

# DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL AUTUMN 2005 VOL. XIX NO. 2

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## LANDMARKS LION AWARD GOES TO GOTHAM'S ULTIMATE PEDESTRIAN, PUBLIC TELEVISION STAR BARRY LEWIS

BARRY LEWIS IS NOW FIGURING OUT how to cram even a paltry fraction of what he knows about The Bronx into a one-and-a-half-hour walking tour/documentary he is starring in, with David Hartman, for the Public Broadcasting System.

"An hour and a half isn't enough time," he admits in advance. "I know we'll get to the Grand Concourse, Yankee Stadium, Fordham Road, the zoo, the botanical garden; but then there's Parkchester, the wetlands at Pelham Bay Park, Orchard Beach where you can't believe you're in New York, the Puerto Rican community on 138th Street, the beautiful secluded neighborhoods in Throgs Neck, that Dry Dock Savings Bank with the wonderful Italianate tower. I don't want to leave out anything important."

The show, due to air in a year or so, will be the ninth slice of New York City he has helped develop for PBS, after strolling the likes of Harlem and Central Park. And the production will mark at least the 10,000th time he has lectured enlighteningly about his hometown. On October 26, the His-



photo: Dianne Arndt

*Landmarks Lion 2005 and New York booster Barry Lewis has brought the city into living rooms all over the country with his relaxed and informed television walking tours.*

toric Districts Council will honor Mr. Lewis as a Landmarks Lion (with Mr. Hartman as co-chair of the benefit committee) for his 30-year career of opening the eyes of novices and experts alike to every cranny of the New York streetscape.

Barry Lewis has taught at half a dozen prestigious institutions, including the New School and the Cooper Union Forum, and has contributed to four books

so far—he is now finishing a summary volume of his Cooper Union curriculum called "The City Transformed." He has covered foreign architectural history, too, but what he loves best is explaining a neighborhood he has explored since childhood while standing in the middle of it.

"Nothing beats taking a student to see the buildings three dimensionally, to understand how everything was thought out down to the doorknobs," he says. "To me, the best possible podium is the sidewalk."

The New York Times has called him "as informed a companion as anyone could wish." Only once can he recall anyone walking away during one of his tours: a couple who had underdressed for a breezy April morning at Battery Park. They had ignored his warning at the start of the tour, he says: "I always tell people, 'Downtown is the first place in America that the wind from Europe touches ground.'"

For all his compelling delivery and impressive academic credentials, he has no formal training in architecture, history or teaching. He learned everything on foot. As soon as his parents—who owned and ran a Queens department store called Lewis of Woodhaven—let him take subways alone in the late 1950's, he says, he would ride to the end of the lines "just to see what was there." He walked every bridge, whether river or rail crossing, that allowed pedestrians. "And the more I poked around," he says, "the more I learned, the more interested I became."

As a teenager at Forest Hills High

### SAVE THE DATE

17th Annual Landmarks Lion  
Award Ceremony & Dinner  
honoring architectural  
and urban historian  
Barry Lewis

Wednesday, October 26, 2005  
Visit our Web site for details  
[www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org)

School, he sat in on anthropology lectures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, explored Beat-era Greenwich Village and watched avant-garde theater productions of Jean Anouilh and Samuel Beckett. He has lived outside New York City for only a few years: in the mid-1960's he studied sociology at the University of California at Berkeley and then taught English to schoolchildren in Paris.

In 1974, at age 29, he started volunteering to give free walking tours in SoHo to aid Margot Gayle's preservation drive for an historic district. (His day job at the time: selling hippie clothing at a boutique near Bloomingdale's.) "Margot said to me, 'You know, you're very good at this.' And I said, 'Yes, well, I like it.' Our preservation effort worked so well that it's almost impossible to give tours there now. People are packed into every inch of sidewalk. I remember when you could look down Broadway from Prince to Spring on a weekend afternoon and not see a soul. Below Houston then really was an alternative world."

He doesn't actually much like crowds, he confesses, which is the main reason he lives in a leafy neighborhood of mostly freestanding houses, far from Manhattan.

For 35 years he has rented a one-bedroom apartment in Kew Gardens. In one corner of the living room his computer screen flashes architectural screensavers: one day it might be the 1851 Crystal Palace in London, the next day Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. Filling much of the walls are steel bookshelves that he bought at an office-supply shop on 23rd Street in 1971. But their contents keep evolving; he makes room for new books, sometimes by getting rid of slides he has recently learned to digitize.

"I just read 'The Devil in the White City,' and I'm about to start 'Great Fortune: The Epic of Rockefeller Center,'" he says. "History's not a fixed thing you can memorize; it's always changing. I can't tell you how many times I've walked down a street I'd walked a hundred times before, and a student asked a question I'd never thought about or pointed out some detail I'd never noticed. New York is a subject you can never master; it'll always keep you young."

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

professional, prefer brownstones to tenements and grand Victorian houses to modest 19th century workers' cottages.

