

LANDMARK

Newsletter of the Preservation Association of the Southern Tier

www.pastny.org

PAST -- Saving for the Future

Spring/Summer 2012



Carnegie Library, 78 Exchange Street, Binghamton, then and now.

Four years ago the City of Binghamton launched a “Blight Prevention Initiative” to ensure basic maintenance of vacant buildings and to hold owners of neglected properties accountable. Mayor Matt Ryan announced this program to the media, very symbolically, from the front steps of the long-vacant Carnegie Library. The following year Broome County Executive Barbara Fiala said: *“We cannot become a community that allows a Carnegie library to deteriorate to the point where it cannot be saved.”*

For over a century the Carnegie Library at 78 Exchange Street, has been one of downtown Binghamton’s most visible and most treasured historic landmarks. It was initially presented as a gift to the people of Binghamton by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. As stated at the dedication in 1903: *“it shall be the People’s University in which every man, woman and child of our city shall have part and lot.”*

Nearly 100 years later it closed. Today the building is designated as a local landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing structure in the Court Street Historic District. But for the last 12 years the building has been empty, neglected, and slowly deteriorating.

On February 22 of this year Broome County Industrial Development Agency (BCIDA) held a public hearing to solicit comments on a proposal to acquire the property “pursuant to the provisions of the Eminent Domain Procedure Law of the State of New York for the purposes of blight elimination, preservation of an historic site, and the establishment of space suitable for commercial, office, higher education and related purposes.”

PAST supports this bold initiative taken by the Broome County IDA. Hopefully the ultimate successful outcome will serve as a catalyst to highlight and put a stop to the neglect of other historic treasures in our community.

COMING EVENTS

2012 HOUSE TOUR May 19

This year the annual House Tour takes place on Binghamton's West Side, Saturday, May 19, from 1:00 to 4:00pm. Advance tickets are \$20 for members, \$25 for non-members. After May 9 ticket prices increase to \$25 members, \$30 non-members.

ANNUAL MEETING & AWARDS May 24

The PAST annual meeting and presentation of awards will be held at the newly remodeled Grand Royale, formerly Binghamton City Hall, 99 Collier Street, Binghamton. The meeting starts at 7:00 in the Chambers Room. Light refreshments will be available at 6:30.

VESTAL GARDENS June 9

PAST's 23rd Annual Garden Tour is scheduled for Saturday, June 9, from 1:00 to 4:00pm. Advance reservations are \$12 members, \$15 non-members. Ticket prices increase to \$15 and \$18 on the day of the tour. Tickets and tour maps are to be picked up June 9 between 11:00am and 12:30pm at Weis Market, 100 Rano Blvd, Vestal.

FIRST FRIDAY ART WALK

As always, be sure to make the historic Perry Building in downtown Binghamton your first destination for every *First Friday Art Walk!* PAST's exhibits are always interesting and filled with photographs and information regarding local architecture and historic preservation. Held on the First Friday of each month, the exhibits are open from 6:00 to 9:00 pm.

SALVAGE SHOWROOM

First & Third Saturday of Each Month

The showroom is located on Eldredge Street in Binghamton, and is open the first and third Saturday of each month, 9:00AM to 1:00PM. Visit www.pastny.org for directions.

Blast from PAST

Our Blast from PAST email provides up-to-the-minute news and event information. If you would like to receive the weekly Blast, send an email to past@stny.rr.com.

Tickets to events may be purchased on-line at pastny.org, or by sending a check to PAST, 89 Court Street, Binghamton, NY, 13901.

For more information call the PAST office: 607-237-0887 or visit www.pastny.org

Gotta Go Ghosting!

By Mary Sze-Tu

That's what you'll need to remember in October this year. If you've already caught PAST's Spirit Tour, going strong four years straight now, then you know this is the best sort of history this side of the afterlife. This is the event to introduce your friends, some who might never think twice about the history that surrounds us every day, to some of the best of what PAST offers. This is how to have folks walk our downtown appreciative and smiling, and maybe a teensy-bit apprehensive. Even without the History Quiz at the end. Just kidding, there's really no quiz, for this year anyway.

While trustworthy guides help groups hunt spirits throughout downtown's historical sites, the ghosts wait to deliver stories of past centuries. Meet visitors of long ago who bemoan their earthly attempts to do their best. Others are more arrogantly confident, and more than pleased to boast. Dr. S. Andral Kilmer hawks his swamp root medicine; land agent Joshua Whitney defends his early street plans, and still more: architect, judge, regretful martyr. From mere decades past, Rod Serling's cameo fascinates.



