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NEWSLETTER

FALL/WINTER 2019

Welcome to the 31st 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.

Preservationist McAneny Honored Civic Leaders Gather at Federal Hall

Civic leaders gathered on the morning of October 17th at Federal Hall National Memorial to commemorate the legacy of George McAneny, born 150 years ago. Hosted by the Friends of McAneny in conjunction with the National Park Service, the Archive Project, and

The Battery Conservancy, the event was originally slated to take place outside the walls of Castle Clinton, but gale-force winds required a last-minute pivot. Since McAneny had worked to save both Castle Clinton and Federal Hall, both venues *Continued on page 2*



A crowd gathered to celebrate the sesquicentennial of civic leader George McAneny's birth at an October 17th event, "Honoring the Spirits of McAneny," hosted by the Archive Project and the Friends of McAneny at Federal Hall National Memorial. | Courtesy of Josie Naron



Warrie Price (The Battery Conservancy), Jimmy Cleckley (National Park Service), and Gale Brewer (Manhattan Borough President) share congratulations following the event. | Courtesy of the Archive Project

The Battery. Each reader then shared personal statements highlighting how McAneny's works related to his or her career or organization. The National Park Service and The Battery Conservancy provided attendees with a limited edition "challenge coin" as a memento of the day.

Finally, the highlight of the event featured Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer announcing the names of scores of individuals who had been designated "Spirits of McAneny"

by the Friends of McAneny, an alliance of individuals and organizations founded by McAneny's great-granddaughter, Kay Ciganovic. The Spirits were honored in the realms of preservation, planning, transit, history, or public spaces for continuing McAneny's legacy in their work.

To learn more about George McAneny's legacy during this "Year of McAneny," visit an exhibit at Federal Hall this winter or visit the Friends of McAneny website at: www.georgemcaneny.com ■

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were appropriate. McAneny had helped lead campaigns that resulted in these sites achieving federal landmark recognition in the course of the 1940s.

The commemorative event highlighted McAneny's work as a planner and preservationist with emphases on transit and public spaces. Warrie Price, founder and President of The Battery Park Conservancy, and Jim Cleckley of the National Park Service welcomed those in attendance in the rotunda, noting McAneny's outsized role in inspiring and informing their efforts. Arvind Sindhvani, Brad Vogel, and Anthony C. Wood, the Archive Project's Reisinger Scholar, Executive Director, and Chairman, respectively, shared remarks on the expansive career and continuing relevance of George McAneny in contemporary New York.

A group of distinguished guests, including Tom Wright of the Regional Plan Association, Concetta Bencivenga of the NYC Transit Museum, Kent Barwick (former Municipal Art Society President), Christy Maclear of the Municipal Art Society, Seri Worden of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Tom Meyers of The Bowery Boys, and key friends of McAneny, recited segments of McAneny's famous speech "The Fight to Save Castle Clinton," originally presented on October 19th, 1950. Each excerpt helped tell the story of the nine-year fight to stop Robert Moses from destroying Castle Clinton and

2019 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit



Join us in honoring **Otis Pratt Pearsall**

with our 2019 Preservation Award for his work to safeguard and utilize archives of the fight to landmark Brooklyn Heights. The benefit features guest speaker **Priscilla Hancock Cooper** who helps steward key civil rights sites in Alabama.

December 13, 2019

8:30 - 10:00 a.m.

The Yale Club

50 Vanderbilt Avenue

Tickets at www.nypap.org



Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer presents honorary certificates to the modern-day "Spirits of McAneny" as Archive Project Executive Director Brad Vogel and Board Chair Anthony C. Wood look on. | Courtesy of the Archive Project

Geoffrey Platt

The Man on the High Wire

By Anthony C. Wood, Archive Project Founder & Chair

Needing to refresh my memory on how many historic districts had been proposed and how many designated during the tenure of the first Chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), Geoffrey Platt, I turned to the “Preservation by the Numbers” article in the Fall/Winter 2018 issue of this publication. I was mortified to discover that in our apparent haste to provide information on the designation records of all the LPC Chairs, we had committed a sin of omission: Chairman Platt’s numbers were not included in the article. To remedy that, here they are: during Platt’s tenure as chair of the LPC (1965-1968), the commission proposed 23 historic districts — including eight outside Manhattan — and designated six. Platt’s legacy includes the first district, Brooklyn Heights, as well as Gramercy Park and Hunters Point. Not that there is a contest, but that puts Platt in second place, with the highest number of proposed districts during the tenure of any LPC chair belonging to Robert Tierney with 47 districts designated.