Society needs to reinvest its energy and resources into a broader spectrum of communities. There is more than one way to do that, including by promoting investment in a broad spectrum of communities and by using planning and zoning to protect neighborhoods. We need to marshal



photo: twig

David Goldfarb aboard the John J. Harvey fireboat (see page 5), Manhattan behind him.

**DISTRICT LINES**  
 NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE  
**HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL**

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

WHY DOES THE GRAND CONCOURSE in The Bronx remain a wasteland as far as landmarking is concerned? Why are the workers' houses on Harrison Street and in Port Richmond on Staten Island still overlooked as potential historic districts? They qualify in terms of age and sense of place, so why has designation of them not been actively pursued? There are many factors at work: buildings in lower-income neighborhoods are often neglected and the original fabric may no longer be there; the constituents may be renters rather than owners and therefore don't have an incentive to work for historic designation; and the owners themselves may be unaware how preservation works, especially that landmarking a neighborhood increases the value of property. That astonishing fact has been demonstrated in case study after case study over the last 15 years and not long ago (2003) in a report of the New York City Independent Budget Office.

Another reason may also be that some preservationists, both amateur and

all the tools at our disposal to preserve neighborhoods where affordable housing still exists. The preservation movement needs to appreciate lower-income neighborhoods for their history and culture, if not for the architectural significance of their individual buildings.

The Historic Districts Council's conference in 2006 will focus on the economics of preservation, a subject we need to take a closer look at. Meanwhile, we urge the preservation community to think about what can be done to achieve preservation that celebrates communities across the economic spectrum; how we can achieve preservation without displacement; and how we can work toward a society that can provide affordable housing in historic neighborhoods that will benefit all members of society. —David Goldfarb

## LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE, MUSEUMS FACE SCRUTINY FOR APPROPRIATENESS IN ALTERATION DESIGNS

NEW YORK CITY has no dearth of museums. From frivolous to scholarly, each museum competes with the others and itself to display what people want, perhaps more than they want.

One thing is sure—museums would not have such collections without the visitors to support them. Indeed, according to a recent poll by Alliance for the Arts, annual attendance at nonprofit cultural institutions in New York City has reached a record 26.5 million visitors.

It is not surprising, then, that museums are expanding their facilities. A combination of factors such as growing collections, increased public programming and greater attendance inspires these costly and complex expansions; and right now it seems that almost every museum in town is expanding up, out, down or all three. The Museum of Modern Art finished a spectacular expansion last year; the New Museum of Contemporary Art in SoHo and The Bronx Museum of the Arts have wholly new buildings under construction; and the Brooklyn Children's Museum is undergoing a massive renovation. Others, including the American Museum of the Moving Image in Long Island City and the Queens Museum of Art, have announced plans that remain in the design phase.

Many museums occupy buildings that are either individually landmarked or within historic districts, so their expansions must meet standards of historic appropriateness as well as programmatic needs. The Brooklyn Museum, the Jewish Museum, the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art have all accomplished large expansions under the guidance of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Following is a look at three current expansion projects: one, the Pierpont Morgan Library, is an individual landmark and will finish its expansion in 2006; the second, the Whitney Museum of American Art, is in an historic district and recently received LPC approval for its changes; and the third, the Queens Museum of Art, is a municipally undesignated but historic building that has been



photo and model: Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architects

*Seen from the 36th Street side, this model of Renzo Piano's design for the Pierpont Morgan Library shows two of the original Italian Renaissance-style buildings in the foreground with Mr. Piano's additions behind and between them.*

declared eligible for listing on the New York State Register of Historic Places and is currently in limbo about its design changes. As it happens, the designer of both the Morgan and the Whitney additions is the Swiss architect Renzo Piano, who gained worldwide attention with the design of the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1972-76.

### **Pierpont Morgan Library**

In midtown Manhattan's Murray Hill, the construction of Mr. Piano's design for the Morgan Library is nearly complete. The library complex, a collection of individual landmarks, is composed of several buildings facing Madison Avenue and on East 36th and 37th Streets. J. Pierpont Morgan commissioned Charles McKim of McKim, Mead & White to design the primary, Italian Renaissance-style building, which was built between 1902-06.

His son, J. P. Morgan Jr., converted the structure to public use in 1924, and the Morgan Library was born. Early expansions, so to speak, include the annexation of other structures on the block—a 1928 building put up on the site of Morgan's earlier house and an 1852 townhouse. Together, the group creates an Italianesque enclave within the city that was

designated in stages: the exterior of the library and annex in 1966, the library's interior in 1982 and the J. P. Morgan Jr. house in 2002.

The library's collection and programs have grown beyond the capacity of the historic building cluster. While a 1991 Voorsanger & Mills structure, already demolished, connected library and house by means of an enclosed courtyard, it was not planned to address the pinch on exhibition or storage space.

In 2000 the Morgan commenced a larger-scale expansion program, working with Mr. Piano and the New York City architecture firm Beyer Blinder Belle to integrate the addition with the existing structures. In terms of space, the Morgan will gain 69,400 square feet, of which 43,300 will be subterranean. Gallery space will double, and enlarged research and storage facilities will allow the museum to broaden the scope and reach of its programs. Underground, a new auditorium will be built alongside the increased storage facilities.

