



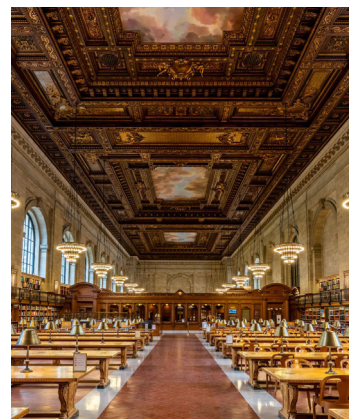
NEWSLETTER

FULL YEAR 2023

Welcome to the 38th 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.

50th Anniversary of the 1973 Amendments to New York City's Landmarks Law

By Katie Heiserman, 2023 Jeffe Fellow



Left to right: Interior of the Apollo Theater courtesy of the Apollo Archives, Coney Island Riegelmann Boardwalk courtesy of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, Morningside Park courtesy of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, The Rose Main Reading Room of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building courtesy of *Curbed NY*

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1973 amendments to New York City's Landmarks Law. Among other notable changes, the amendments introduced interior and scenic landmarks as new designation categories and implemented structural changes that made the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) a full-time administrative body.

Mayor Robert Wagner signed the 1965 Landmarks Law to protect historic buildings and districts from unchallenged developments that would destroy or fundamentally alter their character. At the

time, the law did not include provisions to protect public parks and other landscape features. The 1973 amendments allowed the designation of Central Park as a New York City scenic landmark in 1974.

The 1965 law also left many culturally and architecturally significant interiors vulnerable to demolition. In 1967, the auditorium of the Old Metropolitan Opera House, designed by Carrère & Hastings in 1903, was destroyed despite vehement preservation efforts. At the time of the 1973 amendments' passage, there had been recent

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2023 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit

Join us in honoring **Peter Samton** with the 2023 Preservation Award for his efforts to keep the memory of the Penn Station advocacy campaign alive.

The benefit will also feature award-winning author **Fiona Davis** as the guest speaker.

December 14, 2023

8:00-10:00 a.m.

General tickets starting at \$150

Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit 2022

By Lisa Ackerman, Chair

Every year I am as excited about the Bard Breakfast as the first time we held the event. Tony Wood, a lover of alliteration and clever titles, dubbed it the BBBB, Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit! From the humble beginnings of actually having to stop by my office on the way to the Bard Breakfast to squish the projector and screen into a cab for the speaker's presentation, to the grand celebration we held at The Players in 2022, I remain a loyal supporter of the event. It never ceases to be a joyful occasion to see friends, celebrate New York City's preservation movement, and remember the talented and dedicated figures who have made our preservation activities so vital over the decades.

2022 was no exception. Christabel Gough was a gracious honoree and her remarks that morning were a very clear reminder that the preservation community has been battling many of the same issues over a long period. However, few people have documented some of the battles as clearly and carefully as Christabel, and listening to her read some of her past writings provided just one example of her elegance and eloquence. As a co-founder of the Society for the Architecture of the City, her message is very clear. We must take responsibility for the community in which we live. Her admirers filled the room, and, if they are like me, left The Players feeling more motivated than ever to work hard to protect the city we love.

Our 2022 speaker was Christine Cipriani, author of a forthcoming book on architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable. Before Christine's opening remarks, I knew I would be one of the first to buy a copy of this biography, as I love Ada Louise Huxtable's

writings and have read and reread many of her articles and essays over the years. As Christine's talk unfolded, my curiosity for the biography grew. Christine offered great anecdotes and insights into her research and a deep dive into the archives to shape the narrative of Ada Louise's life and work. I very much hope the Archive Project will have Christine Cipriani speak again at a future event.

As I spoke with friends and colleagues that morning, I felt that great sense of reunion that always permeates the Bard Breakfast. There is much that could be said about all the terrific people in the room and those who were remembered with tables dedicated to some great preservation advocates to whom we have said goodbye over the years. I would be too afraid I would forget

someone important if I were to name all those that were present. What I will say instead is that the mixture of architects, preservationists, planners, students, past and present landmarks commissioners, and the Archive Project's board members illustrated the great range of professions that make up our community.

If you were with us in December 2022, thank you for being an active participant in the Archive Project's activities, and thank you for getting up early to celebrate our shared accomplishments and show your support for Christabel Gough and Christine Cipriani. Mark your calendar now for the next Bard Breakfast on December 14, 2023 at The Players! While it seems impossible to think it will be better than last year, I know it will be another terrific occasion to be together. ■



Christabel Gough at the New York Preservation Archive Project's 2022 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit |
Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project

Board Member Spotlight: Yukie Ohta

By Yukie Ohta

I am a native New Yorker. There are not too many of us around anymore, at least people who are my age. I am more specifically a product of 1970s SoHo, when the neighborhood was a flourishing, and then declining, artists' community. It was a very special place at a very special moment in time. My experiences growing up in SoHo have made me who I am today. Since graduating from college, I have been a grants administrator, an editor, a literary translator, a handbag designer, a boutique owner, an artist, an archivist, and a writer. I have also gone to graduate school twice, once in my twenties and once in my forties.

