



# ALBANY PRESERVATION REPORT

## Albany Preserves!

### *The Palace Theatre*

*The Palace Theatre, a grand cultural and entertainment facility in the heart of Albany, first opened its doors in October 1931. Built during the height of the Depression, the Palace was the largest theater in a city already noted for a number of other opulent movie houses. Today, the Palace Theatre remains the sole survivor of this period of entertainment and continues to make history with a widely diverse offering of popular acts and cultural events.*

#### **The Past**

The Palace Theatre was designed by John Eberson, one of the foremost motion picture theater architects in the world. Originally an RKO movie house presenting vaudeville acts between the first run feature films, the interior of the Palace Theatre boasts an ornate Austrian Baroque design with "atmospheric" elements in the auditorium.

Atmospheric design referred to architectural features that created the illusion of the auditorium being open to the sky above. In the Palace Theatre, this was achieved by installing a small ceiling cove painted with clouds floating over a blue sky. Though many changes have taken place since its opening, the Palace Theatre fortunately has retained most of its original design



*Opening night at Albany's Palace Theatre. Phase II of renovations, slated to begin this summer, will include restoration of the period marquee.*

features. These include an impressive brass chandelier in the main lobby, original murals painted by Andrew Karoly and Jules Zartol, and plaster beams in the fore-lobby painted to resemble carved wood.

The scale and splendor of the Palace Theatre made the facility a success and favorite of Capital District moviegoers. In 1940, to comply with a Supreme Court decision in the antitrust "Paramount Case," RKO began divesting its theatre holdings. Control of the Palace went to the FAST Theatres chain, a subsidiary of Fabian Enterprises. Fabian operated the theatre until September 1969 and used the facility as both a movie house and concert venue. Arguably the most notable concert event took place at the Palace Theatre in April of 1965 when the now legendary Rolling Stones appeared here on their first tour of the United States.

In 1969, the City of Albany assumed ownership of the Palace Theatre for use as a civic audito-

rium. Though movies were no longer part of regular programming, the Palace Theatre gained renown in the seventies as a concert venue for popular acts.

During the eighties, the administration of the Albany Symphony Orchestra managed the Palace Theatre, and in 1989, the Palace Performing Arts Center was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation to manage the business activities of the theatre.

The Palace Theatre's programming became and continues to be the most diversified in the Capital District. Two resident companies, the Albany Symphony Orchestra and Albany-Berkshire Ballet, call the Palace home.

*(continued on page 5)*

***Turn to page three  
for an update on  
Saint Joseph's Church!***



## Historic Albany Foundation

89 Lexington Ave. · Albany, NY 12206  
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[www.historic-albany.org](http://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 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.*

## A Moveable Feast

*HAF's Annual Fundraiser Slated for Saturday, March 8*

**H**istoric Albany Foundation's annual fundraiser, *A Moveable Feast*, will take place on **Saturday, March 8, 2003.**

The upcoming gala evening of fine food and drink celebrates the contributions of the **Free and Accepted Masons of New York** to our capital city's built environment.

The evening begins with a cocktail reception and silent auction at the **Masonic Temple** on Corning Place. Guests will then adjourn to historic private homes throughout the city for the main course. The dessert reception will be held at eba Dance Theatre on Hudson Avenue (*pictured at right*), which was built in 1917 as the Chapter House of the Order of the Eastern Star.

A Moveable Feast gives our guests the opportunity to "go behind the façades" of Albany's historic buildings - public and private. Participants come from throughout the region to view the amazing architectural heritage of New York's capital city and to enjoy the hospitality of property owners who are caring for wonderful old houses. Most importantly, the evening sustains the commitment of Historic Albany Foundation to preserving history in our midst.

Tickets for the full evening, including cocktail and dessert receptions and dinner, are \$75 per person. For more information or to make a reservation, call the Foundation at 518/465-0876, or visit [www.historic-albany.org](http://www.historic-albany.org).

