

ABANDONED: The Structures

The story behind the pictures

I have always been drawn to abandoned houses. I think it is the mystery. They are like a novel missing the last chapter; where we find out what happened to the characters. Why are they left? Who lived there? What memories are etched into the soul of the structure? What hopes are also abandoned? Why doesn't anyone claim these structures? Why do they wait, season after season, until they finally crumble back into the earth?

I began painting abandoned houses in 2011. I often return to the same houses each season to find changes as they slowly transition back to the earth. Sometimes they are saved and it brings me joy to see that someone else saw the merit and beauty of the building. Too often they continue their decline, tenuously defying the elements and gravity.

Yes, these houses had much better days. Yet they are still strong and vibrant as they slowly transition to another, final state. Their decline is beautiful to me. I hope I age as gracefully.

I was driven to paint this series. Only after I had completed many of the paintings did I begin to realize that these paintings of abandoned structures were a metaphor for me. I am a career consultant and since 2011 I have been helping many older workers who had been laid off. They had so much to offer, so much value, and so much history. And yet they were overlooked, rejected, and pushed aside for the new. Just like the structures I was painting. That, I believe, was the connection that fueled my drive to paint this series.

Carol Perron Sommerfield

www.frogsleapgallery.com

carol.sommerfield@gmail.com • 23 Orlando Avenue • Ardsley, NY 10502 • (914) 693-5815



No ATVs

2012

Oil on Canvas

20X30 unframed

22X32 Framed

I found this boarded up house on a late August day. I loved the cold, crisp light, which brought out the strength of the house. The only sign that someone has visited in the past decade was an old sign that read "NO ATVs". As I painted in the stillness, out of the woods came someone on an ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle), ruining a magical afternoon alone with this house. Well, after that, there was no question about the title of the painting!



Abandoned Interior, Tennanah Lake

2013

Oil on Canvas

20X24 Unframed

25X29 Framed

This house has a special draw for me. It was abandoned long ago and I have passed it on my way to town for decades. Each year I watch it become frailer, and yet more and more intriguing. One morning, at 6 am, I passed the house to find the light strangely illuminating the old chair in the room. It was absolutely glowing, as if the soul of the house had been freed of its timbers for a moment. It was a moment I couldn't let pass.

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Left, Cooks Falls

2012

Oil on Canvas

24X30 unframed

29X35 Framed

One of my favorite activities is hunting for abandoned houses near our summer home in Roscoe, New York. One afternoon, on my way to a little forgotten town called Cooks Falls, I stumbled across this old house, long abandoned and stoically waiting for its owners to return. I suspect they returned to earth well in advance of this house. I loved how it sat on a slope, making me look up, appearing as if it was rising out of the tangled forgotten garden at its feet.



Nothing Left

2013

Oil on Canvas

24X24 Unframed

24X24 Framed

Early in the summer of 2013 I learned that a dear friend was diagnosed with late stage pancreatic cancer. The news was devastating and I needed to express my emotions in a painting. I returned to one of my favorite abandoned houses and somehow this view of the room seemed right. I don't know what it all means, but I know that painting this scene helped me express what words could not.

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Broken Window, Freed Curtain

2013

Oil on Canvas

22X28 unframed

24X30 Framed

I've learned the progression of decline. First, the windows break. This allows for new occupants, like birds, racoons, snakes, and bats to take up residence. It also allows water to freely enter the house. Water is the enemy. After the windows go, then the roof starts to rot and leak. More water. Soon strong wood transforms into spongy pulp. The sills of the house become food for termites, and the house sags. The floors begin to crumble. It's end is soon after that. Often a heavy snow is all it takes to bring down a once mighty house.

This painting is of an abandoned house in the early stage of decline. Someone had made curtains long ago for this window, and now the glass in the window is gone. The curtains are free to billow outside, to follow the wind wherever it goes.



