

## **Address to Hull House 2010 membership meeting**

Thanks Gary [Costello]

As Gary has said in his kind introduction, I've been involved in the Historic Preservation Movement for a very long time. Actually, as a graduate student at Georgia Tech in the early 1970s, I was involved in one of the first times that newly enacted federal regulations stopped a highway from bulldozing through a historic neighborhood -- at that time, the Governor of the state was Jimmy Carter and the state's transportation director was Bert Lance.

I am very proud of being part of this preservation movement, as I believe it was one of the few movements that have focused on our cities -- recognizing that Urban Renewal was a destructive force, using the term 'historic' as a brand to offset fashion that labeled older neighborhoods as derelict and old-fashioned, coming up with the Main Street approach, to revitalize the commercial centers in many small towns -- used extensively in other states but not often in New York.

The success -- and some of the weakness -- of the historic preservation movement is that it is almost exclusively a local movement. In New York, we have a very good statewide organization to support and encourage local preservation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation is an effective voice for us nationally and also a way through its publications, conferences and National preservation conference, to share good ideas across the country. And we now have tax credits for the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

But Historic Preservation is a local movement. Unlike our cousins in the environmental movement, preservation organizations are not chapters of national groups. They are all independent groups, acting to save an individual property, citizens banded together to save their neighborhood and city and regional organizations that act as watchdogs, advocacy groups, educators, promoters, and even sometimes as non-profit developers, to ensure the survival of their area's historic resources.

Buffalo's history with historic preservation is mixed. There have been some wonderful individual projects and initiatives, such as the saving of the Guaranty Building, the on-going efforts to restore the Richardson complex,

Graycliff and the Darwin Martin House, and, I will add to this list, the exemplary effort to save and restore the Hull House.

Another project I would add to this list is the rehabilitation of the Roycroft Inn and I think we can all see today the importance of the Wendt Foundations extraordinary commitment to this effort. But the Roycroft Inn also illustrates a limitation of Buffalo's preservation movement. The Wendt Foundation, when they looked around at Buffalo's preservation organization, found that they were two tiny, too limited in their functions to serve as the Inn's interim owner. They had to ask Rochester's Landmark Society to take on this task.

Jimmy Carter famously said that "Life is Unfair". I'll change that "Life can be unfair for historic cities". There is nothing that says that a city rich with historic assets will have the preservation organization it deserves. I credit the strength of Rochester's Landmark Society because an extraordinary group of women in the late 1930s came together and created the start of an organization was able to flourish and was there as an important voice when bad things were happening in our cities. With such foresight, or often stated by an individual creative leaders, preservation organizations have been started and – more importantly – somehow received that special spark to allow them to grow and flourish over time. and without some spark, the movement itself has languished in other cities. So, Rochester flourished but the preservation organizations in Syracuse and Buffalo did not. In Syracuse, their preservation organization, without staff, has waxed and waned based on the leadership and energy or their volunteer chairman movement in Syracuse. Buffalo has had one small preservation organization, later to be two small preservation organizations and in this Century had three small preservation organizations. At time, these organizations did some very important things, but neither could develop a substantial, multi-faceted preservation organization that Buffalo deserves and needs.

I don't think you can identify the needed spark in advance – but I now think we have it in Buffalo. And I think we will look back and see that Buffalo's spark was the decision to develop a bid for the National Trust's National Preservation Conference, that will come here in exactly one year. Bidding for the conference brought together civic leaders, the CVB staff, foundation and preservation organizations. They feel that they were initially dismissed as buffalo not being ready, then dug in, organized great support for the bid,

had a crowd of 400 to at a dinner for the National Trust's president -- and won the bid. And they did not stop there. The three preservation organization joined together with the National Trust to have a consultant report on the state of preservation in Buffalo – not too surprisingly, the consultant stated the movement was too divided and disjointed with three organizations... but she also concluded that there wasn't much to do about it. No so... two of the organizations had the foresight to start talking about how to merge. The National Trust and the PL provided encouragement and soon a Transition Committee was underway and I started working with them as a consultant. Subsequently the Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier and the Preservation Coalition of Erie County came together in October 2008, with an announcement that three foundations, the Oishei Foundation, the Baird Foundation and a family foundation, the DB Trust, had provided monies to hire staff and start to effort to create a significant substantial preservation organization for Buffalo. Several of those that lead this charge are here, including Chuck LaCuisa, Catherine Schweitzer, Steve Weiss and Dick Baerd. Gary Costella and Jeff Schvino were on the Landmark Society Board The effort to bring these two organizations together I'll leave to Catherine's memoirs.

