NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the 35th 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.

Preservationists gather at a March 26, 2021 press conference in front of 857 Riverside Drive, the 1851 house built by Dennis Harris, a documented Underground Railroad operative. (l-r) Maria Luna, Mitch Mondello, Michael Henry Adams, Corey Ortega, Assembly Member Al Taylor, Dan Cohen, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President-elect Mark Levine | Courtesy of Nora Fritsch/Upper Riverside Residents Alliance/Save Riverside

Capturing Pandemic-Era Preservation
Archive Your 2020/21 Activities

Executive Director’s Column, Brad Vogel

Did you fight for a historic building at risk during the past year and a half? Did you don a mask and take to the streets to oppose senseless demolitions? Did you shift your programming to Zoom to maintain momentum?

If you have taken any action during the global pandemic to protect historic resources, it is time to take the next step: create an archival record of your efforts! Doing so can seem like a major lift amidst the many challenges thrown at beleaguered New Yorkers each day, but it is of utmost importance, as the Archive Project knows full well. Ensuring that a record of preservation activities—even those that did not succeed—exists for the future helps to generate the full story of New York City. Gotham is a place of dynamism, yes, but its greatness also derives from the efforts of those who love and fight like hell for the special, the rare, the classic, and the livable aspects of the city. Someone once called them preservationists.

A good preservationist, of course, is also an archivist. For organizations and individuals

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engaged in historic preservation, the all too ephemeral advocacy blitzes that emerge on an ad hoc basis in the face of crisis are wont to disappear. So make it a habit to place those printouts, pins, and posters in a titled folder. Or get to know someone who can do that task for you. Save labeled electronic documents, copies of social media posts, and e-blasts in an external hard drive and the cloud, including one or more places where someone might look in a pinch if you are no longer around. Send photos to people who appear in them for their own records.

Those, really, are the baby steps. Here are some additional thoughts on how to take stock of what just happened across the pandemic and make sure the record of your personal or group preservation advocacy work is not lost in the fray. Remember, people in the future will likely be especially intrigued to know what people were doing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Take Stock**: Conduct a mini-assessment. Time warped weirdly during the pandemic, so take a moment to build a timeline of your preservation activities during the past two years. Then, use that timeline to locate and review any physical or electronic reminders of those activities.

2. **Organize**: Get it together! Build a system, no matter how simple, to categorize and make logical what might be a maelstrom of images, emails, and banners. Label things; people and places depicted in a photograph might be obvious to you, but will that hold true for a third party viewer in the future? Err on the side of recording more explanatory information. If you have the need and the means, consider hiring an archival consultant to assist with this step.

3. **Safety & Redundancy**: Once you have coalesced your own collection, think about how you will keep it from disappearing in the immediate future. Are the papers currently in a room where moisture is a problem? Is your laptop where the protest photos are stored...a decade old and getting shaky? Make copies. Send a duplicate external hard drive to your cousin's house. Take steps to make sure that your collection is not in immediate danger.

4. **Share**: Do not hide your story if it is worth sharing. Tell the world! One of the best ways to ensure that preservation stories are not lost is to circulate them widely and let a reassuring redundancy grow in their retelling. If you are part of an organization, consider both internal and external audiences. Employ Creative Commons or other use guidelines as needed. Tag us in your photo on Instagram: @nypap_org.

5. **A Long Term Home**: Think long term about the collection that represents you and your work as a preservationist.
Yukie Ohta of SoHo Memory Project to be Honored at Bard Breakfast

The Archive Project’s beloved annual Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit, known to many as simply “The Bard Breakfast,” returns for the 19th time with an in-person format on the morning of December 16th. The event’s namesake, Albert Sprague Bard, was a tireless and essential preservationist whose efforts across many decades led to the Bard Act, New York State legislation passed in 1956 that allowed New York City to pass its own Landmarks Law in 1965.

The event will take place at a new location in Manhattan, 8 East 69th Street, and it will include a panel discussion on the acquisition of the Robert Caro papers by The New-York Historical Society. Valerie Paley, the Sue Ann Weinberg Director of the Society’s Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, will moderate the panel. Panelists include Paley’s predecessor and Archive Project board member Michael Ryan, former Manhattan Borough Historian Michael Miscione, and Archive Project board member, John Reddick.

