

CASE STUDY: **Landmark Place in Kingston, NY** **Old Poorhouse Turned Into New Apartments for Seniors**

By Mark Fogarty

Charles Dickens' character Scrooge defined British attitudes towards housing the poor in the 19th century with a dismissive "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" The United States had its share of these gloomy, well, Dickensian workhouses also. In Kingston, NY, an "almshouse" functioned until 1947, with residents called "inmates" doing farmwork on its large estate. In recent years, though, the Kingston Alms House has been transformed into modern housing.

To get an idea of how overcrowded and unpleasant almshouses could be, historic consultant Cindy Hamilton of Heritage Consulting Group says this one in Kingston had 200 residents, compared to only 34 apartments in the refinished building, now called Landmark Place West. A new construction, encompassing 32 apartments, is called Landmark Place East. All apartments are for seniors aged 55 and over and all are affordable to residents at 60 percent and below area median income (AMI).

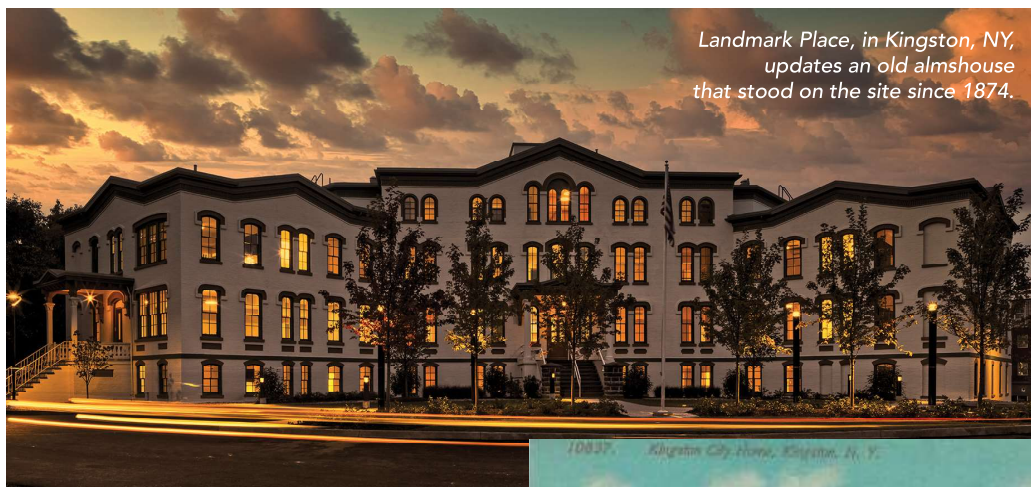
Hamilton says New York state had almshouses dating back to the 17th century, during Dutch Colonial times. She calls the workhouses "bleak, dark, crowded, unpleasant. But in the 19th century, there was a new era of progressive reform.

"And that led to the formation of a new institution, built in 1874, and designed to provide better relief to the poor."

These workhouses were designed with ample grounds, and usually in more remote areas. They believed in having ample ground for the enjoyment of the patients, but also for work.

"A lot of the reformers believed work was important so on this site they had a lot of farm buildings, and they were farming the land," says Hamilton.

"The original building was built by the city of Kingston. They had an Alms House Commission, which reflects on their effort to care for the poor and provide improved housing and limited medical care."



The style of the 1874 building was Italianate. "It worked well for an almshouse because of its tall windows, which allow for a lot of light and air. That was important."

After 1947, "it was county offices and that sort of a thing. Today it has 14 acres in total, with five buildings (the main house, a laundry house, a barn, a cottage and a brick office building)."



RUPCO Is the Developer

The new Landmark Place has been developed and is operated by RUPCO, which is based in Kingston and does new construction and historic rehabs in the Hudson Valley area of New York. The firm, 40 years old, is a non-profit with a mission to create homes, support people and improve communities. RUPCO manages a rental portfolio of 770 homes, implements program services that support families, seniors, homeless and special needs populations, manages 2,000 HCP vouchers in Ulster and Greene Counties and runs homeownership programs that help people buy and stay in homes.

