



Esperanza: A House Built on Hope

The 1838 Keuka Lake mansion that lived a dozen lives — and still watches over the water

Penny Carlton • February 20, 2026

There are places around Keuka Lake that feel older than the calendar allows — places that seem to remember more than the people who pass through them.

High above the west branch of the lake, just outside Penn Yan in the Town of Jerusalem, stands one of those places.

The white columns rise first through the trees...
Then the bluff...
Then the lake beyond it.

And suddenly you're looking at Esperanza — a mansion built not simply as a home, but as a statement.

A Wedding Gift Made of Stone (1838)

On July 3, 1838, Virginian landowner John Nicholas Rose completed construction on what would become one of the Finger Lakes' most remarkable homes. Rose had purchased more than 1,000 acres in Yates County in 1823, and the mansion was built as a wedding gift for his bride.

He named it Esperanza — derived from the Latin word for hope.

Hope, however, was not built lightly.

The house was constructed with 27-inch-thick stone walls, massive enough to endure nearly two centuries of harsh winters and lake winds. Its towering two-story Ionic columns were formed by encasing entire tree trunks in brick and covering them in stucco — a grand Southern plantation style transplanted to the hills of the Finger Lakes.

Even today, it feels more like a Southern estate misplaced in upstate New York than a typical 1800s farm residence.

Hidden inside were practical details of a working estate: large hearth ovens (two of them concealed), servant spaces, and expansive rooms designed for entertaining. Labor for construction was likely brought north from the South — another reminder of how different the world of 1838 truly was.

The Rose Years to the Grape Era

The Rose family lived at Esperanza from 1838 to 1870, presiding over the property during the early agricultural and settlement years around Keuka Lake.

In 1873, the estate passed to Clinton Snow, a noted grape culture expert — placing Esperanza directly into the early story of Finger Lakes wine. By then, vineyards were beginning to reshape the local economy, and the mansion became tied to the agricultural identity that still defines the region today.

Later, in 1903, New York City financier Wendel T. Bush purchased the estate. During his ownership, suffrage meetings were reportedly held within its walls — meaning the house witnessed not just local history, but national social change.

From Mansion to County Home (1922–1948)

In 1922, Esperanza’s life changed dramatically.

The grand private estate became the Yates County Home, serving the community for over 25 years. Instead of private gatherings and lakeview parties, the halls now housed residents in need of care and shelter.

For a building built as a symbol of prosperity, this era gave it something deeper – purpose.

Years of Change – and Near Loss

After 1948, the mansion passed through many hands and identities:

- 1967–1979: Betty Bader planned an art gallery
- 1979: Reborn as Chateau Esperanza Winery
- A period of neglect and vandalism in the 1950s–60s nearly destroyed it

Like many historic structures, it came painfully close to disappearing. Windows were broken. Rooms were stripped. Time began to win.

But Esperanza proved stubborn.

Restoration and Revival

In 1995, the mansion earned placement on the National Register of Historic Places – formal recognition of what locals had long understood: this wasn’t just another lake house.

It was a survivor.

In the early 2000s, the Wegman family undertook a significant restoration, breathing new life into the aging structure and transforming it into a banquet facility and inn. Later owners continued the careful preservation, maintaining it as a hotel, restaurant, and wedding venue while honoring its layered past.

Today, the 19-room Greek Revival mansion is known as The Mansion of Keuka Lake and offers nearly 6,000 square feet of space overlooking the bluff. Weddings, dinners, celebrations, and quiet overnight stays unfold inside rooms that have witnessed nearly two centuries of change.

Esperanza carries more than documented history.

Local oral tradition suggests it may have served as a station on the Underground Railroad, likely along routes connecting Bath, Penn Yan, and Naples.

And then there are the stories everyone whispers about:

The Lady in White – seen along the halls and staircases, appearing and disappearing as quietly as lake fog.

Whether folklore or memory, places this old tend to collect both.

A House That Refuses to Be Just One Thing

- Private estate.
- Agricultural landmark.
- County home.
- Winery.
- Gallery.
- Hotel.

Esperanza has been all of them – and somehow remains itself.

Some buildings hold history.

Others participate in it.

This one keeps reinventing its purpose while keeping its name:

Hope.

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