This year the Bard Breakfast will honor the work of Yukie Ohta, the founder and guiding spirit behind the SoHo Memory Project. The Archive Project will present Ohta with the Preservation Award for her efforts to document and disseminate the history of the preservation movement in New York City’s SoHo cast iron neighborhood, as well as her work to secure a long-term home for the Memory Project’s archives and materials with the New-York Historical Society’s new Diamonstein-Spielvogel Institute for New York City History, Politics, and Community Activism. Taken together, Ohta’s efforts under the aegis of the SoHo Memory Project are an inspiration: every historic neighborhood would benefit from having a similar small-scale project that serves as a community repository of images, materials, and stories, and that safeguards a local heritage of preservation activism.

Preservation Award Honoree

“I love SoHo in all its iterations,” Ohta said. “It is a preservation story—both on purpose and by accident.” Both that love and that story have come together in the SoHo Memory Project that Ohta has cultivated for just over a decade.

As she wrote on January 1, 2021: “What began as a blog that I thought only my mom would read has turned into a nonprofit organization with an archive that will soon be acquired by the New-York Historical Society Library. Together we built our collective memory of SoHo, past and present, grit and glory, from scratch.” Ohta was inspired to start the project by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation with encouragement from Henry Raine at the New-York Historical Society.

Today, the SoHo Memory Project has grown to include collections of oral histories, archives, audio walking tours, and installations, all focused on the history of SoHo from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Importantly, Ohta made clear at the outset that the effort would aim to capture “SoHo as a community, a neighborhood made up of a wide variety of people, families, businesses, community groups, and, only incidentally, all manner of creative activity.” She has succeeded in her aims. Today, “everybody comes to me if they need to know about SoHo history,” Ohta said.

Along the way, Ohta has learned a great deal about the cast iron district that preservationist Margot Gayle, who founded Friends of Cast Iron Architecture, and many other individuals, especially resident artists,

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Yukie Ohta, founder of the SoHo Memory Project, will be honored with the Archive Project’s 2021 Preservation Award at the Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit. | Courtesy of the Archive Project
during the pandemic. What will happen to it when you are gone? Consider inquiring with a collecting institution (a museum, historical society, archive, or library) about whether it might want to acquire your collection today or at a point in the future. In 2020, multiple pandemic-specific collecting efforts emerged seeking items that helped to tell the story of the pandemic in New York City. Here are just a few of those efforts you may want to consider, as they remain ongoing:

**History Responds, New-York Historical Society:**
www.nyhistory.org/history-responds

**The Great Pandemics Archive:**
www.jamiecourville.com/pandemics-time-capsule

**Neighborhood Stories — NYC Department of Records & Information Services:**
www.archives.nyc/neighborhoodstories

The fact that the pandemic is not yet over is quite apparent as I conclude this piece; I write it while home after a breakthrough case of COVID-19. Thankfully the symptoms have not been severe. But the time in quarantine has made me glance over at a pile of handmade signs, posters, and folders from 2020 that sits near my weatherworn waterfall armoire. The pile, generated in my free time, remains stuck at phase three in the steps I laid out above. I think it may be time to stop typing and go push the pile to phase five so posterity might know what this strange time has been about.

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**CAPTURING continued from page 2**

Andrew Berman, Executive Director of Village Preservation, spoke at an October 2021 rally in front of 4-54 Ninth Avenue/351 West 14th Street in the Gansevoort Market Historic District as the nine buildings in a row dating to the 1840s were being demolished. | Courtesy of Helen McCall Freeman

**Did you know?**

NYC Municipal Archives has launched ArchivesSpace, a web-based tool that enables researchers to explore New York City’s archives: https://a860-collectionguides.nyc.gov/
As another NYPAP newsletter is in its final stages, I have been speaking with Brad Vogel and many of my fellow board members about the Archive Project’s plans for 2022. Before we say goodbye to 2021, we are thrilled that we will see many of you at the upcoming Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit. It is hard to believe that this is the 19th BBBB. We began the Breakfast in the Archive Project’s early days to gather with friends and colleagues to celebrate a forgotten figure in preservation history, despite the fact that New York State’s law that permits local landmarks regulation is called the Bard Act. We wanted to highlight the way archives play a role in current research, holding thousands of ideas, just waiting to become the central motif in a book, lecture, blog, or podcast.

