

Lutheran Street

A “Building Shells: Building Community” Walking Tour



Welcome to Newburgh’s East End Historic District, a collection of over two thousand buildings encompassing 445 acres—one of the largest in New York State. The district was formed in the 1980s to encompass and dramatically expand the Montgomery–Grand–Liberty Streets Historic District formed in 1973, whose landmarks—by the likes of A. J. Davis and Calvert Vaux—represented the city’s elite rather than the middle and working class population whose architecture surrounds us.

Today we’re on Lutheran Street. While only two blocks long, this street is a great place to learn about architectural features up-close, and study how contractors standardized an ideal house model to develop the street. To standardize means to make something in the most efficient way, often with

the same appearance. The residents of Lutheran Street developed it themselves in the decade following 1900. They looked for ways to create the most comfortable domestic setting possible using successful models at the lowest cost. You'll see a lot of houses here that look identical, with some creative variation.

This is the story of laborers and developers who found housing solutions for the growing middle class in Newburgh. We're hoping to gather more contemporary histories, so if you have some stories, please share along the walk!

Tour theme: Housing

Becoming A Street

The buildings of Lutheran Street are really some of the youngest in the historic district. But, before diving into the street's architecture and design, let's first talk about how and when this became a street.

The street, as we know it today, was built in two phases. Before the Civil War, Lutheran extended from Broadway, or Western Avenue as it was called in the early 19th century, to Van Ness Street. Newburgh was still considered a village then, with about 12,000 people living much closer to the waterfront. The name Lutheran probably pays tribute to the German Lutherans who colonized Newburgh in 1709.

The idea of extending the street another block—all the way to First Street—began in the 1840s, a challenging decade for Newburgh financially and a chaotic one in the Western world. Property owners were pressured to sell off farmland and encourage the village's westward growth. Efforts to develop here were spearheaded by Theron Felter, a prosperous hotel manager. On May 1, 1846, for \$500 Felter acquired the lot from First Street to Van Ness Street.¹ Just as Felter could have made a profit in rapid development, he and his family left Newburgh for Warwick.

As proprietor of the United States Hotel on the waterfront, Felter, his wife Catherine, and their children lived in comfort here, with three Black servants in their employ. On the first of May 1849, Theron opened his new hotel, the

Greenwood Lake House, to visitors.² Theron made Warwick the family's primary residence and occupied a house across the cove from his hotel.³ After 1855, the Felters returned to Newburgh to operate the Quassaick House Hotel, and began subdividing their lots. Complete responsibility fell on Catherine after Theron's death in 1864, and she continued to sell off parcels into the 1870s. These fell into the hands of real estate investors, such as the politically-inclined Odell family, Benjamin and Hiram, two brothers who operated an ice company. Other buyers were middle class business owners intent on constructing rental properties. After it was graded in the fall of 1888, the extension from First Street to Broadway was finally opened to the public, and contracts for the building of sewers were given in March 1890.⁴

Lutheran Street to Van Ness Street

Before we begin looking at these first houses, can anyone tell us what a speculative house is, especially one built by developers? What does a developer do? (*Wait for answer, discuss.*)

Notice on this side of the street how we're more or less viewing the same design. Can anyone point out things that may've been selected to differentiate each house? What are some individualistic features? (*Wait for answer, discuss.*)

12 Lutheran Street

At this part of the street, we see the accepted building standard for single family houses across from a cost-saving innovation. Since the early 1870s, Newburgh builders had created visual interest in construction with the addition of multi-story bay windows placed to one side of the facade, with an entry, placed at the other side, accessing the hall and staircase. Porches were incomplete, and bay windows could be organized in brick using polygonal, and later circular and rectangular outlines, viewable in 9, 11, and 13 Lutheran Street. Stylistically these houses are Italianate, with cornices as crowning elements on the flat roof. This style had originally referenced Italian architecture, but became simplified and ingrained into the building culture here because of its cheapness.

This wooden house was built about 1908. It has a bay window on the upper floor and a full-length porch on the lower level. The porch is supported by three Tuscan columns, with plain shafts and a band around the top. Can you spot any additional columns? (Wait for comments). The two columns affixed to the house are engaged columns. Engaged columns are simply decorative – they provide no structural support. The lower portion of the bay—the parlor window—is a tripartite window, being composed of three parts: a large opening flanked by two narrower ones. Dentil molding, rightly resembling little teeth, is seen on the porch and upper cornice.

