Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony

The evening of June 11, 2014, brought out a large crowd of Victorian Society New York members and guests for the Chapter’s annual business meeting and awards ceremony. Outgoing VSNY president Frampton Tolbert led the proceedings before passing leadership of the Chapter to Hilda Regier, who was elected to a two-year term that evening (see our Q&A with Hilda, page 7).

The annual meeting gives VSNY members the opportunity to review and celebrate the many activities of the all-volunteer group, and to see how it makes the most of a modest budget. A highlight of the meeting is the presentation of the Chapter’s yearly awards and Margot Gayle Fund grants, as audience members get to hear about inspiring work being done in our area. This year was no different, with three grants and eight awards representing an impressive range of projects. For an enriching experience, we encourage readers to learn more about these 2014 winners.

VSNY Annual Awards
EXHIBITION AND CATALOG
THE ARMORY SHOW AT 100: MODERN ART AND REVOLUTION
NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This exhibition and catalog commemorates the centennial of the influential but controversial “Armory Show,” the International Exhibition of Modern Art, held at New York’s 69th Regiment Armory. The 1913 show introduced an American audience to then-largely unknown artists such as Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso. Organized by Marilyn Kushner, the N-YHS exhibition is documented in an extensively illustrated catalog with 31 scholarly essays exploring the culture of early 20th-century America.

EXHIBITION
THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING @ 100
THE SKYSCRAPER MUSEUM

Another cultural landmark that celebrated its centennial in 2013 was Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building, New York City’s first skyscraper and the tallest building in the world until 1930. The Woolworth Building @ 100 traces the building’s design and construction in drawings, blueprints, photographs, contracts and other artifacts. Guest co-curator Gail Fenske worked with Skyscraper Museum director Carol Willis to mount this exhibition, which lives on in virtual form at skyscraper.org.

BOOK
MICHAEL KATHRENS, GREAT HOUSES OF NEW YORK, 1880–1940, VOL. 2
ACANTHUS PRESS, 2013

In his second volume of Great Houses of New York, Kathrens continues his exploration of the elegant town houses of New York City’s elite, documenting 37 more structures built from 1880–1940. Illustrated with nearly 300 period photos,

Roger Castellani, Richard Moses and Alan Ruscoe enjoy the reception at the New York School of Interior Design following the annual meeting. Photograph by James Russiello

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE
Embellishments is a long-running newsletter feature where we explore places and things related to current VSNY programming. This time we focus on the school buildings designed for New York City by Charles B.J. Snyder (1860–1945), the subject of a September lecture and associated tour by Jean Arrington (see pp. 4–5). Look closely—Snyder’s schools are everywhere. Dr. Arrington counts more than 400 buildings planned by Snyder during his 1891–1923 career as a superintendent in the NYC public school system, many of them still in use. Chances are, you have one nearby.

(TOP) Exterior details, Erasmus Hall, Flatbush, Brooklyn. Photographs by Heather Jane McCormick

(RIGHT) Erasmus Hall High School (now Erasmus Hall Educational Campus), constructed beginning in 1905, shown here in a c. 1906 view.

Details of the 1904 exterior, former Manual Training High School, Park Slope, Brooklyn. Photographs by Heather Jane McCormick

The Manual Training High School (now the John Jay Educational Campus in Park Slope), Brooklyn, opened in 1904, in a 1907 or earlier postcard view.
Hands On History

Our Chapter’s public school education initiative, Hands On History: Preserving the Past in the Present, continues to evolve, thanks to the hard work of Lesley Doyel and Tenzing Chadotsang. Going into its fourth year, HOH started with middle- and high schoolers at the LAB School in Chelsea, and now reaches elementary students at nearby PS 11—a C.B.J. Snyder building on West 21st Street.

The program immerses seven- to ten-year-olds in the study of their neighborhood, emphasizing the importance of preservation and adaptive reuse in afterschool sessions with preservationists and urban archeologists and visits to historic sites. This year, the class used its 2013 Margot Gayle Fund grant to create a display of antique gym equipment discovered in a long-unopened closet in the school’s fifth floor gymnasium.

