

PRESERVATION NOTES

NEWSLETTER

Vol. LI Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2016

THE GEORGE FOWLER HOUSE IN FREETOWN, EAST HAMPTON

The modest, weatherworn house where the Native Montaukett, George Fowler and his family once lived is remarkable for its survival, its material culture, and its historical significance. And now, following July's local landmark designation, it will be preserved by the Town of East Hampton as a place for remembrance and acknowledgement of Native American life on Long Island from the distant past to today.

George Fowler was born at Indian Fields in present-day Montauk County Park. His family was among the last residents of Indian Fields when Arthur Benson of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, purchased more than 11,000 acres of Montauk land at public auction around 1879. Although Benson was expected to respect the Native Montaukett's residency rights, they were displaced. When the Montaukett attempted to sue to regain their lost lands, the New York State court stripped them of their tribal status. To this day, New York State does not recognize the Montaukett as a tribal group and their history and social identity remain misunderstood.

In the 1880s, the Montaukett from Indian Fields were relocated beyond the boundaries of East Hampton village to the racially segregated neighborhood of Freetown, which was settled by free people of color in the early 19th century. Some of the Montaukett houses in Indian Fields were moved to small parcels of land in Freetown. The Fowler House is rumored to be one of those houses.

The Fowler family occupied the house in Freetown from roughly 1885 through the end of the 20th century. A 1½ story saltbox structure, the house measures roughly 15x15 feet, with a small later addition to the side. It stands on field stone corners, but does not appear to have a full fieldstone foundation or basement. There was a kitchen, living room, and bedroom downstairs. Upstairs, there was another bedroom, a small storage area, and what appears to have been a work space under a sky light. Lacking central heating and in-



George Fowler's house was moved from Montaukett land at Indian Fields (now Montauk County Park) to Freetown, East Hampton, in the 1880s. Now owned by the Town of East Hampton, this extraordinary house is in dire need of repair. (Courtesy of Kyril Bromley for 27east.com)



(Left) An old photo of the George Fowler house found in the East Hampton Library's Long Island Collection archives, reveals that the house's existing gabled roof porch replaced an earlier porch with a flat shed roof. Although vernacular in style, the gabled roof porch is reminiscent of Greek revival architecture that was popular in East Hampton around the mid-19th century. (Courtesy of the East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection)



(Left, detail above) George Fowler appears in an undated photo steering Thomas Moran's family gondola. (Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum)

door plumbing, a stove in the living room served to heat the house. A small, circular sub-floor, brick-lined pit is visible under the sink in the kitchen to drain water that was brought into the house in some way. At least one outhouse likely served the needs of the family.

George Fowler worked for artist Thomas Moran, who lived in East Hampton village. Fowler, like many other Freetown men, was employed in gardening and landscaping. U.S. Census records reveal that Fowler's sons were also employed at private East Hampton estates as gardeners and chauffeurs. According to James Devine, a Fowler descendant who grew up in Freetown in the second half of the 20th century, the grounds of the Fowler property included orchard trees, ornamental plantings, and shrubbery, which exhibited the family's knowledge of landscaping and gardening work.

In the 1990s, the Fowler property was seized by Suffolk County for owed taxes. The County eventually transferred the property to the Town of East Hampton with a mandate requiring the town pre-

serve the site as parkland, protect any buried cultural resources on the property, and consult with Fowler descendants and the Montauketts to interpret the site for the public. A committee of local historians, historical society directors, one archaeologist, and interested residents was formed in 2015 to advise the town on preservation of the site.

Research by Farmingdale State College anthropologists Drs. Allison Manfra McGovern and Anjana Mebane-Cruz helped

identify the site's significance. They are gathering ideas from Montauketts and local residents to inform the future restoration project.

The East Hampton Town Board approved local landmark status for the Fowler site this July and plans are underway to stabilize the structure in preparation for winter. Once the structure is stabilized, the committee will seek funding and grants for research and restoration.

