

The PRESERVATIONIST

Newsletter of
the SPRINGFIELD PRESERVATION TRUST

Winter 1994

TOUGH BREAK FOR SPRINGFIELD: STEIGER'S CLOSES DOWNTOWN STORE

Shock waves rippled through the region with the announcement that the venerable Steiger's Department Store chain was being sold. Even more of a blow was the news that the flagship Downtown Springfield store would be closed. Steiger's has had a presence in Downtown since 1906. Its store is really made up of eight buildings acquired and incorporated as the business grew. The first acquisition was at the corner of Main and Hillman street (now closed); the last was at the corner of Main and Bridge Street in 1957. In 1930, Steiger's bought the business of Charles Hall and relocated it into their store as Hall's Galleries. The same year, the Art Deco style facade was added along Hillman Street. After World War II, the Main Street side was redesigned to match. Steiger's was probably the most notable Art Deco facade in Western Massachusetts until it was marred by the addition of a ponderous second story airwalk to Baystate West in the early 1970's and then, in the early 1980's, by the second story mall of Center Square (SIS Center). At the time, the Trust had unsuccessfully argued that the Hillman Street facade should be handled with care. Center Square argued that it needed to build over Hillman Street and abut Steiger's in order to get as much retail space as possible. Unfortunately, the mall has never been a success and, in fact, its second floor space has been turned into offices.

Continued on Page 3



The Steiger's store in better days

ALL NEW "PORCHES, PERGOLAS AND PARLORS" LECTURES TO START

Get ready to attend the second in a series of lectures on residential homes, architecture, and landscapes presented by the Trust, in conjunction with the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum. "Porches, Pergolas and Parlors" will be held on Tuesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 in the Museum of Fine Arts auditorium at the Springfield Quadrangle just off of State Street. Tickets for each lecture will be available at the door for \$4 for members of the Springfield Library & Museums or the Trust (\$5 for non-members). Tickets are only \$3 for those who are members of both organizations. (See schedule on Page 2)



SPT CALENDAR

Monthly meetings
held at 7:30 P.M. in
the **Memorial House at Mercy Hospital**

Next meetings are
March 2, April 6 and May 4

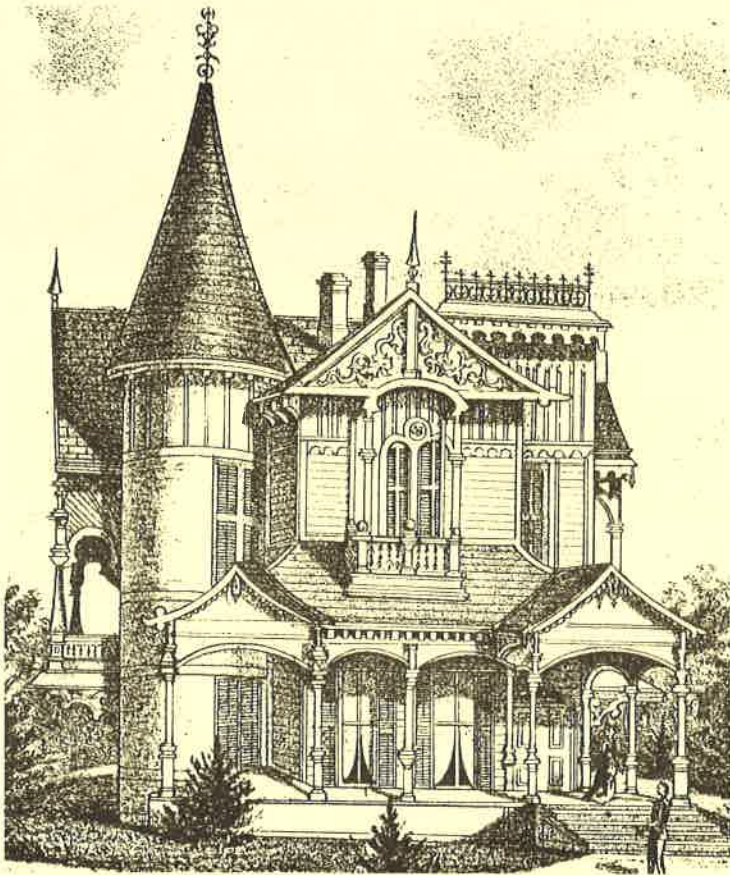
Spring Lecture Series
"Porches, Pergolas and Parlors II"
March 15, March 29 and April 12

**"PORCHES, PERGOLAS AND
PARLORS"
LECTURE SCHEDULE**

March 15 - "**The Eclectic and the Modern: Springfield Residential Architecture from 1900 to 1950**". The Trust is pleased to welcome Kathleen Kelly Broomer, Preservation Planner, Massachusetts Historical Commission, who conducted a survey in 1992 of the Pine Point section of Springfield and presented a talk on the Craftsman-style architecture found there. Ms. Broomer will present an architectural history of Springfield homes from the turn-of-the-century to the post-war era. This period is well-known for its Colonial, Dutch Colonial and Georgian Revivals, as well as English Tudors, Craftsman, Mission and Queen Anne styles. If you are still uncertain as to the style of your home after hearing Ms. Broomer, she can help you analyze it if you bring a photograph.

