



## HOWLAND STONE STORE MUSEUM

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### **Case Statement**

In 1837 Slocum Howland erected the little cobblestone building in Sherwood for his mercantile business. He took in his son William as partner in 1845 and when Slocum died in 1881, William built the wooden building just north of the cobblestone to house the enterprise. The smaller original structure then became a storage facility. When William's daughter Isabel Howland died in 1942 ownership of the cobblestone devolved to Alice and Charles Koon, who later kept a small library there and a museum collection upstairs.

At her death Mrs. Koon deeded the building to the Cayuga Museum in Auburn, provided that it be kept as the Isabel Howland Museum. From about 1967, and for a short time only, the Museum maintained the property as directed but in 1987 proposed to sell it. Concerned neighbors in Sherwood were able to obtain a provisional charter and acquire the cobblestone as Friends of the Stone Store in 1991. In 1996 they succeeded in chartering the structure as the Howland Stone Store Museum (HSSM), a 501(c) 3 entity. Heritage New York subsequently identified the store in 2004 as a confirmed site on the Underground Railroad Heritage Trail.

The museum Board sponsors an array of history presentations pertinent to Sherwood's role in local and wider events. Constrained by limited quarters, the volunteers maintain and display with pride their collection. The Board counts a sizeable number of members and supporters and since 1997 has successfully written over \$100,000 in grants.

### **Vision Statement**

Share the historic contributions of Sherwood's past to inspire current and future generations.

### **Mission Statement**

The Howland Stone Store Museum promotes an interest in, and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Southern Cayuga County, with particular interest in Sherwood and its environs, for the education and enjoyment of the public. To accomplish its purposes, the organization shall preserve and maintain (an) historic site(s) and structure(s), preserve and make available for study objects of material culture, and sponsor and encourage programs and exhibitions reflecting the scope of its nationally significant collections related to abolition, women's rights, and education.

## Place in Perspective

In 2006 the Preservation League of New York State selected Sherwood—“one of the state’s most historically significant hamlets”—as one of its Seven-to-Save designees. The League recognized Slocum Howland and his wife Hannah Talcott and daughter Emily as activist leaders for a span of more than seventy years, people of import who “distinguished Sherwood as a hotbed of local, state and national social reform movements including Abolitionism, Women’s Rights and Temperance.”

The Sherwood Equal Rights Historic District comprises twenty-nine properties in the near vicinity of the hamlet having important connection to abolition efforts, including Underground Railroad sites, women’s suffrage and early education efforts. In 2008 the Sherwood Equal Rights Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

## Opendore

One of the prominent properties of the District is the home known as Opendore. Originally built in 1837, it became the residence of William Howland in 1851. He married Hannah Letchworth in 1853 and their daughter Isabel was born in 1859. In 1888 William made some improvements and expanded the house. In 1891 Hannah organized the Sherwood Equal Rights Association with her husband William and daughter Isabel as founding members. Their home became a virtual community center, a place for meetings and rallies and socializing. When Isabel inherited the property she made major renovations in 1910, further expanding the original footprint, and further opening herself and her home to the community. Hence, Opendore.

After Isabel’s death the graceful home passed through a series of ownerships and tenants until 1970. A few years later Opendore entered a period of wanton neglect that lasted more than thirty years. In 2008 Cayuga County acquired the property for taxes and transferred title to the Howland Stone Store Museum.

“Howland’s Revival Opendore...gets boost toward restoration”—*Post Standard*, Syracuse, NY, Jan. 12, 2012

The once-vibrant structure is now a derelict, sagging and pilfered. It is in danger of total loss and its demise would be a blow to the Historic District. But the HSSM, seeing the chance to advance its mission in spite of odds, won a \$400,000 matching grant from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund. Its specific goal is the stabilization and recovery of the north wing and library portion of the building. This preservation will anchor a new structure to include exhibition space and storage capacity, public facilities, a public gathering space and climate-controlled areas. Formal gardens will be restored and outdoor community space made available.

Hannah and Isabel were ardent fighters, with sister-in-law and aunt Emily Howland, in the equal rights issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In particular, they are associated with the struggle for women’s suffrage. The Howland Stone Store Museum is possessor of a number of original posters proclaiming women’s rights and demanding equal consideration. Appraised as one of

the finest collections in the country, these artifacts insist upon a proper home for safekeeping, appropriate care and display.

## **The Effort**

The HSSM volunteers are engaged in a campaign to match the state grant, to fund an additional \$100,000 in furnishing the new wing and another \$100,000 to fund operations for the first three to five years. The members see the opportunity to save a major contributing property to the Equal Rights Historic District. At the same time, Opendore will be the means to tell the story of Sherwood's people and their actions on the local, state and national stages. It can provide linkages to more familiar characters and locations, such as Tubman and Seward, Seneca Falls and Rochester. It will testify to the importance of preservation, expand programming opportunities and actively figure in promotion of tourism.

The Board has adopted a Sustainability Working Plan and a budget. It is an ambitious undertaking that will not end with the first round of matches. A long-term endowment is part of the future.

But also part of the future is the preservation and celebration of the past. The success of this effort, the conservation of this critical link in the elements of our local and state and national heritage, is dependent upon the continued support of our friends and volunteers, as well as the cultivation of a new family of friends who are convinced of the importance of carrying yesterday into tomorrow.