



ALBANY PRESERVATION REPORT

Albany Preserves!

Historic Albany Foundation's Vacant Buildings Initiative

In November, 2000, a survey showed that Albany residents felt that the biggest problem facing their neighborhoods was decaying buildings. For two years, Historic Albany Foundation, neighborhood associations, and local officials have worked together to craft a plan to address this problem.

The outcome of the first Neighborhoods Work conference, convened by the Council of Albany Neighborhood Associations (CANA) and the Neighborhood Resource Center, didn't come as a surprise. For many years, neighborhood associations and elected officials had been trying to address the issue of vacant and abandoned buildings.

In 1998, Albany's Common Council considered an ordinance to establish a Vacant Building Registry. The proposal found that "buildings which remain vacant ... are unsightly, unsafe and have a negative effect on their surroundings." The purpose of the proposal was to facilitate the identification of vacant buildings, determine the responsibilities of owners, and speed the rehabilitation of these structures.

Historic Albany Foundation had begun searching for comprehensive and creative solutions for Albany's abandoned properties, beginning with a series of meetings and discussions with local officials and policy makers. The short-term goal of these meetings was to identify problems and create opportunities to collaborate on solutions. "After the first round of meetings, it became clear that we needed more data and information to under-



stand the patterns of abandonment and begin to work on solutions," said Elizabeth Griffin, Executive Director of Historic Albany Foundation.

The Vacant Buildings Registry and other official counts did not tell the whole story. Historic Albany Foundation announced the Vacant Buildings Initiative, planning to work with Albany neighborhood associations to document abandoned buildings. However, Ray Bromley of the University at Albany's Department of Geography and Planning contacted the Foundation, offering the labor and skills of graduate students who would do the work as part of their Fall Studio – the result of which was the Foundation's commissioning the Vacant Buildings Survey. Under the direction of Dr. Catherine Lawson, Assistant Professor in the Geography and Planning Department, the survey

was undertaken in the autumn of 2002, with students developing an inventory, dynamic database and state-of-the-art GIS mapping. HAF's technical committee reviewed a draft of the report in February, 2003, which showed over 800 vacant buildings in the city. The final survey is due to be released this month.

On Spec or Out of Spite

The survey not only identifies the city's abandoned buildings, but delves into the issues that lead to abandonment. In some cases, their owners bought them as speculative investment properties. Other properties are in a state of suspended animation – boarded up, but with the owners paying taxes and thinking of them as long term investments. Some buildings are caught in legal limbo: in estate disputes, or held by elderly owners who are no longer able to maintain them. Still others are "problem buildings" which have been purchased at public auction, but whose owners are unable or unwilling to make repairs.

Adding to the complexity is the fact that Albany County handles the foreclosure process for the City of Albany. "The challenge is to get both governments to develop a coordinated solution to match potential homeowners with vacant properties," said Griffin. "That way, the properties are more likely to go into the hands of people who are committed to renovating and living in them."

As a private, not-for-profit organization, Historic Albany Founda-

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Historic Albany Foundation

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www.historic-albany.org

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Historic Albany Foundation is a private, not-for-profit membership organization working to promote the preservation and appreciation of the built environment in and around the city of Albany.

Newsletter and website writing and design donated by Colleen M. Ryan.



The Preservation Report is published for members and friends of Historic Albany Foundation with assistance from the New York State Council for the Arts.

Hidden City House & Garden Tour

Much-anticipated tour slated for Thursday, June 19

The 13th annual **Hidden City House & Garden Tour** will take place on **Thursday, June 19, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.** The event will feature the architectural elegance and creative hidden gardens of a dozen homes located in one of Albany's historic districts.

Co-sponsored by **Historic Albany Foundation** and the **Center Square and Hudson/Park Neighborhood Associations**, the event supports the work of each organization.

Stroll Albany's streets, enjoying the splendor of homes built more than 100 years ago. See the innovative ways in which city home owners have adapted gracious townhouses to fit their 21st century needs and lifestyles. Visit a **work-in-progress** which shows the transition between a full gut rehab and a nearly completed living space.



The tour also highlights the talents of creative city gardeners, who have turned limited spaces into tranquil urban gardens. **City Gardener Judy Stacey** and **City Forester Tom Pfeiffer** will answer your questions about urban gardening.

Tickets will be available at Ben & Jerry's, 250 Lark Street, the Lark Street BID, 245 Lark Street, and the Downtown BID, 522 Broadway, from June 8th through June 18 at a cost of \$15 per person. Tickets will be sold in the Robinson Square parking lot (Hamilton Street between Dove & Swan Streets) on the day of the tour at 4:00 p.m.