Tyvek House, Lake Muskoday

2013

Pastel on Paper

19X14

I got a good laugh over this house. Is it really worth all the fuss? The Tyvek coating does not address what I would consider to be bigger problems. Take a look at the piers. On a beautiful July afternoon I put my pastels in the rowboat and docked in front of this house. It was a wonderful excuse to be on the lake in the sun and wind. The house still stands and not a thing has changed. It waits patiently in its Tyvek attire.

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Broken Glass with Hornet's Nest

2013

Oil on Canvas

18X24 Unframed

23X29 Framed

No matter how you look at it, something in this scene is going to hurt. This house is starting its decline back to the earth. The window has been broken by birds flying into the glass. Soon the wind and weather will dislodge the remaining glass.

The house might be abandoned by humans, but a large colony of hornets knew good real estate when they saw it. I was glad I was a safe distance away from them as I sketched this house.



Condemned

2013

Oil on Canvas

24X30 Unframed

30X36 Framed

I loved this house. It is now long gone. An elderly lady lived there, and each year she and the house declined in tandem. Then one year she was gone and the house lost its life partner. Slowly it began to crumble until it was torn down. The land has since healed and the only clues that a family and a house lived here are the lilac trees that bloom in the spring, and the apples that drop from the trees in the fall.

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Waiting

2011

Oil on Canvas

24X30 Unframed

30X36 Framed

This farm house sits, season after season, waiting for its family to return. Each season it sags a little more, and someone comes to board up the windows that have broken. I don't know the story of this house, but it and the land surrounding it are my muses. One late August morning, at 6 am, I packed up my paints to spend time with my muse as the sun rose behind her, casting a warm light on my old friend.



Survived The Winter

2012

Pastel on Paper

17.5X23.5 Unframed

22X28 Framed

This little cottage has been left and forgotten for more than two decades. It is a strange situation, since it is a lakefront house. Who lived here in the summers? How many children laughed with delight on this yard as they chased fireflies and frogs? Do the heirs know they have a summer cottage on Tennenah Lake? Why do they pass up summers filled with swimming, boating and relaxing? This one is about to return to the earth and each spring I eagerly look for it, hoping it has survived the winter.

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Forsook

2012

Oil on Canvas

20X24 Unframed

22X26 Framed

This lakeside cottage served as a lake bungalow and boathouse. It has not been used in decades and waits for someone to return. I suspect it will fall before that happens. One afternoon I decided to heed the house's call and rowed up to its shore to visit. I loved how the pinks and greens played off of each other. After I studied it awhile it was time to go, leaving it to wait patiently for someone to remember it existed.



Abandoned House - 1

2013

Oil on Canvas

20X24

26X30 framed

Who knew that junk on a roof could be an artist's delight? Whatever this debris was, it was reflecting the clear blue sky above. The windows were boarded up with plywood so I have no idea about the state of the house. I loved the structure, color, and pattern of decay.

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Tappan Lodge

2013

Oil on Canvas
24X30 Unframed
30X36 Framed

I have admired this log cabin on the shores of Lake Muskoday for decades. Luckily, I was introduced to the owners in 2012 and given a tour of this 1925 gem. It has been left for a new structure, built higher on the hill. The roof is leaking, the stairs treacherous, and the porch boards spongy. But she still stands, looking out over the lake, as she has done for almost a hundred years. I entered the cabin carefully to find that nothing has changed since the 1950's. I felt as if I was temporarily transported in time, to the heyday of this house. The greatest gift of this cabin is the close friendship I formed with the owners, Claire and Jim Gordon. All because I wanted to paint this abandoned house.



