

PRESERVATION NOTES

NEWSLETTER
Vol. LII Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2017

ANNOUNCING SPLIA'S NEW NAME!

Since its founding in 1948, the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA) has reshaped itself a number of times and we're about to embark on our next exciting transformation! Starting in 2018, the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities will be known as Preservation Long Island.

Our new name is the result of a year's worth of careful study involving interviews, surveys, data analysis, and the expertise of branding consultants. We learned a great deal going through this process—most importantly, that our current name limited our ability to engage

people who do not already know who we are. Moreover, it was difficult to say, hard to remember, and no longer sufficiently encompasses the dynamic, multifaceted organization that we are becoming.

As Preservation Long Island, we will continue to advance the importance of historic preservation throughout our region with a refreshed brand and a renewed sense of purpose. These are exciting times and we look forward to adding the next chapter in our organization's accomplished career in advocacy, education, and stewardship.

New logo by Malcolm Grear Designers.



REDISCOVERING SMITHTOWN'S GOLDEN AGE OF PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN (1911–1948)



Currently vacant and in need of restoration, the Byzantine Catholic Church of the Resurrection Rectory (built 1913) was designed by Gustav Stickley as a private residence for Mr. and Mrs. Frederick J. Wagner. The structure is a designated local landmark, and the church is currently pursuing National Register listing. The congregation hopes to restore the building to use as the priest's residence and a space to hold parish gatherings and events. (Courtesy of C.V. Geske)

Smithtown's little-known ties to Gustav Stickley and other influential figures of American arts and architecture are being revealed by Corey Victoria Geske, an independent local scholar. With the goal of proposing a new historic district for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, Geske has identified a number of significant structures that reveal how progressive architecture and design movements, including the American Craftsman style, flourished in Smithtown between 1911 and 1948.

Among Smithtown's underappreciated examples of exceptional early 20th-century architecture is a house designed by Gustav Stickley. Initially built in 1913 as a private residence for Mr. and Mrs. Frederick J. Wagner, the Byzantine Catholic Church later acquired the house. Geske found evidence for Stickley's involvement in the building's design within the April 1913 issue of *The Craftsman*, a magazine Stickley published and edited

himself. In a piece entitled “The Value of Cooperation Between Owner and Architect as Illustrated by Specially Designed Craftsman Homes”, Stickley illustrates his collaborative approach to architectural design using three examples, including the Wagner’s house in Smithtown: “One of the essentials of successful home-building is cooperation between owner and architect,” explains Stickley, “the more closely they work together...the more satisfying the home will be.”

The Wagners were part of a dynamic group of early 20th-century residents who looked to progressive design ideas like Stickley’s to help grow Smithtown into a place where art and creativity would enrich everyday life. Among these leaders was St. James resident and architect, Lawrence Smith Butler (1875–1954). A descendant of the town’s founder Richard “Bull” Smythe, Butler designed the Town Hall (built 1912) and was the creative force behind the iconic statue of Whisper the Bull that now stands at the intersection of Routes 25 and 25A. Structures designed by Butler’s architecture firm Ford, Butler, & Oliver remain important features of the community such as the St. James Fire

House, the Old Smithtown Library, as well as private residences throughout the town.

In addition to commissions by Stickley and Butler, Smithtown boasts many structures designed by celebrated American architects during the 1910s–1940s including the Smithtown Railroad Station (1937) by Lawrence Grant White, son of Stanford White; the New York Avenue

School (1924) by Tooker & March; the Byzantine Catholic Church of the Resurrection (1929) by McGill & Hamlin; as well as private residences by Peabody, Wilson & Brown.

Unfortunately, many of Smithtown’s remarkable early 20th-century buildings have been torn down or extensively renovated, and a number of the surviving



Gustav Stickley, Architect.