### *The Masonic Temple 67 Corning Place (at Lodge Street)*

Freemasons first established a lodge in Albany in 1737, and in 1768 a lodge was built on this corner. The present building was erected in 1895-96 to the designs of Albany architects Fuller and Wheeler and incorporated such Italian Renaissance-style elements as rusticated stonework and a loggia with Ionic columns and wide eaves. The entry is flanked by polished columns with orbs and protected by a handsome wrought-iron gate. The bust honors

James Ten Eyck, a prominent Albanian and grand master of New York State Masons. Masonry is the oldest fraternity in the world, although no one can claim to know its exact origins. There is evidence that the

Masonry we know today probably grew out of the guilds of stonemasons who built the castles and cathedrals of the Middle Ages.

### *eba Dance Theatre 351 Hudson Avenue (at Lark Street)*

Designed by Thomas L. Gleason and built in 1917, this structure served as the Chapter House of the Order of the Eastern Star for 60 years. The Order of the Eastern Star is a Masonic institution made up primarily of female relatives of Master Masons. Instituted in Albany in 1869, this chapter shared the Order's statement of purpose: "*to take good people and through uplifting and elevating associations of love and service, through precept and example, build an Order which is truly dedicated to Charity, Truth and Loving-Kindness.*" The buff-colored brick building features a large upstairs meeting room, which was long used for children's dancing classes, and is now owned by eba, the only Dance Theater Company in the United States to own and operate an historic theater.



## City of Albany Poised to Transfer St. Joseph's Church to HAF

The City of Albany's Common Council recently moved on the City's efforts to protect one of our most historically and architecturally significant properties by approving legislation introduced by the Honorable Michael Brown to transfer the former St. Joseph's Church to Historic Albany Foundation. Approval of the resolution took place during the February 3 Council session.

This approval now authorizes Mayor Jennings to formally sign over title of the property to the Foundation and triggers the release of a \$300,000 match grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The grant will be used for the second phase of stabilization of the church, which engineer Russ Reeves determined was in a dynamic mode of failure in December, 2001. The City of Albany declared the building a public safety emergency and entered the structure early last year to begin the first phase



*Engineer Russ Reeves points out an element of the proprietary scaffolding design developed by Safway Steel Products.*



*Members of Historic Albany Foundation's Board of Directors inspected the interior of the former St. Joseph's Church on February 4.*

of emergency stabilization. The City has invested approximately \$250,000 in stabilization efforts. Last month, the City successfully moved to take the building through eminent domain proceedings.

"The final transfer of title is imminent, though the City and the Foundation have not yet set a date," said Elizabeth Griffin, Executive Director of Historic Albany Foundation. "We are looking forward to taking on this important project, and are counting on input and support from neighborhood residents and elected officials. We are planning a public signing ceremony in conjunction with the City of Albany, and we will announce the date as soon as possible."

According to Mayor Jennings, "This transfer will mark yet another milestone in our efforts to preserve this landmark and I look forward to our ongoing partnership with the Foundation in this regard."

Matthew Bender IV has agreed to chair a committee to lead the public process to determine a re-use of the building. In addition, the Foundation must raise \$300,000 against the State grant. To date, we have received an anonymous donation of \$20,000. Look for a special section on our website for updates on "Saving St. Joseph's."

## Assemblymen McEneny, Canestrari Secure \$50k for HAF Preservation Resource Center

Last summer, HAF requested funding from the NYS Assembly to establish a **Preservation Resource Center**. Assemblymen **Ron Canestrari** and **John J. McEneny** recently approved HAF's application for \$50,000 for capital improvements, which include façade improvements; repairs to the roof, skylights and drains and back windows; improvements to the offices and gallery/workshop space; and upgrades of the buildings mechanicals and electrical systems.

We hope to create a one-stop-shopping environment for anyone interested in purchasing, restoring or renovating a building in Albany.

These improvements are part of HAF's master plan for our facility on Lexington Avenue, which was built as a car dealership in the 1930s. The master plan includes renovations which will provide space for the Foundation's expanded staff; a preservation library; the Foundation's extensive slide and photograph collection; gallery space for architectural art exhibits, educational presentations, and monthly preservation workshops; a vacant buildings resource room; and the Parts Warehouse.