- Allison Manfra McGovern



The George Fowler House will be preserved by the Town of East Hampton as a place for remembrance and acknowledgement of Native American life on Long Island from the distant past to today. (Courtesy of Kyril Bromley for 27east.com)



Farmingdale State College anthropologists are gathering ideas from Montauketts and local residents to inform the future restoration. (Left to Right): Dr. Miriam Deitsch (Director of FSC's Social Science Research Institute), Dr. Anjana Mebane-Cruz, Dr. Allison Manfra McGovern, and Dr. Veronica Henry (Executive Assistant to FSC's President/Chief Diversity Officer)

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*Vol. LI Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2016
Iss 0885-7326*

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*Published by
The Society for the Preservation
of Long Island Antiquities*

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Credo: It has become apparent that those of us who are interested in conservation and preservation need to be alerted to the destruction of the irreplaceable values and environments that comprise our heritage and to the actions proposed to avert such threats. These notes are designed to raise awareness.

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*Preservation Notes is listed in
the Avery Index to Architectural periodicals
and is made possible by the
New York State Council on the Arts*



THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF SAG HARBOR HILLS, AZUREST, AND NINEVAH SUBDIVISIONS

The Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest, and Ninevah subdivisions (SANS) are a historically African American summer community encompassing three adjacent subdivisions in the Village of Sag Harbor just outside the Sag Harbor Historic District. When SANS was first settled by middle class African Americans during the late 1940s, people of color faced widespread racial segregation, violence, and discrimination that prevented them from accessing beaches and resorts. SANS quickly became a popular destination for African American leisure. Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, and Harry Belafonte were frequent visitors. SANS homeowners have included Ron Brown, who served as President Bill Clinton's Secretary of Commerce, and Roscoe C. Brown, who was a pilot in the Tuskegee Airmen.

Today, the rolling wooded hills of SANS still feature many low-profile, mid-century ranches and bungalows that were built by original residents. But as the booming real estate market grows on the East End, the distinctive historically-rooted setting of SANS is changing rapidly. Existing structures are being demolished as lots are clear cut and consolidated to make way for much larger houses. Many longtime residents are increasingly concerned that the remarkable history of SANS will be lost to redevelopment before it can be told.

As one of the first African American resort communities, SANS is certainly a place with many important stories to tell. Like the story of how Azurest, the oldest of the three subdivisions, was founded by Amaza Lee Meredith, one of the first African American female architects, and her sister Maude Terry, in partnership with two of Long Island's most famous realtors, Daniel and Kent Gale. The sisters spent their summers in Azurest and co-managed the Azurest Syndicate Inc., which brokered lot sales and financed mortgages for the SANS subdivisions.

The situation in SANS has raised some thought-provoking questions about the future of historic preservation on Long Island. For example, how should preservationists approach the vast built environment of mid- to late-20th century suburbia as it comes of age for landmark designation? How can preservation advance the recognition of places like SANS that embody the experiences of historically underrepresented groups? SPLIA will be tackling these vital questions through our continued advocacy and outreach in Sag Harbor and across Long Island.



Meredith designed a house in SANS (above) for her sister, Maude Terry. Known as "HIHIL," it was built in 1949. The original houses of SANS are at risk for demolition. (Courtesy Grace Lynis Dubinson)



"Azurest South" Meredith designed this modernist style house on the VSU campus, inside and out, for herself and her partner, Edna Meade Colson. Built in 1939, it was listed on the National Register in 1993 and now serves as the VSU Alumni House. (Courtesy VSU Alumni Association)



Amaza Lee Meredith (1895-1984) Meredith enrolled at the Teachers College of Columbia University in 1928 and served as faculty at Virginia State University (VSU) from 1930 to 1958. She founded VSU's Fine Arts Department and was appointed Department Chair in 1935. (Courtesy VSU University Library Special Collections and Archives)

LONG-AWAITED LANDMARKS IN BROOKLYN AND QUEENS

New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has made great progress on their Backlog Initiative to address 95 properties in all five boroughs, including many on western Long Island in Brooklyn and Queens.