Regrettable as the omission of Platt may be, correcting it creates an opportunity to share with newer generations of preservationists the landmark legacy of Geoffrey Platt. Platt’s contributions to preservation started well before he became Chair of the LPC. In many ways, he was the midwife of the Landmarks Law. In 1961, he and Harmon Goldstone (both in leadership positions at the Municipal Art Society at the time), guided and supported by James Felt, the Chair of the City Planning Commission, succeeded in having Mayor Wagner appoint “The Mayor’s Committee for the Preservation of Structures of Historic and Esthetic Importance.” Platt then chaired that committee, which recommended the creation of an Advisory Landmarks Preservation Commission. Mayor Wagner implemented that suggestion by creating the Commission on April 21, 1962 and named Platt as its Chair. Over the next four years, the Advisory Landmarks Preservation Commission (Advisory LPC),



Photo of the swearing-in of the first Landmarks Preservation Commission, June 29, 1965. From left to right, Stanley Tinkel, Vice-Chair, Mayor Robert Wagner, Geoffrey Platt, Chair, and Sam Lefrak, Commissioner. At times, this photo has been misidentified as the signing of the Landmarks Law. | Courtesy of Anthony C. Wood Archives

under Platt’s leadership, would begin to identify and designate landmarks (without any power to protect them) and draft a proposed landmarks law. Ultimately, highly public preservation controversies would propel that draft legislation forward. After hearings, debate, modifications, and more preservation dramas, it would be signed into law by Mayor Wagner on April 19, 1965.

These basic facts fail to do justice to Platt’s enormous contribution to preservation. The skill, diplomacy, patience, and perseverance required to navigate the shark-infested waters of New York City politics at that moment in time (and perhaps at any moment in time) cannot be underestimated. The Advisory LPC was cautious, and largely side-stepped

the Pennsylvania Station controversy. Other landmark-worthy sites would also be lost as the work slowly moved forward. Platt was criticized for this, but his singular goal was achieving the passage of a landmarks law with true regulatory power.

Platt’s public policy high-wire act didn’t stop with the passage of the law. Over the next three years, Platt shepherded an unproven city agency as it implemented an untested law in a hostile environment. At the signing of the law, Mayor Wagner stated that if the law were found to be “too restrictive on property rights or did not meet the problems of landmark owners,” it would be amended. On one side, Platt was confronted

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Why We Tend Our Papers

Otis Pratt Pearsall

on Keeping Accessible Archives

By Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe, Vice-Chair



Otis Pratt Pearsall with a portion of his home archives. | Courtesy of Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe

This September, Archive Project Vice-Chair **Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe** sat down with **Otis Pratt Pearsall** (and his wife **Nancy Pearsall**), legendary Brooklyn Heights preservationist and the 2019 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit honoree, to discuss his years of preservation service and his personal archival practices. Otis served on the Archive Project board from 2003 to 2019.

Thank you for having me to your home, Nancy and Otis. This is a wonderful house—so evocative of history! And so appropriate for our conversation!

Yes, it's one of the oldest Federal houses in New York City, dating to about 1825. It has a great many of its original details, such as molding, woodwork elements, doors, and fireplaces.

Otis, you are a giant in New York preservation history. Thanks to you, the seven-year battle (1958-1965) to designate Brooklyn Heights as a historic district is one of the best-documented preservation campaigns in NYC history. Did you keep your extensive records of your many preservation initiatives because you are a lawyer, or because you wanted to save the preservation story?

I saved the materials because I am a lawyer. I had a rigorous academic career at Yale Law School, and I developed the habit of keeping orderly records. Additionally, as a practicing attorney, especially in litigation, I found it essential to have case files. So, keeping my preservation papers was not a new thought. I've also kept all the speeches I made when I was accepting various preservation awards. I believe these speeches are referred to fairly frequently.

And I even have in my possession the desk book I gave to the 84th Precinct outlining the criminality

of failing to obey landmark laws. Somehow, I got that back!

I know that Nancy has been a partner in your work and was especially involved in the Brooklyn Heights designation effort.

Nancy contributed greatly to the Brooklyn Heights battle and enhanced our archives collection by creating a scrapbook. She has also been active with later initiatives. I should note that I'm not the only Landmark Lion in the family; Nancy is one as well.

How are your materials organized? How easily are they accessed?

They are in folders, in chronological order. I am able to access papers on virtually any initiative in which I was involved in the space of a weekend at the most. I have a deep reservoir of documents available at almost an instant's notice. There's one place to come, and that's to me! It's a great source of personal satisfaction.

