

# THE LANDMARKER

The Newsletter of the Preservation Association of Central New York  
Vol. XII, Spring 1998



## A Message From the President

The Preservation Association of Central New York (PACNY) has a very clear objective -- the preservation of Central New York's historical resources. This past year PACNY was again a leader in local historic preservation issues. We have been quick to respond to emergencies, but we have also served as a proactive voice in protecting our vulnerable resources. The reappearance of *The Landmarker* after four years is part of this continuing effort.

1997 began with PACNY's successful advocacy for the protected site status of the former Jewish War Veterans building on Westcott and Genesee streets in Syracuse, an effort in which we were joined by many community groups, the city of Syracuse and respected figures in Syracuse's architectural and preservation community. As this is written, plans are being prepared by Eastside Neighbors in Partnership and the art organization Altered Space for the rehabilitation of the building.

The year ended with PACNY joining forces with the Urban League and Bethany Baptist Church in an effort to rescue the "clay faces" on the wall of the former Wesleyan Methodist Church underground railroad. These efforts were recently recognized by significant grants from the Community Foundation, the Gifford Foundation and other donors.

Despite these and other achievements, however, the loss of the Hine House in Nedrow and the Railroad House in Liverpool are reminders that planning and development can never be taken for granted. In 1998, PACNY is already confronting a long list of preservation issues. Last year's public actions have brought new requests for help and a new willingness on the part of elected officials to consult with PACNY. From assisting efforts to save the Poor House to securing tax credits for restoration projects carried out on Landmark Properties, your support is needed.

Preservation works best as a proactive effort, and along those lines PACNY had defined four general areas of engagement pertaining to the resources of Onondaga County and the Greater Syracuse Area.

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Sculpted clay face beneath Wesleyan Methodist Church. Photo: Douglas Armstrong/PACNY

## *Faces from the Past: PACNY Helps Preserve a Freedom Trail Site in CNY*

PACNY has combined forces with several community groups including the Urban League and Bethany Baptist Church to lead an effort to conserve and protect a group of sculpted faces on the basement wall of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in downtown Syracuse. At the request of PACNY, the Central New York Community Foundation has established a fund dedicated to the Underground Railroad "Faces" Conservation to raise funds for this project.

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## From the President, con't from p. 1

- **Preservation Advocacy:** PACNY will actively pursue the conservation and protection of significant historical resources which are essential to the cultural and economic well-being of our community.
- **Preservation Education:** In cooperation with other civic organizations (via newsletters, programs, symposia, etc.) we will educate the public on the importance of preserving historical resources within communities.
- **Preservation Resources Center:** The PACNY Preservation Resource Center will fulfill four initial objectives: (a) organizing of site files about significant archaeological and historical sites within Onondaga County, (b) maintaining of updated information on protected and endangered sites in the region, (c) promoting the advantages and assist in the efforts of listing sites as designated local Landmarks and/or nominating sites to the National Register of Historic Places, (d) developing and maintaining of *The PACNY Endangered Sites List* of most threatened historic buildings and sites in Onondaga County. The list will be printed in the PACNY newsletter, and a more detailed version will be posted on our web site.
- **Recognizing Outstanding Preservation Achievements:** The annual spring-time presentation of the Jasina Foley Education Award, Pat Earle Award, Preservation Merit Awards, and the Tender Loving Care Awards recognizes the contributions made by groups and individuals to preservation in Central New York. These awards serve to encourage further efforts in historic preservation, advocacy and education.

Please help us protect and preserve the diverse heritage represented in the historically rich buildings and sites of our region. An active organization can assist our communities in the efforts to retain and re-develop a quality living environment in Central New York. Your continued involvement is essential.

Douglas V. Armstrong

The writing and production of this issue of *The Landmarker* was a collaborative effort of Joanne Arany, Doug Armstrong, Peg Chestnut, J.A. Evangelisti, Jr., Samuel Gruber, Dorianne Gutierrez, Kathy Hudson, Robert Temple, and Vic Vaccaro

## Faces, con't from previous page

In the first two months of the fund raising campaign more than \$200,000 has been collected or pledged to conserve the sculpted faces. Our goal is to generate at least \$250,000 locally and to seek matching funds from the state. The initial fund-raising effort was given a significant boost by generous challenge grants from the Rosamond Gifford Trust and the Community Foundation. Contributors to this campaign include KeyBank, OnBank, Syracuse Newspapers - S.I Newhouse Trust, Niagara Mohawk, Fleet Bank, MONY, and a growing group of individual donors. The fund is housed at the CNY Community Foundation. For more details consult:

[http://www.nyhistory.com/wmc/;](http://www.nyhistory.com/wmc/)

This project has gained unanimous support from the full spectrum of local and regional political leaders. Building on this effort, the City of Syracuse's Sesquicentennial Commission has defined a goal to purchase of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and create a Regional "Freedom Trail" Center in Syracuse as a legacy to the future. In addition to protecting the faces and the building, it is hoped that this legacy will reemerge as a symbol of the contribution of the people of Syracuse to the cause of freedom at the time of the founding of this city in the 1848.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Syracuse was an abolitionist church that was directly engaged in the activities of the Underground Railroad. Archaeological studies of the site carried out by Syracuse University Anthropology professors Douglas Armstrong and Lou Ann Wurst have demonstrated the mid-19th century context of a dugout passageway beneath the church on which the faces are located. Further research has shown the probable use of the dugout basement area as a hiding place for African American refugees from enslavement and point to the possibility that these features were created by African Americans on their way north to freedom. This study has been reported by Douglas Armstrong and Lou Ann Wurst in *Faces of the Past: Archaeology of an Underground Railroad Site in Syracuse, New York*. Syracuse University Archaeological Report Volume 10 (1998).