Haunted

2011

Oil on Canvas
24X30 Unframed
29X36 Framed

This house has a personal story and a very happy ending. My parents, Frank and Harriet Perron, found this abandoned historic house on Merritt Island, Florida. It was going to be torn down. Within two hours they bought it and made a promise to the house to restore it. They spent four years of sweat equity restoring it to its former glory. The previous owners had abandoned it, and as they walked away they said "...it was haunted and the house had turned against us." I loved the mystery of that departing statement. I eagerly awaited my first ghost sighting, but none came. If there were ghosts they must have approved of my parent's efforts, since nary a complaint was ever issued from the other side. I had the honor of seeing it at the very beginning and helping in the restoration efforts. I also had the heartbreak of selling the house after my father died. I recently returned to look at my old friend and was delighted to see children laughing and running across the meadow. It is in good hands.

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No Smoking
2013
Oil on Canvas
20X24
22X26 framed

Sometimes you just have to laugh. This abandoned structure is tucked away in the woods near a stream. I stopped the car to investigate, only to find the 'No Smoking' sign on the front door. Really? I think the house has more to worry about than a cigarette! The windows are broken and the bridge over the river risky. But that 'No Smoking' sign was such an act of defiance I had to paint this portrait.



**Barn –
Eminence Road**
2011
Oil on Canvas
24X30

This painting and I have a history. On an early August morning in 1978 I found this barn and did a very fast sketch on canvas. Then I stopped painting for 34 years. I found this canvas again as I was rummaging through my old art supplies in 2011. It was time to finish the painting, which I completed in the winter of 2011. During the following summer I went in search of the barn. Did it still exist? What happened to it? Alas, I never found it again and assume it rotted back to the earth. But I did come across the Eminence Road Winery during my search. Something lost, but something gained.

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Ghosts In The Meadow

2012

Oil on Canvas

24X18

6 am. The mist was still dancing in the neglected field. Only a few minutes left before the sun would find it and burn it off. For a second I thought I was seeing ghosts twirling, embracing, and gliding. Who would they be? Who lived here and worked these fields? We'll never know.



Abandoned Store -Parksville

2014

Oil on Canvas

20X24

Imagine my delight when I entered Parksville, NY to find an abandoned town. Route 17 (the Quickway) recently passed the town by, leading to its further decline. There are many abandoned houses on its main street, much to my glee. This one caught my eye. An old store with plastic tarps as its curtains. Fabulous!

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Drugs, Coca-Cola, and Cosmetics

2013

Oil on Canvas

30X40

I love this old drug store I found it in Parksville, NY. A peek in the windows revealed an old Shortline bus schedules from the 60's, Coppertone sunscreen ads from the early 70's, and an odd poster painted in blue and orange. The inside was a mess, with debris everywhere. I found someone who lived in the town and he explained that the drug store has been abandoned since the 70's. The nearby river has overflowed its banks many times since then, flooding the store. The family holds onto the building because it has been part of their history for so long, and they don't want to let it go. It holds their memories. They have loyalty. And so it waits, suspended in time.



Collapsed Building - Grossingers

2014

Oil on Canvas

16X20

I remember Grossingers. It was glamorous. They had celebrities. Important people went there. At age 14 I remember that a group of us planned a visit from Lake Muskoday to see all the elegant ladies in their evening gowns. Flash forward to the summer of 2013. A friend and I went to take pictures of the once great Grossingers. We found a dilapidated, depressing wreck left to decay because demolition is too expensive. Though I thought I'd be excited by all the abandoned buildings at the site, I found the whole experience left me so empty and sad. I couldn't paint anything about Grossingers for almost a year. The winter of 2014 helped me along - a perfect winter for approaching a depressing subject! You see, there is always hope, even in the worst situation. Look at that window. There was truly an other-worldly peachy orange light illuminating that window. There is always hope. Always.

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Another Time. 2011. Oil on Canvas. 24X30
Collection of Dolly Cheser

I love this painting for many reasons. I think it is one of my best paintings, it also holds stories that mean a great deal to me. And the stories span my lifetime.

In the late summer of 1978, at the age of 22, I threw two canvases into our 1967 station wagon. My goal was to travel the dirt roads at sunrise to see what I could find. At the top of a mountain I found this house and its barn, both abandoned.