Were you ever tempted to toss something? Do some favorite stories make you want to save more things—and others, fewer items?

I keep *everything*. I don't save selectively. You never know what you might need. You can't make judgments in advance; something could be pivotal later on. As for favorite projects, I must say that I am immensely proud of Brooklyn Bridge Park. That was a wonderful outcome. I wrote 100 pages on that particular battle—part of the book about my whole preservation story that I'm never going to write!

When and where have your archives been used in exhibitions and publications?

My archives have been used in a variety of places. For several years, the *Activist New York* exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York used a photo of Nancy and me studying a demolished building in Cadman Plaza, looking at a mantel as part of an effort to save architectural objects that could be salvaged and reused by people fixing up old houses that needed original details. I also lent the museum some papers of mine for that exhibition, including a flyer that they displayed. To their credit, they returned them!

The Brooklyn Historical Society has used my archival materials on a number of occasions, including the 20th anniversary exhibition for Clay Lancaster, who was a key player in the Brooklyn Heights designation effort. He surveyed and documented every house in the neighborhood to make the case for their historic importance as a district. My papers were also used for the 50th anniversary exhibition on the designation of Brooklyn Heights.

Of course, NYPAP's Chair, Anthony C. Wood, used my archives extensively for his book, *Preserving New York*. I give him credit for his thorough study of all that material. And the local press still contacts me on "all things Brooklyn Heights."

How often are you contacted by people for assistance with background on preservation history?

Very frequently. A couple of examples come to mind. When the GVSHP was looking to plan its 50th celebration, I sent them my archives related to the Village. They kept copies of those papers, and they now have an Otis P. Pearsall archival collection.

Another interesting inquiry came in just recently when a woman by the name of Christine Cipriani contacted me for information on Ada Louise Huxtable, about whom she is writing a biography. Ada Louise was greatly admired here in the Heights for her influential editorials in the late Sixties opposing the relocation of the Fort Greene meat market. The Lindsay administration wanted to put the market in the area that is today DUMBO. Ada Louise was a major force in helping us to keep that from happening. I was very impressed by Ms. Cipriani. She read everything I sent her, no matter how technical, and understood it.

Are there lesser-known preservation initiatives that you would like to share with our readers?

Several come to mind. One of the last things I did before I left my law practice was to write up the history of several such lesser initiatives. One of these involved a key addition to Fort Sterling Park. There was an empty lot, about to be auctioned off by the city. It was an open space providing a view to the water, and it would be unfortunate to have it developed and ruin that scenic

perspective. So, we convinced the City Planning Commission, which was getting very low bids for the land because there was a tunnel beneath it, to designate the lot as parkland. Beverly Moss Spatt, who became chair of the LPC in 1974, was very helpful with this effort.

Another less widely-known initiative involved saving two dilapidated Greek Revival buildings east of the Unitarian Church, which was going to knock them down for a playground. We persuaded the church to sell them to Saint Ann's School. The school considered tearing them down as well, but decided instead to fix the houses up and make them into apartments.

Another effort that was very rewarding was the saving of one of the "deep gardens" behind the houses on Remsen Street backing up to Grace Court. One of these deep garden lots had been spun off as a building lot and Charles Gwathmey was hired to create a "modern landmark." He's a wonderful architect, but this would not be in the aesthetic interest of the neighborhood.

Luckily, the young man who had the contract on the property, a Mr. Epstein, was really sympathetic to our concerns—every once in a while you meet someone like this—and I got Grace Church to take over the contract and keep the garden area open.

Do you have any thoughts on a permanent repository for your archives?

I've sent packages of some projects to the Brooklyn Historical Society archives, and I gave some things to NYPAP. I've been holding on to my archives, because I thought I'd write a book, which won't happen. I haven't yet decided on a final place. I really want my papers to be respected. ■



Otis Pratt Pearsall and Nancy Boden Pearsall with their dog, Curly, in their Brooklyn Heights home. | Courtesy of Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe

Chairman's Column

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with preservation advocates who had been fighting for decades to create a law. There was huge unmet demand for action to preserve numerous threatened sites and historic neighborhoods. On the other side, if the commission went too far too fast, Platt confronted the very real possibility of lawsuits and political backlash from the real estate community that could have led to the weakening or even eradication of the law. During this period of uncertainty, his guiding principle was to do nothing that would jeopardize the Landmarks Law itself.

