

The PRESERVATIONIST

Newsletter of
the SPRINGFIELD PRESERVATION TRUST

Spring 1995

IS THE GLASS HALF-FULL?

Steiger's is gone. Arguably the most ornate art deco facade in all of Western Massachusetts now lies somewhere in a landfill. Another of Springfield's landmark buildings has disappeared without a definite plan for reuse of its site. One could look at this as the glass being half-empty.

But with Steiger's demise also came the demise of the notorious AIRWALK. The ponderous, fortress-like structure looming over Main Street is gone! Perhaps the glass is half-full after all.

For nearly a quarter-century, the ill-conceived Airwalk darkened the downtown sidewalks and cut Main Street in half. Like Berlin after the Wall, Main Street is now whole again. Many positive comments being heard around town about the new, sunlit and airy Main Street are due to the removal of the looming Airwalk itself and NOT the removal of the Steiger's building. One wonders what the reaction might have been if the Airwalk had been the first item to be removed from the site instead of the last. It would have been nice to see the Steiger's building without the horrific appendage at least once before its demolition.

Come visit downtown to experience the changes. Stand at Boland Way and look north to the historic Fuller Block and Worthy Hotel, now visible in their entirety, and to East Mountain rolling gently in the distance. Walk down to Bridge Street and look south to the Masonic Building clock tower and on to the greenery of Maple Street hill. Even the Baystate West building looks better! Compare in your mind the shadowy Main Street of the recent past to the Main Street of the present and resolve that it should never again be marred by another Airwalk.



Unimpeded view of Main Street, minus the "Airwalk"

NORTH END TOUR IN THE WORKS

During the fight to save the historic Chestnut Street School from demolition, the Trust found strong support from neighborhood residents. The New North Citizens Council was an invaluable ally in persuading the City to find another location for a proposed new middle school which would have destroyed not only Chestnut but many surrounding houses. It was evident that the Council took pride in the landmark buildings of its neighborhood.

To further spread the word about the rich, architectural heritage which exists in the North End, the Trust has decided to hold a guided walking tour of the many historic structures to be found there. The tour is tentatively set for Sunday, October 1. More information will come in the next newsletter.



SPT CALENDAR

Monthly meetings held at 7:30 p.m.
in the Wesson Board Room on
the High St. Campus of Baystate Medical Center
Next meetings are
May 3, June 7, and July 5

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The Trust would like to welcome the following new members: Joe Nadeau, Christopher H. Gauthier, Mary Boland, John Collier, Rosemary Moran, Stephen and Linda Fisher, Ron and Myra Smith, Marc and Mary Prince, James and Linda Craven, Berkley and Rose-Anne Bennett, Stanley Dorance Gauger, Ron Rouillard Jr., Michael Nadeau, Stephen and Kelly Cary, Barry Gordon, Conrad W. Eberhardt, John Tansey, Carlo A. Marchetti, David Jordan, and Edward J. Forest.

The Springfield Preservation Trust

This newsletter is published quarterly for the members of the Springfield Preservation Trust, Inc., 979 Main Street, Springfield, MA 01103

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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.



CAN YOU GUESS?

We have all noticed the attractive additions being put onto the old Milton Bradley building at the corner of Maple and Union Streets. Originally home to the Insurance Company of North America, we can admire this handsome Colonial-style edifice as one of the finer buildings on a street lined with nice older homes, row houses, 1920's apartment buildings and new, less-than-beautiful office buildings. But was the site vacant before all this 20th-century development occurred? Turn to Page 7 and see.

CELEBRITY HOMES TOUR A SUCCESS

Visitors from Boston to the Berkshires travelled to Springfield on Sunday, May 7th for the Trust's 18th Annual Tour of Homes. This year's "Tour of Celebrity Homes" encompassed a wide selection of building styles and the personalities that live in them.

The Springfield Sunday Republican billed the event as a "tour of politician's homes". The tour did include the residences of Mayor and Mrs. Markel, former Mayor Charles Ryan and Mrs. Ryan, and former City Councilwoman Kateri Walsh, as well as other civic and arts leaders in Springfield.

