

PRESERVATION NOTES

NEWSLETTER
Vol. XLVI Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2011



Ravi Coltrane (left), Steve Fulgoni of Friends of the Coltrane Home, and Huntington Town Historian, Robert Hughes (back row) with Councilman Mark Mayoka, Councilwoman Susan Berland, and Wendy Nicholas and Brent Leggs of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011.

JOHN COLTRANE HOME, DIX HILLS

This summer, John Coltrane's home on Long Island received national attention when it was included on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places List. Across the country, people learned about the 1952 ranch house in Dix Hills, that the world-famous jazz musician bought in 1964 to raise his family, its narrow escape from demolition in 2003, and the ongoing struggle to raise funds for its restoration and eventual use as a learning center.

SPLIA first reported on the Coltrane Home in Preservation Notes in 2004 when designated a local landmark by the Town of Huntington. In 2006, the Town purchased the property and assigned ownership of the house to the newly formed Friends of the Coltrane Home. Shortly afterwards, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. By 2010 there had been little progress. Still vacant and deteriorated, the property was nominated and placed on SPLIA's List of Endangered Historic Places

in early February, and its needs were brought back into the public view. SPLIA had also connected the Friends to the National Trust by coordinating a meeting that helped the Trust contact African American Heritage organizations on Long Island.

In addition to restoring the Home, the Friends want to perpetuate the musical and spiritual legacies of John and Alice Coltrane by developing an archives and learning center – the Coltrane Legacy Education Project. To make this vision a reality, the Friends need to first raise funds for an historic structure report that will assess the condition of the house and make recommendations for its restoration and interpretation.

Initially, the Friends were concerned about the John Coltrane Home being identified as endangered, but increased public awareness has only helped. Since its listing on SPLIA's endangered list, the group successfully received a matching Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) grant

of \$38,810 from the State of New York, as well as \$5,000 from the National Trust. Now given its status as one of eleven most endangered in the nation, support for the John Coltrane Home is coming from all corners. Recently an anonymous gift of \$50,000 matched the EPF challenge and, as the world takes greater notice, the voice of the Friends is coming through louder and clearer. As the Friends would likely confirm, recognizing endangerment isn't always a bad thing. Often it clarifies issues and needs, and brings in support which really gets things started.

SPLIA GETS SOCIAL

According to a 2011 Pew Research Center report, the number of American adults who use online social networks doubled in the last three years to nearly half the population. Social media is increasingly a standard in marketing and brand development across all industries and many not-for-profits have also begun exploring its outreach and advocacy potential. A survey of 11,000 nonprofit professionals this year revealed 82% found value in their social networking efforts. Not measured by the survey was whether they felt they were using social media optimally. This brings to light the complexity of navigating a new world of communication that is still in development.

SPLIA's first foray into social media was the creation of a Facebook page dedicated to its List of Long Island's Endangered Historic Places program. Intentionally limited in scope, the campaign set specific goals to test how Facebook communication worked. As expected, it successfully reached a wide audience during the call for nominations and provided a platform for distributing news related to listed places which facilitated conversations on other Facebook pages.

With greater understanding of Facebook's communication style and management demands, SPLIA is now better equipped to further develop its social media campaign to engage the online community.

“AMERICA’S TENNIS STADIUM,” FOREST HILLS

Located adjacent to Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, the Forest Hills Tennis Stadium was the epicenter of competitive tennis in America for 55 years. Touted as “America’s Tennis Stadium” in magazine ads before it opened in 1923, the 14,000-seat stadium, designed for the West Side Tennis Club (founded in 1892) by architect Kenneth M. Murchison, was not only the place where the United States Lawn Tennis Association Championship became the US Open, but also where Althea Gibson broke the sport’s color barrier. As the first African American competing in a world tennis tour, Gibson won the Grand Slam title there in 1956. Yet despite these historical associations, the New York City Landmarks Commission decided not to recommend landmark designation for the structure citing its advanced state of deterioration as a cause for rejection.

