

**Where Age Is an Asset**

Doris Herzig Newsday Home Writer

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*Down Roslyn's Main Street, the past is more than a memory. Page 4A.*

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**THE COVER.** Photo by Ken Spence. Roslyn is the only village in Nassau County with its historic section still intact, and on its Main Street is the Roger Gerrys' home, built in the 1830s and restored as part of the village's drive to preserve the past. Beginning on Page 4A, Newsday Home Writer Doris Herzig describes the restorations included in a house tour tomorrow.

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The once-dilapidated Warren Wilkey house, built in the French Second Empire style, has been restored and is for sale.

# Where Age Is an Asset

By Doris Herzig  
Newsday Home Writer

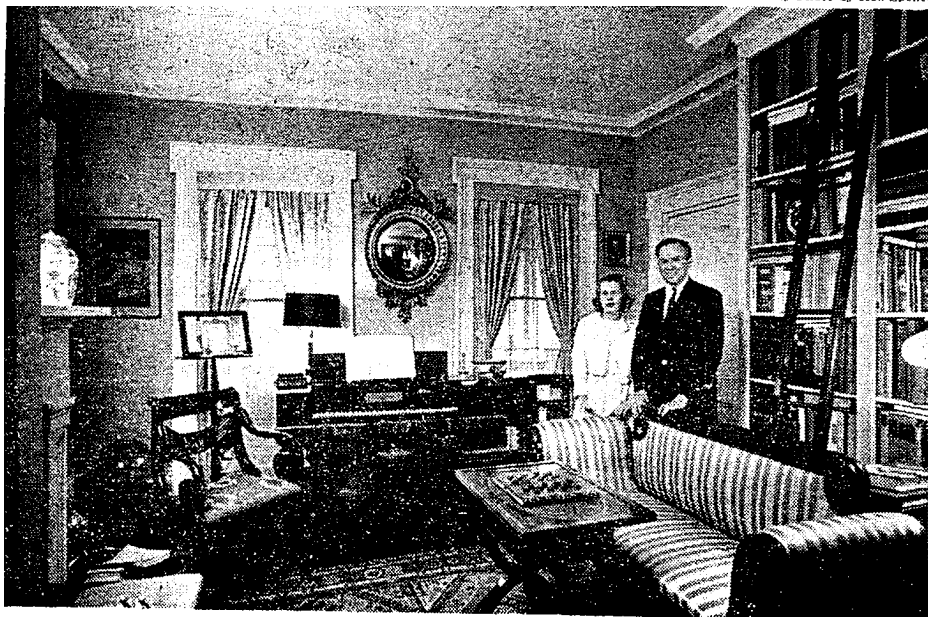
A few days after she came back from Japan, Peggy Gerry was on a bus when she saw a bulldozer about to demolish an 18th Century house on Old Northern Boulevard in Roslyn.

She got off the bus and managed to hold off the bulldozer—but only for two hours. Except for the two fireplace mantels she has in her garage, the house is gone.

Since that day in 1959, however, many another old house in Roslyn has been saved and authentically restored through the efforts of a group of citizens spearheaded by Dr. Roger Gerry and his wife. One result is obvious to anyone who drives along Main Street with its quaint, tree-shaded homes looking as fresh as when they were first built more than 100 years ago.

But Roslyn, the only village in Nassau County with its historic section still virtually intact and inhabited, is not just a lesson for history and architecture buffs, not just a charming retreat from the pressures and drabness of a mechanized age. By turning back the clock, the village has, for the time being, averted the fate of many other old communities. By making its age an asset rather than a drawback, it has prevented the kind of deterioration that often results in slums.

The clock has been turned back—not stopped—and is still ticking ominously. There are, for example, plans for a nearby industrial park that could revive road-widening plans scotched more than 10 years ago. On the other hand, the village's charm and serenity promise to influence North Hempstead's urban renewal program for Roslyn Heights.



The Greek Revival home of the Gerrys will be included on the tour.

*“... in a world that is increasingly dull . . .  
I don't think people should  
have to live in such surroundings.”*

Urban Renewal director Hector Gayle said that this area would be remodeled to "take on the identity of the entire Roslyn area. We're not building any high-rise structures, and we're going to have a lot of trees."

In addition, he said, the Long Island Railroad station, dating from 1882 and in the renewal area, would be moved and kept in use. The preservation and restoration program in Roslyn "gives stability to the entire community."

To Gerry, an oral surgeon, "it was obvious that Roslyn was going downhill," as far back as 1956, when, as a captain in the U.S. Navy, he was assigned to Japan. Soon after the Gerrys' return in 1959, they learned that Nassau County was planning to condemn land on both sides of Roslyn Road for road-widening. "We were destined to become a big traffic circle," he said.

