

# Springfield Preservation Trust

# S P T

January 2014

Dr. Robert E. Holbrook (1937 - 2013)



It is with great sadness that we report longtime Springfield Preservation Trust supporter, advocate, and board member Dr. Robert E. Holbrook, passed away on November 29th. Bob did so many great things for not only the Trust, but throughout the community.

In addition to serving on the SPT Board for the past nine years, Bob was active in the community as a member of The Kimball Tower Condominium Board, The Armoury-Quadrangle Civic Association, The Springfield Museums, The Springfield Exchange Club, and The Pioneer Valley Dental Society.

His partner, Robert Louder, has requested that memorial donations in Bob's memory be sent to the Springfield Preservation Trust, 74 Walnut Street, Springfield, MA 01109. Bob will be sorely missed but fondly remembered.

## Most Endangered Committee Focus Property

LOST-- Chestnut Junior High School

On September 3, 2013 the Chestnut Junior High School was lost to arson. The fire was set from two locations within the building, one near the front of the building and one near the rear of an adjoining structure. The fire burned for several hours and the damage so great, the building has been declared a complete loss. The cost to clear the site has been estimated at approximately 1 to 1.5 million dollars.



The Chestnut Junior High School was built in stages in 1901 and 1907. In 2004, the building was ordered closed by Mayor Charles V. Ryan due to a rotting gymnasium floor and other hazardous conditions. Since that time the building has remained vacant. In 2007 and 2012, the city designated developers who planned to convert the school to housing, but none were successful.

There are several questions residents of Springfield and the preservation community should ask about this incident:

1. During the time it was vacant, was the owner diligent in preventing further deterioration? It would seem prudent that a building and land worth 5 million dollars be considered an asset and, if not repaired, at least monitored to prevent further damage.
2. During the time it was vacant, was the owner diligent in keeping it secure? The fires were set from the interior of the building so someone was able to get in. It is understandable that such a large structure would be difficult to monitor, but were steps taken to increase security as much as possible, such as exterior lighting, periodic checks of the exterior for signs of break-in, periodic checks of the interior for activity?
3. What impact do vacant buildings have on our property values, safety, and security? Is it

acceptable as a community to allow a building to be vacant and deteriorating for 7 years?

While SPT doesn't have the answer to these questions, they are, nevertheless, important to ask. And although this building was owned by the city, the situation could have occurred at any number of vacant buildings throughout Springfield, many with even greater historical significance.

With the recent losses of the Allis Mansion and now the Chestnut Street Junior High School fresh in mind, efforts are underway to enact a demolition delay ordinance to give a measure of protection to historic buildings located outside of designated historic districts within the city. This, when combined with increased monitoring of vacant properties and advocacy for educational initiatives on their rich historical legacy, may lead to an increased awareness of their true value to the city of Springfield.

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### Demolition Delay Ordinance

The Springfield Historical Commission has filed for enactment for an ordinance which would impose a twelve month delay on demolition for any building on the National Register of Historic Places or any building 100 years old or older. Exempted would be demolitions ordered by the Building Commissioner for public safety or any demolition within a casino zone. Owners may make a case to the Commission for lifting of the delay and the Commission may grant the request.

The ordinance is intended to allow public discussion regarding demolition of older buildings and time to explore alternatives to demolition. More than 120 Massachusetts communities already have such ordinances including Boston, Worcester, Longmeadow, Holyoke, Westfield, and Northampton.

The ordinance received the first of three required votes of the City Council and was referred to its Planning Economic Development Committee. That committee met and voted to return the ordinance to the full council on December 16 with a recommendation for adoption. Unfortunately, just as the meeting was concluding, two local developers (one of whom demolished Saint

Joseph's Church) showed up to object. Another committee meeting has now been scheduled.

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### SAVE THE DATE - 2014 Winter Fundraiser

This year's annual SPT Winter Fundraiser is being held on Sunday, January 26, 2014 at 2 PM. The event will be hosted by Joseph & Kathleen Pellegrino at their almost 100 year old home at 43 Atwater Road in the Atwater Park neighborhood.