During the spring semester, students concentrated on the rich history of Chelsea’s waterfront, with field trips to the repurposed Chelsea Piers and the lightship Frying Pan, a historic floating lighthouse docked at Pier 66 Maritime, one of New York’s few remaining floating railroad barges. The class followed the train tracks across 11th Avenue to the massive Terminal Warehouse Company building and its iconic neighbor, the Starrett-Lehigh building, where they had special access to balcony views of the Hudson River. Other field trips included a visit to the former National Maritime Union building (now the Maritime Hotel) with its evocative “portholes,” and an in-depth tour of the landmarked Jane Hotel, which was the American Seamen’s Friend Society Sailors’ Home and Institute when it sheltered survivors of the 1912 Titanic disaster.

Hands On History is one of the VSNY’s most successful and meaningful initiatives, instilling enthusiasm and respect for our city’s built heritage in its youngest residents and helping to educate a generation of future preservationists. Now you can experience what this great program has to offer during a special tour to some of its sites, including the Snyder school that is its home base (see Tours for details).
**Lectures**

Lectures are held at Dominican Academy, located at 44 East 68th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues. **NEW TIME: 6:30 P.M.** Admission is free; no reservations are required. Attendees are invited to meet the speakers at our post-lecture receptions.

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9**

**AS AMERICAN AS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE LEGACY OF CHARLES B.J. SNYDER**

A Progressive-Era architect and superintendent of New York City school buildings, Snyder used innovative design and construction techniques to promote health, safety and architectural elegance in his designs for over 400 school buildings beginning in 1891. CUNY professor Jean Arrington draws on her extensive research on Snyder in this lecture and her related tour of Snyder schools in the South Bronx on September 20 (see Tours Below).

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14**

**WILLIAM MANGELS: AMUSING THE MASSES ON CONEY ISLAND AND BEYOND**

Mechanic and inventor Mangels came to the United States as a teenager and by the early 20th century he was the leading manufacturer of amusement park rides in the country, patenting the mechanism that gives carousel horses their gallop. Lecturer Jeff Richman is a historian and curator of the Green-Wood Historic Fund’s exhibition on Mangels, which runs from September 7–October 26.

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11**

**VICTORIAN EXHIBITION CERAMICS**

Between 1850 and 1900, British ceramics manufacturers such as Minton, Copeland, Doulton and Lambeth showcased their technical excellence and innovative designs at over fifty international exhibitions. Highlighting examples of these creations is lecturer Ian Cox, director of the VSA London Summer School, professor of art history at the University of Glasgow and consultant to Royal Crown Derby.

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9**

**THE GILDED STAGE: NEW YORK THEATER IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY**

From *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to *The House of Mirth*, popular American theater of the 19th century was melodrama. Plays were performed in ornate theaters, before diverse audiences, presented by such famed impresarios as Joseph Jefferson, Anna Morvath, P.T. Barnum, Rachel Crothers and David Belasco. Lecturer Alex Roe is an actor, writer, teacher, set designer and, since 2001, the Artistic Director of the Metropolitan Playhouse, winner in 2014 of a VSNY award for performing arts.

Lectures are made possible by a grant from the New York Council for the Humanities, and the generous support of Lewis I. Haber.

**Tours**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20**

**1:00 P.M.–4:00 P.M.**

**A CLUSTER OF SNYDER SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH BRONX**

In a walking tour of the South Bronx, Jean Arrington, the preeminent authority on the career of Charles B.J. Snyder, will point out the variety of styles the architect employed for public schools located just a few blocks apart. Among the styles to be seen are Dutch Renaissance Revival, Palazzo, Italianate, Simplified Gothic and Snyder’s revolutionary H-plan.

**FEES: $25 FOR VICTORIAN SOCIETY NEW YORK MEMBERS, $35 FOR NONMEMBERS**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22**

**3:15 P.M.–6:15 P.M.**

**HANDS ON HISTORY: CHELSEA AS CLASSROOM**

Learn about the Chapter’s education initiative firsthand in a walking tour of some of the Chelsea sites students visit during their Hands On History afterschool program led by Lesley Doyel. After orientation at the program’s home base, a Snyder-designed elementary school, the streets become the classroom: participants will see 1830s houses, later warehouses and the site of the first Thomas’ English Muffin bakery.

**FEES: $10 FOR EVERYONE**

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**New Victorian Landmarks and Historic Districts**

Since our last newsletter, no individual Victorian-era landmarks have been designated. The newly designated Park Avenue Historic District in Manhattan includes a handful of early apartment buildings (1898–1915). LPC now has a new Chair; watch this space to learn what this might mean for new Victorian designations.

