The Metropolitan Chapter’s proposal to expand the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District gained exposure before an appreciative audience at the Annual Meeting of the SoHo Alliance at St. Anthony’s Church on November 27. PowerPoint illustrations and take-home handouts enhanced the presentation by members of the Preservation Committee.

Melissa Baldock led off the presentation by explaining that Margot Gayle, a founder of the Metropolitan Chapter and the preeminent expert on cast-iron architecture who was instrumental in obtaining the initial district designation, has long wanted the expansion. Gayle will be 100 years old in May, and Baldock suggested that expansion of the district would be an appropriate birthday gift.

The proposed expansion, Baldock pointed out, would correct a mistake made in 1973 when the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District was designated. The district lines were drawn down the middle of boundary streets, leaving many similar buildings that are landmark-worthy undesignated. The proposed expansion includes buildings on the west side of West Broadway below Houston Street, the east side of Crosby from just south of Spring Street to Howard Street and the south side of Howard at its nexus with Crosby, west to Broadway. Of the 72 sites involved, nine are buildings with cast-iron fronts, and one is a vacant lot. Designation, Baldock stressed, would ensure that whatever is built on the vacant lot would be in keeping the architectural heritage of the district. Inappropriate signage and insensitive renovations, she added, would be curbed.

Stephen Gottlieb was the next speaker, but before he could begin, a man who identified himself as a resident of Crosby Street interrupted to support designation. “We need protection,” he emphasized. “I didn’t arrange that,” said Gottlieb before describing architectural details of some buildings dating from the 1860s to the 1880s.

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Honoring Margot Gayle: A Centennial Celebration

On May 14, Margot Gayle will celebrate her 100th birthday, and to honor one of the Victorian Society’s founders, the Metropolitan Chapter is throwing her a birthday party! The event will be held at 6:00 p.m. on her birthday at the Century Association, 7 West 43rd Street.

As many of you know, it was around Margot’s kitchen table that the Victorian Society in America was founded. At the urging of Sir Nicholas Pevsner, who recognized that Americans were rapidly losing scores of nineteenth-century structures, Margot, J. Stewart Johnson and Carolyn Karpinski began to gather volunteers and in the summer of 1966, officially founded the Victorian Society in America. Today, that organization boasts 16 chapters and over 1,300 members. Margot’s commitment to historic preservation reaches far beyond her work with our organization. Since the 1960s, when she successfully campaigned to save the Jefferson Market Courthouse, she has worked tirelessly to raise public awareness as to the importance and significance of Victorian architecture.

Invitations for this Centennial Celebration will be mailed in early April, but mark your calendar now. We hope you will join us on May 14 at the Century Association to wish Margot a happy birthday and honor a woman who has devoted her life to preserving the rich architectural legacy of New York City and the Victorian heritage of our country.

Margar Gayle at Jefferson Market Library ceremony, November 27, 2007

Photo by Simeon Bankoff

Two buildings of identical design: 34 Howard St. (left) is in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District while 29 Howard St. is undesignated. Photos by Stephen Gottlieb

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Melissa Baldock, the Chapter’s recording secretary since 2004, energetically performs a number of other duties as well. She maintains its website and does the PowerPoint presentation for the annual awards ceremonies. As a member of the Preservation Committee, she worked on developing the proposal to expand the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District that has become a major effort of the Chapter. She also writes the testimony that the Chapter presents at hearings of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. As a member of the Lecture Committee, she arranges for two speakers each year. In the upcoming series, she has engaged Barbara Cohen-Stratyner to lecture on vasevile.

A native of Cincinnati where her mother was her high school principal, Baldock came to New York to study at NYU. After graduating, she worked for a year for the American Institute of Architects and then for two years for Landmark West before enrolling in Columbia University’s historical preservation program. She received her M.S. degree in 2003 and subsequently served on the board of the Preservation Alumni. Fresh out of Columbia, she joined the Historic Districts Council as a preservation associate and reviewed applications from all five boroughs for alterations to landmarked structures. In 2004, Baldock moved into her current position as director of preservation and research for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. In a recent major project, she oversaw preparation of a proposal to designate a South Village Historic District that has been forwarded to the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The research uncovered a fascinating social history as well as surveying the architecture. Once a week Baldock teaches a class on preservation at Fashion Institute of Technology. Her students are seniors studying interior design and have an interest in Coney Island, the subject of her master’s thesis. In it, she looked for ways to keep the area affordable while adding new features to bring back fun for people who cannot afford to travel far for recreation. One of her own favorite forms of recreation is swimming.

William J. Dane became a member of the Victorian Society in America within months of its founding in 1986. Introduced to the fledgling organization by one of its founders, J. Stewart Johnson, he helped formulate and carry out programs to foster appreciation of the culture of the Victorian era as well as conserve its architecture. During many years as a Board member, he was at various times treasurer and vice president of the Metropolitan Chapter. In 2002, he received the Chapter’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

This past fall, the Newark Public Library honored Dane at a gala celebrating his 60 years on its staff. Also honoring him was an exhibition, The World in Prints, reflecting his success in duping the library’s collection of fine prints. While his official title is special collections librarian, he preens “keeper of the prints,” a designation he spotted on a door at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Under his care, the collection has grown to more than 23,000 prints, ranging from a 1549 engraving to etchings and woodcuts by contemporary artists. He has expanded the holdings with posters, artist books, autograph collections, shopping bags and pop-up books. In 1997 the library’s Board of Directors named the assembly the William J. Dane Fine Print Collection. In 2004, Dane established the Gertrude Fine Prints Endowment Fund, honoring his late sister, to maintain and expand the collection.

