



# Register of Very Special Places

A PROJECT OF TRADITIONAL ARTS IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

## DOCUMENT A SITE

Traditional Arts in Upstate New York [TAUNY] is pleased to invite you and members of your community to undertake several important steps that can contribute valuable information to future students of the history of your community. Your efforts can also lead to regional recognition of a place in your community that you consider “very special.” TAUNY’s ultimate goal is to create a centralized inventory or census or register of “cultural landmarks” in the region that both recognizes the significance of specific sites to local communities and, perhaps, might aid in advocacy efforts for preservation of the sites or continuation of their activities in the future. Many of the sites we have in mind would be overlooked by most historians, even architectural historians, as insignificant structures or of little historical importance. Examples as diverse as diners, Grange halls, country churches, barber shops, auto repair shops, even cemeteries, bridges and parks may be included. The purpose of our study is a little different from conventional historical preservation efforts. We are interested in the relationship of North Country people to the site and to its meaning to community life over time as much as we are in the details of its construction and style.

TAUNY’s criteria for selection to our Register include the following. It is up to community members who know the site well to suggest which are the most important of these criteria about your site. They are:

- a place for community gatherings
- a place that meets community’s social, spiritual, economic or entertainment needs
- a place where vital community events still take place
- a place that has served multiple generations over time
- a place where an important local historical event or movement occurred and is remembered
- a place that’s a source of or repository of local beliefs, customs or stories
- a place that’s a physical marker on the local landscape
- a place that’s a good example of a vernacular architectural form
- a place that’s a factor in community or regional identity
- a place that’s an example of the vanishing regional or American landscape

While the following outline of steps and questions may seem daunting at first to you, we at TAUNY want to assure you that they really need not be difficult. You do not have to be expert in any way—about architecture, about photography, about doing interviews, about local history research—to gather the information for this documentation. It will take some time, but you will produce an important result that should be well worth the effort..



We suggest you or someone else in the community chair the study but call upon others to help. This could be a local historical society's project for a few weeks or a high school or college teacher's independent study project for a student or two; it could be done by older 4-H club members or scouts looking for a merit badge project. And, remember, TAUNY is available to advise and help all through the process. This may turn out to be the first and only time that significant information has been collected about your site. Have fun with it!

BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE DOCUMENTATION PROCESS, WE URGE YOU TO CAREFULLY READ THROUGH THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THIS WEBSITE. IT SHOULD CLARIFY MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT DEFINITIONS, THE PROCESSES OF DOCUMENTATION, WHERE MATERIALS WILL BE PRESERVED, ETC. FEEL FREE TO CALL TAUNY FOR ANY ADDITIONAL HELP OR CLARIFICATIONS.

### Background Information

*Because forms restrict how you can prepare information, TAUNY asks that you type the information you submit on 8 1/2" x 11" white paper, with 1 inch margins and in no smaller than 12 point text. Please re-type the question and list them in the order below. We suggest you check off the boxes as you finish each part and review the checklist before you submit this documentation package.*

- 1  Name[s] of preparer[s] of this documentation
- 2  Date of this documentation
- 3  Contact information for preparer[s]
- 4  Official name of nominated site
- 5  Do local people refer to the site by any other name[s] or nickname[s]?
- 6  Exact location of the site [use 911 numbers and names]; if possible; compass directions, and nearby highway markers or obvious physical landmarks will also help]
- 7  Date [or approximate date] of original construction and of any major changes
- 8  Name [if known] of builder of original site and of any major changes
- 9  Name [if known] of original owner[s] of site
- 10  Name [if known] of other owners of site over time
- 11  Current owner[s] of the site

- 12  Contact information for owner[s]

### Overview

*Most of the following questions suggest buildings or clusters of buildings. Some nominated sites may not have the same criteria. If your site is an open space, a park, a street intersection or some other location that is not a physical structure or building, it still may be a Very Special Place. Describe with as much detail as possible here. You may want to discuss this with a TAUNY staff member before you proceed.*

