



THE PRESERVATIONIST

Newsletter of
The Springfield Preservation Trust

Fall 1990

Reprint of the Mayor's letter to the state Massachusetts Historical Commission

March 29, 1990

Dear Commissioners:

It has come to my attention that the Springfield Preservation Trust has applied for a Survey & Planning Grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. This proposal involves the Pine Point and Bay neighborhoods as well as parts of what is known as "metrocenter" on the fringes of Springfield's downtown, most of which is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

As Mayor during my City's most difficult times, I have serious reservation about this grant proposal, especially since the Trust has not chosen to inform the Planning Department of its intentions. During my ten year tenure on the City Council, I have always gone on record as a staunch supporter of the Springfield Historical Commission's efforts and voted in favor of numerous preservation projects in the City. As Mayor, I continue this commitment to historic preservation.

I am proud of the existence of our six local historic districts which protect the integrity of approximately 1300 properties. I am also aware of the many fine structures and areas in Springfield which are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

About seven years ago, the City of Springfield applied for and received a Survey & Planning Grant from your Commission to conduct an inventory of structures and identify those meeting eligibility for inclusion on the Historic Register. This was a successful, cooperative venture intimately involving the Springfield Historical Commission, the Mayor, the Director of Planning and the Commissioner of Community Development. Survey results have been put to use and are a convenient planning tool. However, much more work needs to be accomplished in order to do justice to existing and expanded historic districts as well as instances where structures or sections meet eligibility criteria.

Springfield is in great financial difficulty and has had to reduce departmental support staff. Ultimately, I feel it is in the best interest of preservation to properly maintain, administer and monitor existing and eligible historic properties. I assure you that much thought was given to priorities when the historic designation process began in 1972. As you know, Springfield has a good record for a City its size, having declared an unusually large number of places as historic, both National Register and City Ordinance. I am also cognizant of the enormous

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TRUST RECEIVES GRANT FROM MHC

The Trust has received notice that it will receive grant monies from the state Historical Commission to conduct a survey of the Pine Point, Bay and Metro Center neighborhoods, President Dan Sotak-Cooper announced at an August executive board meeting.

The Commission will provide a \$4,000 Survey and Planning Grant, which the Trust will match, to do the survey. The Trust first applied for the monies in December of 1989 and must complete the project by next summer.

According to President Sotak-Cooper, the Trust must now advertise and hire a consultant to research and survey the historic aspects of the Bay and Pine Point neighborhoods and the area between Chestnut and Federal Streets in the Metro Center community.

In approaching the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for grant monies, the Trust was asked to obtain a letter of recommendation from the local historical commission.

Although President Sotak-Cooper approached chair Frances Gagnon, the Trust received no response from the Springfield Commission and later learned that Mayor Mary E. Hurley had written the state Commission office withholding support for the survey stating other fiscal priorities (see sidebar for reprint of Mayor Hurley's letter).

The Trust received word of the approval in early August.

Soldiers of Fortune Left Legacy in Springfield

By Stefania Catera

As an art restorer, it is a very fortunate coincidence for me to be here in Springfield and in New England because many historic homes in this area have beautiful samples of American mural decoration. In fact, the mural decoration in America started in Massachusetts and the

Continued on page 4.

President's Column

The Importance of Being Surveyed

The foundation which underlies all of our many historic districts is the historic survey. A thoroughly executed survey of any given area is of supreme importance because it forms a permanent record of the build environment that includes all of its structures and clearly identifies those of special historic and architectural significance.

From this carefully researched document, a clear knowledge may be obtained and an official historic designation may or may not be made. More importantly, a record has been created that remains for posterity, documenting the physical assets of a particular place at this particular time in history. Once accomplished, the same survey will be utilized again and again over the years as a primary reference.

If a local historic district should be created, then the survey will be consulted whenever changes are proposed for structures within that district. They present the facts that enable those charged with protecting historic properties to make informed decisions on what may or may not be altered. We believe that it is necessary that all of the historic structures in our city be surveyed and their existence recorded.

It is for this reason that the Springfield Preservation Trust applied for and received a matching grant of \$4,000 from the state to survey certain parts of Springfield which have not yet been covered.

It is both puzzling and dismaying that our Mayor would write a letter of non-support to the state and that the Springfield Historical Commission would not be enthusiastic about our efforts to record this critical information. The survey in question can only help all parties concerned preserve the history that makes Springfield such a special place.

The city's reaction is even more surprising since the survey will not cost them a penny! It is paid for by the Trust and the state, and we will gladly share the fruits of our efforts with the city, just as we have done with our surveys in the past. We can only wonder as to why official endorsements were not forthcoming and then, just press ahead with our agenda.

—Dan Sotak-Cooper

Welcome to New Members

We would like to welcome the following people as new Trust members: Hank Thorburn, Mary Harris, Bill and Lisa Lonergan, Margaret O'Donnell, Bettye Bradley, Lydia Sebastyn, Mr. and Mrs. Ramon Carando, and the McKnight Neighborhood Council.

MAYOR HURLEY'S LETTER, *continued.*

burden of work assumed by the Springfield Historical Commission and volunteers.