I am currently the founder and director of SoHo Memory Project (SMP), a small nonprofit organization that celebrates the history of SoHo as a New York City neighborhood. SMP began as a blog in 2011 and has grown by leaps and bounds since then. At first I thought it would only be my family and friends who would read the blog, but then more and more people started reading. A community grew up around this blog where people who lived the blog's stories offered me their papers, and the people who read, listened to, and watched the stories were interested in learning more. My mission over the last decade has thus been to preserve SoHo's past so that present generations understand our neighborhood's rich history and can make informed decisions as we shape its future.

The inspiration for SMP came to me when I was taking a class on archives for my degree in Library Science. We were studying various archives that document the history of places, people, and historical eras. It was then that I realized there was no archive documenting the history of SoHo. I thought such an archive should exist and that someone should do it. I then realized that time was of the essence, that the SoHo stories in need of preservation would disappear with those who lived them, and that I could not sit around and wait for that someone to come

along. That someone had to be me.

I am uniquely positioned to serve as SoHo's memory keeper. As a child of SoHo who still lives in the building where I grew up, I have a lifelong connection to those who were on the front lines of SoHo's transformation from an all-but-abandoned manufacturing area to a thriving artists' community at a time when the area's approximately 250 cast-iron buildings were considered outmoded, and powerful forces felt the City would be better off with a highway or a housing complex instead of the architectural treasures that still stand today. SMP collects archival documents in many forms that tell the story of how SoHo's magnificent built environment was preserved by artist-activists, making it the first instance of widespread adaptive reuse in New York City, as well as how a tight-knit artists' community formed along the way.

SMP is a labor of love and my way of giving back to the community that raised me. My now retired parents, a painter and a poet by nature, and a carpenter and general contractor by trade, respectively, came to SoHo from Japan in the 1960s to build a life, and what a life it was. I experienced a singular childhood spent inhabiting a spectacular built environment in a community of extraordinary creatives, all the while thinking that that was how everyone lived. Back then, I had no idea how lucky I was. With 50 years of hindsight, it is



New York Preservation Archive Project board member Yukie Ohta |
Courtesy of Yukie Ohta

unfathomable to me that before now, there was no repository that held the evidence of a now-fading artists' community and the 26 blocks of cast-iron buildings this community fought to preserve.

Now that SMP's document archive has been accessioned by the New-York Historical Society, where it will be preserved and made accessible to the public, my next step is to use SMP as a model to help other New York neighborhood groups and organizations preserve their own histories. My ultimate dream is to create an interconnected network of neighborhood memory projects that each contribute to the collective of a New York Memory Project. We may never get there, but it will sure be a fun ride trying! ■

2023 Shelby White & Leon Levy Archival Assistance Initiative Grant Awardees

The New York Preservation Archive Project originally presented Archival Assistance Initiative grants in 2013, 2015, and 2017 to assist historic preservation-related not-for-profit organizations across New York City with identifying and maintaining their archival resources. The generous assistance of the Leon Levy Foundation revitalized the program in 2022 and provided additional funding for future rounds of small grants.

This year, we had a robust applicant pool and equally robust deliberations. Please join us in congratulating the following awardees of the highly competitive 2023 Shelby White & Leon Levy Archival Assistance Initiative Grant:

Friends of the Alice Austen House
Historic Districts Council
Historic Richmond Town
Jefferson Market Library
Jill Gill Archive
Lower East Side Preservation Initiative
Tenement Museum
Village Preservation

Congratulations to all of this year's grantees! Grant funding from this cycle will support projects that improve archival stewardship of and public access to materials related

to historic preservation in New York City. Details on the next round of funding will be announced in 2024. ■



Cabinet found in Jefferson Market Library containing documents related to the building's preservation | Courtesy of the Jefferson Market Library



Tenement Museum Curatorial Assistant Shannen Smiley surveying a recently acquired collection documenting the research, career, and preservation contributions of Joyce Mendelsohn, the Museum's first Director of Education | Courtesy of the Tenement Museum

Checking-In At 25

The Archive Project Marks a Milestone

Archive Project Chair Lisa Ackerman and Chair Emeritus Anthony C. Wood joined former Executive Director Brad Vogel on April 28, 2023 for a conversation about the organization's twenty-fifth anniversary of incorporation in 1998.

Vogel: Just looking back for a moment on these 25 years, Tony, if you could take us back to the very beginning, because I know the Archive Project was incorporated in 1998, but you were actually doing work prior to that. That basically led to the creation of the Archive Project, correct?

Wood: I came to New York in 1978, and I wanted to learn the history of preservation; there wasn't anything written. There were just no resources. And in 1983 I was lucky enough to get a small grant to do a series of oral histories with prominent players in the field of preservation who had been involved for decades. I was trying to figure out the origins of the field and so those interviews (we're not even going to go into the foot pedal-operated transcription tape recorder that I had to use and the Kaypro computer) in 1983 started that process.

And then actually, we [the Archive Project] started. I partnered with Christabel Gough, and she started to publish some of those oral histories in her Village Views. But I'd say the real significant start prior to incorporation was a 1993 grant from the J.M. Kaplan Fund to the Historic Districts Council as fiscal agent to create the New York Preservation Archive Project. So we then gathered a few like-minded people: Eric Allison was early on in the conversation and Vicki Weiner. They became, with me, the three incorporators, and then, immediately after that, we added Dorothy Miner, and so that was the crew in place in the space between 1993 and incorporation in 1998.