The Pellegrino's home was built in 1915 for J.G. Roy at a cost of \$8,600. The Arts & Crafts Style home, or "Middle European Country Home" as the original owner called it, was designed by Gardner & Gardner, Springfield's foremost architectural firm. Gardner & Gardner designed the Worthy Hotel, Technical High School, the Bishop's Residence on Elliot Street, and many of Springfield's most prominent buildings of the time. Eugene Gardner was one of the early residences of what was to become Atwater Park and his son George designed more than a dozen homes in the neighborhood.

Hors d'oeuvres, wine, and nonalcoholic beverages will be served. Admission is \$35 for SPT members and \$40 for nonmembers. Make your reservation by mailing a check to SPT at 74 Walnut Street, Springfield 01105 or online at [www.springfieldpreservationtrust.org](http://www.springfieldpreservationtrust.org). Reservations are limited and must be ordered by January 23rd.



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### SAVE THE DATE – SPT Annual Meeting

The 2014 SPT Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, March 2, 2014. Annual elections will be held for the Board of Directors and a review of the past year will be presented. Look for your invitation in the mail closer to the date of the meeting.

### SAVE THE DATE –Cabaret Fund Raiser

Cabaret singer Vickie Phillips has offered her talents for an intimate fund raising event on Sunday, March 16, at 2 pm at the Kimball Towers Condos, 140 Chestnut Street.

Most recently seen in her NYC critically acclaimed one-woman Show “Songs Are Like Friends,” Vickie is an award winning singer/actress who, although living in Springfield, remains a familiar face in the New York Cabaret scene, especially at the famous ‘Don’t Tell Mama Cabaret Theater’, which she fondly calls her home away from home. She is one of the first cabaret performers to receive the prestigious Backstage Bistro Award as well as the Off-Off Broadway Review Award.

Vickie will be accompanied by Springfield resident and SPT member Michael Rheault. Michael is Director of Performing Arts Activities and Artist in Residence at Bay Path College, Director of Music at First Park Memorial Baptist Church, piano instructor and accompanist at Springfield College, and organist/cantor at Sacred Heart Church in Agawam.

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### 77 Maple St Update

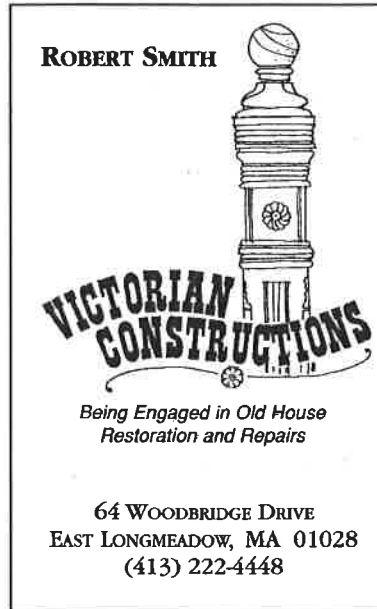
The Contract for 77 Maple St.'s current phase of construction was signed in November 2013, and work is about to start. On December 9 a careful de-leading of all work areas will begin. A total of 6 designated areas of Exterior Trim and 10 selected Windows will be stripped, repaired as needed, thoroughly "tuned up" (for smooth operation, etc.), and given 3 coats of paint.

The General Contractor is Peter Hamm's Historic Preservation Associates, of Wales, MA. Peter has worked on 77 before, and does excellent work. The \$102,000.00 project is to be completed in May 2014.

Peter is also rehabbing the much-abused 83 Maple St. next door, for new owner, Develop Springfield. A gate has been cut into the fence between the houses for expedited movement between the 2 jobs.

### Would you like to lead a walking tour?

Volunteer walking tour leaders are needed for the 2014 and 2015 “Second Saturday Walking Tours”, which are put on by the Springfield Museums and the Quadrangle Civic Association.



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Tours can focus on aspects of architecture, history, or the natural world in the general vicinity of the Quadrangle. Many Trust members and supporters have led and attended these tours. Turnout generally ranges from 20 – 50+ people. The attendees are enthusiastic and genuinely interested in what the tour leaders have to say. A state of the art, lightweight headset amplification system is provided to tour leaders.