The chronicle of the City brings us much joy—whether it is because of the books we read, the exhibitions we visit, or those we follow on social media. Many of our favorite sources of information depend on research that is made possible because institutions and individuals have devoted time and energy to collecting notes, images, articles, and oral histories that reveal the narrative of our environment.

We hope the newsletter captivates you and inspires you to help us continue our work.

If we will see you at the Bard Breakfast, we cannot wait to greet you, either in person or virtually. And if we will not see you there, drop us a note, send us an email, and let us know what is on your mind. Maybe we will see you at an event soon. And of course, we hope you will continue being a part of the NYPAP family long into the future.

COVID-19 remains much on everyone’s mind, as does the state of life in the City. Preservation and archives are constants in our lives that can seem less urgent in light of the challenges facing New York at the moment. Yet they are essential to the resiliency of New York in which we take great pride. •
Digging Into Our Ever-Expanding Preservation History Database

by Rachel Ericksen, 2021 Reisinger Scholar

Where does one turn to learn about preservation history that is specific to New York City? The Archive Project’s online Preservation History Database.

Over the past nine months I have had the privilege of leading an effort to expand the database by conducting research and writing entries with a team that focuses on the people and places integral to the history of the preservation movement in New York City. By focusing on expanding the breadth of entries to include more sites located in the five boroughs and more people representative of the full story of preservation, our efforts reflect a thread that ties these seemingly random entries together. The saving of places has always been brought about by passionate people who use their own special skills to rise to the occasion as preservation leaders, not only for the sake of buildings but also the communities they anchor.

For each of the bolded entries mentioned below, please find the full entries, along with many more, at our website, www.nypap.org.

Take, for example, the work done by Thom Bess, a court reporter who wanted to do something about the decaying state of the buildings in the Longwood neighborhood of the Southwest Bronx. Working with Marilyn Smith in the 1970s and early 1980s, he rallied the community—literally ringing on every doorbell—to raise awareness and build an engaged community of citizens integral to the establishment of the neighborhood as the Longwood Historic District and the founding of the Longwood Historic District Community Association.

Other preservation leaders focused on the power of their pens to advocate for saving places meaningful to their communities. Mary Ann Haick DiNapoli was a historian of the South Ferry Arab American St. George’s Syrian Melkite Church, a remnant of Manhattan’s Little Syria, designated an individual city landmark in 2009 | Courtesy of 6tocelebrate.org
community in Brooklyn. Her research and writings were integral to the landmarking of St. George’s Syrian Melkite Catholic Church and provided historical context for other designation efforts in what was once Manhattan’s Little Syria. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Marianne Moore wrote a rallying cry in the 1960s to save the Camperdown Elm, a famed tree called out in the 1975 scenic landmark designation report for Prospect Park.

Sometimes, the call to be a preservation leader stems from fighting the forces who wish to come in and disrupt or disregard the physical fabric of one’s community. As stated by the late Linda Mariano, a leader in the preservation of the industrial heritage of the Gowanus Canal and its environs, “There is no other way to say it, it’s a fight. It’s a fight for how you feel about where you live, and that’s all I’m trying to do.”

The physical sites added to the database over the past few months offer their own insights into the history of preservation efforts. Even at the dawn of landmarking in New York City, people were advocating not only for the grand sites, but for sites that tell the full story of the people and eras of the City. Those stories emerge at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital, where generations of New Yorkers serving their country during times of war and peace were treated. They radiate out from the vernacular Wyckoff House from the 1600s, where a former indentured laborer showcased his success. It holds the distinction of being the City’s first designated individual landmark.

In Queens, this sense of story is embodied in Kingsland Homestead, a house moved twice by preservationists to maintain the borough’s only 18th century home. These stories epitomize how people drive the preservation of place.

In the process of continuing to build out the database, I have learned that preservation is about community, whether it is a community that rallies to save a space it finds meaningful or about communities preserving important stories that once inhabited a building, street, or neighborhood. Ultimately, the act of preservation formally links the tangible and intangible elements that make up a place—the fabric of the built environment and the community-generated stories—and stitches them into a permanent bond, a bond that functions to engage and inspire those wandering in, through, and past such places. To me, this is where preservation’s magic lies, both as a passion and as a profession. Thank you to Pat Reisinger for supporting this position, to Executive Director Brad Vogel for his support and encouragement, and to many Archive Project members for their insights into these people and places.
I come from a long line of rabble-rousers, so it took little convincing for my father to join in my earliest activist pursuits. Together, we marched against the Iraq war, petitioned against the clearcutting of a local forest, and dredged trash from the Farmington River’s swollen banks.