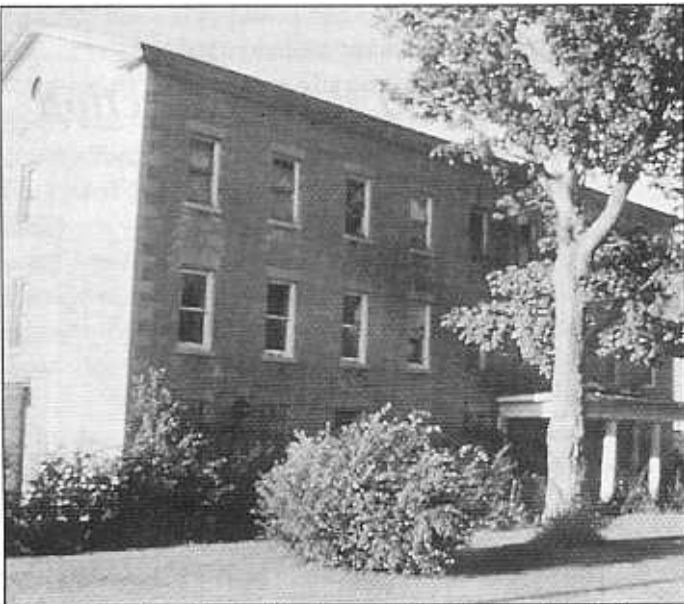
## Visit PACNY's Webpage!

PACNY member Robert Shear has set up a webpage at <http://www.nyhistory.com/pacny>. The site will provide information on PACNY projects, an updated list of endangered sites in Onondaga County, copies of PACNY newsletters and announcements, and links to other historic preservation sites.

# PACNY Urges County Legislature to Save Onondaga Poor House

*On September 2, 1997, Samuel Gruber, co-chair of PACNY's Preservation Committee, spoke before the Onondaga County Legislature on behalf of PACNY in support of a proposal under consideration by the Legislature to preserve a portion of the Onondaga County Poorhouse complex, one of the oldest and most significant institutional buildings in the County. Speaking to the historical and architectural merits of the site (referred to in the legislation as Van Duyn h-2), Sam noted that PACNY applauds and endorses the extensive efforts undertaken by the Town of Onondaga Historical Association (TOHA) to preserve this important structure. The following article is adapted from Sam's testimony.*

PACNY believes that the entire complex of buildings that cluster to form the Onondaga Poor House site is a significant historic resource, but the organization supports TOHA's request for provisions to save, at the very least, the 1854 Poorhouse structure, and endorses TOHA's ultimate plans for adaptive reuse of the building for the benefit of town and county residents.



Former Onondaga County Poor house, 1854 Building. Photo: Sam Gruber/PACNY

The history of the entire Poorhouse-Hospital site is representative of the changing methods and beliefs in the care of the poor, the disabled and the sick, during much of the history of our country. In the 1820s and 1830s a debate about the causes of poverty and its social effects began -- and that debate continues today, in the form of our nation's current discussion of welfare and

entitlement reforms. Opinion has swung widely over the decades -- from belief that poverty was providential, and out of the control of man and society, to that the social order itself was responsible for certain levels of poverty and thus had an obligation to treat the symptoms of its own creation. In the antebellum period -- of which the Onondaga Poorhouse building is a rare survivor -- the optimism of social reformers was responsible for the belief in the power of society to transform children, women and men from unproductive impediments to contributing members of the social order. Popular enthusiasm for these beliefs resulted in scores of social institutions being founded, and new buildings erected. While the methods of many of these places were, by today's standards, oppressive and even cruel, they were considered a great improvement for the thousands of individuals "rescued" from disease, vice, and the poverty of the streets. Perhaps the only historical counterpart to this movement was the "Great Society" of the 1960s -- another national policy attempt to remedy social ills through the creation of new service institutions.

Throughout America, the development of social institutions was seen as a benevolent aid to an ailing society. The net was cast wide to fill these institutions. In Onondaga County, much the same spirit that made the county a center of abolitionism created the Poorhouse -- a belief in society's collective ability to "save" the lost, and give dignity to the indigent.

Eventually, by the last quarter of the 19th century (the period which saw the erection of the Jamesville Penitentiary, also slated for demolition), the benevolent social institutions lost their allure. The movement which supported them suffered from inadequate funding, impatience, and increased recognition of the intractable nature of certain social problems in a rapidly expanding capitalist economy with few checks and controls. They were transformed from rehabilitating way-stations to dumping grounds for society's unwanted. The rate of prison construction increased in relation to the building of other social aid institutions.

This review of history can serve to express the eloquence of a building such as the Onondaga Poorhouse. Few structures in this country, and none in this county, are so able to connect us with this past -- a past that is really very much part of our own continuing social and political existence. Buildings are a way we connect with the past. Once they are gone they are gone forever. In an increasingly illiterate society, where only things that can be seen really count, to remove a building from sight effectively removes that piece of history from our

consciousness. In the case of the Poorhouse, this loss would be tragic.

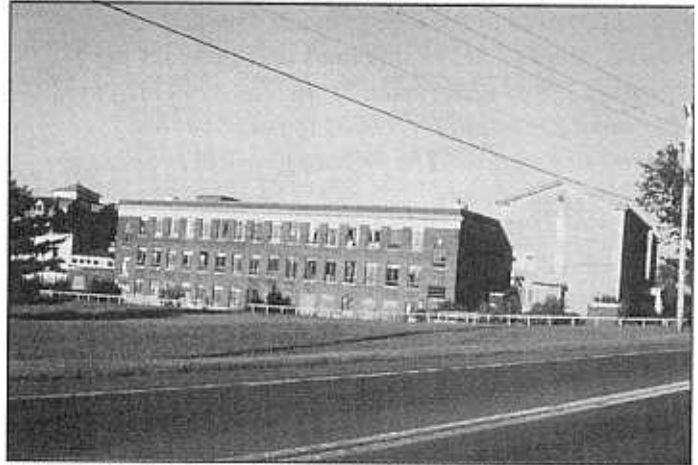
In an ideal world PACNY would like to see the entire complex saved and put to a good use. We realize, however, that for many reasons this may not be a possible alternative.

