News From PRESERVATION Buffalo Niagara

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Storytellers wanted!

Become a Buffalo Tours docent and tell WNY's stories

Are you interested in sharing stories about Buffalo Niagara's architecture, environment, culture, and history? If so, we invite you to sign up for a docent training program beginning Jan. 29. Trainees will learn about Buffalo's heritage, develop public speaking skills, and practice docent and concierge techniques.

Buffalo Tours is partnering with Forest Lawn Cemetery, the Roycroft Campus Corporation, the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site, and the Buffalo Religious Arts Center to train volunteers who are passionate about leading tours in the Buffalo Niagara region.

To register, an online application at www.BuffaloTours.org must be completed by Jan. 17. Following registration, applicants will be interviewed by phone. Those accepted will be required to pass oral and written tests to actually become a docent.

What training sessions are like.

Training sessions are about three hours long on ten consecutive Saturdays. The first ninety minutes of class focus on docent skills, homework review, and practice presentations. The second ninety minutes consist of lectures, tours, and guest speakers. Locations are usually in Buffalo, but classes have also taken place in such diverse locations as the Roycroft Campus in East Aurora, the Niagara Falls Power Vista, and the Darwin Martin House. On these field trips, trainees deepen their understanding of local history, current events, and the influence of such world-famous architects as Frank Lloyd Wright, E. B. Green, Henry Hobson Richardson, and landscape-architecture partners Olmsted and Vaux.

After each class, trainees are invited to enjoy an informal, no-host lunch at a nearby restaurant—a great way to meet and socialize with other volunteers.

After the first five joint classes, volunteers choose to continue training with one of the individual organizations for another five weeks. A one time fee of $75 covers the cost of training materials and meeting space.

Docent training equals Continuing Education.

Many compare docent training to a college-level class. A Buffalo Tours docent can, for example, "major" in the Queen City Downtown architectural tour (see photo, page 6). This year's Buffalo Tours' training will focus on Buffalo's downtown architecture and the Erie Canal Harbor. Forest Lawn tours highlight the unique histories of Buffalo's most famous citizens. Roycroft Campus tours give visitors a glimpse into the 1900's Arts and Crafts community located in East Aurora. The TR Site shows visitors the most famous (or infamous) event in Buffalo's history, while the Buffalo Religious Arts Center preserves and displays sacred cultural artifacts.

The collaboration among these organizations is formally known as the Buffalo Niagara Docent Training Alliance. It is anticipated that docents trained for these organizations will conduct tours for the National Preservation Conference in October.

For more information, contact Fred Schrock, education coordinator, at 716-852-3300 or at info@BuffaloTours.org, or visit BuffaloTours.org.§

Hull House Transfer Is Finalized

Photo courtesy of Hull House Foundation

Hull House president Gary Costello, at that historic property's annual dinner Oct. 22, accepted a key from PBN executive director Henry McCartney. The exchange symbolically marked the long-awaited transfer of title to the house and grounds of the Hull House to the Hull House Foundation.

A rare surviving Federal-style stone structure, the Hull House is one of the oldest substantial masonry structures in Erie County and one of the oldest structures in Western New York. Built in the pre-Erie Canal era by Warren Hull, a veteran of the American Revolution, the building is located in the town of Lancaster on Genesee Street (then called "the Batavia Road") between Buffalo and Batavia. It was used as a private residence as recently as 1990.

Preservation Buffalo Niagara's predecessor organization, the Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier, acquired the Hull House in 1992, the same year it was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The Society pledged to

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Also Wanted!

Volunteers to do Hamlin Park Historic Resources Survey

See story, page 4.

From the (Now Former) Chair

An Exciting Three Years . . . and More to Come

In mid-December, a talented group of volunteers was elected by the trustees of Preservation Buffalo Niagara to serve as officers for 2011. Steve Weiss will serve as the board's chair, Greg Lodinsky as vice chair, and Marla Bujnicki as secretary. Lynn Stievater was reelected treasurer. Preservation Buffalo Niagara is fortunate to have these capable leaders and a dedicated board to guide the organization in next phase of its growth and development. As I complete my term as your chair, I know that PBN has the right leadership team to address the opportunities and challenges of the future. I extend my heartfelt support to Steve, the officers and trustees, and wish them every possible success in the year ahead.

