

the new york preservation archive project

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2014

Welcome to the 20th edition of the newsletter of the New York Preservation Archive Project. The mission of the New York Preservation Archive Project is to protect and raise awareness of the narratives of historic preservation in New York. Through public programs, outreach, celebration, and the creation of public access to information, the Archive Project hopes to bring these stories to light.



Kent Barwick protesting Mayor Koch's proposed changes to the Landmarks Law at a 1988 restaging of the 1962 picket line at Pennsylvania Station, June 29, 1988; Courtesy of Steven Tucker

1965 to 2015 to 2065: Who and What Will Tell the Preservation Story?

By *Anthony C. Wood, Founder & Chair*

The multi-year celebration of the 50th anniversary of New York City's Landmarks Law is building steam. The NYC Landmarks50 Alliance, under the dynamic leadership of Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, now involves over 120 organizations, and each of them is hosting a special activity to focus public attention on the past 50 years of preservation in New York City. Appropriately, as part of this celebration, there will be efforts to present and analyze the history of the past 50 years. Though still too fresh for a truly detached

and definitive historical analysis, this will be the "first take" on telling the story of preservation over the last half-century.

How will that story be told? In great part, the answer depends on the archival material and other resources available to inform that story and make it dynamic and engaging. Appreciating what we have and what we don't have to tell that story can help instruct us in what we should be saving and archiving now so that in 2065, when the centennial of the Landmarks Law is celebrated, the story

of the second 50 years of preservation can be told with even greater thoroughness, accuracy, insight, and excitement.

What do we have to work with to tell the story of the last five decades of preservation in New York City? First, where do we stand on the basics—the Sergeant Joe Friday of Dagnet "Just the facts, ma'am" approach to history? We have the public records of what the Landmarks Preservation Commission has designated. Second, going deeper, do we have the basic facts for the

preservation efforts behind those and other sites, e.g. chronologies of events, lists of protagonists, accounts of activities? Sadly, it is a rare occurrence when a specific episode of preservation advocacy has been dutifully documented during or shortly after the fact, when information is readily available and memories still fresh. Good examples of such efforts are the book *The Fight for City and Suburban Homes* and the web resource “Campaign to Preserve 2 Columbus Circle: Chronology, Bibliography, Dramatis Personae” on the Archive Project website.

This rarity proves that those engaged in today’s preservation campaigns and those who will be involved in tomorrow’s need to add the task of keeping basic accounts of their activities to their already lengthy to-do lists. Future historians will bless them for even the most rudimentary timelines of events (meetings, public hearings, press coverage, etc.) and an annotated roster of the key players. For multi-year preservation efforts (and most are) with many permutations (e.g. designation hearings, court proceedings, hardship procedures, etc.) a simple chronology will provide future historians an invaluable guide to their efforts.

Having access to the facts helps answer the basic questions of “What happened?”; “When?”; and “Who did what?”; but doesn’t necessarily provide answers to such higher order questions as “What were they thinking?” To gain that level of understanding one needs access to the thoughts of the players. When it comes to capturing the mental processes of those involved in the last 50 years of preservation, the Archive Project has conducted over 60 interviews, many of which are available as transcripts on the Archive Project website.

Part of that collection is a series of oral histories with each of the past chairs of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (with the exception, sadly, of

David Todd, who passed away before the project was launched). This collection provides a baseline view from that singularly important preservation perch. We also have oral histories from leaders of key civic organizations and a range of participants in a variety of preservation efforts. Many more such narratives are needed to fully tell the story of the last half century, but we have made a good start. Looking ahead, the task of capturing the voices that will tell the stories of the next half-century is one we all need to embrace.

Providing great insights, yet rarely available, are first person accounts of preservation efforts. A great example of a new entry in that category is Scott Hand’s and Otis Pratt Pearsall’s *The Origins of Brooklyn Bridge Park, 1986-1988* (now available on the Archive Project’s website). This 90-page account of the earliest days of the efforts to create Brooklyn Bridge Park not only rigorously recounts the events that took place, the players in the drama, and the tenor of the times, but also provides insights into the thinking and strategy behind the scenes. Meticulously documented, this narrative is a model other preservationists should be encouraged to emulate.

Finally, what do we have to animate the preservation stories of the last 50 years? Fortunately we have photographs documenting such iconic preservation battles as the efforts to save Grand Central Terminal

and St. Bartholomew’s. But how many unknown photographs of less prominent preservation efforts exist in forgotten files or dusty scrapbooks? In an old photo album of mine I recently ran across photographs of the exhibition mounted at the Municipal Art Society in the 1980s as part of the unsuccessful campaign to have a stretch of Fifth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan designated a historic district. What photos do you have? With cameras now built into every possible device, there is no excuse for not appropriately documenting the next 50 years of preservation history, unless, of course, we forget to do so!

Over the past 50 years, there has been radio and television news coverage of key episodes in preservation history. Surely there must be existing footage somewhere of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis taking the Landmark Express Train II to Albany to testify against legislation that would have removed religious properties from the protection of New York City’s Landmarks Law. Is there a tape somewhere out there of William Warfield singing “Goin’ Home” at the City Council public hearing on the Dvořák House? What other treasures might be out there?

There is also the media generated by the campaigns themselves. Remember Tony Schwartz’s “narrowcasting” (messages targeted to the key decision-maker in a controversy and aired publicly vs. broadcasting aimed at motivating the general public) media efforts employed on behalf of the battle to save the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park? Looking to the future, with the help of technology, why shouldn’t every present and future preservation effort be extensively documented on video shot from smart phones? Today, there is almost no excuse for failing to capture significant events.

In addition to seeing the players and hearing their voices, what else can bring alive key episodes in the history of preservation?