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*BY ANTHONY W. ROBINS*

Anthony W. Robins, an author, lecturer and tour leader, is a former VSNY board member. His website is www.anthonywrobins.com.
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19
10:00 A.M.
MARGOT GAYLE’S TRIBECA: A NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION WALKING TOUR
Join historian Anthony W. Robbins of Discover New York’s Landmarks on this walking tour of the TriBeCa Cast-Iron Historic District, a unique landmarked neighborhood that the late preservationist and Victorian Society in America cofounder Margot Gayle helped to protect. Robbins learned the tour guide’s craft under Gayle’s tutelage in the mid-1970s, and we are pleased to offer this special orientation tour for new Victorian Society New York members. Become a member today!
BY INVITATION ONLY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25
2:00 P.M.–4:00 P.M.
NOTED AND NOTORIOUS WOMEN OF DOWNTOWN NEW YORK
On a downtown walking tour, Kathleen Hulser, a public historian, will introduce fascinating women who navigated the social hazards of 19th-century New York. Among those featured: paper pattern inventor and tea merchant Ellen Demorest; spiritualist, stockbroker and free love advocate Victoria Woodhull; philanthropist Juliet Toussaint; abolitionist and evangelist Sojourner Truth; reporter Nellie Bly; soprano Jenny Lind; and the notoriously wicked Madame Restell.
FEES: $30 FOR VICTORIAN SOCIETY NEW YORK MEMBERS, $40 FOR NONMEMBERS

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1
7:30 A.M.–6:30 P.M.
THE ARCHITECTURAL TREASURE TROVE OF TROY
Troy, New York, retains numerous architectural treasures from its prosperous Victorian era. Led by architectural historian Suzanne Spellen, participants will tour the Washington Square vicinity (surrounding the only private city park in the country other than Gramercy Park), Russell Sage College campus, Monument Square, the interior of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church decorated entirely by Louis Comfort Tiffany and more. The bus tour includes a catered lunch.
FEES TO BE ANNOUNCED

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7
TIMES AND FEES TO BE ANNOUNCED
CONNECTICUT YANKEE HOLIDAY
A bus tour to Westport, Connecticut, will feature visits to houses decorated for the holidays.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF TOUR 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 because of health conditions or disabilities, please contact events@vicsocny.org or call 212-886-3742. The Victorian Society New York reserves the right to decline to accept or to refuse to retain any person as a member of its tours at any time.

Margot Gayle with an example of the cast-iron architecture she helped to protect: 361 Broadway at the corner of Franklin Street in TriBeCa, built in 1881–82. This photograph was taken in 1983, the year after the building achieved landmark designation. The Victorian Society New York

Minton & Co. bone china vase, exhibited at the London Great Exhibition, 1851. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Morris High School (now Morris Educational Campus) in the Bronx, designed by C.B.J. Snyder and opened in 1904, in a postcard view c. 1920.


The Rice Building, Central Troy Historic District. Photograph by Matt H. Wade via Creative Commons

In 2014, the Metropolitan Playhouse revived Bayard Veiller’s 1912 play, Within the Law.

The Tickler, a Coney Island ride designed and built by William Mangels, shown c. 1911.
Many of our members are introduced to the VSNY through participation in the Victorian Society in America’s Summer Schools. Each year, the VSNY provides scholarship funding for students in both the London and Newport, Rhode Island, programs. This year, two students from our region received our support: Timothy Wroten, Associate Manager of Communications at the New-York Historical Society, and Kristin Sarli, Program Coordinator at The Royal Oak Foundation. Tim, who will join the VSNY board this year, answered a few questions about his ten eventful days in Newport this spring.

Tim, how did you learn about the VSA Summer Schools?

One of the curators of decorative art at the New-York Historical Society where I work attended the Newport Summer School and encouraged me to apply. She knows I’m enthusiastic about history through material culture and architecture.

When you were planning your application for the Newport school, what were you hoping to see and learn?

I was actually hoping to learn a lot about Gilded-Age New York. New York has been such a build-up, tear-down city, so few of the grand homes from the era remain. By visiting Newport, you can get an understanding of the architectural and decorative tastes of New York’s elite. I’m also a big McKim, Mead and White fan, and was looking forward to seeing some of the firm’s work from their “adolescence” before Pennsylvania Station and other large-scale commissions.

What surprised you most about the experience?