March 29 - "**Period Garden Design and Plantings**". This lecture will be presented by Rudy J. Favretti, historical landscape architect and Professor Emeritus, Landscape Architecture, University of Connecticut, Storrs. Professor Favretti is the author of For Every House a Garden and Landscapes and Gardens for Historical Buildings. Learn from a well-known authority on period horticulture about appropriate options for the gardens of period homes and how to restore historic ambience to your landscape. Historically suitable plantings and designs for your gardens will be discussed.

April 12 - "**The Japan Craze: Art and Life in Victorian America**". We are pleased to announce the return of Mr. William Hosley, Curator, American Decorative Arts, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. Victorian America's relationship with Japan is one of the most important chapters in American art history. Following its debut at America's Centennial Exhibition in 1876, Japan sought to compete aggressively with the nations of Europe for a share of the booming "art goods" market. Explore the "Japan Craze" which resulted in the domination of Japanese taste in the arts as never seen before or since.





CAN YOU GUESS?

This barren scene could not always have been like this, not in the middle of a densely populated neighborhood on the corner of Oak Street and Walnut Street in the Old Hill neighborhood. While there is currently a swimming pool under this layer of snow (the Barrows Pool), there was something else named Barrows here before. Turn to Page 7 and see what it was. (Please take note of the large old tree in both photos. Is it perhaps the same tree?)

STEIGER'S continued from Page 1

Mayor Markle has appointed a task force to consider reuse of the property as well as the Steiger family's offer to donate the building to the city. Sadly, there are already voices calling for the demolition of the building for yet more parking. The Steiger's building has been a landmark in Springfield for most of this century and it ought to continue as an anchor for this block into the 21st century. Even with empty windows, it will contribute more to the streetscape than acres of windswept asphalt. Its design remains more interesting than those newer buildings whose construction compromised its integrity. The Trust urges the reuse of the building - whether for retail, office, entertainment or any combination. To those who argue for more surface parking, we respond; Remember the damage caused by Center Square's quest for all the retail space it could get! Let us not let this history repeat itself!