Exhibition at the Municipal Art Society mounted as part of the campaign to designate a portion of Fifth Avenue as a historic district, 1984; Courtesy of Anthony C. Wood

How about the sailor's hat (referencing the iconic photo of the sailor kissing the nurse in Times Square on V-J Day) worn by participants in the rally to save Times Square or the preservation lollipop from the Campaign to Save 2 Columbus Circle (known as the "lollipop building")? What would we give today for one of the original placards from the August 2, 1962 picket line at Pennsylvania Station or the September 26, 1964 protest at the Brokaw Mansion? What about the architectural models for some of the proposed towers over landmarks that were defeated? What about reminders from preservation failures or salvaged elements of beloved lost sites? I have an eight-inch piece of decorative plaster from the Biltmore Hotel's Palm Court that I picked from the wreckage while being ejected, along with Gabe Pressman, from the demolition site in August of 1981. What's in your closet?

So what will be available to help tell the story of the next 50 years of preservation history? The answer is simple—*whatever you save*. What events will be brought alive on film? The events you document. Whose voices will future preservationists hear? Yours, and those that you record. What inside knowledge will we have on the preservation efforts in which you've been involved? The information you record through an oral history or a first person narrative. The preservation stories you help capture are the intellectual capital of the movement and in one sense belong to us all. However, unless you make the effort to document and preserve them, odds are good that their full value and their ability to inspire, inform, and instruct future preservationists will be squandered.

The New York Preservation Archive Project is committed to the work of documenting and preserving the history of preservation, but the task is too big for any one group. What is needed is a preservation-movement-wide effort to consciously document our history, both while it is being made and shortly thereafter. Together we can preserve our story as we have been preserving the buildings, neighborhoods, and cultural landscapes that tell the story of our city, state, and nation. Just as the preservation of those sites has greatly benefited society, the preservation movement stands to benefit immensely from preserving its own legacy. ■

NYPAP Events

Our Public Programs Continue to Celebrate, Educate, & Inspire

This spring the Archive Project joined the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, the NYC Landmarks50 Alliance, and NYU Press to celebrate the publication of James M. Lindgren's new book, *Preserving South Street Seaport: The Dream and Reality of a New York Urban Renewal District*. Lindgren is a professor of history at SUNY Plattsburgh and the author of several books and essays on preservation. **Preserving South Street Seaport: A Book Talk** was generously hosted by The Paris Café, first opened in 1873 and frequented by such personages as Thomas Edison and Theodore Roosevelt.



James M. Lindgren signs a copy of his book *Preserving South Street Seaport*; Courtesy of Kelly Becker

Over pub fare and happy-hour drinks, the 150 attendees were regaled with Lindgren's account of the complex and fascinating struggle to preserve the character of Lower Manhattan's South Street Seaport. Lindgren's presentation chronicled the tenuous rebirth of the neighborhood, including the acquisition of ships, real estate market booms and collapses, controversial developments, and years of often conflicting efforts by preservationists, developers, bankers, politicians, and museum administrators. Lindgren concluded with a discussion of some of the most recent proposals moving forward at the Seaport, leaving the audience questioning what will happen to this unique piece of New York

City history. Attendees gained both a greater knowledge of this dynamic neighborhood, and a better understanding of the process of urban renewal as it pertains to New York City's distinctive waterfront and the special history these areas exhibit. An in-depth book review of *Preserving South Street Seaport* appears on page seven.

As a follow-up to the 2013 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit, the Archive Project and the Neighborhood Preservation Center hosted **The Rise & Fall of Penn Station: A Screening Party**. Over 200 New Yorkers descended upon Professor Thom's Bar & Restaurant in the East Village for drinks, some of the City's best nachos, and a viewing of the new documentary *The Rise & Fall of Penn Station!* The film did not disappoint; after introductory remarks by Peter Samton, one of the original protesters of the station's demolition, and Archive Project founder and chair Anthony C. Wood, the audience immersed themselves in the epic tale of the doomed terminal. The many facets of the story were compelling—the acquisition and clearing of blocks in the Tenderloin District where the building would rise, the perilous construction of the tunnels under the East and Hudson Rivers in the first decade of the 20th century, the decline in rail travel after World War II, the financial failure of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the battle to save the station from demolition in the 1960s. Indeed, each topic could easily have been the focus of its own documentary. The film, first aired on PBS in February 2014 as part of the *American Experience* series, is a worthy addition to the body of work on the iconic station.

Many thanks to our co-sponsors—the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Pratt Historic Preservation Alumni, the NYC Landmarks50 Alliance, Preservation Alumni, and the Young City Coalition—for helping make this informal film screening such a success. The Archive Project hopes that this is merely the first installation in a series of similar screenings. Please contact our office if you



Archive Project board member Bradley J. Vogel (r) with friends at *The Rise & Fall of Penn Station* screening; Courtesy of the Archive Project

have any ideas for preservation-related films, documentaries, or television shows that could be shown in the future.

Last December's **Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit** was one of the Archive Project's most successful fundraisers yet, a fitting tribute to the milestones the event marked. As our tenth annual benefit, the breakfast was the culmination of a decade of celebrations that similarly honored the history of the preservation movement. And the event also marked what would have been Albert Bard's 147th birthday. Bard was dedicated to protecting the aesthetic values of special places, drafting the New York State legislation authorizing the Landmarks Law (known as the Bard Act), and advocating for City Beautiful concerns ranging from billboard control to zoning. Finally, 2013 marked yet another preservation milestone as the 50th year since demolition began on New York City's Pennsylvania Station, a monumental loss that is regarded as a galvanizing influence on preservation advocacy and policy in the United States.

To commemorate this 50th anniversary, the featured speaker at the 2013 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit was Michael Rossi. Rossi is an independent documentary film and non-fiction television producer whose most recent work is *The Rise & Fall of Penn Station*, a film made for the award-winning PBS series *American Experience*. Rossi has spent the last 13 years producing, directing, shooting, and editing national programs for public television. His production credits include the children's engineering series *Design Squad Nation* (for which he won an Emmy Award) and various films for the *American Experience* series. Rossi has also contributed to PBS's *Frontline*, and his company, Rossi Films,

has completed production work on documentaries, feature films, television shows, music videos, and commercials. Rossi was introduced by Lorraine B. Diehl, the author of the classic study *The Late, Great Pennsylvania Station*.