FRONT OF THE RESIDENCE OF MR. AND MRS. F. J. WAGNER, WHICH WAS RECENTLY BUILT AT SMITHTOWN, L. I., FROM SPECIAL CRAFTSMAN PLANS: THE WALLS, WHICH ARE OF HOLLOW CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION, ARE LIGHT GRAY AND THE ROOF AND PERGOLAS OVER THE SLEEPING BALCONIES ARE GREEN. REAR OF THE WAGNER HOME, WITH THE RECESSED KITCHEN PORCH ON THE LEFT.

The Craftsman, April 1913, Vol. 24, No. 1, page 76. Gustav Stickley designed the house shown above for Mr. and Mrs. F. J. Wagner of Smithtown; it is now owned by the Byzantine Catholic Church of the Resurrection for use as a rectory. In April 1913, Stickley featured photos and plans of the house in his popular magazine, *The Craftsman*, which included a discussion of Stickley’s collaborative design process with the Wagners. (Courtesy of HathiTrust Digital Library)

PRESERVATION NOTES

Vol. LII Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2017
Iss 0885-7326

Sarah Kautz, Editor

Published by
The Society for the Preservation
of Long Island Antiquities

161 Main Street
P.O. Box 148
Cold Spring Harbor
New York, 11724-0418
info@splia.org
631-692-4664

Credo: It has become apparent that those of us who are interested in conservation and preservation need to be alerted to the destruction of the irreplaceable values and environments that comprise our heritage and to the actions proposed to avert such threats. These notes are designed to raise awareness.

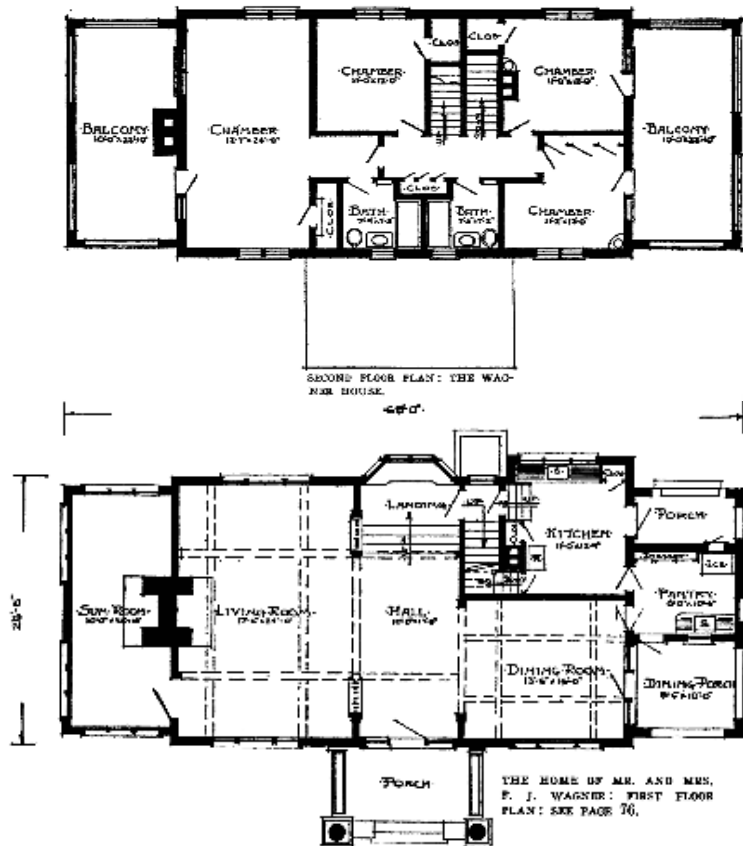
For SPLIA Membership Information
visit www.splia.org
or call 631-692-4664

Preservation Notes is listed in
the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals.

buildings are at risk for demolition or insensitive alteration.

