

# DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL AUTUMN 2007 VOL. XXI NO. 2

## YOU CAN IGNORE THE LANDMARKS LAW BUT NOT THE LAW OF GRAVITY

CHUMLEY'S COLLAPSED IN APRIL. The bar and restaurant was a former speakeasy in an 1831 building at 86 Bedford Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District, and it was legendary. It had attracted famous literary patrons ever since it opened in 1926; that was part of its cachet. But so was the fact that it didn't have a sign on the door—you had to be in the know to find it.

Last spring the owner undertook alterations without a building permit, work that included removing a fireplace and its chimney wall. The wall developed a major crack. A year earlier the same owner undertook similar work on the other side of the party wall with the same results. A hearing at the Environmental Control Board was scheduled for 13 months later, during which time the whole wall collapsed. There is now a partial stop-work order on Chumley's.

Many other buildings in the city have partly or completely collapsed because owners dug down around them and failed to underpin the foundation or failed to do so adequately or because they removed interior structural elements such as chimneys on party walls. Such actions are a result of carelessness, vandalism, ignorance or all three, and they have been going on a long time.

Four years ago the rear wall of a four-story apartment building on Prospect Place in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, sheered off and collapsed when construction workers dug too deep preparing for two new houses on an adjacent lot. Dirt from the apartment building's foundation drained into their excavation pit, and the wall gave way. The work permit listed a general contractor who said his signature had been forged. It

turned out that a former employee of the Department of Buildings had expedited the permits for an uninsured contractor by using the name of a bona fide contractor who was not associated with the work in any way. Two years later the former DOB employee was arrested and accused of forging documents.

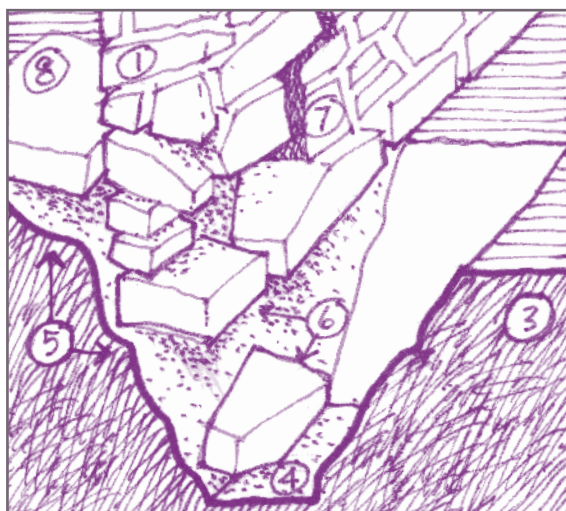
Within historic districts, it would seem the Landmarks Preservation Commission would have some sway, and that when an application for alteration to an historic building is made to LPC, it is the

drawings. ... All structural work, including excavation, on a landmarked property must meet the Building Code and be approved by DOB."

Mechanisms to ensure stability are in place among DOB regulations, but they are often ignored, it seems, with impunity. Work is done without permits, and unless DOB is notified, it cannot follow up. Even legal work is rarely inspected, so there can be no assurance that it conforms with the permit.

In one recent case follow-up was swift. Demolition was underway at 215 Plymouth Street in the proposed, calendared DUMBO Historic District in Brooklyn. A New York Times reporter saw it, photographed it and sent an e-mail with the photos to the LPC press office, asking whether LPC was aware of the work. Ms. de Bourbon forwarded the pictures and concerns about the work, which was being done without permits, to the enforcement unit of LPC, which contacted DOB, which sent out an inspector who shut down the work. The whole thing happened in a matter of hours. The next morning LPC inspectors went to the site to document the changes and investigate three other complaints about demolition in the proposed district. Without that initial call, however, nothing would have happened.

DOB's Web site projects a vigorous response to illegal excavations. Two separate bulletins flash, "Do you know excavation and trenching is twice as dangerous than [sic] average construction activities?" and "Building Safety: reminder to all contractors and engineers of the importance of underpinning." There are links to DOB "Excavation and Trench Safety Guidelines" and a DOB "Earthwork/Excavation Fact Sheet" regarding notification and inspection regulations. There is even a link to a PowerPoint on underpinning that was prepared for a



LEO J. BLACKMAN

### Excavation without underpinning

- |                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1—Masonry party wall   | 5—Soil fails, spills out |
| 3—Unexcavated soil     | 6—Stones shift and fall  |
| 4—Bottom of excavation | 7—Cracks appear          |
| 8—Floor slab collapses |                          |

optimum time to examine whether the work is structurally sound. But LPC does not rule on structural matters—that's DOB's bailiwick—and LPC does not even have a structural engineer on staff.