In summary, I must refrain from supporting the Springfield Preservation Trust's request for a Survey & Planning Grant. The uncertain fiscal future demands that Springfield meet current responsibilities to the best of its ability with limited resources.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Hurley

Much is Quiet on the Western Front

With all of the problems that have been facing the city over the past six months, little has happened in reference to advocacy issues on which the Trust is keeping an eye.

Technical and Tapley Schools continue to sit idle. With the real estate market as it is, there are not many developers actively looking for projects at the moment. Vandalism is the greatest potential risk.

It is still unknown what will become of York Street Jail. An idea to keep it as a women's prison was suggested but rebuffed as people see it as a key to development on the riverfront.

A proposal to develop Carew Street School, which has been deemed register eligible, was proposed. The initial proposal also suggested some demolition of surrounding buildings as well as an addition to the school. A watchful eye is needed so that the building is protected.

If you hear anything on these issues or on anything else that would be important to our preservation interests, please feel free to call Jim Boone at 734-9110.



Can You Guess?

Do you know this building? Turn to page 6.

Spring Tour

The Historic House Tour held on Sunday, May 6 continued the Trust's 13-year tradition of providing an overview of homes in various historic districts. Approximately 350 people oohed and aaahed their way through five beautiful homes and two condominium units.

While an important educational event for the public, the tour raised \$2,000 for the Trust. These monies will be applied towards a matching grant for surveying the Pine Point and Bay neighborhoods if the grant is approved by the state. The application is currently under consideration.



This Lower McKnight home was one of the several featured on the Spring Tour.

the Duquette home.

A Great Success

A warm thanks go to those community members who shared their homes for the day. They included Tom Brown on Mattoon Street, Bob Kinder and Ed Zuckerman in McKnight, Pete DeCuir and Lynne Whittaker in Lower Maple, Bob and Pat Duquette in Maple Hill, and Steve and Catherine Hays in Forest Park Heights.

Special thanks also go to Shawmut Bank for their continued support in helping underwrite many of the tour expenses, and to Channel 22 for publicity in broadcasting from

Annual Meeting Date Shifted

The Annual Meeting, which is open to all members, has been shifted from August to November.

Traditionally scheduled to coincide with the August pot-luck picnic, the Trust Board has voted to couple the meeting with the annual awards ceremony which takes place in mid to late November.

The usual 15-minute meeting summarizes the Trust's activities for the year, and presents and elects a new slate of officers. The Board voted to make the change in an effort to reach a greater number of dues-paying members and interested guests.

Book Review

Book Pair Good Decorating Resource

For Trust members who want to know more about how their 19th century houses were decorated both inside and out, an excellent resource is a pair of books written by the husband and wife team of Roger W. Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler.

Victorian Interior Decoration and Victorian Exterior Decoration guide readers through the process of choosing exterior paint colors and their placement, along with all aspects of authentic 19th century interior design.

The book on exterior decoration in particular is an expert reference on how to work through the specifics of doing an historically appropriate paint job down to the last detail, with close attention paid to the architectural style of the house with which one is dealing. Similarly, the book on interior decoration breaks interiors and their elements into specific time periods, making the information easy to apply to your own house.

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Hessians Painted for their Supper

MURALS, *continued.*

Springfield area was a very active center.

The word fresco, a kind of mural, originated in Europe and its roots are in the Latin language meaning "to paint on fresh." It was used to refer to a painting executed on walls, ceilings, etc. of which the mortar or plaster was not quite dry so that the colors could sink in and become more durable.

In America, the word fresco came to indicate a variety of interior mural paintings mostly landscapes, which were sometimes painted by hand and at other times stenciled.

After the War of Independence, many of the Hessian soldiers, who were mercenaries hired by the British, stayed in America. They carried with them a valuable cultural heritage which provided them with the necessary skills for stenciling and painting murals. These itinerant soldiers were offered jobs of interior decoration in exchange for lodging and board.

At this time in Europe, decorative wallpapering and tapestry murals were very much in vogue. However, it was too expensive for most Americans to acquire any of these beautiful works of art. Also because of the nature of the materials, it was very difficult to transport these fragile products.

All of this created a demand for the skills of the itinerants. Many wealthy Americans desired the beautiful wallpaper and painted panels of canvas depicting historical events and natural landscapes.

The life of the itinerant craft person was exciting. Being free after the war, these workers

were able to travel the countryside, carrying a tool box which contained dry colors, a supply of stencil cut frames of thick paper or leather, various measuring tools, a plumb line, a piece of chalk, and skimmed milk to use as a medium for mixing the colors.

One can follow the work of these skilled artisans on a map and trace their route by following the repeated decorative patterns depicted on the walls of the homes along the way.

At that time the Springfield area was one of the main centers of American culture. Many of the old historic homes possess a variety of samples of this floridity of the times. It is still possible to find behind renovated walls and ceilings, hidden, beautiful frescos.

Many of those old buildings and homes, however, have been destroyed, especially around the beginning of this century. We hope that these works do not continue to be lost and can be rediscovered and restored to their original beauty.