At a minimum, the 1854 building can be saved, and it is of a size manageable enough to be reused. There are proposals for reuse as an historical and archive center and library that would be sympathetic to its historical significance. To allow this, the county must resolve not to demolish this building and to apply funds to the stabilization and mothballing of the structure. The demolition of an adjacent structure will endanger the 1854 building. It is imperative that the County take steps during demolition to reinforce the wall of the 1854 structure contiguous to the later addition.

PACNY hopes that the County can and will contribute an amount of funds and effort to this task equal to what it would take to demolish the 1854 structure (no small amount given the size and solid limestone construction of the old building), thus putting the money to the positive use of reinforcement rather than the negative act of demolition. PACNY has offered financial assistance, in the form of a \$5,000 challenge grant to the Town of Onondaga Historical Association to assist in this endeavor. If the building can be stabilized

and secured, there will be time to develop plans and funding for a new future.

*As a result of the urging of PACNY and others, the Legislature voted to postpone demolition, and to solicit demolition bids which would include the 1854 building and which would exclude it. As we go to press, at least two developers have expressed interest in the site, with plans to utilize at some of the existing structures. Threat of demolition is still great, but is no longer immediate.*



Former Onondaga Poor house, view of 1854 building (right) in context. Photo: Sam Gruber/PACNY

## ***Former Jewish War Veterans' Post Saved Due to PACNY Action***

by Samuel Gruber

Empty for several years, the Queen Anne building on the corner of East Genesee and Westcott, formerly known as the Jewish War Veterans' Post (although built in the 1890's as a private home), was saved in large part to quick action of PACNY board members. By working with Common Councilors Nancy McCarty and Karen Uplinger, PACNY successfully argued, in November 1996, for postponement of the requested demolition of the building pending a hearing of the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board (SLPB). The SLRB then recommended that the structure be listed as a protected site. In March 1997, the Common Council designated the building a Protected Site in accordance with Part C, Section VII, Article 8 of the city zoning law. PACNY recognizes the effort made for this designation by SLPB Chair Don Radke, Vice-Chair, Dean Biancavilla, and the members of the Westcott East Neighborhood Association (WENA).

Throughout the lengthy process PACNY members researched the history of the building, helped organize community support for its preservation, and



Former Jewish War Veteran's Post , 2000 E. Genesee St., Syracuse, after vandals smashed all the windows. Photo: S. Gruber/PACNY

privately lobbied and publicly testified as to the significance of the building as an important and worthy example of late nineteenth-century residential architecture.

Saving this building was very important for the historic and aesthetic integrity of the city's East Side. The building's size, siting and form all act to tie together the rich collection of houses nearby, on Westcott and East Genesee, most of which date from the 1880s to the 1920s. The site also serves as the gateway to the entire "Westcott Nation" neighborhood. Removal of this building would have destroyed the cohesion of an important intersection and significant urban vistas from every direction, especially from the west and north.

The house, with its generous porch and prominent tower, is one of the finest original structures remaining on East Genesee, witness to the first suburban expansion of the city to the east in the last quarter of the 19th century. It was first occupied by prominent Syracusans, and later served important community functions. First occupied by surgeon Archer Babcock, then local businessman Frank Shattuck, the building later became the Republican Club in the 1930's and the Jewish War Veterans' Post #131 after World War II.

During the process in which the building was designated a protected site and demolition plans halted, PACNY worked to find alternative uses for the structure. Midway through the process, an interested buyer emerged -- the artists' cooperative Altered Space. While Altered Space was looking for a new home, it was unclear if they could afford the combined purchase and restoration price, (increased due to the mysterious destruction of the building's windows the evening after demolition was postponed). Fortunately, Eastside Neighbors in Partnership (ENIP), a community-based federally funded housing provider, came forward as a partner for Altered Space. In the summer of 1997 ENIP purchased the building from the developer, and since then has been preparing plans for the rehabilitation of the structure for mixed-use (to include an arts center, community offices, and housing). As of March, 1998, ENIP and Altered Space are still raising money for the project -- expected to cost \$400,000. Despite this good news, until work commences, the building must still be considered endangered.

The architect Robert Gibbs, best known for helping design shopping malls and other suburban amenities spoke to the Syracuse Onondaga Planning Association at the time when the future of the Jewish War Veterans' Post building was in jeopardy. Mr. Gibbs made the point that cities cannot compete with shopping malls on the mall developers' terms. They can never win. Cities should instead treasure and market the assets they

have -- including the historic and intimate nature of their architecture and neighborhoods. It is this neighborhood character that the "new urbanism" is so desperately trying to recapture in their new communities.

Mayor Joseph Riley of Charleston, South Carolina, spoke at the same session as Mr. Gibbs and maintained that cities should promote "quality of life" by resisting pressures of short-term commercial interests which scar neighborhoods and by vigorously searching for beauty in construction and design. While different in many ways, Syracuse can still learn from Charleston's success.

The eleventh hour prevention of demolition of the Jewish War Veteran's Post, the recent demolition of nineteenth-century commercial buildings at Butternut and Lodi for the erection of a large Rite-Aid store, and the destruction of the Hine House in Nedrow for an Aldi's supermarket, demonstrate how massive changes can occur overnight in a neighborhood.