One controversial aspect of the proposed design moves the museum entrance from the main Italian villa on East 36th Street to a grand entryway midblock on Madison Avenue where the 1991 addition stood. The Historic Districts Council

regretted this decision in its January 2002 testimony at an LPC hearing: "We will miss the sense of having the privilege of entering a unique private space. The new entrance, while handsome and not inappropriate, is far more institutional. This design changes the character of the Morgan Library and alters not only the building but also the experience of visiting it."

At the public hearing, opposition was also expressed by Richard Cameron, vice chairman of the Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America, who objected to the change in spatial organization that losing the central courtyard would cause. He also felt that the new design would encroach upon the garden and that modern components were included at the expense of the original Beaux-Arts ones.

For the museum and the LPC, these objections were apparently not sufficient to prevent approval, and the Morgan is on schedule to complete the expansion by spring 2006, according to Frank Priol Jr., a project architect with Beyer Blinder Belle and a member of the HDC board of advisers. Mr. Priol notes that sensitive handling of scale, proportion and light characterizes the new work, which besides adding structures also removes several older, less appropriate additions. The overall effect, he maintains, is enhanced clarity in the composition.

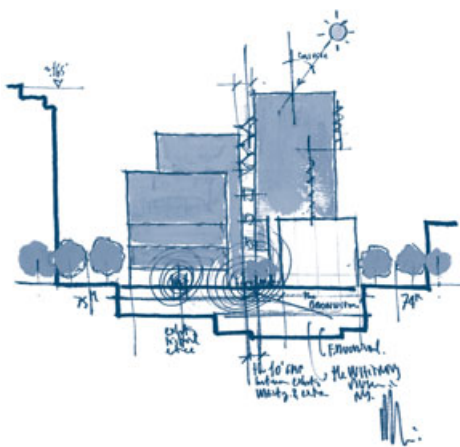
### Whitney Museum of American Art

The Whitney Museum has actively acquired contemporary American art since sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney opened the Whitney Studio Club in 1916. Founded in 1931 with a permanent collection of 700 works, the Whitney first occupied a building now used by the New York Studio School on West 8th Street in Manhattan. Today, after an interim location adjacent to the Museum of Modern Art on West 53rd Street, the museum occupies several buildings on Madison Avenue between East 74th and 75th Streets in the Upper East Side Historic District.

Architect Marcel Breuer, with Hamilton Smith, designed the primary building, a signature structure of 60,000 square feet that opened to the public in 1966. The Whitney must have anticipated a need to expand: Breuer included large knock-out panels in the south wall so it could grow outward without making

design changes to his building. The Breuer structure involved the demolition of several Madison Avenue buildings when it was built; the neighborhood, the Upper East Side Historic District, was designated long after that, in 1981.

Today the collection contains more than 15,000 works, and the Whitney's commitment to show contemporary artists means this number will grow. The museum has been involved in a dramatic and often painful saga of ambitious plans beginning in 1985 with a series of design proposals by Post-Modernist architect Michael Graves, which would have added



drawing: Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architects  
*Sketch for the Whitney Museum Expansion and Renovation Project, May 2005; Madison Avenue view.*

134,000 square feet to the Breuer structure by building up and out. Mr. Graves proposed three different designs, but because of community opposition citing an obtrusive presence, the Whitney never developed any of them. Instead, it expanded into an adjacent brownstone, gaining thereby an additional 15,000 square feet of support space. For the first time, the Whitney was able to open galleries devoted solely to its permanent collection without making perceptible changes to the streetscape.

A recently approved expansion by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, on the other hand, places the bulk of the additions in a new building behind and taller than the existing building—an expansion up and out. In interior floor area the new building adds 49,000 square feet to the

complex in the form of spaces for conservation, administration and handling, as well as an auditorium, more galleries, and retail and circulation space.

However, preservationists had many reservations. HDC's testimony at an LPC hearing protested the demolition of adjacent townhouses and the breaking of the streetwall to provide an entrance that would "sideline" Breuer's original entry. HDC also said that the new tower, albeit set back, would "overwhelm the existing townhouses and the Breuer building. An addition to a building as significant as the Whitney Museum," the testimony reads, "must be more subordinate to the original structure." Moreover, HDC was concerned that the proposed rooftop addition on the Breuer would change the Whitney's skyline and be too visible from Central Park and other points on the public way.

After hours of public hearings and discussions, LPC approved a compromise design that permitted the demolition of one rather than two brownstones adjacent to the Breuer, the one that was termed "no style" in the designation report, and required the rooftop addition to be set back farther. This made objectors only half happy.

One can only hope that the new complex of buildings will demonstrate an integrity of its own comparable to that of the Breuer building.

### Queens Museum of Art

At the Queens Museum of Art, the administration is struggling to square the needs of increased space with the demands of its signature building.