One of the difficulties in learning about Lutheran Street’s early residents is that many of these homes were built to be rented. In some cases, as we’ll see, the builders behind the houses attracted newspaper attention, but no one seems to have reported on this free-standing building. The builder was probably James D. Tweed, a contractor and supervisor of the sixth ward who purchased this parcel in April 1908 from the Odell family.⁵ Though not the house’s first renter, Tweed and his wife lived here in the late 1910s and afterwards made their residence next door at 14 Lutheran Street, a similar house built after 1913.⁶ Tweed built a new wing on New Windsor School in 1920 after architect Frank E. Estabrook, its architect, accidentally drowned. Tweed also served as Newburgh’s building inspector and was later mayor of Newburgh.

18 Lutheran Street

Yet another fascinating architectural attribute of the street is the two-story flat house with double porches, a building type almost unique here. “Flat house” in turn-of-the-century Newburgh denoted a house purposely built to house two apartments on its two floors, with the option for a basement rental. This flat house gave tenants more exterior access by adding double porches, at the rear and front, the upper unit having access through one side of the multi-story bay. Constructed by contractor William H. Thorn ⁷ in 1908, by 1920 the house had two consistent tenants, Frederick W. Knapp and Gottlieb Muhlemann, a German-American pipe fitter and early resident of the street. He lived in this house until his death in 1959.

Cross Van Ness Street.

23 Lutheran Street

Positioned on a corner lot, 23 Lutheran uses its length on Van Ness Street to display an imaginative cornice and multi-story bay beneath its roof peak. It is the prototype for 12 Lutheran Street, but here the Tuscan columns appear thinner. Contractor Ira L. Burhans built this house in 1902 for him and his wife Laura after he purchased the lot from Hiram B. Odell that April.⁸ This same year, he and his brother Lewis took the contract to build a new church on William Street designed by Estabrook.⁹

Ira and Lewis trained in the firm Thomas Shaw's Sons in the late 19th century and began their own building firm by 1900, with an office at 62 Miller Street.¹⁰ With his experience in building, Ira was promoted to the Board of Public Works by Mayor Jonathan D. Wilson, also in 1902, and likely had a hand in regulating infrastructure projects in the neighborhood.¹¹

Laura E. Burhans, Ira's wife, was a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at this time, a large organization of women that held annual fairs in promotion of abstinence from alcohol, a movement growing with traction before Prohibition.¹² She became treasurer of the union in September 1903, and offered the house as a meeting space for the executive committee.¹³ At age 40, Laura died in the house in September 1910.¹⁴ Ira continued living here with his relative, Carrie, who operated it as a lodging house until the early 1930s.

24 Lutheran Street

Directly across the street is the Burhans house's unassuming twin: a house and garage extension occupied by William Sager and his family in the late 1910s. Sager was a gifted mason, and in the 1890s he was contracted to build three mansions at the end of Grand Street designed by architect Frederic M. Sneed.¹⁵ His own residences at this time on Washington Street and later William Street were much more humble, and when he moved in, he may have added the garage extension as a workshop space. William's daughters, Lulu, Ella, and Flora, who worked as hat trimmers, sold the house in 1955.¹⁶

27 Lutheran Street

These twin flat houses with double porches match the description of two begun by contractor Fred Kiefer in fall 1905. William Sager was the mason, James F. Templeton & Son did the carpentry, and George W. Strong did the painting.¹⁷ Sager and the Templetons would work together on the Newburgh Carriage Company Building at 9–11 Chambers Street the next year. This four-story warehouse integrated figures of naked children and carriage tie rings as decorative motifs on supporting corbels.¹⁸ Strength in detailing is also seen on these corbels, nonfunctional bracketed elements on the cornice. Wooden brackets on the porches are also referential of Gothic trilobed shapes, while the dentil molding, from ancient Greek and Roman architecture, makes an appearance up top again.