A better lesson for Syracuse can be learned from Armory Square, where in just a few short years, preservation of historic buildings has helped create an entirely new neighborhood identity and economy.



November, 1997 clean-up at former Jewish War Veterans' Post  
Photo: Doug Armstrong/PACNY

### PACNY WISH LIST

- A Computer with a least 12 MB RAM, 120 MB hard drive, and a fax modem.
- Laser or ink jet printer

### PACNY NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!!!

PACNY needs volunteers to research buildings, attend government hearings and meetings, edit *The Landmarker*, solicits members and sponsors, and more. Call PACNY at 475-0119.

# *Nedrow's Hine House Demolished, Despite Community Protests*

by Joanne Arany

Built in 1847, the Hine's family homestead was an unusual remnant of the Nedrow farming community. When Ambrose Hine built this brick farmhouse for his family, the surrounding village was called Rockwell Springs. Naturally flat landscapes twined with creeks and trout streams joined the Hines' to their neighbors, and to the borders and edges of the Onondaga Nation.

Through decades of growth and change the Hine House stood, operating as a farmstead until the 1960's. The house itself was representative of the Italianate style -- the interior a simple square of rooms intersected with a central hall and stairwell. The exterior boasted unique dropped "s"-eave brackets and the usual porch gingerbreading typical to the period.

The Hine House was unusual because the same family had retained ownership for 150 years. This direct association with an early farming family, taken together with the house's architectural style made the building eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The site also held great potential to be identified as an early Native American settlement. If the Town of Onondaga had a local preservation ordinance, the structure and its site would certainly have been eligible for local listing as well.

The lack of a preservation ordinance, however, was only one of the factors which brought the Hine House to its ultimate demise on November 20, 1997. As Nedrow residents Kathy and Brian Madigan, Marion Madigan and Jill Johnson Babinger, found out along with many of their friends and neighbors, lack of legal protections are among many of the pitfalls encountered when trying to preserve historic resources.

Economics typically drive the preservation or loss of historic resources and the Hine House situation was no different. In this case, however, the house was Economically viable. It had been successfully adaptively reused as professional office space bringing income to the owners, and paying taxes to the Town's coffers.

The structure was sound and in no need of major repair. Located on its site were historic remnants of bygone days: a small brick smokehouse and a fieldstone icehouse. As situated, the house contributed to the economic and aesthetic well-being of the general community.

All that changed when Aldi's (a European owned corporation) approached the family seeking to develop the site into a supermarket warehouse. Although many

appropriate sites were available nearby for such a development, Aldi's chose the site of the Hine House for its construction.



Ambrose Hine House, Nedrow, before demolition. Photo: Sam Gruber/PACNY

The Madigans first learned of Aldi's plans in July 1997. After a public town meeting, the Madigans realized they needed to act and proceeded to invite the involvement of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Nedrow/Town of Onondaga community members, and PACNY. In August, over 40 community members voiced their concern to the Town of Onondaga, urging them to reconsider their inclination to approve this development without considering the loss of the value of the historic resource. Pedestrian and vehicular safety traffic loads and the longevity of Aldi's commitment to the area were all brought to the table for discussion.

By September 15, community members discovered their eloquent and cogent arguments had been for naught, as the Town Planning Board voted unanimously to subdivide the site, and the Town Board voted 4-1 for the zoning change that would enable the new use proposed by Aldi's.

Jane Tracy, Town of Onondaga Historian, started referring other interested parties with re-development plans to the Madigan family. With their involvement there was hope that Town Board Members would realize that the structure could contribute to the economic vitality of the community. Some spoke of moving the structure, others talked about redeveloping the structure on site.

Community members were confident that the Town could offer Aldi's another site proximate to the Hine House that had undergone prior development within recent years. Vacant supermarkets and drugstores were among the choices -- all located within a half mile of the proposed development site.

During this time, Aldi's position was one of calculated dialogue. While they did not acknowledge the historic significance of this structure, they indicated they were willing to give the house to any taker. Should the structure ultimately be demolished, Aldi's promised the townspeople that they would salvage significant architectural detailing as well as relocate the smokehouse.

Aldi's sincerity was tested during the next few months as plans to move the house to an adjacent site began to gel. Beth Clemons (owner of an Eastwood bridal shop) was making every effort to redevelop the Hine House, relocate it in Nedrow and establish it as a bridal salon. A site was available, but it was revealed that Aldi's was negotiating for it simultaneously. Owned by Hess Corporation, the site was contiguous to the Hine House as it stood.

Hess had indicated that they would consider donating the site to a not-for-profit, but Aldi's was saying that they would buy it from Hess and sell it to Beth Clemons with the proviso that she install a plaque honoring Aldi's "involvement" with saving the house. PACNY, acting in advisory capacity since mid-August, volunteered to serve as the not-for-profit for the land donation, but it never came to pass. PACNY was also asked and agreed to serve as a conduit for those willing to donate funds to assist in the preservation of the Hine House. Working with the Madigans, PACNY organized a walking tour of Nedrow's historic resources, hoping to invite the participation of Town legislators and planners with an educational opportunity. Attendance was strong, but the Town did not act to save the Hine House.

In early November, Aldi's verbally expressed their willingness to give preservationists to the end of that month, or possibly until Christmas to make their arrangements to move the house. In the meantime, PACNY was exploring the connection to Native American settlements of the Onondaga Nation as there were solid indicators that what was once known as Onondaga Castle, was home to the Onondagans.