Platt, guided by that philosophy, would receive criticism from preservation advocates demanding more decisive action by the LPC while he simultaneously dodged threats of lawsuits from those working to undermine the law. Was he too conservative? Did he strike the right balance? Almost enough time has passed for historians to weigh in on that question. However, that creative tension between advocates for the aggressive application of the Landmarks Law and those conservatively administering that law continues to this day. Knowing preservation's history can provide context for that ongoing dynamic.

Geoffrey Platt's full preservation legacy deserves its own monograph. While waiting for someone to write it, you can find on the Archive Project's website, under "Our Collections: Oral histories," an interview with Geoffrey Platt conducted in 1984 and originally published in *Village Views*, volume 4, Number 1. More on Platt can be found in Gregory Gilmartin's *Shaping the City: New York and the Municipal Art Society*, Marjorie Pearson's *New York Landmarks Preservation Commission (1962-1999): Paradigm for Changing Attitudes Towards Historic Preservation* and this author's *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks*. References to Platt also appear in numerous oral histories on the Archive Project website.

So, was Platt too conservative a preservationist or was he as much a preservationist as his times allowed? Start reading preservation history and you may reach your own conclusion. ■

What is your long-term plan for your preservation papers?

Remember that Preservation Lawsuit? Keep Your Records!

Why Legal Archives Are So Important For Future Advocacy

By William J. Cook, Vice-Chair

Although the Archive Project focuses on the story of historic preservation in New York City, it provides a blueprint for preservation-related archive projects everywhere. Since becoming involved with the Archive Project, first as an oral history interviewer for the “Through the Legal Lens” oral history series, and then as a board member, I have learned that the lessons of the past remain not only relevant to preservation as a way to understand the rich tapestry of history but also as a legal advocacy tool.

It is increasingly important to collect legal archives to inform legal advocacy. I will share specific examples of how the Archive Project’s archives have bolstered my legal advocacy in support of saving historic places by helping me develop strategy, hone arguments, and persuade historic preservation commissions and judges to secure preservation wins.

Archives provide important legal insight into how lawyers and judges think, but not everything makes it into legal documents. Like a map, briefs and court opinions do not show all of their underpinnings. Two archives that have played an important role in my practice as a preservation attorney are NYPAP’s oral history interviews and archival collections and the legal advocacy archives of the National Trust for Historic Preservation at Georgetown Law Center. These archives have been especially important to my law practice when I have had to defend local governments against accusations that preservation regulations are a “taking” under the 5th Amendment.

As every preservation advocate likely knows, the most important historic preservation legal case is *Penn Central Transportation Co. v. City of New York*, decided by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1978. The *Penn Central* decision established two

important precedents in its ruling. First, it affirmed that historic preservation serves a valid public purpose. Second, it established the balancing test that federal and state courts continue to use today to determine whether governments owe compensation to property owners for the diminution of their property rights as a result of land use regulation. What is not revealed in the text of the decision itself is the remarkable story behind the legal challenge. Why did lawyers frame their arguments using certain language? What strategic choices did they



Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and other Grand Central Terminal advocates aboard the Landmark Express, a chartered train that took the preservation activists to Washington, D.C. to protest Grand Central’s threatened demolition. | Courtesy of *Amtrak News*

make? What social, political, and economic circumstances influenced the litigation? The opinion says nothing about the historical moment where New York City almost dropped its appeal and settled the case during a period of extreme financial stress; how Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis persuaded the mayor of New York City to press ahead in defending its Landmarks Preservation Law and Landmarks Preservation Commission; or how the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the leading preservation organization in the nation, wrestled with whether to participate as an *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) in support of the City.

In moments when traditional legal research

may not help, archival collections can provide answers. For example, the Archive Project’s oral histories with attorneys Virginia Waters and Leonard Koerner—who defended the City at the Supreme Court—make the Penn Central story come alive in a way that secondary sources could never achieve. In an era of reliance on electronic databases such as Westlaw, Lexis, and Google, a preservation advocate can easily locate hundreds of law review articles and other references to the Penn Central decision, along with other forms of legal commentary. Electronic research, however, leaves out many archival sources. Having the ability to access these records means that letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, and any other ephemera are often overlooked. Those materials can provide firsthand accounts about a relevant person or event can add depth to legal advocacy and fill information gaps.

Without Virginia Water’s oral history with the Archive Project, for example, attorneys would not know from reading the Court’s opinion that Penn Central Transportation Co. could not have participated in the transfer of development rights (TDR) program established by New York City to mitigate lost development rights associated with historic landmark designation. This is critical information: even though the Court seems to have viewed Penn Central’s lack of participation in the TDR program as an affirmative choice, it appears to have ignored or overlooked transactional barriers that arguably tilted in Penn Central’s favor. A future court might not do that. Archives matter in preservation advocacy.