To address the ongoing loss of historic resources, improving Smithtown's approach to preservation should be a priority when the newly elected supervisor and town council members take office next year. Leadership from the town board and other officials is essential; especially if real estate speculation and redevelopment pressure intensify when the town's long-awaited revitalization initiatives get underway. As the Planning Department continues to investigate opportunities for revitalizing downtown, the survival of Smithtown's rich architectural heritage depends on a clear commitment to protecting the largely overlooked, but nevertheless, visionary places Smithtown's residents built decades ago.

-Special thanks to Corey Victoria Geske for sharing her exciting new research on Smithtown's architectural history.



The Craftsman, April 1913, Vol. 24, No. 1, pages 78 and 79. Gustav Stickley's floor plans for the Wagner house in Smithtown. Top image: Second floor; Bottom image: First floor (Courtesy of HathiTrust Digital Library)

MARION CARLL FARMSTEAD UPDATE



The Marion Carll Farmstead is a time capsule of Long Island rural life spanning the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, this unique place is threatened by ongoing environmental exposure and long-term neglect.

Located upon a nine-acre site surrounded by a residential golf community, the property contains an 1860 farmhouse, several outbuildings and an impressive collection of Carll family artifacts. Marion Carll gifted the property to the Commack School District in 1968 to be preserved for

educational purposes and historical interpretation. Educational programming was offered by the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) until 1992; since then, the property has stood vacant and deteriorating.

A preliminary sales agreement between the school district and private developers was halted in 2011 after residents opposed a plan to restore the farm buildings in exchange for a zoning variance to build high-density townhouses adjacent to the site. Following the controversial sale

proposal, the property was nominated and listed on SPLIA's 2011 Endangered Historic Places List.

In 2012, Carll's relatives sued to recover ownership of the property, resulting in a New York State Supreme Court ruling in favor of the school district. The court's January 2017 decision noted that Carll's relatives failed to take, as required by state property law, legal action within 30 years of when the district took possession of the farm in 1968. Carll's heirs appealed, but the Commack School District is optimistic that the Supreme Court decision will be upheld.

Recently, the district has taken some steps to improve their stewardship of the embattled historic farmstead. The Marion Carll Property Committee was established in September 2017 to assist the Commack Board of Education in implementing solutions and sustainability plans for the property. Much work remains to be done, but it is exciting to see renewed efforts toward honoring Marion Carll's generous gift and restoring the site to active educational use as its donor intended.

OLD SAINT JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH: A NEWLY DESIGNATED LANDMARK IN ELMHURST, QUEENS

Another important step in the on-going preservation of Old Saint James Church, Elmhurst, Queens, occurred on September 19, 2017, at the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. The small and unassuming 1736 church building at 86-02 Broadway was designated an individual city historic landmark, noting its venerable age, its role in the development of colonial Queens County, and its association with the colonial-era growth of the Church of England in New York, which became the American Episcopal Church after the Revolution.

The signboard in front of the newly designated building proudly displays “Old St. James Church, Founded 1704,” dating the congregation to the year a London-based missionary society organized and funded the parish; the same society also aided many Anglican churches in New York, partially out of religious zeal and partially to promote mainstream English culture. By 1736, Saint James parish had erected a meetinghouse-type church, box-like in form, and finished with shingle cladding, round-arched windows, and an attached tower and steeple with a weather-vane. This heavy-timber-framed building was reportedly identical to the early St. George Church in Hempstead, Long Island, completed two years earlier in 1734 (no longer standing).