Backlogged properties are those that were proposed for landmarks designation prior to 2010, but were never acted upon by the Commission until now. Since 85% of the properties have been on the backlog for 20 or more years, the condition and setting of many properties have changed considerably. In some cases buildings were moved or demolished, lots were combined, and addresses had changed, which all served to highlight the impor-

ance of an expeditious review process for landmark designation.

As part of the Backlog Initiative, the commissioners also voted to withdraw some properties from landmark nomination by issuing a no-action letter, which removes a property from landmark consideration without judgment on its merits for designation. Although no-action properties may be reconsidered by LPC in the future, they currently have no landmark protection and therefore remain at risk.

So far this year, the Backlog Initiative has established several new landmarks in Brooklyn and Queens. Highlighted here are a few of the properties addressed this year during LPC's Backlog Initiative.



DESIGNATED Green-Wood Cemetery Chapel

500 25th Street, Brooklyn
Built: 1911-13
Architect: Warren & Wetmore
Backlogged since 1981
Designated on April 12, 2016

Designed by Warren and Wetmore after Christopher Wren's Tom Tower at Christ Church, Oxford University.



(Courtesy of Karla Murray Photography)

DESIGNATED Pepsi Cola Sign

4600 Fifth Street, Long Island City
Built: 1936
Manufactured by Artkraft Strauss
Backlogged since 1988
Designated April 12, 2016

The Depression-era neon sign was once perched atop PepsiCo's Long Island City bottling plant. The plant was demolished in 2001, but the beloved 60-foot sign survived and finally achieved formal landmark status this year. An icon of the Queens waterfront, the Pepsi Cola sign is one of the last vestiges of an era when industrial factories churned out popular products made in NYC.



The Pepsi Cola sign was originally located atop the PepsiCo bottling plant in Long Island City. The plant closed in 1999 and was demolished in 2001 to make way for a luxury condo tower. (Courtesy of Shamon Stapleton for The New York Times)



DESIGNATED Bowne Street Community Church

143-11 Roosevelt Avenue, Flushing
Built: 1891-1892
Backlogged since 2003
Designated April 12, 2016

A Romanesque Revival style church featuring detailed brickwork and stained glass windows manufactured by the Tiffany Glass Company of Corona. The windows were designed by Agnes Fairchild Northrup, an associate of Louis Comfort Tiffany and a life-long Church member.

It was built for the Reformed Dutch Church of Flushing that merged with the First Congregational Church of Flushing to form the Bowne Street Community Church in 1974.

**WATCHING:
Coney Island Pumping Station**

2301 Neptune Avenue, Brooklyn

Built: 1937-1938

Architect: Irwin S. Chanin

Backlogged since 1980

No-action vote on February 23, 2016

Owned and long neglected by the City of New York, the Coney Island Pumping Station is a particularly elegant example of an Art Moderne style utilitarian structure. Black granite columns frame the front entrance of the elliptical, fireproof building made of steel and concrete with exterior walls faced with limestone.

The Pumping Station delivered high pressure water to western Brooklyn, which innovated firefighting in an area known for infamous conflagrations like the fire that destroyed Coney Island's Dreamland in 1911. The station could provide as much as 13,500 gallons of water per minute under 200 pounds per square inch of pressure. The station has been largely abandoned since the City shut it down in the 1970s.

Commissioned as a Works Progress Administration project, the Pumping Station represents the only public design by Irwin S. Chanin, who is known for his landmarked buildings in Manhattan, such as the Century and Majestic apartment buildings on Central Park West and the Chanin Building on 42nd Street.