Leonard Koerner also once shared with me his recollections of how Dorothy Miner, legal counsel to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission from 1975 to

1994, argued to make sure that the City’s legal briefs focused on the Landmark Law’s applicability to the city. Miner’s decision turned out to be a critical strategic decision then, and remains true today when defending regulatory takings challenges. Leonard also revealed the famous anecdote about himself appearing in the Supreme Court without any notes and shocking his boss who asked to review them in the minutes leading up to oral argument. Leonard replied: “And I wrote on a pad, ‘Mr. Chief Justice and members of the court,’ [the standard opening address at the Supreme Court and nothing more] and

he turned colors. I’ve thought afterwards that I should have told [him that I planned to memorize my entire argument] in advance.” As any appellate judge would tell you, this is a good lesson for law students and attorneys to remember.

Legal archives serve many roles, all of which inform legal advocacy and strengthen preservation advocates’ arguments by helping to tell the full story of a case. Archives educate, inspire, and provide a record of history that would otherwise not be available for current and future generations to discover.

Using archives adds another layer of research, time, and occasionally expense, but archival research provides invaluable information in helping advocates and decisionmakers understand a case’s complete history. In recognition of legal archives’ important role in illuminating the evolution of preservation law, saving the records of attorneys and other legal advocates in more intentional ways should be a preservation movement priority. ■

William J. Cook is Special Counsel at Cultural Heritage Partners, PLC.

NYPAP Events

Programs & Events Celebrate Preservation Stories



Stewardship Society members observe the preserved remnants of the box column footprints from the Twin Towers. | Courtesy of the Archive Project

Stewardship Society Tour of National 9/11 Museum

On September 25th, the Archive Project’s Stewardship Society toured the National 9/11 Museum. The tour, led by museum staff, including conservationist Lisa Tonte and oral historian Amy Weinstein, as well as independent preservationist Ken Lustbader, focused on preservationists’ critical efforts to

ensure that key artifacts from Ground Zero were retained in the aftermath of 9/11. While preservationists engaged in the federal Section 106 consultation process for the site with the intention of assessing impacts on historic buildings around the Ground Zero site, efforts quickly focused on the need to save historically significant artifacts in the site itself. The preservationist coalition that formed in the face of this need was called the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund. It included the following organizations: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Preservation League of New York State, and the World Monuments Fund. Large-scale artifacts saved

by preservationist and survivor advocacy groups include the slurry wall, the Survivors’ Staircase, and the box column footprints of the Twin Towers, artifacts that remain central to the Museum’s ability to tell the story of the events of 9/11. To join the Stewardship Society please feel free to contact bvogel@nypap.org.

Columns Club Tours the Northern Wilds of Central Park

The Archive Project’s Columns Club traipsed across the northern wilds of Central Park at dusk one evening in September, visiting a number of historic sites with a team of Urban Park Rangers. A highlight of the tour was a rare glimpse inside Blockhouse No. 1, a stone remnant of the War of 1812 and the second oldest structure in the Park after Cleopatra’s Needle. Columns Club members also visited the Andrew Haswell Green Bench (with its five “symbolical” trees commemorating the unification of the five boroughs), the mortar-less Huddleston Arch, and the sites of several small fortifications from the Revolutionary War era.

LGBT Oral History Event

On June 21st, the Archive Project presented its new oral history series focused on early efforts to identify and preserve historic sites related to LGBT people and history in New York City. Former Oral History Program Manager Liz Strong outlined the initiative and shared excerpts from the oral histories conducted thus far. Jay Shockley, a cofounder of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, provided additional context to some of the oral histories. The event took place at the Bureau of General Services — Queer Division at the LGBT Center. Generous support for the effort comes from the New York State Council on the Arts and the law firm of Thompson Hine LLP.

Preservation Battle Book Revived for its Unique “Vieux”

By Brad Vogel, Executive Director

“We all know that eternal vigilance is the price we must all pay for democracy. We have also learned that is also the price we must pay if we desire to protect and preserve the quaint and distinctive character of this city that we all love.”

Who said it? Was it Jane Jacobs thinking of the Village in the wake of the harrowing Lower Manhattan Expressway fight? Albert Bard or George McAneny as the dust settled following years of preservation warfare to save Castle Clinton and The Battery from Robert Moses and the ramps of his proposed highway bridge?