Elmhurst used to be known as Newtown, one of the earliest towns in Queens County that was still semi-rural during the early 19th century. Old Saint James Church served the Newtown congregation



View of Saint James from Broadway in 1773, from “A Brief History of St. James Parish,” 1954. (Courtesy of Marianne Hurley)



Old Saint James Episcopal Church, 2017. Today’s exterior of Old Saint James Church is the result of a major remodeling in 1883. The Gothic Revival and Stick style features were most likely added at the same time. These included the truss-like trim below the clipped gable ends, overhanging eaves with brackets, the round window, and drip molding. (Courtesy of Marianne Hurley)



Saint James Church, 1928, NYC Municipal Archives. (Courtesy of Marianne Hurley)

as their main sanctuary until 1848 when the parish erected a new and larger church on a separate lot. The old 1736 building then became a chapel, a parish hall, and later, an informal community center. By 1883, the tower had been removed and the exterior was updated with Gothic-revival details such as pointed lancet windows and drip molding. The building’s appearance today is a hybrid of colonial and late 19th-century vernacular architecture.

In 1999 the historically significant Old Saint James Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Around the same time, a Historic Structure Report documented both the exterior and interior of the building, noting that it was structurally sound and even retained some of its 18th-century paneling and woodwork. The report provided important information for an extensive restoration project in 2004. Assisted by grants and loans from the city,

state, and the New York Landmarks Conservancy (a non-profit agency), the building was repaired and repainted, bringing it back to its 1883 appearance.

It is remarkable that Old Saint James Church survived 280 years and is the second-oldest church still standing in the five boroughs of New York City (the Friends Meetinghouse in Flushing is the oldest). Real estate development, fire, and even the Revolutionary War destroyed many historic wood structures. In addition, pioneer church buildings are often taken down by congregations to make way for larger sanctuaries, but Saint James built its new facilities a block away. Despite the loss of so many other 18th- and 19th-century churches, Old Saint James Church remains on its original site and continues to be an historic contributor to the streetscape of Elmhurst, Queens.

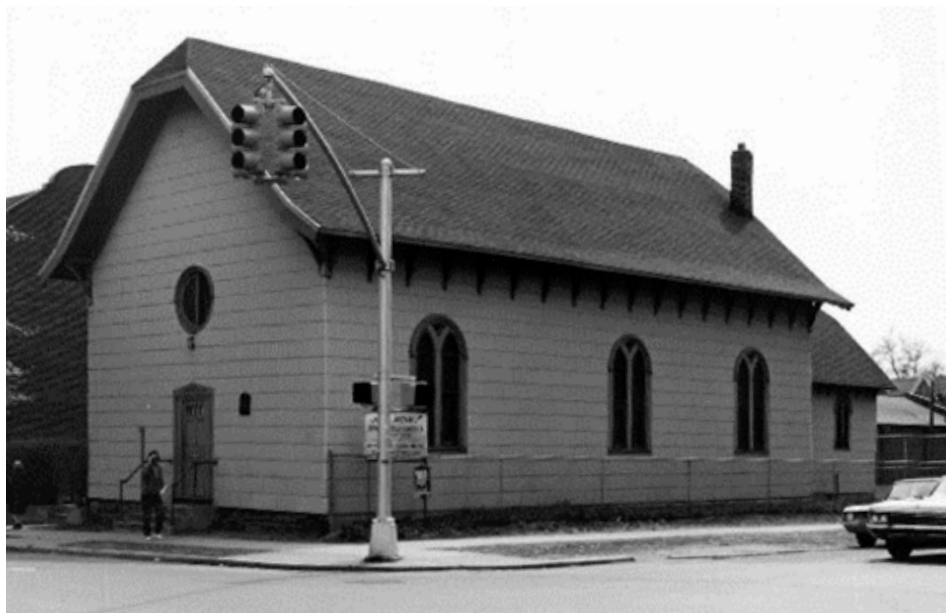
As noted above, Old Saint James Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but this usually does not provide protection at the local level. Over the years, local non-profit historical societies and individuals either associated with or interested in Old Saint James Church have advocated for its designation as a city landmark.

The New York City Landmark Preservation Commission's research staff evaluated the building for its eligibility as an individual landmark and it was placed

on the Commission's calendar for the public hearing that took place on August 8, 2017. Official designation followed a month later. Now its landmark status adds an extra layer of protection that includes the Commission's review of future alteration projects (including demolition). As a community historical resource, Old Saint

James Church, a unique 18th-century survivor, has been formally acknowledged as a tangible reminder of the colonial village that evolved into today's bustling and diverse neighborhood.