Please join us in thanking Assemblymen McEneny and Canestrari for their ongoing support for the work of the Foundation, and for their commitment to our headquarters and Albany's West Hill neighborhood.

# Upcoming Preservation Events & Programming

Wednesday, March 26

## Saving Saint Joseph's Slide Show Presentation

with Jim Cohen, Russ Reeves, the Hon. Jack McEneny and Bill Brandow

This presentation was so well attended last year that we've decided to hold it again. There will be updates regarding progress over the past year as well as history and recent developments. Architectural significance will also be discussed.

Tuesday, April 15

## Out & About

Member's Only Event: TBA

## Wednesday, April 30 • 10-11:00 a.m. Inside/Outside: Finding a Sense of Place

Researching Your Building's History at the Albany County Hall of Records

95 Tivoli Street - RSVP by calling 436-3663

Tuesday, April 29 • 5:30-7 p.m.

## Tour Ten Broeck Triangle

Tony Opalka, Guide  
meet at Sweet Pilgrim Church, corner of Ten Broeck St. & Clinton

The Arbor Hill tour will focus on the historical development of the neighborhood northwest of downtown Albany, beginning when it was part of the Van Rensselaer Manor and subdivided into streets and lots by Patroon Stephen VanRensselaer in 1764, to the construction of Abraham Ten Broeck's home in 1797, to its annexation to the city in 1815. During the period following 1815, Arbor Hill was a working class neighborhood, and included part of Albany's small African-American population. After removal of the Van Rensselaer burial ground from Ten Broeck Street in the early 1840s, the easternmost portion of Arbor Hill became the home of many of Albany's wealthiest lumber merchants and others who built grand rowhouses overlooking the Lumber District and the Erie Canal along the Hudson River. The tour will begin with an

overview of this development, followed by a walk to Ten Broeck Mansion and around the former St. Joseph's Church and parks in one of Albany's most important historic districts.

Sunday, May 4

## Albany History Fair

Visit HAF's table and display at the Albany Visitor's Center, Quackenbush Square - call 434-4791 for more info

Thursday, May 8 • 6:00-8:00 p.m.

## Annual Meeting at the Governor's Mansion

for Members and Friends of HAF

Watch your mailbox for an invitation to the meeting and cocktail reception.

Wednesday, May 14 • 6:00-7:30 p.m.

## Out & About: Tour of the NYS Capitol Restoration Projects

Jim Jamieson, Capitol Architect

This tour will be limited to 20 people - guests must submit names and driver's license numbers two weeks in advance. No walk-ins or backpacks will be allowed, but photographs are permitted. This tour will highlight some of the recently completed restoration work at the Capitol, including the skylight and lay light in the Great Western Staircase. The principal spaces of the building - the Assembly, Senate and Executive Chamber areas - will be included, as well as the \$1 million encaustic tile floor restoration in the Senate Library, which is slated for completion in December.

Saturday, May 17 • 11 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

## Peeble's Island Open House

NYS preservation/conservation center, Peebles Island State Park, Waterford

Visit HAF's table and display - for more information or directions, call 237-8643.

Tuesday, May 20 • 5:30-7 p.m.

## Pastures Walking Tour

Tony Opalka, Guide  
Meet at 96 Madison Avenue

Located just south of downtown Albany, this neighborhood was once a common pasture for the city and now contains some of our oldest houses. Join noted regional architectural

historian Tony Opalka as he points out significant buildings and highlights the history of the Pastures.

Tuesday, June 10 • 6-7:30 p.m.

## Out & About

Member's Only Technical Tour of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception - details TBA

Thursday, June 19

## Hidden City Garden Tour

A walking tour of Albany's secluded urban gardens - details TBA

Tuesday, June 24 • 5:30-7 p.m.

## Mansion Neighborhood Tour

Tony Opalka, Guide  
meet at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

During the 19th century, the area south of Downtown Albany developed rapidly from open land with a few scattered estates to the densely populated area long known as "the South End." With physical and demographic changes of the mid-to-late-20th century, the area was transformed into smaller neighborhoods surrounded by high-rise housing, highways, and the Empire State Plaza.