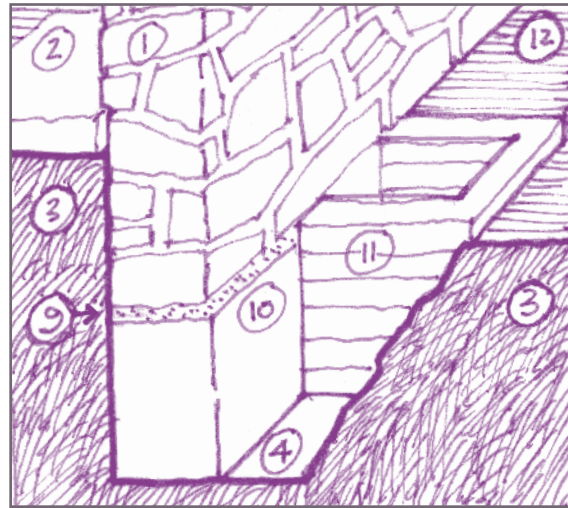
According to Elisabeth de Bourbon, spokeswoman for LPC, "The commission determines whether the work is appropriate to the architecture of the building and the characteristics of the historic district through a review of architectural

*Funding for this issue of District Lines was provided in part by New York State Senator Liz Krueger, of Manhattan.*

Structural Engineers Association of New York (SEAO NY) symposium in 2005. So an effort is clearly being made to alert builders to potential dangers. An effort also needs to be made about the impact on adjacent historic structures. Most of all, some way has to be found to reach builders who do not look up the Web site.

In 2002 the celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz proposed buying her neighbors' house at the corner of West 11th Street and Greenwich Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District to enlarge her own property at 755 and 753 Greenwich. The neighbors would not sell. Ms. Leibovitz began renovation work and had LPC permits for the design but no DOB permit for excavation, which included digging out the cellar. That work got underway without proper shoring and without supervision by an architect or structural engineer. The party wall collapsed, bringing ceilings with it. The facade wall pushed out toward the street, and the neighbors' house dropped down a foot or more. Its gas line ruptured. The neighbors had to move out. After a year, they agreed to sell. Ms.

Leibovitz bought their house, lived in the complex of houses a couple of years and recently, according to The Villager newspaper, put all three properties up for sale.



LEO J. BLACKMAN

#### Sequence of underpinning work

- |                         |                             |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1—Masonry party wall    | 9—Dry pack below old wall   |
| 2—Existing cellar floor | 10—New concrete foundation  |
| 3—Unexcavated soil      | 11—Wood planks shore hole   |
| 4—Bottom of excavation  | 12—Next section to underpin |

The Leibovitz experience indicates how LPC, without an architect or engineer on staff and with very limited inspection capabilities, is dependent on DOB to review drawings and dependent on an owner's consultants to observe and report on structural problems in the field. Communication is critical. Usually this process works, but not always.

New York City Code requires that underpinning plans be prepared by an architect or engineer and that inspections during the work be performed by a second engineer. All sides of an excavation more than five feet deep must be protected by shoring, bracing or sheeting—wood planks or corrugated metal to hold the dirt back so it does not spill into the excavation and leave the party wall unsupported. According to a brochure prepared by SEAO NY, "Lack of proper underpinning is the leading cause of construction problems in New York City. Most often the effects of improper underpinning and excavation are sustained by the adjoining buildings that settle excessively, crack and in extreme cases, it causes partial or total collapse....Many of these incidents are preventable."

Implemented correctly, underpinning

minimizes the threat of collapse when excavation is necessary. Small sections of the existing foundation are exposed and temporarily supported while a new concrete wall is installed below the old, down to the level of the new foundation adjacent. This process is repeated sequentially the length of the common wall until the entire existing structure has been reinforced. Even when done properly, however, it is dangerous work. In the case of houses with party walls, the work jeopardizes the neighbor's structure as much as the one under construction, since the same wall is holding up the beams of both buildings.

Pre-Civil War structures have foundations typically made of rubble—roughly mortared fieldstone—rather than the cast reinforced concrete with spread footings common today. The 19th century buildings are especially vulnerable to digging next door. The vibration pulverizes old mortar, leaving loose stones free to shift and fall. SEAO NY counts one or two underpinning failures each month, mostly in Brooklyn on small one- to six-story projects.

A lot of these buildings are also in Greenwich Village. Last spring the new owners of an early 19th century row house on Greenwich Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District decided to enlarge the building they had bought for renovation and resale. They proposed adding a floor, removing the rear wall and part of the parlor-floor structure, digging out the cellar to raise its ceiling height and removing fireplaces and flue walls in the upper stories to modernize the house. Before they started work they stopped in to see the owners next door, Linda Yowell and her husband. Ms. Yowell is an architect, preservationist and vice president of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, and she was alarmed. None of the work indicated any underpinning; and the fireplaces, apparently unknown to the new owners, were structural elements in houses of this age. The owners were warned of what might happen if they went ahead with the work, but they applied to LPC for a Certificate of Appropriateness anyway. They included no structural drawings in their application. Eventually they withdrew the application before it was heard.

## DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE  
HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

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EDITOR - PENELOPE BAREAU

ART AND PRODUCTION - MOOM LUI

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT - JACK TAYLOR

CONTRIBUTORS - PENELOPE BAREAU,  
LAUREN BELFER, LEO J. BLACKMAN, PAUL GRAZIANO,  
EVE M. KAHN, FRAMPTON TOLBERT, NADEZHDA WILLIAMS

STAFF - SIMEON BANKOFF, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
FRAMPTON TOLBERT, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
LAUREN BELFER, NADEZHDA WILLIAMS,  
PRESERVATION ASSOCIATES

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MERITING PRESERVATION. THE COUNCIL IS  
DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF  
NEW YORK CITY'S LANDMARKS LAW AND TO  
FURTHERING THE PRESERVATION ETHIC.



Ms. Yowell talked with GVSHP's preservation committee about trying to forestall other near-calamities like this one. A meeting was held to which the committee invited Joseph F. Tortorella, a structural engineer, vice president with Robert Silman Associates and chair of a task force to improve underpinning in New York City.