-Marianne Hurley, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission



Old Saint James Church, c. 1970. (Courtesy of Marianne Hurley)



*Old Saint James Church was recently identified in the historical landscape painting shown above. Part of SPLIA's extensive regional collection, it is currently on view at the SPLIA Gallery. (Un-identified artist, **Landscape of Newtown, Long Island**, 1839. Gift of Mr. Edward Voss, 1968.15)*

SPLIA's painting depicts a small village with fenced pastures, country estates, and a street lined with churches, businesses, and home-steads. The artist is unknown, but an inscription on the reverse indicates the setting to be Newtown, Long Island in 1839. It is difficult to imagine that the picturesque townscape painted nearly 180 years ago is today Elmhurst, Queens—a bustling urban community. Newtown's name changed to Elmhurst in 1897, just one year before Queens County was incorporated into Greater New York City.

The church-lined street highlighted in the detail above is Broadway, and the churches illustrated from left to right are: the Dutch Reformed Church of Newtown (1831); Old Saint James Episcopal Church (1735-36); and the First Presbyterian Church, built after the Revolutionary War, but no longer standing.

LOST: TWO OF LONG ISLAND'S OLDEST HOUSES



Demolition day at the Baxter House, Monday, October 9, 2017. (Image by Howard Schnapp for Newsday)



Demolition day at the Smith House, Monday, July 3, 2017. (Image by Taylor Swaak for Newsday)

With the destruction of the Baxter and Smith Houses in 2017, Long Island lost two extraordinary historic structures that had stood for centuries. Both houses were the subject of long, often contentious, debates amongst local officials, property owners, and members of the local community who advocated for preservation.

Even though these structures were torn down, the efforts to save them offer important lessons about how sustained community support for preservation, and the active participation of local residents in the decisions of their municipal government, can shape preservation outcomes going forward.

The Baxter House (Village of Baxter Estates, Nassau County)

The oldest part of the Baxter House was built in the 18th century or earli-

er. Oliver Baxter purchased the property around 1742; the house was enlarged by his son, Israel, who served as a private in the Great Neck-Cow Neck Militia under the command of Captain John Sands. After the Battle of Long Island, the British occupied the Baxter House and quartered Hessian mercenaries there. During the 20th century, the suburban community of Baxter Estates Village grew up around the old homestead, and the Baxter House became the community's only designated local landmark in 2005.

When the owner sought village approval to demolish the historic house and replace it with a replica in 2016, local advocates launched an energetic campaign to preserve their village's lone landmark. Unfortunately, the vacant building was damaged by a severe fire in February 2017. Although the cause of the fire remains un-

determined, the village's Landmarks Preservation Commission found that the owner's neglect had produced conditions that detrimentally impacted the Baxter House.

Despite requests to consider restoring or partially preserving the structure, a demolition order was issued, and the house was torn down on Monday, October 9, 2017. A few days later, the waterfront lot was listed for sale at an asking price of \$2.9 million. Nevertheless, because the Baxter House's lot is also landmarked, any forthcoming site plan or subdivision proposal must be approved by the village's Landmarks Commission. So far, the site's future remains uncertain, but local supporters of the Baxter House can play an important role to ensure that whatever comes next appropriately honors and celebrates their community's lost namesake.

David Smith House (Village of Babylon, Suffolk County)

The Smith House was demolished on July 3, 2017, after years of failed negotiation attempts to preserve it. The original wing was constructed in 1790 by David Smith (1759-1809), an early American farmer and tailor whose Revolutionary War regiment fought in the 1776 Battle of Long Island. Because Babylon Village has not yet adopted a local landmark ordinance to protect historic places like the Smith House from demolition, the building was especially vulnerable to redevelopment.