As we created PBN, we had a long vision statement on things we felt a full-service preservation organization should tackle. And while we have not accomplished this vision, we have tackled many of them..

- **Building a Preservation Constituency - We now have 1,000 members, more people than even participants in Buffalo tours, including expanded offerings like the Scavenger Hunt and the Delaware Neighborhood Tour of Homes.**
- **Developing Professional Expertise** - employing within its staff trained preservationists that have a comprehensive knowledge of their field, reinforced by volunteers who have expertise in preservation, architecture, construction and allied fields; developing productive relationships with staff of state and national preservation organizations and insights into their programs and procedures.

**Andee Rebeck with over 30 yeares experience...me with 30... Fred with 2 but learning fast. Lecture Series reached wide variety of professionals and those with other responsibilities.**

- **Providing Preservation Leadership and Advice –**
- **Serving as an Advocate for Historic Resources –**
- **Creating Alliances and Partnerships**

**The 6 session Lecture Series...flier and web site on the new tax credits, scores of emails asking advice almost every day, a web site attracting 45,000 (mostly Buffalo Tours but lots for information). 469 Delaware Avenue... Willert Park... lots of other arenas where we are providing leadership**

**Monitoring the BPB, leading the charge on 468 Delaware Avenue, being involved in S. Park Properties, testifying against a window replacement project on Bryant Street.**

**Advocating for Willert Park/AD Price Courts**

**Have great relationships with SHPO, Preservation League, National Trust and NYSCA (been 10 years or more since preservation supported by NYSCA in Buffalo).**

- **Expanding and Sharing Knowledge of Historic Resources -** working to expand the region's inventory of historic resources, encouraging historic resource assessment as part of community planning and welcoming consultations with property developers and project planners in advance of project development.

**North Prospect Hill, supported Black Rock, worked with LISC re Cold Springs/Masden Survey.... Escorted New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff around Buffalo. His significant article on the city appeared on November 14th, 2008.**

- **Fostering Job Opportunities related to Preservation –** provide training and support for persons in building construction (especially skilled craftsmen), architecture, home renovation, real estate development/sales and other related fields, emphasizing continuing education in emerging arenas (i.e. green standards for rehabs).

**The most relevant goal that relates to the Hull House is our Goal of Conducting Heritage Education Efforts -** through programs, events and tours,

coupled with public relations, to educate the public and students about a city's and neighborhood architectural heritage and the benefits and opportunities of having an older city with significant historic resources.

**This goal does not mention Tourism, though our case statement does talk about it elsewhere. If I could re-write this vision, it would now be more explicit about tourism. But before moving to Buffalo, I have only lived in cities where tourism was only a bit player in the local economy. In Buffalo, I need to adjust, as Buffalo in my opinion is one of a relative handful of cities, cities like Charleston, Providence, New Orleans, San Francisco and Buffalo where tourism can play an important role in the economic life of the city. It is already doing so in Buffalo, but it can do so much more.**

**As the director of a preservation organization, however, my belief is that our efforts should foremost be directed as educating the local populace about the value of their architectural heritage. If we can get our local populace excited about where they live and appreciative of this heritage, our job will be a lot easier as we pursue historic preservation. Too often, Buffalonians are negative about our city. We don't need that. Instead, through education, through events, through publicity and through seeing the productive reuse of historic places... we need to make local residents our city's best ambassadors.**

**And this is not a job for the CVB, as they are judge by visitors coming to the city and people in the hotels. I want to comment that the CVB has an excellent view of the city's historic places as being our best asset to attract visitors. But their role and our role is different. We need to complement each other, but realize that we do have different roles.**