In his absorbing lecture entitled *Pennsylvania Station: Archives, Preservation, & Storytelling*, Rossi discussed the many decisions required of documentary filmmakers and how archival research informs the creation of non-fiction film. Rossi delved into extensive archival collections in his research for *The Rise & Fall of Penn Station*, especially those at the Pennsylvania State Archives and the records of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company at Temple University. These institutional archives were significant in the filmmaking process, and Rossi explored how the contents of these repositories affected the documentary's development, as well as the essential role that personal collections and first person interviews played in completing the narrative arc. Rossi also showed several clips from the film itself, which incorporated extraordinary archival photographs of the building's construction, the workers who burrowed tunnels beneath the Hudson and East Rivers, the gleaming architectural masterpiece upon its completion, and its heartbreaking demolition. Rossi also described the creative process of layering music, unique sound effects, and interview clips over historic photographs to bring the story to life.

Although Rossi's new documentary focuses primarily on Pennsylvania Station as an engineering feat rather than the station's demise, preservationists in attendance were enthralled with the film clips, which showed the monumentality of the construction project, the breathtaking final product, and how devastating its demolition was after a life of only 50 years. The film is another reminder of what was lost with this extraordinary structure and the danger posed when a city lacks legal protection for its architectural heritage. The film in its entirety can now be viewed online at www.pbs.org.

Central Park was in peak fall foliage last November when Manhattan Borough Historian Michael Miscione led the **Eleventh Annual Salute to Unsung Civic Hero Andrew Haswell Green**. Lauded as "arguably the most important leader in Gotham's long history" by Columbia University professor and author Kenneth T. Jackson, Green was the 19th-century master planner, reformer, and preservationist who transformed New York into a cosmopolitan city. Over his 50-year career, Green steered the creation of some of New York City's most recognized parks, cultural institutions, and public works, including Central Park, the New York Public Library, the Bronx Zoo, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He also rescued the City from bankruptcy after the Tweed Ring scandals, pioneered the local historic preservation movement, and masterminded the 1898 consolidation of the five boroughs. Archive Project founder and chair Anthony C. Wood joined



Anthony Wood speaking at Andrew Haswell Green's salute; Courtesy of Michael Miscione

Miscione at Central Park's Andrew H. Green Memorial Bench (the only public monument to "The Father of Greater New York" in the five boroughs) to speak on the importance of recognizing this often forgotten preservationist and civic hero. The Archive Project salutes Michael Miscione for keeping the memory of this important civic figure alive through this annual event. For more information on Andrew Haswell Green, please visit the Archive Project

online database entry at www.nypap.org.

As noted throughout this newsletter, 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of when demolition began on New York City's Pennsylvania Station, a watershed moment in the history of the City's modern preservation movement. Last spring the Archive Project and the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation cosponsored a panel discussing and analyzing the numerous actions taken to advance some form of landmarks protection that predated this famous loss. Following that theme, **Preservation after the Demolition of Penn Station: A Panel Discussion** was hosted in November to focus on how the preservation effort in New York has evolved since the demolition of Pennsylvania Station. The panel included Franny Eberhart, trustee of the Historic Districts Council, vice-chair of the Historic House Trust, and president of FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, Anthony C. Wood, founder and chair of the Archive Project, and Anthony W. Robins, preservation consultant, writer, lecturer, and tour guide. The panel was moderated by Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. Much of the panel discussion focused on the rise of neighborhood advocacy organizations and the evolution of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) with a focus on each mayoral administration. Robins, who worked at the LPC for over 20 years, gave fascinating insights into the early workings of the agency, including shifting priorities, the pros and cons of increased design flexibility within historic districts, and how the composition of the departments within the agency has changed. Discussion inevitably turned to the new administration and predictions on how the LPC and the preservation field in New York City might change in the near future. ■

The Archive Project enjoys hosting exciting collaborations that celebrate the history of preservation and record the stories of those involved in the field. If you know of a preservation story that should be captured, please consider contacting us to cosponsor an event such as those described here that will educate other preservationists and inspire similar projects.

NYC Landmarks50 Alliance

Planning the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Landmarks Law

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Landmarks Law in 2015, over the next two years the NYC Landmarks50 Alliance will work to broaden the appreciation of New York City's landmarks through a series of programs held throughout the five boroughs. Each member of the Alliance is planning a special project for the upcoming anniversary, and many of these plans are already coming to fruition.

The Society of Illustrators—founded in 1901 to appreciate and promote the art of illustration—has planned a special exhibition in honor of the City's landmarks. *Illustrating our Landmarks*, curated by Leslie Cober-Gentry, will take place from June 3 to August 16, 2014. Members of the Society have been asked to create a visual interpretation of their favorite New York City landmark, in any media and size. A jury will select one work to receive the prestigious Stevan Dohanos Award (named after the American realist painter famed for his *Saturday Evening Post* illustrations), and twelve additional works that will be reproduced in the Society's 2015 calendar. These works, and a selection of other entries, will be included in the exhibition that will run through the summer. If you are interested in participating, please visit the Society's website at www.societyillustrators.org for additional information.

In April 2015 the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY) will present the major exhibition *Saving Place: Fifty Years of New York City Landmarks*. Co-curated by Donald Albrecht, curator of architecture and design at MCNY, and Andrew Dolkart, director of the historic preservation program at Columbia University, and assisted by Seri Worden, preservation consultant, this exhibition will explore the past, present, and

future of historic preservation in New York City.