I loved how the September light warmed the house, revealing beautiful colors on its white exterior. The fields were untamed and the old apple tree freed from annual pruning. It was a glorious moment, and the house seemed to revel in its sudden clothing of light.

I set up my easel and quickly painted the house and barn, intending to finish both paintings in the studio. What I didn't know then was that it would take me 35 years to finish this painting. After leaving college I had to make a living, and soon found that my corporate career consumed all of my time and energy. Like a flower bulb in the winter, my art waited patiently for a creative spring.

In April of 2010 I had left my corporate life. By May I had gathered enough courage to dust off my paints and face a canvas again. I tentatively started, trying to remember where I had left off over 35 years ago. Who was that person who painted so long ago? Who is the person now who picks up a paint brush?

One of my great teachers, Jock MacRae, told me that painting is as much about our own personal maturation and growth as it is about our artistic vision and ability. Life experience makes us better painters. That thought gave me courage, for by 2010 I had lots of life experience to draw upon.

In 2011 I was rummaging through my old canvases and art supplies when I unearthed this canvas. I decided that it was now time to turn the fast sketch made on a beautiful summer morning in 1978 into a painting.

The name, *Another Time*, refers to this painting's beginning. Through this painting I was able to meet my former self and create something wonderful.

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Forgotten, Tennenah Lake. 2012. Oil on Canvas. 20X30.

Collection of Lynn Gaudio.

I have found that certain places and houses are my muses. I have two houses that speak to me, and this is one. I return year after year to paint its different moods. And its decline. The porch stairs are gone, the porch is going, and this little summer cottage is starting its return to the earth.

Very early one June morning I went to visit this house. The sun had just risen, casting a bright and cheerful light on my old friend. Her peeling white walls took on pastel hues cast from the surrounding landscape and light. I silently asked this house about its story. Why was it left? Who lived here? Who bounded up the stairs to this porch each summer? Who is this house stoically waiting for? What memories are found in its walls? There were no answers to my questions, so I honored it by painting this carefree little house, long abandoned by its owners, and free to do whatever it wants.

The gardens were wildly liberated. I had to wade through thigh high grasses and flowers to approach the house. The experience felt like being within the gypsy soul of this place. It was too unstable to go inside, so an exterior appreciation was all that could be accomplished. Nevertheless, the light was brilliant and the house patiently stood to have its portrait painted.

I can only hope that the painting captures that intimate and joyful morning with my muse.

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*Abandoned House, Tennanah Lake Road, Roscoe. 2014. Oil on Canvas. 18X24.
Collection of Nancy and Ed Fox*

My parents bought land on Lake Muskoday in Roscoe, NY in 1962. Since that time I have taken Tennanah Lake Road to our lake house every summer. It sat directly down the mountain from the Campbell Inn, which you can see vaguely in this painting on the hill. For over three decades I passed this house, and for most of those years it was a beautiful farmhouse, not much different from the other proud farmhouses that dotted the landscape. It was my beacon. When I saw that house I was almost at my soul place.

Because it never changed from year to year I never gave it much thought. It was an icon, a permanent piece of the landscape that welcomed us every spring and said goodbye to us every fall. I never knew who lived there, but at one point there must have been a lot of people. The house was as long as it was wide.

I finally did begin to pay attention to the house when it changed. It began to look shabby and unkempt. I began to notice an elderly woman, stooped and slow, who walked the grounds. It seemed that the house and its lone resident were declining in tandem.

One February we took a trip to see the lake in winter and as we passed this house it was empty. I assume the owner died and the house was on a fast decent to its own death. I think of this story as a love story - once the house lost its life partner it had no reason to live much longer. And that was its fate. It was torn down shortly thereafter.

The land has since healed and the only clues that a family and a house lived here are the lilac trees that bloom in the spring, and the apples that drop from the trees in the fall. It is gone, but not forgotten by those of us who knew of it. I miss the house, but its spirit lives on.