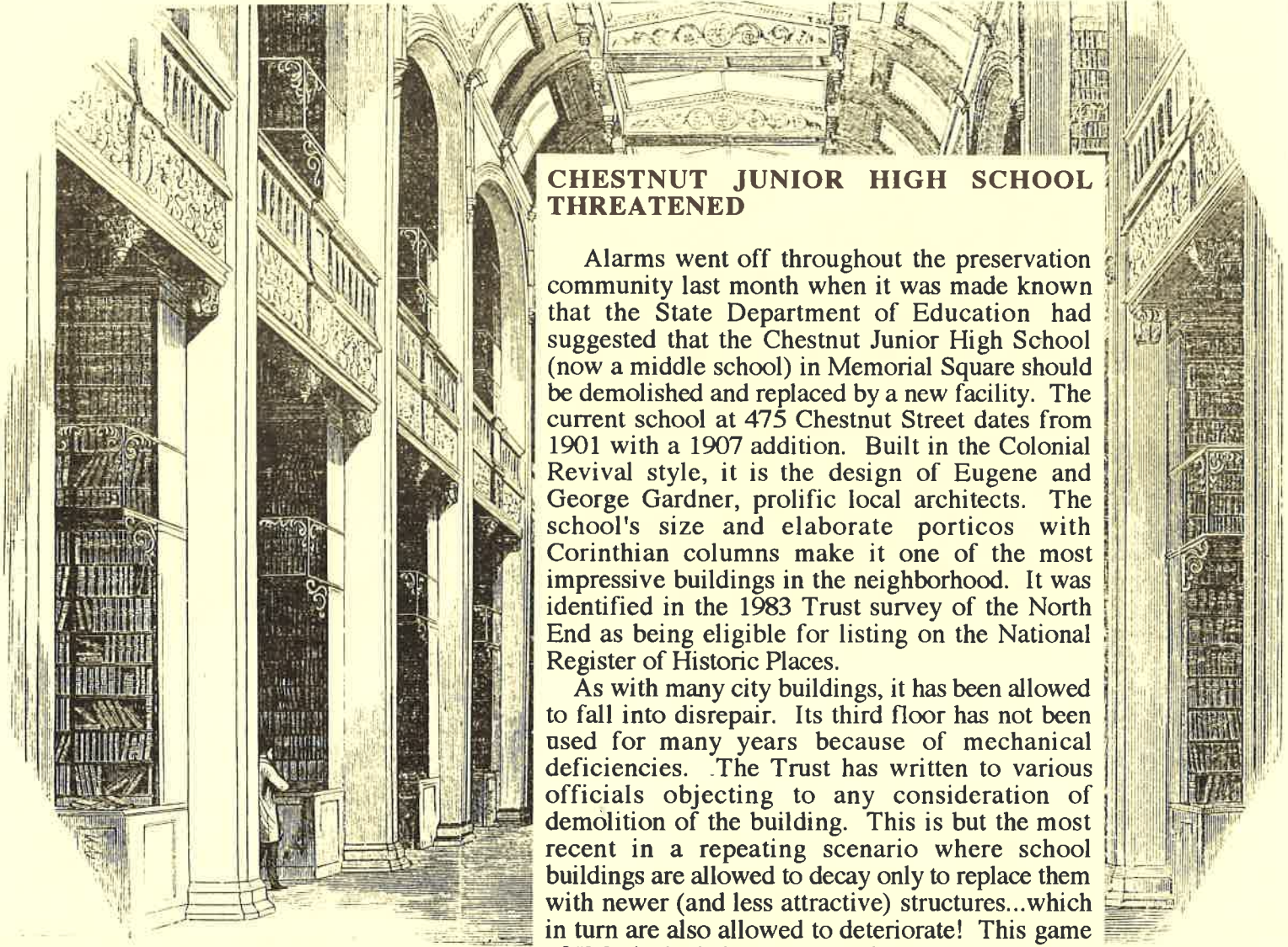


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**CHESTNUT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
THREATENED**

Alarms went off throughout the preservation community last month when it was made known that the State Department of Education had suggested that the Chestnut Junior High School (now a middle school) in Memorial Square should be demolished and replaced by a new facility. The current school at 475 Chestnut Street dates from 1901 with a 1907 addition. Built in the Colonial Revival style, it is the design of Eugene and George Gardner, prolific local architects. The school's size and elaborate porticos with Corinthian columns make it one of the most impressive buildings in the neighborhood. It was identified in the 1983 Trust survey of the North End as being eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

As with many city buildings, it has been allowed to fall into disrepair. Its third floor has not been used for many years because of mechanical deficiencies. The Trust has written to various officials objecting to any consideration of demolition of the building. This is but the most recent in a repeating scenario where school buildings are allowed to decay only to replace them with newer (and less attractive) structures...which in turn are also allowed to deteriorate! This game of "Musical Chairs" must stop!

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Jim Boone receives the special Donald E. Campion award at the Annual Reception.

ANNUAL RECEPTION IS WELL-ATTENDED

Sunday the 21st of November saw a packed Guild Room at the South Congregational Church for the annual meeting and recognition reception. Elected as officers were President Wilfred Stebbins, Vice Presidents for Education Jo Sarnelli and Michael Plumly, Vice president for Advocacy, Linda Gebo, Secretary Terry Ward and Treasurer Marilyn Sutin. The 1994 Board of Directors is John Bellows, Jim Boone, Ted Devanski, Bill Devlin, Diane Fisher, Lynne Goldberg, Roger Harris, Gary Lewis, Bob McCarroll, Sarah Murray, Anne Rice, Dan and Lisa Sotak-Cooper, Mike Stevens and Sandy Vella.

The Trust also honored a wide range of individuals and groups for their preservation efforts. They included:

- Karen Bogdanovich and Ed Lonergan for exterior restoration of 110 Clarendon Street.
- Mary Harris for restoration of fire damage at 50 Dartmouth Street.
- Mary Ragland for removal of siding at 11 Yale Street.
- Karen Rucks for renovation of the vacant house at 131-133 Sherman Street.

- John Tansey for the renovation of the vacant house at 76 Florida Street.
- Carlo DiLizia for restoration of the 1835 Bangs Block at 463-465 State Street.
- The Stefan Agency for renovations to the 1907 Beaux Arts Union Trust Building at 1351 Main Street.
- Christ Church Cathedral for careful stewardship of its 1874 church at 35 Chestnut Street.
- Shawmut Bank for careful stewardship of its 1933 Art Moderne bank building at 127 State Street.
- The Spaghetti Warehouse for adaptive reuse of the industrial building at 60 Congress Street.

The special Donald E. Campion Award for Outstanding Achievement in Historic Preservation was awarded to James Boone. Jim has been an active member of the Trust since its revitalization in the mid-1970's. He served a term as President and numerous terms as Vice President for Advocacy. Jim has been a guide on our bus and walking tours, narrated our architectural video, coordinated our house restoration efforts and lectured on various preservation issues. He also serves on the Springfield Historical Commission and is active in neighborhood activities in McKnight. Congratulations, Jim!