John Darrow as S. Andral Kilmer, and Sparky.

Beginning every tour hear powerful, haunting organ music ushering the group from the sanctuary of Christ Church. While ethereal beings regale you with their stories you absorb the place where they reside.

After braving the many ghostly haunts, you are heralded back to the present with autumn favorites of cider and donuts. Stalwart survivors couldn't help but have enjoyed a...well, not-quite-living...history lesson, and most particularly Binghamtonian experience.

Many thanks, once again, to script writer and coordinator, Ruth Levy and the many PAST volunteers who work to make all the fun, and the sponsors who support the doings of it all: Coughlin & Gerhart, Hinman, Howard & Katell, and Levene, Gouldin & Thompson.

JOHNSON CITY SELECTED FOR NYMS FUNDING

By Johnson City Partners

A total of \$457,000 in NY Main Street Program funding has been awarded to the Johnson City Revitalization Program (JCRP). It has been proposed that these funds will rehabilitate 13 commercial buildings from Arch Street to Avenue B. 12 of the structures are considered to be historic. Although no final decisions have been made, the plan calls for 15 residential units and 13 commercial units to undergo renovations. Façade upgrades, roofing, heating systems, stairway repairs, electrical upgrades, energy efficient window replacements, ceiling replacements, wall repairs, kitchen, and bath renovations are included in the plan. Once completed, property owners will be reimbursed 75% of their project costs up to certain limits.

Included in this funding is a total of \$35,000 for the purchase of matching period style waste receptacles, benches, and matching planters with shrubbery. In conjunction with the recent historic district designation, there will be “Welcome to Historic Downtown Johnson City” and other key way finding signage installed. The streetscape improvements will begin to make the area more appealing and pedestrian friendly. There will be no cost to the village for these improvements.

The grant includes \$26,000 in administrative funding for municipal government oversight. The Village of Johnson City will be the Local Program Administrator. In conjunction with the grant, \$100,000 in low interest façade loans are available through the Town of Union’s Façade Loan Program as well as \$10,000 in Community Development Block Grant funding which has been earmarked for architectural studies and renderings.

A Committee comprised of Johnson City Partners Members conducted the research and wrote the grant proposal for NY Main Street funding, on behalf of the Village of Johnson City. The key individuals involved in submitting the application were Marcia Ward, Julie Deemie, Corinna Johnson, Robert Olcott, Jim Furman and Barbara Thompson.

One of the core missions of the Johnson City Partners is the revitalization of the downtown business district. The NYMS funding will enable us to begin to undo many years of neglect and the disparity in this unique, historic area. Careful selection of renovation projects will produce visible changes in a short timeframe. Our hope is to spark investor interest and uncup the many potential building uses for creative entrepreneurs through proper marketing. Beyond this opportunity we see many additional improvements coming to this recently nominated Historic district.



Main Street, Johnson City.

We are honored and proud to have been chosen to receive NY Main Street Program funding in an especially competitive year. Johnson City is the only Broome County NYMS grant recipient for the 2011 round of funding and the largest NYMS grant recipient in Broome County since the programs inception in 2004.

In closing, the Johnson City Partners thanks Johnson City Mayor Dennis Hannon along with the entire Johnson City Board of Trustees and Mr. Tom Johnson (Clerk-Treasurer) for accepting this partnership and for their ongoing support of the Johnson City Partners organization. This is a prime example of how government and residents can form a perfect bridge by working together and proof that people can make a difference in their neighborhoods and in their community.

The Johnson City Partners will continue to volunteer their time toward helping to implement the Program and in seeing its successful completion.

LOFT LIFE!

By Mary Sze-Tu

"Who knew..? !" Oft exclaimed the afternoon of PAST Loft Life Tour, also pretty much summed up the wonderment of those wandering these amazing city living spaces. After gathering a map from the PAST office in the Perry Building, tour goers embarked on a unique chance to peek into clever college lofts, professionals' chic hideaways, and stunningly designed homes all perched above and throughout the city streets of Binghamton. While enjoying their urban hike, their map also provided an excellent selection of eateries to patronize in downtown.