The Commission’s opinion was rendered in May 2011 in response to a Request for Evaluation submitted by the Rego-Forest Preservation Council as part of a grassroots campaign to save the structure. At that time, the Tennis Club

was considering a proposal to sell the stadium – vacant and in decline since the 1990s – to the Cord Meyer Development Company for \$9 million. Ultimately voted down by the club membership in October, the developer’s plan called for the demolition of the stadium’s interior to make way for a new condominium complex that would have incorporated the arched exterior façade of the historic structure. While some members just didn’t like the development plan, others wanted to see what they consider Forest Hills’ principal landmark remain intact.

To bolster their case, supporters for

designation also point to the Stadium’s relationship to the performing arts from the 1950s through the 1970s. Hosting appearances by so many musical greats (from Ella Fitzgerald to the Beatles and Bob Dylan), many feel that the stadium should also be recognized for its contribution in this arena as well.

Advocates for the Stadium’s preservation continued to seek landmark designation believing such status will help shape a better redevelopment plan and would like to see the stadium repurposed as a mixed-use facility that includes cultural activities and entertainment for the public.



View of the Forest Hills Tennis Stadium, 2010. (Photo courtesy of Michael Perlman)

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Credo: It has become apparent that those of us who are interested in conservation and preservation need to be alerted to the destruction of the irreplaceable values and environments that comprise our heritage, and to the actions proposed to avert such threats. These notes are designed to alert you.

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JONES BEACH HAS FRIENDS

The Jones Beach State Park Central Mall mosaics, depicting aquatic figures and a map of Long Island with its State Parks, are severely deteriorated and the cost of restoration is estimated at \$250,000. To begin the process of restoring the mosaics which are comprised of colored concrete, slate and brass inlay, a feasibility study and conditions assessment is needed to establish the best treatment plan.

Jones Beach Rescue, a volunteer organization dedicated to supporting the restoration and enhancement of the State Park,



Detail of one of three panels that comprise the Central Mall mosaics showing general deteriorated conditions, 2010.

has made the restoration of the mosaics its first fundraising effort. Towards that goal, its first fundrasier was held in September: an “End of Summer Party” that featured a lecture on the history of Jones Beach through photographs and a tour of the West Bathhouse that included a visit to Robert Moses’ summer office. Also part of the program was the announcement of four winners who submitted images to a photo contest celebrating the beauty of Jones Beach during the summer of 2011.

Event proceeds will cover the balance needed to complete the feasibility study. To learn more about Jones Beach Rescue, you can find them on facebook or visit their website: www.jonesbeachrescue.org.

Preservation at Jones Beach State Park has long been a focus of SPLIA’s advocacy efforts. In 2004 the Society produced a report on the park’s status and condition that led to its listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2008 we successfully nominated the site to the Preservation League of New York State’s Seven to Save list.

CONEY ISLAND, BROOKLYN

Visitors flocking to Coney Island this summer saw several new sights, including a new amusement park along with old favorites like the Wonder Wheel and Cyclone. For those arriving by subway, exiting the Stillwell Avenue terminal provides an entirely new experience through a radically diminished historic Surf Avenue commercial strip. Gone is Henderson's Music Hall which stood on the corner of Surf and Stillwell for over a century. Embellished by the fabulous and mysterious Faber's Fascination neon sign, the historic hall where Groucho Marx first performed with brothers Gummo and Harpo, was the first sight that millions of visitors once saw as they spilled out of the subway. Along with the Bank of Coney Island and the Shore Hotel – also demolished this year – Henderson's was reduced to rubble with no long-term plan for the site.

The popularity of Coney Island has endured for well over a century, remaining a destination for generations of New Yorkers and visitors worldwide. The seaside site is anchored by the still popular public beach and adjacent boardwalk dating from the 1920s. While the current amusement district is much smaller than the spectacular Coney Island of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the "People's Playground" is still home to a popular amusement park and several local landmarks. Among the historic attractions protected as New York City landmarks are the Wonder Wheel (1920), the Cyclone roller coaster (1927), and the Parachute Jump (1939). A small number of buildings have been recognized as individual local landmarks, though many more are unprotected.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, disinvestment, urban renewal and speculative land swaps destroyed much of the historic fabric of the amusement district. Today the destruction of the People's Playground continues, driven now by property owners planning new residential and retail development. This type of development is now permitted in the amusement district because of the controversial rezoning passed by the New York City Department of City Planning in 2009.