ASK THE TRUST

Starting with this issue, the Trust is beginning a new column as a service to our members. We will answer your questions about issues of historic preservation, house restoration, researching house history, contractors, decorating or anything else of interest to you. Please send your questions to: Jim Boone, 97 Florida Street, Springfield, MA 01109. All questions will be answered either in the newsletter or in person. We encourage you to write us!

Our first questions are about the relationship of the Trust to the Historical Commission, as well as the Historic Districts themselves: what are they and how do they work? The reply is written by Roger Harris, who is the Trust's representative on the Historical Commission.

Q. What is the relationship of the Springfield Preservation Trust to the Springfield Historical Commission?

A. The Springfield Preservation Trust (SPT) is a volunteer, non-profit organization founded in 1972 and dedicated to preserving Springfield's built environment. The SPT provides education and advocacy functions, including tours of historic buildings, lectures and annual preservation awards. During the 1980's, it restored five seriously deteriorated houses and relocated another.

The Springfield Historical Commission (SHC) is a public body, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council, charged with specific duties as stated in local ordinance and state laws. These duties include the preservation and promotion of Springfield's historic assets through actions relating to local and national historic districts guidelines and preservation restrictions. The SHC has a number of designated seats filled by representatives of certain groups, including the SPT. The quest for an SPT seat was initiated by the SPT in 1982 and filled by Mayor Hurley in 1991 with the appointment of Roger S. Harris. Over the last twenty years, a few present and past SPT members have also held undesignated seats on the SHC.

Q. Is there a way to find out about the guidelines and regulations pertaining to the historic districts?

A. Yes! Simply call the Springfield Planning Department at 787-6020 between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. during a weekday and request a copy of the guidelines for the particular district you live in. The Department has a part-time SHC staff person, Mr. Bill McGrath, who will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Q. If you are in a historic district and suspect that a neighbor is not adhering to the historic preservation guidelines, what are your rights?

A. Call the Springfield Historical Commission staff person at the Springfield Planning Department (787-6020) promptly so that the situation can be checked into and stopped if deemed inconsistent with the guidelines. The building owner will then have to file an application with the SHC for a Certificate to allow the work to proceed. A public hearing is scheduled and all abutters are notified. The SHC can deny the applicant the right to proceed with any changes inconsistent with local Historic District guidelines and Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws.

Next issue: Learn how historic districts are established and more...





CAN YOU GUESS? Continued from page 3.

The large brick Barrow School occupied this site for years until it was eventually demolished. It harkens back to a time when every neighborhood had its own school and all children had to walk to school. Note the decorative Victorian fencing. Do you recall seeing this fence somewhere else? In upcoming newsletters we'll be doing a feature entitled "Wandering Artifacts" which will highlight architectural elements from Springfield that have "traveled" to be reused in other places.



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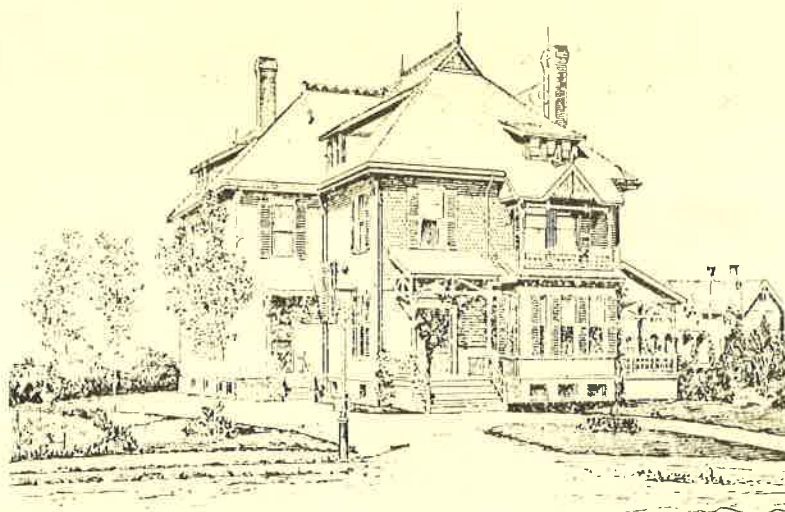
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Springfield Preservation Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic structures in the City of Springfield, Massachusetts.

HISTORIC HOME TOUR PLANNED FOR AUTUMN

The Trust's next Historic House Tour is being planned for early Autumn 1994, following a one year hiatus. The tour has been shifted from its usual scheduled date in the Spring to one in the Fall in an effort to avoid other tours which occur in May and to provide adequate time for publicity by our new co-sponsor, the Springfield Library and Museum Association. This joint venture with the museums was inspired by our successful lecture series in 1993, also co-sponsored by the Association.

Any of our readers who would be interested in opening their house for the tour or working on the tour should contact Jo Sarnelli at 746-9067.



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