- 13 Take a walk around your site and make a list of what could be photographed. Then shoot at least one roll of color film [or its equivalent in digital images]. See Tips for Documentation: Taking Architectural Photographs. Include with this documentation a minimum of the 7 following photographs:

- a wide, environmental shot, showing where site is in relation to its surroundings
- a front shot, showing one side
- a rear shot, showing the other side
- a front elevation shot
- an overall interior shot or two
- major elements of the building, especially that can tell us more about the building
- details such as materials and hardware
- copies or scans of historical photos of the site, including any that show activities

Submit one set of 4 x 6 prints of your selection of photographs and clear labels for each Or you can submit a CD with digital images and labels [preferably as jpegs at 200 resolution and 4" x 6"]. These will not be returned.

- 14 Create a rough drawing of a floor plan, showing the exterior shape of the building and the interior layout of spaces See Tips for Documentation: Measuring & Documenting Landmark Structures & Environment.

- Take measurements [need not be exact] of walls, windows, door frames and other significant architectural elements and label on drawing
- Label room[s] with their function—i.e., storage, bathroom, meeting room, etc.

- Provide a key for major building elements—doors, windows, etc.—if necessary
- 15 Create a rough drawing of an overview or site plan, which shows this place as part of its larger physical landscape. In other words, the site plan should describe the surroundings, including neighboring property.
- Draw outlines to scale of any structures on the site [again, need not be exact]
- Locate and identify major geographic features—trees, fences, outbuildings, boulders, neighboring structures, etc.
- Indicate a compass orientation of the property

### Physical Features

- 16 In at least 250 words—2 or 3 paragraphs—write a narrative description of the site [Please include as much information about the following as you can find. We want a picture in our minds of what this place looks like in words:
- description of the structure’s **exterior** [architectural style (if known), shape, size, type of construction, building materials, number of stories, type of foundation, framing, location, number and type of doors, windows, roofing material, etc.] Are there any outstanding or unusual features of the building’s exterior—signs, landscaping, etc.—that make it unique or reveal an interesting story about the place.?
- description of the structure’s **interior** [Please treat each floor or story of the building separately, usually starting with the first floor and working up.] Describe how the space is arranged, the location of stairways and other major interior features, flooring materials and finishes, wall materials and finishes, built-in features, decorative features, etc. Are there any outstanding or unusual features of the building’s interior that make it unique or reveal an interesting story about the place.?
- description of any significant architectural changes in the history of this place—additions, deletions, etc. What evidence do you have of such changes? You can either make a list of alterations over time or describe alterations under the relevant category.

If your site is an open space, a park, a street intersection or some other location that is not a physical structure or building, for this section, describe with as much detail as possible. You may want to discuss this with the TAUNY RVSP Coordinator before you proceed.

Remember, the above guidelines are only that, guidelines. Use your judgment to focus on what is most relevant. Review what you have written to be certain it paints a clear picture.

### Histories

- 17 According to the Library of Congress: “Historians use a wide variety of sources to answer questions about the past. In their research, history scholars use both *primary sources* and *secondary sources*. Primary sources are actual records that have survived from the past, such as letters, photographs, articles of clothing. Secondary sources are accounts of the past created by people writing about events sometime after they happened. For example, a history textbook is a *secondary source*. Someone wrote most of the textbook long after historical events took place. The textbook may also include some *primary sources*, such as direct quotes from people living in the past or excerpts from historical documents. People living in the past left many clues about their lives. These clues include both primary and secondary sources in the form of books, personal papers, government documents, letters, oral accounts, diaries, maps, photographs, reports, novels and short stories, artifacts, coins, stamps, and many other things. Historians call all of these clues together the *historical record*.”
- Finding documents, photographs and artifacts in local public or private collections can be very helpful in establishing the uses and values that sites have in communities over time. Using them to support your own findings and the memories and observations of oral narrators is encouraged for RVSP. See [Tips for Documentation: Finding Local Documents & Resources to Consult](#) and [Links to Websites Relevant to the Register of Very Special Places](#). Copies of photographs, photocopies or scans of such primary materials can be important parts of your documentation.