Lack of proper underpinning is the main problem, he said. DOB should require drawings for underpinning to be filed by the contractor, but even then there can be sloughing off down the line. Contractors, not engineers, are ultimately responsible for the construction work and they are supposed to hire the engineers to design the underpinning. But, Mr. Tortorella said, "The engineer of record for the building shows the minimum on drawings because it's not his responsibility and he doesn't want to be sued. So contractors think it's enough to use these minimal drawings without hiring their own engineer and submitting proper shop drawings. What does the engineer do? Usually let it go."

In July, GVSHP sent a letter to Manhattan Borough Commissioner Christopher Santulli at DOB summarizing the points developed in that meeting, beginning with the request that Buildings more vigorously enforce existing rules and regulations to safeguard historic properties. Two of these rules are:


- to require vibration monitoring and observation by an engineer of any landmark-protected building within 90 feet of any foundation or excavation work
- to require a report accounting for structural stability when beams or bearing walls of an existing structure are replaced

Neither of these rules is regularly observed, and violators are rarely fined. In addition to more aggressive inspection and enforcement of existing rules, the letter urges that:

- a pre-design existing-structural-conditions report be prepared by a licensed and experienced architect or engineer before a permit is issued, a report that would include photographs and would detail sequencing of prospective work, structural issues, methods and procedures
- there be a peer review of the report and also of structural stability or underpinning drawings
- contractors be required to carry insurance adequate for adjacent buildings

- contractors be trained to work with older buildings
- contractors ensure their subcontractors follow the drawings

As Ms. de Bourbon at LPC stated, "Our experience has shown that structural work, including excavation, can be done, and is routinely done, in a safe manner."

*Can be done safely is not enough.* Agencies responsible to the public need to make sure the work *is* done safely, always. Enforcement is key, and these guidelines could help. 

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

AS THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL'S newly elected president, I would like first to greet our staff, our directors, our advisers and our Friends. I look forward to working with all of you in 2007 and beyond.

In recent years we have expanded our



DENISE CERMANSKI

*Paul Graziano, shown here presenting a 2006 Grassroots Preservation Award, is HDC's sixth president. A resident of Flushing, Queens, he is an urban planner who specializes in creating contextual zoning.*

constituency, our boards, our staff, our budget and our mission, the better to anticipate the changing definition and scope of historic preservation in New York City. While we have been increasingly successful during those years in our fight

to defend our architectural and cultural heritage, many neighborhoods, individual buildings and sites deserving protection remain endangered—and, indeed, some have been lost—due to the most intensive period of development in the city's history since the 1960's.

Part of our role in identifying areas of the city that need protection is to attract HDC board members from neighborhoods in all five boroughs, as well as individuals representing the crafts, architectural services and preservation professionalism. To this end, we have intensified our search for committed volunteers to serve from geographically disparate locations throughout the metropolis and to ensure also that they have the diverse skills to meet the needs and challenges ahead.

That said, a brief introduction to our new directors and advisers follows. Please welcome them.

—**Paul Graziano**

### Directors

**Joan C. Berkowitz** is the director of conservation at Superstructures Engineers + Architects, responsible for creating the firm's new conservation division. Formerly, she was president of Jablonski Berkowitz Conservation. She teaches building conservation in Columbia University's historic preservation program and serves on the board of the Association for Preservation International. Ms. Berkowitz lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

**Françoise Bollack** is principal of the award-winning firm Françoise Bollack Architects. She is involved in preservation issues throughout the city as a board member of Landmark West! and as adjunct associate professor of architecture at Columbia University. In 2006 she was an HDC Grassroots Preservation Award winner for her work as part of the Save Austin, Nichols & Company Warehouse coalition. She, too, lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

**Nancy Cataldi**, a photographer by trade, is president of the Richmond Hill Historical Society and is a past HDC Grassroots Preservation Award winner for her work preserving her Queens community. She has also written histories of Richmond Hill and Maple Grove Cemetery.

**Katrina Miles** is a former executive director of the Lewis H. Latimer House Museum in Flushing, Queens. Ms. Miles

*continued on page 8*

## PRESERVATION'S "QUIET FORCE," LISA ACKERMAN, GETS A CHANCE TO ROAR AS HDC'S 2007 LANDMARKS LION

COLLEGE ART-HISTORY MAJORS hoping to improve the world after graduation might well look to Lisa Ackerman, B.A. Middlebury College 1982, for inspiration. While holding down a day job as executive vice president of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, a major arts funder, Ms. Ackerman has carved out time to serve on the boards of numerous New York nonprofits, including the Neighborhood Preservation Center (the Historic Districts Council's home), the Historic House Trust of New York City and the New York Preservation Archive Project. For her countless hours of expert advice, tireless strategizing and networking, and bubbly enthusiasm for preservation causes in every borough, she will receive HDC's Landmarks Lion Award on October 24 in the ballroom of the former Prince George Hotel in Manhattan's Madison Square North Historic District.

"She's the quiet force behind so many organizations and initiatives, but she's so self-effacing that many people don't realize the range and depth of her accomplishments," says Anthony C. Wood, HDC's chair emeritus and its 1999 Lion, who has served alongside Ms. Ackerman at national and local institutions including Partners for Sacred Places and Brooklyn's St. Ann Center for Restoration and the Arts. "She's brilliant, rational and solid," Mr. Wood adds. "She's open to new ideas, then smart about bringing them to reality. She's great to have on any team. I'm delighted to welcome her to the ranks of Lions."