The scope will be expansive, including a look at the people and the processes involved with landmark designation; an exploration of the roles of community activists, policy makers, owners, developers, and architects; and an examination and celebration of the beauty and power of the City's architectural heritage. Several controversial topics in the field will be addressed, including the shifting interpretation and implementation of the Landmarks Law, the complicated economics of preservation, and contemporary design within historic districts. In order to successfully tell this complex story, the exhibition will feature a rich combination of renderings, models, historic documents, ephemera, photographs, archival film and radio clips, interactive features, digital media, and architectural fragments from some of New York City's greatest lost treasures.

If you have any items that are significant to the history of preservation that could be included in the exhibition, please contact our office at info@nypap.org. MCNY is especially interested in original ephemera, photos, or archival materials related to early preservation campaigns for such sites as Pennsylvania Station, the Brokaw Mansion, Grand Central Terminal, Greenwich Village, and Brooklyn Heights.

These two exhibitions are just a small sampling of the wide range of projects that are being planned for the next two years. Feeling inspired? The NYC Landmarks50 Alliance welcomes innovative ideas from individuals and organizations throughout the five boroughs. To get involved, share ideas, and volunteer your time, please email info@nyclandmarks50.org. ■



New to Archives

Frank Cousins Collection & Carnegie Hall's Digital Archives Project!

The Public Design Commission of the City of New York (formerly the Art Commission) has digitized a small but notable collection of photographs important to the history of preservation in New York City. In 1913 the agency commissioned photographs of approximately 50 buildings that were deemed architecturally and historically significant. Several were chosen for documentation because they were thought to be in danger of demolition, and in fact many were subsequently destroyed. The commission's objective was to ensure that future generations would at least have access to these structures in photographic form. The project photographer was Frank Cousins (1851-1925), an expert on American colonial architecture who is credited with making architectural photography a specialty discipline. Due to his expertise, Cousins likely had some input on the selection of buildings to be documented. This series of photographs is significant as one of the City's earliest official efforts to document its architectural heritage.

The Frank Cousins Collection includes images of residential, commercial, and

religious structures from the 18th- and early 19th-centuries throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Staten Island. Several of the surviving buildings are now house museums, including the Morris-Jumel Mansion and the Lefferts Historic House. Other recognizable surviving landmarks include Colonnade Row on Lafayette Street and the Rectory of the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton near Battery Park. But many of the buildings captured in these photographs have not survived. St. John's Chapel on Varick Street was torn down in 1918 for a controversial road-widening scheme, and the Rhinelander Mansions on Washington Square North were replaced with an apartment building in 1951, not without considerable opposition. A variety of other lesser-known colonial farmhouses and townhouses documented in this project have likewise met the wrecking ball, including the row of private homes pictured below, built ca. 1820 and named by *American Architect* magazine as the "best masterpieces of our old city homes" in 1915. Luckily, the photographs survive, and the digital scans include both the prints themselves and the short, handwritten descriptions on the

reverse of each print that relay interesting snippets of history about each structure. The Frank Cousins Collection may be accessed from "The Archive" tab on the Public Design Commission's website.

In 2012, Carnegie Hall embarked upon its Digital Archives Project, a multi-year initiative to conserve and digitize a significant portion of the Hall's vast historic collections. This project will ensure that the Hall's distinguished legacy is preserved for future generations. Although Carnegie Hall did not establish a formal archive until 1986, a vigorous effort was made in subsequent years to collect materials related to the building's history over the preceding century. The Carnegie Hall Archive now contains thousands of concert programs, posters and fliers, musical manuscripts, autographs, administrative files, and architectural drawings that tell the story of the Hall since it opened in 1891. Included within the collection are materials related to the successful effort to save Carnegie Hall from demolition in the early 1960s, led in large part by renowned violinist Isaac Stern.

The Carnegie Hall Archive obtained a grant to perform an assessment of their entire collection and then commenced digitization in 2012. In the first year of the project, 2,000 video and audio recordings and 3,700 programs were digitized. Textual records of 15,000 events that occurred in Carnegie Hall from 1891 to 1950 are now available on the Hall's website. Of special interest to architects and preservationists is an early product of this project: the restoration and digitization of a detailed cross-section drawing of the Hall prepared in 1889 by the building's architect, William Burnet Tuthill. It is a rare surviving example of an original design drawing by Tuthill, whose papers were lost after he died in 1929. Also of note is the digitization of the documentary film *The 28-Week Miracle*, which chronicles the 1986 restoration of the Hall's interior, including interviews with Stern, then-Mayor Ed Koch, and restoration architect James Polshek. Stay updated on the Digital Archives Project by visiting www.carnegiehall.org. ■



69 & 71 Charlton Street, between Varick & Hudson Streets, 1913; Courtesy of the Public Design Commission

Book Review

Preserving South Street Seaport: The Dream and Reality of a New York Urban Renewal District

by Bradley J. Vogel

On your next visit to the South Street Seaport, with its distinctive steep-pitched roofs and bobbing spider webs of rigging overhead, be sure to thank the governor of New Jersey. No, not the current occupant of that office, but one of his predecessors, Robert B. Meyner, who in the 1950s influenced the Port Authority to move the site of the massive World Trade Center development west to the Hudson River side of Manhattan, and closer to his home state. This fateful intervention spared the early 19th-century structures and waterfront that today constitute the South Street Seaport, retaining a tangible connection to New York City's maritime past.

This episode is one of many harrowing moments recounted in James M. Lindgren's new book, *Preserving South Street Seaport: The Dream and Reality of a New York Urban Renewal District*, which delves deep into the numerous crests and troughs faced by the historic district over the past five decades. Focusing on the South Street Seaport Museum, which was founded in 1967 at the heart of the district, the story traces the development of the Museum's novel, community-based vision of a "museum without walls" as it became transformed by both external and internal forces. Because the Museum was charged with the urban development of its surrounding district, the institution's dreams often diverged from the realities it faced, and these forces eventually left the institution hanging by a financial thread.

