

NEW YORK METROPOLITAN CHAPTER OF THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN AMERICA

Fall 2010

Ten Awards Given in 2010

The May 11 Annual Meeting was especially festive, thanks to its magnificent venue—the restored interior of the historic Eldridge Street Synagogue (now the Museum at Eldridge Street)—the impressive selection of awards, and the attendance of so many notable recipients and members.

The Chapter recognized two outstanding **Preservation** projects for 2009: the exterior restoration of the Polish Consulate General's building on Madison Avenue and the roof restoration at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Harlem. Polish Consul General Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka accepted on behalf of the team responsible for the \$1.2 million restoration of the former De Lamar Mansion (1902-05, C. P. H. Gilbert), which included window replacement and cleaning and repairs to the masonry, ironwork, and steep slate roof. Senior Warden Shirley Daniels accepted the award for the congregation of St. Andrew's. One of the city's finest Victorian Gothic edifices (1889-91, Henry M. Congdon), St. Andrew's saw the superlative restoration of its slate roof in 2009—a difficult and expensive job due to the roof's complexity and height of the tower—after nearly a decade of fundraising and planning led by Ms. Daniels.

The 2009 **Exhibition and Catalogue Award** went to the New-York Historical Society for *Lincoln and New York*. This carefully researched and compelling exhibition traced the evolution of Lincoln's complex relationship with this deeply divided city, which witnessed his breakthrough Cooper Union speech in 1860, produced both pro- and anti-slavery leaders and profiteers from the cotton trade, supported the Union cause but was the scene of the bloody Draft Riots of 1863, and assembled grief-stricken in the streets after his assassination in 1865. Exhibition curator Richard Rabinowitz accepted the award, which also recognized catalogue editor Harold Holzer. *Continued on last page >*



Left to Right: Marcus Fiore and Dan Allen of CutsoGeorge, Tooman & Allen architects, Carol Baschnagel of Baschnagel Bros. Roofing, and Rev. Alan Jackson (back row) and Shirley Daniels of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. Photograph by Paul Margolis.

City Council Approves the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension

We are overjoyed to announce that on August 25, 2010, the City Council approved the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension. The designated area consists of approximately 135 buildings, mainly along the west side of West Broadway, the east side of Crosby Street, and a stretch on Lafayette, Centre, and adjacent streets. The proposal for designation

originated in 2006 when the Chapter submitted a formal request to the Commission for the Extension with accompanying documentation and photographs. Our campaign gathered wide support from elected officials, Community Board 2, the SoHo Alliance, Friends of SoHo, neighborhood owners and residents, and preservationists citywide. We thank our members and friends for the unwavering and enthusiastic support that helped to make this important achievement a reality. For detailed information, check the Chapter's website: www.metrovsa.org.



Vintage buttons of the Friends of Cast Iron Architecture, founded in 1970 by Margot Gayle as an offshoot of the VSA. The group mounted the successful campaign for LPC designation of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District in 1973.

Chapter Launches castironnyc.org

At the May 2010 Annual Meeting, Preservation Committee chair Joyce Mendelsohn proudly announced the launch of a new website documenting cast iron buildings in New York City that remain unprotected by landmark status. The website, www.castironnyc.org, features a searchable database of 68 buildings identified in Andrew Dolkart's 2006 survey (funded by the Chapter's Margot Gayle Fund for the Preservation of Victorian Heritage). Designed by Deb Sher, the website received generous support from the Felicia Fund, Inc., the Peggy N. and Roger G. Gerry Charitable Trust, the Chapter's Margot Gayle Fund, and Chapter members. A resource for architectural historians and researchers, the website will help track the status of these important examples of New York City's architectural heritage, which remain at risk. Since Dolkart's survey, twelve buildings have been designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (nine as a part of the recently expanded SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District; see article above) and two have been demolished, emphasizing the continued threat they face.

A Changing of the Guard

In September we salute **Jeff Sholeen**, outgoing President of the New York Metropolitan Chapter, and welcome new President **Joyce Mendelsohn**, who was elected in May at the Annual Meeting.