Ms. Ackerman herself says she "still can't quite believe" that she has earned the honor: "I'm trying to picture myself up there with all those past Lions that I so admire, who have had such an impact on New York." Her own devotion to the city, she explains, stems partly from her trips here as a starry-eyed child growing up in half a dozen cities, including Chicago, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles. "I had a gypsy youth," she recalls. Her father Bruce, a physician, trained during the 1960's with scattered specialists in the then-new practice of neonatology. When her parents divorced in the 1970's, her father moved to Brooklyn; and her mother Jean, who taught special-education students in pub-

lic schools, settled with Lisa and her sister Stacy in Fort Lee, New Jersey. Ms. Ackerman focused on New England when she started scouting colleges in the 1970's: "It was the only part of the country I hadn't



GAIL CIMINO

*Lisa Ackerman*

seen, in all our travels for my father's work and all our driving vacations crisscrossing the country."

Shortly after earning that art-history degree at Middlebury, she took an entry-level job at the Kress Foundation and was promoted steadily even while studying for a master's of business administration degree at New York University. Her main field of study was marketing for nonprofits. Ms. Ackerman has since spent 25 years helping to run the Kress Foundation and almost as much time contributing her skills and time to local civic groups. The Kress board of directors and president, she explains, encourage her to serve New York causes pro bono, so when she's in town a typical weekday might find her juggling Kress meetings and then heading to Staten Island or Queens for consultations with house-museum administrators.

Founded with Samuel Kress's five-and-dime-store fortune and housed in an Upper East Side town house, the foundation has evolved over its 78 years. It originally concentrated on helping restore

European structures and expand American museums' collections of European paintings, then shifted to funding scholars' training, research and publications. Today it gives out \$4.5 million annually to art historians, conservators, curators, archaeologists and preservationists.

Ms. Ackerman travels the world meeting grant recipients and giving lectures on everything from preservation career tracks to the influence of Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi. She also visits building-restoration sites abroad that Kress supports in partnership with the World Monuments Fund, including a 13th century altarpiece at Westminster Abbey and a muraled sixth century church in Spain. Back home in New York she takes in the city's abundant cultural offerings, subscribing to the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Joyce Theater and the Manhattan Theatre Club. "I don't sleep, apparently," she says, laughing. "The office staff here sometimes makes fun of my calendar. I've been told I should learn the word 'no,' but it seems that's just not in the cards."

For the past three years she has packed another undertaking into her schedule—studying for a master's degree in historic preservation at Pratt Institute's Brooklyn and Manhattan campuses. "I've loved the opportunity to talk about preservation theory with teachers and students from all kinds of backgrounds," she explains. "We talk about how preservation plays a crucial part in urban change and social issues. It's not some elite pursuit, and it's not just about the mechanical processes of saving historic fabric or getting rid of salt efflorescence." As part of her Pratt coursework, she has spent months analyzing the community of Gowanus in Brooklyn: "I've fallen in love with that neighborhood; there's deep history there that people don't recognize. A single block can tell stories about every phase of Brooklyn history, from Dutch settlement through the rise and waning of industrialization to the development pressures of contemporary life."

Whenever she is at her Kress desk, the phone is likely to ring with a new local preservation group calling out of the blue to seek her advice on fundraising or



publicity or maneuvering through city red tape. She always offers to pitch in. "I feel very optimistic about where preservation is headed here now," she says. "Look how many more historic districts there are, how much press coverage there is when buildings are saved or threatened, how much savvy communities are about creating a stir. And I love working with groups like the Historic House Trust and HDC, all these amazing people who are rolling up their sleeves and putting their time, energy and money into caring for culturally important buildings, who are figuring out how the buildings can better serve communities. I love being part of the complex forces that make this city great." 🐾

## NEW COMMISSIONERS JOIN THE LPC TABLE

TWO NEW COMMISSIONERS have joined New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission. Diana Chapin and Roberta Washington are taking the places of Rev. Thomas F. Pike and Richard Olcott, respectively.

**Diana Chapin**, a native of Michigan, is a 38-year resident of Jackson Heights, Queens, and lives in a building within the historic district there. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Michigan and master's and doctoral degrees in medieval literature from Cornell



DOMINICK TOTINO

**Diana Chapin**

University. Currently Ms. Chapin is the executive director of the Queens Library Foundation, the private, nonprofit fundraising arm of the Queens Borough Public Library.

Ms. Chapin brings extensive city-government experience to the LPC table. She worked for 16 years at the Department of Parks and Recreation as head of community relations, as deputy commissioner for planning and capital projects and as Queens Borough Parks Commissioner where, she says, she became very familiar with the borough's neighborhoods. In her role at the Parks Department, Ms. Chapin was a founding board member of the Historic House Trust, the not-for-profit organization that works in tandem with the agency to preserve historic houses located in city parks. She went on from Parks to serve as deputy commissioner at the Department of Buildings and first deputy commissioner of the city's Department of Environmental Protection.

Many preservationists hope that Ms. Chapin's appointment will enhance LPC's focus on historic sites outside Manhattan, especially in her home borough. She is aware of this, saying, "I hope that I will bring an interest in the [outer] boroughs, which obviously as someone coming from Queens, I think people look for me to do."