**My suggestion for the Hull House is that you also focus on our region's residents as well as tourists visiting the region. I was delighted to hear that a group from East Aurora recently came to visit the Hull House. I foresee in the future that historic sites like the Darwin Martin, Graycliff, the Hull House and many others create a campaign to encourage adult study groups, garden clubs, family reunion groups and many other types of groups to organize group visits to our historic sites ... and we should also work diligently with these groups to give them wonderful experiences.**

**I must also say that historic sites, like the Hull House, have an achilles heel when seeking out of town visitors. The cost of marketing to attract these out**

of town visitors is most likely to exceed the revenues that will be generated through their visits. Here the CVB can help by putting the Hull House on an itinerary of what to do when visiting Buffalo and Hull house should position itself as a stop as visitors are approaching Buffalo or are on their way to Niagara Falls. Let people see how this all started. I also had a chat with Gary and Anne Conable and suggested that you reach out to a restaurant, motel or B&B to be the attraction to help such establishments attract visitors – and let them do the marketing.

One mission where PBN and the CVB are joined at the hip is next year's National Preservation Conference. They see 2000 visitors coming to the city – key visitors that will see the city through many tours and field sessions and go back home and praise the architecture of Buffalo...and who is better prepared to do so than preservationists. We see that too, but also see an impact on our local residents... wow people from throughout the county came to see Buffalo and our region's architecture. My god, we must be something special.

PBN also runs Buffalo Tours, which aims to reach our local residents and also serve the tourists. We've found that our downtown walking tour and our Buffalo city Hall tour serves people from virtually all over the world. I sometimes get emails, such as from a city hall docent... two people from China, one from San Francisco, three from Georgia and one from Akron. From May through October, we also have tours of other historic places, say Humbolt Parkway, or South Buffalo or the Central Terminal... those are mostly Buffalonians and others from the region learning more about the city. I'll soon talk to Gary about getting the Hull House on our 2011 Buffalo Tours schedule.

Just a couple of nites ago, I was talking to one of our Buffalo Tours docents who stated that she had just given a tour to a group of German exchange students. With my Rochester hat on, I thought...what is a European student going to think of our buildings, most much less than 200 years old, compared to their own European Cities with buildings that are hundreds of years old.

Then, perhaps thinking I was coming to a Hull House event, I turned this story around. What a story we have to tell that is condensed into just 200 years...starting with the Hull House. This student's view of the American frontier should be the Hull House and the workers that built the Erie Canal .. and not some cowboy in Dodge City. The European history of this region

**virtually starts at the Hull House ... and is the history of their ancestors and immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Poland and elsewhere building our new nation. And our architecture that was built upon the images that the early settlers and these immigrants brought from Europe...and of such a rapid change that within 100 years Louis Sullivan would build in the remarkably prosperous downtown buffalo the prototype of a new American architecture, the skyscraper, that would be a model for the world.**

**Of course, this story is just a valuable for American students and adults from our region. This architectural heritage that is in Buffalo is a heritage that is important for us all.**

**I earlier mangled Jimmy Carter's line that "Life is unfair for Cities". I could have said, "Life is Unfair for Historic Buildings"... and life has been unfair for every other homestead build at the time of the Hull House. They are all gone. But somehow the spark got lite for the Hull House. The Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier played a role in saving the Hull House, a role that PBN will be proud to acknowledge as part of our history. But the far greater role has been played by a dedicate core of volunteers, initially a committee that became the Hull House Foundation. Neither the Landmark Society nor today's PBN could have given the Hull House the dedication and focus it needed. PBN gets hit with a new need or a vital issue virtually every day. So, what has happened at the Hull House over these last years has been the perfect thing for the Hull House and for PBN.**

**Let me thank all the volunteers of the Hull House your tour guides, you committee members, your maintenance people. To me, you are all doing vital work for our historic preservation movement, for our region and for our history. Thank you.**

**Henry McCartney  
PBN Executive Director**