Dane joined the library staff in 1947 as a clerk in the art and music department after graduating from the University of New Hampshire in his native state. His undergraduate education there was interrupted by military service during World War II. In the Army, his high mathematics scores led to his being sent to Newark College of Engineering (now New Jersey Institute of Technology) to study bridge building, but before his course was completed he was shipped to Europe in an infantry unit that crossed Belgium and Germany. He was in the force that met the Red Army at the Elbe River in 1945, dividing the Third Reich. After the war, Dane studied at the Université de Nancy in France before returning to the University of New Hampshire. In 1950, the Newark Public Library allowed him to study for a year at the Sorbonne. During that time, he spent every afternoon at the Louvre. He continued his art education with courses at Harvard and New York University and earned a master of library science degree at Drew University in Philadelphia. Travel has been part of his self-education through the years. In the past year he toured Barcelona with the Victorian Society Summer School Alumni and took a summer vacation in Iceland.
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BARBARA COHEN-STRATYNER, Women in the (vaudeville) House tueSdaY, maRcH 11, 6 Pm covers, literary posters and ephemeral materials. Tiffany before her career as a designer of book La Farge and was a designer for Louis Comfort Tiffany before her career as a designer of book covers. She trained in stained glass production with John La Farge and was a designer for Louis Comfort Tiffany before her career as a designer of book covers, literary posters and ephemeral materials.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 6 PM Women in the (vaudeville) House BARBARA COHEN-STRATYNER, curator of exhibitions, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Recognizing women’s increasing discretionary income, vaudeville circuit managers, led by B.F. Keith, targeted them to attend afternoon performances. As a result, the image of women in vaudeville shifted from victim of marriage, to the ball game. In addition, young immigrant working women became popular characters.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 6 PM The Proper Decoration of Book Covers: The Life and Work of Alice C. Morse MINDDEL DUBANSKY, preservation librarian, Thomas J. Watson Library at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and curator of an exhibition on Morse and her book covers at the Grolier Club, on view January 24- March 7. Virtually unknown today, Alice C. Morse achieved fame in the late 1880s as a designer of intricate book covers and case bindings. She trained in stained glass production with John La Farge and was a designer for Louis Comfort Tiffany before her career as a designer of book covers, literary posters and ephemeral materials.

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TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 6 PM Transmitting Beauties of Nature to Elements of Decoration: The Glass Gardens of Louis C. Tiffany LINDSY PARROTT, manager and curator of the Neustadt Collection of Tiffany Glass at the Century Association, 7 W. 43rd St. Tiffany devoted significant time and money to developing new glass formulas and innovative fabrication techniques that enabled him to translate the beauty and subtleties of the natural world into glass. This lecture will explore sources of Tiffany’s inspiration and the materials and methods used to masterfully replicate naturalistic effects of color, texture and pattern in his leaded-glass windows and lampshades.

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 6 PM The Great War of the Architects: Religious Architecture in New York during the Victorian Period DR. RONALD J. BROWN, assistant professor of history, ethnic studies and political science at Touro College and adjunct professor of world religions at Unification Theological Seminary. In the Victorian era, Jews, Catholics and Orthodox Christians from the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires, Christians and Jews from Lebanon, Armenia and Syria and Catholics from Italy and Ireland transformed New York into the world’s most religiously, ethnically and linguistically diverse city. Construction of houses of worship reflecting their countries of origin was central to the immigrants’ retaining their religions and cultures.
soho continued from first page  Two buildings of identical design by Renwick and Sands, he noted, illustrate the commonality of buildings in the current district and those in the proposed expansion. In fact, the undesignated building at 29 Howard has more original details than 34 Howard, which is in the district. Other prominent architects whose works are in the proposed expansion include Defoe Lansay and D.A.J. Jardine.

Simeon Bankoff concluded the presentation with a rousing call for action by audience members. "We need support from you," he declared. Most pressing, he stressed, is the need to get the expansion proposal onto the agenda of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

"You're speaking to the converted," said Bo Riccobono, vice president of the SoHo Alliance, at the conclusion of the presentation. More than 60 postcards to Robert Tierney, Landmarks Preservation Commission chair, were signed and collected at the meeting. More have since been received, and several residents have written more detailed letters.

The proposal was mentioned in The Villager, a weekly newspaper with wide circulation in downtown neighborhoods. In a follow-up letter Jeff Shohet, president of the Metropolitan Chapter, emphasized the effort to broaden community support. "We hope that the residents of SoHo and surrounding neighborhoods will join us in asking the Landmarks Preservation Commission to landmark the many outstanding buildings on the edge of the SoHo historic district as a 100th birthday gift to Margot Gayle," he wrote.

lectures move to new location in fall

Beginning in September, the Metropolitan Chapter's lectures will be in The New Church (Swedenborgian) at 112 East 35th Street in Manhattan, between Park and Lexington Avenues. The Donnell Library, long site of the lectures, will be closed for several years due to construction.

The new site was obtained after an extensive search by Karen Zukowski, Lecture Committee chair, aided by other Board members. Guiding the search was the Board’s desire that the lectures continue to be free to the public. The church is fully accessible to the handicapped and space is available for receptions after the lectures. The Renaissance Revival structure, built in 1858-59 and expanded in 1932, recently underwent a sensitive restoration.

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