Since 1972, QMA has occupied half of the New York City Building designed by Aymar Embury II, the only extant structure built for the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. It served as headquarters of the United Nations between 1946 and 1951 and did duty as home of the New York City Panorama during the 1964 World's Fair.

In determining eligibility for the State and National Registers of Historic Places, the State Historic Preservation Office noted that the building was "characteristic of many public buildings erected in the 1930's and early 1940's that combined elements of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne with the Beaux-Arts style."

*continued on page 10*

## FIREBOAT CRUISE

WITH NO IMMEDIATE firefighting responsibility, the John J. Harvey fireboat, retired, makes itself available for harbor cruises. The Historic Districts Council took advantage of the offer and on July 14 enjoyed a spectacular sunset cruise around Manhattan, down the Hudson from the dock near West 23rd Street, around the tip of the island and up the East River underneath the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges to

One of the treats was to see the undersides of all those bridges; another was to watch--and dodge--the spray of Harvey's hoses in a special demonstration; and a third was the Statue of Liberty at sundown.



photo: twig



photo: twig

*Life preserver aboard the fireboat, as logo.*

*We had the run of the boat, top and bottom.*



photo: HDC

*Mary Howland Cole of Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, and Mike Morrell, president of Westerleigh Improvement Association, Staten Island.*



photo: HDC

*Laura Heim and her husband, Jeffrey A. Kroessler, vice president of HDC and president of the Queensborough Preservation League.*



photo: HDC

*Pauline Metcalf of Manhattan, historian and designer of historic interiors, and Simeon Bankoff, executive director of HDC, on the deck.*



photo: twig

*Aft deck set up for a cruise, with plenty of chairs and a canopy to protect against displays of the fireboat's spraying prowess.*

## A TALE OF TWO WAREHOUSES

*Adaptive reuse is one of the principal tools of historic preservation, enabling buildings originally designed for one purpose to be used for another when they outlive the first—warehouses converted to residential use, for instance. Those who do these conversions are on the front lines of adaptive reuse, and District Lines wanted to find out what it was like on the inside.*

AS DWELLINGS, warehouses have their pluses and minuses: large, airy, light-filled spaces, they are in manufacturing districts and sometimes abandoned ones—not everybody's idea of home sweet home.

We spoke to residents in two buildings on either side of the Brooklyn Navy Yard: one north of it in Williamsburg near the East River, the Austin, Nichols warehouse; the other south of the Navy Yard at 177 Water Street in the DUMBO section of Brooklyn (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass). The Austin, Nichols warehouse was heard by the Landmarks Preservation Commission for designation as an individual landmark on July 26; 177 Water Street is in a district proposed for historic designation and has already been listed on the National Registers of Historic Places.

The Austin, Nichols & Company warehouse at 184 Kent Avenue was designed by the distinguished architect Cass Gilbert (1859-1934), who was also the designer of the Woolworth Building, the George Washington Bridge and classical buildings such as the U.S. Custom House, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the U.S. Courthouse on Foley Square. It was built in 1913 for Austin, Nichols & Company, one of the world's largest grocery wholesalers, and still has some commercial tenants on the ground floor.

In 1998 a group of enterprising artists approached the owner, Moshe Kestenbaum, to ask if they could rent a floor of the building and convert it to living spaces. He was initially reluctant to have residential tenants but changed his mind when he saw how profitable it could be. The artists installed heat, plumbing, fixtures and interior walls and put in new windows. Mr. Kestenbaum did major renovations on the second and third floors of the building; and there are now around 100 apartment units with high-quality fixtures and rents averaging around \$3,000 for a two-bedroom apartment. A floor and a half of the building are still being renovated.

At one point Mr. Kestenbaum personally went door to door asking residents to sign riders to their leases agreeing to vacate their apartments within 60 days if asked, which the residents fear will happen if he begins to construct luxury apartments. They signed because they said they loved the building itself, especially the

through her slot windows than have a water view through the picture windows Mr. Kestenbaum sought through the variance. He said he was strongly opposed to landmarking and said his lawyer would call to answer questions, but he did not.

All tenants agreed that the area around the building has become much safer than when it was a hot spot for prostitution. Although episodes still occasionally occur in its shadow, many young families now live in the building, contributing to its safety and forming a more mature and financially stable population.

On the south side of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, 177 Water Street was used for paper recycling until 1980, when it was



photo: M. Salisbury

*Austin, Nichols & Company warehouse, nestled in a manufacturing district in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on the shore the East River. It now has more than 100 residential apartments.*

views it affords, the high ceilings and the way the concrete walls keep it cool in the summer.

In spring 2004 the landlord applied for a use variance to construct a large rooftop addition and make changes to the tripartite windows. His move galvanized a group of residents, community members and Cass Gilbert fans to try to stop the variance and to begin a campaign to landmark the building, calling themselves the Williamsburg Waterfront Preservation Alliance, and the campaign culminated in a contentious Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing on July 26. One resident ventured that she would rather see the building landmarked and look

partly converted to apartments. It is a four-story brick structure built in 1880 by George L. Morse as a storehouse for the John Masury & Son Paint Works. Artist Doreen Gallo moved into the building just 100 years later, in July 1980, when the area's cobblestone streets were mostly desolate but intact. The neighborhood is now one of Brooklyn's trendiest, with rents to match and loft spaces that are used just as often by dot-com start-ups as by artists. Now, she says, both neighborhood buildings and cobblestone streets are suffering from increased traffic and attention.