Tuesday, July 29 • 5:30-7 p.m.

## Washington Park Tour

Tony Opalka, Guide  
meet at the First Presbyterian Church

Washington Park is Albany's contribution to the urban parks movement of 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, similar in importance in Albany's history to New York's Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park. This neighborhood was home to Albany's most important citizens, whose fine rowhouses on surrounding streets included some that were architect-designed and published in national journals. The tour begins with a discussion of the park's use as the city's parade ground and cemeteries, and a residential area that was demolished between the park lake and the parade ground. The tour will look at important houses along State and Willett streets and discuss others on Madison and South Lake avenues.

Find more details and programming online at [www.historic-albany.org/](http://www.historic-albany.org/)

## Albany Preserves: The Palace Theatre

(continued from page 1)

### The Present

The Palace Theatre's 2,807 seats make the venue an ideal size for popular acts, theatrical events, gospel shows, community events, local dance studio recitals, daytime children's presentations, and even boxing.

Efforts are now underway to renovate, modernize and expand the use of the Palace Theatre with the intent of ensuring the historic building's place in the Capital District community for generations of audiences to come.

Phase I of the project began in July 2002 and is scheduled to be completed by the end of February. This phase, with an estimated price tag of \$3 million, includes the restoration and rehabilitation of the entry spaces, lobby and concession areas; restoration and rehabilitation of finishes in the main theater, including repainting, lighting and seat replacement; and upgrades to comply with building codes.

The second phase will begin in summer of 2003 and includes a new marquee and back of house improvements. Future phases will include the potential expansion of the stage.

### The Future

The renovation of the Palace Theatre is expected to act as a catalyst to increase the number and size of theatrical performances hosted in downtown Albany, and to cement the Theatre's role as the northern anchor of Albany's Pearl Street Entertainment Corridor and expanding cultural district.

For this reason, Historic Albany Foundation recently contacted the Albany County Legislature's Court

Facilities Committee to ensure that if a new Family Court building is located in the Clinton Avenue Historic District, they endeavor to design a building that takes into consideration the character of the district and the increased

strain additional parking will have on the daily lives of those who live there.

The plan originally called for the demolition of the Salvation Army building which faces the Palace Theatre from across Clinton Avenue. New plans spare the building, and the Foundation is working with the City to ensure that the eventual reuse of the building will be in keeping with the arts and culture momentum spearheaded by the recent interior renovation of the Palace Theater.

For years, homeowners in this neighborhood, including members of the Ten Broeck Triangle Preservation League, have been struggling to promote this area's potential for residential and entertainment investment. Recent planning initiatives have increased the hope that this neighborhood is poised for revitalization in keeping with this goal. Parking will play a key role in determining the future success of these efforts.

The area surrounding the Palace Theatre has enjoyed investment, focused on historic preservation, from the city, the county and the



Photo: Christopher Gould

*The newly-refurbished lobby of the Palace Theatre as it appeared on First Night, December 31, 2002.*

State. Albany County recently provided a \$150,000 grant to stabilize the façade of 41 Ten Broeck Street, thereby preserving the intact streetscape which runs the length of Ten Broeck Street along the Triangle. Late last year, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation awarded a \$300,000 grant to Historic Albany Foundation to assist with the second phase of stabilization efforts of St. Joseph's Church.

In time, these buildings – including the Palace Theatre and the 1927-8 Salvation Army building – will take their place in a rejuvenated Arbor Hill. Historic Albany Foundation is working to preserve the historic streetscape that marks the entrance to this neighborhood.

*The theater manager, Palace Performing Arts Center, is a 501(c)(3) organization established in 1980. For more information on the Palace Theatre, visit [www.palacealbany.com](http://www.palacealbany.com).*

# Albany Underground

## *The Quackenbush Square Rum Distillery: Water, Molasses and an Egg*

In the spring of 2000, the Albany Parking Authority engaged Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc. to research the history of the new Quackenbush Square Parking Facility site at Orange Street to find out what remains of early Albany might be buried there. Research showed this part of downtown once had been the location of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century brickyard, then a distillery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the New York Central Rail Road yard. Finally, in 1902, Albany's first public bath was built there. With the waning of the railroads, the site was converted into a parking lot following the construction of I-787.