Indeed, soon after the Smith House was purchased in June 2012, an application to subdivide the nearly one-acre property into three new lots was submitted to the village and met with strong commu-



The Baxter House, pictured ca. 1905, when it served as the local women's reading room and social club. (SPLIA, Harry R. Gelwick Collection)



New lots were redeveloped adjacent to the Smith House, pictured above in 2016. (Courtesy of the Home In Babylon blog)

nity opposition. The village approved the controversial subdivision in August 2012, but no demolition permit was granted at the time. Over the next few years, a group of local preservationists struggled to save the Smith House, which rapidly deteriorated due to neglect. Potential buyers interested in preserving the structure were identified, but their offers were rejected, and a demolition permit was eventually granted in 2016.

Some Smith House supporters noted the bitter timing of the demolition on July 3, 2017; indeed, the loss of a Revolutionary War veteran's house was an unhappy event to mark on the eve of Independence Day. Nevertheless, supporters still have an important advocacy role to play in urging local officials to adopt a landmark ordinance that would help protect Babylon Village's remaining historic places.

PROTECTING LOCALLY UNDESIGNATED HISTORIC RESOURCES

Only a small percentage of historic properties on Long Island have been officially designated by local governments as individual landmarks or as contributing resources of an historic district. Locally undesignated historic properties, including those listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are frequently demolished without any consideration for the property's historical significance. As a result, communities across Long Island too often face the unexpected demolition of cherished historic places in their towns and villages.

To avoid this unfortunate circumstance, SPLIA has developed the following strategies to help protect undesignated historic resources from demolition:

- **Demolition Review:** Undesignated historic properties may be granted temporary protection by instituting a demolition review process. Demolition review helps to ensure that potentially significant historic resources are not demolished without public notice. It also provides an opportunity for local governments to assess the significance of a threatened property and pursue designation or other solutions if appropriate.

- **Historic Resource Survey and Designation Plan:** A proactive municipal approach to preservation can greatly reduce the need for demolition reviews.



SPLIA's 2017 List of Endangered Historic Places includes Idle Hour and other exceptional structures built for William Kissam Vanderbilt I (1849–1920) as part of his former 900-acre estate in western Oakdale. Unfortunately, many of the estate's most important structures, including the mansion, are vulnerable to demolition because they have not yet been designated as local landmarks by the Town of Islip.

Preservation outcomes benefit from the maintenance of accurate and up-to-date survey information about historic resources within a municipality. Such information is essential for outlining a designation plan, which identifies preservation priorities and allows municipalities to actively recognize and protect important historic resources before they are threatened by demolition or other adverse actions.

- **Incentives for Property Owners:** Some municipalities offer financial incentives to encourage owners of historic struc-

tures to officially designate their property. For example, the Town of Southampton's Landmarks Maintenance Award Program helps owners of designated local landmarks to fund maintenance and repairs.

- **Adopt a local landmark law:** Local governments play a crucial role in historic preservation. But some municipalities on Long Island provide no legal protection for historic resources. If your city, village, or town lacks a local landmark law or a comparable provision, ask your local officials to consider adopting one.



SOCIETY FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF
LONG ISLAND
ANTIQUITIES

161 Main Street
P.O. Box 148
Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724
www.splia.org

SPLIA
Building A Future For Our Past

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
HUNTINGTON, NY
PERMIT NO. 14

PRESERVATION NOTES

NEWSLETTER Vol. LII Nos. 1 and 2

FALL 2017

IN THIS ISSUE:

Announcing SPLIA's New Name!

Rediscovering Smithtown's Golden Age Of
Progressive Architecture & Design (1911-1948)

Marion Carll Farmstead Update

Old Saint James Episcopal Church:
A Newly Designated Landmark In Elmhurst, Queens

Lost: Two Of Long Island's Oldest Houses

Protecting Locally Undesignated Historic Resources