Just three years ago, in early 2008, preservation organizations in Buffalo were too small and financially fragile to pursue a substantial preservation agenda, despite the potential the historic preservation movement held for this region. After receiving a very honest assessment, the Landmark Society and the Preservation Coalition voted to implement the necessary changes identified in the consultant's report to create a stronger organization. Trustees of these boards deserve great credit for selflessly working towards the best model for the Buffalo region. With guidance from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Preservation League of New York State, a hard-working transition committee formulated a plan, eventually approved by both boards, to create PBN. At the time, this process seemed laboriously slow. In hindsight, launching PBN, after a mere eight months of discussion, investigation, legal steps, and fundraising, was remarkably fast.

Key to developing the organization and realizing PBN's vision were grants provided by the John R. Oishei Foundation, the DB Trust, and the Baird Foundation that enabled PBN to have a strong beginning. Quickly thereafter, support from the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo and the National Trust made it possible to hire a preservation specialist as a resource for city and regional preservation efforts. Today, the Western New York Foundation and the Marks Family Foundation are also supporting this effort. Another major program, Buffalo Tours, continues to grow, boasting over 500 annual tours thanks to long-term financial support from M&T Bank and dedicated volunteers whose generous commitment makes this program possible.

Serving as head of the transition committee and then as PBN's first chair has been a genuine honor and privilege. With a passionate and devoted team, this young organization continues to mature and has achieved significant accomplishments in two years. We recently sent our members a report, *Progress on Our Vision*, which is now on our website (see About Us at www.P-B-N.org). As planned for PBN, an ambitious list of key objectives was outlined, from developing professional expertise to conducting heritage education efforts, from providing preservation leadership to building a preservation constituency, and other vital needs. Realistically, it should take years to address these objectives. Instead, on behalf of the organization, I am extremely proud to report that PBN has made great progress on virtually all of its objectives.

As I step down as chair, I look back with awe at these last three years. Transformation is never easy—it is not glamorous or fun. It requires a great deal of thoughtful work. To all our volunteers, trustees, supporters, and believers, I humbly send my thanks and appreciation to everyone who helped make PBN possible and to those who enabled PBN to thrive. Thank you, all!

— Catherine F. Schweitzer

Deadline nearing for May Preservation Award nominations

Preservation Buffalo Niagara is pleased to announce that the selection process for our 2011 preservation awards and planning for the awards luncheon are both underway.

The deadline for submitting an award nomination is Jan. 10. Nomination form and award categories are available at www.P-B-N.org (select the Events/Education tab and see Awards).

The luncheon, which is held during National Preservation Month, is tentatively scheduled for May 19.

Trustee Tom Yots chairs the awards selection committee and trustee Maura Cohen will again coordinate the luncheon.§

Preserve New York grant awarded to Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls

The Preservation League of New York State has awarded Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls a $5,000 Preserve New York grant toward the cost of completing a historic landscape report. The 18.3 acre cemetery with its curvilinear paths and drives, the work of local civil engineer T. D. Judah, reflects nineteenth century romantic landscape design principles. Landscape architect Dean Gowen of Amherst will complete the report, which will guide stewardship of the grounds of this historic cemetery.

Funds for Preserve New York are provided through the New York State Council on the Arts.§

2011 Preservation Conference Update

The theme selected for the National Trust's Preservation Conference scheduled for Buffalo in October 2011 is *Alternating Currents*. The choice refers to both the raw power and energy that influenced the development of Western New York, and to the positive and negative pressures impacting the historic preservation movement in Buffalo and throughout the country.

The conference affords a priceless opportunity to showcase our region's successes and the challenges affecting its historic resources.

Proposals for educational and field sessions are being accepted electronically by the Trust. Deadline for submission is Feb. 18. Anyone interested in submitting a proposal for either or both sessions, and who is willing to take the lead in its development and presentation should become acquainted with the information posted on our website, www.P-B-N.org.

Also found there are links to the on-line application (see Conference page under the Events/Education tab) and to a recorded webinar conducted by the Trust explaining proposal submission step-by-step.

Everyone working on a topic is encouraged, but not required, to email BuffaloPreservationConference@gmail.com to keep local conference organizers apprised of what they are doing.

