

American Rescue Plan Act Montgomery County New York

**ERIE CANAL GROCERY Lock 32 Exhibit at Historic Diefendorf Hall**

47 Main Street, Fort Plain, NY 13339

Friends of Fort Plain Incorporated

A 501(c)(3) community volunteer group, established 2008.

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Project title: Canal Grocery Lock 32 Exhibit at Historic Diefendorf Hall.

Website: <https://mohawkvalleyvillagesny.com>

Project Summary: Historic Diefendorf Hall is a planned community space serving as a Cultural Heritage Center for the Village of Fort Plain and surrounding communities. The installation of the façade of an original Erie Canal Lock Grocery, moved here from the NYS Museum, will attract heritage tourism and serve as a backdrop for community gatherings, presentations, workshops, and student programming. Providing such a public space and area attraction is important to our Region.

Description of our organization and how the requested project is aligned with our mission: After nearly 10 years, the community volunteer group continues to work for the preservation of the historic assets of the Village and Region as a means of **regional sustainability**. Friends of Fort Plain started work on this process by initiating a Cultural Resource Survey for the Village of Fort Plain. With guidance and funding from the Preservation League of NYS, Friends group assisted other local Villages in this undertaking resulting in area Historic District designations in several of the Mohawk Valley communities.

The construction of the Erie Canal and its influence on the development of the rural waterfront communities in the Mohawk Valley is one of our most important assets. The completion of the Canal was largely responsible for the expansion and present-day location of the Village of Fort Plain, and the importance of Diefendorf Hall serving as social and cultural center for the surrounding communities.

The Friends of Fort Plain envision Diefendorf Hall as a continuing point of interest and an introductory point to the immediate region attracting residents and visitors. The installation of an authentic Erie Canal Store façade moved to Diefendorf Hall from the NYS Museum collections will serve as a main exhibit. In addition, Diefendorf Hall houses an authentic replica of this Canal Store, which will give visitors a peek into how its proprietors lived and worked. The goal of renovating the building and installing the Canal Store façade is in keeping with the Friends' mission of preserving real property of historic significance in the Village of Fort Plain and the town of Minden and returning it to productive use to the community and the area.

Project Description: The project entails the installation of the façade of an original Erie Canal Store that stood at Lock 32 of the old Canal in Fort Plain during the late 19th century. The result will be a life-size exhibit in Diefendorf Hall depicting life at such an establishment. In the past four years the Friends of Fort Plain have worked with DHSES/FEMA flood recovery engineers and staff to carry out flood recovery repairs in the building after the catastrophic flooding event of 2013. Along with engineering consultants, the group worked to oversee the clean-up, monitor the stabilization of the foundation/basement area, and secure the envelope of the building. With the bracing of the west wall, the installation of the Canal Store façade is now possible. The two-level Canal Store porch areas will be rebuilt and serve along with the façade as the primary exhibit in the rehabilitated structure. An ADA-Compliant entrance will allow handicapped visitors to enjoy the exhibits as well. After years of dedicated work, our Friends group is the best group to implement the final stages of this undertaking. We expect to create a major point of interest in the region and a significant local history resource for the area, school children, and visitors.

Implementation Plan: Background:

The Fineour Erie Canal Store artifact was moved to Diefendorf Hall in May 2015. The transfer from the New York State Museum warehouse was documented in an approval letter dated March 4, 2014 from Robert Weible, NYS Museum Director. Funds designated for Canal Store transportation and preparation for installation were provided by the William G. Broughton Foundation with a grant of \$20,000 in 2014.

Pieces of the structure remained in storage at DH during the flood recovery repairs 2015 to 2021 and COVID pause. Repairs included foundation repairs, rebuilding back wall and foundation of back wall, reinforcing envelope of building, constructing bracing system on the interior west wall to strengthen brick wall, eliminate exterior brick bulge and provide a bracing system in preparation for interior reassembly of the Canal Store artifact.