Papers of preservationists were being lost. Ruth Wittenberg's apartment had been cleaned out after she died. Ray Rubinow's papers were stored in the basement of his apartment building, and he became sick and all of a sudden somebody cleared out the

basement and all the papers were lost. So such incidents reinforced the growing realization that preservation had a real history, it was being lost, and we were suffering because it was being lost.

Ackerman: I was the fourth, fifth, or sixth board member to join after that initial wave. Tony and I met in 1982 when he was at the Kaplan Fund and I was at the Kress Foundation, and Joan Davidson and Marilyn Perry, who were head of each of those organizations, felt great empathy for what was happening at the church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity with saving stained-glass windows. Our two organizations got involved in a campaign not just to restore the stained glass, but also to address the issue of people being trained in this. On many long subway rides back to the Upper East Side from Brooklyn Heights, I think he [Tony] and I

began a conversation about preservationists' papers. We saw that there was this need.

A preservationist often had a whole other job and was doing this as a volunteer, and so there wasn't that consciousness about how to document these efforts. Nevertheless, a lot of local organizations had great archives, even if they didn't call them archives, but they didn't have the resources to figure out how to do it and that's where technology today has made it a lot easier. So a lot of things came together at once, and it was really kind of a moment. In time we realized you are going to really lose valuable information about people who were great activists.

Wood: Lisa also provided the third step that got the archive project really going as a group. The first was the Kaplan Fund, so we had a little money in the bank. The second



The New York Preservation Archive Project's 2017 celebration of the Crown Heights North preservation movement | Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project

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was actually getting legally incorporated. But the third was when Lisa arranged for a Kress Fellow to come on as the first really paid staff person.

Vogel: Okay. So, as Executive Director, and having been a board member for six years prior to that, I know that the Archive Project is really built around oral histories and saving papers, as well as events and celebrations to get out into the public consciousness and lift up the legacy of preservation history. What would you say are the chief accomplishments looking back across the 25 years?

Wood: I like that the major accomplishment is that we're still around after 25 years. It's grown from an idea of a handful of people to a developed constituency. I won't go so far as to say an army but certainly a wonderful cluster of people who are in preservation that now understand the importance of our work, and so I think there is a realization that it's needed. So to me that's kind of the proof in the pudding, and the thing of which I'm most proud. I'm not running it anymore. It's gone beyond the founder, which is key.

Ackerman: I look back on it, and I think there's really kind of some miraculous moments. We had a small grant from the Vinmont Foundation to do some very targeted research, but I think even that was one of those proof-of-concept moments where you think, well, we wrote the grant. We got the grant. We completed the research, and we were able to demonstrate that we were moving the needle on something. I have a great fondness for one of our significant public programs, which was this series called Sages and Stages, and it was an opportunity to marry a more senior person in the field with an emerging preservationist and match them up. They were all fantastic, but one that always stands out to me was Ed Kirkland talking about the far reaches of Chelsea and the struggle to protect that area. And then he was paired with Eddie Neelms talking about the Bronx.

There was something magical about these opportunities to bring people together and build that constituency that Tony talks about. Hearing from people, but also in hearing the stories of how preservation evolved over time in the City.



The New York Preservation Archive Project's 2012 Archival Workshop Series |
Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project

Wood: And you're right about how things lead to other things. Grant money that came in from "Windie Knowe" – which was money that Jack Taylor anonymously sent our way – was used to commission the research paper on George McAneny. That set in motion what has now become, thanks to Kay Ciganovic and others, the groundwork for what someday in the relatively near future will be a whole book on McAneny. We've done that, let the ripples go out in a very exciting way.

Vogel: There are so many things that could be mentioned here like the Preservation Film Festival that happened for a number of years, and the Bard Breakfast which serves as a fundraiser. But also a lot of heavy lifting in terms of lifting up preservation and building this broader ethic of preservation that's out there. Are there any particular oral histories that you recall as being especially pivotal or meaningful?

Wood: What jumps to my mind is not a person, but the idea to interview all the past Landmarks Preservation Commission chairs.

Once they cease to be in that role, a lot of times there's no opportunity to hear from them what they thought about their tenure – highs, lows, greatest challenges, etc. The chance to allow chairs to have a reflective moment on their tenure was a great idea.

So the oral histories are also about the present and documenting the past with an eye towards the future. I've always thought: Okay, in 50 years, when somebody wants to write the history of this period, what would they like as a researcher? Wouldn't it be nice if I had access to the papers of this person or that person? Now it'll be there for them.

Vogel: What are some of the fun times that you remember that come to mind across the 25 years of the Archive Project's work?

Wood: Well, one of the things I'll never forget was the night when we were screening "Preservation She Wrote" at The Paris Café and the audio suddenly disappeared, and Susan de Vries, without missing a beat, then gave a sports broadcaster blow-by-blow

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report of every event that was unfolding on the screen. That captures how we've always tried to do things that were also fun, and I remember we had you read a poem at one of the Bard Breakfasts.

Vogel: That's right.

Wood: So we have tried to be out of the box a bit while we're filling the history box with information.