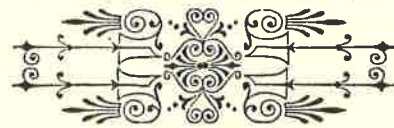
The Rectory of St. Michael's Cathedral was opened to the general public for the first time in many years. The stunning Italianate Victorian-style interior also included a surprise "high-tech" designer kitchen installed in the 1980's.

Another surprise was the fish pond and waterfall in the garden of Springfield Central's Carlo Marchetti. The cottage-style house had been saved from the wrecking ball only a decade ago.

Rounding out the tour was the 1870's townhouse of performance artist Vickie Phillips and her husband Stanley Chiz. The early 20th-century home of Judge Joseph Pellegrino and Mrs. Pellegrino represented the Atwater neighborhood.



A steady stream of tourgoers visits one of many fine homes.



TRUST LECTURE PONDERES THE FATE OF CITIES

The Trust sponsored a lecture and reception at STCC on April 9, 1995, "Our Town: Downtown: Where Did It Go? Why Care?" The session was led by Brian Pfeiffer, the Vice President for Conservation and Preservation at SPNEA (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities), an organization headquartered in Boston.

The lecture began with the audience being asked to identify a slide showing a busy city intersection. After many guesses ranging from Sixteen Acres to Mason Square, Mr. Pfeiffer confessed that the picture was not from Springfield at all, but of one of the Boston suburbs. His point was that, in contemporary cityscapes, one corner looks pretty much like another one. This modern phenomena evolved along with the widespread reliance on the automobile. Today, people no longer choose to live close to downtown (or in the city at all) since they now have the ability to commute long distances to work. The vast highway network has

allowed for the growth of retail chains rather than unique family stores (such as Steiger's or Forbes & Wallace); these retail chains prefer locations easily accessible by car, i.e. malls. Even many businesses traditionally located downtown have now begun to find suburban locations. As a result, cities no longer evolve to accommodate people and their homes, businesses and shops, but to allow for easy automobile access. Streets are widened, buildings removed and turned into parking lots or garages. Intersections are filled with traffic signals and cluttered with billboards and signs.

In contrast, photographs from the 19th-century showed grand homes located close to Main Street with large front yards and tall trees. In front of each house stood a proud resident. It was an era when people had their pictures taken in front of their house or place of business to show pride in their property or their association with a company. In the more mobile world of today, homes are more temporary and seldom built to individual specifications.

continued on page 5

CHESTNUT SCHOOL GETS A REPRIEVE

It appears that one more historic structure may be removed from the endangered building list. Thanks to an alternate proposal for the development of a new middle school, the Chestnut School will remain intact. According to the School Committee, a new structure will be located in the Brightwood section of Springfield adjacent to the German Gerena school. The Chestnut School will undergo minor repairs and alterations to become the location for the City's alternative education programs. The plan initially proposed for the site called for the demolition of the building, as well as the probable demolition of the Italianate-style Strong mansion located directly behind the school. The Chestnut Knoll Nursing Home, also adjacent to the site, was also threatened by this proposal.

All three buildings have important connections to the history of Springfield. The school was built in the first quarter of the 20th century by Eugene C. Gardner, the architect of such well known buildings as the Worthy Hotel, the Trolley Barn, Springfield Hospital, and Technical High School. He served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and published six books on architecture which are often referred to by contemporary scholars of American architecture.

The Strong Mansion is one of the few large estates remaining which once dotted the area. Most of these houses, built between 1850 and 1880, were in the Italianate or Second Empire style. The original Mercy Hospital building and the rectory of Our Lady of the Rosary Church (on Franklin Street) are two other remaining examples. The Chestnut School was built on what was formerly the front lawn of the Strong house.

Chestnut Knoll, designed in 1900 by the noted Springfield architect Guy Kirkham, was founded by members of prominent Springfield families; included on the first Board were Marvin Chapin, O.H. Greenleaf, Mrs. Chester Chapin, Angela Stebbins, and William Birnie. The home was created to provide comfort and shelter to destitute elderly women in the city.

