
the
New York
Preservation
Archive
Project *Newsletter*

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SPRING 2009

Welcome to the tenth edition of the newsletter of the New York Preservation Archive Project. The mission of the New York Preservation Archive Project is to document, preserve and celebrate the history of preservation in New York. Through public programs, outreach, and the creation of public access to information, the Archive Project hopes to bring these stories to light.

Chairman's Comments: Living Legacies

Anthony C. Wood

In the early 1980s I did a series of oral histories with some of the great sages of preservation in New York City: Geoffrey Platt, Harmon Goldstone, Brendan Gill, and Ruth Wittenberg. Also on that list was Margot Gayle. All these giants of preservation responded warmly to the request of a preservation neophyte to conduct an oral history with them. All generously shared their stories, time and wealth of knowledge. I will never forget the time I spent with those living legends.

Once Margot became aware of my archival interest, for over the next twenty years she would continue to feed it with additional information and materials. Every so often I would get an envelope with a historic treasure enclosed. It might be a sheet of historic letterhead or a flyer from one of her old preservation efforts or an article on a past preservation battle.

As much as Margot appreciated the past, she was never lost in it. As we all know, she remained an active preservation advocate to the very end. I think it was at least partially because she appreciated how preservation history could help refine and support preservation advocacy, that she was willing to devote time and energy to helping me capture that history. Indeed, Margot's own evolution as a preservationist both inspires and instructs. Her organizing strategies, political tactics, and creative approaches to advance preservation have much to offer those advancing preservation's agenda today.

Because we are lucky and most of Margot's preservation story has been documented, we can benefit from it.

Unfortunately, Margot is only one of a handful of preservationists whose stories have been captured. Since the interviews I conducted in the early 1980s, additional ones have been conducted by a variety of individuals and organizations. As important as each such effort is, for the most part they have been very limited, highly opportunistic and episodic. The cost of the absence of an organized and disciplined professional effort to gather preservation oral histories grows with each new obituary.



Anthony C. Wood and Margot Gayle

It would be hard to imagine a more difficult economic time to launch a major, proactive and well planned, preservation oral history initiative. Unfortunately we have no choice. Though such an effort will be costly, even when done creatively and economically, the price of waiting will only be greater. In reality, holding off for better economic times is not an option.

The Archive Project needs your support to help us take on this challenge. If you are a foundation with preservation interests, this is a high leverage project where your funds will make an extraordinary contribution. If you are a major individual donor, know that by funding this project you will make a permanent contribution to the field—the oral histories we capture will live on as part of the historic record. If you are like me, one who can write only a modest check, know that your gift of any size will make it possible for us to incrementally start this ambitious initiative and in so doing, improve the odds of capturing these preservation voices before they fade forever.

Archival First Responders

On October 21, 2008, NYPAP received an urgent call – not a regular occurrence in the preservation archives world. Margot Gayle, an ardent preservationist who was pivotal in the establishment and designation of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District and so much more, had passed away just a few weeks earlier on September 28, 2008 and her two daughters were in town to sort out what remained in her apartment of the vast collection of files and clippings she had amassed over the years. Anything that was not claimed within those two days was to be discarded.

NYPAP’s Administrator, Sarah Sher, along with intern Melissa Umberger, headed to Ms. Gayle’s Upper East Side apartment with archival boxes and folders at the ready. The result of 50 years of research and correspondence was a room lined with books, papers, clippings, notes and other materials scattered all over the floor, and photographs dating back to the 1960s of New York City’s architectural treasures stuffed into every nook and cranny of the apartment. The Archive Project, along with staff members from the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission and



NYPAP Intern Melissa Umberger at Margot Gayle’s apartment

Pratt Institute’s Library, spent hour upon hour sorting through Ms. Gayle’s incredible collections, trying to identify anything that might be historically valuable.