Four paired Pegasus sculptures once graced the Coney Island Pumping Station's entrances. A testament to the building's stylistic excellence, the Pegasus statues are now on display at the Brooklyn Museum's Steinberg Family Sculpture Garden. (Courtesy of Lore Croghan for Brooklyn Daily Eagle)



Despite years of neglect, the wide walk between lawns leading to the entrance of the curvilinear Coney Island Pumping Station still conveys Irwin S. Chanin's stately Art Moderne design. When the continuous band of three-tier windows (see below) was damaged by vandalism, the City installed painted cinder blocks to protect the building. (Courtesy of Flickr/Matt Green)

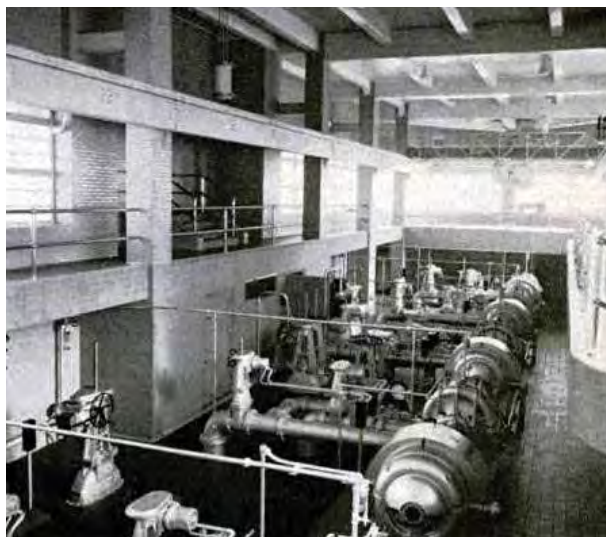


The masonry above the windows is suspended by cantilevered ends of the Pumping Station's roof girders. (Source: Short and Brown, 1939, Public Buildings)

Paired Art Deco Pegasus statues by the Piccirilli Brothers originally flanked the station's two entrances. The statues were loaned by the City of New York to the Brooklyn Museum in 1981 for safe keeping following an outbreak of vandalism at the site. Currently, the Pegasus are on view in the Steinberg Family Sculpture Garden at the Brooklyn Museum, where the statues have become more famous

than the building in Coney Island that they were made to adorn.

Many advocates, including SPLIA, remain eager to see this unique building landmarked, renovated, and repurposed for the community. We look forward to seeing the Pegasus statues returned home to a revived and landmarked Coney Island Pumping Station!



(Left) The interior of the Coney Island Pumping Station pictured soon after completion in the late 1930s. The main floor was constructed to lie 12 feet below grade, which allowed the pumps to be placed beneath the intake water level. A windowed gallery extended around the station at grade level. (Source: Short and Brown, 1939, Public Buildings)

A.T. STEWART-ERA HOUSE IN GARDEN CITY DEMOLISHED



The A.T. Stewart-era house at 104 Sixth Street, Garden City, was demolished on August 1, 2016. (Courtesy Garden City News Online)



The historic house that once stood at 104 Sixth Street (above) was built in 1883 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the late 1970s as part of the A. T. Stewart-era Thematic Group. (Courtesy Howard Schnapp for Newsday)

The house that stood at 104 Sixth Street in Garden City for over 130 years fell prey to the steel claw of a Caterpillar excavator on August 1st. Built in 1883, this structure was part of the visionary planned community developed by Alexander T. Stewart upon the then grassy expanses of the Hempstead Plains.

The property was purchased in November 2015 for \$1 million by New York Islander's hockey player, Johnny Boychuk, and his wife, Sheena. The Boychuks hired architect T.J. Costello to design a modern Victorian house to replace the authentic Victorian house demolished at 104 Sixth Street.

The house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the late 1970s along with nearly 50 other structures in Garden City. Today, less than 40 of the historic buildings that were listed on the National Register survive.

Without a local landmark ordinance, Garden City's remaining National Register listed properties are at risk. However, the loss of the irreplaceable historic building at 104 Sixth Street has reinvigorated efforts to protect Garden City's cultural resources. SPLIA joins the Garden City Historical Society and others in calling for local officials to address the ongoing loss of Garden City's historic places by enacting a preservation ordinance.

To learn more about A.T. Stewart and the development of Garden City, please see "Garden City: American Visions of Utopia" by Richard Guy Wilson, which appears in SPLIA's latest publication, *Gardens of Eden: Long Island's Early Twentieth-Century Planned Communities* edited by Robert B. MacKay.