Fast action on the part of the Springfield Preservation Trust probably had an effect on the final decision to save the school and its surrounding properties. Letters and telephone calls to the city council and school committee, as well as attendance at the North End Citizen's Council meeting, made the city aware of the threat to the historic fabric of the neighborhood.



VOLUNTEERS WANTED

to assist our Board of Directors with production of our events (lectures, home tours, etc.). If you would like to help, please leave your name and phone number on *TRUSTVOICE*, the SPT phonenumber, 747-0656.

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Mr. Pfeiffer pointed out that Preservation Societies were originally formed only to preserve the homes of historic figures, leading to "museum"-type preservation projects. Current thinking is that preserving empty buildings is not sufficient and that it is important to include not just historical sites but the architecture of an era for its own sake. He outlined several ways this can be accomplished: (1) The growth of cities is cyclical. During hard times many buildings become vacant. Municipal governments must resist the temptation to tear down these vacant buildings. The economy inevitably picks up again and downtown footage will again be in demand. Older buildings were built to last. Even if a building is vacant for ten years, it is more cost effective to maintain it in an empty state than to tear it down and build it again later. As an example of this folly, it was pointed out that Union Station has been built and destroyed three times! Each successive building lost some of its grandeur and yet each was far more costly to

build. (2) An economically viable use must be found for a building unless you intend to become very good at fund raising. Creative ideas are needed to change the use of a building so that it will attract a paying tenant or buyer. (3) Keep the scale of preservation small. A single major tenant or buyer will have to invest heavily to renovate an entire building or block. By seeking out several smaller entrepreneurs, it will be much easier to recoup an investment that is correspondingly small. Several successful small businesses will attract other businesses, while a large business that fails miserably will scare away other investors for a long time.

The lecture ended with a slide showing busy downtown streets filled with people and trolleys and lined on either side by countless shops and businesses. It turned out to be Springfield at the turn-of-the-century. It reemphasized the point that cities originally grew to accommodate the needs of their residents and that there is hope that they may do so once again.

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ENDANGERED PROPERTIES UPDATE

The "Top 10" list remains unchanged from our previous issue. With attitudes and economics being what they are right now, we could probably do a "Top 1000" list and still come up short on all the threatened locations. One prominent example: The Paramount Theatre is now for sale - what is going to happen to it?

While there are still various ideas, some rather intriguing, being floated for some of these properties, the winning combination of project announcement and actual start-of-work has yet to be seen. However, on a positive note, the City has indicated more than once that it plans to clean out the Gemini buildings, which were left full of flammable cotton fabrics when the company closed.

There was actually a positive demolition recently - the Steiger's AIRWALK is gone! The Airwalk was a dreary, brooding, darkening influence on Main Street, an obstruction of the street's "urban room" or "corridor", and we certainly hope that such things will be avoided in future projects.

In general, it is "open season" on buildings in Springfield. Please don't be shy about speaking up for our rich heritage, and be sure to call us with alerts, with questions, for advice, etc.

"TOP TEN" List

<u>PROPERTY</u>	<u>OWNER</u>
(1)Hotel Charles.....	SRA
(2)Carew Street School.....	City
(3)Union Station.....	SRA
(4)Winchester Square Fire Station.....	City
(5)Temple Street Carriage House.....	Private
(6)York Street Jail.....	County
(7)30 High Street.....	Private
(8)Gemini Mfg. (lower Central St.).....	Private
(9)Lower Franklin Street	Private
(10)Lower Florida Street houses.....	Private

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CAN YOU GUESS? continued from page 2

What a nice neighborhood! This view from the corner of Mulberry and Maple looks back at the current Milton Bradley site. Maple Street was the most fashionable section of the city for the very wealthy, as these houses from the 1880's can attest. This picture of Upper Maple Street gives you a flavor of what the area was like all the way to State Street. In another part of the City, the McKnight historic district still retains an appearance very similar this photograph from times past.





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