I was surprised to learn how many organizations and models are involved in preserving Newport. I was aware of the Preservation Society of Newport County, which oversees and interprets 11 historic properties for public access (most notably The Breakers). I was intrigued to learn about The Newport Restoration Foundation, which owns and maintains dozens of historic buildings. While a few operate as museums, most are rented and continue to function as private, lived-in properties as they have for centuries. Some of the most amazing places were privately owned by descendants or architecture enthusiasts. Meaningful preservation literally takes a village.

The VSA Summer Schools are a great way to forge connections with colleagues from around the country and the world. How do you think your new friendships will influence your working life?

When you take Richard Guy Wilson and add an incredible, international range of participants—graduate students, curators, museum administrators, architects, passionate enthusiasts—it leaves you with an unforgettable, enriching experience. While on the tours, everyone would bring his or her own perspective for a combined expert force. So now, I have a roster of experts to ask for advice on everything under the sun.

Do you have a favorite moment or memory?

The only things Newport has more of than historical architecture are exquisite trees—especially of the “weeping” variety. Richard actually made us scale a brick wall and walk around the backyard of Chateau-sur-mer just to take in one fine example. Also, seeing the fish-scale wood carving and craftsmanship inside the Samuel Tilton House by McKim, Mead and White was incredible.

I’ve saved the most important question for last. How was the food?

Newport is wonderful for seafood lovers, and our hosts were incredibly hospitable with coffee, wine and treats. I’d recommend some early morning jogs to take in some scenery and burn calories!
NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

Q&A with Hilda Regier

In May, Hilda Regier took on a two-year term as president of The Victorian Society New York. A familiar face at VSNY events, Hilda is a longtime member serving her second stint on the Chapter’s board. She is a retired professional journalist who spent most of her career at medical publications before becoming a freelance writer and editor. Her work has included research for VSNY founder Margot Gayle’s Daily News column “Changing Scene” and two entries in The Encyclopedia of New York City. In her Chelsea neighborhood, Hilda has devoted time to many local organizations, including Community Board 4, the Council of Chelsea Block Associations, Save Chelsea, Chelsea Community Church and the Chelsea Garden Club. She took time out to answer a few questions.

Your involvement with the Victorian Society New York goes back many years. When did you become a member?

I think it was 1969, but for years I wasn’t active, only occasionally attending lectures. A demanding job that sometimes required 16-hour days and involvement in local organizations prevented participation.

You’ve certainly made up for that since. One of your main activities at the VSNY has been to help plan our tours. Do you have a favorite destination in the New York area?

That’s a difficult question, because most of our tours are memorable, but the Sportsman’s Club on Long Island’s South Shore was something special. The town of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, provides one of the most intact Victorian-era downtowns.

You are a Chelsea homeowner. Tell us a little about your place.

My four-unit house is an 1847 row house with a brick and brownstone façade. Under stipulations set by Clement Clarke Moore when he sold the lots on this block it is set back 10 feet from the street, allowing a high stoop for the main entrance. The house was built in the Greek Revival style, but the front doors were replaced years ago with an Italianate touch. I had been living in Chelsea for several years when I bought the house in 1977 and loved its “small town” neighborliness. Some parts of the neighborhood were a bit rough, and it definitely was not the upscale area it has become. It was a time when people of modest means were buying old houses and often working on them with their own hands. I discovered a trompe l’oeil pattern hidden in the parlors of my apartment. It took me 10 years to uncover it—removing wallpaper and in some areas paint from the paint below and touching up defects by mixing paint to match. But in an instant a large part of the restored artwork was destroyed by a steel beam rammed through the party wall during a massive renovation next door.

What a heartbreak! Stories like that make a preservationist’s blood run cold. As a longtime activist in your neighborhood, you’ve seen many campaigns and worked on many initiatives. What is your proudest achievement, and what do you see as the most pressing issue today?

Proud? Satisfied may be a better word. A lawsuit by Chelsea Neighborhood Associations, which I chaired, resulted in a landmark 1973 decision by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals that mandated the US Postal Service to produce environmental reviews for its building projects. (We lost the fight to prevent the building, but the policy holds.) More recently Save Chelsea spearheaded the successful effort to prevent a 17-story building on Ninth Avenue where the existing zoning limits heights to 75 feet. The most pressing issue today may be the potential sale of air rights from the piers in Hudson River Park to developers beyond the highway. Another is the need to landmark more areas that are endangered by insensitive renovations.