My father got the bug, in turn, from his parents. Ethel and Frank Untermyer raised their family in what now is a suburb—but was then a swamp hemmed in by active farmland.

From their custom-built modernist home, Ethel drafted, typed, and mimeographed her 1958 ballot measure that created a countywide preservation and conservation agency. For his part, Frank preached the gospel of civil rights as a professor at an early integrated college and welcomed leaders like James Baldwin to the family home.

Frank’s father “roused rabble” too, although in his signature reserved fashion. Justice Irwin Untermyer molded the law from his perch on the Appellate Division bench in Manhattan and promoted beauty through his longtime service on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Irwin’s father’s activism remains the stuff of legend. Papers dubbed Samuel Untermyer a “superlawyer,” as he hounded officials with plans for monopoly regulation, subway unification, and entry into World War II to fight his mustachioed nemesis, Adolf Hitler. Elements of Samuel’s verdant estate still enchant visitors to Untermyer Gardens in Yonkers and Untermyer Fountain in Central Park.

My entry into Gotham’s preservation community may have thus been inevitable, but I jumped in with gusto upon moving to Manhattan in 2008. Early projects were unsuccessful, but later initiatives bore fruit thanks to the guidance of Mosette Broderick, Carol Herselle Krinsky, and many, many others.

A productive decade followed. By 2015, Simeon Bankoff had asked me to join the Historic Districts Council as its Deputy Director. My activism professionalized somewhat as we took on destructive and unimaginative proposals of all types across all five boroughs.

But I reverted to those scrappy Untermyer roots after departing for law school. And today, I find myself on the board of the Archive Project, a venerable group charged with maintaining that most ephemeral of essences: the spirit of preservation in New York and its environs.

Given the long line of rabble-rousers who precede me, I could not be prouder.
worked to save from the plans of Robert Moses. “It was saved in spite of and thanks to Moses,” Ohta said, indicating how Moses managed to galvanize a community with the temperament to live in lofts before it was legal. “People underestimated the energy and power of artists.” The historic district was designated in 1973 after more than two years of battle. Gayle’s tours layered direct architectural value onto the functional value of SoHo’s loft spaces, which were occupied by artists full of idealism and a willingness to live behind blackout curtains (so that their unauthorized use of industrial spaces as residences would not be noticed). Artists ultimately prevailed upon the city to change the area’s industrial zoning to allow for artists’ residential use. Today, SoHo faces another prospective change in zoning, one that has been hotly contested.

When Ohta was first becoming acquainted with the archival profession, she thought: “There’s got to be some archive for SoHo.” But there was not. “So I did it,” she recalls, reflecting on the founding of the Project. “I had a vision and it actually came true.” In creating the Memory Project, she started out with a blog and some friends. The undertaking grew exponentially, creating a collective memory one story at a time by accumulating images, ephemera, and records. The Memory Project filled a need in the SoHo scene, one that catalogued and preserved the vigorous activism in public meetings and on the streets. The Memory Project may at first have been less publicly visible than those other forms of civic engagement, but it was soon seen as a crucial means of validating the work of the community. As Ohta puts it: “archivism is activism.”

Today, the SoHo Memory Project’s emphasis extends beyond the cornices and the foundry stamps (small insignia denoting where cast iron components were made) that mark SoHo’s built environment, with an eye to the future. “There’s a whole new generation—who will be decision makers,” Ohta said, mentioning her role as an archivist and guest lecturer at the Little Red Schoolhouse. There she instills a sense of why history is relevant to students, pushing for equity in history at every step. New technological approaches help as well. The Memory Project’s audio tour now brings even more history and life to the neighborhood and to new demographics.

Bringing archival materials and the history of preservation to new audiences is crucial. As Ohta notes, speaking of SoHo’s journey as a place of ongoing adaptive reuse: “You kill the ghost—the figures of the past who made this setting—you kill the desire to be here.” Place is given meaning by its story thus far.