**Roberta Washington**, FAIA, is the principal of Roberta Washington Architects, P.C. The Greensboro, South Carolina, native knew as an eighth-grader that she wanted to go into the field after interviewing an architect for a school project. She received a bachelor of architecture degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C., and from Columbia University a master of science in architecture with a focus on hospital and health-facility design. Prior to founding her architecture firm in 1983, Ms. Washington spent 12 years specializing in health-care and institutional facilities, including four years in Mozambique as the head of a provincial design office. There she developed the prototype for district mother-child health centers and designed several secondary schools and teachers' colleges.

Ms. Washington's Harlem-based firm specializes in health and educational facilities as well as the restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings for low- and middle-income housing. Projects have included the restoration of the 28 wooden



WAMBUI BAHATA

**Roberta Washington**

porches on the landmarked 1880-1883 Astor Row on West 130th Street as well as the gut rehabilitation of two of the buildings. The firm also restored the historic Hotel Cecil, once the home of the famous jazz club Minton's Playhouse. Its preservation work can be found outside New York City as well. In Kansas City, Missouri's, 18th and Vine Historic District the abandoned El Capitan Club was restored to become part of the Negro Baseball League and the American Jazz Museum.

Ms. Washington is past president of the National Organization of Minority Architects as well as a past chair of the New York State Board of Architecture. She currently sits on the board of the


## SAVE THE DATE

19th Annual Landmarks Lion  
Award Ceremony & Dinner  
honoring  
Lisa Ackerman,  
executive vice president,  
Samuel H. Kress Foundation.  
Wednesday, October 24, 2007

Visit our Web site for details:  
[www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org)

AIA's NYC Architecture Foundation. For five years she also served as the housing committee chair and the co-chair of the land-use committee on Central Harlem's Community Board 10.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is made up of 11 commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the Mayor for staggered three-year terms. Represen-

tatives from each borough are included, as are at least three architects, an historian, a realtor and a planner or landscape architect. In addition to the new appointments of Ms. Chapin and Ms. Washington, Chair Robert B. Tierney and four current commissioners—Pablo Vengoechea, Stephen F. Byrns, Joan Gerner and Christopher Moore—were recently reappointed. 

to Marjorie Ferrigno, a past president of the Queens organization, who helped found it more than 40 years ago.

• **Crown Heights North Association** was formed to promote the historic district designation of its community in Brooklyn. The neighborhood contains an impressive array of row houses, free-standing mansions, churches, tenement buildings and more, many by renowned architects. As Ron Melichar, HDC board member and award presenter, said at the ceremony, "My first trip there many years ago left me speechless. Its intact integrity—its block after block of unblemished streetscapes—is truly amazing." The Crown Heights North Association had been a steady advocate in pushing for designation. Just weeks before receiving the Grassroots citation, the group was rewarded for its work by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which granted the neighborhood historic district status,

## HDC HONORS LOCAL GRASSROOTS ADVOCATES AT 17TH ANNUAL EVENT

ON MAY 10 more than 200 friends of preservation joined the Historic Districts Council to salute seven groups and individuals with awards for preservation activities on the local level. The Grassroots Preservation Award winners follow:

• **Broadway-Flushing Homeowners**

**Association**, in Queens, was honored for successfully getting more than 1,300 buildings in its suburbanlike community listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. HDC board member Paul Graziano (now president), who presented the award, gave special recognition



ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE, AYUMI TAMAKI

*With HDC Executive Director Simeon Bankoff are Valerie Bowers, left, and Annette Kavanaugh, both of the Crown Heights North Association.*



*Broadway Flushing Homeowners Association members with, front center, Marjorie Ferrigno, who helped found the organization in the 1960's.*



*Partygoers included Lo van der Valk, left, president of Carnegie Hill Neighbors, three members of the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance, right, and one of their guests.*



*Members of the East Village Community Coalition and Chino Garcia, with beard, director of CHARAS/El Bobio, the nonprofit once run out of the landmarked P.S. 64 building on East Ninth Street in Manhattan.*



the first new district in Brooklyn in more than ten years.

• **East Village Community Coalition** was created to save one of the East Village's most beloved treasures, former Public School 64, which later housed the noted community center CHARAS/El Bohio. P.S. 64's owner wanted to convert it to a university dormitory and began removing architectural details from the facade as a first step toward that end. Unfazed, the coalition waged a grassroots campaign and in 2006 secured landmark designation for the building despite the owner's continued opposition and ongoing mutilation of the property. The group perseveres as a watchdog for the building and is also focusing its energy on other community initiatives, including a rezoning of more than 100 blocks of Manhattan's East Village and Lower East Side.

• **Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance** received its award even as the neighborhood was being considered for historic district status by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The community's dedication proved successful when it was designated in June as the seventh historic district in Queens. See the cover story in District Lines, Spring 2007, for more information on this significant planned community.

#### Friend in High Places Award

**Deborah Glick** represents the 66th District in Manhattan, HDC's home district, in the New York State Assembly. She has been a longtime friend to preservation, working with preservationists on the extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District, the designation of the Gansevoort Market and Weehawken Street Historic Districts, and the current push for the SoHo district extension. She was also a strong supporter of the Historic Homeowner Tax Credit, which passed the State Legislature in 2006.

#### Friend from the Media Award

**Curbed**, a neighborhood and real estate blog, was launched in 2004 and quickly captured a large following of people interested in the built environment. Curbed has shown a great interest in covering preservation stories across New York City, introducing a huge new audience to the work of HDC and other preservation groups.