An effort to create a local historic district on the south side of Surf Avenue was not supported by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and several iconic buildings, like Nathan's Famous, remain unprotected. Despite this,

in August of 2010, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation issued a Determination of Eligibility, recognizing the significance of a proposed Coney Island National Register Historic District.

- Beth Bingham



Before and after demolition views of former Henderson's Music Hall site on Surf Avenue, 2010. (Photos courtesy of Lindsay Wengler.)

LOST: BROOKLYN WATERWORKS MILBURN PUMPING STATION, FREEPORT



Historic view of the Milburn Pumping Station. (Photo courtesy of Blog: Freeport Historical Society.)

Serving the Brooklyn Waterworks, the Milburn Pumping Station was one of several structures built by the City of Brooklyn to feed its Ridgewood Reservoir during the second half of the nineteenth century. The system tapped a 2000-acre watershed that stretched across Long Island's south shore through the Massapequas and was a primary water supply until the consolidation of Greater New York City in 1898 brought upstate Croton Reservoir water to Brooklyn. The 1891 Milburn Station –designed in the Romanesque Revival style by noted Brooklyn architect, Frank Freeman– was among the system's largest and most architecturally accomplished. Largely abandoned when Nassau County acquired the site in 1977, the station was given local landmark status by the Village of Freeport when it was sold for redevelopment in 1986. Permit delays, legal issues, and a fire led to the vacant building's further demise. What remained of the building's façade was ultimately demolished in 2011.

LONG ISLAND'S 2010 EPF GRANT WINNERS

Each year, New York State offers a series of grants to encourage preservation of open space and historic resources. Administered by the Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation, these grants – established in 1993 – are made possible through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). They are available only to municipalities and not-for-profit organizations with an ownership interest for properties that are accessible to the public. Awards must be matched through other funding sources (which may include in-kind donations) and they can be significant – up to \$400,000 or more.

There are three EPF grant programs available for historic preservation: The Acquisitions Program for the purchase of lands, waters or structures for park, recreation, conservation or preservation purposes; The Historic Preservation Program for funds to improve, protect, preserve, rehabilitate or restore properties listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places; and the Heritage Area Program covering projects that preserve, rehabilitate or restore lands, waters or structures identified in the management plan of a New York State Designated Heritage Area.

In 2010, eight EPF grants totaling \$2 million were awarded to historic preservation projects on Long Island: six in Suffolk County, one in Queens, and one in Brooklyn. Featured here are Long Island's 2010 winners.



City of New York Department of Education

\$300,000 for exterior restoration of the 1787 Academy Building of Erasmus Hall High School located in Flatbush Brooklyn. Built on land donated by the Dutch Reformed Church, Erasmus Hall Academy was the first secondary school chartered by the New York State Regents. Vacant for many years and now dilapidated, the building's restoration cost is estimated to be close to \$2 million and planning for its preservation and reuse is in partnership with the New York Landmarks Conservancy. *(Photo courtesy New York Landmarks Conservancy)*



The Friends of Connetquot, Inc.

\$102,500 for the restoration of the eighteenth century Nicoll Grist Mill located at the Connetquot State Park Preserve. Funding will cover the last two phases of a restoration project that will return the mill to a fully operational status in order to interpret Long Island's social and industrial history through demonstration. EPF funding is one of three grants awarded to the Friends in 2010. The other two are \$100,000 from the New York State Dormitory Authority and \$35,000 from the Knapp Swezey Foundation.



Free Synagogue of Flushing

\$263,882 for exterior stabilization and restoration. Designed by Maurice Courland and completed in 1927, the building is the second home of the oldest Reform synagogue in Queens (founded in 1917). Its importance was brought to light through the New York Landmarks Conservancy's survey of Queens synagogues and subsequent National Register listing in 2009. Funding from the EPF will help to secure the building's envelope in preparation for future restoration. *(Photo courtesy New York Landmarks Conservancy)*



Town of Brookhaven:

\$400,000 for the acquisition of Wardencliff, the 1903 former laboratory designed by Stanford White for world-famous scientist, Nikola Tesla. Located on 16 acres in Shoreham, the site's purchase is in partnership with Suffolk County and plans for its future include the main building's reuse as the Tesla Science Center: a combined museum and educational facility that will preserve the legacy of Nikola Tesla while encouraging new scientific learning for the future.



