

2014-2015

The University at Albany Foundation purchased the 8.7-acre Holt-Harris land and buildings in McKownville for \$597,900 in December 2015.

Joyce Durgerian wrote two very informative articles about the Holt-Harris land and buildings. They were published in the Turnpike Record, December 1966. (This Albany weekly newspaper is no longer published).

According to Joyce, there were..."four satellite houses"... on the property in 1966. One was the Chapel House. It was built in 1905. It burned in 1985.

A second house, the Thomas Francis Wood home, was lived in by Lois Gregg and Janet Havens, University at Albany staff persons. It was built in the early 1900's. It was demolished for University expansion in the 1980's.

The third house was built in 1949 and was lived in by Judge Holt-Harris until he died in 1999. It is still standing.

The fourth house..."the house west of his (the home of Judge Holt-Harris) and off McKownville's Norwood Street may have been the original farm house of the LaGrange tract"... Judge Holt-Harris is quoted as saying. The home is standing and is the focus of this letter. Much of the campus of University at Albany was once part of the LaGrange tract also.

The LaGrange family---Omnice LaGrange---came to Albany in the 1690's. Christian LaGrange, a descendent, was a participant in the 19th century anti-rent wars. The LaGrange lands stretched from what is now Washington Avenue to the Helderberg escarpment.

The McKownville Improvement Association is attempting to establish the age of the "LaGrange tract" house. It is slated for demolition by the University at Albany Foundation.

The New York State Historic Preservation Office said that if it was provided photos of the interior of the “LaGrange” tract house it could probably date the house.

I have offered to take the photos.

Judge Holt-Harris often said that the “LaGrange tract” house probably dates from before the 1850’s. The Schoolcraft home and the McKown home—both on Western Avenue—date from the 1840’s. That is, the “LaGrange tract” home may be important in the history of Albany County also.

Albany is very proud of its history. The University shares the name of the city and county and its history. Hopefully the University will permit the age of the “LaGrange tract” house to be determined before it is too late to discover whether it has a more important place in our shared history.

Written by Don Reeb, 4/20/2016