One of the early tenants was Malcolm E. Parrott, a manager of the Van Motor Co., who married Mary Bradley Morey in November 1913 and made their home here. Parrott was credited with introducing the first taxicabs in Newburgh.¹⁹

31 Lutheran Street

This towering former carpentry workshop is where we might guess many of the street's prefabricated wooden elements originated. It was built in 1889 as a workspace and apartment house by carpenters William Tweed and Caleb Woodruff, brother-in-laws who launched the firm Tweed & Woodruff in 1890. Tweed and Woodruff's families were also property owners in the neighborhood, and purchased these inexpensive lots of Catherine Felter's land.²⁰ Tweed & Woodruff managed construction for the government at West Point and worked on three projects with Estabrook between 1892–1895.²¹

When Woodruff died, the building sold in 1920 to Whitfield Crevling, a contractor, who shared the space with R. W. Crevling. Like Ira Burhans, Whitfield was associated with Mayor Wilson and looked upon favorably.²² R. W. was a member of the Lions' Club and a pianist for their events.²³ In 1906, Whitfield had worked to convert a flat house on the corner of Broadway and Grand Street into the Columbus Trust Company Bank working with an exterior sculptor and architectural firm from New York City.²⁴ By 1930, the Fleischmann Company, the largest yeast manufacturer in the world, had a distribution location here. Tenants took rooms upstairs consistently in the following decades, but at times the storefront was vacant. After passing

through several owners in the past twenty years, and sometimes under the city's ownership, the building was reclassified as a residential shell.

34 Lutheran Street

Contractor George Purdy built these two twin flat houses from 1901–02 for owner Joseph R. Semler.²⁵ The bay is noticeably rectangular, a trend begun in the 1890s, with a frontage striped by belt courses. Can someone point out what belt courses and why they're named this way? (*Wait for answer*). These bands of stone continue through the sills and lintels of the windows for ornamental purposes; we find them absent in the two similar flathouses, 36 and 38, which aim to be more straightforward and functional by providing more porch space.

F. Gerard Wood and his wife Mabelle Tice married the year construction began on the house.²⁶ They were the only tenants in the late 1910s, when Wood worked as chief stock clerk for the Fabrikoid factory. With his Fabrikoid employees, Wood was an active bowler and hockey player.

39 Lutheran Street

Here's the rarest building on the street, one designed by a professional architect. This is probably the most unassuming house Frank Estabrook ever designed, unlike the rest of his Newburgh houses, which tend to incorporate heavy stone and exciting rooflines. Here, he's designing to harmonize with the street. This house was built in 1891 for Caleb Woodruff and his wife Matilda, an Irish immigrant, and their children. When Woodruff entered into business with William Tweed, the family lived almost directly behind this lot on Carpenter Avenue. Following the common house form being erected in other parts of the city, Estabrook ornamented it with shaped terracotta blocks and string courses laid in the masonry. These touches are expressive of the Queen Anne style from England, a variant of which took inspiration from brick architecture in England during the early 18th century reign of Queen Anne. The lintels above the window, for instance, were cast to resemble jack arches, these flat, upwardly-spreading blocks from colonial American buildings. Estabrook also designed a house of similar shape for Tweed on City Terrace in 1895, which still stands. Both were published in a catalog of his work the next year, meant to show his cheapest-built commissions to his largest structures.

Born in Wallkill in 1845, Woodruff grew up on a farm there and in Middletown, the son of a carpenter. At eighteen he enlisted in the Civil War, fought in several major battles, and a year after the war's end he came to Newburgh as an apprentice of carpenter Samuel McKee. Like many Newburgh builders, Woodruff worked many years under the city's largest firm, Thomas Shaw's Sons, before beginning their own practices. While employed by McKee, he wed Matilda Tweed in 1867, born in Scotland to Irish parents who immigrated to Newburgh. Woodruff befriended his brother-in-laws, builders William Tweed and James D. Tweed, and chose William as his business partner. Two of Woodruff's four sons who resided here joined them as carpenters, while his eldest child, Anna, was a dressmaker. Charles Woodruff, his youngest, was a silversmith, and lived here with his wife Anna Shaw until his death in 1949.

The next owner, J. J. Wheeler, an embalmer, operated a funeral home from the house until 1970. Tenants lived here continuously under the funeral home's operation. Notice that the sill on the second floor was cut through to create an egress. A mansard roof, with those sloped sides, was added to accommodate more residents sometime in the early 20th century. In the past decade, the house has become a building shell, and the city reclassified it as a residential shell. After passing it to a buyer in 2017, the city reclaimed the house in February 2022.

42 Lutheran Street

This towered flathouse is similar to one at 31 Dubois Street. It is a freestanding house built in the 1890s. But, the lots beside it were sold off after 1913, giving it less breathing room. The three-story building has an Italianate cornice interrupted by this weighty polygonal tower, considered an element of the Queen Anne fashion. At the corners are brownstone quoins, those blocks articulating the edges; brownstone also appears in the sills and lintels. Panels on the tower are made of angled bricks where typically terracotta blocks might be inserted. A number of similar towers were designed by the firm Thomas Shaw's Sons at this time, increasing the likelihood this may be their work.