The Caumsett Foundation

\$400,000 for the stabilization of the John Russell Pope-designed polo stable located at Caumsett State Historic Park (formerly the Marshal Field estate). This is the latest of several grants awarded to the Friends who have helped raise over \$4 million for the preservation of historic buildings within the park over the last twelve years.

Town of Shelter Island

\$110,000 for the restoration of the Smith-Taylor Cabin on Taylor's Island. Saved from demolition in 2005 by an outpouring of local public support, preservation of this c. 1900 recreational cabin (converted for year-round use in 1937) began in 2005 with the formation of the Taylor's Island Preservation and Management Committee and the award of Preserve New York Grant to produce an Historic Structure Report. Today the tax-exempt Taylor's Island Foundation works closely with the Town and Committee to restore, maintain, and provide public access to Taylor's Island. *(Photo courtesy Shelter Island Reporter)*



Town of Brookhaven

\$388,000 for the restoration of the Davis Town Meeting House located in Coram. Also known as the Lester Davis House, the 1750 building was the center of town government from 1800 to 1885. *(Photo courtesy DanTD)*



Friends of the Coltrane Home

\$38,810 for the preparation of an Historic Structure Report for the 1954 family home of jazz legend John Coltrane in Dix Hills. A first time EPF award for the Friends, this funding will help to prepare the document that will guide the building's restoration and future interpretation.

SAVING THE MAINE MAID INN, JERICHO

The recently formed “Citizens for History” seeks to preserve the 1789 Maine Maid Inn (a.k.a. Valentine Hicks House) located in Jericho. The effort was initiated by the East Norwich Civic Association when it reached out for support in nominating the building for town landmark designation. Among those

who came forward were the Cedar Swamp Historical Society, the Society of Friends Jericho Meeting, local historians and the Long Island North Shore Heritage Area, who, along with SPLIA, collectively persuaded the Town of Oyster Bay Landmark Preservation Commission to recommend designation to the Board of

Trustees at a hearing held in August.

The Citizens for History, pleased with this outcome, must now await the Board’s decision. Home to Valentine Hicks in the early 1800s, the building is representative of Quaker settlement patterns on Long Island and is associated with the Underground Railroad. A son-in-law to the famed abolitionist preacher, Elias Hicks (whose own house, built circa 1740, is located across the street), Valentine was a successful businessman, an instrumental force in establishing New York City’s public school system, and the second president of the Long Island Railroad. In the 1950s, the property became the Maine Maid Inn but is not part of the Nassau County-owned Jericho Preserve and has been vacant since 2009.

While local designation would protect the Inn from demolition or insensitive alterations, the Citizens realize that the building also needs a viable reuse plan to truly preserve it. Towards that goal, the Citizens are reaching out to as many supporters as possible with the hope that a real solution can be developed for the Maine Maid Inn.



View of the Maine Maid Inn (aka Valentine Hicks House) north facade, 2011.

“HILLSIDE,” OYSTER BAY

The historic Trousdell House (aka “Hillside”), located on East Main Street in Oyster Bay, narrowly escaped demolition when it was purchased by the North Shore Land Alliance this spring. Situated on two-plus acres and in very poor condition, the house was without the protection of local landmark designation and could easily be replaced by at least two, and possibly up to five new buildings.

The significance of the Trousdell House is primarily tied to Oyster Bay’s nineteenth century summer colony. Built in 1844 for Adelia and Cornelius McCoon and used as an inn by its second owners in the 1850s, the property is best known through the recollections of Frances Irvin, the granddaughter of its third owner, Richard Irvin who had it from 1861 to 1913. In her published memoir, *Oyster Bay in History: A Sketch*, Frances describes the house in the languid context of the summer colony – how it was altered over time, who visited, and how it was part of a larger social circuit. Through Frances we are told that her grandfather named the place “Hillside” and that James A Roosevelt rented it for few summers in the 1870s.