**PLAN: BUILDING THE CANAL STORE EXHIBIT**

1. Bracing system on interior of west wall completed as part of flood recovery. See Engineering drawings.
2. Using architect's proposal and engineer's design drawings site prepared for framing of 2 level porch façade originating from Old Erie Canal Lock 32.
3. Building components on hand provided by **NYS Museum workshop**: Doors and windows requiring installation within the constructed framing. All measurements recorded in notebooks provided by NYS Museum and engineer's drawings

First level: 3 entry doorways, with double sidelites, 1 - 6 over 6 window, 1 main store entrance. 6 porch posts, encased and primed. 2 fireplace mantels. All measurements included.

Second level: 5 – 6 over 6 double hung windows, shutters, one main entry. 6 porch posts encased. Railing design remnants. All measurements included. **Anticipated completion December 2022.**

**The project addresses the goal of heritage tourism in Montgomery County** in the following ways:

The project location, Diefendorf Hall in the Village of Fort Plain, is located within a few steps of the Canalway Bike Trail. Cyclists who are looking for an historical site during a stopover in town can easily ride or walk to the building. In addition, the Hall is only three miles from the closest Thruway exit at Canajoharie, thus facilitating tourism by motorists. Both categories of visitors will be able to learn about a typical Erie Canal era grocery and supply store, as well as the many historical figures -- entertainers as well as political figures -- who visited or spoke at the Hall in its heyday, including Horace Greeley, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and P.T. Barnum. An existing exhibit at Diefendorf Hall consists of a unique replica of the Canal Store that stood at Lock 32 at the western edge of the Village. Installing the original façade of this store as an additional life-size exhibit will improve the visitor experience. The proximity of several other historical sites nearby, such as the Fort Plain Museum, Fort Klock, the Palatine Church, and others, will encourage overnight stays in the area. Lastly, the addition of an ADA-compliant entrance to the building will make Diefendorf Hall's exhibits accessible to all.

The expected result will be the Canal Store façade installed at Diefendorf Hall, related exhibits added to public assembly space, and the replica of the Canal Store installed in the main conference room. Completion of this primary exhibit will create a major point of interest and significant educational resource for school children, residents/visitors as well as public assembly space for organizations, workshops, hobbies, business meetings and social gatherings. We anticipate an increase in visitors to our local businesses, improved marketing efforts and increase in hospitality services for the Mohawk Valley Region.

Return of the Canal Store to the Village is a source of pride for many of the older life-long residents and the entire community. The Fineour Canal Store replica is of great interest to school children and plans to host more student groups will continue. The Otsquago Creek Study Station to be housed within Diefendorf Hall will serve as a base for the High School Environmental Study Team. Local businesses, professional organizations, civic groups, history groups have requested use of this space.

**Community Involvement:** Local residents, business owners, visitors, and friends from neighboring communities are very supportive of this project and make frequent visits to Diefendorf Hall. Prior to the 2013 flood, as a result of the Historic Resources Survey funded by a grant from Preserve NY and NY State Council on the Arts in 2010, the Friends group organized a series of Village architecture tours depicting the local architecture of a Planned Erie Canal Village. During the flood recovery period following the flood of 2013, the Hall was a construction site. When feasible, the community was invited to participate in special events in

the limited public space in celebration of holidays and to attend presentations and workshops. Volunteers also participated in clean-up of the building and created window displays and advertising. The Friends of Fort Plain also organized Canal Bike Path cleanup with local businesses and school groups, and hosted the crew of the Lois McClure and community upon several occasions during their stops at Lock 15. For several years prior to the current pandemic, fourth grade students and teachers have made visits to Diefendorf Hall on their springtime tour of the Village as part of their local history curriculum, and with a grant from the Council for the Arts/Saratoga Arts, local 4th grade classes created mosaics depicting the Erie Canal in Fort Plain, which are now on display at the Harry Hoag Elementary School. The Friends group also partnered with the Schoharie River Center, Fort Plain and Canajoharie school districts to sponsor fresh water field ecology programs, for which Diefendorf Hall was home base due to its proximity to the Otsquago Creek and the Mohawk River. Thus, as active members of the community, the Friends group and this project have become well-known and respected in the Village and the region as a whole. The installation of the facade of the Canal Store with its replica will constitute additional assets to attract heritage tourism to the Village and the region.