If the book makes one thing clear, it is that there has been no shortage of trials and travails in the effort to preserve the South Street Seaport. From interference by City Hall and questionable board decisions to undermining commercial interests and a mutiny of the historic ship restoration crews against the Museum itself, the tale is a complicated one, served with a

veritable alphabet soup of organizational acronyms. In recounting these tales, such as the Museum's last-ditch effort to acquire the final vestiges of commercial sailing ships with the vessels *Wavertree* and *Lottie Cooper*, Lindgren leaves the reader with a sense of how precious the South Street Seaport's "street of ships" is as a historic relic. And

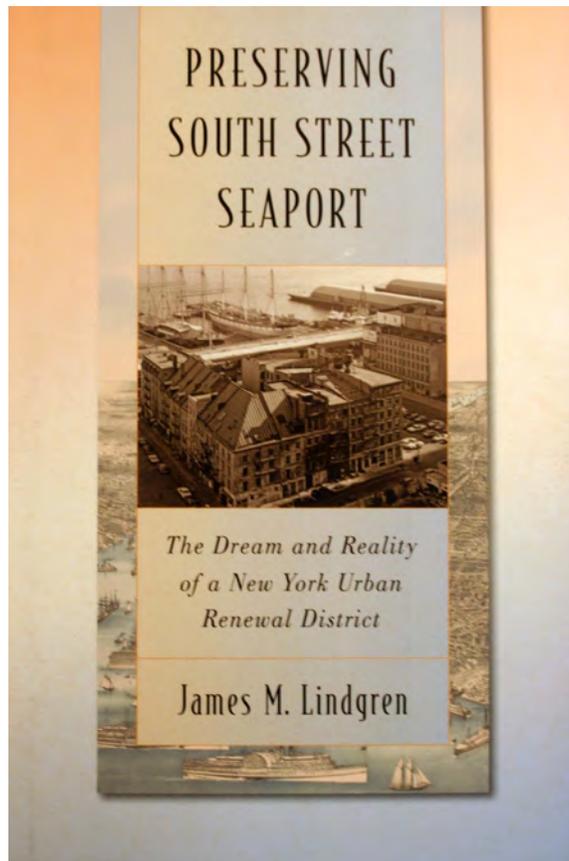
the institution on course.

While the chapters are loosely themed and occasionally challenge the reader with chronological shifts, the level of research is apparent and impressive. Quotes from Seaport characters such as Captain Jeremiah Driscoll, acerbic observations from Ada

Louise Huxtable, as well as anecdotes about Seaport hangouts, visits by Pete Seeger and Brooke Astor, and the Mafia's presence in the Fulton Fish Market, pepper the book with color and keep descriptions of bureaucratic maneuverings from becoming overwhelming. Overall, the book provides insight for other preservation and urban development efforts. But it is, first and foremost, a tale focused on the particular story of the buildings, ships and, critically, *people*, that have kept the lamp burning at the South Street Seaport Museum. Brought to its knees by Superstorm Sandy, de-coupled from the short-lived stewardship of the Museum of the City of New York, and facing additional development on Pier 17 by the Howard Hughes Corporation, the Museum today is fortunate to have the fruits of Lindgren's scholarly labors. Citing the Archive Project's own Anthony C. Wood, the book notes that historical institutions, in particular, need to be cognizant of their own histories.

In looking to its future, the Museum should take some comfort as it looks back, although its pumps have failed at various points in the past. *Preserving South Street Seaport* makes it abundantly clear that with devoted volunteers at its core, the Museum has nevertheless remained afloat as a testament to the preservation spirit, a wonder to behold. ■

Bradley J. Vogel, an attorney, serves on the board of directors of the New York Preservation Archive Project and is the former editor-in-chief of the Tulane Maritime Law Journal.



Cover of *Preserving South Street Seaport*; Courtesy of NYU Press

Lindgren's detailing of the machinations of the 1970s and 1980s, when the Museum faced diminished leadership and increased economic development pressures, further stresses how close the Museum and the entire district came to losing their souls. Museum co-founder Peter Stanford, benefactors Jack and Peter Aron, maverick Museum chairman Jakob Isbrandtsen, and Peter Neill, Museum president from 1985-2005, emerge as key figures who, despite ongoing struggles, kept

An Interview with Anthony C. Wood: Preservation Activist, Historian, and Archivist

As the 50th anniversary of the passage of New York City's Landmarks Law draws near (2015), Archive Project founder and chair **Anthony C. Wood** recently sat down with vice-chair **Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe** for an in-depth interview. The conversation touched on many aspects of Wood's long career in New York as both a preservationist and the visionary behind the mission of the Archive Project to save the story of preservation in the City.

You came to New York from the Midwest in 1978 with a graduate degree in urban and regional planning. This raises two questions: first, how does that particular academic background inform your role as a preservationist, and second, did you view New York as a logical or even special destination, and why?

The reason for the degree is really an element of fate. My undergraduate degree is in history. I had applied to a variety of master's programs and had received a scholarship to a program in urban and regional planning. I had just finished a summer as a Fellow at Historic Deerfield in Massachusetts. Working there made me realize that I was extremely interested in how Deerfield Village had been preserved. I loved history and research, but after my time at Deerfield I realized that I wanted to become engaged with "active" history, the actual preservation of places. As a consequence, when I started my graduate studies, I put a "preservation spin" on all of my courses, writing papers with preservation themes. The best takeaway

from my degree was that I had the ability as a planner to "attack" other planners! I came to New York because urban planning programs naturally lead to cities, and in 1978 New York was the Detroit of its time. I had made a point of reading *The New York Times* faithfully while in grad school, and I arrived here with a bagful of clippings related to my planning and preservation interests. On a personal note, as a gay man, I also felt that I could imagine a more satisfying personal life in New York City than almost anywhere else.