#### Mickey Murphy Award

This award is given to an individual whose community efforts have been singularly outstanding. It is named for a passionate preservationist and HDC director who died in 2002 after a long career of civic advocacy. This year the citation was given to **Chan Graham**, executive director of the Preservation League of Staten Island. Mr. Graham has also served as a founding board member of the National Lighthouse Museum and the Sea View Historic Foundation, both on Staten Island. Although Mr. Graham was not able to be at the ceremony—he was taking a long-planned and well-deserved vacation in Spain—James G. Ferreri, HDC board member and president of the Preservation League, accepted the award on his behalf, saying, "Chan, an architect and then a professor of architecture, retired to Staten Island and, wanting to contribute to his new city, sought out PLSI. His dedication during his years as president and since have made quite a difference in a borough where landmarking anything is difficult, to say the least. He is still my role model." 🐾

## KITTY CARLISLE HART AND GIORGIO CAVAGLIERI DIE, BOTH IN THEIR 90's

THIS PAST SPRING New York City lost two icons of its cultural and civic life, two of its most dedicated preservationists: **Kitty Carlisle Hart**, 96, a talented performer and lifelong advocate of the arts—as well as the Historic Districts Council's 2003 Landmarks Lion—died April 17; and architect **Giorgio Cavaglieri**, 95, a founding leader of the urban preservation movement, died less than one month later, on May 15. Though neither was a native New Yorker, they committed the better part of their lives to improving the town they chose as their home. Both died in Manhattan.

A star of stage and screen as Kitty Carlisle, and later of television and opera, Mrs. Hart was born in New Orleans. Her father died when she was young, and she grew up mostly in Europe, traveling with her mother and studying music and drama. They came to New York in the



MELISSA BALDOCK

*Kitty Carlisle Hart in 2003 at a reception before her HDC Landmarks Lion Award ceremony. With her is Scott Heyl, then president of the Preservation League of New York State.*

1920's to pursue the young woman's dreams in the performing arts. In the mid-1930's, featured performances in stage shows and major motion pictures opposite such greats as Bing Crosby and Groucho Marx helped catapult her into the lavish life of the city's theatrical elite. In 1946 she married playwright-director Moss Hart, and the couple socialized with such luminaries of the entertainment world as Cole Porter and Noel Coward. Though in her theatrical career her roles as leading lady were few, Mrs. Hart's experiences in that world set the foundation for her future as one of the most influential and effective advocates for cultural and arts organizations in New York.

In fact, it was her decades-long dedication to the New York State Council on the Arts that earned Mrs. Hart HDC's Landmarks Lion Award. Throughout her tenure as chair of the agency, from 1976 to 1996, Mrs. Hart pushed to keep historic preservation at the forefront of NYSCA's agenda and allocated more than \$20 million to preservation projects across the state, from the Niagara Frontier to Staten Island. "Preservation groups blossomed while Mrs. Hart was chair of NYSCA," notes former HDC President David Goldfarb. "Her advocacy for preservation organizations has enabled them to survive and flourish across New York State. Everyone in the preservation movement owes her a debt of gratitude."

After retiring from NYSCA, Mrs. Hart continued to devote herself to sup-

porting the cultural life of New York City by actively serving on the boards of several arts and educational institutions. Small crystal and silver awards and ornaments, tokens of gratitude from the many charities she supported across the country, adorned the walls and shelves of her Upper East Side apartment until the very end. "It's a cliché now that people say they want to make a difference," she once remarked in reference to her work with NYSCA. "But I'd like to think that I somehow made a difference."



STEVEN TUCKER, COURTESY NY PAP


*Giorgio Cavaglieri, shown here with his preservation colleague, Margot Gayle, at a 2003 event sponsored by the New York Preservation Archive Project to honor them.*

Throughout his long and respected career as both architect and engineer, Giorgio Cavaglieri sought to preserve New York City's built environment, whether in buildings designed by renowned architects or by "the Joe Blokes," as he was known to say. For him, historic preservation was integral to maintaining the city's unique character.

After graduating in 1932 from the Politecnico di Milano, Mr. Cavaglieri served the Italian government under Mussolini as a military-airfield designer. After realizing that his quality of life as a Jew would be compromised by the rise of Fascism, in 1939 he moved his family to the United States and initially found work at a design firm in Baltimore. Later he served in Europe with the U.S. Army and won a Bronze Star for his work there testing the safety

of bridges and converting German camps for use by Allied forces. After completing his wartime service, Mr. Cavaglieri moved to New York and worked alongside Rosario Candela, a leading designer of the era's most lavish apartment buildings in Manhattan.

Mr. Cavaglieri's preservation projects included the redesign of the Fisk Building's lobby and the conversion of the Astor Library into what is now the Joseph Papp Public Theater; but his most celebrated project was his restoration of the Jefferson Market Courthouse in Greenwich Village, completed in 1967. Prior to commencing work on its conversion to a public library, Mr. Cavaglieri spent four years researching the High Victorian Gothic structure, which had been spared from demolition thanks to a successful campaign led by such local activists as Margot Gayle. He worked meticulously on the building's historic details, from stained-glass windows to doors carved from black walnut, at the same time managing to incorporate the modern technology a library requires.

In addition to his own professional accomplishments, Mr. Cavaglieri dedicated much time and effort to defending many of New York City's other historic structures and landmarks. As president of the Municipal Art Society 1963-65, he campaigned against proposed alterations to the interior of Grand Central Terminal; he also served as president of the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects and chairman of the National Institute of Architectural Education. 