Part of NYPAP’s mission is to provide in such emergency situations a temporary home for important preservation papers that otherwise would be lost to the dumpster. The Project then seeks to find an appropriate permanent home for such items with established collecting institutions. Though tempted to bring every last piece of paper from Margot’s apartment back to NYPAP’s 11x13 office space, only that which could be immediately determined to be significant could be retrieved. We returned to our building on East 80th Street with a box full of correspondence dating all the way back to 1948, hundreds of slides of New York City sites that are now in the hands of the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission’s research department, and nearly one thousand photographs from the 1960s and 70s taken by Margot Gayle herself. The collection of photographs will be available on NYPAP’s website in a searchable online database within the coming months.

The National Trust Library is now the steward of Margot Gayle’s Friends of Cast Iron papers. Various letters, books,

and images were scavenged by NYPAP and other institutions with a deep interest in New York City and preservation history. Over the years Margot had given away the papers dealing with some of her earlier preservation efforts but having lived to a very active 100 years of age, she continued to generate new material until just before her death. Despite the valiant efforts of family, friends, and preservation organizations, it is likely that under the pressure of having to beat the clock, some Margot material of interest was lost.

This experience underscores the importance of both making plans for your preservation papers and of keeping those plans updated. Years ago Margot may well have thought she had planned for the future of all her important papers, but as her preservation advocacy and research continued unabated, she generated additional decades of archival material. If you have been involved in important chapters in the history of preservation in New York City you need to make plans for the future of your archival material—particularly correspondence, memos, and other original documents. NYPAP does not permanently collect such material but is eager to work with you to identify the most appropriate home for your archives.

Call NYPAP if you are aware of preservation papers heading for the dumpster. Better yet, call us before the emergency arrives. Even preservationists don’t live forever. We are here to help you preserve your piece of preservation’s history. Preservation organizations also need to make plans for the future of their archives so that preservation’s story can be saved. Give us a call; NYPAP is here to help.

NYPAP at the Movies: 2008 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit Features Talk by James Sanders

Side by side, what appeared to be two pictures of the same brownstone were in actuality structures on opposite sides of the country. In New York, the original building, and in Los Angeles, its replica, made of cheap materials and with no structure beyond its façade. James Sanders guided the audience at NYPAP’s 5th annual Bard Birthday Breakfast on December 12, 2008 through many similar archival photographs showing these types of comparisons between New York City buildings and their movie set twins in Los Angeles. These detailed photos of New York City, which Mr. Sanders discovered while conducting research for his book *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*,



James Sanders signing copies of his book, Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies

were taken in an effort to document the city's streetscapes so that they could be accurately recreated on Hollywood lots.

Mr. Sanders' illuminating talk, enjoyed by a full room of early risers at the Harvard Club, not only touched on an interesting period of film history where New York City based movies were all shot in Los Angeles due to inadequate sound technology that picked up too much street noise in cities, but also showed that this rich documentation captured and preserved a piece of New York's history.

Many thanks to all who attended and supported NYPAP's 2008 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit. A very special thanks to our donors at the Benefit Committee level and above:

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Preservation in the 1970s: NYPAP and Pratt Collaborate to Collect Oral Histories with Key Figures

For the second year in a row, the New York Preservation Archive Project and Pratt Institute's graduate program in historic preservation successfully collaborated in collecting oral histories from pivotal figures in preservation. NYPAP Chair Anthony C. Wood guided students in the program's Public History class, co-taught by Marci Reaven and Jeanne Houck, in understanding the context of this year's topic, preservation in the 1970s, and helped them develop skills in conducting oral history interviews.

- Thom Bess, interviewed by Inna Guzenfeld, recounted the story that led up to the designation of the Longwood Historic District.



Melissa Brunette and Bronson Binger

- Bronson Binger, interviewed by Melissa Brunette, reflected on his time as Assistant Commissioner for Capital Projects at the New York City Parks Department, as well as his efforts to designate the Carnegie Hill Historic District and save the Old Metropolitan Opera House.

- Michael Gruen, interviewed by Lauren Peters, discussed the central issues he dealt with while he was Chair of the Historic Districts Council, as well as his effort to designate the Riverside Drive – West 105th Street Historic District.



Lauren Peters and Michael Gruen, former Chair of the Historic Districts Council

- Lenore Norman, interviewed by Marios Drakos, reflected on her time as executive director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Each interview contains fascinating stories that add tremendously to the overall narrative of historic preservation in New York City. All of the interviews have been transcribed and are now available on NYPAP's website.