The Loft Life Tour, offered one chilly October Saturday, was a cooperative venture between PAST, Binghamton Local Development Corporation, Broome County Planning Department and BingSpot (downtown business & nightlife website). The first half dozen stops along Court Street, each with requisite staircase ascension, allowed perusal of very different homes. Built between 1860's & 1890's, these buildings now welcome visitors with the character of exposed brick interiors, or windows boasting arches, as well as fine high ceilings, and touches such as hand carved banisters. One tucks a garage into the first floor, with the artistically designed second floor showing interesting open spaces with lofts along windows over Court Street. Its third floor has yet another bedroom, bath and laundry, too. Other renovated homes on the tour were equally a pleasure to explore with their more historical notes contrasting shining dark granite countertops, tiled baths and splendid contemporary pendant lighting. Clever lay-outs incorporate lofts and balconies to view the cityscapes below.

NYS Main Street grants and further significant private investment assists such development. A fire station dating originally from 1867, then complete with a horse-drawn water pumper, now showcases a three level home with a double-decker porch for river-watching the Chenango. Other buildings downtown are renovated not only into homes but beautifully appointed offices, other independent businesses, and art studios as well. A circa-1880 industrial block at 21 Depot originally housed S. Mills Ely Warehouse, yet stunned tour participants with expansive designer suites presented by realtors currently offering further units planned for imminent completion. PAST was essential in providing nearly 50 volunteer docents, organizing ticket sales, and researching buildings for this self-guided tour. Anyone viewing the extensive renovations, involving more than a dozen living spaces exhibited on the PAST Loft Life Tour, could not miss the strong preservation message. Ruth Levy, key to the tour's organization, noted "Now people are fixing them up and living upstairs, the building's going to be maintained, and it makes for a very vibrant city. As people are living downtown, they're going to need more services downtown, so some of the empty first floors will be developed as well." These homes, and the folks who clearly enjoy living in them, heighten the enthusiasm for revitalization, ultimately protecting our region's historical and architectural heritage. Kudos to everyone involved for so many jobs well done in an event highlighting the historical, present day, and future strengths of our Binghamton area!



A Court Street Loft... the one that started it all!

North Presbyterian Church

Successful Preservation and Adaptive Reuse of a Binghamton Landmark

In April a ribbon cutting ceremony took place at the former North Presbyterian Church on Chenango Street, Binghamton. Just three years earlier the structure was seriously endangered. After decades of neglect, windows were broken, blue tarps covered large holes in the roof, and the brick façade was crumbling. Pigeons had easy access to the interior, where plaster fell from walls onto rotted wood flooring.

The large octagonal church was designed by Truman I. Lacey and built in 1884. The congregation grew and the church thrived for many years before membership started to decline in the mid-1900's. Finally, in 1980 the church closed and the congregation merged with nearby Broad Avenue Presbyterian Church.

The following year the property was purchased by the non-profit group Volunteers of America (VOA). While adjacent buildings were utilized as emergency housing for individuals in need, the church building sat vacant, suffering demolition by neglect.

Finally, in 2008 VOA applied to the New York State Homeless Housing Assistance Corporation (HHAC) based on a need in the community for supportive housing for homeless individuals. That resulted in a \$3.2 million grant to renovate the structure and create housing units. The project gained support from many sources, including Broome County, the City of Binghamton and the Northside Neighborhood Assembly.

Today this landmark structure represents a true preservation success story. The exterior of the building has been restored to its former glory and the grounds have been landscaped. Inside there are 29 studio apartments on three floors, complete with kitchenettes and private bathrooms. Original architectural features such as arched windows and massive wooden beams are evident in many of the apartments.

On April 18, 2012, a ribbon cutting ceremony took place celebrating the opening of the re-purposed facility. Coincidentally, it was on that same day 132 years ago, April 18, that the church celebrated its 10th anniversary. That ceremony opened with singing of the anthem "Let us Arise," as fitting now as it was then.

Like those that will now call this building home, this once-grand structure now has an opportunity to rise again and reach its full potential.

*See before and after photos on-line at
www.nysLandmarks.com/churches
a project of the Broome County Historical Society.*



Interior prior to redevelopment.



After completion of the rehab project.



