

PRESERVATION NOTES

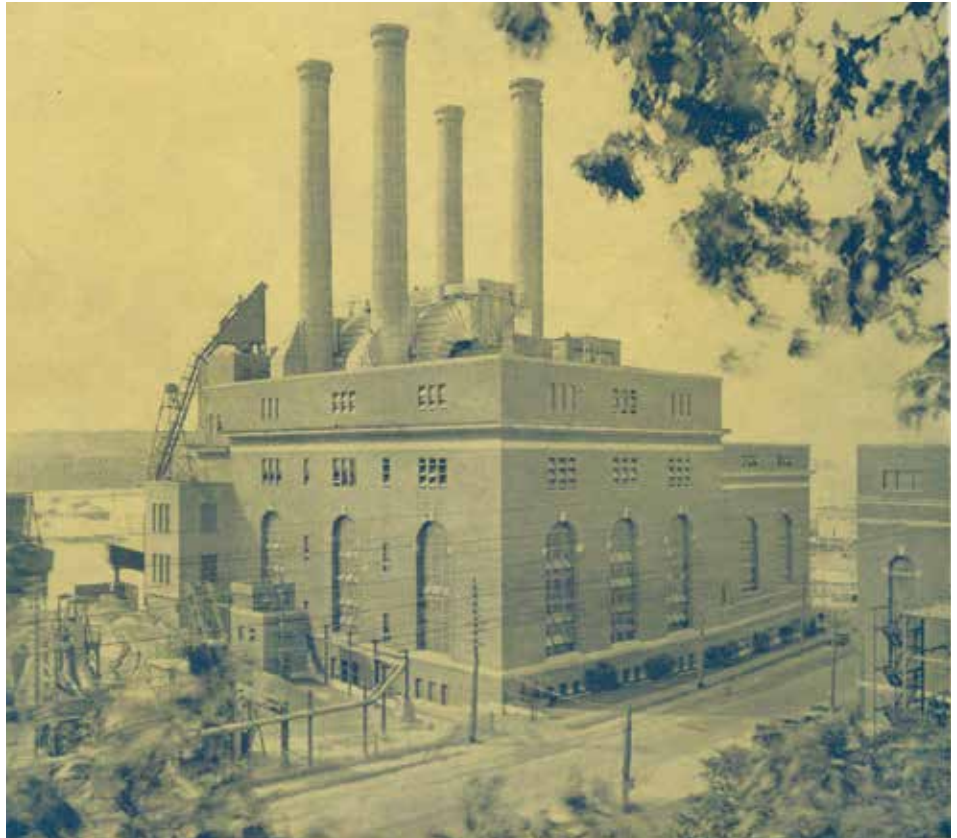
NEWSLETTER
Vol. XLVIII Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2013

GLENWOOD LANDING POWER PLANT, HEMPSTEAD HARBOR

It seems in other parts, not far from Long Island, old infrastructure often gets repurposed into exciting centers of economic redevelopment. In Manhattan, the Highline (once a blight on the far west side) was transformed into a grand promenade that brings tourism to a new upscale neighborhood, and in Brooklyn, the old navy yard is now a hub for creative industry and an engine for neighborhood turnaround. Further afield, Boston's Chestnut Hill waterworks pumping station is now a museum and an anchor for a new residential complex while an old tobacco warehouse district in Durham, North Carolina has become a vibrant new mixed-use downtown neighborhood.

On Long Island we frequently get a different story. The exuberantly designed Brooklyn Waterworks pump house in Wantagh moldered away until its remaining shell was torn down in 2011, while the locally designated and vacant Old Speonk Mill (built in the mid-1800s) is a fabulous redevelopment project just waiting to happen.

In Glen Cove, there's the Glenwood Landing Power Plant, a testament to Long Island's industrial heritage. Built in 1923 by a consolidated Long Island Lighting Company, it helped generate gas and electric power for an entire region until operations ceased in 2012. Its current owner, National Grid, has filed plans for its demolition with the Town of North Hempstead, but a local group, Save the Glenwood



This image of the Glenwood Power Plant appeared as the "Key Electric Generating Plant on Long Island" on the cover of the Long Island Lighting Company's first newsletter, The Main Line, published in February 1936.