As early as the 1630s, Killiaen van Rensselaer, the first patroon, had paid for the construction of a home along the Hudson River at this spot where clay could be easily mined. He used the house as an incentive for a brickmaker to relocate from Holland to New Netherland to take up this important trade. The bricks made in Van Rensselaer's yard were used to build Albany's sturdy Dutch and English-style houses. The brickyard eventually came into the hands of Peter Bont Quackenbos, whose descendant built the Quackenbush House about 1735. The family name is still associated with the plot of land



*Distillery Overview: After the excavations of the 18<sup>th</sup> century distillery were completed, the shelters were removed and the site was prepared for public viewing. Here a few of the more than 3,000 visitors to the Quackenbush Square site look over the distillery on St. Patrick's Day, 2001.*

north of Orange Street where the parking garage now stands. During the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Peter W. Quackenboss (the great-grandson of Peter Bont) built a distillery long after the brickyard was abandoned.

During the winter of 2000-2001, a backhoe stripped four to six feet of 20<sup>th</sup> century building rubble and fill, under which the archeologists found the 17<sup>th</sup>-century brickmaker's house and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century distillery. What remained of the brickmaker's house revealed that it had been dismantled, burned, and then rebuilt between about 1640 and 1680. But it was at the distillery where the most impressive remains were unearthed.

The Quackenbush Square distillery was a 30-by-60-foot wood-framed building that stood on a mortared stone foundation. Inside were more than 18 wooden vats and the stone

bases for two stills. A late 1700s recipe for rum-making called for the distiller to

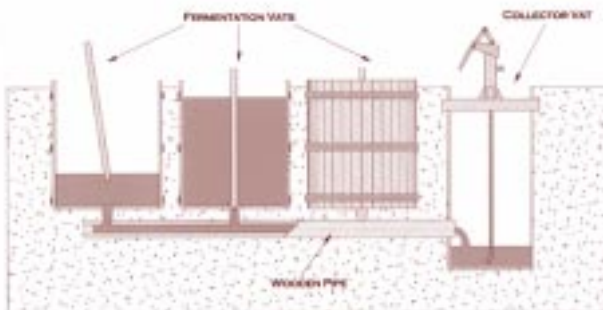
fill a large Vat or Vessel near three Parts full of River-water, to which add as much new Molasses ... so strong as it will bear up [float] an egg. Then beat them very well, till a froth begin to appear on the surface, and let the Liquor stand fermenting for the space of twelve or fourteen days ... then skim it clean and put it into your Still.

The liquor in the still was heated to 182° allowing the alcohol to steam off. The vapor was quickly cooled and collected as rum in wooden barrels.

The vats were connected with a complex plumbing system that eased the arduous labor of transferring up to 1,800 gallons of liquor from each vat to the stills. Two connected systems of six vats each produced a steady supply of liquor to the stills. Since it took about two weeks for a vat of liquor to ferment, one vat was ready to distill every day of the week except Sunday.

The rum from the Quackenbush distillery was sold locally and also became part of the Indian trade. Barrels went to the British and Colonial armies during the French and Indian War, and to the American Army during the Revolutionary War.

*Justin DiVirgilio  
Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc.*



*Distillery Plumbing: Each set of six vats was joined by wooden plumbing to one smaller collector vat. This cross-section shows how the liquor in the fermentation vats was transferred to the collector vat. A hand-pump over the collector was used to fill the nearby still.*

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

[www.historic-albany.org](http://www.historic-albany.org)

## Spring Preservation Workshops

Spring preservation workshops require registration – please call 465-0876 to sign up. Each workshop is \$5 for members of HAF, \$10 for non-members.

