

PRESERVATION NOTES

NEWSLETTER

Vol. L Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2015



Owner Jonathan Pearlroth (right) stands with Jake Gorst (left) grandson of architect, Andrew Geller.

DOUBLE-DIAMOND HOUSE RESTORED

If you've ever been down Dune Road in Westhampton Beach, you've seen the Pearlroth House. The modernist structure is no stranger to curious stares.

In 1958, Arthur and Mitch Pearlroth commissioned architect Andrew Geller to design a modest beach house, and gave him creative freedom to execute his vision. The end result: a 600 square foot house with distinctive "double diamonds" and an interior defined by clever nooks for leisure and sleeping.

According to architectural historian Alastair Gordon, the Pearlroth House "is one of the most important examples of experimental design built during the postwar period – not just on Long Island but anywhere in the United States. It is witty, bold and inventive."

This past spring, SPLIA visited the newly restored Pearlroth House. Our tour guides for the day had a personal connection to the house: filmmaker Jake Gorst is Andrew Geller's grandson (who has devoted much of his professional life to preserving Geller's legacy) and Jonathan Pearlroth is the current owner and son of Arthur and Mitch. Pearlroth recounted childhood memories of his playing hide-and-seek in the house; the family's personal connection to the home is also evident in an old black and white photo of Pearl-

roth's mother, Mitch, on one of the walls. In the photo, she is wearing Cat Eye sunglasses and is standing on the beach with the house in the background. The eventual restoration of the house was a collaborative effort of sorts between Pearlroth and Gorst - with Gorst acting as a volunteer consultant on the project.

Over the years, the house saw some changes. Poorly constructed wings were added in the 1970s to create more space for the family and the ocean air contributed to the deterioration of the additions. By 2006, they were demolished, leaving the original structure intact. Pearlroth wanted to create a larger space for his family but he also understood the importance of preserving the Pearlroth House as both a family touchstone and as a modernist beacon on Dune Road.

Gorst referred Pearlroth to COOK-FOX architects in Manhattan. As Andrew Geller devotees, they devised a solution that would allow Pearlroth to build a larger house on the site for his family while also restoring and moving the Andrew Geller-designed structure closer to the road.

The goal is to open the modernist structure to the public for tours by appointment. For more information and updates please visit: pearlrothhouse.org. - Kate Tuohy

PRESERVATION NOTES TURNS 50!

It has become apparent that those of us, interested in conservation and preservation, need to be alerted to threats of destruction to the ideas and irreplaceable things that comprise our heritage, and to the moves designed to avert such threats. These brief notes are designed to alert you. *****

This was the credo Barbara Van Liew (1911-2005) put on the front cover of SPLIA's first *Preservation Notes* edition in March 1965. BVL, as she was affectionately known, felt Long Island's cultural heritage needed a voice and she was determined to make a SPLIA newsletter be that



Barbara Van Liew, 1981.

voice for preservation. Volume I of *Preservation Notes* consisted of spring, summer, and fall editions covering issues such as: a proposed sand and gravel mine in Wading River and Shoreham; endangered buildings at the Brooklyn Navy Yard (including the 1806 Commandant's Residence, designed by Charles Bullfinch); the announcement of New York City's Landmarks Law; the establishment of architectural review boards in Northport and Sea Cliff; and the proposed demolition of the original Garden City Hotel, designed by Stanford White.

Fifty years later, the credo remains and SPLIA strives to keep BVL's voice alive in *Preservation Notes*, covering preservation issues and success stories from the East River to Montauk.

CROWN HEIGHTS NORTH III HISTORIC DISTRICT, BROOKLYN

The Crown Heights North III Historic District in central Brooklyn was designated by New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) in March 2015. Adjoining the Crown Heights North and Crown Heights North II Historic Districts (designated 2007 and 2011 respectively), the three districts contain more than 1,000 buildings representing a wealth of architectural styles and building types dating from the 1870s to the 1930s.

Until the first half of the 19th century, the area comprising present-day Crown Heights North consisted of large tracts of farmland belonging to Brooklyn's old Dutch families, such as the Lefferts, who also held their family seats there. Following the opening of the Kings County Elevated Railway in 1888 (which ran along Fulton Street to the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge), the area later exploded with hundreds of high-style row houses. Referred to as the St. Mark's District and marketed as "fashionable" and "select," development intensified in the early 20th century and led to a proliferation of apartment flats

and two-family row houses.

The Historic Districts Council, a New York City preservation advocacy group, included Crown Heights North on their annual Six to Celebrate list in 2015, advocating for the Crown Heights North Association's effort to broaden the neighborhood's historic district boundaries.