Much to their disappointment, townspeople discovered confirmation that gas tanks below grade on the Hess property would render the site too expensive for redevelopment. Events escalated. As Beth Clemons regretfully withdrew her development plans, Aldi's moved ahead with theirs. Although PACNY demonstrated that the structure could be retained on site with minor modifications

to Aldi's plans, bulldozers found their way to the homestead by mid-November.

Pressured by the legitimacy of the community's position, Aldi's acted in violation of Town permitting requirements and proceeded to destroy the ice house after clearing the lot. A huge chunk of roof was torn from the Hine House by the end of that day. That evening, PACNY, the Nedrow community and the Onondaga Nation held a press conference to try to attract last hour support.

Despite this effort, the house was gutted of its architectural detail over the next few days and on November 20th all trace of the house was obliterated.

Dear PACNY Members,

We would like to share our sincere appreciation for all the help and emotional support that was extended to us by Doug Armstrong, Joanne Arany, J.A. Evangelisti and Sam Gruber during our four month-long battle with Aldi's to save the Hine House in Nedrow. After going to Town Board meetings and meeting with community members once the Onondaga Town Board voted in favor of changing the zoning for Aldi's to purchase the Hine House property, we were desperate and about ready to give up. But along came these heroes of PACNY to help and support us. They were eager to get involved and help us on our mission.

While talking to Mark Peckham of the N.Y. State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, he suggested that maybe PACNY could help our cause and gave us Joanne's name. She toured the Hine House and attended the Town Board hearing, presenting to the Board her views on the preservation of the 1847 house. She encouraged us to attend some of their meetings to network with other PACNY members. Sam helped to start a walking tour of Nedrow during which Doug conversed with the residents to pull any information from them about the historical aspects of the area. This was well attended and helped to give some pride and sharing of common history amongst the community. Unfortunately, in the long run, all of this failed.

We thank them for giving us hope and trying to help us with numerous ideas to save the house. Hopefully, all of their hard work paid off in some way, maybe by making the Town Board think harder the next time they allow an historical building to be destroyed.

We are very glad we got to know such caring people somebody that does care about our history and our heritage. One thing we did learn from this experience was that it is important to get old buildings listed on the Historic Preservation List and we will strive to do this in our community.

Kathy and Brian Madigan  
Marion Madigan  
Jill Johnson Babinger  
(Nedrow Community Members)



PACNY Walking Tour Discusses Fate of Hine House.

## PACNY Explores Neighborhoods on Fall Walking Tours

Preservation Association members joined local architects and historians on three walking tours this past fall that were insightful and invaluable to the appreciation and understanding of our resources.

In September, Jamison Steele led a group through the Hawly-Green Historic District, showing off over a score of beautiful nineteenth-century residential buildings. Steele explained the positive effects of designation on the District, while pointing out the continuing difficulty of maintaining property values and establishing a vibrant residential and commercial community.

In October, PACNY Board members Doug Armstrong, J.A. Evangelisti, and Samuel Gruber led a walk through the Westcott Street neighborhood concentrating on the older sections of Westcott and Allen Streets south of East Genesee. The walk explored the initial turn-of-the-century Victorian and Queen Anne houses of the area, as well as several Arts and Crafts era homes designed by Ward Wellington Ward. Interspersed with the earlier buildings are Colonial-Revival houses of the 1920s, erected when the city urged owners to subdivide their lots to achieve greater urban density. The group toured the Jewish War Veteran's Post at Westcott and East Genesee (see story p. 4), saw traces of two former synagogues, and toured the newly restored home of Tim Cassavaw and Andrew Besemer, recipients of last year's PACNY TLC award. This farmhouse, which predates most of the surrounding homes, has been totally restored over the past nine months -- the third house on Allen Street that Cassavaw and Besemer have restored.

On November 8th, members of PACNY and residents of Nedrow and Onondaga assembled at the Nedrow firehouse to hear a lecture on the history of the town by Chuck Sarazin. Despite a rainstorm, the group continued with a visit to the imperiled Hine House to discuss its history and future with Onondaga Historian Jane Tracey and local activist Kathy Madigan. Unfortunately, in spite of tremendous effort, the Hine House was demolished in November (see story p. 6). The tour also included many other fine homes on South Salina Street with a visit to the former Onondaga Poor House (see story p. 3). The tour concluded with a dinner and discussion at Kelly's Restaurant.

## City Moves Ahead with Plans for "Avenue of the Arts"

On December 29, 1997, the Syracuse Common Council voted 7-2 in favor of proceeding with the so-called Avenue of Arts plan, an ambitious \$46.1 million development and educational initiative that will include the renovation of two Syracuse elementary schools, the rehabilitation and reuse of four downtown historic buildings and the creation of a Syracuse School District magnet school for the arts. While most details of the plan remain to be seen, including the plans for the downtown buildings, the mayor, the Council and the School Board have all endorsed the project.

Of particular concern for preservationists is the fate of several

structures: the long-empty Mizpah Towers on the corner of Montgomery and Jefferson, facing Columbus Circle; Reid and Peck Halls, both being vacated by Syracuse University; and the Metropolitan School for the Arts, located in the former Masonic Temple on Montgomery Street. Current plans call for a multi-million Dollar restoration of the Metropolitan School and for the building to be shared by Metropolitan and the School District, the rehabilitation of the First Baptist Church/Mizpah Towers to be used as an art technology center by the School District, and the temporary use of the Reid and Peck Halls to house the displaced elementary schools during

renovation, followed by occupation of the buildings by miscellaneous school offices and programs.