For more information call Frances Tarlton at (518) 436-7630 or visit the "Hidden City Garden Tour" section on our web site at www.historic-albany.org.

HAF Annual Meeting Held May 8

On Thursday, May 8, friends and supporters of HAF attended the Foundation's Annual Meeting at the Governor's Mansion.

Russ Reeves was unanimously elected to the board of directors. Mr. Reeves is the owner of Reeves Engineers in Troy, a civil and structural engineering consulting firm specializing in Town and County bridges, analysis and rehabilitation of historic structures, evaluation and stabilizing of structures in timber, concrete, masonry and steel.

Board members **Jim Campbell**, **Chuck Kuhtic** and **Jackie Ring** were unanimously elected to serve a second three-year term.

Per HAF bylaws, Board members **Marilyn Kaplan**, **Mac Mowbray** and **Nancy Wawrla** were ineligible for another term after three consecutive terms. Board member **Nadine Feiden Shadlock** also resigned from the board after many years of service.

Thanks to all past, present and future HAF members and directors for their dedication to preserving history in our midst!

HAF Supports City Schools Plan

Three years ago, the National Trust for Historic Preservation issued a report titled **Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can't Walk to School**. An excerpt from the Executive Summary reads as follows:

Across the country, parents and teachers are clamoring for smaller, community-centered schools on the basis that they are better for kids and better for learning. Many historic neighborhood schools fit precisely that description and could be renovated to meet state-of-the-art technology, code, and education programs if given the chance.

Instead, handsome buildings that once inspired civic pride are being discarded for nondescript, "big box" schools. Acres of asphalt are replacing close-knit, walkable neighborhoods as the typical school setting. Increasingly, a stressful drive through traffic separates parents and children from even more distant schools. Sprawl has made our environment so inhospitable to pedestrians that only one in eight children walks or bikes to school today.

In 2001, as city residents prepared for a vote on the Albany City School District's proposed facilities plan, Historic Albany Foundation hosted a presentation by then-Albany Superintendent of Schools Lonnie E. Palmer and the firm hired to complete an engineering study of the school district's facilities and develop a long-range facilities plan.

Mr. Palmer provided a citywide overview of the plan, focusing on historic preservation and planning – specifically, which school buildings would be renovated and which would be razed.

In developing this plan, preservation architects and engineers rated every building on its suitability for the educational program, its structural soundness, its mechanical and electrical infrastructure, its telecommunications system, and the quality of its site. Based on these ratings, and in the interest of cost-effectiveness, the school district recommended that Schools 16, 18, 26 and Philip Schuyler B at the Harriet Gibbons site be completely replaced. The plan called for construction of buildings of similar scale and massing on the existing sites, with sensitivity to the surrounding structures.

In addition, Schools 19, 20 and 27 will be expanded and remodeled, and Livingston and Hackett will be completely renovated. The remaining schools were considered suitable for remodeling and upgrading, including Arbor Hill, Thomas O'Brien Academy, Giffen (which will get a new cafeteria), and Sunshine School (in Lincoln Park).

Prior to the December, 2001 vote, the Foundation commended the school district for working within the guidelines of the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and for developing renovation plans which are sensitive to the historic nature of these buildings. While we expressed regret that Albany would be losing four historic school buildings, we were pleased to see that the School District followed an appropriate process in developing its plan.

Historic Albany Foundation recognizes the advantage of neighborhood schools. We are pleased that the City School District of Albany realizes that smaller, community-centered schools in historic neighborhoods are an asset, not a liability.

Staff Profile

Meet Susie Olsen

Susan Colleen Olsen was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, to socially active parents who founded a nonprofit assisting the poor in their home. She attended Visual and Performing Arts Magnet High School where she specialized in vocal and piano music.

In 1994, Susan relocated to the Capital Region when her husband was offered a job as a music professor at Union College. Susan received her Bachelors of Arts Degree from Russell Sage in Creative Arts in Therapy.

For the next few years she worked as a Music Therapist at the Capital District Psychiatric Center. Realizing a Master's degree was necessary for professional advancement, Susan was accepted into the Social Work School at the State University of New York in Albany. However, feeling the need to reach beyond treating the individual into the larger systems of society, she sought a more inclusive and holistic path. This led her to the Master's of Regional Planning Program – also at SUNY.

Susan will receive her Graduate degree in the summer of 2003. She believes treating society's malaise involves a wide variety of social and political institutions, including sensible grassroots planning of land use, the environment and transportation – and of course, historic preservation. Last summer, Susie worked for the National Park Service on the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Project. She and her husband Tim live in an 1844 home in the Nationally Registered Erie Canal hamlet, Vischer Ferry.