Today we have the information, the culture and the skills necessary to preserve this valuable heritage.

Stefania Catera is a fine art restorer and a guest contributor.

BOOK REVIEW, *continued.*

Both of these books are written in a very readable, well-organized style and are well worth purchasing for long-term use, as you will find yourself referring to them over and over again during the course of any restoration. These books, donated by the Trust, are also available from the library.

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SPT CALENDAR

Monthly meetings are held in the Community Room at Forest Park Library at 7:30 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month. All members are welcome. The next meetings are scheduled for October 3, November 7, and December 5.

Video Viewing Draws Large Crowd

The premiere showing of the Trust's new video on residential architecture drew a full house on Friday, May 18.

Over 60 Trust members and guests crowded into the renovated F.L. Roberts' lobby where the special showing of "Homes of the City" was scheduled. Dues-paying members received invitations to the viewing which included movie-style refreshments such as popcorn, crackerjack, chips, and assorted candy. The film was later aired on Springfield's Cable Network and copies will eventually be released to area schools, libraries and the local archives.

Trust president, Dan Sotak-Cooper drew laughs from the audience as he opened the program with a humorous film clip showing several false starts by narrator, Jim Boone and videogra-



Boone and Sutin beam with success.

phers, Vinnie and Joanne Yacovone.

After the showing of the 30-minute video, "Pressie" awards (a.k.a. Oscars) were presented to Jim Boone for narrating the video and to Marilyn Sutin for producing it. The Cable Endowment provided a grant of \$7,500 for the project. The Trust contributed \$2,500 raised from previous house tours.

House Tips:

Three Rules for Exterior Maintenance

Ed. Note: The following is the final article in a four-part series.

Keep it dry, keep it clean, and keep it painted. These three approaches will help you better preserve the outside of your house.

Keep it dry. Foundation plantings and vines are attractive, provide privacy — and lead to the rapid deterioration of your porches, chimneys, and house. They trap moisture, snow and ice and do not let it go. Try to keep bushes trimmed away from the house and avoid problems by running vines up trellises.

Also, in the winter, shovel the snow off your porches and steps so they dry as quickly as possible and the ice does not penetrate the wood and cracks. A house needs sun and air to stay dry and healthy.

Keep it clean. If you live on a busy street, that generates a lot of dirt and dust. Wash your house down under the eaves, on the porches and anywhere the vertical rain water does not get to. Your house will not only look brighter, but the paint will hold up better.

Keep it painted. You do not have to repaint the whole house each time one area needs it. Just do that area after you have done very good preparation. If you only have a small area to do each year, you may even consider doing it yourself.

Keep a close eye on your porches and hatchway; they get a lot of wear from weather and people and need to be painted more often. Keep up with this chore as both architectural features are very expensive to repair.

Remember also: paint not only looks good, it protects. If you have paint peeling down to the bare wood, cover the wood quickly to stop further moisture from being absorbed. Before painting, try to figure out where the moisture that caused the peeling in the first place came from. Faulty gutter, humid bathroom or kitchen, too little air circulation or sun, cracked clapboards? Fix the problem before repainting.

Keep it dry, keep it clean, and keep it painted. These should be your three rules of thumb for exterior maintenance.

— Jim Boone

Trust Offers Funds to Commission

The Trust has offered \$400 to help defray the overall expense of preparing a mailing to all property owners within the city's historic districts. The donation came after the local Historical Commission requested assistance with educating property owners as to their rights and responsibilities within the specially designated areas.



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? Tiffany-Bowles House

Until its demolition in 1980, the Tiffany-Bowles House on Central Street was the second most historically significant home in the city (the first being the Alexander House on State Street).

The Italianate style house was designed in 1853 by Henry Sykes, who also designed the Mills/Stebbins Villa. Its first owner, The Reverend Francis Tiffany, did not live there long, but its second owner, Samuel Bowles, did. Bowles was publisher of the Springfield Republican and a prominent member of the newly-formed Republican party. Around the turn of the century the house became the MacDuffie School for Girls.

In 1978 MacDuffie petitioned the Historical Commission for permission to demolish the house, which it claimed was in deteriorated condition and whose site was needed for tennis courts. The Commission denied the request. One year later, the Commission decided to reconsider its decision. Despite much opposition and with little discussion, the Commission voted to reverse itself and allow demolition. Early the following morning, Trust members met at the house to await the possible bulldozer while a

court injunction was sought. In a classic preservation showdown, members formed a human chain to block the bulldozer (which appeared around 8:30 a.m.) until the injunction arrived. The case was litigated to the Supreme Judicial Court where the Trust lost, not on the merits of the case, but on the narrow grounds that only an applicant, mayor, or board of selectmen could contest a Commission decision. The house was demolished in 1980.

The tennis courts were never built. MacDuffie ultimately sold the land for a condominium project currently underway. The Trust, however, successfully petitioned for an amendment to state local historic district legislation so that now an abutter, a nearby resident of the district, or a preservation group has standing to bring a suit in court.



Tiffany-Bowles House in the process of being demolished.



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