The old charges of "elitism" seem to never disappear when leveled against preservationists. Edward Glaser, for example, has enjoyed a fair amount of press in his attacks against historic districting in places such as the Upper East Side, arguing that it keeps the rich richer and the poor bereft of housing. How would you respond to this?

It's actually sad about Glaser, because he writes about how wonderful cities are, which is great, but he doesn't understand that preservation is so key to what makes cities wonderful. The idea that historic districting in neighborhoods like the Upper East Side is the cause of New York's affordable housing problem is lunacy. Glaser also confuses skyscrapers with population density. As for the "elitist thing," anybody can walk down the City's beautiful streets and enjoy the preserved houses. These neighborhoods are a public space like Central Park and keep the City livable. People deserve beauty, and historic districting keeps the City beautiful for everyone.

Columbia University began its master's program in historic preservation in 1964. You have been a faculty member in that program. How has this program advanced preservation in New York?

This program was a game changer in the City and beyond. At this point, we now have a group of earlier graduates who are "eminence grises" in the City and the preservation movement, with a long history of activism and a wealth of experiential knowledge, as well as a newer generation of younger graduates who are full of enthusiasm and new ideas. The program created a cadre of like-minded people with the tools they need to be effective in preservation on many fronts. Additionally, Columbia inspired numerous other institutions across the country to create similar programs, which are creating a larger network of preservation professionals.

*You have spoken of how, when you came to New York, you realized that there was no volume dedicated to the history of preservation in the City. Your book, *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks*, published in 2007, filled that niche. Writing that book was a major undertaking. What made you decide to be the one to write this much-needed book, and how did you go about gathering all the material and organizing it? Did you have a special game plan in attacking this project?*

When I came to New York wanting to become involved in preservation activities, I felt I should read "the" book or even an article on the story of how New York City's Landmarks Law had come into being. There was none to be found! I started to take it upon myself to seek out the origins of the Landmark Law. I managed to get a \$5,000 grant to do oral histories with people who knew pieces of the story of the Landmarks Law, and I interviewed such key players as Geoffrey Platt, Harmon Goldstone, Margot Gayle, and Brendan Gill. Each oral history raised more questions, so I kept researching and had about 75% of the story, 20 years into the project! So finally I decided to commit to writing a book.

I reached out to friends who had published books and got templates of book proposals, since I was not going to write the story without the imprimatur



Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe interviewing Anthony C. Wood at the Ittleson Foundation; Courtesy of the Archive Project

of a real publisher—essential in my mind for getting the book into libraries. I was cautioned that there was “no money” in this topic, so I didn’t bother to try and get an agent and instead contacted publishers in the general preservation field. Initially this did not work out, but I did get good feedback on how to make the story more compelling for the general public. I had to revamp my structure and narrative to recast the book. I then found a publisher who liked the reworked proposal.

As to the actual mechanics of writing the book, I was fortunate to receive a sabbatical from the Ittleson Foundation, who was then and remains my employer. To avoid having friends and acquaintances distract me from my work while on sabbatical, I used the “cover” that I was writing the book in our house in Vermont while actually writing it in my office where all my materials were. However, I would sometimes get caught when I would run into someone in New York and they would ask me how the weather was in Vermont, and I would give them a blank stare! After the sabbatical, I was still not finished, so I came to my office early, and worked on the book from seven a.m. until ten a.m. and did not check emails or answer the phone during that block of time. I suspect that I suffer from some mild

form of ADD, so I would spend 60 minutes writing, 60 minutes researching, and 60 minutes raising money and handling other administrative tasks for the book.

I had two years in which to deliver the book to the publisher. I did not know that a deadline is usually not something that writers adhere to, and I found that the publisher was quite surprised to receive my manuscript on time. I am very glad that I undertook this book project, but I have two regrets. The first is that I put so much pressure on myself to meet the deadline that it took much of the fun out of the project; the second is that I accepted the publisher’s indexer, and I am not happy with the result. I am constantly augmenting the index in my desk copy.

How would you assess the general media coverage of preservation in New York? How has it expanded over the years, and are preservationists getting more of a hearing?

Because of the great changes in media, especially social media, you really can’t make an apples-to-apples comparison of then versus now. In the old days, “victory” was getting a *New York Times* editorial; now many people don’t read newspapers and some politicians take pride in championing positions contrary to an editorial! In general, with all the “new media” there seems to be more coverage of local preservation issues and more opinions being expressed. If many multiple voices echo the same view, can they “equal” one Ada Louise Huxtable piece? One can debate that point. Today we live in a world where a smart phone can record all events, and countless individuals can tweet their opinions. At some point there may be so much material on preservation that we will face the “garbage in, garbage out” problem. Still, I’d prefer future historians having too much information to sort through than too little.

If you had to name the three biggest challenges and the three biggest opportunities facing preservation in New York City at this moment, what would they be?

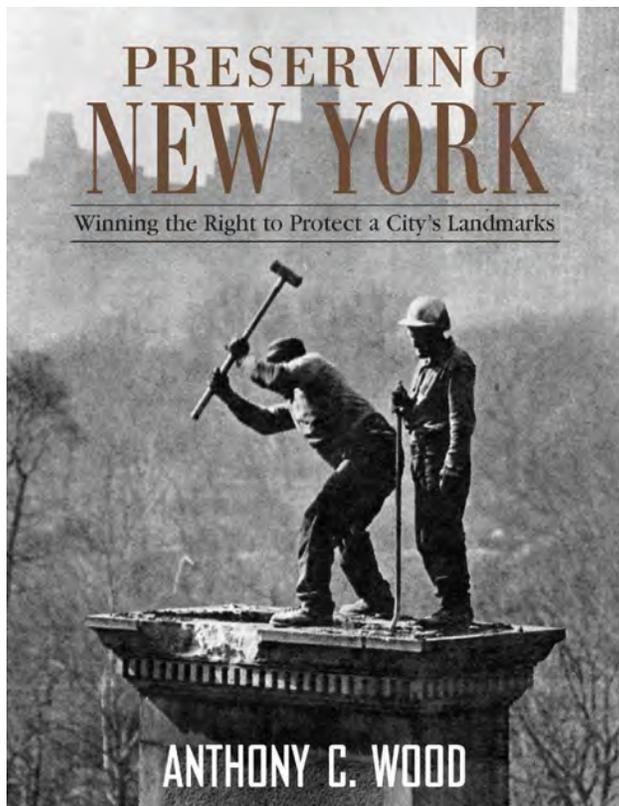
I believe that the three biggest challenges at the moment are serious and differentiated.