Landing Power Plant, wants another outcome, one that mirrors those of its not too distant neighbors.

Calling out the success of similar projects, advocates for preserving the Glenwood Landing Power Plant envision a stellar venue for cultural, sporting, and other recreational activities. They see a dynamic reuse of historic buildings that could employ rehabilitation tax credits and they see a waterfront revitalization project that would create jobs and income for surrounding areas. They also envision enhanced quality of life and environmental well-being in neighboring communities and a Long Island in line with other places where historic preservation and economic

growth are partners and friends.

Just up the Hudson River in Yonkers, there's a Glenwood Power Station that's the center of a 250 million dollar redevelopment plan slated to open in 2016. Incorporating a program for hotel, spa, restaurant, retail, and event uses, Senator Charles Schumer has called it a high priority that is estimated to employ 2,000 construction workers and generate 1,000 permanent jobs after completion. A compelling promotional video on YouTube summarizes the project in less than two minutes. Called "Glenwood Power Plant Project," it can easily be imagined for our very own power plant on Long Island... if only the right people could see the light.



View of the Glenwood Power Plant today, 2013.

PYRRHUS CONCKER HOMESTEAD, SOUTHAMPTON



View of the Pyrrhus Concker Homestead today with early twentieth century alterations, 2013.



Nineteenth century photo detail of Pyrrhus Concker.

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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.

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The home of a freed slave family recently brought media attention to the Village of Southampton. Situated within a locally designated historic district but not distinguished as a contributing resource, 51 Pond Lane came to light after its current owners submitted a request for demolition. Because of its location, permission was contingent on approval by the Architectural Review Board following a public hearing that was scheduled for September 25th. Village records and the outward appearance of the building pointed to a construction date of 1920 but members of the public recognized it as one associated with a man named Pyrrhus Concker during the 1870s. Realizing that records are sometimes wrong – especially for older structures that pre-date zoning – the Architectural Review Board (ARB) adjourned the first hearing to allow for an interior analysis that ultimately revealed at least a portion of the building was in fact built during Concker's lifetime.

After three public hearings, the application was closed for written response so that the ARB could render its decision. During the process, a lot of new information about Pyrrhus Concker and his property has been discovered. Born in Southampton, Concker (1814-1897) was made famous throughout Long Island for his 1844-47 voyage on the whaling ship, *Manhattan*, with Captain Mercator Cooper. During that journey, the *Manhattan* rescued 22 Japanese shipwrecked sailors and as a result, Pyrrhus, along with another African American,

Prince Williams, and a Shinnecock Indian became the first men of these races to meet the Japanese.

The property was once known as the homestead of Gad Williams, another African American. Gad (meaning "fortune" in Hebrew) and his wife, Esther, had gained freedom in 1811 after Gad fulfilled the condition that he complete and survive a whaling voyage in 1803. Records indicate that in 1838, Gad sold the southeast corner of the property to his son, Prince (Pyrrhus' crew mate), who later conveyed it to his children upon his death in 1859. Pyrrhus appears as a neighboring owner on historic maps dating back to 1870 and is listed in associated property deeds as early as 1852. Pyrrhus' probate documents also list 51 Pond Lane as his "homestead," certifying the fact that he lived there.

Interestingly, Gad, Prince, and Pyrrhus (named after a Greek king) were all originally owned by the same man and it may be that Pyrrhus became an owner of the property through the Williams family. Not yet known is just how much of the original house remains and whether the current owner would consider allowing a more in-depth assessment of the building and property. After reviewing the information gathered thus far, and considering strong public testimony, the ARB ultimately decided to deny the demolition permit. The owners have threatened to sue in response so despite strong support, the fate of the building still lies in wait.

- Sally Spanburgh

JACOB POST HOUSE, FREEPORT

Set on a large parcel once known for its beautiful gardens and landscape, the c.1930 fieldstone house at 92 West Lena Avenue was a featured stop on Freeport Historical Society house tours even though it had seen better days. For those in the know, it was steeped in local history. Built by prominent Freeport businessman, Jacob Post, it was a gift to his daughter, Olive, upon her marriage to the concert violinist and a founder of the Nassau County Philharmonic, George Porter Smith. Later, it was home to the famed World War II radio commentator, Gabriel Heatter, who broadcasted from his rustic living room. For its latest owner, it was just a deteriorated old house that needed a lot of work.