The Archive Project looks forward to honoring Yukie Ohta’s work as the founder and caretaker of the SoHo Memory Project. She has certainly earned this year’s Preservation Award.
Inspired by Grassroots Stories Series

The Archive Project conducted a series of group oral histories this year with grassroots preservation groups, facilitated by funding from the New York State Council on the Arts. Preservation consultant Kelly Carroll moderated virtual sessions with groups in Harlem, Elmhurst, East New York, and other neighborhoods, focusing on the intersection of architectural preservation and community preservation. The series included individual oral histories with preservationists in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island as well. Videos and transcripts for each of the oral histories can be found on the Archive Project’s website, www.nypap.org. Special thanks to Pat Reisinger for additional support for the series, which complements and runs in parallel with the Archive Project’s ongoing Oral History Intensive funded by the Peggy N. and Roger G. Gerry Charitable Trust.

Saving Preservation Papers

On November 4, Archive Project Executive Director Brad Vogel presented at a CUNY graduate class about the Archive Project’s work. Vogel joined the class at the invitation of instructor Darrel Holnes and consulted with students regarding oral history projects focused broadly on the Black experience in Brooklyn. Students were provided with access to the Archive Project’s oral history guide and a variety of model oral histories. Several of the proposed student oral history projects tied into the Archive Project’s areas of focus.

Podcast on George McAneny

In October, Archive Project board member Adrian Untermeyer, Executive Director Brad Vogel, and independent historian Lucie Levine joined the Historical Society of the New York Courts for a unique podcast on the legacy of civic figure George McAneny. The three speakers chimed in on a joint podcast from different rooms in the courthouse at 60 Centre Street on Foley Square, touching on several preservation-related themes in the course of the discussion. Check out this podcast on YouTube, number 15 in a series produced by the Historical Society of the New York Courts, on how New York City was shaped by McAneny’s life in the law.

Vogel Visits CUNY Class

Executive Director Brad Vogel presented recently to a CUNY graduate class about the Archive Project’s work. Vogel joined the class at the invitation of instructor Darrel Holnes and consulted with students regarding oral history projects focused broadly on the Black experience in Brooklyn. Students were provided with access to the Archive Project’s oral history guide and a variety of model oral histories. Several of the proposed student oral history projects tied into the Archive Project’s areas of focus.
In Memoriam - Doris Diether

by Alison Greenberg

Doris did not shy away from dramatic protest. Wearing business attire, Doris led a pig on a leash in front of Governor Nelson Rockefeller’s office as part of a 1960 Save the Village protest against the demolition of older Village buildings to pave the way for luxury apartments.

Doris joined her local community board in 1964 and was perhaps the longest-serving community board member in Manhattan, if not the City. Doris was never afraid of, and in fact relished, the sport of battling with developers who advanced applications that strayed from what was appropriate throughout the Village, SoHo, NoHo, Chinatown, Gansevoort Market, Little Italy, and Hudson Square. Whether or not she was invited, Doris made it a point to read the testimony for CB2 at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, in person.

When she started her civic career, Doris was the only woman in a zoning class. She eventually taught herself the subject and became a consultant to many community groups. As Sean Sweeney, her longtime co-chair of the CB2 Landmarks & Aesthetics Committee, notes:

“Doris was what is called in constitutional law a strict constructionist. So she consistently rejected any modernizations to the Village’s 19th century buildings which were becoming common as wealthy arrivistes bought historic homes and attempted to remodel them with their own 21st-century sensibilities.”

Widowed in 1987, Doris made family through friendships and mentoring many in the preservation community. She consistently attended CB2 Landmarks & Aesthetics Committee meetings every other week, as well as the monthly full CB2 board meetings. During the holiday season, she proudly shared that she had a party each night, from the start of the month through New Year’s Day. She never complained of being tired.

Doris was proud to have received the Historic Districts Council’s Mickey Murphy Award for Lifetime Achievement and to have received official proclamations from (among others) former Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and Borough President Gale Brewer. Doris inspired the Archive Project to discuss the need to document community board landmarking records with Municipal Archive officials. She will be missed.
YOUR FALL/WINTER 2021 NEWSLETTER HAS ARRIVED!

The Archive Project would like to thank the Leon Levy Foundation, 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, Kay Ciganovic, Patrick Reisinger, and the Robert A. and 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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