Ackerman: I always find the Bard Breakfast rewarding. You haven't seen people for six months, or even sometimes a year, and so I really look forward to the Bard Breakfast because I know whomever we have as a speaker is going to be great.

It's also a frantic time of year for everybody with holidays and family obligations and year-end commitments looming. And so you get to have this one morning where you get to just slip away from all that's going on in December in New York City.

Wood: Here I thought Lisa was going to call out the Bard Breakfast that involved Roxy Beaujolais.

Vogel: Let's let that just hang out there. And somebody looking at this tape will wonder what that was all about. One thing I'll add is that not everyone out there in the public has attended an Archive Project board meeting, and I think, looking back on my over a decade of involvement, which is relatively slim compared to your two records, the board meetings and the tone that you set [Tony] as the chair by making them fun, by making them entertaining and making everyone feel collegial, went a long way in cohering the organization and retaining interest and participation by a wide range of people over the years.

Wood: Well, thank you, but also the added advantage is that we don't have too many contentious issues that come up in conversations about documenting, celebrating, and preserving the history of the preservation movement. So we are kind of blessed that way. But it's been a very congenial group and it's evolved over time. Board members have brought much to the table over the years.



The New York Preservation Archive Project's 1973 Amendments anniversary event in 2008 |
Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project

Ackerman: Truly, this is an organization that would not still be here after 25 years without the board having come through in so many different ways, bringing so much to the table, and offering their dedication. You know, the chance to spend time with people like Otis Pratt Pearsall and Dorothy Miner and many others.

Wood: Certainly I feel like I could look at the whole roster of current and past board members and feel like I've learned something from each and every one of them. I'd like to give a shout out to our late, good old friend, Eric Allison, who for years played a very helpful role at the Archive Project. Everyone has brought something to the table.

Vogel: Stephen Facey has also been a tremendous support on the sort of finance and budget side of things, keeping it all going.

Wood: He's kept the car on the highway financially, kept us away from the guardrails.

Ackerman: Yes, yes, indeed!

Vogel: To zoom back out to the broader preservation field in New York City, what are the challenges you see in collecting or ensuring that we don't lose preservation history going forward?

Wood: Well, I'll just say kind of good news,

bad news. The good news is more preservation groups are aware of their own history because they've reached an age, some of them, where they're celebrating anniversaries and want to know their history. But I think the flip side is most preservation groups, except ours, are in the business of doing preservation and that appropriately is their top priority. And it's an under-resourced field. But the challenge with the preservationist is often like that of the shoemaker. The shoemaker's kids go barefoot. So the preservation organizations are out saving other people's history, and it's still a challenge to get them to realize how important it is to preserve their own history.

Ackerman: Granting institutions have also now prioritized archives and access to information. The Leon Levy Foundation for more than a decade has given grants specifically to help people digitize their records and organize online archives. They're not alone, but they were a leader in this, and so, as it becomes more of a priority, money will flow. I think that we still fill a need, and a 25-year run for an organization at this level is really impressive. So fun to have been a part of it.

Vogel: Absolutely.

Wood: 25 years is a good beginning. ■

Archive Project News

Our Executive Director Transition: Applauding Brad Vogel and Welcoming Emily Kahn

By Lisa Ackerman, Chair

As this edition of the Archive Project's newsletter is put to bed, we celebrate the three-month anniversary of Emily Kahn's tenure as Executive Director. We are grateful for Brad Vogel's accomplishments as Executive Director, and we know that Emily steps into her role on a very solid footing.

Perhaps one of the universal truths of the nonprofit world, particularly in small, understaffed organizations, is the great passion, ingenuity, intelligence, and good-humor of the personnel. The Archive Project has been no exception. A wonderful

roster of past directors, administrators, interns, fellows, and engaged community members have led and nurtured the Archive Project since its inception.

Brad Vogel joined the Archive Project's board in 2012 and transitioned to Executive Director in 2018. He brought great enthusiasm and a broad view of how preservation can benefit an ever-evolving cityscape. During his tenure as Executive Director, he broadened our programmatic reach and navigated us through the COVID-19 pandemic. One of Brad's greatest accomplishments was relaunching the Archival Assistance Grant Program through support from the Leon Levy Foundation and others. I am especially proud of this achievement, as the resurgence of this grant has allowed us to highlight archival collections, which hold fascinating, and frequently little-known, materials that tell rich histories of preservation in New York City.

Emily's time with the Archive Project has already been productive. She worked with the Archival Assistance Review Committee to finalize the grantees for this year's program, and she is consumed with organizing this year's Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit. She has also articulated a strong plan for enhancing the Archive Project's oral histories. Emily is dynamic, personable, and enthusiastic about archival practice and how collections offer myriad portals to preservation's history. As with many of us, she is captivated by the stories still to be told. She also has a keen eye for what is happening today in preservation that will undoubtedly deserve a

prominent role in future documentation of New York City's preservation history.