Hail to the Chefs!

A Moveable Feast -- A Great Success

The Moveable Feast Committee would like to thank everyone who participated in our most successful Moveable Feast ever! Ticket sales and silent auction income combined for net proceeds of well over \$20,000. The success of this event enables us to continue to promote the preservation and appreciation of the built environment in and around the city of Albany through public education, provision of design and technical assistance, community projects, advocacy for endangered buildings, publications, tours, and lectures.

Dinner Hosts

Mike Bergan & Frances Tarlton
Kathy Bilos & George W. Simmons
Bill Bouchard & Herb Clark
Bill Brandow & Liz Benjamin
Ben & Anne Brewster
Paul & Barbara Cohen
Richard Conti & Steve Snow
with Tom & Wendy Nitido
Marci David
Jim Davies & Gordon Harris
Michael Gilhooly
Chuck Kuitic, Morgan State House
Peter & Judy Levin
Charlie McCaffrey
Terry McCormick & Erlinda Rejino
Colin McKnight
Mac Mowbray
Hennie Newhouse & Mary Hodge
John & Jennifer Quinn
Robert Reineke & Jeffrey Linton
Jackie Ring
Kathleen Rose
Bill Rusch
Dave & Rachel Kjelgaard Sears
Neil Shapiro & Judith Place
Carol & Dwight Wallace
Rick & Nancy Walley
Clare Yates

Moveable Feast dinner hosts Mac Mowbray, Liz Benjamin, Clare Yates and Charlie McCaffrey enjoy themselves at the dessert reception at eba Dance Theatre.



Reception Donors

Albany Pump Station • Barcelona • Bayou Café • Bella Napoli • Big House • Colleen's Cookies • Cousins • Debbie's Kitchen • El Mariachi • Ghandi • Ginger Man • Grandma's Pie Shop • Honest Weight Co-Op • Jillian's • Joan's Cake Chateau • Krause's Homemade Candy • Londonderry Café • Miss Albany Diner • My Linh • Nicole's • Peaches Café • Rolf's Pork Store • Shades of Green • Stephanie's On the Park • Taste of Greece • The Chocolate Gecko • The Daily Grind • The Larkin • Van's • Victory Café • V&R

Silent Auction Donors

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VACANCY:

Albany's Abandoned Buildings Through

Artists Eyes

Call for Entries

As Degas said, "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see." We're calling on artists to help others see the potential of Albany's abandoned buildings through their artwork.

Historic Albany Foundation will present *VACANCY: Albany's Abandoned Buildings Through Artists' Eyes* as a one-night show and sale in October at a location to be announced. Last year's reception featured more than eighty works of art, including paintings, photographs, sculptures, and mixed media.

Guests will have the exclusive opportunity to bid on major works by the region's best-known artists. Those who purchase art displayed at the show will be further supporting the education, advocacy and technical assistance programs offered by Historic Albany Foundation.

The event is part of a continuing effort to promote the potential of Albany's abandoned buildings.

Artists are encouraged to submit artwork inspired by Albany's vacant abandoned buildings. Participating artists will receive a percentage of the proceeds of any of their art sold at the show, the remainder will be a tax deductible donation to Historic Albany Foundation.

If you are interested in participating in this very exciting event or have any questions about it, please call Susie Olsen at 518-465-0876, or download the prospectus from the Foundation's web site at www.historic-albany.org/VACANCY/prospectus.pdf.

Albany Preserves: The Vacant Buildings Initiative

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tion was free to explore more creative solutions to the problem of abandoned buildings. A November art show and sale, *VACANCY: Albany's Abandoned Buildings Through Artists Eyes*, helped draw attention to the issue, but also afforded participants the opportunity to move from discussing problems to the potential these buildings held.

Moving Forward

Through meetings, focus groups and discussions, HAF is now working in a supportive role to help the city of Albany create an entity to accept vacant and abandoned buildings for rehabilitation. The Foundation is also working with Albany County to fine-tune the foreclosure process with the goal of neighborhood revitalization.

According to Griffin, "The Albany Local Development Corporation was able to hone conversations about possibilities and turn them into an actual program to solve problems. Now, each participating group – from the Foundation to the neighborhoods to local government – is doing what it does best. Everyone has a role, and everyone is rising to the occasion."

At their April 2003 Board meeting, the ALDC/City authorized the execution of a contract with the Enterprise Foundation. Enterprise Foundation, a national not-for-profit, has assisted other communities such as Cleveland, New York City, and Rochester in organizing successful abandoned building programs.

