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# Against the Odds:
# Accounting for the Survival of the Berkshire Athenaeum

A Thesis Presented

by

JOHN S. DICKSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2014

Department of History

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# Against the Odds:
# Accounting for the Survival of the Berkshire Athenaeum

A Thesis Presented

by

JOHN S. DICKSON

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Mark T. Hamin, Chair

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Marla R. Miller, Member

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David H. Glassberg, Member

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Joye L. Bowman, Department Head
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**DEDICATION**

To Mary, my partner in all.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with much in life, the idea for this study of the old Berkshire Athenaeum came about rather haphazardly, and fortuitously. Bill Gillen, the architect hired for the current preservation of the building, sensed the need to document the project, probably as a community outreach exercise, to inform residents of Pittsfield about the extensive undertaking to protect an important piece of the city's built cultural heritage. His e-mail exchanges with Will Garrison, the Chair of the Pittsfield Historical Commission, and with the members of the commission were copied to me. As I had already been at the time working with Will as an intern at Herman Melville's Arrowhead, I considered the notion and volunteered.

The idea to document the project as a thesis came with the support of Marla Miller and Max Page, professors at the University of Massachusetts and program directors of the UMass-Hancock Shaker Village Historic Preservation Program. Max Page allowed me to audit his introduction to historic preservation course, which gave me an underpinning into the history and issues of preservation. Mark Hamin, Professor in the Landscape and Regional Planning Department agreed to serve as my thesis advisor and has been throughout an astute, supportive and tolerant counselor. Marla Miller and David Glassberg have been instrumental in guiding me through the public history program, as well as willing members of the thesis committee.

The opportunity to sit in every week since last September on the construction status meetings continues to afford me, a layperson, unusual access to a highly complex project, one that the contractor has labeled "an extreme project." All, around the table –

Bill Gillen, John Krifka, Mike Mucci, David Fang, Heidi Germanowski, Jude Clary, Ron Salice, Mike Slowinski, Pat Walsh, Phil Godin and Frank Clare – have extended the courtesies of time they don't have to allow me to observe and film and ask questions. Chuck Woodard and David Guarducci opened up their stained glass studio to provide a front-row view on their artistry.

Finally, the support of the local history library section at the Berkshire Athenaeum, under the leadership of Kathleen Reilly, has been indispensable to the research. In addition, Ryan Cowdrey and Norm Schaffer at Pittsfield Community Television have been generous with their time and expertise in introducing me to the world of video production and editing. With their help, this study will continue, as a video documentary to show the preservation of the Athenaeum to its completion.

**ABSTRACT**

**AGAINST THE ODDS:**
**ACCOUNTING FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THE BERKSHIRE ATHENAEUM**

MAY 2014

JOHN S. DICKSON, B.A., PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

DIRECTED BY: PROFESSOR MARK T. HAMIN

Comparative approaches in historic preservation usually involve two or more different buildings. The old Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts allows for a comparative approach with the same building, but in two different eras: one where the clamor to replace the library building came close to resulting in its destruction (1960s); the other, 35 years later, where the question of the building's survival was never in doubt, never even raised (2000s). From its earliest days, serious design and workmanship flaws have plagued the structural integrity of the monumental Victorian Gothic building that stands in the center of Pittsfield. Its grand space proved inadequate for the functioning of a public library. Yet it continues to survive, and in 2014, another major preservation project is underway to address the bulging of the masonry on the front façade. A narrative of the history of this building reveals broader trends in public attitudes towards the preservation of our cultural heritage, and insights into the contributing elements that provide justification for preservation as well as into the role of the public historian in connecting preservation with the community.

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## CHAPTER 1

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

On the evening of September 5, 2013, ten residents of Pittsfield, Massachusetts attended a public meeting in the Bowes Building to hear of the plans to preserve and stabilize the 137-year old building, owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and housing two state courts and a registry of deeds. Representatives of various organizations involved with the project outnumbered the members of the public in attendance. Before the hour was over, the representatives had outlined their interest in and support for the planned project, and the architects and contractors had explained the structural problems and the proposed processes to stabilize and mitigate the life safety issues of stonework pulling away from the façade.



Figure 1.1. The Berkshire Athenaeum was renamed the James A. Bowes Building in 1980. Photo, author, 2013.

The official title of the project was Life Safety, Exterior and Accessibility Improvement, undertaken by the agency responsible for all state-owned buildings, the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM.) The $4.3 million, 18-month project began as a minor project to stabilize the visible cracks and bulging of the stone work on the front façade. Initial engineering tests revealed more extensive damage, which required that much of the stone on the front façade be removed and re-attached using anchors to a new reinforced supporting wall. The rising cost of the project

passed the threshold to trigger the American with Disabilities Act requirements to improve accessibility features for this public building. Additional renovations related to electrical upgrades, convenience and computer services were included to take advantage of the construction presence.