Beachside Bungalow Preservation Preserved

NYPAP commends its good friend Richard George, president of the Beachside Bungalow Preservation Association (BBPA) for recently donating his Beachside Bungalow Preservation Association of Far Rockaway archives to the Queens Library.

This collection covers the years between the establishment of the BBPA in 1984 to 2008. The BBPA strives to preserve, organize, and improve the community of Far Rockaway, Queens, from Beach 24th Street to Beach 27th Street, between Seagirt Boulevard and the boardwalk. Their campaign to save Wavecrest Gardens and preserve Derech Emunoh Synagogue, as well as their community-building efforts through street fairs and greening projects, are all well documented in this rich archival collection contained in eleven boxes at the library's Long Island Division. These archives contain a mixed assortment of media, including DVD's, artwork, maps, and correspondence.

Richard George's choice to donate these archives to a library instead of allowing this well-documented history of a young non-profit organization fall into oblivion is a perfect example of what NYPAP advocates for on a daily basis. Saving the everyday documents of an organization gives the preservation movement a sense of its past and

chronicles what has been successful in earlier campaigns or programs.

The Archive Project hopes that other preservation organizations follow Richard George’s lead and find ways of preserving their own archives so that their past endeavors can guide the future of historic preservation.

NYPAP is Proud to Co-Sponsor “In Their Own Words: A Salute to the Women of the Greenwich Village Preservation Movement”

Thursday, April 2, 2009
 6:30-8:00 P.M.
 Judson Memorial Hall
 239 Thompson Street between W. 4th and W. 3rd Streets

Free; reservations required.
 RSVP to rsvp@gvshp.org or (212) 475-9585 ext. 35

GVSHP’s Oral History Project, conducted over 10 years and only now available to the public, features interviews with many of the most influential women of the preservation movement, including Margot Gayle, Verna Small, and



Jane Jacobs. Hear fascinating selections from their oral histories shedding new light on their experiences and passion for preservation. Introduction by NYPAP Board member Susan

De Vries, director of the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum and conductor of several of the interviews, and a keynote lecture on Jane Jacobs by Roberta Brandes Gratz, former award-winning journalist and author of *The Living City: Thinking Small in a Big Way* and *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown*.

In Memorium

Dorothy Miner

Lisa Ackerman

Each year we lament the loss of important figures in our professional and private lives and the preservation community in the last several years has felt an acute loss as beloved friends and colleagues have died. NYPAP has said goodbye to Giorgio Cavaglieri, Paul Byard, Jan Pokorny, Margot Gayle and several other steadfast supporters of preservation in New York City as well as frequent audience members at NYPAP events and programs. The death

of Dorothy Miner in October 2008 was, however, a most personal loss.

The obituary in *The New York Times* referred to Dorothy as “...a fierce, immovable stickler — and could infuriate allies as well as adversaries with her insistence on principle and procedure.” No other phrase could describe Dorothy more perfectly. Dorothy was such a fixture in New York City’s preservation world that I have no actual memory of meeting her. She was simply a part of my professional life from my earliest memories extending back more than 25 years. I do have very distinct memories of Dorothy’s contributions to the field, her unfailing support of NYPAP, her generosity with knowledge, and her clear sense of preservation principles.



Dorothy was an engaged NYPAP Board member, attended nearly every event we organized, brought students and colleagues to NYPAP programs, and asked tough questions at every turn. She could indeed infuriate anyone working with her. On more than one occasion, I was exasperated that Dorothy wouldn’t use email. It seems foolish now because there was often great joy in sitting down and writing her a note and receiving a written response.

One of my strongest memories of Dorothy is walking out of an evening event at the Neighborhood Preservation Center, asking her a simple question about something I was reading, and then being kicked out of the NPC office more than two hours later when Dorothy was helping me construct a meaningful bibliography if I really wanted to explore that topic more thoroughly. This might not seem odd to anyone who witnessed her receive the Landmarks Lion award from Historic Districts Council. Dorothy made the usual polite remarks and then provided the audience with an unparalleled lecture on the evolution of the landmarks law and its contemporary meaning.