Peck Hall, Syracuse. Albert Brockman, architect (1896). Photo: Sam Gruber/PACNY

# ***City of Syracuse Passes Legislation to Aid Historic Property Owner***

On December 22, 1997, the Common Council of the City of Syracuse passed a "Local Law to Provide a Partial Exemption to Real Property Taxatio for Certain Historic Property" in accordance with the State of New York Real Property Tax Law (Chapter 183 of the Laws of 1997), amended to include Section 444, to provide a local option real property tax exemption related to historic properties. PACNY was one of four groups testifying before the Council urging passage.

The law provides for a limited freeze on increase of property tax assessments which result from owners improving the property in compliance with historic preservation standards. This affects only properties locally designated as historic sites. The legislation allows a 50% waiver in new property taxes due to increased property values. The State Law allowed municipalities a higher exemption -- 100% new taxes for the first five years. While supporting the law allowing the 50% waiver, PACNY continues to press for stronger legislation which would allow for the full 100% waiver. In January, the Rochester City Council passed legislation granting historic property owners in that city the full exemption allowed by the state law.

The new law will encourage investment in historic neighborhoods of Syracuse. By improving the quality of city life suburban flight can be discouraged. New residents and businesses can be attracted at no cost to the city, giving a real long-term gain in property value and probable tax revenues in the affected neighborhoods over the long term.

With this law the city has made a clear statement of support and recognition for the value of historic properties in the city, recognizing the contribution of well-maintained historic structures to the physical, emotional, aesthetic and economic life of Syracuse. As many neighborhoods across the city demonstrate -- architecturally intact and cohesive historic districts help foster strong communities. Because some historic property owners perceive having to make applications for small changes to the exterior by way of approval of the Syracuse Landmarks Preservation Board (SLPB) to be a burden, this legislation provides a perfect way of providing some appreciation and compensation for that effort.

In order to take full advantage of the law's potential, however, the City should take upon itself the responsibility to have more properties locally designated. Only by doing this will the law be fair to those people and districts that are not now on the list but are clearly eligible. For example, owners of properties in the (unlisted) West Onondaga district should enjoy the same advantages as owners in listed Sedgwick. Indeed, the law can dramatically encourage the retention and improvement in areas such as West Onondaga. The National Register Historic District at South Salina Street, where city code enforcement has already ordered the demolition of two NR listed houses because of deterioration and near collapse, is another area that might benefit from this law, ultimately benefiting the entire city. In such a district, if designated a Protected City District, the new law might well encourage re-investment in these buildings. It should be emphasized that sites and districts

listed on the National Register will not be automatically eligible for this tax assessment freeze under the proposed law, unless they are added to the city list.

PACNY will be available to assist in any effort to expand the city's list of historic structures, but ultimately, by existing law, it is the City's of Syracuse's responsibility to carry out this task. With passage of this law the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board is still required and expected to uphold its standards of review and not just approve applications under pressure to grant people their tax "freeze".

## **Preservation Association Board of Directors**

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The PACNY Board meets the third Tuesday of every month at 5:00 p.m. at the PACNY office, 650 James St., Syracuse. Meetings are open to all PACNY members.

## PACNY Compiles List of Threatened Historical Sites

Over the past year PACNY has concerned itself with several critical preservation "hotspots" where historic buildings and sites have been either demolished or threatened with demolition for new development without the knowledge of the immediate neighbors or the broader community. In emergency situations PACNY mobilizes its information and support to fight these threats. Even in successful efforts like the Jewish War Veterans Post on East Genesee, last minute efforts are the least effective or desirable way to implement good preservation policies. The best tools preservationists can have are information and time. To this end PACNY has initiated two lists and monitoring systems to assist our efforts in saving our past.

First, we have compiled a PACNY *Endangered Sites* list for our county in which additional properties can be added as information about their threatened status comes to attention. Second, there is a PACNY *Watch List* that will identify properties, districts, or building types that may be threatened over time and will require monitoring. This will include historic sites that have already been "saved" but whose repair, rehabilitation, conservation, or restoration may require monitoring or oversight. We have learned from past experience that even a well-intentioned promise to preserve a property can come to naught if the pressure to comply is not there.

PACNY will seek out information on tax delinquency, frequent code violations, abandonment, sale or pending sale, applications for demolition, government or legislative changes, or any other pertinent issues that could effect significant sites. This is an enormous job for which we must be able to count on our members for support. We have created a Web page for PACNY at <http://www.nyhistory.com/pacny> where the lists will be posted and updated on a regular basis. We encourage our members to be the eyes and ears that will inform the Preservation Committee of pending or potential threats to historic sites. PACNY has already initiated partnerships with community groups for the sharing of information. Our walking tours, which began last fall, will take these issues to the streets first hand.

Both the *Endangered Sites* list and the *Watch List* work in tandem with existing local, state, and federal lists. PACNY recognizes that these existing lists are the starting points for all monitoring and preservation efforts. The following is our first list of endangered sites, nominated by PACNY members and community organizations from around the county. This is only the beginning.

**Are you aware of a threatened historic building or site in Onondaga County? Let PACNY know. Contact the Preservation Committee c/o Sam Gruber, co-chair, tel. (315) 474-2350, fax (315) 474-2347, e-mail: [sdgruber@syr.edu](mailto:sdgruber@syr.edu)**

## ENDANGERED SITES LIST

### 1. Onondaga County Poorhouse:

The entire Poorhouse-Hospital complex is representative of the history of the country's methods and beliefs for caring for the poor, the disabled and the sick. The 1854 building, which ranks among the most important institutional buildings in the county can be saved. Proposals for its reuse as an historical and archive center and library are sympathetic to its historical significance. Onondaga Facilities Management slated the building for demolition unless funds for stabilization and "moth-balling" were in hand by March 1998. PACNY pledged \$5,000 to assist in this effort. As of March, 1998, however, bids for demolition had not been solicited and at least two buyers had expressed interest in purchasing and developing the site.