PROFILE

GETTING TO KNOW OUR BOARD MEMBERS

Marcia Ward

by Kay Buckley

Born in Watkins Glen, NY, PAST Board member Marcia Ward grew up in the center of the Finger Lakes region. After Cornell University, her first job was as a dietitian at Wilson Hospital in Johnson City, NY. She enjoyed her career as a Registered Dietitian and as a nutritional consultant for 13 years. However, her longtime interest in old houses and historic buildings resulted in her taking another career direction, so she took on a mid-life career change.

Marcia enrolled in a special Master of Architecture Program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for students with bachelor degrees in other fields. While at RPI, she worked at the Lighting Research Center, and took several courses in lighting design and technology in addition to the architecture courses. While Marcia attended RPI, her husband, Al Kukol, attended Albany Law School, and together they raised two children while completing their degrees.

When Marcia's husband was offered a position in Binghamton, the family returned to Johnson City. Here, they lived in a 1916 Foursquare which they continued to restore with period lighting and wallpaper.

Because there was no work for Marcia as an architect, she accepted a position at NYSEG as an energy auditor which, she says, "gave her an opportunity to visit hundreds of homes in the area and educate the owners on energy conservation." Fortunately for her, Marcia liked "crawling around in attics and basements" which was a necessary part of the job. After that position ended, Marcia became a Customer Advocate for NYSEG, and later worked for an insulation company.

While working, Marcia and her husband began to buy some of the houses in their neighborhood because "many had become rental properties and were falling into disrepair." Finally, her dream of renovating old houses had come true!!

In the past seven years, Marcia and her husband have purchased four properties and as necessary, upgraded bathrooms, kitchens, electrical systems, and plumbing.

In 2010, Marcia joined Johnson City partners, a group of JC residents whose mission is "to increase economic opportunity in Johnson City while preserving its historic character." Marcia and Julie Deemie, the President of the group, attended a workshop on "Enhancing Main Street: Making Upper Floors Work Again" and learned about the New York Main Street Grant Program. In 2011 the organization applied for and received one of the Main Street grant awards.

Clearly, Marcia Ward is yet another active, interested, industrious member of the PAST Board whose own past and history prove that dreams do, in fact, come true.

Days of Future PAST

A Message from the President

Just hours before this newsletter went to press it was announced that Binghamton's STONE OPERA HOUSE, along with several other historic properties will be auctioned on May 24. The opera house, later known as Riviera Theater, has been identified by PAST as one of the five most historically significant and endangered structures in the Southern Tier. The Preservation League of New York State lists it as one of the seven most threatened in the state. PAST, the local community, and preservationists throughout the state will be very interested in the outcome of this auction. Let's hope the ultimate result is rehabilitation and reuse of this once-grand Binghamton landmark.



This year our annual meeting and awards ceremony takes place in the Chambers Room of old Binghamton City Hall (now the Grand Royale Hotel), one of our area's most historic and magnificently restored structures. An exciting program is planned for the evening. Students from Owego Middle School's Architectural Awareness Program will showcase their current project, awards will be presented for outstanding examples of historic preservation, and there will be a brief presentation on the state of the organization... a presentation you won't want to miss! Come see what a difference *your* PAST is making in our community, and share in the excitement!

Roger Luther

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Landmark is a bi-annual publication of PAST THE PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION OF THE SOUTHERN TIER

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*Please Consider Adding Your Organization to the list of Business Members.
Sign up on-line at www.pastny.org or use the form on the back page of this newsletter.*

Pardon our Dust...

... not to mention the excavators, jack hammers and occasional broken gas main!

Construction of the much anticipated round-a-bout is happening in Downtown Binghamton... happening in fact, right outside PAST's offices at the Perry Building.

In spite of the construction, PAST is open for business... so when you're downtown don't hesitate to stop in and visit, view the latest exhibit, see the Ross Green Man, or browse the library.



Notice of Proposed Amendment to PAST By-Laws

Please note that a proposed amendment to PAST's by-laws has been approved by the Board of Directors and will be submitted for vote at the annual meeting, May 24, as follows: *An officer may submit a written request to serve an additional one year to his/her term of office and be accepted upon majority approval of the board.*



PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION OF THE SOUTHERN TIER
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PAST Membership and Green Man Order Form

Become a member of the Preservation Association of the Southern Tier, or if you are already a member, please pass this on to a non-member friend. Fill out the form, enclose payment and mail to PAST, 89 Court Street, Binghamton, New York, 13901... or do it all on-line at www.pastny.org. *Thank You!*

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Have you considered adding PAST to your will? Please contact the office for more information, 607-237-0887