840s
- **Architect:** Unknown
- **Current owner:** Kane County
- **Historic significance:** Former home of the White family, who settled in Geneva in 1838 and would become prominent members of the community.
- **Why it is endangered:** Vacant and without an approved plan for reuse, the house faces an uncertain future.



Credit: Elizabeth Safanda

The White family settled in Geneva in 1838, eventually constructing their two-story limestone Greek Revival house north of present day Fabyan Parkway in the 1840s. Amasa White was a farmer and prominent Geneva resident. He also earned a significant profit from cutting and selling timber from his land. He had an interest in the progressive movements of the time and was also an appointed member of the building committee for the Geneva Unitarian Church, which was completed in 1843. The Whites raised their nine children in the impressive stone residence, many of whom went on to become involved in many of Geneva's manufacturing and production industries.

The house stayed in the family's hands into the 1920s, when it was purchased by the State of Illinois. By the 1950s, the land surrounding the house was part of the Kane County Home for the Aged and the Kane County Poor Farm. Today, the Amasa White House is owned by Kane County. Though the property sits vacant, the county has taken care to keep the house closed and secure. In 2007, the county published *The Fabyan Utilization Study* that identified the area of the Amasa White House as a possible historic settlement that would be a location for county historic buildings and educational programming. However, after the economy faltered, no pursuit of this recommendation was undertaken. To date, there is no approved reuse for the property.

What you can do:

- If you are a Geneva resident, contact the Geneva City Council to support landmark designation of the Mill Race Inn prior to the Council's May 7, 2018, meeting.
 - Additionally, ask City Council to follow its approved 2008 Historic Preservation Plan where 63 historic resources, including the Mill Race Inn, were identified as potential landmarks and should be approved for landmark designation when landmark recommendations come to the Council.
- If you are a Kane County resident, contact your [County Board Members](#) regarding the significance of the Amasa White House and the need to develop a reuse plan for this early settlement property.

Additional Links:

- Mill Race Inn
 - "Geneva delays vote on Mill Race Inn's landmark status," *Daily Herald*, April 17, 2018: <http://www.dailyherald.com/news/20180417/geneva-delays-vote-on-mill-race-inns-landmark-status>
 - "Geneva preservationists gear to save original Mill Race structure," *Kane County Chronicle*, April 2, 2018: <http://www.kcchronicle.com/2018/04/01/geneva-preservationists-gear-to-save-original-mill-race-structure/aaynsva/>
 - "Geneva eyes landmark status for 1840s Mill Race Inn Building," *Chicago Tribune*, February 22, 2018: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/aurora-beacon-news/news/ct-abn-mill-race-inn-st-0223-20180222-story.html>

- “Shodeen seeks to raze 1946 limestone building at former Mill Race Inn in Geneva,” *Kane County Chronicle*, January 8, 2018:
<http://www.kcchronicle.com/2018/01/05/shodeen-seeks-to-raze-1846-limestone-building-at-former-mill-race-inn-in-geneva/arvjwxk/>
- Amasa White House
 - Commemorative Biographical and Historical Record of Kane County, Illinois, 1888:
https://books.google.com/books?id=pc1MAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA810&lpg=PA810&dq=amasa+white+kane+county&source=bl&ots=UVaeebyB_u&sig=7H7jZnnctJzRcf-JX7_FOKXZV1M&hl=en&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwi5i6C874raAhXEm-AKHXisAVUQ6AEIQDAE#v=onepage&q=amasa%20white%20kane%20county&f=false
- Fabyan Utilization Study: ([PDF](#))