One day, a future chair of the Archive Project will be recapping Emily's accomplishments. I hope that is very long after the baton has been passed to a new chair. The entire board is eager to work with Emily and help her take the Archive Project forward. For now, we are holding tight, letting Emily's creativity reign, and not letting her think about anything except all she can do to make the Archive Project even stronger! ■



New York Preservation Archive Project's former Executive Director, Brad Vogel | Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project



New York Preservation Archive Project's new Executive Director, Emily Kahn | Courtesy of Historic New England

2023 Bard Breakfast to Honor Peter Samton

By Emily Kahn, Executive Director

The Archive Project's twenty-first annual Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit returns to The Players on December 14, 2023. The event's namesake, Albert Sprague Bard, contributed decades of civic service to New York State, culminating in the 1956 Bard Act which paved the way for New York City's own Landmarks Law in 1965. Since 2015, the Archive Project has presented its Preservation Award honoring outstanding contributions to the documentation, preservation, and celebration of the history of preservation in New York City at the Bard Breakfast.

We are thrilled to announce that Peter Samton will receive the Archive Project's 2023 Preservation Award for his decades-long efforts to keep the memory of the Penn Station advocacy campaign alive. As a young architect, Peter was one of the original organizers of the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York (AGBANY), which led the 1960s campaign to preserve McKim, Mead & White's original Pennsylvania Station. After spending time in Europe as a Fulbright Scholar, Peter observed the overall lack of interest in preservation in the United States. In a 2014 oral history for the Archive Project, he stated, "There were lots of politicians who just were not knowledgeable about architecture, nor were they interested in it. There were just a few of us young architects who showed interest. The idea of preservation was barely mentioned by people."

Serving as a living link between preservationists past and present, Peter has helped produce a more preservation-minded architecture community. He has remained active in preservation architecture and advocacy throughout the past 60 years and has frequently educated the public about the impact of the attempts to save Penn Station from demolition. A practicing architect who co-founded the firm Gruzen Samton in 1967, Peter has also worked with local preservation organizations to protect historic buildings undergoing renovations, including the 72nd Street subway station and the Montana



Peter Samton, 2023 Preservation Award Recipient |
Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project

Apartments on the Upper West Side. All of these efforts have contributed to a present-day culture where, as Peter stated in the 2014 oral history, "most every architect with major commissions in New York City" is "more sensitive to the important older buildings," "the need to preserve," and "the need to be a good neighbor to other buildings."

The Bard Breakfast will further emphasize Peter's work educating about, and advocating for, the importance of preservation to broader communities through this year's featured speaker: Fiona Davis. Fiona is an award-winning author of seven historical fiction

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The benefit will also feature award-winning author **Fiona Davis** as the guest speaker.

December 14, 2023
8:00-10:00 a.m.

The Players
16 Gramercy Park South

Tickets:

Benefit Co-Chair: \$1,000
Benefit Committee: \$500
Benefit Ticket: \$150
Student Ticket: \$50

To purchase tickets, or if you have any questions about the event, please visit the event page on our website (www.nypap.org) or contact Archive Project Executive Director Emily Kahn at ekahn@nypap.org or 212-988-8379.

Your support of the 2023 Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit will enable the Archive Project to continue its efforts to celebrate, preserve, and document the history of the preservation movement in New York City. We are very excited about our honoree and speaker and sincerely hope you will join us on December 14th!

In Memoriam - Eulogy for Jeffrey Kroessler (1952-2023)

Written and delivered June 13, 2023 by Anthony C. Wood



Jeffrey Kroessler | Courtesy of the Historic Districts Council

There is a famous Talmud saying attributed to the sage Tarfon. It goes, “It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you free to neglect it.”

Jeffrey could not finish his preservation work but he never, ever, neglected the work of preservation.

He was truly dedicated to the cause. He was involved with the Historic Districts Council (HDC) in one way or another for some 36 years. I am glad he said “yes” all those years ago when I asked him to join that board. Unlike others, he never blamed me for ruining his life, though perhaps he was just too polite to say so. He was recruited to the board because of his passion for, and knowledge of, Queens. That passion and knowledge soon expanded to encompass the entire city and his civic

involvements grew well beyond just HDC and culminated in his role as president of the City Club.

Over the years, no matter how disappointed Jeffrey might be about the state of preservation — and there usually was something to be disappointed about — he never gave up, even when he knew the odds were against him.

He would still write that brilliant op-ed piece, he would still mount that insightful public program, he would still go to the endless regular meetings and those special ones necessitated by one assault after another on the buildings and neighborhoods he cared so deeply about.

Even when his decades of experience in the trenches told him a cause was hopeless,

he never gave up. Testimony to this was his joining the steering committee of the Citizens Emergency Committee to Preserve Preservation whose Don Quixote-like mission was trying to stop the downward spiral of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I’m not sure if it was the chocolates that Whitney North Seymour, Jr. always brought to our meetings that kept Jeffrey coming, but he stayed the course. “Mike” Seymour was a wonderfully old school preservationist (dating from pre-landmarks law days) with deep roots in Greenwich Village. He believed every cause needed a song, and Jeffrey joined in when we all sang the ditty that was written for the Committee. Don’t worry, I’m not going to sing it for you.