Kevin O'Connor, chief executive officer at RUPCO,

notes that by serving the needs of low-income and formerly homeless seniors, Landmark Place lines up with the original intention of the city fathers of Kingston in housing vulnerable populations back in the 1870s.

He notes that the architect of the original almshouse, Jay Wood, also built one across the Hudson River in Poughkeepsie, with a nearly identical design. That structure also has been renovated for senior housing.

O'Connor says his firm is no stranger to historic rehabs and the complications they can bring. The first one he did, at the Kirkland Hotel in Kingston, used 17 funding sources! The total development cost at Landmark Place came to about \$25 million.

In addition to providing new housing, O'Connor says this kind of historic rehab is also notable for the energy efficiencies it allows.

COVID complicated the supply issues the building faced, and adding a whole new building on the site was also a complicating factor, he remembers.

O'Connor notes that supportive services for the formerly homeless mean there are personnel at the site 24/7, including health and behavioral specialists and a live-in superintendent.

The Governor Takes Note

This development was considered so noteworthy that New York Governor Kathy Hochul announced its completion and detailed its capital stack:

"Financing for Landmark Place included \$2.4 million in permanent tax-exempt bonds, Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits that generated \$8.5 million in equity and \$9.5 million in subsidy from New York State Homes and Community Renewal.

"The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation approved Federal and State Historic Tax Credits that generated \$1.5 million in equity. The New York State Federal Home Loan Bank awarded a \$1.3 million grant and TD Bank provided a \$125,000 grant. Additional financing partners include the National Equity Fund."

The governor noted residents "have access to rental subsidies and an array of onsite services funded through the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative and administered by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

"Services include self-advocacy support, medication management and training by an onsite Licensed Practical Nurse, daily living skills training, skill development support and socialization activities," the Governor noted.

Residential amenities include a 24/7 front desk staff,

onsite laundry, onsite superintendent, garden space, proximity to mass transportation routes and in-house transportation with drivers to assist in transporting residents to local service points for medical and benefit services.

Hamilton notes, "Building a brand-new building to the rear was the key to making this project work. The Italianate-style building was repainted, with new windows to match the historic ones. The interior has refinished or new wood floors, new kitchens and bathrooms. There are nice units and a community room."

Architect Scott Dutton notes that one of the big challenges for his firm in the original building was that "most of the extant features had been altered in an unsympathetic way over the years after it ceased to be an almshouse." It was occupied by the local county government for a variety of offices, for instance the health department was in there, dropped ceilings were put in, moldings were altered and there wasn't a lot left to work with.

The National Park Service and the state historic preservation department "hung on with more fervor to what is existing. Reprogramming it to serve the needs of the less unfortunate now is a little different than it was 150 years ago. We had to alter room configurations to some extent."

The exterior of the building was rather easy to restore, Dutton says. It involved repointing brick and repainting. "But on the interior, it wasn't easy to come up with a configuration that preserved the original openings in the common corridor. But we managed it."

Making a New Entrance

Another challenge was the main floor, which is up quite a few steps "so we had to come up with a solution for accessibility, a small vestibule addition on the lower-level side of the building. That was a little tricky to develop. The main ceremonial entrance, there was no way to make that accessible."

Dutton was also the architect of the new building on the site. He notes the National Park Service, which administers the Federal Historic Tax Credit program, "encourages you not to create a false sense of history, a false narrative, and create a mini-me. They talk about having compatible scales and materials.

"We did a careful analysis of the site in three dimensions and started by mapping the building and situating the building on the site, so it sat at a much lower elevation. You could argue it was subservient to the original building in its scale and massing. But the new building is very much a modern building. It tells the story of the original campus as part of history and as an extension of the property." **TCA**