When Ms. Gallo moved in, there were three other tenants, and the area was

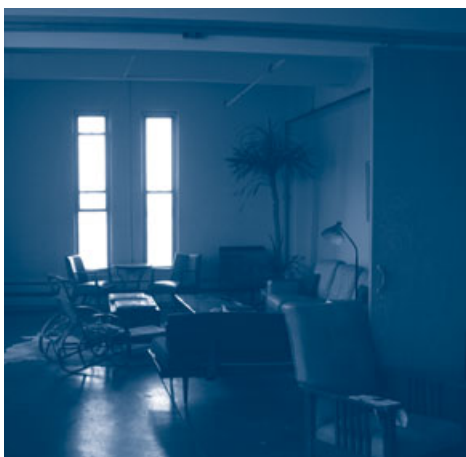


photo: Alice Rich

*Interior of one apartment in the Austin, Nichols warehouse building, looking very comfortable. Residents want these original narrow windows to remain.*

already zoned for residential use, and she liked it not only for its inexpensive rents and large, light filled spaces but also for its remote feeling and lack of distractions. She moved in three months after the “loft law” expired, meaning that in buildings occupied residentially before April 1980 landlords could not raise rents until the buildings were brought up to code. If a resident put in all the fixtures, such as the sinks, toilets and heating necessary to convert a space to one that can be lived in, the landlord cannot claim that the space is being used for manufacturing uses and start eviction proceedings.

Maybe the building was lucky for her, because it was soon after moving to DUMBO that she was commissioned to do an installation of three-dimensional sculpture for the late art dealer Holly Solomon. It drew a lot of attention from prominent people, was featured in Time magazine, and her career took off.

Ms. Gallo has organized the other tenants in her building to oppose what they considered to be rent increases that were too high. Negotiations with the landlord’s representative have been successful for the most part, and relations with him have always been cordial—he allowed them to do whatever they wanted with the space, he sponsored the building’s softball team, bought the uniforms, and they named the team after his company. But other DUMBO landlords have used classic underhanded techniques to oust long time tenants, such as shutting

off the sprinkler systems and then calling the Fire Department.

Gail Marriner-Smith moved to 177 Water Street on Election Day 1980. She had come to New York from Connecticut in the mid-1970’s, settling in Brooklyn Heights but was intrigued with DUMBO from the start and explored it on foot. She said she always felt that the neighborhood had a magical quality, right down to the smell of exotic spices being ground in old spice mills in the area. Of course, the neighborhood had its seedier side—she says it was a popular dumping ground for dead bodies, asbestos and junk. She was mugged twice, once by two young boys with a machete. She told them she didn’t have any money on her but offered them the bag of groceries she was carrying, and they apologized and left her alone. The second time she was not so lucky and was relieved of her cash. Neighbors called the area “pocket-



photo: Annemieke Beemster Leverenz

*Warehouse at 177 Water Street in DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass), Brooklyn, has had residential occupancy since 1980.*

book-thief training ground” As more residents moved in, safety increased.

The fall that Ms. Marriner-Smith and one other residential tenant moved in, there was not much in the way of plumbing or heat in the building. They installed a wood-burning stove with the safety advice of the local firehouse and shared the building’s only bathroom with work-

ers at the paper-recycling company on the first floor. Ms. Marriner-Smith vividly remembers having to break up ice in the toilet bowl on early winter mornings. She says that they were some of the first members in the St. George health club in Brooklyn Heights because it had showers and they did not.

A bond between Doreen Gallo and Gail Marriner-Smith was forged in those pioneering days. Indeed, there was a feeling of community among building tenants and neighborhood residents, with frequent parties, art shows and a neighborhood softball league with teams from each building. The two women remain friends today, 20 years later, and Ms. Marriner-Smith stayed a member of the DUMBO Neighborhood Association, even after moving to Long Island, where she does multimedia marketing for environmental concerns. She kept her DUMBO loft and is currently renovating it so she can use it to write a series of books about growing up on the waterfront.

Camaraderie and a stronger sense of community often result from the long process of historic-district or landmark designation, as political awareness and bonds are formed by shared adversity and triumph. One cannot separate the community of people from the neighborhood they inhabit. Working to enhance and preserve the neighborhood invariably benefits the community.

## PRESERVATIONISTS AT THE GRASSROOTS TAKE A BOW AT HDC

ON AN EARLY EVENING chilly for mid-May, about 200 people from all over New York City gathered to honor a number of individuals and organizations whose work in neighborhood historic preservation has been noteworthy. These were the Historic Districts Council’s Grassroots Preservation Award winners:

- **Judy Berdy**, president of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society, lectures, guides tours for visitors and has organized exhibitions to bring the past and present of her island, which is officially part of Manhattan, into wider public consciousness.
- **Rosemary Cappozalo** almost single-handedly restored, renovated and revital-

ized the St. George Theatre on Staten Island. Located in the St. George/New Brighton Historic District, the theater was a fashionable spot for vaudeville, musical concerts, films and other events from 1929 when it opened until it closed in 1980.