This threat aroused the community to the need for proving its unique historic value and resulted in the formation, first, of the Roslyn Landmark Society and, more recently, the Roslyn Preservation Corp. Gerry, a village trustee, is president of both.

The society was instrumental in having Main Street (Roslyn Road) from its intersection with East Broadway to the clock tower at Old Northern Boulevard declared an historic district by Nassau County. A larger area, including East Broadway, has been designated a special historic district by the village.

While the designations have no legal force, they helped put a halt to road-widening plans that would have demolished the heart of a village founded in 1650. "The period of 1800 to 1850 was the period of its greatest growth and the biggest survival is of that period," Gerry said one recent evening on the porch of his antiques-filled Greek Revival home at 105 Main St. The house, built in the 1830s, will be included in the Landmark Society's 12th annual house tour tomorrow from 10 AM to 4 PM. The tour is open only to members, but anyone can join the society on the day of the tour at a booth at 1326 Old Northern Blvd.

"Roslyn is a complete collection of American vernacular architecture,"

Gerry said, explaining that most of the old houses were built by local carpenters for merchants and artisans. "It was a prosperous little village," his wife added. "... a flourishing port in 1845, shipping wheat, spirits, paper and lumber to the New York market."

Thanks largely to the Gerrys, several of the middle-class houses have not only been rescued, but many also serve once again as private homes. When the Leonard Blums bought their house at 148 Main St. in 1964, the Gerrys recommended Gerald R. W. Watland, an architect specializing in historic restoration, and Mrs. Gerry even masterminded the selection of appropriate antiques to furnish it.

The Village Hall, which belongs to the Bryant Library and had been rented out for meetings, had previously been restored and furnished under the guidance of the Landmark Society, with the physical help of about 40 volunteers. Roslyn village paid for the restoration.

Since the formation of the nonprofit Roslyn Preservation Corp. in 1966, the stockholders have established a revolving fund for the acquisition of early derelict buildings. First, an attempt is made to find a buyer who will accept covenants in the deed giving the corporation control over the restoration. If no buyer is found and funds are available, the corporation restores the house and then tries to sell it. In addition to Watland, two other architects, Guy Ladd Frost and Daniel M. C. Hopping, are consulted for different projects.

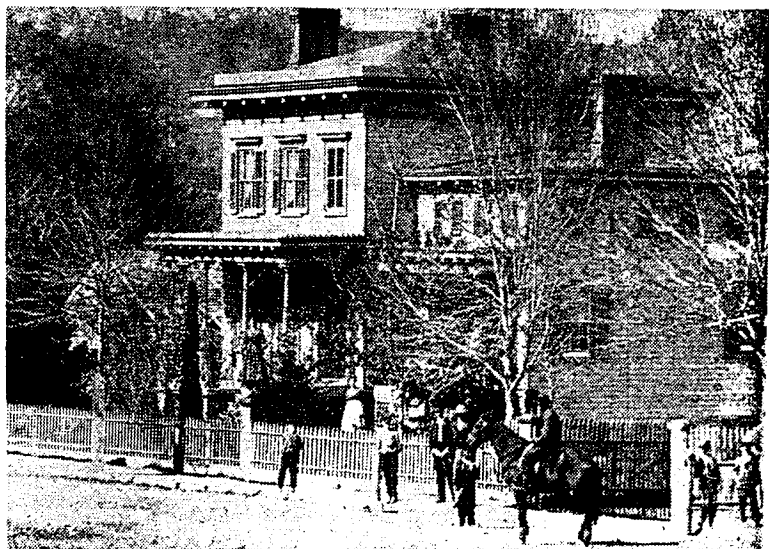
To be shown on the tour tomorrow is the Willet Titus house, named after the merchant who built it in 1853, which was about to be demolished to make way for a parking lot when the corporation bought it in 1969. It has been sold for use as a sculpture gallery, studio and residence. With the restoration—paid for by the new owner, William Friedle—almost completed, it looks much as it did in an 1870 photograph.

Also on the tour is the Warren Wilkey house, dating from 1864. It had been used as a rooming house and divided into apartments before it was boarded up, vandalized and damaged by fire and landslides. The corporation has restored it and is looking for a buyer. The asking price is \$80,000.

In all, the society is interested in about 100 structures, the latest of which is the Trinity Church, designed by Stanford White and built in



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1906. Several are in Roslyn Harbor beyond the designated historic districts.

Not the least of the benefits to the community, Gerry said, is that "people today intimately use the names of tinsmiths and blacksmiths and cabinet-makers who died 100 years ago." He himself always refers to the Village Hall as the William Valentine house.

"I can remember when Hempstead was a beautiful place," said the 56-year-old Gerry. "I can remember when Flushing was a beautiful place. We are living in a world that is increasingly dull and I don't think people should have to live in such surroundings." He feels that a number of other Long Island communities, especially Northport and Port Jefferson, could benefit from Roslyn's example. /■