Most recently, in Rochester, Enterprise assisted the city in developing the Rochester Housing Development Corporation and raising a \$10 million loan pool for the initiative to convert abandoned, HUD foreclosed properties into opportunities for home ownership. In Rochester, the Housing Development Corporation acts as a holding company for abandoned properties – they purchase them, coordinate rehabilitation, and then sell them to new owners.

With the Abandoned Building Initiative in Albany, the ALDC is assisting the city with the development of a strategy to reduce the number of abandoned buildings city-wide. The

ALDC and the City have asked local banks to join in sponsorship of the strategy and ultimately in partnership for the implementation of the strategy.

Lori Harris, Commissioner of the Albany Local Development Corporation, "feel(s) that there is a great deal of momentum and positive energy throughout the city to devise a successful initiative. We are very fortunate to have so many organizations and individuals committed to the goal of reducing abandoned buildings in the City of Albany."



University at Albany graduate students work on a deployment map for the Vacant Building Inventory.

This work has national implications. Other cities, including Baltimore and Philadelphia, are considering policies to address vacant and abandoned buildings, but don't have the data – such as the Vacant Buildings Survey – to back it up. According to Dr. Catherine T. Lawson of the University at Albany, "Our city may be smaller, but the methodology of the Vacant Buildings Survey should be portable and apply to other areas."

Critical mass

Historic Albany Foundation considers the Vacant Buildings Initiative to have been a great success, and is now passing the baton to the ALDC/City Abandoned Building Initiative, and moving into a more technical, advisory role.

The Abandoned Building Initiative has gained the support of neighborhood

advocates, some of whom have been dealing with abandoned buildings in their neighborhoods for decades. Albany Mayor Gerald Jennings endorsed the goals of the program and has authorized his staff to take the next steps. Meetings with Albany County Executive Michael Breslin and his staff have resulted in an enhanced flow of information. Commissioner of Public Safety John Nielsen sees benefits, as abandoned buildings are frequently sites of drug use and dealing and other illegal activity.

Recent economic developments have changed Albany's real estate market, causing demand to far outrun supply – and creating incentives to rehabilitate vacant buildings. The announcement that International Sematech and Tokyo Electron are coming to Albany has already created a housing shortage.

Around the city, neighborhoods are already benefiting from investment. The Preservation League of New York State's selection of St. Joseph's

Church and the Ten Broeck Triangle as one of their "Seven to Save" has focused attention on this struggling neighborhood. The Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan Advisory Committee calls for increased home ownership and residential re-investment. The Community Builders, one of the largest non-profit urban housing developers in the country, is rehabilitating 45 rental units on Grand Street in the city's Mansion neighborhood.

"Every renovated home will help stabilize the neighborhood and inspire others to invest in the city," said Griffin. "Vacant buildings and the weed-choked lots that result from demolition are bad for the quality of life and neighboring property values. The demand for housing in the city is too great for us not to try to save our abandoned buildings."

Albany Underground

Mary Ball: Queen of Boardinghouse Widows

From 1987 to 1999, Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc. conducted several archeological surveys at what was at the time the future site of the State Comptroller's Office and Parking Garage at 110 State Street and 40 Howard Street in downtown Albany. These blocks were within Albany's boardinghouse district during the first half of the 19th century.

Boardinghouses played an important role in the 19th-century commercial and industrial success of the city. A burgeoning wage-earning workforce dominated by single immigrant men and the sons of farm families flocked to Albany to fill jobs as skilled and unskilled workers. As a result, an informal boardinghouse district was established south of State Street in the working-class

neighborhood that developed in the filled-in valley of the Ruttenkill. It lasted for more than 50 years. In an age before trolleys, buses, and automobiles, the district provided its residents with nearby employment as printers, iron founders, gunsmiths, butchers, tailors, and carpenters, while also supporting businesses that furnished clothing, food, medical care, and the variety of consumer goods and services.

Other "goods and services" were available as well, since the city government tended to overlook gambling, drinking, and brothels in the boardinghouse district. The sporting life, as it was called at the time, was overtly rejected by polite society, but nonetheless attracted not only the working-class bachelors who resided in the neighborhood, but also out-of-towners and bourgeois residents from elsewhere in the city

Curiously, the suggestive name "Mary Ball" and sometimes the "Widow Mary Ball" appeared as a boardinghouse keeper in every Albany city directory between 1813 and 1863. At first, Hartgen's researchers referred to her as the "Queen of the Boarding House Widows." However, further study indicated that there was more to Mary Ball's tale than simply keeping house for working-class tenants. Since Mary Ball boardinghouses were listed at no fewer than 17 addresses over 51 years, it eventually became clear that the name was code for various houses of prostitution.