THE NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT TURNS 50!

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) into law in 1966. The Act established the National Register of Historical Places as well as regulations and incentives for preservation. Fifty years later, the Register has over 89,000 listings encompassing more than 1.7 million resources. NHPA continues to play a central role in preservation throughout the United States.

SPLIA celebrates the 50th anniversary of NHPA with a salute to preservation advocates across Long Island and across the country. Here's to the next 50 years!



The historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people...the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans

— National Historic Preservation Act, 1966

RESTORED, DESIGNATED AND AT RISK

Soon to be Restored



Lefferts Historic House Park Slope, Brooklyn

The Prospect Park Alliance was awarded a \$2.5 million allocation from the New York City Council to fund much needed roof repairs at the Lefferts Historic House, an 18th-century Dutch farmhouse and museum inside Prospect Park, Brooklyn.



Second House, Montauk

Restoration of Montauk's oldest structure, the Second House, is expected to begin in early 2017. It was built in 1797 to house a succession of stewards who oversaw local livestock and pastureland.

Based on an in-depth study and recommendations by Robert Hefner, the historical preservation consultant for East Hampton Town, the project aims to restore the appearance of the house, barn, and setting to 1886, when the last steward lived there. After restoration, the house will look more like it did in a late 19th century image of the structure shown below.



(Courtesy East Hampton Historical Society)

Designated



Church of Our Lady of Kazan Sea Cliff

Crafted after wooden churches built in northern Russia in the 13th and 14th century, this church was added to the National Register of Historic Places on October 4th. SPLIA guided the National Register nomination in partnership with the congregation and local artist, Richard Gachot.

The church was built from a converted garage in 1942 by Russian families who immigrated to Long Island displaced by the World Wars. Architect Boris Riaboff donated the property and designed the plans to convert the garage. It was enlarged in 1946 and 1950, and bright blue onion domes, characteristic of Russian Orthodox architecture, were added.

Restored



Canoe Place Chapel, Hampton Bays

The chapel was moved about 100 feet south to a lot owned by the Town of Southampton in May. Since then, the interior and exterior has been restored with support from the Town's Community Preservation Fund. Built in 1820 as a church and meeting house, local historians believe the small blue and white Chapel was once a part of the Shinnecock Presbyterian Church building. The two structures were probably separated in the 1840s, when the Shinnecock Presbyterian Church was moved from Hampton Bays to the Shinnecock reservation.

At Risk



Plum Island

Many natural and cultural resources on this enigmatic island off the tip of the North Fork could soon be lost to private development, including the Plum Island Lighthouse (1869) and Fort Terry (1897).

Owned by the Federal government since 1826, the General Services Administration and the Department of Homeland Security are looking to sell the entire island at auction without any provisions to protect the significant resources found there. The Coalition to Preserve Plum Island, which encompasses advocacy groups from both sides of the Sound, filed a federal lawsuit in July that seeks to stop the sale and preserve the island.



Idle Hour Country House and Estate ex-Dowling College Campus, Oakdale

Several structures from William K. Vanderbilt's Idle Hour estate, including the exceptional country house (1901) and stables/coach house (1888), are located on the former Dowling College campus. Since the college closed in August, the future of some of Idle Hour's most significant buildings is uncertain. SPLIA has partnered with the Oakdale Historical Society to initiate preservation efforts.

For more than a century, the Oakdale community has grown up around Idle Hour's old buildings. The Vanderbilt-era landscape, notably the Grand Canal, still anchors the landscape of western Oakdale today, palpably shaping its character.

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Restored, Designated and At Risk

A CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Do you know of an endangered historic place on Long Island? Want to raise awareness and support for its protection?

SPLIA's 2017 *List of Endangered Historic Places* may be a way to start. If you know of an historic resource that's threatened, nominate it today. A nomination form is included in this publication, or can be downloaded from our website at: www.splia.org.

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