The first is the fact that preservation is now often taken for granted by the general public—there is an assumption that things are protected. Complacency is never a good thing for preservation. A second challenge is that preservation is often misunderstood and miscategorized, an example of this being the idea that it is a block to affordable housing, a misconception that the new administration seems to be operating under. Hence, we in preservation have a “messaging issue” to deal with.

Related to this is the threat of “devaluing the brand.” What I mean by this is that from a policy perspective, more things are “protected,” but what that means is under threat. Regulation, some would argue, is not as rigorous as it used to be, and there is increasing pressure to allow more things to happen to a landmark. A case in point involves two buildings in the Ladies’ Mile Historic District that are currently threatened by demolition. Years ago, developers would not have even bothered to seek permission from the Landmarks Preservation Commission to demolish them. Now they are testing the limits.

The third major challenge has to do with the fracturing of the preservation movement itself, which is more severe than ever. The good news is that splintering can mean that preservation is an umbrella that covers many people; the bad news is that there is no real recognized leadership. Within preservation, there are people who dislike each other more than they dislike Donald Trump! The reason is that they never expected Trump to support their particular preservation cause, but they did expect the support of their fellow preservationists. There are turf and ego battles that go on and on. Preservationists have given themselves the luxury of disliking each other and not working together on other issues because of some past disagreement. We can’t afford to have “blood feuds” when we need to present a united front on the critically important issues.

On a happier note, I see many opportunities, but I will focus on the three most significant. The first and most exciting development is the chance to capitalize on the fact that the values preservation embodies are appreciated more than ever before. There is a vital sense of the power of place. People are making choices about living in locations that reflect a quality of life that is dictated by historic environments, which are especially popular in New York. This really helps preservationists with our policy case.



Cover of *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks*; Courtesy of Routledge

Stewardship Society

The Archive Project's annual series of special events for our Stewardship Society continues in 2014. This spring, Society members were awarded the rare opportunity for a private tour of The Explorers Club. Astronaut-in-training Kellie Gerardi led the group around the stunning Jacobean-style mansion on the Upper East Side that became the Club's headquarters in 1964. It was a fitting setting for the Club's collection, which includes personal papers from significant explorers, manuscripts, works of art, maps, and artifacts accumulated over a century of traversing land, sea, air, and space. From Theodore Roosevelt's safari spoils to a model of the shuttle that will take civilians into space, there was an extraordinary story behind every piece in the Club's collection. What great fortune to be guided through this unforgettable assortment of curiosities!

The Stewardship Society is the Archive Project's devoted group of benefactors who regularly meet for special tours at institutional archives and private collections throughout New York City. The Stewardship Society is made up of those donors who annually contribute \$500 or more in general support, in addition to purchasing a ticket to the annual Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit.

Our next event will be a visit to the Bank of New York Mellon Archives at the noted Art Deco skyscraper, One Wall Street. With a viewing of the building's glittering mosaics by Hildreth Meière, a visit to the observation deck, and a look at special items pulled from the archives, this should prove to be another wonderful opportunity to explore a part of New York City that is not usually open to the public.

We hope that you will consider becoming a Steward of the New York Preservation Archive Project and thus a steward of the history of New York City's preservation movement. To join the Society, please contact Matthew Coody at mcoody@nytap.org or 212-988-8379.

Also, we have more ability through the new media to present the visual, which is so essential to the preservation message, and finally, there is an emerging generation of young preservationists who really care deeply about localities, regional food systems, and other issues that are in tune with preservation values. This contrasts dramatically with the Fifties, when preservation was out of tune with the prevailing Zeitgeist of "new and mass-produced."

New York is a study in multiple preservation organizations. How can they keep their missions clear for the public?

Policymakers need to know the differences, but it's true that the number of different organizations can get very confusing for outside viewers. There are building-specific groups, architectural-period groups, historic-neighborhood groups—everything from the Victorian Society to the Friends of Terra Cotta. New websites are an aid to making things clear as to what each group does, but the upside of the large numbers of organizations means that they provide many entryways into the larger preservation community. Specific groups can be "intake valves" for people to find a "core."

Most preservationists have great personal anecdotes about famous people involved in the movement. Would you recount the phone call you received when you were working as a junior member of the MAS team from one Jacqueline Onassis?

Back in 1984, I was working late at the Municipal Art Society planning the Landmark Express II train to Albany—a trainload of preservationists heading to Albany to testify against an ill-conceived piece of legislation that would have removed properties owned by religious institutions from the protection of local landmark laws. The phone rang, and having just finished a lengthy call with a long-winded community activist, and fearing that they were calling again, I answered the call in a brisk and sharp voice. On the other end was the delicate and quiet voice of Jackie Onassis. Responding to the Society's inquiry, she was calling to indicate that, yes, she would be riding the train with us up to Albany for the hearing but that she wasn't planning to testify. After profusely thanking her, in what you can imagine was a much more pleasant voice, my excitement about her coming with us to Albany was tempered by the fact that we had already told the politicians and Albany press that if she came she would be



Jackie Onassis testifying in Albany, 1984;
Courtesy of Joleen Weiss

testifying. The day of the trip arrived, and a wonderfully engaged and animated crowd of preservationists came on board. On the ride up, Jackie sat next to the great preservationist Fred Papert. As we were getting off the train she turned to me and said she had changed her mind and that she would testify! She delivered her testimony in that same delicate and quiet voice. The chairman of the hearing had to ask the cameramen to quit taking photos because their clicks and snapping flashes were overpowering Jackie Onassis's voice. Everyone in the room hushed, leaned forward, and strained to hear her speak—which made her remarks even more powerful and effective. There has never been another quiet voice for preservation as loud as hers.