The LPC's recent historic district designation of this particular section of the neighborhood is a major step forward in the local community group's effort to preserve the rich architectural fabric in an area of Brooklyn that has recently become an epicenter for real estate speculation and redevelopment.



Prospect Place "Super Block," courtesy of LPC Designation Report.

RIDGEWOOD, QUEENS: RICH IN GERMAN HISTORY

Late in 2014, New York City's Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Central Ridgewood Historic District in Queens. The neighborhood is significant as an intact grouping of nearly 1,000 buildings of mostly brick row house design, representing one of the most harmonious and intact enclaves of early 20th century working-class dwellings in the city. The neighborhood was developed in the first decades of the last century, leading up to the First World War, by German-Americans and immigrants from Germany. Most of the row houses, featuring round projecting bays, were designed by the architectural firm Louis Berger & Company. Today, the district retains a high

level of integrity and ambiance that has distinguished it for the last century.

During the neighborhood's rise, Ridgewood was considered one of the fastest growing sections of the city. The area was populated mostly by Germans who had first settled in Manhattan's Lower East Side and Brooklyn's Williamsburg. Many worked in Brooklyn's sugar refineries along the East River and breweries in Bushwick. Though no longer a predominantly German community, the LPC notes Central Ridgewood's success as a comfortable and attractive working-class neighborhood that continues to the present day as an aspect of this newly-designated historic district's significance.



69th Avenue street view showing typical row houses, courtesy of LPC Designation Report.

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*Vol. L Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2015
Iss 0885-7326*

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*Published by
The Society for the Preservation
of Long Island Antiquities*

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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.

*For SPLIA Membership Information
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*Preservation Notes is listed in
the Avery Index to Architectural periodicals
and is made possible by the
New York State Council on the Arts*

BUFFALO ROOM RESTORATION AT COE HALL

Over the last several years, major changes have taken place at *Coe Hall*, the grand medieval revival mansion designed by Walker & Gillette that was completed in 1921 for William Robertson Coe and his wife, Mai Rogers Coe. The Coe's breakfast room, known as the Buffalo Room for its murals painted by artist Robert Winthrop Chanler in 1920, depicts romantic scenes of the Wyoming landscape where the family owned "Buffalo Bill" Cody's hunting camp, Irma Lake Lodge, in Cody, Wyoming.

Born into a patrician New York family, Robert Chanler was close friends with Mai Rogers Coe and gave drawing lessons to the Coes' second son Robert. Described by Robert Coe as "eccentric and almost bizarre," Chanler's work often utilized metallic pigments and textured plaster to accentuate the feeling of movement and energy. In the Coes' Buffalo Room, he used the impasto technique on the mural to create a textured relief, and hints of gold applied to the buffalos give the intimate space a dramatic effect.

Conservators from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation have monitored this important mural for temperature, humidity, and light control for the past fifteen years. Two of the four walls have been masterfully restored by the conservation team, with the other two walls and the ceiling ready for work to begin. A special air conditioning



Detail of Chanler's Buffalo mural in the Breakfast Room of Coe Hall, 2015.

system has been installed (utilizing the original forced hot air vents) to maintain ideal conditions to preserve the rare murals. This is the only room in the house to be completely climate controlled.

Mr. Coe donated the property to the State of New York in 1955 with the expectation that it would be used as a center for horticultural education. Planting Fields Arboretum finally opened to the public in 1971 as a state park and the Planting Fields Foundation was established in 1979

to enhance the preservation and interpretation of the grounds and mansion.

The progress on the Buffalo Room mural restoration is just one aspect of a larger preservation program taking place at Planting Fields Arboretum. Rooms are being restored and furnished to better interpret the house to when the Coes first moved in and a new audio tour narrated by Dr. Michael Coe, a grandson and President of Planting Fields Foundation, was released in the summer of 2015.



Exterior view of Coe Hall, completed in 1921. Landscape designs by the Olmsted Brothers.

SAG HARBOR WORKS TO IMPROVE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

Signs of the Great Recession coming to a close is clearly evident by increased construction throughout Long Island's East End. In the last several years, the villages and towns of the South Fork have come up with creative new solutions to incentivize historic preservation and address the growing issue of tear downs.

The Village of Sag Harbor, roughly a square mile featuring a local, state, and national historic district incorporating approximately the total area, has witnessed some significant losses to historic resources in recent years. Whereas the Village of East Hampton and the Town of Southampton established "zoning bonuses" to incentivize historic preservation by allowing owners to build larger houses in exchange for designating the historic house a landmark, Sag Harbor must address their preservation challenges through a different approach.