BE CERTAIN TO HAVE TAUNY ARCHIVES RELEASE FORMS SIGNED BY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS OR AUTHORIZED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS TO OF ALL OF THESE ITEMS. SEE TIPS FOR DOCUMENTATION: RELEASE FORM.

- 18 While submitting copies of recorded interviews of community members about your nominated place is optional, TAUNY strongly encourages that you undertake interviews of several community members to verify facts and to solicit opinions about the special values of the place to your community over time. If you do, we recommend that you follow guidelines for interviews we have created for RVSP and that you record them with good audio or video equipment. See [Tips for Documentation: Fieldwork Interviewing Guide](#) and [Tips for Documentation Recording Interviews 101](#). For a guide to asking appropriate and helpful questions for RVSP, see [Tips for Documentation: A Place-Base Questionnaire](#). An alternative to recording is to take very good and complete written notes of interviews, including direct quotes from the informant whenever possible. We can advise on interviewing, if you wish.

We encourage you to conduct interviews with present and past site owners, present and

past users of the site and other community members who can shed light on the site's history, uses and values to the community.

If you do record, use standard audio cassettes, CD-R's, mini-cassettes or video tapes. Do not use mini-cassette tapes, like those used in telephone answering machines. Transcriptions of the interviews from the recorded format are especially helpful.

If you do submit copies of recorded interviews or transcriptions with this documentation, label them clearly and refer to them in written narratives described elsewhere in these questions. They will not be returned.

**BE CERTAIN TO HAVE TAUNY ARCHIVES RELEASE FORMS SIGNED BY INTERVIEW NARRATORS. SEE TIPS FOR DOCUMENTATION: RELEASE FORM.**

### Uses

- 19  In 2 or 3 paragraphs, write a description of the major use[s] of this site over its history. Keep in mind we are especially interested in its uses today and recently. To the extent possible, relate the major details of who, what, where, when and why of these uses. In particular, explain significant changes in usage that have occurred over time.

### Values

- 20  In paragraphs, write a description of the special value[s] that your site has to your community. Begin with a description of the community or segment of the community--religious, ethnic, occupational, recreational, social, gender, age, family, or geographic--for which it is especially important. Then cite examples from the community--local records, newspaper stories, quotations from local residents, etc-- to demonstrate why the site is important, especially today.

The following are important criteria for TAUNY's Register of Very Special Places. In your description for this section, indicate which of the following apply to your site and, briefly, tell why:

- place for community gatherings
- place meets community's social, spiritual, economic or entertainment needs
- place where vital community events still take place
- place that has served multiple generations over time

- place where an important local historical event or movement occurred and is remembered
- place is source of or repository of local beliefs, customs, or stories
- place is a physical marker on the local landscape
- place is good example of a vernacular architectural form
- place is a factor in community or regional identity
- place is example of vanishing regional or American landscape

**Sources of Information**

21 List specific sources of information you used to prepare this documentation and their locations.

- documents in local collections [business records, diaries, letters, etc.]
- published materials [books, newspaper or magazine articles, etc.]
- photographs in local collections [family, business or local historians or historical societies]
- recorded interviews [audio or video]
- other

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature[s] of preparer[s] \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you very much for taking time to document your place for the Register of Very Special Places. We hope this has been a pleasant and informative process for you. You have gathered*



*information that will be invaluable to TAUNY in making a determination for recognition on our Register of Very Special Places. Even more important, you and your friends have compiled resources that should become a part of the permanent record of your community's history*

<http://www.tauny.org> <mailto:info@tauny.org>

*Please deposit a copy of this report with your local town or village historian, local historical society or museum and/or your local public library.*

*The RVSP Advisory Committee meets quarterly with the RVSP Coordinator to make final determinations. The TAUNY Board of Directors will act upon their recommendations soon thereafter. If we have questions, we will contact you about clarifications or additional information*

*If you have questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

Please mail your completed information, including supplementary materials, to:

**RVSP Coordinator**  
at address below