The property’s last owner, Dr. James Trousdell bought it in 1945 and used it as his home and medical office. Stylistically, the house retains many elements of its



View of Hillside’s north (front) facade, 2011.

Greek Revival origins, but its outward appearance is largely Colonial Revival because of substantial alterations, designed by William H. Bottomley, that occurred during the 1910s-20s. Dr. Trousdell’s tenure brought a second front door to access the office and examination rooms he created on the east side of the house.

The Alliance’s swift action was meant to be a stop gap towards a better solution. With support from the Oyster Bay Preservation Roundtable – a coalition

of local preservation groups and SPLIA – the Alliance plans to restrict excessive redevelopment of the site and hopefully transfer ownership to someone who will rehabilitate the historic house. Being eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the property could benefit from public grants and/or tax incentives depending on how it gets reused. What’s needed now is a new owner with the creativity and vision to incorporate the past into plans for the future.

NATIONAL REGISTER HIGHLIGHTS



Steven Harding House, Sea Cliff

Completed in 1878 for a local photographer, the Steven Harding House and Studio is one of the original homes built during the period when Methodist Camp Meetings were held in Sea Cliff. It is one of the best surviving examples of Queen Ann style cottages in the Village and its connection to Harding illustrates how small industries developed in the area to serve seasonal residents associated with the Meeting. The property's listing on the National Register is an outgrowth of a village-wide survey sponsored by the Sea Cliff Landmarks Association.



Tourbillion, Mill Neck

A typical example of a settlement-era house that was enlarged and restyled with a Colonial Revival overlay, Tourbillion tracks Mill Neck's historical transition from rural outpost to country house enclave during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. While the house contains some evidence of eighteenth century framing, the National Register listing identifies 1890 through 1944 as its period of significance – the period that is best illustrated by the property's current appearance.



Elvira, Brookhaven

Although National Register listings are predominantly buildings and districts, they also apply to objects and structures. One such structure is the 38-foot "P" Class racing sloop, *Elvira* that was built in 1906 for Harry Walton by famed Patchogue boat-builder, Gilbert Monroe Smith. *Elvira* is one of the few remaining examples of Smith's work and is the oldest of his "P" boats to remain sea-worthy. Recently rehabilitated, *Elvira* is a classic example of historic boat design specific to yacht racing on Long Island's Great South Bay.

MONTAUK POINT LIGHTHOUSE: A NATIONAL MONUMENT

Commissioned during George Washington's presidency and completed in 1796, the Montauk Lighthouse will soon become New York's latest National Historic Landmark, joining the ranks of such prestigious Long Island properties as the First Presbyterian Church in Sag Harbor, the Old House in Cutchogue, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Louis Armstrong House in Corona, and Green-Wood Cemetery.

The National Historic Landmark Program is a step above the National Register of Historic Places and is reserved for properties that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating the heritage of the United States. Potential listings must be evaluated by a national heritage committee of the National Park Service, approved by its Advisory Board, and ultimately recommended by the Secretary of the Interior. Fewer than 2,500 historic places in the country bear this elevated distinction and only twenty are located on Long Island.

Gaining National Historic Landmark status for the Montauk Point Lighthouse (listed on the National Register in 1969) has been a six year endeavor for the Montauk Historical Society's Lighthouse Committee and preservation consultant, Robert Hefner. After two rejections (apparently, being America's second lighthouse commissioned by President George Washington does not a national landmark make), the National Park Service Advisory Board



View of the Montauk Lighthouse and setting, 2007.

was finally convinced that the property was indeed eligible for this distinction based on the critical role it played in New York City's development as the nation's leading seaport.

According to Hefner's research, the Montauk Lighthouse was first commissioned to guide sailing ships traveling by prevailing northern winds during the winter and it continued to illuminate what be-

came a major European trade route until about 1870 when domestic manufacturing – propelled by the Civil War – began to seriously compete with imports. Thanks to the efforts of the Montauk Historical Society and its consultant, a deeper historical understanding of the Montauk Lighthouse has been gained and Long Island has once again emerged as a major player in defining our nation's heritage.

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