Trust staff will return to Buffalo Jan. 18–21 to conduct another public session on the conference. They expressed willingness to meet with individuals and small groups to discuss possible sessions. Times and locations have not been determined yet but will be featured in a future PBN e-newsletter and on PBN's website. §

PBN's second Annual Meeting staged at historic Riviera Theatre

What a great place to have a meeting!

Preservation Buffalo Niagara held its second annual meeting Nov. 3 in a spectacularly appropriate venue, the Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda—winner of a PBN 2010 historic preservation award for restoration and stewardship of this historic building that has been underway since 1989.

Members were treated to a prefilm Wurlitzer organ concert, popcorn, a silent film starring Charlie Chaplin, and the Buffalo premier of the acclaimed video *Buffalo: This Place Matters*, produced by the Buffalo and Erie County Convention and Visitors Bureau for viewing at the recent National Trust conference held in Austin, Texas.

PBN's business meeting included a finance report by treasurer Lynn Stievater and a report on PBN's 2010 activities given by outgoing chair Catherine Schweitzer and executive director Henry McCartney.

Trustee elections were also held. Elected to a first term as PBN trustees were Anne Leary of East Aurora and Marge Gillies of Niagara Falls; six trustees were reelected to a second term: Greg Lodinsky, Marla Bujnicki, R. Maura Cohen, Peter Flynn, Tyra Johnson, and Douglas Swift.

To end the evening, members posed for the Riviera Theatre – *This Place Matters* photo shown below.§

Photo by Martin Wachadlo

University Park and Hamlin Park

Two Buffalo neighborhoods seeking national recognition

Two Buffalo neighborhoods are engaged in efforts to become National Register Historic Districts. The application for University Park, a section of University Heights, is complete and awaiting review by the New York State Review Board in March prior to submission to the National Park Service for listing on the National Register. When listed by the Park Service, it will be the first National Register-listed historic district designated in Buffalo in almost twenty-five years. Meanwhile, preliminary work on nominating Hamlin Park, a Buffalo local historic district, is set to begin in January. Listing on the National Register is valuable for celebrating the history of a neighborhood. But perhaps even more important for individual homeowners, listing also extends eligibility for New York State Rehabilitation Tax Credit of twenty percent for such qualified work as furnaces, plumbing, electrical, roofs, and gutters necessary to repair and rehabilitate a historic home.

University Park

The effort to nominate University Park, an area roughly bordered by University Avenue to the west, Main Street to the south, Capen Blvd. to the east, and Kenmore Avenue to the north, began about two years ago when a small group of neighborhood residents, led by Paul McDonnell, Buffalo Preservation Board chair, began discussing creation of a historic district in the neighborhood.

In 2009, Mr. McDonnell, along with Kerry Traynor of the University at Buffalo, Dan McEneny of the New York State Historic Preservation Office and Michele Brozek Knoll of the City of Buffalo–Office of Strategic Planning began working to move a nomination forward.

The first step was for a University at Buffalo historic preservation class to survey the neighborhood under the guidance of Ms. Traynor. Annie Schentag, an Urban Planning graduate student, also under the guidance of Traynor, then worked tirelessly throughout spring and summer of 2010 to draft the nomination. When completed, the draft met with praise from the New York State Historic Preservation Office. At a public meeting in November, many of the more than sixty residents in attendance voiced their support. During fall 2010, Ms. Brozek Knoll completed the building list, intern Chelsea Petrucci provided the photography, and Dan McEneny oversaw and edited the entire document. §

Hamlin Park

Volunteers are being sought to help survey Hamlin Park as part of a community-based, volunteer-driven effort to nominate this local historic district to the National Register of Historic Places.

Hour-long training workshops will be held during the week of Jan. 24, with a tentative survey date of Saturday, Jan. 29, and a 'rain date' of Sunday, Jan. 30. Volunteers will be asked to bring their digital cameras, and in small groups will complete a simple checklist on the condition of buildings in assigned sections of Hamlin Park.

This effort is being spearheaded on a pro-bono basis by Preservation Studios, a full-service historic preservation consulting firm headed by PBN trustee Tom Yots, in conjunction with the Hamlin Park Taxpayers Association, Preservation Buffalo Niagara, the Buffalo Preservation Board, and other organizations.

If successful, placement on the National Register will bring additional recognition to this historic neighborhood and new benefits to neighborhood residents and businesses, including tax credits and special reviews for state and federally funded projects.