Dorothy will be remembered by many long into the future. Many of us will miss her well-meaning vexing behavior. Indeed, I have discovered I have an inner Dorothy who is always reminding me that the enforcement of the land-

marks law cannot wane. Now all NYPAP Board members use email, but we've lost a key figure in the 1978 Penn Central Transportation Company v. New York City battle and one of the board's strongest champions.

Truman Moore

The Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District

The death on October 4, 2008, of Truman Moore at age 73 leaves a void among photographers who document the architectural heritage of New York City. Truman's studio was in one of the glorious buildings that, since 1989, has been part of Manhattan's Ladies' Mile Historic District – an area in which he and his wife, Margaret (Peg) Moore, played pivotal roles in persuading the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate it, after a six-year campaign of researching, photographing, educating, and lobbying.

Part of that effort, spearheaded by the still-active organization called The Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District, included the production and sale of the book "End of the Road for Ladies' Mile?" with Truman's incisive photographs of the area's architecturally stunning Palaces of Commerce, many of them then at risk of demolition or insensitive alteration. They were silent and endangered symbols of the great shopping area of the Gilded Age between the Civil War and World War I, now again a thriving commercial and increasingly residential part of the city.

Truman, a successful commercial photographer, was an architecture and history buff who donated his camera and an enormous part of his time and talent to the cause of historic preservation. Almost all of the Ladies' Mile's 400 buildings, in 28 blocks of what is now called Midtown South, were documented by Truman's loving lenses. His images inspired a generation of landmarking advocates and activists. Truman, a Southerner by birth, and Peg, moved to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1994, where Truman's photography and Peg's preservation advocacy worked their magic again to help save and expand that city's architectural heritage. They left behind in New York the Ladies' Mile Historic District, which celebrates its 20th anniversary in May of this year.

Full obituaries for Truman Moore available at www.savethecity.org and in the October 7, 2008 edition of the *Post and Courier*

Evelyn Strouse

As we were going to print, the Archive Project learned of the death of Evelyn Strouse. Ms. Strouse passed away on January 15, 2009 at the age of 92. She was the leader of

the Union Square Community Coalition for 20 years, an early member of The Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District, and served on three committees of Community Board 5 from 1992 to 2002. A full obituary is available in the February 4-10, 2009 edition of *The Villager*.

NYPAP News

Melissa Umberger, a graduate student in the Pratt Institute's historic preservation program, is continuing her fall internship into the spring. Ms. Umberger has been working tirelessly on scanning, identifying, and organizing the Margot Gayle Photo Archive, as well as drafting new entries for NYPAP's online database. Ivy Harrison, a sophomore at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, joined the Archive Project as an intern at the beginning of the spring semester. Ivy has been researching and writing entries for NYPAP's online database.



Photograph of 125th St. and Lenox Ave. taken by Margot Gayle in 1961

The Archive Project's online database, intended to serve as an encyclopedia of historic preservation, will be live on www.nypap.org by the end of Preservation Month (May). This database will be a first-step resource for researchers who wish to find out the locations of archives or oral histories related to a person, place, organization, event, or campaign within the history of preservation. This database is a constant work-in-progress, as NYPAP continues its in-depth research into the field of historic preservation.

Thanks to the generosity of Anne Whitman, NYPAP has just begun an extensive oral history interview with Carolyn Kent, a key preservationist in Morningside Heights. NYPAP encourages anyone who wishes to sponsor an oral history interview to contact our offices for more information.

NYPAP is delighted to welcome its most recent board member, Shirley Ferguson Jenks. For over 30 years Shirley has been active in historic preservation. Since 1994 she has provided fund-raising counsel to nonprofit organizations in the fields of culture, education, health and social services. She is the principal of the Jenks Group, LLC. Shirley's preservation background and fundraising acumen will be of great assistance to NYPAP as it seeks funding for its second decade of documenting, preserving, and celebrating the history of preservation in New York City.

The Archive Project thanks the following for generous contributions in 2008:

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