Keeseville features an impressive collection of historic commercial buildings that line the western side of Front Street. The section to the north, abutting the Colonial Revival public library, was known as the Kingsland Block. This stretch is a particularly intact example of the type of downtown architecture prevalent in thriving communities during the second half of the 19th century. The buildings are styled using Italianate elements such as brackets along both cornice lines, and hooded windows capped by a flattened arch. Pilasters designed to resemble porch posts flank the doorways and large display windows.

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The Italianate style which lent itself so well to the commercial architecture just viewed was a popular choice for residences from about 1850-1880. A style that originated in the Picturesque movement, Italianate houses were more free form than their Greek Revival and Federal predecessors. Though most were simple blocks capped by a hipped roof, variations were common. Facades could be asymmetrical, featuring porches, towers, and bay windows. Doors and windows were highlighted by heavily detailed hoods or frames, and often shaped in a full arch. Cornice lines, both along the main structure as well as the porch, provided another opportunity for embellishment. Brackets, often paired, as well as supports were used to achieve this.

Architecture of the Champlain Valley

Keeseville
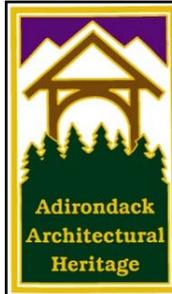
For more information about Keeseville history visit:
Anderson Falls Heritage Society
Located on the second floor of the Civic Center.

Open research hours are:
1st and 3rd Wed. of each month 1:00-5:30
2nd and 4th Wed. of each month 1:00-3:00

For appointments please call:
Roby Scott 834-7342
Betty Brelia 834-7138

The village of Keeseville, straddling the Ausable River, was settled in 1808. By mid-century it was prospering as an industrial and commercial center and was home to the Keeseville Manufacturing Company, the E. and J.D. Kingsland Company, and the Eagle Nail Factory, all early manufacturing concerns. A visitor in 1860 described it as a bustling Adirondack hamlet containing "seven churches, the Keeseville Academy, two extensive rolling mills, three nail factories, a machine shop, ax and edge tool factory, a cupola furnace, a planning mill, two grist mills, and a nail keg factory." In addition, by 1864, R. Prescott & Sons employed over one hundred persons in making furniture, architectural components, homes, and bridges.

As these industries flourished along both sides of the river, so too did the village's commercial centers along Main and Front streets. Stores, stables, churches, hotels, theaters, banks, doctor's and lawyer's offices, and other establishments sprang up. The residential areas surrounding the commercial and industrial center of the village include the elegant homes of manufacturers and merchants, along with more modest dwellings of clerks, laborers, and tradesmen.

As with other industrial based communities in the region, Keeseville eventually experienced a steep decline in its local industries and its last enterprise, R. Prescott & Sons, closed in 1965. Exacerbating the already declining economic conditions in the village was the construction of the Adirondack Northway in 1967. After the completion of the Northway, most traffic bypassed the village and its role as a crossroads community faded. What remains today is a remnant of a more affluent era, preserved in a wonderful array of 19th century buildings and bridges. The historic and architectural significance of Keeseville's structures is recognized by the listing of 125 structures on the National Register of Historic Places.

Keeseville has the distinction of having three historic and unique bridges within the confines of the village. The "Swing Bridge" is a pedestrian suspension bridge constructed in 1888 by the Berlin Iron Bridge Company of Berlin, Connecticut. To the south is the Upper Bridge (1878) a prefabricated metal truss bridge, and to the north is the Stone Arch Bridge built in 1842. All three bridges replaced earlier structures, often made of wood. They are also all designated as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.
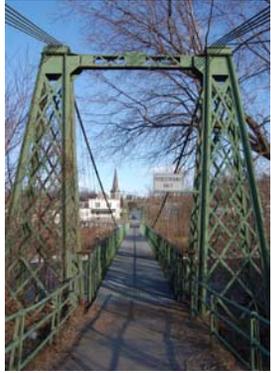
This Greek Revival house on Liberty Street was built by a descendant of the Kingsland family around 1850 and embodies a number of characteristics that define the style. The full return on the cornice line of the center and side gables emphasizes the temple like pediment. Flanking twin porches, supported by ionic columns and pilasters, give the house a symmetrical façade common to classical design.

Cornice
An ornamental molding, usually of wood or plaster, running round the walls of a room just below the ceiling. The exterior trim of a structure at the meeting of the roof and wall; usually consists of bed molding, soffit, fascia, and crown molding.

Though Keeseville is rich with high style architecture in the houses of factory and mill owners, a large number of vernacular homes are present as well. These simpler structures would have been occupied by workers employed at the many industrial sites. They often are gable front, two stories and feature simple architectural detailing. Their designs come from local building tradition and style interpretation as opposed to the plan of a professional designer.

This site was where the former Baptist Church, the grey wood frame building across the street to the south, was originally located. It was bought by a French Canadian Catholic congregation in the 1840's who eventually moved it to make way for the impressive stone church that stands on the site now. Saint John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church was built in 1901 in the Romanesque style using locally quarried granite. The twin 125 foot steeples and imposing façade make it a local landmark and represents the prosperity of the Catholic congregation at the time.

District School No. 8, built circa 1850, is the oldest school in Keeseville. Simple in design and form, this utilitarian building is typical of public schools of the time, though larger than most; it could accommodate several dozen students. The building is now used by the village as a recreation center.

The Silas Arnold House, 1820, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Greek Revival design is the work of Seneca Perry who, working with son Isaac, built several Keeseville residences including the two across the street. The pair were well known for their construction of spiral staircases. Isaac went on to gain recognition as the architect for many of New York State's armories.

A surviving example of the industrial history of Keeseville is a complex of buildings dating to the 1840s and 50s. It was here that the Eagle Horse Nail Company began, led by Daniel Dodge and his patented horse nail machine which produced 150 pounds of nails daily. Company headquarters and Dodge's workshop were housed in the three story Greek Revival building near the road, while production took place in the mill along the river. This site was occupied by a variety of businesses following the closure of the nail factory including R. Prescott and Sons, Keeseville National Bank, and two delis, and will soon be the new home of AARCH.

The stone building up the hill was originally the shipping office for the nail factory. It was here that nails were sorted and packed into 25 pound pine boxes and sent to distributors. In 1903 this became home to the Ausable Valley Grange, one of only a handful in the Adirondacks that is still functioning.