Senior Vice President and Associate Broker with the Corcoran Group, Jeff Sholeen joined the Chapter in 1981 and has served as President twice: 1987-1991 and 2006-2010. A native of Chicago, he developed an early interest in its 19th-century architecture, especially the movements that preceded the Prairie School. In 1977, Jeff came to New York, where he worked briefly for the Landmarks Preservation Commission and in the antiques trade, attending the Sotheby's Institute of Art and Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program in the late 1980s. Elected to the Board in 1986, he attended the VSA London Summer School two years later. Jeff has worked tirelessly for the Chapter, generously giving guidance and expertise during his Presidency; we are pleased that he will continue to serve on the Board. The Chapter honored Jeff at a reception on September 21.

New President Joyce Mendelsohn is an author and educator who has taught courses on NYC history and architecture at the New School and is known for her publications, lectures, and walking tours of the city. The first Director of Education at the Tenement Museum, Joyce has also served as Education Consultant to the Historic House Trust and is a recent recipient of a Grassroots Preservation Award from the Historic Districts Council. Her publications include *Touring the Flatiron: Walks in Four Historic Neighborhoods* (1998, 2003) and *The Lower East Side, Remembered and Revisited* (2001, 2009). A member of the Chapter since the early 1980s, Joyce attended the London Summer School in 1986, joined the Board in 2001, and has been co-chair of the Preservation Committee since 2004.

Also at the May meeting: **Heather Jane McCormick** was elected as a new Board member; **Melissa Baldock**, **Brian Coleman**, **Stephen Gottlieb**, **Laura Handlin**, **Caroline Hannah**, **Alta Indelman**, and **John Metcalfe** were reelected to new terms.



Outgoing and incoming: Jeff Sholeen, Joyce Mendelsohn. Photographs by Paul Margolis.

A Gas Lighting Primer

Did you know that gas lighting was one of the major industries of the 19th century? First used for street lamps, by the mid-1800s gas had replaced kerosene as the preferred source of interior lighting and was the third largest industry in the country, behind railroads and mining. Produced in municipal "gashouses" as a by-product of heating bituminous coal in airtight chambers, gas was driven off the coal, collected, and then piped into homes and commercial buildings in nearly every city in the country.

Chandeliers, wall sconces or "brackets," and "portables," as table lamps were known, all used gas. Portables drew their gas from a flexible tube attached to an overhead light.

Despite its importance, the era of gas lighting was to be short-lived, lasting just half a century, with Thomas Edison's 1879 patent for the light bulb signaling the beginning of the end. As gas was initially cheaper and more reliable than electricity, many manufacturers at first made combination gas and electric fixtures (the electric

lights typically pointed down and the gas jets up). General Electric's development by 1908 of the durable, inexpensive ductile tungsten filament light bulb (still in use today) was the final blow. With gas lighting considered out of date, gas was relegated to less visible but still vital roles—the basement furnace and appliances such as the kitchen stove.

~ Brian Coleman



Gas and electric combination chandelier, c. 1890. Photograph courtesy Paul Ivazes.



Photographs © Kate Milford.

The Museum at Eldridge Street—the site of the Metropolitan Chapter's 43rd annual meeting last May—provided this issue's photographic embellishments. Our association with this National Historic Landmark dates back to 2004 when the Chapter gave a Preservation Advocacy Award to what was then the Eldridge Street Project. The National VSA subsequently recognized it with an award to Walter Sedovic Architects, who oversaw the renovation.

Dedicated in October 1887 as the Synagogue of the Congregation Kahal Adath Jeshurun with Anshe Lubz, Peter and Francis William Herter designed the structure. These Roman Catholic brothers (unrelated to the Herter Brothers who were cabinet makers) were responsible for the design of many buildings, including relatively upscale tenements on the Lower East Side. The building's style, usually characterized as Moorish Revival, came to be considered appropriate for synagogue architecture.



The prevalence of the Star of David indicates the building's sacred function, although the architects also used this motif, along with the horseshoe arches, in other buildings.

Members can visit the website www.eldridgestreet.org to see more images and to learn about family programs, lectures, walking tours, and other events at the Museum. Starting October 11, there will be a daily architecture tour at 4 p.m. This fall will also see the unveiling of the new eastern rose window designed by artist Kiki Smith and architect Deborah Gans.

TOURS

Members will receive detailed itinerary and registration information by mail. Nonmembers may contact 212-886-3742 for information.

PHILADELPHIA BUS TOUR

Saturday, October 16, 2010 7:30 AM–6:00 PM

Participants visit the Academy of Music, including its remarkable Opera House, Union League Club (with building tour by the Club Historian), and two private houses with collections of Aesthetic Movement furniture and decorative arts. Buffet lunch and reception included. \$125 for Chapter members; \$140 for nonmembers.