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*continued from page 3*

was selected by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a 2003 Emerging Preservation Leader and as a National Trust Diversity Scholar in 2007. She lives in Harlem.

### Advisers

**Shijia Chen**, founder and owner of B & H art-in-architecture, is a well known masonry restorer. His firm has worked on numerous major New York City landmark restorations such as Tweed Courthouse, Bethesda Terrace, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Grace Church. His offices are located in Brooklyn.

**Paul DiBenedetto** resides in Bay-side, Queens, where he is a member of Queens Community Board 11, a board

member of Bayside Historical Society and a member of the Queens Civic Congress. He has worked diligently to rezone the Bayside area and has advocated for numerous neighborhoods seeking landmark designation.

**Dan Donovan** is the head of the Bronx Landmarks Taskforce and in 2001 received an HDC Grassroots Preservation Award for his efforts. He currently works for the Bronx Borough President's office and resides in Riverdale.

**Kimberley Francis** is president of the Concerned Citizens of Laurelton, in southeast Queens. She is a Civic Board member through the Public Advocate's office, a trustee of Merrick Academy in Queens and serves as the director of projects and planning for The New York Times.

**Alfred Gallicchio** serves as principal for West New York Restoration of CT, a contracting and restoration firm founded in 1984. The company has won numerous preservation awards and handled more than 600 projects. His firm is located in the East Tremont section of The Bronx.

**Christabel Gough** is a preservation advocate serving as secretary of the Society for the Architecture of the City, a citywide preservation group. She was the winner of the 1990 Landmarks Lion Award, HDC's highest honor. Ms. Gough lives in Greenwich Village.


**Jeffrey Greene** is principal of Ever-Greene Painting Studios, one of the most prominent decorative-art restoration workshops in the United States. Ever-Greene's work involves restoring murals and fine wall finishes in state capitols, museums, religious institutions and more than 100 historic theaters nationwide. Its offices are in Midtown Manhattan.

**Barry Lewis**, noted historian and 2005 HDC Landmarks Lion Award winner, lives in Kew Gardens, Queens. Mr. Lewis is known to many as the face of "A Walk Through," the TV series on WNET/Thirteen, in which, with David Hartman, he acts as a tour guide through historic neighborhoods around the city.

**Felicia Mayro** works as director of the St. Mark's Historic Landmark Fund and its Neighborhood Preservation Center project, both of which are located in the St. Mark's Historic District in Manhattan's East Village. She also serves on the board of the James Marston Fitch Foundation.

**Christina Wilkinson** lives in Mas-



peth, Queens. She is editor of the Forum West newspaper, board member of the Juniper Park Civic Association and correspondent for the Web site Forgotten New York. Ms. Wilkinson is completing a book on the history of the western Queens neighborhoods of Maspeth, Middle Village, Ridgewood and Glendale for the Newtown Historical Society. 

## DISTRICT PROFILES

### VINEGAR HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT, BROOKLYN

THEY DON'T MAKE VINEGAR in Vinegar Hill. It is hardly even a hill. It is an old neighborhood of modest buildings lying on the western edge of Brooklyn between the Manhattan Bridge and the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Until 1637 the Canarsee Indians lived there, hunting and fishing in the marshes where the industrial park still called the Navy Yard is now. That year they sold a tract of land including Vinegar Hill to Joris Jansen Rapalje, said by Russell Shorto in his 2004 book "The Island at the Center of the World" to be a Flemish textile

worker who had immigrated to the New World in 1624. Rapalje and his wife bought land to farm in Brooklyn, including Vinegar Hill. Wallabout Bay, on the shore of which the Navy Yard sits, was named for the Walloons, a Flemish sect, who occupied the area when the Rapaljes owned it. Indeed, "Wallabout" is a corruption of "Waal Boght," which means Walloons' Bay.

The 1997 designation report of the Landmarks Preservation Commission for Vinegar Hill says that Rapalje descendants continued to farm the land for well over a century until after the Revolution, when it was confiscated from John Rapalje, who declined to back independence and became a Loyalist instead—even though he served as a New York State Assembly member. Perhaps because of his apparently split loyalties, he was suspected of spying, had his land and possessions seized and fled to Britain. The real estate was split up and sold in 1784 by the Commissioners of Forfeiture to John Jackson and to two brothers, Comfort and Joshua Sands, both of whom became prominent citizens. Comfort instigated protests against the Crown before the war—at least *his* loyalty was never in doubt. Afterward he became auditor general of New York and eventually a founder and director of the Bank of New York along with Alexander Hamilton. His younger brother Joshua became an Army captain during the war

and later established a rope-making industry, owned merchant ships, served in the United States House of Representatives and was president of the Merchant's Bank. A street two blocks south of the historic district was named for the brothers—Sands Street.

Much of the early development, however, was undertaken by John Jackson, a shipbuilder. His shipyard lay at the foot of present-day Hudson Avenue, and he constructed housing nearby for his workers. Some of those residences are extant in the historic district—for example, 49 Hudson Avenue at the corner of Plymouth Street. Around 1801 he sold 40 acres of his original 100-acre parcel to the United States government for the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and he built housing for those workers, too.

At the same time, Jackson named the community Vinegar Hill to commemorate the 1798 Battle of Vinegar Hill in Ireland, in which the British suppressed an Irish insurrection. That battle led to the creation of the United Kingdom, the union of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It also led to the exodus of thousands of Irish to New York, so many of whom ended up in this part of Brooklyn that it was at one time known as Irishtown.