A clue: it was, in fact, spoken by a preservationist who fought a destructive proposed highway. But the quote did not issue from a New Yorker’s mouth. It encapsulated a fight with stakes just as high, however. So who said it?

Bill Borah of New Orleans. The late, legendary preservationist made the observation as he summed up the lessons of the preservation battle that saved that city’s French Quarter from a gigantic elevated expressway—originally proposed in 1946 by Robert Moses, a consultant hired by the Louisiana Highway Department. It would have run across the front of New Orleans’ famed Jackson Square; the knock-down-drag-out fight to stop it came to be known as “The Second Battle of New Orleans” (the first having been won by the Square’s namesake in an effort to stave off the British in the War of 1812). It also came to be the title of a 1980 book written by Borah and his compatriot Dick Baumbach recounting the long-running civic conflict—a book that is being re-released by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press in late 2019.

The book is a unique creation; the outline and section headings may seem dry, but it

is the blow-by-blow account found in the marrow that makes it worthwhile reading. It is a fascinating read for all those who find themselves gravitating directly toward any planning, preservation, or history book that comes within arm’s reach. And as journalist Jed Horne’s lively new foreword for the forthcoming edition points out: “Jane Jacobs’ famous book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* would inspire resistance across America to the kinds of disasters Moses and his ilk continued striving to implement. Borah’s and Baumbach’s wisdom



Bill Borah signing *The Second Battle of New Orleans* at the Garden District Bookstore, 1981. | Courtesy of Louisiana Landmarks Society

is assembled in this volume, which deserves equally wide readership.”

The urbanist and author Roberta Brandes Gratz also tells Horne, in the draft foreword, that Borah is the Jane Jacobs of New Orleans. He never gained—and never really wanted—as high a profile, but “his role in saving New Orleans was every bit as pivotal as hers in saving Greenwich Village and lower Manhattan.”

Borah and Baumbach also took the time, it must be noted, to write the account of the preservation fight. In doing so, they provided a valuable resource and tool for preservationists to come, and they shaped preservation history itself.

The book may surprise a reader because it provides a rather comprehensive and unexpectedly objective telling of the overall tale, marching through Chamber of Commerce, government agency, and neighborhood activists’ machinations across the 1960s. Borah and Baumbach attempt to provide the full tableau and let the facts speak for themselves rather than making the book a spirited, personalized account of their own heroics, though the facts provide quite a dramatic account of a heated fight over a microphone in front of the Secretary of Transportation in Washington, D.C. as the fate of the Vieux Carre (“old quarter”) hangs in the balance.

The book also captures an interesting moment in time, as the federal Department of Transportation was first established near the climax of the highway fight in New Orleans. The National Historic Preservation Act, too, materializes on the scene in the midst of the fight, and that law’s Section 106 mechanism is quickly taken up by preservation advocates as an arrow in the quiver.

But throughout Borah and Baumbach’s narrative, the lessons for preservationists shine through strongest: persistence in the face of overwhelming odds (business interests, government, the press), resourcefulness, skepticism, casting a broad net for allies, and delineating the values at stake.

I had a chance to get to know Bill Borah during my time in New Orleans, as we fought to prevent the mass demolition of nearly 70

acres of neighborhood in a National Register district post-Katrina. His vigor and spirit inspired me, and he knew how to lace the tough times with a cup of turtle soup at Mandina's or a cocktail on his balcony across the street from the French Quarter.

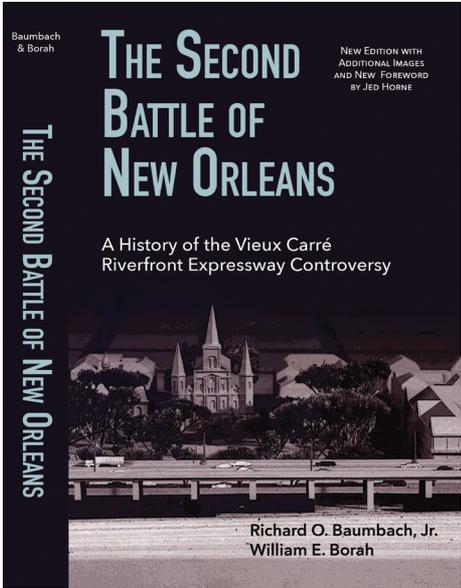
He was also adamant that preservationists needed to record and heed the history of earlier preservation efforts. As he told me in an interview in 2011:

"I got involved in the Riverfront Expressway controversy back in the '60s. We were trying to stop the interstate highway going through the French Quarter. We were successful. But in terms of decision-making and the ad hoc, dysfunctional system that I grew up with... it continues to this day. And all the hopes and dreams we had after Katrina...there were some things done that were positive...but the city and state, looks like it's reverting to the way it was before Katrina."