Ten years hence, where would you like to "see" the Archive Project in term of its mission?

The ultimate goal of the Archive Project is to fundamentally change the culture of the preservation movement so that preservationists and their organizations regularly document, preserve, and celebrate their own history. Conceptually, if and when that goal is achieved, the Archive Project could declare victory and leave the field. However, since preservationists are naturally more akin to Dalmatians responding to ongoing current alarm bells than archivists, our work will be needed for many decades to come. With some luck, in a decade, the Archive Project will be able to spend less time conducting oral histories and intervening to save records, papers, and preservation paraphernalia from the dumpster, and more time and resources on educating, training, funding, and otherwise assisting preservation organizations. ■



Bronson Binger in 1982; Courtesy of *The New York Times*

In Memoriam

The preservation community mourns the recent death of our colleague Bronson Binger. An architect and preservationist with deep ties to New York City, Binger served his city as a leader in public service and activism. He was born in Manhattan in 1930 to a family of New Yorkers active in architecture and civic life; his father Walter was a renowned civil engineer who helped save Castle Clinton from destruction by Robert Moses, and his grandmother was the developer of Turtle Bay Gardens. Following his schooling and army service, Binger settled in Carnegie Hill in 1958, where he quickly purchased two houses, became a neighborhood preservation activist, and campaigned for the creation of a historic district. At the time, Carnegie Hill was threatened by large development proposals, but Binger believed in its future as a historic neighborhood. “I knew that historic preservation was good for real estate,” he said in an Archive Project oral history interview conducted in 2008 in partnership with Pratt Institute’s graduate program in historic preservation. “It has to be a positive thing because you are encouraging people to maintain their buildings and upgrade them. And therefore you can also at the same time prevent bad things from happening.” The district was eventually designated in 1974.

In 1966, Binger also became involved in the battle to save the old Metropolitan Opera House. After that unsuccessful fight, Binger told the Archive Project, he walked onto the stage as the building was being dismantled and, with plaster falling around him, sang “three loud notes” in order to be the last person to have sung there. During that campaign he joined the Municipal Art Society, serving as head of its Landmarks Committee. In that role he testified at many Landmarks Preservation Commission hearings into the 1970s and helped found the Historic Districts Council.

After stints working for the South Street Seaport and a housing organization, Binger joined the Parks Department in 1979 as its assistant commissioner for capital projects. There he led the preservation of many Parks Department-managed historic houses, as well as Central Park, Prospect Park, and Union Square. In the 1980s, Binger began working for the Department of General Services, where he oversaw the restoration of McKim, Mead and

White’s Municipal Building, a Beaux-Arts skyscraper that overlooks City Hall. Binger initiated the project, he said, after finding a piece of granite on the street that had fallen from the building’s 25th floor.

Binger understood preservation to be closely allied to both architecture and the building trades. Preservationists and architects alike, he felt, should understand how buildings are constructed—an understanding that Binger feared was slipping away as architects designed buildings by computer, and preservation became its own profession. To Binger, this made preserving old buildings even more critical: “I think preservation, in these days, is more important than ever because it does show us what architecture should be,” he told the Archive Project in 2008.

Binger died on December 23, 2013. More of Binger’s reflections on preservation, architecture, and his experiences in New York City can be found in the transcript of the Archive Project’s oral history interview with him, available on our website, www.nypap.org. We encourage readers to share their recollections of Bronson Binger on our Memory Collection Project web page, which is also accessible from the above address. ■

NYPAP News

The Archive Project bids farewell to Eric Allison, who stepped down from the board of directors earlier this year. A much deserved salute to Allison’s long and devoted service to the organization and its mission.

Join us in welcoming our newest board member, Richard J. Moylan. For over 28 years Moylan has served as president of The Green-Wood Cemetery, where he has guided a wide variety of conservation and preservation projects. Originally founded in 1838, the 478-acre cemetery was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2006. Green-Wood is the resting place of many preeminent New Yorkers, including Leonard Bernstein, William M. (“Boss”) Tweed, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and Horace Greeley. Moylan’s unique skills will surely benefit the leadership of the Archive Project.

Fueled in part by the ongoing multi-year celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the New York City Landmarks Law and an increased interest in the history of preservation, the Archive Project is faced with more opportunities to document, preserve, and celebrate the story of preservation than ever before. In response, the organization has hired its first full-time executive director. Matthew Coody, who until now was employed as the Archive Project’s part-time administrator, has been promoted into this role. With continued support from readers like you the Archive Project can keep growing, and with an increased capacity we can become an even more effective organization!

Several new entries have recently been published in our online “Preservation Database,” including posts on Huyler Held, the Citizens Union, and Henry Hope Reed. Visit www.nypap.org to check them out!



174 East 80th Street | New York, NY 10075



YOUR SPRING 2014 NEWSLETTER HAS ARRIVED!

The Archive Project would like to thank the New York Community Trust's Windie Knowe Fund, the Elizabeth R. and Robert A. Jeffe Preservation Fund for New York City of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Kress Foundation, the Winston Foundation, the Irene Ritter Foundation, and the J. M. Kaplan Fund for their generous support.

Our work could not be accomplished without their—and your—financial support.

We hope you will consider making a donation to support the documentation and celebration of the history of preservation in New York City. Donations can be made in the form of checks mailed to our office via the enclosed remittance envelope, securely online via PayPal on our website (www.nypap.org), or by credit card over the phone at 212-988-8379.

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