Due to a unique concentration of late 18th and early 19th century built fabric within a very dense village setting, Sag Harbor has one of the strictest local historic preservation ordinances in the region. However, even the best laws are only as strong as the weakest interpreter. Residents and community activists started calling attention to the lack of communication between the various appointed boards, such as the Board of Historic Preservation and Architectural Review and Zoning Board of Appeals, and the inappropriate alterations to buildings within the historic district that were being approved.

In July, the Sag Harbor Village Board listened to cries for action from the community. Following a dozen testimonies



Aerial view of Sag Harbor Village.

asking for a stop to the rampant destruction of the village's historic built fabric, Village Trustees voted in favor of a six-month building moratorium to reassess and revise its building code as well as improve its historic preservation ordinance and review process.

When the announcement was made, the Board of Historic Preservation and Architectural Review also announced a new board chair and the establishment of a non-voting historic preservation consultant position to advise the board.

As a Certified Local Government (CLG), Sag Harbor is able to apply for

State funding to pay for a preservation consultant as well as fund a preservation plan for the village and provide training for board members -- useful tools to be utilized during the building moratorium.

The history and architecture of Sag Harbor is what continues to draw visitors to the tiny seaside village season after season. While the post-recession building boom on the East End is an encouraging sign that the economy is once again strong, communities must be diligent to ensure growth is balanced in order to preserve the vibrancy and unique character of place.

UPDATE: SPLIA'S LIST OF ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

In six years, SPLIA has called attention to eighteen endangered places and some are seeing positive change. The nomination of the **Sayre Barn** (2010) in Southampton Village led to a "save" and the restoration was detailed in 2014's *Preservation Notes*. The **LaGrange Inn** (2013) in West Islip was threatened by a chain store pharmacy. The nomination garnered community interest and a "save" for the Inn by relocating it closer to the street corner. The **John Coltrane Home** (2011) in Dix Hills was subsequently added to the National Trust's *Eleven Most Endangered* and was awarded a \$36,000 state grant towards a feasibility study, \$30,000 from the 1772 Foundation to begin restoration, and new fundraising efforts to restore the house and establish interpretive and cultural programming. After years of planning and review by the Town of Southampton,

the **Canoe Place Inn** (2010) in Hampton Bays - close to being a lost cause when it made SPLIA's list - will be restored as part of a new development plan for the site. Following the 2012 closing of the **Sacred Heart Church Complex** (2013) in Cutchogue on the North Fork, an ad hoc committee was formed to galvanize support for preserving the church structures. This motivated the Town of Southold to establish an Historic Preservation District floating zone in 2015, providing incentivized protection to eligible historic landmarks in exchange for additional uses not currently permitted in the underlying zoning district.

Generally, the overall status of most properties is oriented towards improvement though some remain unchanged. The long-term future of **St. Paul's School** (2010) is still vague. The **Booker T. Wash-**

ington House (2010) in Fort Salonga escaped demolition, however, the house is still vacant and gutted. Public attention was brought to the deteriorated state of the **Oyster Bay Train Station** following its 2013 nomination, and plans are moving ahead for the restoration and reuse of the site by the Oyster Bay Rail Road Museum. SPLIA must also acknowledge two losses: Huntington Village lost the **Hotel Huntington** (2011) for a new bank building in 2012 and SPLIA's watch property, the **St. Ignatius Retreat House at Inisfada**, was demolished to make way for a private residential development in 2013.

SPLIA's *List of Endangered Historic Places* was initiated to help shine a light on the region's threatened historic resources. The abovementioned saves are encouraging, and SPLIA continues to advocate for improvements at the other sites.

LONG ISLAND'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AT RISK

Long Island's industrial heritage can be found across the region in the form of wind and tide mills that once ground grain into flour, commercial waterfronts where boat yards built ships to transport goods and people, aviation sites that pioneered the testing and manufacturing of the first airplanes that now dominate our skies, and factories that produced textiles and other goods.

Industrial heritage east of the Brooklyn and Queens waterfront on Long Island contributes to the identity of communities, from Port Jefferson to Patchogue and Riverhead to Glen Cove, yet few examples of industrial buildings have survived to the 21st century. The loss of the Glenwood Landing Power Plant (a brick structure with soaring arch windows that stood on the eastern edge of Hempstead Harbor since 1923) was the catalyst for SPLIA's 2015 thematic nomination of Industrial Heritage at Risk.