Wesleyan Methodist Church, Syracuse, during renovation, 1995. Photo: Sam Gruber/PACNY

### 2. Wesleyan Methodist Church Site:

Beneath this church is a series of partially intact, but extremely fragile, clay relief sculptures believed to have been created by hidden run-away slaves en route to freedom on the Underground Railroad. PACNY arranged initial stabilization of the reliefs. Negotiations and fund-raising are currently underway to decide their fate – whether they will stay in Syracuse, or be removed entirely from the city and state. For more information check the Wesleyan Methodist Church web site at: <http://www.nyhistory.com/wmc>

### 3. Onondaga Castle Site:

The site of the now-destroyed nineteenth-century Hine house is due to become a parking lot for Aldi's supermarket. However, this site -- known as Onondaga Castle -- is an archaeologically sensitive area critical to our understanding of the Native American history of the region. PACNY questions why the Onondaga Town Supervisors checked the negative impact box on the environmental assessment form when they know that the Onondaga occupied this area is from 1720-1779. The farmhouse is gone but the developer does not yet have a building permit.

### 4. Reid Hall) and Peck Hall (University College):

Syracuse University no longer occupies these fine late 19th - early 20<sup>th</sup> century institutional buildings. They are now scheduled to be reused as part of the "Avenue of the Arts" development by the City of Syracuse and the Syracuse School Systems. Details concerning their rehabilitation/restoration remain unknown.

### 5. Former Kasey's (Kress) Drugstore, Park & Butternut Street:

The three-story Romanesque Revival brick commercial building, designed by noted Syracuse architect Archimedes Russell, was recently sold. The corner location is conducive for the needs of modern drugstores or drive-in food stores which makes this a severely threatened resource. Butternut was once a vibrant North Side commercial street, but the development of supermarkets and malls has greatly affected its ability to compete.

### 6. Nineteenth-century commercial buildings on West side of Butternut between Lodi and McBride:

These two structures are under-utilized and are for sale. They are

adjacent to the site where buildings were recently demolished for the erection of a large Rite-Aid. These structure, too, are now at extreme risk. Number 501 Butternut is a large mid-block three story brick building with patterned brickwork.



Peck Hall. Photo: Sam Gruber/ PACNY



Reid Hall. Photo: Sam Gruber/ PACNY



East Syracuse First Presbyterian Church, East Syracuse. Photo: S. Gruber/PACNY

### 7. Former East Syracuse First Presbyterian Church, East Syracuse:

This 1896 shingle-style church is located at a key juncture of the commercial and residential sections of East Syracuse. Designed by M.H. Hubbard of Utica, the building is the oldest religious structure in East Syracuse. The church interior is noted for its diagonal layout, sloped radial seating and corner altar. The church is under threat of demolition by Village of East Syracuse.

### 8. Former Jewish War Veterans' Post:

Local Protected status has been granted, but until renovation plans are implemented it is still endangered. By listing this we remind the community that sites are endangered until the restoration project is well underway.

### 9. 1st Baptist Church / Mitzpah Towers:

A vacant church at the heart of the historic Columbus Circle district, this property is part of the "Avenue of the Arts" project, to include restored auditorium, classroom and office space. The plans are only in the preliminary phases -- with no feasibility study, no structural report, and no preservation plan.

### 10. Nineteenth-century block at the SE corner of South Geddes and Gifford, and 1920s bank on NE corner:

The fine brick Victorian storefront, with its 1895 date boldly inserted in its gable was formerly rehabbed as the "Street of Shoppes". The building is now for sale and is rumored to be targeted for a drugstore. Across Gifford Street is another endangered structure -- a 1920s classical bank, originally the Geddes branch of First Trust & Deposit and most recently a Key Bank.

# Post Mortem: Liverpool's The Railroad House

by Dorianne Gutierrez

Yet another piece of the past has been bulldozed in the Village of Liverpool. Perhaps someone will offer a remnant brick to the Village Museum, cradling it in both hands saying "Too bad it had to go: here's a brick we saved for you." A few more buildings gone and we could construct a new one with these carefully preserved fragments.

Today's casualty is the Railroad House Saloon, an 1870 Italianate commercial building with two stories of brick rocked by years of passing trains. The tracks were laid in Liverpool in 1871 with the depot standing conveniently adjacent to the Railroad House Saloon, which offered refreshments, the inevitable cigars, and transient accommodations. The RW&O took over the track in 1875 when there were still compelling commercial reasons to travel to the North Country, and the New York Central took its turn in the 1890s. The depot was moved across Route 57, still next to the tracks, but behind today's Heid's hot dog stand.

Despite the moving of the depot, the Railroad House remained. The news coverage of the demolition inaccurately reported that the long-gone train depot had

been destroyed, as if depots are somehow more worthy of preservation than saloons.

Not in Liverpool, where the Railroad House and similar ventures typified the community. The texture of life in this village in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was entrepreneurial, commercial and industrial; few had the means to build grand houses, and fewer still the leisure to enjoy them. The Oswego Canal, the salt industry, and the willow business were the heart, lungs and muscle of the village. If you didn't make a living directly at one of the big three, chances are you made your living off them by running a store, a saloon, or a boarding house. The Railroad House was one of these ventures.

From the 1830s, the "First Street" business district served the canal and the salt blocks. The Railroad House was built in the 1870s, in a district a few blocks northeast, which in a similar fashion served the new railroad. The saloon's neighbors were coal yards, a willowware manufactory, a foundry, a brickyard, modest houses, and willow fields – and within two or three blocks, three more saloons; and within five or six blocks, an additional five or six saloons.