In addition to helping benefit this early twentieth century neighborhood, volunteers will gain a close look at its architecture. To sign up as a Hamlin Park volunteer, email Jason Wilson at jasonwilson@preservationstudios.com.§

For more information about the National Register and the New York State Rehabilitation Tax Credit, contact the New York State Historic Preservation Office at (518) 237-8643 or visit http://www.nysparks.state.ny .us/shpo/.

For information about local historic districts or to learn about the distinction between Local Historic Districts and State/National Register Historic Districts, call the City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning at (716) 851-5029.

Update on Statler Towers sale

Were this an old-time daily newspaper, we'd be stationed at street corners shouting "EXTRA! EXTRA!", so quickly does the status of the Statler Towers shift.

As this newsletter went to press, the bankruptcy judge extended Statler City LLC's right to purchase to Jan. 12.

Statler City's plan calls for (1) using public funds to secure the exterior, (2) revitalizing the lower floors into mixed use space to generate cash to support the building's operating expenses, and (3) when practical, developing the towers as local market conditions permit.

A new twist involved negotiations with the City of Buffalo that would have the city take title of the building while entering into a development agreement with Statler City LLC, a move that would make it easier to invest public monies in the building.

University Park designer created restrictions to ensure beauty and cohesiveness

As a basis for discussion of their proposal for creating a National Register historic district, neighbors had in hand the pamphlet "University Park: A Restricted Residence Subdivision," published in 1914, that was designed by its author, Anthony J. Huck, to entice new homeowners to a "beautiful, harmonious residence district."

University Park land had been owned by Huck for many years—his ancestors had purchased it from the Holland Land Company for fifty cents an acre. However, he did not produce a development plan with Matthew-Northrup Works until 1913, shortly after announcement of the planned expansion of the then-private University of Buffalo. Travel to numerous residential communities in the U.S. helped Huck envision an ideal community featuring setback restrictions, distance between houses, green and open spaces, and garages, reflecting the growing importance of the automobile to the area's upper-class residents. The unique features of the neighborhood have remained almost completely intact nearly one hundred years later, and a great majority of homes in the district have retained their historic character and original building fabric, making the neighborhood ideal for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.§

Photo courtesy of Michele Brozek Knoll

Hull House (*Continued from page 1*)

begin restoration in accordance with Secretary of the Interior Guidelines within the first ten years.

Community involvement was key from the onset. Six years ago, a committee of the Landmark Society headed by Gary Costello began focusing on this important project. Their accomplishments to date have been remarkable. In 2003 the energetic group held its first Hull House benefit dinner; to date their fundraising efforts have generated $300,000.

The Hull House Foundation has also received more than two dozen grants totaling more than $900,000. These monies have funded substantial restoration on the exterior and interior: wood-shingle roofs and six wood-burning fireplaces have been repaired, settling floors and parapets stabilized, windows replaced, and an ell addition demolished to return the property to its early nineteenth century state.

This year the Hull House Foundation organized informative camps and reenactments, a barbeque, haunted barn tours, tea parties, and ice cream musicales, and it has no plans to slow down in 2011.

University at Buffalo archaeologists have uncovered evidence of prior Native American use of the property and have surveyed the land for artifacts and evidence of original structures that may be rebuilt in the future. The Hull Family cemetery is also slated for restoration, making the site a regional destination for historical interpretation and education.

Longtime preservationists may note similarities between the effort to preserve the Hull House and that of the Coit House, the oldest home in Buffalo, which led to the creation of the Landmark Society back in the 1960s.

The Hull House Foundation has the best wishes of PBN in all their efforts to restore and interpret the historic Hull House.§

Photo courtesy of Hull House Foundation

Hull House president Gary Costello ponders which of the formidable tasks necessary to restore the interior of the historic property to tackle next.

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Photo Gallery

Clockwise from upper left: Gary Costello receives symbolic key to the Hull House from PBN executive director Henry McCartney in exchange for one dollar; architectural historian Martin Wachadlo touts the strength of a Medina sandstone pillar to docent-trainees while fellow-trainee Rebecca Stadler examines the texture of the terra cotta ornamentation; the still-beautiful ballroom of the Statler Towers shows itself ready for gatherings despite mothballing of the once-model luxury hotel.
Photo credits, same order: Courtesy of the Hull House Foundation; Fred Schrock; Martin Wachadlo.