With so little industrial heritage in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, those remaining are all the more important to preserve: the Bulova Watchcase Factory in Sag Harbor, one of the last surviving examples of large scale industrial architecture, was recently transformed from a neglected shell to luxury condominiums; the 2002 proposed redevelopment of the former Bluepoints Oyster Company motivated the West Sayville community to preserve their commercial waterfront by enabling a new owner to adapt the site for new maritime uses; and the Village of Port Jefferson successfully reused certain industrial maritime buildings (such as the former J.M. Bayles & Son shipbuilders complex) to create the Village Center. However, countering the success stories are losses like the exuberantly designed Brooklyn Water-



Roslyn Grist Mill, 2015.

works pump house in Freeport that moldered away until its shell was demolished in 2011.

The success of SPLIA's Endangered Sites program depends on public participation. Local residents are the most aware of issues affecting historic resources in their community and the Endangered Sites nomination process is how SPLIA is able to raise awareness to larger regional audiences. This year SPLIA has chosen two in-house nominations to represent Long Island's Industrial Heritage at Risk:

Roslyn Grist Mill, Roslyn

A rare surviving early 18th century industrial building featuring unique Dutch framing methods, the Roslyn Grist Mill has been vacant and deteriorating since the 1970s. Owned by Nassau County and

listed on the National Register of Historic Places, community members and local preservation groups have been planning to restore the structure for over a decade. Funding is earmarked for restoration yet numerous false starts and no clear vision of how the building can be repurposed has delayed restoration.

Since SPLIA announced its 2015 list of Endangered Historic Places, an ad hoc committee of preservationists and local residents have regained momentum, putting a plan into motion for rehabilitation that makes the site the center of a downtown and waterfront revitalization initiative. Currently, the greatest hurdle for the site is transferring ownership from Nassau County to the Village of Roslyn.

Fordham Saw Mill, Remsenburg-Speonk

Designated a Town landmark in 1985, the building has been vacant since 2008. Once a center of industry in the area, the mill served as a location for carriage, wheel, and coffin-making throughout its history. The community wants to see the former mill rehabilitated but the owners claim landmark designation is a disincentive to potential buyers or renters and have let the property decline.

In May, two local community groups co-hosted a public forum and site visit at the mill. Representatives from the town and the property owners addressed residents on current preservation incentives in place for property owners, the structural status of the building, and challenges for adaptively reusing the site which straddles the ecologically-sensitive Speonk River.



Fordham Saw Mill, 2015.

SPLIA DOCUMENTS LONG ISLAND'S OPEN-AIR MUSEUMS

Across Long Island, collecting historic artifacts and architecture flourished in a unique fashion after World War II, particularly in preparation for the Bicentennial: SPLIA's founder, Howard C. Sherwood bequeathed his 18th century farmstead for use as a museum; Ward Melville established the Ward Melville Heritage Trust, preserving his collection of decorative arts and architecture; and local historical societies across the island began establishing campuses of moved buildings to store and interpret objects and images relating to Long Island history.

The campus model of moved buildings, known as "open-air" or "living-history" museums, is an approach to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting material culture within a campus setting. Such methodologies began with the 1891 establishment of Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden by Arthur Hazelius who interpreted buildings and traditional pre-industrial life-ways, in reaction to a rapidly changing world.

American industrialists established similar sites for the same goal as Hazelius in the early 20th century: automaker Henry Ford developed Greenfield Village in Michigan in 1929 (a National Historic Landmark); Standard Oil tycoon, John D. Rockefeller sponsored the restoration and reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg

in Virginia (also a National Historic Landmark) in the 1930s; and in Massachusetts, Albert Wells assembled what is today known as Old Sturbridge Village in the 1940s.

These three examples of the curated open-air museum village utilized relocated historic structures or reconstructions to interpret American life before industrialization. Conceptually, they align with the national popularity of the Colonial Revival aesthetic introduced during Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition of 1876.

While the so-called "robber barons" purchased enormous tracts of land for private country estates on Long Island, another population of wealthy individuals purchased and restored early American farmhouses. These antiquarians, like Sherwood and Melville, filled their historic houses with objects relating to Long Island's Colonial past, pioneering the period room and "living with antiquities" movement. By the dawn of World War II, the antiquarian movement was popularized with the establishment of scores of open-air museums and historic sites across the country.

This past year SPLIA has embarked on a thematic survey of ten open-air museums on Long Island. Eight campuses were identified in Suffolk County and two in

Nassau County. The museum campus survey documents the history of each building moved to the site identifying age, original location, ownership, date of relocation, and information regarding the restoration of the building for display in the museum setting. The research has uncovered the identities of the early preservationists involved, their goals for disseminating Long Island history to the public, and how these efforts contribute to the history and professionalization of historic preservation at a national level.