Not recognizing the building's historic value, insensitive alterations were initiated and then aborted due to foreclosure proceedings, but not before the removal of such character-defining features as leaded glass windows and oak doors. By the summer of 2013, the property was in limbo and neighbors realized they needed to act if they wanted it preserved. Joined by the Northwest Civic Association, they approached the Freeport Landmark Preservation Commission requesting landmark status for the house.

The Commission voted to landmark 92 West Lena Avenue in September and

forwarded its recommendation to the Village Board of Trustees who would make the final decision. As a show of support, Commission members, the Civic Association, and local residents met at the house to be photographed. Joining them was Olive Post Smith's grandson, Dr. Henry Smith and his mother, Doris, who literally

brought the building's storied past to life. Encouraged, Village Trustees approved designation in October. Such status won't prohibit an owner from making changes, but it will prevent demolition and require future alterations to be appropriately tuned to the historic qualities that made the property a community asset in the first place.



Advocates gather at the Jacob Post House in support of local landmark designation, 2013.

CHERRY GROVE COMMUNITY HOUSE & THEATER, FIRE ISLAND



The c. 1900 Cherry Grove Community House with 1949 gambrel roof theater addition at left, 2012.

Located in Brookhaven's Fire Island hamlet of Cherry Grove, the Community House and Theater is the third site in America to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places for playing an important role in the history of the gay liberation movement.

The building is composed of two histor-

ic adjoining sections: a one-and-a-half-story c.1900 peak roofed carriage house and a two-and-a-half-story gambrel roofed theater addition constructed in 1949. The original section was floated across the Great South Bay in 1946 to serve as a headquarters for the Cherry Grove Property Owners Association – the first known civic entity

to integrate gay and lesbian interests into governance and social life. The theater was added by the Association's Art Project Committee to facilitate what is described as the first "gay theater" produced by gay people, for gay and straight audiences in the United States. Still in operation since its inaugural show (*The Cherry Grove Follies* of 1948), the theater was a conduit for heightened visibility of homosexuals in the performing arts, and together with the Community House, it helped to establish a place where a collective gay identity could appear openly for the first time.

As a precursor to the Stonewall Uprising of 1969, the Cherry Grove site is significant for representing an earlier chapter in the history of homosexuality in America. It captures a time when integration, self-affirmation, and social acceptance were new to a community largely hidden from the outside world and its story helps us to understand how civil rights movements evolve. In becoming "America's First Gay Town," Cherry Grove demonstrated what could be and helped foster the voices that would make it so.

ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES: 2013

Lost: Inisfada, North Hills



One last view of the Jesuit Retreat House at Inisfada with mature landscape, 2013.

Once again, SPLIA's latest list of endangered historic places spans over 200 years of Long Island history. From a classic eighteenth century farmhouse with commercial additions threatened by demolition, to a 1929 high-rise bank building that's been vacant for over 20 years, each nomination reveals how the built environment absorbs collective stories over time. Six nominated sites officially made the list, but it was SPLIA's watch property, the St. Ignatius Retreat House at Inisfada, that garnered most of the attention. Unfortunately, such attention came too late and Inisfada is now the first property associated with our endangered list to be lost.

Located in the Village of North Hills, Inisfada was initially identified by SPLIA as a property of concern in *Preservation Notes* 2012 when the New York Province of Jesuits announced its closing. A spectacular country house built in 1916-20 for Genevieve and Nicholas Brady, it had been donated to the Jesuits in 1936 and had captured two important historical narratives – one related to Long Island's country house movement and the other to the Jesuits in New York. Despite obvious eligibility, Inisfada was not a designated landmark and at 33 acres it would obviously attract developers interested in demolition to make way for residential subdivision.