I truly admired Jeffrey’s courage. Just two examples of many to make the point: In 2018 in *Environmental Law in New York* he published an article entitled “Losing Its Way: the Landmarks Preservation Commission in Eclipse.” Not only was he willing to take on the Landmarks Preservation Commission, he was willing to go against the prevailing winds of our time by being a public voice urging the protection of the City’s monuments—even when others argued for their removal. His *New York Daily News* op-ed entitled “The Statue Topplers Insult Our History” begins, “Hundreds of scholars of ‘American art, cultural history and social analysis’ have signed a letter to Mayor de Blasio’s monuments commission calling for the removal of symbols of hate. I am not among them.” He went on to eloquently state his principled position on the subject.

Jeffrey did bring his sense of humor to his advocacy work, I remember a panel on the state of preservation advocacy that Jeffrey arranged at an HDC conference. He called it, “At the Alamo and down to our rifle butts.”

As the majordomo of the Elliot Willensky Fund, he would take delight when he could steer a modest grant to a neighborhood group

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In Memoriam -

Cervin Robinson (1928-2022)

By James Addiss



Cervin Robinson |
Courtesy of Gail Addiss

The architectural photographer and historian Cervin Robinson died peacefully in his home in Wakefield, Rhode Island on December 22, 2022. The son of architect Frank J. Robinson, Cervin studied at Exeter Academy and Harvard University, and then later served in the United States Army.

He began photographing architecture as an assistant to Walker Evans in the Library of Congress' Historic American Buildings Survey. He was widely published in magazines and contributed to histories including *The Architecture of Frank Furness* (1973) by James H. O'Gorman. He co-

authored two books, *Skyscraper Style* (1975) with Rosemary Haag Bletter, and a history of architectural photography, *Architecture Transformed* (1985), with Joel Herschman. His work was widely exhibited in galleries and museums.

An honorary member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), he received a special commendation as a photographer and historian from the AIA. His wife, sculptor Lucy Hodgson, and two sons, Samuel Hodgson Robinson and Moses Hazard Robinson, survive him. ■



Photograph of the Chrysler Building taken by
Cervin Robinson | Courtesy of Lucy Hodgson



Photograph of the Tribune Building taken by Cervin Robinson | Courtesy of Lucy Hodgson

In Memoriam - Beverly Moss Spatt: A Reminiscence

By James Sanders, FAIA

On a cold January morning in 1974, I stepped for the first time into the offices of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) at 305 Broadway and encountered a scene of bustling and, it seemed, disconcerting change.

Beverly Moss Spatt, a new chairperson appointed by recently inaugurated Mayor Abraham D. Beame, was also arriving for her first day in the office, and a feeling of upheaval was in the air. She was only the third LPC chair and the first woman to hold this position since the LPC's founding in 1965. As I caught sight of the distinguished Harmon Goldstone clearing out his office of five years to make way for his successor, I could not help but sense the changing of eras. In many ways Goldstone, a leader in the effort to establish an official landmarks agency in New York City, represented the original generation of urban preservationists: patrician, civic-minded New Yorkers, for the most part, who had somehow managed to translate their passion for the City's classical architecture into the first landmarks law of its kind in the country.

The incoming chair, Beverly Moss Spatt, was something else entirely. I first met her about a year earlier, as a Columbia freshman, when I attended the Urban Geography course she taught at Barnard. I do not recall discussing a lot of "geography." I do remember Beverly regaling us with stories of the political and philosophical battles she had waged for half a decade at the City Planning Commission (CPC), where she had served as a commissioner since 1965, when Robert F. Wagner appointed her in the closing months of his term as mayor. There, Beverly

cemented her reputation as a "gadfly" and "maverick" in high-profile struggles with the other commissioners—nearly all appointed by Wagner's successor, John V. Lindsay—and especially with the CPC's smooth-spoken chair, Donald Elliott.

poor communities across the boroughs. The struggle came to a head with the CPC's 1969 publication of the six-volume Plan for New York City – the City's long-awaited "master plan," which Beverly disavowed so completely that Elliott was forced to include her sprawling dissent as an addendum. Despite some press and public outcry, the CPC did not reappoint Beverly upon the completion of her term in 1970.

But, in early 1974, Beverly emerged from the political wilderness through her appointment as LPC chair, a move which surprised and dismayed many in the still small and insular world of historic preservation. Though Beverly had by then amassed substantial credentials as an urban planner through her time on the CPC and years of diligent research leading to a Ph.D. from New York University and a 1971 book on planning, she had little professional expertise in landmarks preservation. Some City Hall skeptics wondered (or grumbled) about the new mayor's long and close political relationship with Beverly's father, the late Maximilian Moss, a powerful Surrogate Court judge and a pillar of the Brooklyn Democratic Party, through which Beame had risen over the decades.

But one way or the other, here Beverly was, ready to take on the world.

Impressed with some projects I developed with my then colleague, Roy Strickland, Beverly invited us to join the LPC staff one day a week (I was still a college sophomore). Unable to place us either in the Research department or the Preservation department, she proposed we occupy the



Beverly Moss Spatt in summer 1974 |
Courtesy of James Sanders

Beverly's intense, sometimes strident opposition arose, broadly, from a deep-rooted belief that the Lindsay-era CPC was far too accommodating of the City's major developers and real-estate owners, and too focused on Manhattan's central business districts at the expense of working-class and

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BEVERLY MOSS SPATT
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free-floating position of “Special Projects Coordinator” under the loose supervision of her deputy, Adele Chatfield-Taylor (already seemingly omniscient about the many-layered workings of New York City and, to my teenage eyes, impossibly glamorous and elegant). Over the next three years, even while developing my own “special projects” with Roy, I enjoyed a ringside seat as Beverly not only directed the daily operations of the LPC but also began to transform it into a different kind of place.