The re-release of *The Second Battle of New Orleans* this year is a welcome—and necessary—step toward ensuring that preservationists everywhere have a full accounting of one of the nation's most tenacious preservation battles. New Orleans preservationist Sandra Stokes played a significant role in ensuring the book's release following Borah's death in 2017.

When spirits flag and the right outcome seems impossible, I still, to this day, picture Bill Borah, recall his indefatigable smile, and think of the events set out in his book. We are never doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. ■

Copies of *The Second Battle of New Orleans* are available from the Louisiana Landmarks Society:
www.louisianalandmarks.org/new-products-1



The cover of *The Second Battle of New Orleans* set to be re-released in December, 2020. | Courtesy of Louisiana Landmarks Society

In Memoriam



The late Thom Bess and the late Eric Allison at the 2006 Golden Jubilee of the passage of the Bard Act. | Courtesy of the Archive Project

Dr. Eric Allison, a preservationist and one of the initial incorporators of the Archive Project, died on June 15, 2019 in Idaho. An educator, author, and leader in the historic preservation field, Allison developed the graduate historic preservation program at Pratt Institute. He served as president of the Historic Districts Council from 1990-2000, chaired the National Council for

Preservation Education, and served on the board of the Archive Project. He believed that preservation is about more than the building as an object or work of art and encouraged students to look beyond the familiar to understand both the past and the future and to study both great buildings and overlooked structures. The Archive Projects looks forward to writing more about our colleague, Eric, in a future issue. His oral history can be found at: <http://www.nypap.org/oral-history/eric-allison/>

Instrumental in organizing his neighbors to campaign for the designation of the Longwood Historic District in the Bronx (designated 1980), **Thom Bess** passed away March 26, 2019. He helped create the Longwood Historic District Association to provide preservation assistance to residents of the district. Bess later became involved in preservation in Harlem and served as a board member of the Historic Districts Council. His oral history with the Archive Project can be found at: www.nypap.org/oral-history/thom-bess/

Whitney North Seymour, Jr. died on June 29, 2019 at the age of 95. While his obituary in *The New York Times* focuses on his lengthy career in politics and as a prosecutor, it barely touches on the fact that "Mike" (as he was known to friends) was a preservationist and a director of the Municipal Art Society of New York. Seymour, Jr. became actively involved in preservation through the New York Bar Association Committee for the Preservation of Historic Courthouses. He was an active community member, serving on the Greenwich Village Association and as president of the Park Association of New York City; he was active in efforts to save Washington Square Park. After being elected to the New York State Senate in 1966 he advocated for many preservation projects, including the establishment of a museum at South Street Seaport.

Seymour, Jr. was also an accomplished amateur artist who painted watercolors and oils of historic courthouses. Listen to Seymour's oral history with the Archive Project at: www.nypap.org/oral-history/whitney-north-seymour-jr/ ■

A Quick Trip Through the 2019 Preservation Film Festival

By Josie Naron, Jeffe Fellow



A crowd gathered for Nathan Kensinger’s *Managed Retreat* (2018) at the National Lighthouse Museum on Staten Island. | Courtesy of the Archive Project



Kent Barwick joined the Project for Public Spaces to lead a discussion at the J.M. Kaplan Fund. | Courtesy of the Archive Project

If you attended any of the 2019 NYPAP Preservation Film Festival’s ten events over the course of April, the phrase “five-borough film festival” may sound familiar. But it bears repeating: for the third iteration of the Archive’s Project Preservation Film Festival—and for the first time ever—screenings were hosted in *all five boroughs*. Through a diverse range of screenings and venues, from Astoria to Staten Island, from Coney Island to Upper Manhattan, creative, insightful, and often provocative discussions about preservation emerged all across the city.

In a whirlwind of a month, the Preservation Film Festival featured ten events in total. The Archive Project created a photo archive from

the festival to provide a snapshot look into each of the ten memorable gatherings.