BEDFORD-STUYVESANT WALKING TOUR

Saturday, October 30, 2010 2:00–4:00 PM

A look at one of Brooklyn's most beautiful Victorian row house neighborhoods and its origins and regeneration, including magnificent houses, apartment buildings, and churches. \$25 for Chapter members; \$30 for nonmembers.

PRIVATE NEW YORK WALKING TOUR

Saturday, November 6, 2010 10:00 AM–3:00 PM

Visits to The Osborne on West 57th Street with apartment viewing accompanied by Osborne preservationist Lester Barnett, and a West 10th Street



converted seamen's tenement, home of board member Brian Coleman. Lunch on your own. *Note: More stair climbing than usual (see terms and conditions of participation).* \$25 for Chapter members; \$30 for nonmembers.

NEWARK REVISITED BUS TOUR

Saturday, December 4, 2010 8:00 AM–6:00 PM

Guided by Liz del Tufo with stops at Cass Gilbert's Essex County Courthouse, Peddle Baptist Memorial Church, Cathedral Basilica of the

Sacred Heart, Frederick Law Olmsted's Branch Brook Park, Ninth Ward Center, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, and Sydenham House. Box lunch and reception included. \$125 for Chapter members; \$140 for nonmembers.

Terms and Conditions of Participation

Meeting places will be provided in the confirmation of registration. Participants in our tours must be in excellent health and be able to participate safely in all activities. The sites we visit may have challenging stairs; if you have any doubt about your ability to participate fully due to health conditions or disabilities, please contact events@metrosva.org or call 212-886-3742. The New York Metropolitan Chapter reserves the right to decline to accept or to refuse to retain any person as a member of our tours at any time.

Prepaid reservations are required for all tours.

LECTURES

*Presented at The New York New Church (Swedenborgian), 114 E. 35th St. between Park and Lexington Avenues, Manhattan
Admission is FREE; no reservations required. For VSA Members only: Meet the speakers at our post-lecture receptions!*

GOTHAM LOST AND FOUND:

UNCOVERING MANHATTAN'S

FORGOTTEN CULTURAL LANDMARKS

Tuesday, September 21, 6 PM

David Freeland, historian, music journalist, and author of *Automats, Taxi Dances, and Vaudeville: Excavating Manhattan's Lost Places of Leisure* (winner of the Chapter's Publication Award for Pop Culture and Entertainment for 2009), will examine the clues that present-day New York City still holds to its 19th- and early 20th-century past.

LEOPOLD EIDLITZ: NEW YORK

ARCHITECTURE IN THE GILDED AGE

Tuesday, October 12, 6 PM

Kate Holliday, architectural historian, Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Texas Arlington, and author of *Leopold Eidlitz: Architecture and Idealism in the Gilded Age*

(winner of the Chapter's Architectural Monograph Award for 2008), will explore the architect's New York City work, which includes the Tweed Courthouse and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as well as his architectural philosophy.

ART FOR SCIENCE'S SAKE:

THE NATURAL HISTORY DIORAMA

Tuesday, November 9, 6 PM

Kevin Avery, Associate Curator in the Department of



Canadian Lynx Diorama, American Museum of Natural History. Photograph by Denis Finnin.

American Paintings and Sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and adjunct professor in the Art Department at CUNY's Hunter College, will investigate how the early 20th-century diora-

mas in our oldest natural history museums originated from traditions of both scientific collection and entertainment in the late 18th century.

A.J. DOWNING, WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT,

AND THE AMERICAN PARK MOVEMENT

Tuesday, December 14, 6 PM

Judith Major, Professor at the University of Kansas School of Architecture, Design, and Planning, and author of *To Live in the New World: A.J. Downing and*

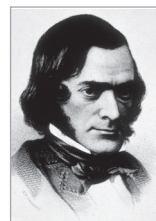


Image of A.J. Downing from The Horticulturist, author's collection.

American Landscape Gardening, will discuss the campaign to create urban parks led by Andrew Jackson Downing (editor of *The Horticulturist*) and William Cullen Bryant (editor of the *New York Evening Post*) in the mid-19th century and its relevance today.