On the surface, of course, Beverly brought a new, and to some, radical presence to the LPC. Physically petite and sporting a distinctive pixie haircut, a product not of the elite Upper East Side but of activist Brooklyn Heights, she seemed constantly in motion, jumping from topic to topic in meetings with startling speed, and quick to entertain long (if often fascinating) digressions from the subject at hand. In the spirit of William Shawn’s memorable line about his predecessor, the *New Yorker’s* legendary founder Harold Ross — “he lent himself to anecdote” — Beverly’s sometimes hilarious turns of phrase and unconscious (or were they?) malapropisms made her seem larger than life. She once referred in a speech to “the great American poet, Jack Frost” and in another to “architectural travesty” instead of travertine.

It was easy, from all this, to see the outlines of the crude caricature of Beverly that arose among the City’s moneyed real-estate community: a slightly unhinged dogooder, an outspoken meddler threatening vested property interests—as if, in their worst nightmare, the familiar figure of the eccentric left-wing lady who rants endlessly at community board meetings had somehow been given genuine power and a measure of control over their fortunes. The caricature was scarcely accurate, of course, but arose from a kernel of truth. Beverly seemed quite fearless, hardly ever “political” in the calculating sense, and rarely hesitant to take on developers and landowners. During her tenure, the scope of landmark designation in New York expanded dramatically, encompassing not only new

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In Memoriam – Remembering Joan Kaplan Davidson

By Anthony C. Wood, Chair Emeritus



Joan K. Davidson accepting the Archive Project’s 2018 Preservation Award at the annual Bard Birthday Breakfast Benefit | Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project

The death of Joan Kaplan Davidson brought forth a wonderful chorus of tributes from a wide array of civic organizations. Many of these groups share a common history of receiving both a Kaplan grant and encouragement from Joan. These tributes serve as appropriate and accurate testimonies to the outsized role she and the J. M. Kaplan Fund have played in the life of New York City, New York State, and the nation.

Joan played such a role for the New York Preservation Archive Project. Like so many other organizations, it was a Kaplan grant that gave us our start. Joan’s support has spanned our entire 25-year existence, from that first grant (channeled through the Historic Districts Council) to the last donation which arrived just days after her death. Beyond essential funding, Joan’s presence at our events, particularly in the early years, both encouraged us as well as elevated the importance of our work in the eyes of others. We were delighted when she accepted our Preservation Award in 2018.

Unlike philanthropists who only fund established organizations, Joan was willing

and excited to back an unproven new organization with a compelling mission and a passionate leader. She bet on the jockey, not the horse. She was a brilliant talent scout. Unlike funders who avoid controversy, Joan was willing to stand up and fund the good fight, no matter its popularity. Unlike others who only back likely winners, Joan funded important causes, even if their chances of success would have scared off the most inveterate gambler.

Books have been written about Joan, her philanthropy, and her influence (if you missed it, see Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe’s review of Roberta Gratz’s *It’s a Helluva Town: Joan K. Davidson, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, and the Fight for a Better New York* in our Spring/Summer 2021 Newsletter). So, suffice it to add, the impact of her loss is as incalculable as the impact she has had on all of us and the places she loved so much: New York City, the Hudson River Valley, and the entire Empire State. Her legacy lives on in those places and in all of us who were lucky enough to be encouraged, empowered, and inspired by her. As she would say: Excelsior! ■

designation categories such as interior and scenic landmarks, but also some of the first designations of the City's most valuable, income-producing commercial structures, such as Broadway theaters, large apartment houses, and towering skyscrapers — all of which, one sensed, her more cautious predecessors had tacitly deemed off-limits.

Of course, Beverly's greatest triumph as chair was the 1978 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States to uphold the New York State Court of Appeals' ruling which confirmed Grand Central Terminal's landmark status, and, with it, the legality of New York's landmarks law. It is ironic (though, given our celebrity-oriented culture, understandable) that the figure now popularly recalled from that historic victory is Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, whose full-fledged volunteering brought extraordinary visibility to the energetic publicity campaign that the Municipal Art Society waged on behalf of Grand Central (an effort coordinated by Margot Wellington, the Society's executive director at the time—and, as it happens, my stepmother). But we

must always remember that the core of the official effort to preserve the terminal was the legal strategy developed jointly by the LPC — under Beverly's leadership and through the agency's first-ever attorney, Dorothy M. Miner, whom Beverly had hired — and the Corporation Counsel, by Nina Gershon, a brilliant young staff lawyer and today a U.S. District Court judge. It was Beverly and these other remarkable women, in addition to Jackie, who "saved Grand Central."

I am prepared to suggest, however, that Beverly's largest contribution to the long-term trajectory of the LPC emerged precisely from what had alarmed the landmarks community from the beginning: her background as a planner and activist, not a career preservationist. This contribution began with her efforts to expand the agency's reach beyond its traditionally narrow and elite constituency by transforming the LPC into a kind of "open house" in which ordinary people could come into the offices and meet with staff for the first time. She also focused much of her attention not on individual Manhattan landmarks but on the designation and preservation of the expansive "historic districts" with hundreds of buildings each that were now expanding across all five boroughs and into every kind of community,

changing, and hopefully improving, the lives of all sorts of New York households.