SPLIA was surprised when Inisfada

was not nominated to its 2013 endangered places list and it was clear that the program needed a new category to identify historic properties that were at risk and without a group to advocate for their protection. As the first official SPLIA Watch Property, Inisfada gained much publicity following news that the Jesuits had accepted a purchaser's offer

Oyster Bay Railroad Station, Oyster Bay



The Oyster Bay Railroad Museum (stewards of the station owned by the Town of Oyster Bay) received a \$65,693 Nassau County Community Revitalization grant through the efforts of Legislator Judy Jacobs. The grant is to help fund exterior facade restoration that includes doors, windows, and brick masonry.

in May. The site officially closed in early June and the property changed hands in August after the building's finely crafted St. Genevieve Chapel (along with its stained glass windows) was removed to Fordham University in the Bronx. Local civic groups, including the Council of Greater Manhasset Civic Associations and the Manhasset Preservation Society, along with countless individuals, galvanized a strong campaign for the building's protection, but the two entities that could have forged an alternative outcome – the new owners (Manhasset Bay Group) and the Village of North Hills – had no interest in even considering other options.

Inisfada was demolished in early December. The village, having no provision in its municipal code for local landmark designation, made no use of its discretionary power to require a review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act, to assess the adverse impacts of a large subdivision project separated into two parts. With demolition approved apart from the eventual subdivision plan, the Manhasset Bay Group gained a fast track to completing a project that should have been assessed in its entirety at the onset. Sadly, as important as Inisfada was, its fate was ultimately determined through a shallow interpretation of land use law and a disregard for public interest.

Old Cedar Swamp Road, Jericho



Approval for the widening of Old Cedar Swamp Road was granted to Bristol Assisted Living Facilities by the Town of Oyster Bay and the first of the district's endangered mid-nineteenth century houses was subsequently torn down. While a change of zone is still pending, the new development appears to be moving ahead.

Sacred Heart Church, Southold



View of the Sacred Heart Church and Rectory, 2013.

On the North Fork, another religious property on SPLIA's 2013 endangered list is turning towards a more optimistic future. While similar to Inisfada in being perceived by its owner as a no longer needed redundant facility, the Sacred Heart Church complex has a chance of being saved because stakeholders have agreed to discuss preservation planning.

Owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese, Sacred Heart occupies fifteen acres in the heart of Cutchogue – a picturesque hamlet in the Town of Southold. The site includes an 1878 church with 1905 rectory and carriage house that have long been regarded as landmarks on the scenic Main Road, both architecturally and for their association to the Catholic immigrants for whom the parish was created. Citing unsafe building conditions and a lack of funding for costly repairs, the diocese closed the complex in late 2012 and moved a diminished congregation to its Mattituck campus.

Sacred Heart's closure sparked community action. Concurrent with the site's nomination to SPLIA's 2013 List of Endangered Places, the Cutchogue-New Suffolk Historical Council (which stewards a complex of restored buildings on

the Village Green as well as the nearby Old Burying Ground) formed an ad hoc committee to galvanize support for preserving the church structures. Co-chaired by Council director Zach Studenroth and Southold Town Landmarks Preservation Commission member Jamie Garretson, the Committee has strong support from the many descendants of the Church's first parishioners still living in the area and is making measurable headway in leading a collaborative effort to develop strategies for preserving the buildings.

To date, constructive dialogue has been established with church officials and several committee meetings have been held to explore adaptive reuse alternatives to demolition. Southold Town Supervisor, Scott Russell, has expressed his support and the town's Planning Department is contributing its expertise to address options for alternative zoning and subdivision that could maximize the value of the property.

With assurance from church officials that communication will remain open during this planning process, the committee has established the best possible conditions for developing a viable solution to save these prominent local landmarks.

...And the Rest



The La Grange Inn, Islip

Islip Town officials recently granted CVS Pharmacy permission to build a new drugstore on the site in exchange for preserving the original portion of La Grange Inn and moving it closer to Higbie Lane.



Meadowbrook Bank, Freeport

With a Request for Proposals announced, the Village of Freeport appears to be encouraging redevelopment that will incorporate the existing building into a mix of retail and residential uses that may also include a hotel.



Henry Rhodes House, Southampton

Due to an uncooperative owner looking to sell the property privately, the building's endangered status is unchanged.

SAGAMORE HILL, OYSTER BAY



Sagamore Hill under construction, 2013.

If you've ever visited a historic house museum on a hot summer day, you've experienced it: That nagging curiosity about how people managed to endure the heat with little more than an open window. Outfitting historic houses with modern heating and cooling systems has always been a conundrum, especially if the intention is to maintain an immersive

and authentic visitor experience.