We hear that you grew up on a Kansas farm. How did those early experiences prepare you for the life you’ve led in New York City?

It taught me that life requires work.
the book depicts such notable interiors as the 45-foot-high studio of Louis Comfort Tiffany and the art-filled houses of Henry O. Havemeyer and Jeanette Dwight Bliss.

NEW MEDIA

THE BOWERY BOYS PODCAST AND BLOG

The VSNY’s New Media award reflects the proliferating range of electronic and online projects relevant to our members’ interests. This year we honor The Bowery Boys, the team of Greg Young and Tom Meyers, who together produce a lively and informative podcast and blog devoted to NYC history. Taking their name from a notorious Five Points gang, the Boys focus on the 19th century, with some forays into 20th-century subjects. Fluent in social media, they spread their content through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, making New York’s past accessible in the most current of ways.

PERFORMING ARTS

METROPOLITAN PLAYHOUSE

Entering its 23rd season, the Obie-winning Metropolitan Playhouse’s mission is “finding America one play at a time” by rediscovering and staging plays written in—or about—19th- and early 20th-century America. This fall, Artistic Director Alex Roe will discuss their work in a VSNY lecture on December 9 (see Lectures).

PRESERVATION

CHEROKEE APARTMENTS AND CTA ARCHITECTS

In the early 20th century, many believed that the scourge of tuberculosis could be prevented or even cured by better living conditions—more natural sunlight and fresh air. Henry Atterbury Smith’s magnificent Shively Sanitary Tenements (now the Cherokee Apartments), at the east end of 77th and 78th Streets in Manhattan, epitomized that belief. Featuring courtyard light wells, exterior stairs and covered walkways with Guastavino tile vaults, they had handsome balconets and triple-hung floor-to-ceiling windows that allowed residents to flood their interiors with light and air and to step outside. After a century of deterioration, the landmarked building, now cooperative apartments, retained CTA Architects for historically sensitive restoration and repairs. Nine hundred triple-hung and 360 double-hung windows were replaced with mahogany true-divided-light windows, operated by weights and chains, and the balconets were meticulously restored.

GRASSROOTS

ST. PETER’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, BRONX, AND PRESERV BUILDING RESTORATION MANAGEMENT

St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in the quiet Westchester Square neighborhood of the Bronx is a landmarked 1853–55 Leopold Eidlitz building on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2012, the church’s soaring steeple suffered extensive damage during Hurricane Sandy. The congregation hired PRESERV Building Restoration Management and in May 2013 full steeple restoration began, including reproduction and replacement of more than 2,000 stamped copper shingles. Today the steeple is once again a beacon in the community and a wonderful example of church stewardship.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

JACK TAYLOR

Through his relentless efforts and persistence, preservation advocate Jack Taylor has protected hundreds of architectural treasures in New York, achieving designation for a wide range of individual landmarks and historic districts, notably the 440-building Ladies’ Mile Historic District, more than ten important structures overlooking Union Square, and the East 17th Place Historic District. Although we honor his lifetime of achievement, we know that his work goes on.

Margot Gayle Fund Grants

SUNSET PARK LANDMARKS COMMITTEE

Sunset Park, Brooklyn, is a primarily residential neighborhood of brick, brownstone and limestone row houses built from the 1890s to the 1910s. The Sunset Park Landmarks Committee is working hard to preserve the historic character of the neighborhood by seeking landmark designation from the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission. A $350 Margot Gayle Fund grant supports color printing for the SPLC’s presentation to the LPC.

QUEENS HISTORICAL SOCIETY AT HISTORIC KINGSLAND HOMESTEAD

For the past 30 years, the Victorian Parlor at the Kingsland Homestead has embodied Victorian life in Flushing, New York. The Queens Historical Society is adding to its educational program by creating a hands-on flip book with detailed content about the parlor and its furnishings. A $500 Gayle Fund grant supports production, including photography and research, of 20–25 cards for this show-and-tell feature.

ST. PETER’S CHELSEA EPISCOPAL CHURCH

St. Peter’s Chelsea, completed in 1838, has 13 stained glass windows, including examples by the Tiffany and J & R Lamb Studios. As part of a building-wide rehabilitation, St. Peter’s has engaged Rambusch art glass studios for a professional window survey to determine the scope of restoration before they approach donors for support. A $1000 Gayle Fund grant will make a significant contribution toward the survey fee.