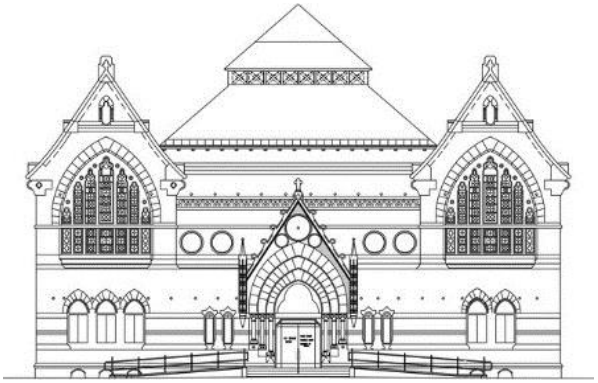


Figure 1.2. Architectural drawing of Athenaeum, 2013. Courtesy, Ford-Gillen architects

Several other aspects of this project prompted federal and state regulations requiring that the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) launch a review of the plan to assess if "the nature and scope of a project is likely to impact a geographical area and cause a change in the historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural qualities of a property."[1] The MHC entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with DCAMM that included requirements to make one alteration of the railing on the accessibility ramps, to follow certain historical documenting procedures of the work involved, and to post a photo display in the lobby of the Bowes Building during construction.[2] Separate from the agreement was a recommendation that the architectural firm hire a historic preservation consultant to provide guidance on subsequent issues related to preserving the historical integrity of the building.

[1] Section 71.07, Massachusetts General Law 950 CMR 71.00: "Protection of Properties included in the State Register of Historic Places."
[2] "Memorandum of Agreement Between The Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance and the Massachusetts Historical Commission regarding the Berkshire Probate and Family Court," signed March 1, 2013.

Getting to this point involved a complex thicket of laws, regulations, agencies and actors with no small amount of negotiation between them. Even though the path of this particular project to September 2013 was cumbersome and delayed, it represented developments in historic preservation that many in the field over its own history would not recognize. What was remarkably absent in 2013 was any question regarding the disposition of the building: it would be preserved. That was not always the case.

Just 35 years prior, the same building had reached a crossroads, after almost a century of accommodations with inadequate space and structural safety concerns. Then, the Bowes Building was known as the Berkshire Athenaeum, one of the busiest public libraries in the state. Originally built in 1876, the building was deemed unsafe and unable to meet the demand of a growing population by the 1950s. At the height of the baby boom, the city and the library had wrestled for years with a decision whether to repair yet again the current structure, move to a new facility at a different location or demolish and build new on the same site. In 1966, the Urban Land Institute submitted a report to the city recommending that the "the old library building could be demolished and ….redeveloped into a substantially higher taxpayer to the community."[3] This report joined several other commissioned studies arguing for a major urban renewal program in Pittsfield that eventually saw the demolition of several city blocks starting on the western side of Park Square, the same central plaza where the Athenaeum was situated. A city-wide referendum took place in 1969 to decide whether to accept federal funding for a new building, but it failed due to the required contributions needed from the city tax base. Finally, in 1973, Robert Newman, the chief librarian, wrote in his annual report that "for

[3] "A Report on the Redevelopment of the Central Business District, Pittsfield, Massachusetts," Urban Land Institute, Washington DC, September 1966, p. 42.

the first time in over 30 years, you will not hear in these reports appeals for a more adequate or safer building…..Ground was broken on December 15, 1973" for a new library building.[4] Within 6 years, a new library was built to the west of the old site, the building ownership had been transferred from the city to the county, and repairs and interior renovations had been completed to convert the old library into a courthouse, housing two courts and the Registry of Deeds for Berkshire County.

Thirty years later, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts determined that the old Athenaeum needed another round of significant structural stabilization to deal with life safety concerns, despite the repairs undertaken when the state took over ownership of the building in 1976. Then, the possibility of demolition was one of the alternatives under discussion; in 2013, not at all. State ownership and continued use of the building as a courthouse and registry were instrumental in eliminating that alternative, but so were others, including the building's contribution to the city's central district, its self-image in revitalizing its downtown core.

Preservation history is replete with successes and failures; the old Berkshire Athenaeum qualifies as a success story. "To understand preservation successes and preservation failures," notes architectural historian Daniel Bluestone, "it is important to explore why in certain cases the narratives associated with place inspired preservation and why, in other cases, they failed to do so."[5] With thousands of structures and sites added to national and state registries of historic places each year, and even more reviews undertaken just by the state of Massachusetts, the case of this particular building offers its

[4] Annual Report, 1973, Berkshire Athenaeum.
[5] Daniel Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes and Memory, Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2011) p. 132.

own unique contributions to the field. First, the history of its preservation now safely resides in the success column; however, for the lack of available financing at a few critical moments, it could have easily fallen into the failure column. Second, its history parallels the evolution and momentum in the field of preservation, and thirdly, it raises many of the themes dominating the field, including the role of aesthetics and architectural uniqueness, of inspiration and association with important events, of identity, memory and place, of contested political space and economic growth and decline, of downtown revitalization and re-use of buildings and of technological advances. Finally, the nature of public and civic ownership of this particular building through its history removes the contentious issues related to community and private interests in controlling development in localities, but with a trade-off: a diminishing role for community participation.

