



Chapter 2: SETTING the SCENE



HISTORY

The Town of LaFayette was taken from the Towns of Pompey and Onondaga and organized on April 15, 1825. It derives its name from the Marquis de LaFayette, a prominent hero in both the French and American Revolutions. He defied the French authorities in 1777 by crossing the Atlantic to offer his services to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. He was a friend of George Washington and served under him at the Battle of the Brandywine and at Valley Forge.

Located in the heart of New York, the center of Lafayette lies at the crossroads of two of the longest roads in the United States, Routes 11 and 20, which span all the way from Canada to Louisiana and the East Coast to the West Coast. The topography of the



Town is hilly and broken. Between the Town's two principal streams, Butternut and Onondaga Creeks, have a high ridge between which rises in altitude from three to six hundred feet and includes deep declivities. The valleys on the east and west of this ridge, Sherman and Christian Hollows, extend the entire length of the Town.

In 1791, the first European settlement was established by John Wilcox, just east of the Indian orchard on Haskin's Hill. Mr. Wilcox sold much fruit to the early settlers. Numerous other settlements were established. Two strong settlement areas that have withstood the test of time are the Hamlet of LaFayette, also known as LaFayette Village and LaFayette Square, and the Hamlet of Cardiff.

The Hamlet of Cardiff, originally known as Christian Hollow, was situated on the Syracuse and Tully Turnpike in the western part of the Town. Although, it was three miles west of the railroad station located in the Hamlet of Onativia, it was the community's strongest hamlet area. At the turn of the 20th century, Cardiff contained 30 houses, three stores, one church, a hotel, two wagon shops, a grist mill, and a post office. The famous Cardiff Giant was "discovered" in late 1869. It had been made of gypsum and purposely buried on the Newell farm in Cardiff. George Hull of Binghamton contrived the story. Thousands visited the grave when it was first discovered but it was eventually dug up and displayed throughout the country until the hoax was discovered. The giant now resides in the Village of Cooperstown.

The Hamlet of Cardiff was a self-sufficient area at the turn of the 20th century. Once Interstate I-81 was built in the mid-1950's, Cardiff ceased to be a commercial growth area due to its remote location from major transportation systems and lack of commercial infrastructure.



With the building of the Skaneateles and Cazenovia road, the “village” of LaFayette continued to grow as the commercial hub of the Town. In 1854, the railroad was constructed in the Hamlet of Onativia. A station closer to the LaFayette Hamlet area would have fortified the economy of the Hamlet, but instead people had to make the trek to the rail station which was located one mile to the east. Town residents used the rail system to access goods and services available in the City of Syracuse located to the north of the Town.



The LaFayette Central School, grades K-12 was erected in the hamlet in 1939, with additions completed in 1950 and 1965 (a new high school building was erected in 1970-1971). By the 1950s two grocery stores were located in the hamlet, one on the first level of the LaFayette Hotel and one located just south. The LaFayette Hotel, the hamlet’s most prominent building, now sits vacant and deteriorating.



LaFAYETTE TODAY

Today the Hamlet of LaFayette remains the center of the community. While there are no longer any grocery stores, the majority of the Town's businesses are located in and around the Hamlet. Businesses include a bank, post office, gas station, auto repair, funeral home, auto parts store, dollar store, farm equipment company, a few restaurants, and others. There are also several professional offices in the hamlet area



along with a medical facility and the headquarters for Byrne Dairy. In addition the Town's Community Center, elementary school, library, Town offices, and a church are located in or near the hamlet, and the Junior/Senior High School is a couple miles north on Route 11.

While the Hamlet of LaFayette remains the center of the community, the town

continues to support agricultural endeavors in other parts of LaFayette along with a variety of businesses outside of the hamlet and Route 11 areas. There is also more housing in the Town than there was in decades past, however, the Town still maintains its rural character and has abundant farmland and other open space.

POPULATION and DEMOGRAPHICS

The Town of LaFayette is a rural community located less than ten miles from the City of Syracuse, and in the southern part of an increasingly urbanized county. LaFayette has a population of 4,952 people according to the 2010 U.S. Census. The Town sits within Onondaga County, with over 467,000 people. Between 2000 and 2010 LaFayette grew by 119 people, or a 2.4% increase, while Onondaga County's population grew by 1.9%. LaFayette is located a 10 minute drive south of the City of Syracuse, which is home to 145,170 people.

LaFayette has a total of 1,997 occupied households, with another 102 vacant housing units. The median age of LaFayette residents in 2010 was 45.2 years old, several years older than New York State's average of 38.0 years and Onondaga County's average of 38.6 years. The Town is a relatively homogenous community as 95.3% of the Town's population is white, 2.1% is "American Indian or Alaska Native", 0.7% is Asian, and 1.9% is "two or more races". However, the Town is neighbors with the Onondaga Nation, which is part of the LaFayette School District. Children from the Onondaga Nation attend elementary school at the Onondaga Nation School, and then



attend Junior Senior High School with students from the Town of LaFayette beginning in ninth grade.

LaFayette is a relatively well educated community, with 90.1% of residents 25 or older having a high school diploma or higher, compared to 89.3% of Onondaga County's residents and 84.4% of New York State's. However, 28.5% of LaFayette's residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 32.0% of the County and 32.1% of New York State.

LOCAL ECONOMIC CLIMATE

2,748 people, or 68.7% of LaFayette's population is in the labor force (i.e. not children, retired, etc). 4.7% of them work from home. It takes an average of 20.6 minutes for the rest of the Town's workers to commute to work, only 1.5 minutes longer than the Onondaga County mean commute time, and 10 minutes shorter than New York State's. The median household income in LaFayette is \$65,490, which is significantly higher than Onondaga County's average of \$50,676. In addition, only 1.4% of families are below the poverty level, as compared to 9.6% of County families and 10.8% of New York State families. In November of 2011, the Syracuse metropolitan area had an unemployment rate of 7.5%, below the State and Country's unemployment rates for the same month.

Despite Town residents having a higher median household income on average, there are still many people in the community earning low to moderate incomes. Many of the Town's residents rely on jobs in the City of Syracuse or nearby suburbs. For the Town's population there are relatively few jobs in LaFayette itself. LaFayette's largest employer is the School District, which employs approximately 200 people.