Railroad House / Wunnicke's Place, Liverpool. Photo c. 1890, courtesy of Liverpool Village Historian's Office

The records of the Excise Commissioners (1872-1895) who granted liquor licenses, shows the owner and presumably builder as German emigrant Fred Gross who owned the property from 1860-1886 then passed it on to Michael Heid (of the local political and hot dog dynasty) who ran the saloon until 1888. After changing owners twice in two years, the saloon prospered as Wunnicke's well into this century. Locals recall the saloon as Steve's restaurant and for the past twenty-five years it was Murphy's Trackside.

In 1997, Young & Franklin Inc., a local industry whose expanding property now includes the site of the Railroad House quickly demolished the building after purchase. The site will be a parking lot.

Some would hold that saloons and boarding houses and other such pieces of history are best forgotten, but to forget these and destroy their settings is to destroy the patchwork of Liverpool's history. This place was not a sleepy New England village or a stable agricultural community. It was a volatile mix of ever-new waves of immigrants, eyes out to the main chance and willing to move on for it. The artifacts they left – their buildings in particular – are what give Liverpool at least a share of that increasingly scarce commodity, a sense of place: this *particular* place, and no other.

Some weeks ago I displayed at the Village Museum a seven-foot artificial Christmas tree, circa 1920, made of wire and goose feather dyed a dubious green. It came from Mamie Wunnicke's house. When I

first unwrapped it I was stunned by the ghost breath of century-old cigar smoke and what? Stale Beer? It was donated by Emma Therre. With the loss of all those houses and saloons this tree, spindly and frankly balding, is about all that says, "We weren't grand house builders, but we were here. We made this place."

But I'm forgetting all those memorial bricks. Oh, I know – let's make a "living" history site! That is, history as interpreted by well-meaning undertakers, who deck the corpse in its best suit and carefully rouge its cheeks. We destroy the past because to do so is momentarily expedient; then, with those reverently preserved memorial bricks we reconstruct it to our own liking. We people our reconstruction with appropriately costumed characters, marvelous because they perform "out of character" – the character *we* have defined for them.

Recently I received an anonymous letter. The writer thought that someone should be interested to know that Heid's hot dog stand, that Liverpool Moderne icon, may soon be sold and demolished to make way for a "completely different kind of business." Already suffering a self-inflicted identity crisis, Liverpool needs a motto to carve into its fancy village limits signs. How about "going, going, gone"?

*Dorianne Gutierrez is the Liverpool Village Historian and a member of the PACNY Board.*

## PACNY Thanks its 1997 Members for Their Support!!!

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There is no easier way to contribute than by cash. For larger gifts, however, consider these alternatives:

### **GIFTS OF STOCK**

With recent stock market gains, this may be one of the very best times to consider a gift of stock. Giving long term appreciated stock offers you a two-fold tax savings. First, you avoid paying any capital gains tax on the increase in value of your stock. In addition, you receive a tax deduction for the full fair market value of the stock on the date of the gift. For income tax purposes the value of such gifts may be deducted up to 30% of adjusted gross income, with an additional five-year carry forward.

### **GIFTS OF REAL ESTATE**

If you have owned your home, a vacation home, acreage, or a farm for many years, a charitable gift of that real estate can be especially tax-advantageous. The property may have so appreciated in value over the years that its sale would result in a sizable capital gains tax. If given outright to us instead, you avoid the tax and, at the same time, realize a charitable deduction for the full fair market value of the real estate.

### **GIFTS OF LIFE INSURANCE**

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### **LIFE INCOME GIFTS**

With money market rates at about 5% -- and many stocks paying less than 2% in dividends -- your gift of cash or stocks to PACNY, made in the form of a "life income gift", can actually increase your income!

A life income gift allows you to transfer assets now, and yet continue to receive the income from the cash, stock, or other property contributed. A life income gift can allow you to: 1) increase your income for life; 2) receive a generous charitable contribution deduction in 1998, and 3) if you contribute stock, avoid any capital gains tax on appreciation! A life income gift is also made through a trust arrangement called a "unitrust" or an "annuity trust." With a unitrust, you and/or your spouse (or any other beneficiary) receive annually a fixed percentage of the fair market value of the assets in the trust. The income received will vary from year to year, based upon how the trust's investments perform. With an annuity trust, you and/or your spouse (or any other beneficiary) receive a fixed amount from the trust. This amount is agreed upon when you create the trust; it stays constant, no matter what happens with the stock market or interest rates. For tax planning purposes, if you have already considered a provision for us in your will, a life income gift often allows you to accomplish your goals during your lifetime -- and in a tax-advantaged way.

### **BEQUESTS**

If you are considering a gift now, why not consider long term tax savings, too? The federal estate tax can easily take 37% to 55% of one's estate at time of death. That's a higher tax bite than income tax! It pays to make plans with your attorney and other professional advisors. PACNY can be named as a beneficiary in a will in any one of a number of simple ways. In many cases you can easily add us to your will through a simple amendment called a codicil; thus your entire will does not have to be redrafted.

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**For more information contact PACNY treasurer Vic Vaccaro, at (315) 475-0119**

**Preservation Association of Central New York  
650 James Street  
Syracuse, NY 13203  
telephone: (315) 475-0119**

## **PACNY ANNUAL MEETING AND AWARDS DINNER**

Traditions of Syracuse Restaurant, 201 S. Salina Street  
Sunday, April 26, 1998

**Cash Bar Reception: 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.**

**Dinner: 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.**

### **PACNY ANNUAL MEETING**

**Welcome & President's Report, 7:00 p.m.**

**Guest Speaker: Stanley Smith,  
Executive Director, Historic Boston, 7:30 p.m.**

**Presentation of PACNY 1998 Preservation Awards, 8:15 p.m.**