In December 2011, Sagamore Hill, Theodore Roosevelt's home in Oyster Bay, closed its doors to visitors in order to tackle this issue. Instead of planning to install modern systems into a home built in 1884, the National Park Service approached the building as an artifact, and carefully studied its design to determine how the original light and cooling ventilation shaft (removed in the 1950s) could be restored to adequately serve modern needs.

According to Amy Verone, Chief of Cultural Resources at Sagamore Hill: "I think a lot of times [curators] think of houses as shells and that we can stuff anything inside of them. Instead of asking, 'What do we want?' we started to ask 'What can the house handle?' The house is designed with all of these different ways to bring air in; it's designed to be drafty. So what we decided to do was help it be the best building it could be. And we hope

that will have a positive effect long term."

A result of this approach is that the original ventilation shaft is now a recognized part of Sagamore Hill's collection and its restoration will further enrich the overall experience for the visitor. The visitor experience is something that Verone thinks about a lot: "One of the things that sets Sagamore Hill apart from other historic houses is that 90 – 95% of the furnishings are original to the house. You don't look at empty rooms; you don't look at rooms with a mishmash of furniture. You look at objects as they were in place historically: They are arranged as closely as we can understand it."

Sagamore Hill is expected to re-open in spring 2015 and there are plans to develop tours that include details about the restoration of the ventilation shaft, and why it is important. As Verone notes, "These are questions that come up a lot on tours. People are interested in the details."

ALUMINAIRE HOUSE, SUNNYSIDE

The fate of the first all metal pre-fabricated house in the United States – the 1931 Aluminaire House – remains up in the air after plans to make it the focal point of a new housing development in the Sunnyside Historic District in Queens met with strong opposition from residents.

The proposal, heard in October by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, calls for a two-story, eight-unit apartment building made of brick and terra cotta to wrap around a freestanding Aluminaire house anchoring the corner of 39th Avenue and 50th Street. The proposal was devised specifically to save the house, but the Commission failed to rule after receiving repeated testimony that the building, variously described as a "space-ship" and "inappropriate," would be out of context in the neighborhood of brick row houses and apartments designed by Clarence Stein/Henry Wright in the 1920s.

In 1987 the Aluminaire House was described as one of the "...pivotal works of modern architecture in America" by Paul Goldberger, then the architecture critic for the New York Times. Originally created for display in the 1931 Architectural and Allied Arts Exhibition in New York, it was designed by architects Albert Frey and A. Lawrence Kocher as a model for affordable manufactured housing made out of aluminum, steel and glass. The house later appeared at the Museum of Modern Art's famous 1932 show "The International Style: Architecture Since 1922" which



Architect's rendering of the Aluminaire House as the anchor of a new residential housing development in Sunnyside, Queens, 2013. (Courtesy of Campani & Schwarting Architects.)

was curated by Phillip Johnson. It was then purchased by the architect Wallace K. Harrison to use as a guest house at his Huntington estate.

Harrison's death in 1981 prompted the property's subdivision. By 1987, the Aluminaire House had deteriorated and was threatened with demolition but the owners were persuaded to donate it to the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) where architecture students reassembled it for study purposes at the Islip campus. Unfortunately, use of the building gradually decreased and all but stopped when the architecture program moved to the Institute's Manhattan and Old Westbury campuses in 2006.

Following increased vandalism, the Aluminaire House was disassembled and put into storage last year, and the architect and NYIT professor Michael Schwarting (who spearheaded NYIT's 1980s rescue of the house) stepped in once again hoping to solve the building's preservation woes. With wife, Frances Campani, who is also his partner in Campani & Schwarting Architects in Port Jefferson, Schwarting created the Aluminaire House Foundation to receive the house as a donation. The team then worked with developer, Harry Otterman (owner of the Sunnyside site), to design the housing project that would both showcase and help finance the reuse of the Aluminaire House as a museum.