- **Landmark West!** has earned its exclamation mark in a big way. An Upper West Side neighborhood preservation organization, it has vigorously advocated for the 2,606 designated landmarks in the area it serves. When LW! began in 1985, its large neighborhood, stretching from 59th Street to 110th Street and from Central Park West to Riverside Drive in Manhattan, had only 337 designated landmarks. This small but fierce group has been involved in increasing that number on virtually a daily basis.

- **Peter Levenson** is a principal in the Kibel Companies, a part-owner of 90 West Street, a designated landmark that suffered severe damage during the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Mr. Levenson's knight-in-shining-armor project has been to restore the structure and facade of the 1907 building to its original glorious condition even as he converts it to residential use.

- **Kate Burns Ottavino** has helped ensure the future of historic buildings by designing the preservation-arts curriculum for the Brooklyn High School for the Arts, the first school in the United States to integrate teaching in these studies and to include hands-on restoration work as part of the program. Ms. Ottavino is vice

president and director of preservation at A. Ottavino Corporation, stone and masonry restoration contractors, and has worked in preservation for more than 25 years, lecturing, participating in panels and serving on numerous boards and committees.

- **Richmond Hill Historical Society** represents the first planned community in Queens and recently advocated successfully for rezoning in its neighborhood in order to preserve its low-rise character. It also pulled the historic Republican Club building out of the jaws of a demolition backhoe and secured its landmark designation just in the nick of time. The society continues to press for district designation.

Awards are also given to elected officials and print or broadcast media which have shown special awareness and understanding of preservation issues, and this year they were:

**FRIEND IN HIGH PLACES AWARD**

City Councilmember Tony Avella, 19th Council District, Queens, has worked to serve his constituents since 2001 and through rezoning initiatives has sought to preserve the nature of the low-density communities of Bayside, Douglas Manor and College Point. He was a prime sponsor of the recently designated Douglaston Hill Historic District as well as the recently adopted Failure to Maintain Bill, which gives the Landmarks Preservation Commission the authority to pursue fines

against owners who let their designated properties deteriorate.

**FRIEND FROM THE MEDIA AWARD**

Riverdale Press, founded in 1950 by publishers David and Celia Stein, has campaigned for planned development and the preservation of open and green space in a community that saw tremendous growth in the years since its first issue. The newspaper regularly features articles on historic buildings and was a leading voice promoting the designation of the Riverdale Historic District.

Finally, a lifetime-achievement award is given each year 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's winner was:

**MICKEY MURPHY AWARD**

Doris Diether has lived up to her Greenwich Village community's reputation for militant advocacy on behalf of the ordinary citizen, preparing material to support appropriate zoning for the neighborhood and promoting tenants' rights and landmark designation in the Village and nearby neighborhoods. A Community Board member for more than 40 years, she has also written articles for The Villager newspaper, taught courses on zoning and is the officially appointed Community Historian for Manhattan Community Board 2.



photo: Elisabeth Robert



photo: Elisabeth Robert

*Grassroots Award winner Kate Ottavino shows her citation to her daughters, Hannah (center) and Megan Parker. Ms. Ottavino's award was for designing the preservation-arts curriculum at the Brooklyn High School for the Arts.*

*Presenting the Friend in High Places Award to City Councilmember Tony Avella (second from right) were (from left) Roger Byrom, HDC vice president; Simeon Bankoff, executive director; and Paul Graziano, board member.*

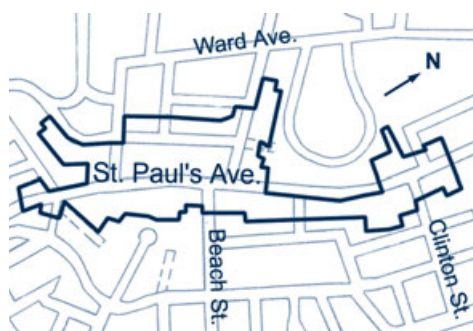


## DISTRICT PROFILES

## ST. PAUL'S AVENUE- STAPLETON HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICT, STATEN ISLAND

TENDING HER LUXURIANT GARDEN one summer day, a resident of St. Paul's Avenue paused and commented that the verdant neighborhood was an attraction to Monarch butterflies, so much so that they included it on their yearly migration path. It goes to show that even an insect knows enough to land here.

Craggy, hilly, well positioned overlooking the Upper New York Bay, this must be one of the most attractive natural sites in the five boroughs. Rather than leveling the land, as was done in 18th and 19th century Manhattan, settlers and developers kept the original topography



map: Annemieke Beemster Leverenz

*St. Paul's Avenue forms the axis of this historic district about a mile south of St. George and the ferry terminal, and up the hill from the harbor.*

and built to take advantage of it. Consequently, many lots are large and steep, with stone retaining walls at the sidewalk. Picturesque wooden stairways ascend to front doors, and magical terraced gardens hide behind unassuming houses.