The tours are held the second Saturday of each month April – November and begin at 10:30 AM and wrap up sometime around noon. 2014 will be the eighth year of these very popular tours that highlight our wonderful city.

The 2015 season will be a street by street tour of the area and will show the 1939-1940 WPA photographs of individual streets in the AQCA neighborhood: Pearl, Byers, Mattoon, Elliot/Salem, Byers/Frost, Spring, School, Temple/High, Maple, State, Union and

Chestnut. Tour leaders will discuss the more distant past of those streets and will also talk about the changes that have occurred in the 75 years since the WPA photos were taken. Would you like to deepen your knowledge about a particular street in the area? Do you already know a whole lot and want to share it? Then why not consider leading one of these special street tours in 2015!

Tour leaders do not need any special training or educational background, just an enthusiasm for the subject they'll be discussing, something to talk about for 90 minutes, and a good pair of walking shoes.

If you'd like to lead a tour in 2014 or 2015, please contact Trust member Erica Walch at [eiwalch@verizon.net](mailto:eiwalch@verizon.net) or (413) 747-3830. Tour leaders are given hearty and heartfelt thanks, but no monetary remuneration. AQCA will, however, happily pay for photocopies of handouts for the tours.

<b>DENNER ♦ PELLEGRINO, LLP</b>	
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### Springfield Historical Commission Appointments

SPT President, Ben Murphy has been appointed to the Springfield Historical Commission (SHC) as a regular member by Mayor Domenic Sarno. For a number of years, Ben has been the alternate member of the commission. SPT board member Bob McCarroll also serves on the SHC making SPT well represented. Also newly appointed is Steve Shultis as the new alternate member of the Commission. Steve has previously served as a board member for SPT and lives in the Lower Maple Local Historic District close to 77 Maple Street.

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### "Voices from the Grave" Tour

The Trust hosted hour-long tours of Oak Grove Cemetery on Sunday, October 27. Docents led groups to six graves of nineteenth century Springfield residents where costumed interpreters spoke about that person. Featured were philanthropist Primus Mason (Melvin Edwards), chain store pioneer Lyman Besse (Mike Stevens), Civil War Congressional Medal of Honor winner Charles Knight (John Toms), Industrialist Frank Wesson (Don Courtemanche, who lives in his house), developer William McKnight (Jim Boone), and Victorian wife Emily Haynes (Kathleen Pellegrino).

Seasonal refreshments were served. Feedback from tour-goers was very positive, and the board has decided to plan another tour next October. A new tradition has been born!

The event was underwritten by the Daboul Family Charitable Trust and Baystate Health.



Please meet some of Springfield's famous residents:

### Lyman Waterman Besse (1854-1930)



Born in Wareham, MA, Lyman Besse did not begin with much capital except his devotion to hard work and integrity. By the time he was 34 years old he had founded several men's clothing stores and had moved in with his wife and family to the newly built house at 29 Ingersoll Grove in Springfield. He was a partner in what would become the "Besse System", 27 stores across New England.

Besse was involved in local businesses and real estate. His children attended Springfield schools and went away to Wellesley, Vassar and Harvard. Besse lived to see the golden anniversary of the Besse System in 1927, but not to see his son-in-law, Stanley King, become President of Amherst College or his grandson, Kingman Brewster as President of Yale University.

Emily Leonard Haynes (1865-1901)



Emily Hayes was born in Easthampton, MA to a family whose roots go back to 17th century Springfield. Encouraged by her mother who believed strongly in education, Emily studied at Smith College and then traveled to Europe where she studied in Leipzig and Berlin. She eventually returned to the states and continued her studies in NYC.

While performing as a soloist at the Hope Congregational Church on State St. in Springfield, she met her future husband, Stanford Haynes. They lived at 11 Thompson St and shared adjoining living space with Stanford's family, who owned Haynes & Company Clothing Store on Main St. Emily died a year after her 3rd child was born. Her 2nd child, Theodosia, married Alexander Taylor. Theodosia's son Isaac gave birth to 5 children, all musically inclined, the most famous being James Taylor.

Charles Knight (1839 - 1904)



Charles Knight was born in the small town of East Westmoreland near Keene, New Hampshire. He went to local schools and then worked on the family farm. When the war came, he enlisted in the 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Volunteers, which was formed in April of 1862.