Typically, a structure that has been moved is not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. However, the phenomenon of relocating structures on Long Island is significant to the cultural history of the region and the area has a greater concentration of open-air museums than almost anywhere in the country. Documenting the regional open-air museum campuses on Long Island establishes a thematic framework for nominations to the National Register by identifying the historic significance of the campus itself. Such a document will facilitate the custodians of these sites to apply for listing as well as provide opportunities to further exploration of Long Island's role in historic preservation during the early to mid-twentieth century.



Aerial view of Old Bethpage Village Restoration.

LOST, SAVED, AND ON WATCH

Lost



Glenwood Landing Power Plant, Hempstead Harbor

Built in 1923 by the Long Island Lighting Company, the Glenwood Landing Power Plant generated gas and electric power for the region until National Grid ceased its operations in 2012. Advocacy efforts were made to preserve and adaptively reuse the iconic landmark as a waterfront recreational facility to no avail. National Grid's plan is to minimally remediate the site, pave it over, fence it off, and leave the waterfront inaccessible to the Glenwood Landing community.



Aluminaire House, West Islip

Designed by architects A. Lawrence Kocher and Albert Frey for the 1931 Architectural and Allied Arts Exposition in New York City, the 22x28 foot all-metal modular Aluminaire House was unprecedented for its pioneering use of prefabricated lightweight materials. After the exposition, the Aluminaire house was moved to the Huntington estate of architect, Wallace K. Harrison. In 1986, it was again disassembled and moved to the West Islip campus of the New York Institute of Technology for use at the school's architecture and design program until the campus closed in 2012.

It was announced this year the building will once again hit the road. This time to Palm Springs, CA, where Albert Frey spent much of his career designing houses.

Saved



"The Witch's Hat," Aquebogue

After sitting vacant and deteriorating for decades, restoration of the "Witch's Hat" on Main Road in Aquebogue is complete following an eighteen-month project led by the Riverhead Landmarks Preservation Committee and the Save Main Road civic group. Built in 1927 as a roadside attraction by retired Brooklyn-native Harry Fleming, the "Witch's Hat" operated as a tiny shop selling candy, cigarettes, gas, and ice cream. Later used as a plant nursery, this icon of roadside architecture was designated a local landmark in 1987 by the Town of Riverhead and is the North Fork's answer to the Big Duck in Flanders.

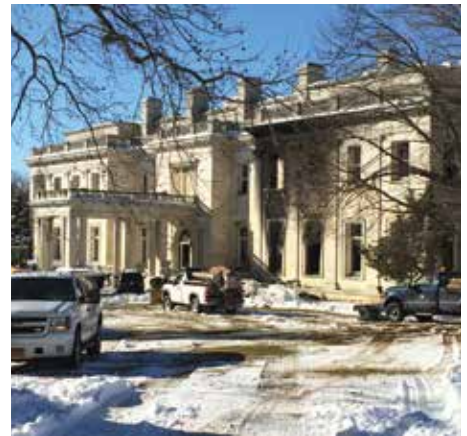


Fowler House, Freetown

The modest two-story saltbox cottage was originally owned by George and Sarah Fowler, Native American Montaukett whose descendants occupied the dwelling until the late 1980s. It is believed to originally have been located in Montauk until the late-19th century when members of the Montaukett Indian Nation were relocated to Freetown, a community established in the early-19th century by freed African-Americans.

With only a sink for indoor plumbing and a kitchen stove providing heat, this modest vernacular time capsule suffered from extensive neglect while passing back and forth between Town of East Hampton and Suffolk County ownership for decades. Now owned by the Town, the property will be preserved as an historic site interpreting the Native and African-American history of Freetown.

On Watch



Winfield Hall, Glen Cove

In late January, a fire ravaged all three floors in the east wing of Winfield Hall, the last and best-known Long Island commission by architect C. P. H. Gilbert for five and dime tycoon F. W. Woolworth. Built in 1916 after a fire destroyed the first Winfield Hall, the property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places but is not a locally designated landmark in the City of Glen Cove. A lack of local designation means there is no real protection to ensure the exquisite mansion is preserved.



Morpurgo House, Sag Harbor

The steady deterioration of No. 6 Union Street in Sag Harbor (commonly known as the Morpurgo House) has become a symbol of demolition by neglect on the East End. Plagued by decades of heirs' disputes, the deterioration of the house has now reached a stage where it is a potential threat to public safety.

A pending foreclosure judgement against the investors, who have owned the house since 2008, prevents Village officials from targeting a responsible party to make necessary repairs to stabilize the property. The mortgage holder agreed to erect a fence around the property but, until the foreclosure process is complete, the fate of this contributing property within the historic district is unclear.



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