Not that all houses in this historic district are unassuming. There are 92 houses here, most of them built from the early 19th to the early 20th century, often with towers or turrets, porches, gables, mansard roofs and complicated massing. They represent a collection of styles—Craftsman,

Gothic, neo-Colonial, Arts and Crafts. Most of them are wood frame with shingles or clapboard facades; those that are built on steep inclines have dry-stone retaining walls built of local trap rock stone at the sidewalk level. Other houses are brick or stucco, and one, on Marion Avenue, is made of hollow terra-cotta covered with cement stucco, a new building technology in the first years of the 20th century when it was built. Marion Avenue runs parallel to St. Paul's one block west and 60 feet higher. A brooding, white-painted Colonial-style mansion, the house overlooks an overgrown garden in back that tumbles down and stops behind a house on St. Paul's Avenue. Like the garden, the house is untended and is looking for a new owner.

Development in the St. Paul's Avenue-Stapleton Heights Historic District began in the 1820's, as it did on Staten Island generally; but according to the Landmark



photo: Penelope Bateau

*Characteristic district house at 56 Marion Avenue, built on a hill ascended by a wooden staircase and wrapped around by a porch for enjoying a summer evening.*

Preservation Commission's designation report the real story began ten or 12 years before that when the New York governor, Daniel D. Tompkins (1774-1825, governor 1807-1816), spent time on Staten Island during the War of 1812 overseeing ways to defend New York from the British. He looked around and, rather like the Monarch butterflies, saw what a beautiful and convenient place it was. He began buying land in 1814—the next-door community Tompkinsville is named after him—and renovated a farmhouse to use as a summer cottage for his family. In 1817, when he was elected vice president of the United States under James Monroe, he made the Staten Island house his primary residence.

That same year he acquired an interest in a steamboat company providing



photo: Robert Mannino Design Associates

*Neo-Colonial-style house at 107 Marion Avenue is on a bluff overlooking St. Paul's Avenue, the district's main street, and the Upper New York Bay beyond it.*

ferry service between Tompkinsville and Manhattan and set up a corporation to build and operate a cross-island turnpike. The turnpike was not a success. He had borrowed heavily to fund it, and when the financial panic of 1819 struck, his creditors called in the loans. Tompkins and his wife had to sign over their assets, including real estate, to settle the debt.

The part of Tompkins's property in the historic district was bought in 1826 by Caleb T. Ward, a nephew of Tompkins who had been involved in his uncle's business ventures and was co-executor of his will; and he began to develop the land. St. Paul's Avenue, the central axis of the historic district, was the backbone of Ward's development. At the time, it was called Richmond Street and was laid out along the route of a farm road, one that was occasionally so muddy the street became known as Mud Lane, a name so picturesque it stuck.

St. Paul's Memorial Church was built in the late 1860's of Staten Island trap rock with brownstone trim. It seems likely that Richmond Street was renamed St. Paul's Avenue at that time, which means the street has had three names—Mud Lane, Richmond Street and St. Paul's Avenue. More than a century later when a local group organized to advocate for preservation of their neighborhood, they called themselves the Mud Lane Society in memory of that historic street.

At first the society planted trees and sponsored house tours, things that foster civic pride and community spirit, but its real purpose was to preserve Stapleton Heights.

People moved in and people moved out, but no bells rang in anyone's head until

the late 1990's, when development started in a big way with teardowns and new town-house construction. In 1999 a small committee was formed with Brigitte Zapata as its chair. She and her committee attended events sponsored by the Historic Districts Council; they talked with HDC Executive Director Simeon Bankoff, board President David Goldfarb—a Staten Islander—and the Preservation League of Staten Island, all of whom Ms. Zapata said were “invaluable.” The committee members took a course in how to research buildings and then did it. They set up a meeting with LPC Chair Robert B. Tierney, and he came with three staffers and City Councilmember Michael E. McMahon. Ms. Zapata, who is an artist, drew pictures of 20 to 30 houses in the district and made postcards of them for neighbors, who sent 600 to the commission.

But what really helped was Barnett Shepherd, Staten Island historian and preservation activist, founder of the Preservation League of Staten Island, teacher and winner of HDC's distinguished Mickey Murphy Award in 2003. Through deeds and conveyance records, Mr. Shepherd documented the dates and original owners for all the buildings in the study area; and his research, judging from how many times it is cited in footnotes in the designation report, was an essential contribution to the landmark status.

All their efforts paid off at the end of June 2004, just about the time the

Monarch butterflies were hatching out in their northern home.

### LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE, MUSEUMS FACE SCRUTINY

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Seeking to enlarge its space and reconfigure its external appearance, the museum proposed a major architectural endeavor in 2002. It sought to expand its floor area from 45,000 to 100,000 square feet by replacing the ice rink currently in the building with cafes, circulatory space and support rooms and in the process improve access. Eric Owen Moss, Architects, a California-based firm, was chosen to give these changes form.