1. On the film festival’s opening night at **Beyer Blinder Belle**, a crowd of preservationists and film fanatics met, mingled, and enjoyed director **Vivian Ducat**’s short film *Stonefaced*, starring **Robert A. King, FAIA**. Both King and Ducat gave short introductions to the film, and the audience enjoyed the violin stylings of thirteen-year-old prodigy **Pilar Winter Hill**.
2. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the decision to preserve the **United Palace of the Spiritual Arts**, Executive

Director of the United Palace, **Mike Fitelson**, led a tour through the “Byzantine-Romanesque-Indo-Hindu-Sino-Moorish-Persian-Eclectic-Rococo-Deco” interior of the theater. Many guests stayed to enjoy a day of *2001: A Space Odyssey*-themed festivities, including a film screening and a special appearance by star **Keir Dullea**.

3. For the Preservation Film Festival’s event in **Queens**, the Archive Project took a trip out to the historic **Zukor Theater at Kaufman Astoria Studios** for a screening of *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948). Those who journeyed out to Queens enjoyed a post-

screening talkback led by Executive Director **Brad Vogel** and Archive Project founder **Anthony C. Wood**.

4. Brooklynites had their day as recent documentary *Battle for Brooklyn* (2011) raised questions of eminent domain, displacement, and development at the Atlantic Yards site. Preservationists and urban advocates **Katia Kelly**, **Ron Shiffman**, **Norman Oder**, and **Daniel Goldstein** presided over a spirited discussion following the film.
5. NYPAP board member and quiz show maven **Susan De Vries** commanded a packed house at Noho's **B Bar** for the fifth annual installment of **Preservation, She Wrote**. After audiences enjoyed a "**Murder, She Wrote**" episode filled with zoning fraud, murder, and innuendo, De Vries led a highly competitive round of trivia based on the episode, with pencils, prizes, and donated gift packages from local sponsors up for grabs.
6. In one of the festival's most unique screenings, the **Coney Island Museum** hosted the Archive Project's showing of *Little Fugitive* (1953). The pioneering independent film provided a poignant look at the Brooklyn of yesteryear and sweeping shots of the Coney Island Boardwalk. **Mary Engel**, daughter of the filmmakers (Morris Engel and Ruth Orkin), also made a surprise appearance, delighting the crowd with her unique insights.
7. **Phil Myrick**, CEO of **Project for Public Spaces**, led a discussion at the **J.M. Kaplan Fund** on journalist and urbanist William "Holly" Whyte's influence on public space. Interspersing the discussion with clips from Whyte's *The Social Life of Small Urban Places* (1980) gave many new insights into the form and function of public spaces today. Legendary historic preservationist **Kent Barwick** also shared his observations on Whyte's work and its implications for preservation.
8. **Nathan Kensinger's** short film *Managed Retreat* (2018) was screened



Board members Paul Lozito and Gina Pollara, as well as Bronx educator Lucy Bloch-Wehba, lead a thoughtful discussion on cooperative housing following the screening of *At Home in Utopia* (2008) at the BronxArtSpace. | Courtesy of the Archive Project

for a packed-to-the-gills full house at the **National Lighthouse Museum** on **Staten Island**. Featuring the voices of expert panelists — **Paul Lozito**, **Jacky Keogh**, and **Kensinger** — and many local residents, the ensuing discussion offered a thoughtful, poignant glimpse into the impact of Superstorm Sandy for many coastal communities in Staten Island.

9. A vibrant crowd came to the **BronxArtSpace** for a screening of *At Home in Utopia* (2008), a documentary detailing the rise and fall of the "Coops" (United Workers Cooperative Colony) social housing project in the Bronx. Featuring a discussion led by current cooperative housing residents and drinks from a local Bronx distillery, it was one of the month's liveliest gatherings.
10. Finally, the 2019 Preservation Film Festival closed in grand fashion at One World Trade Center's **TWA Lounge**, inspired by **Eero Saarinen's** TWA Flight Center at JFK Airport. Toasts were made, glasses were clinked, speeches were given, and the Archive Project celebrated a month of spectacular preservation programming.

PRESERVATION FILM FESTIVAL



NYPAP board members Gina Pollara, Susan de Vries, and John Reddick; Executive Director Brad Vogel; Film Festival Coordinator Lorna Nowwe; Jeffe Fellow Josie Naron; and Board President Anthony C. Wood celebrate closing night at the 1 WTC's TWA Lounge. | Courtesy of the Archive Project



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The Archive Project would like to thank the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, The Achelis and Bodman Foundation, the New York Community Trust, the New York State Council on the Arts, The Gerry Charitable Trust, Thompson Hine LLP, Patrick Reisinger, and the Robert A. & Elizabeth R. Jeffe Foundation for their generous support.

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

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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