No doubt at least partly because of its proximity to the East River, the neighborhood became a link in the Underground Railroad that provided safe transport to



ADAPTED FROM LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION MAP



P. BAREAU

*Three distinct areas of the Vinegar Hill Historic District (map at left) comprise an unusual district configuration — much demolition in the area had created discontinuous historical sections. Above, 75 79 Hudson Avenue.*

escaping slaves. There could have been another reason, too. The designation report cites 1820 United States Census records documenting 657 free Africans in Brooklyn, about nine percent of the population at the time, which could have made the neighborhood a link not only to the river but to destinations in Brooklyn. One nearby church became a station on the escape route, and a house on Hudson Avenue within the historic district still has a door in its subcellar leading to a tunnel to the waterfront, another link in the train.

Several years after Jackson sold some of his land to the Navy, a grisly discovery was made: the remains of thousands of American soldiers casually buried along the bay inside the Yard who had once been prisoners of war incarcerated on British prison ships anchored in Wallabout Bay. The remains were dug up and reinterred in a vault on land Jackson donated just outside the historic district. A monument was erected to them known as the Martyrs' Tomb, and the remains stayed there until 1873, when they were moved to Fort Greene Park, where they still repose.

The district is unusual for reasons other than its name. It is made up of three separate, non-contiguous areas—only one of two districts in the city so configured (the other is Murray Hill in Manhattan). It is also made up of very modest buildings, mostly houses of three or four stories


built, according to the designation report, largely from the 1830's to the 1850's. Its earliest date to 1801.

By the 1880's, Vinegar Hill was an active, thriving neighborhood of mixed industrial and residential use and also a desirable place to live, judging from the fact that a large number of politicians lived there, including James Howell, mayor of Brooklyn from 1878 to 1882. The Brooklyn Bridge was completed in 1883, and in 1898 Brooklyn and Manhattan were consolidated into the City of New York, the two events inaugurating a decade or more of industrial expansion. Small houses began to be replaced by large industrial buildings housing foundries, paint companies (Benjamin Moore started life in this area), engine works and sugar refineries. Even more extensive demolition accompanied the construction and opening of the Manhattan Bridge in 1903 and continued as the area became increasingly industrial in the 1920's and '30's. After World War II, a great swath of land was condemned for the development of the Farragut Houses, constructed for returning veterans and their families, and for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Warehouses, parking lots, waste transfer stations, and Con Edison power plants all replaced housing, driven partly by the 1961 rezoning of the district for manufacturing. The area began to look like a woebegone no-man's-land.

In fact, that was part of the reason LPC did not designate the area when it surveyed it in 1977—there was not enough community support. In the early 1990's the much-loved St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church was torn down. An 1860 Gothic church at the corner of Gold and Front Streets, it had a steeple visible throughout the neighborhood, and it was an anchor not only for the families who had lived in Vinegar Hill for decades but also for the new arrivals of the 1970's and '80's.

Galvanized by these demolitions, residents banded together as the Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Association under the leadership of Monique Dononcin, president, and her husband, Per-Olof Odman. They worked with their then-Councilmember Ken Fisher (HDC's 2002 Landmarks Lion) to petition LPC for designation. It was granted in 1997.

The next year, 1998, the area was rezoned for contextual mid-rise residential use. Since 2001 construction has been so active that the neighborhood is virtually transformed—the rate of residential new building and conversion here is greater than at any time since 1845, according to one observer.

The area is thriving and, because of the dedication of a group of residents and the LPC, the essential character of one of Brooklyn's oldest extant settlements remains intact. 

## RECENT GIFTS AND GRANTS

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS by government, foundations, organizations, companies and Friends of the Historic Districts Council are very much appreciated. Many thanks to those who gave in the period from March 2007 through June 2007:

**Government:** State Senator Thomas K. Duane, 27th District.

**Foundations:** Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, Ketcham Inn Foundation, The Manheim Foundation, New York Community Trust, New York Community Trust/Windie Knowe Fund, Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust, The Staten Island Foundation.

**Organizations:** Alice Austen House Museum, Bay Ridge Conservancy, Bayside-Auburndale Improvement Association, Bedford Barrow Commerce Block Association, Broadway Flushing Homeowners Association, Brooklyn Heights Association, Central Park Conservancy, Crown Heights North Association, Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side, Ditmas Park Association, Douglaston/Little Neck Historical Society, The Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District, DUMBO Neighborhood Association, East 83rd/84th Street Block Association, East Side Rezoning Alliance, Fort Greene Association, Friends of Cast Iron

Architecture, Friends of Terra Cotta, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, The Fund for Park Avenue, Gramercy Park Block Association, The Greenwood Cemetery, Hamilton Heights-West Harlem Community Preservation Organization, Historic House Trust of New York City, Historic Landmarks Preservation Center, The Jackson Heights Garden City Society, King Manor Museum, Landmark West!, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Midwood Park Homeowners Association, Mud Lane Society for the Renaissance of Stapleton, Municipal Art Society, Murray Hill Neighborhood Association,

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GAIL CIMINO

*Lisa Ackerman, singled out for her energy and dedication to preservation issues citywide, is HDC's 2007 Landmarks Lion. Article, page 4.*



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THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S  
HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

232 East 11th Street  
New York NY 10003

tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127

e-mail [hdc@hdc.org](mailto:hdc@hdc.org)

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