### Care and Restoration of Wood Floors

Saturday, March 15 • 10 a.m. - noon  
*Call for location*

Floor work is often one of the first projects undertaken by homeowners. This workshop will evaluate techniques for restoring and repairing wood flooring and provide an overview of flooring materials.

*Ed Pike* is president and owner of Northern Pro Built, Inc. He holds an AAS in Construction Technology and has 35 years of experience in restoration work. He was employed by Western Building Restoration until 1990 when he started his own business. His company works on projects as wide ranging as column replacement, slate roofing, gold leafing and specializes in the repair of inlaid wood flooring.

### The Diagnosis and Treatment of Old House Ailments

Saturday, March 29 • 10 a.m. - noon  
*Call for location*

This popular workshop will present basic techniques to determine the cause of common problems in masonry and wood frame construction. Homeowners will learn to examine typical parts of a building where moisture may enter, and the cause behind such problems as rising damp, efflorescence and insect infestation. This is an excellent seminar for those contemplating the purchase of an old or historic home. *Jeff Dembowski* holds an MA from Cornell University in Historic Preservation Planning. He worked for Historic Albany Foundation for many years as Parts Warehouse Manager, and currently works as a freelance restoration carpenter based in Albany.

### Paint and Finish Removal

Saturday, April 5 • 10 a.m. - noon  
*Call for location*

This workshop, held at the artisan's studio, will cover all aspects of one of the most common and time-consuming old house chores – paint removal. Mechanical, chemical and heat stripping will be covered as well as the pros and cons of each approach. The restoration of woodwork following stripping will also be discussed. *Peter Leue* earned his BFA from the

School of American Crafts at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Since 1968, he has taught woodworking while pursuing his artistic career as a sculptor. He provides fine woodworking and cabinet making to the public from his Albany studio. He enjoys a wide regional reputation.

### House Styles 101: Dating Tips

Saturday, April 26 • 10 a.m. - noon  
*Call for location*

Covering the evolution of architectural styles and construction techniques in America between 1800 and 1930, this seminar will focus on types of housing prevalent in Albany during those years, and how changes in materials and detailing can be studied to better understand the evolution of any house.

*Bill Brandow* works for HAF as Director of Technical Services and as a project Architect with John G. Waite Associates, an Albany architectural firm that specializes in preservation. He holds an MA in Architectural Conservation from the University of York, England.

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89 Lexington Avenue



## Preservation Connection

### Staff Update

**Mark Brogna** joined HAF this fall as Parts Warehouse Manager. He previously served as facilities manager for the Morgan State House. He is also one of a group of neighbors that rescued the former **Bryn Mawr Bookstore** at 215 Lark Street from closure and is now a co-owner of the Lark Street Bookshop.

([www.larkstreetbookshop.com](http://www.larkstreetbookshop.com))

Mark has years of experience working with historic structures and is a wonderful addition to our team. HAF's Architectural Parts Warehouse is open Wednesday through Friday from noon to 5:00 p.m., and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Call the Parts Warehouse at **465-2987**. ☺☺

### Vacant Buildings Initiative

Graduate students at the **University of Albany** are developing a citywide inventory of Albany's vacant buildings. The data collected will be used to inform public policy, and to develop strategies for reducing the number of vacant buildings in Albany.

**HAF commissioned this study**, in which students will devise detailed electronic maps that depict where the city's vacant buildings are located. These maps will help show what sorts of patterns of neglect exist in different neighborhoods. When complete, Albany will be one of just a handful of U.S. cities to have collected this type of data.

The results of the study are slated to be published in **May, 2003**, and will be made available to the City, County,

neighborhood associations and the general public.

HAF continues to have fruitful meetings with staff of **County Executive Michael Breslin** to discuss the foreclosure process and issues of abandoned buildings. HAF is also a member of the Abandoned Buildings subcommittee of the **Arbor Hill Advisory Committee**, which is working toward a developing a pilot program for stabilization and sale of abandoned buildings for owner-occupied use.

If you would like to bring an abandoned building to the attention of the study group, please call the Foundation at 465-0876. Visit our web site for more information on the initiative. ☺☺