IMPORTANT MID-CENTURY MODERN HOUSE FOR SALE

Significant mid-20th century modern buildings with original landscape features rarely come to market as sadly, most of the great ones have been demolished or drastically altered. Sparse examples are in responsible private ownership and a few (like Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan and Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth house outside Chicago) have been saved and open to the public. In Old Westbury, the A. Conger Goodyear House, designed by Edward Durell Stone in 1939, remains privately owned but can only be sold through a covenant of protection.

Now, for sale on Centre Island (without covenants or landmark protection) is *Holly Pond*, a superb house with guest cottage, pool house and gardens designed by The Architects Collaborative (TAC). With Ben Thompson as lead architect and Shogo Myaida as landscape designer, it was designed in 1952 for Mary Griggs (later Mrs. Jackson Burke) who was a friend of Thompson's from their home city of St. Paul. The project was to design a simple beach house on eight acres of hilly ground at *Applegarth*, a demolished great estate.

Founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts TAC was modeled on the group design process that Walter Gropius (émigré dean at the Harvard Graduate School of Design) pioneered in the 1920s at the Bauhaus School in Germany. Gropius certainly was integrally engaged with the design of *Holly Pond* in 1952-3; furthermore, he insisted, after his first journey to Japan in 1954, that Griggs travel there to tour gardens



Mary Griggs and Jackson Burke House, 1953-61. (Courtesy of Ezra Stoller, Esto Photographics.)

with Junzo Yoshimura who designed the Museum of Modern Art's Japanese Exhibition House. Upon returning, Griggs and TAC engaged Shogo Myaida, a founder of the Imperial University landscape studies program in Tokyo and designer of Japan's pavilion garden at the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows. Griggs found the forgotten Myaida in Albertson, where he had quietly hidden out the war years.

Built in stages from 1953-1961, *Holly Pond* is a typical early TAC house with flat roofs, vertical redwood siding and white brick facades composed asymmetrically as rectangular boxes supported by exterior steel stilts. The front hall is en-

tered from a south facing Japanese courtyard garden that contrasts to the informal north beachside "Bog Garden" contrived as a system of streams and ponds below the hill upon which the house is perched. Large pane windows in most rooms allow for association with semi enclosed courtyards, decks and panoramic vistas.

With few alterations, *Holly Pond* is a rare find and SPLIA hopes it will be sold to a buyer intent upon its preservation. More on the history of this fascinating historic environment and Mary Griggs Burke can be found in Caroline Rob Zaleski's *Long Island Modernism 1930-1980* published by W. W. Norton & Company.

SAVED: NOAH HALLOCK HOMESTEAD, ROCKY POINT

Having successfully purchased the Noah Hallock Homestead, the Rocky Point Historical Society accomplished a principal step in saving the area's oldest remaining building. The house, built circa 1721, was home to Noah Hallock and his wife, Bethia, and it remained in their family for eight generations. Having undergone few alterations, its association to one of the first thirteen families to settle the North Fork was strong. When the property went up for sale in the fall of 2012, the Society knew fast action was critical to preserving the historic homestead.

The first step was to contact the owner to make a case for the site's importance and to ask for some time to raise funds for the purchase. The owner agreed and even reduced the asking price from \$282,000 to \$200,000. A no-interest mortgage loan was secured from a generous benefactor, and the down payment was produced by donations from various supporters and a



The main facade of Noah Hallock Homestead, 2012. (Courtesy of Rocky Point Historical Society.)

\$5000 grant from Suffolk County through Legislator Sarah Anker. In-kind donations also helped: Legal counsel was provided pro-bono and a real estate commission was reduced by 25%.

By March 2013, the Society was in contract and by June, the homestead was a locally designated landmark in the Town of Brookhaven and had been nominat-

ed for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Preliminary repairs began in the summer, and plans to convert the building into a museum with an education center and offices are currently under way. For many years, the Society had been collecting Hallock family artifacts (some of which originated from the house) and its recent purchase provides an optimal condition for display and interpretation.

The cooperative spirit that helped realize the purchase of the Hallock Homestead continues to characterize the Rocky Point Historical Society's approach to an ambitious preservation project. Donated time and expertise continue to augment financial contributions and a real sense of ownership is emerging in the community. Such spirit is invaluable to the project because it makes the homestead more than just another old building. It makes it a meaningful place and a source of collective pride. It is grassroots preservation at its best.

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