46 Lutheran Street

George Thomas Barnes—a prominent plumber with a store at 91 Broadway—moved into this house in November 1895 with his wife, Nancy Seabury Cory. The couple were married in Newport, Rhode Island, and returned to Newburgh after their honeymoon.²⁷ It is likely that this house, 48, and 37 Lutheran were built at the same time, as they share details: carved porch posts and broad stone lintels, the sold tops of the window openings. The posts were carved on a lathe, and ones of this design were standard in Queen Anne porches. The lintels resemble those Estabrook used in his house designs in the early 1890s, which indicate the builders took after his work and knew it well—possibly Tweed & Woodruff themselves. This house seems to have been damaged within the past five years but has not been rezoned as a building shell. The Queen Anne porch, a copy of its neighbor, is missing as of recently, but we can see the remnants of its structure in the empty joist pockets, holes which held the supporting lumber.

Tour Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1. *Orange County Deeds*, Liber 119–149. The deed was begun on this date, but seems to have been completed and recorded 13 December 1852. Reason for the delay is unknown. The grantors were Abraham M. Smith's executors David W. Bate and Daniel Farrington.
2. "Wawayanda, or Greenwood Lake House," *Evening Post* (New York), 26 July 1849.
3. Theron and Catherine were managers of a farm with Irish servants, laborers, and two bookkeepers in their command.
4. "Brief and Pointed," *Newburgh Daily News*, 4 September 1888; "Common Council," *Newburgh Daily News*, 19 March 1890.
5. Liber 499–398.
6. 14 Lutheran does not appear on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps until after 1913. It uses brick piers rather than Tuscan columns on the porch, and is contemporary with 44 Lutheran Street. 14 references 12 by replicating the cornice; 44 uses a simpler cornice.
7. Liber 499–139.
8. "Brief Notes," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 2 April 1902, 4.
9. "Contracts Signed," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 28 March 1902, 1. Moulton Memorial Baptist Church (1902–03).
10. "Brief Notes," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 17 March 1899, 4.
11. "A Glance at the News," *Sunday Newburgh Telegram*, 6 April 1902, 5.
12. "Society Echoes," *Sunday Newburgh Telegram*, 12 March 1905.
13. "W. C. T. U. Notes," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 17 October 1905, 2.
14. "Local Review," *Newburgh Telegram*, 10 September 1910.
15. "Mr. Foster's New House," *Newburgh News*, 7 November 1895, 2; "Brief Notes," *Newburgh News*, 23 June 1896, 1; "Mr. McCullough's New Residence," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 14 September 1896, 2; "Brief Notes," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 22 April 1896, 1.
16. Liber 1347–465.
17. "Brief Notes," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 6 October 1905, 5.
18. "Local Review," *Newburgh Telegram*, 11 August 1906, 4; "New Building for Newburgh Carriage Co.," *Newburgh Daily News*, 11 September 1906, 10. The building was built for the "Fowler Bros." as a carriage repository.
19. Malcolm Parrott Weds," *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle*, 13 November 1913.
20. Liber 372–35.
21. *Portrait and Biographical Record of Orange County, New York Part 1*. 403.
22. "Peek into Newburgh's Past," *Newburgh News*, 24 May 1949, 4.
23. "J. M. Ormsby Installed as Lions' Leader," *Newburgh News*, 14 July 1927, 12.

24. "Columbus Trust Company Building," *Newburgh News, Newburgh Telegram*, August 1906.

25. "Review of the Week," *Sunday Newburgh Telegram*, 17 November 1901, 4. "Realty Changing Hands in Newburgh," *Newburgh Journal*, 21 May 1913, 1 lists 30 and 32 as owned by Semler, but claims the dwellings are "fitted for two families." 30 Lutheran Street, a three-story dwelling built after 1903, may be the property referred to, but 34 Lutheran is also possible. In "Obituary: Mrs. Mary A. Semeler," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 19 April 1910, 5, Semler's mother is said to have passed away in her home at 32 Lutheran, implying he allocated one of the flats for her.

26. "Review of the Week," *Sunday Newburgh Telegram*, 4 August 1901.

27. "Hymenal: Barnes—Cory," *Newburgh Daily Journal*, 16 November 1895, 1.