Mr. Moss did not simply reconfigure the interior but also proposed an undulating mass of glass and metal that his plans described as a “drape” covering the “surgical” removal of the pavilion's central section, and it would be wired to change opacity in response to shifts in light and weather.

Jeffrey Kroessler, president of the Queensborough Preservation League and a vice president of HDC, was vociferously opposed to the changes. A coalition of individuals and preservation organizations issued a public statement saying that the historic significance of the structure had been undervalued and ultimately discarded in favor of a flashy new design.

The building is not a city landmark, but because national funding was already involved, the plan was subject to approval by the New York State Historic Preservation Office, which found that the proposed design was detrimental to the historic building. This meant that QMA may lawfully alter the building as its management sees fit, but not with federal funds.

In consultation with the New York City Department of Design and Construction, the museum eventually hired Grimshaw Architects to replace Mr. Moss, with the firm of Ammann & Whitney consulting. QMA also replaced its management leadership and has a new executive director and new board president.

DDC's press release extols the new team, Grimshaw for designs, Ammann & Whitney for restorations and preservation. While this indicates management's interest in respecting the historic integrity of its building, it seems that federal sources have been removed from the list of funders. So for the design to move forward, it would be subject only to the limited review of the Art Commission of the City of New York and that of the local Community Board. We await the results with interest.

## RECENT GIFTS AND GRANTS

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS of foundations, organizations, companies and Friends to the Historic Districts Council are very much appreciated. Many thanks to those who gave in the period from March 2005 through June 2005.

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**Organizations:** Albemarle-Kenmore Neighborhood Association, Bay Ridge Conservancy, The Beaux Arts Alliance, Bedford Barrow Commerce Block Association, Bowne House Historical Society, Bridge Plaza Civic Association, Broadway-Flushing Homeowners Association,



photo: courtesy Queens Museum of Art

Built for the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, this building was home to the United Nations (1946-51) and the New York City Panorama at the 1964 Fair. Since 1972 it has housed the Queens Museum of Art. Note 1964 World's Fair pylons at the left.

Brooklyn Heights Association, Brownstone Revival Coalition, Center for Thanatology, City Lore/Place Matters, Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side, Ditmas Park Association, Ditmas Park West Neighborhood Association, DOCOMOMO/Tri-State, Douglaston/Little Neck Historical Society, DUMBO Neighborhood Association, East 12th Street Block Association, East 60s Property Owners Association, East 79th Street Neighborhood Association, East Side Rezoning Alliance, Fiske Terrace Association, Flatbush Development Corporation, Friends of Alice Austen House, Friends of Cast Iron Architecture, Friends of Terra Cotta, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, Fulton Ferry Landing Association Ltd., Fund for Park Avenue, Gramercy Park Block Association, Gravesend Historical Society, Greenwich Village Community Task Force, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, The Green-Wood Cemetery, Hamilton Heights-West Harlem Community Preservation Organization, Historic House Trust of New York City, Hope Community, Huguenot Historical Society, Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America, Long Island Traditions, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Lower Hudson Conference, Merchants House Museum, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, Midwood Park Homeowners Association, Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, Mud Lane Society for the

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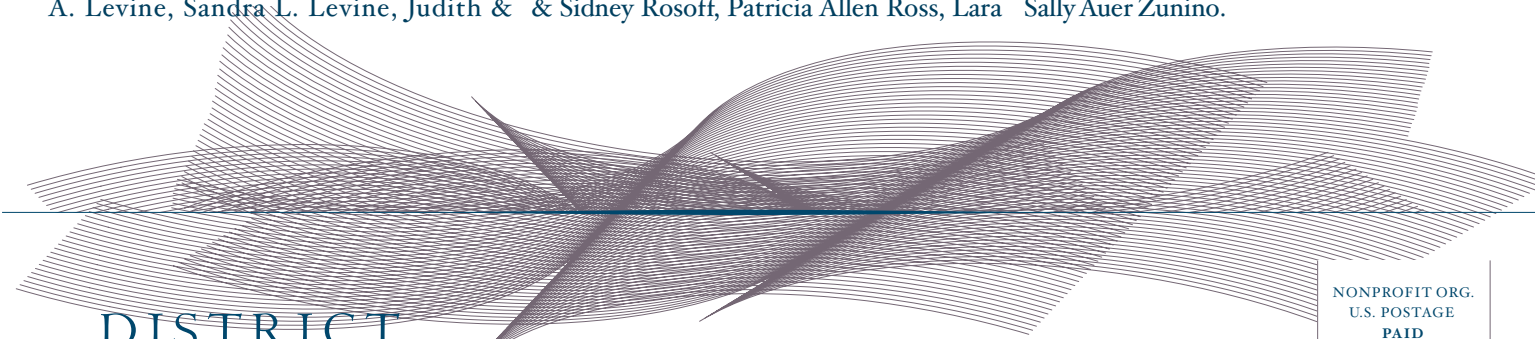
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