Mary Ball boardinghouses were not unique to Albany since the name was also routinely used for the same



Albany's 19th-century boardinghouse district began just south of State Street and extended nearly to Madison Avenue. Mary Ball boardinghouses are highlighted.

purpose in New York City. By comparing the artifacts from several Howard Street boardinghouse sites with similar artifacts found at brothel sites in New York City, archeologists have demonstrated that at least one brothel operated during the 1800s on Howard Street where the State Comptroller's parking garage now stands.

Albany's 19th-century boardinghouse district was instrumental in maintaining the social equilibrium between a transient, wage-earning workforce on the one hand and the "respectable" community outside the district on the other. The archeological record of these institutions presents a unique perspective on the seamier side of 19th-century Albany.

*Kevin Moody
Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc.*



This three-story brick house at 126 Hamilton Street was one of 17 Mary Ball "boardinghouses" operating in Albany between 1813 and 1863.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Each time an historic building is lost to deterioration or demolition, a piece of our history is lost as well. Your membership helps promote, preserve and protect the architectural heritage of the City of Albany.

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

- Active \$35
- Supporter \$50
- Patron/Small Business \$100
- Donor/Corporate \$250
- Benefactor \$500
- Albany Advocate \$1,000

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City _____ State ____ Zip _____

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Please make your check payable to Historic Albany Foundation and mail with this form to:

Historic Albany Foundation • 89 Lexington Avenue • Albany, NY 12206

Historic Albany Foundation is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation. Your contribution is tax deductible.

www.historic-albany.org

Preservation Merit Awards

Call for nominations

Each year, Historic Albany Foundation presents Preservation Merit Awards to recognize outstanding preservation efforts.

This year, Preservation Merit Awards will be presented at a gala reception at the Palace Theatre on Thursday, September 18.

We are seeking nominations for preservation projects which have protected Albany's architectural heritage. Deadline for nominations is Friday, May 30.

Guidelines:

- All nominated buildings must be within Albany County.
- Projects must be completed.
- Since a Preservation Merit Award is viewed as Historic Albany Foundation's endorsement of a project, awards can only be made where proper preservation techniques have been adhered to.

- Preference will be given to projects which have inspired other preservation efforts.
- Individuals or organizations may be nominated for superlative preservation efforts or for continuing contributions.
- Special awards may be given for circumstances which do not fall into the above categories.

To submit a nomination, please send the name, address and phone number of the nominee – as well as your name, address and telephone number – to Historic Albany Foundation at 89 Lexington Avenue, Albany, NY 12206, or e-mail to HistoricAlbany@aol.com, or call Bill Brandow at 518-465-0876.

Forty Under 40



Early this month, HAF Executive Director Elizabeth Griffin joined 39 other Capital Region

professionals as an honoree at the Business Review's "Forty Under 40" awards.

One of only a few not-for-profit recipients, Elizabeth noted that her focus at Historic Albany Foundation is working not with buildings, but with people who are working on buildings. "Since college, I've been involved in grassroots activities and very much enjoy seeing and helping others to become involved in the things that most directly affect their lives."

www.historic-albany.org
Albany, NY 12206
89 Lexington Avenue



Preservation Connection

Saving Saint Joseph's



HAF is set to take title to the former Saint Joseph's Church in a public signing ceremony on **Thursday, May 29 at 10:00 a.m.** on the steps of the church.

In case of inclement weather, the ceremony will take place at City Hall.

After years of abandonment, this mid-19th century masterpiece **fell into disrepair** and nearly collapsed. However, thanks to the **City of Albany's** emergency stabilization efforts, a \$300,000 grant from the **NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation**, and a listing on the **Preservation League's** Seven to Save, the Church's condition has received broad attention, thus ensuring renewed support for its stabilization and re-use.

But with opportunity comes a challenge: Historic Albany Foundation must undertake a capital campaign to **secure matching funds** for the grant. At the same time, the

St. Joseph's Re-use Committee, chaired by Matthew Bender IV, will be working with the community through a series of public meetings to determine the best and most appropriate future use for the building.

Please visit the Historic Albany Foundation web site at **www.historic-albany.org** for more information about Saving Saint Joseph's.

Please contribute to the Saving Saint Joseph's Campaign! The Foundation accepts Visa and Mastercard as well as donations of publicly traded stocks, bonds or mutual funds. To learn how to initiate a charitable securities transfer, call 518/465-0876. ☺☺