With the incorporation of a handicapped-accessible entrance along the newly rebuilt west wall sidewalk, audiences can easily enter Diefendorf Hall, feet away from the public sidewalk on Main Street and at ground level. An ADA-compliant restroom facility is at the same level of the entry area and a drinking fountain will be placed feet away. Our group already participates and sponsors activities for underserved audiences in our community and will continue in these efforts. A local group in a neighboring Day Program serve as caretakers for community flower planters and flower boxes, all of which we encourage and support. As Diefendorf Hall becomes more accessible, we plan to create more opportunities for sharing the space.

**Project sustainability and long-term maintenance plan:** Upon completion of the project, the Friends group will continue to maintain and operate the building. A partnership with the Fort Plain Museum Board of Directors and coordination with other community and area organizations is also under way in which the organizations work together to support each other's activities and projects. Annual foundation awards provide maintenance funds for the building. These funds will continue to maintain grant-funded improvements. The group will also continue to initiate fund raising opportunities and develop a plan to implement community programs while seeking additional volunteers to maintain this unique attraction.

**The project is consistent with the following local, county, regional and/ or other plans:**

DOS-Western Montgomery County Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, under revision since 2011-2012: The plan cites preservation, protection, and enhancement of historic structures and landscapes in western Montgomery County. Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council's 2014 Action Plan: Cites Community Reconstruction Program; Heritage Tourism, Path Through History. The Diefendorf Hall restoration project is also cited in the Mohawk Valley Regional Sustainability Program developed in 2013.

With assistance/coordination of Montgomery County Economic Development Office, a Regional Economic Development grant was awarded to the Friends group/Village of Fort Plain, Historic Diefendorf Hall Rehabilitation Project in 2018. This is an Environmental Protection Fund grant

in the amount total of \$484,947.00. Grant funds \$345,120.00 requiring a 20% matching funds of \$139,827.00. This grant includes interior restoration, framing, flooring, insulation, ceiling, doors windows, roof, masonry, back wall, façade improvements. It does not include installation of the Canal Store exhibit. Grant documents are on file at Montgomery County Economic Development Office.

The grant was prepared with assistance from the Montgomery County Economic Development Office. Current Contacts and visitors to Diefendorf Hall project: Andrew Santillo and Executive Director, Matt Ossenfort. Due to lengthy DHSES/FEMA flood recovery work, and 2-year COVID pause, group has not succeeded in accessing matching funds. A one-year grant extension request is under consideration, should funds become available.

**Key staff involved with the project:** The Friends of Fort Plain do not have any permanent paid staff. Board members work on a volunteer basis. Any paid workers are those under contract to the Friends group to complete specific tasks in connection with contracts to carry out restoration of the building.

The following members of the Board will share in the responsibility of monitoring progress of Canal Store installation: Immaculata Lieber, Ellen Zunon. Eileen Chambers, Town of Minden and Village of Fort Plain Historian, T. Marosek, former Board Member, Richard Clinton, previous clerk of the works for flood recovery construction, Advisor, Susan Thayer.

Estimated cost for Canal Store installation: \$35,000. ADA accessible entry at west wall, \$12,000. Interior stairs egress, \$8,000. Selected lighting fixtures, \$15,000. Budget total: \$70,000. This estimate is based on information provided several years ago. To be completed with separate contracts using Village of Fort Plain Procurement Policy guidelines.

**Total request: Estimated \$70,000.**

Attachments:

- Engineer's design drawings
- SHPO letter
- Lease agreement letter
- Procurement policy
- Note: Photo display available