After the war he relocated to West Springfield and got a job at the Springfield Armory where he worked for more

than 20 years. He married Ellen Burch and had three daughters.

Charles participated in the Battle of the Crater and in 1865 was recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor for being the first soldier to breach the enemy's line. He was again nominated and 32 years to the day

of the Battle of the Crater, he finally received the medal of honor.

Primus Mason ( 1817-1892)



Primus P. Mason was a significant figure in the history of Springfield. He was an entrepreneur, an investor, and a philanthropist whose impact on Springfield is still visible almost two hundred years after his birth. His accomplishments were all the more impressive given that he was a black man in a city not known for its racial tolerance. Primus Mason was born in

Monson, MA, in February 1817, the son of Jordan and Lurania Mason, free people of color.

Mason left for California after gold fever struck the Springfield area. Upon returning to Springfield, Mason earned a reputation as a shrewd real estate speculator. He invested in land in the yet-undeveloped Hill district, which would become Springfield's tony McKnight neighborhood, netting Mason significant wealth. Primus Mason and his family lived in a gracious home on State Street in Springfield, near the corner which would be named Mason Street in his memory. He outlived his numerous wives and his only child, Emily, who died with no offspring in 1873 at age thirty-four.

He was generous with his wealth; it is said that he quietly paid the funeral expenses for many indigent people of color. When he died in 1892 he left the bulk of his estate, a substantial sum of more than \$25,000, to the city of Springfield to establish a Home for Aged Men. This institution still exists in Springfield, now called the Mason Wright Retirement Community. His bequest was the largest gift to the city up to that time.



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### William McKnight (1836-1903)



William McKnight and his brother John came to Springfield in the 1850's from N.Y. They were in the haberdashery business but by 1870 Springfield was growing fast and the demand for housing great. They bought up land on the 'hill' and began building houses. They believed that if you built quality, profit would follow.

They created one of the first planned residential neighborhoods in the US by laying out the streets with five parks; they controlled what could be built and how much it would cost. Over 800 houses were built in the McKnight Improvement, as it was called, some by the brother's McKnight, others lots were sold for development. Because of these houses, Springfield became known as the City of Homes.

The McKnight brothers expanded development to include the Ridgewood section and the north side of Sumner Avenue. They also donated a portion of the south side of Sumner toward the new Forest Park. In 1903, returning home to Clarendon St. from his summer on the Cape, he turned on a gas lamp, couldn't find a match, and died of gas exposure.

### Frank Wesson (1852-1887)



Frank Luther Wesson was born to Cynthia and Daniel Baird Wesson here in Springfield. Daniel Baird Wesson, along with his business partner Horace Smith, founded the Smith & Wesson Company in the same year as Frank's birth. Frank married Sarah Lovell of Montreal and moved to NYC to work in his father-in-law's publishing business. After a short time in NYC, the couple returned to

Springfield, and after renting an apartment for some time at the Massasoit House (now known as the Paramount Theater) they purchased a home at 220 Maple Street. Frank took a position in his father's company and the couple immediately began a family.

Shortly after the birth of their fourth child, Mr. Wesson, aged 35, intended to escort his sister-in-law, Ms Emily Lovell back to her home in Montreal after an extended visit. Wanting to travel in comfort, they delayed their

departure for an overnight sleeper car. Shortly before midnight, approaching the bridge over the White River in Vermont, the last of the four sleeper cars in the overnight train, left the tracks. Three other sleeper cars including the one that Mr. Wesson and Ms Lovell were traveling in, also left the tracks as the train crossed the White River. The sleeper cars plummeted to the ice covered river below where fire immediately broke out. Ms Lovell, relatively uninjured, was able to pull Mr. Wesson from the burning wreck but he succumbed to a fatal skull fracture a few moments later.

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You can also find us on FaceBook, [www.facebook.com/PreserveSpringfield](http://www.facebook.com/PreserveSpringfield)

Monthly meetings of the Springfield Preservation Trust are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m., at the Mason Wright Retirement Center, 74 Walnut Street. All Trust members are welcome.

### Newsletter contributors:

- ❖ Jim Boone
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