With her planning-based perspective, I believe, Beverly intuited something profound about the forces shaping the landscape of New York City in these decades. Through zoning and land-use regulations, the influence of the CPC remained potent in shaping large new commercial projects (of which there were only a handful in those grim, recession-wracked years). Yet the CPC was often surprisingly insignificant in its impact on ordinary communities across the boroughs. It was instead the landmarks law, borne of aesthetic and historical considerations, that had evolved into the most effective means of determining what could and could not be built in many New York neighborhoods and blocks. Intended or not, landmark designation became a fine-grained *de facto* planning instrument that could often control development in ways that the relatively blunt tools of the CPC could not. Beverly's early recognition of this new reality — one that would become so crucial to the City's evolution over the coming decades — brought the world of landmarks preservation in New York out of the rooms of the Century Club, as it were, and onto the streets.

For my own part, Beverly's desire to extend the range and footprint of the LPC led her to wholeheartedly sponsor two "special projects" that Roy and I developed in our years there: a street-improvement project that relandscaped East 20th Street around the landmark Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, and a much-praised exhibition in the Graduate Center of CUNY on the landmarks of 42nd Street. That Beverly would throw her full encouragement and institutional support toward the production of these efforts—carried out while I was still an undergraduate—remains a source of astonishment to me, and an act of commitment and trust for which I will always be infinitely grateful. ■



Beverly Moss Spatt (left) with later LPC chairs Gene Norman and David Todd |
Courtesy of the Historic Districts Council

James Sanders, FAIA, is an architect, author and filmmaker, whose work has garnered him a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Emmy Award, and elevation to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects.

LANDMARKS LAW continued from page 1

and ultimately unsuccessful proposals to demolish the interiors of Grand Central Terminal and the central staircase of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In legal terms, the amendments established that interior and scenic sites could become designated landmarks if they were at least 30 years old and had "a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, state, or nation." To become an interior landmark, spaces also had to be open and accessible to the public. Interior spaces specifically used for the purpose of religious worship, however, were excluded to avoid potential First Amendment challenges.

The 1973 amendments also significantly strengthened the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which had previously operated within a mandatory cycle of six-month "designating periods" followed by three-year hiatuses. The LPC pushed to regularize the hearing schedule, and 25 representatives of prestigious organizations and community groups spoke in favor of amending the 1965 legislation during a public hearing before the City Council's Charter and Government Operations Committee. Only the New York Real Estate Board presented opposition, expressing that the legislation would restrict private ownership and prevent normal development in the city. The City Council subsequently passed the amendments, by a vote of 36 to 0 with one abstention, in November 1973. ■

BARD BREAKFAST continued from page 9

novels set in New York City landmarks. Sense of place and archival research play key roles in her novels, which include *The Spectacular*, *The Magnolia Palace*, and *The Lions of Fifth Avenue*. Translated into over 20 languages, her work celebrates the inspiration archives can provide for telling new stories.

Please join us on December 14th to learn from esteemed author Fiona Davis and honor the preservation education and advocacy of our 2023 Preservation Award recipient, Peter Samton. Tickets are available now. ■

For further information about Peter Samton and to read a transcript of his 2003 and 2014 oral histories, please visit www.nypap.org



Central Park reservoir | Courtesy of Unsplash



Fiona Davis | Courtesy of Fiona Davis Books
(Photographer Deborah Feingold)

J. KROESSLER continued from page 10

taking on a developer or challenging the LPC itself. He was happy to root for the underdog. Though citywide in perspective, and keenly able to focus on the need for systemic change, he had the heart, passion, and spirit of a grassroots preservationist.

I miss Jeffrey not being at the other end of the phone to lament the latest outrage and then to think through how we might best respond to it. And respond to it he would! In preservation battles, Jeffrey was the one you wanted beside you in your foxhole. He was

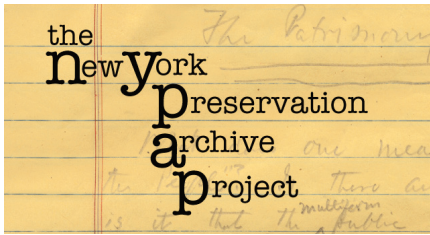
the one you wanted with you on a delegation to see an elected official or an editorial board. He knew his stuff. He held his ground. He never wavered.

He was also the one you wanted to bend elbows with at the bar or be seated next to at a benefit. He was excellent company, great fun, droll, and a constant presence for the good. Though our conversations always began and ended with preservation, we would also chat about such things as the old Cadillac he inherited from a family member or his putting the dock in the lake up in Maine or remodeling the house and office. Dedicated

as he was to the cause of preservation, it was not his entire life—which is likely why he was able to keep his sanity and why he could stay involved in preservation for decades.

One can only hope his example of persisting against the odds, of being on the front lines defending preservation, of never giving up hope, and enjoying life while fighting the good fight will continue to inspire us all and those who follow us.

The battles Jeffrey fought continue, and we are not free to neglect them. ■



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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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