JOIN THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN CHAPTER OF THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN AMERICA

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL:

- Individual \$40
- Household (two adults) \$60
- Sponsor \$75
Acknowledgement in newsletter, annual meeting presentation and website
- Patron \$150
Same benefits as Sponsor, plus admission for one to a special annual event
- Senior (over age 65) \$30
- Student (with copy of student ID) \$30

Name(s) Please print clearly

Address, including apartment designation and zip code

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ADDITIONAL SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION(s):

• VSA Summer School Scholarships \$ _____

• Margot Gayle Fund for the Preservation of Victorian Heritage \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

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Margot Gayle Fund Grants

Not one, but two worthy projects received support from the Chapter's Margot Gayle Fund for the Preservation of Victorian Heritage (MGF) in 2010. Thanks to a \$1200 MGF grant and matching funds from NYU, the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition started work on an interactive timeline that will be online in time for the March 25 centennial commemoration of the 1911 tragedy. With \$1300 in MGF funds, Brooklyn's Green-Wood Cemetery is preparing text for bronze plaques to mark the graves of James Bogardus, "father" of cast-iron architecture, and Daniel Badger, a leading fabricator of architectural cast iron. The MGF Committee met over the summer to review both recipients' progress and to plan for the 2011 grant program. The new application form will be available on the Chapter's website later this fall. Please check back and spread the word! 🍷

Open Call for Next Annual Awards

Do you know of an exemplary publication, exhibition, restoration, or other project completed in 2010 that advances the understanding and appreciation of Victorian heritage in metropolitan New York? The Awards Committee invites your recommendations! Please submit before January 15, 2011. Contact the Chapter by mail: 232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003; e-mail: info@metrosva.org; or phone: 212-886-3742. 🍷

Ten Awards, continued from first page >

The year proved particularly rich with books on Victorian history and culture; the Chapter recognized seven **Publications** with awards. In **Architectural History**, Andrew S. Dolkart's *The Row House Reborn: Architecture and Neighborhoods in New York City, 1908-1929* was honored for its pioneering exploration of early 20th-century rowhouse modernizations and the author's strong case for their preservation. In the **Fine and Decorative Arts** category, *Edwin Howland Blashfield: Master American Muralist* was singled out for bringing attention to a nearly-forgotten artist whose murals adorn significant turn-of-the-century civic buildings throughout the north-east. Paul Gunther, president of the Institute of Classical Architecture and Classical America, which sponsored the project, accepted the award.



Left: Andrew S. Dolkart, director of Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program, speaking after receiving his award. Right: From left, Architect Frank S. Smith and contractor Augustyn Lech with Deputy Consul General Marek Skulimowski, Vice-Consul Ewa Grumpert, and Consul General Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka (holding the award) of the Republic of Poland in New York.

Doug Clouse and Angela Voulangas, authors of *The Handy Book of Artistic Printing: A Collection of Letterpress Examples with Specimens of Type, Ornament, Corner Fills, Borders, Twisters, Wrinklers, and Other Freaks of Fancy*, were recognized for outstanding publication on **Visual Culture**. As the playful title suggests, this book documents the vibrant graphics Victorians were exposed to daily and the wildly divergent fonts, which were the product of the letterpress process. T. J. Stiles's *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt* received an award for its **Biography** of the Staten Island native who became one of the 19th century's greatest railroad barons and, Stiles argues, the most important businessman in U.S. history.

Randall Mason, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Historic Preservation Program, was on hand to receive an award for *The Once & Future New York: Historic Preservation and the Modern City*, which traces the **Preservation** movement between 1890 and 1920 through the ideals, individuals and organizations that shaped it. Recognition for an **Architectural Monograph** went to *The Architecture of Grosvenor Atterbury*, by Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker (both previous winners in this category for their study of Warren & Wetmore), for its much-needed first look at the architect who is best remembered as the leading community planner of Forest Hills Gardens, Queens, but whose career was far more varied, as the authors show.

The last award of the evening—for a publication on **Popular Culture**—was accepted by David Freeland, author of *Automats, Taxi Dances, and Vaudeville: Excavating Manhattan's Lost Places of Leisure*. Well researched and highly readable, Freeland's book explores New York's Victorian-era centers of relaxation and entertainment, from beer halls to movie studios, and including the Chinese Opera House, Hebrew Actors' Union, Tin Pan Alley, Harlem's Swing Street, and the original Horn & Hardart Automat in Times Square. Fittingly, the evening concluded with a lively reception in the lower hall of the Museum. 🍷 ~Jay Shockley

See more photos on the Chapter's new Flickr page!
www.flickr.com/photos/victorianny