Moreover, the Berkshire Athenaeum conveys the story of a town and its people from the late 1800s, with their aspirations of grand designs for their future, but proudly proclaiming how far they had come. It follows that town through growth and then into its decline from industrial flight, but the building still stands and contributes to efforts of revitalization. In this way, it reflects the argument of Charles T. Goodsell in *The Social Meaning of Civic Space:* "one kind of social meaning of architectural space is what it 'says' about those who inspired, built, arranged and use it."[6]

## Framing the research – Key questions

The old Berkshire Athenaeum has survived, barely, but its continued survival seems assured. How was this building able to make such a transition? What are the

[6] Charles T. Goodsell, *The Social Meaning of Civic Space* (University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1988) p. 7.

issues responsible for the repeated structural problems plaguing the building since its earliest days? While each preservation case has its own set of unique circumstances, are there elements in the transition that convey any insights for this community and others facing similar decisions regarding the disposition of their historic structures? This leads logically to the role of the community in historic preservation decisions. Conspicuous by its absence in the initial September 2013 meeting recounted at the start of this paper is public involvement. What accounts for the recent lack of community participation and what are the long-term implications for the growing professionalization of the field?

## Goals and Objectives

In order to arrive at answers which can provide actionable insights to the above questions, it will be necessary to interpret the course of this specific building's history as it reflects the evolution of the city and of historic preservation and urban planning practices. Drawing from that narrative, it will be possible to identify distinct features, developments and trends from which to extrapolate broader insights into the preservation of a community's historic structures. The specific objectives will endeavor to:

- Review the literature on the history of the field of historic preservation, a related set of thematic clusters and its evolution to well-regulated legal practices and procedure, even with the ambiguities and flexibility embedded in that process;
- Narrate the history of the building, its origins as a civic monument in the center of a growing, prosperous and young city; the efforts to mitigate the structural and

space inadequacies for its use as a library; and its eventual transfer to the state and its adaptation as a courthouse;

- Provide special focus on two periods in the evolution of Pittsfield's downtown; first the period of urban renewal in the 1960s, which contrasts the fate of the Athenaeum with the significant demolition just one block away from the library, and second, the extensive effort since 1980 to revitalize the downtown core;
- Examine the current preservation project, its origins and procedural issues, the involvement of historic preservation entities and of the community, and the plans to stabilize the building and preserve its historic integrity; and,
- Identify a set of preliminary recommendations and questions emerging from the history of the Athenaeum and its significance for the current preservation project that carry implications for the role of historians in preservation and for communities facing preservation decisions.

## Outcomes and Benefits

The original suggestion for this study came from the Ford-Gillen architect firm involved with the current preservation. They foresaw a need to document the project that would support their efforts to raise public awareness, by communicating the extent and complexity of the construction and by leaving a historic record for future generations, in layman, non-technical terms. This would complement requirements stipulated by the Massachusetts Historical Commission to post a public mural of photographs in the lobby of the building, as well as the filing of extensive documentary photographs and materials of the building during construction. In addition, this study will inform an ongoing video documentary project of the historic preservation of the old Athenaeum building. The

technical nature of this preservation effort and the documents, drawings and meeting minutes will provide a record for future endeavors by the professionals – architects, contractors, and state facilities managers. The elements of this study, though, emerge from a public history focus, with an appreciation for the building as a text, in its ability to tell a broader story of the history of its surroundings, as well identifying insights in understanding the evolving context and issues of preservation.

## Focus on the narrative

In order to make the case that the history of the old Berkshire Athenaeum carries insights relevant for communities in their historic preservation decisions, this study will narrate the history of the 137-year old building. Several patterns and themes emerge from the narrative, which parallel the evolution of historic preservation practices. The narrative of success may fall short of the kind of "inspiration" that Bluestone seeks in the case-study model, but may more appropriately be instructive for that reason.

The narrative itself will consist of several sections starting with the origins of the building, followed by the almost immediate awareness among its leadership and users of significant structural and space inadequacies, followed by recurring efforts to attend to those issues. The post-World War II period of economic prosperity and population growth in the city further exacerbated space requirements for the library and ushered in a prolonged period of increasing clamor to build a new library. The following section focuses on the period of urban renewal in Pittsfield in the 1960s, where entire city blocks were destroyed but left the Athenaeum intact, leading to a decision to build a new library and transfer the existing structure to the state and adapt it for use as a courthouse and

registry of deeds. The next section turns away from the building itself and provides a backdrop of the efforts to revitalize Pittsfield's downtown area and the reliance on the historic fabric in that effort. The final section in the narrative will examine the current preservation project, the process by which the project was developed and the plans undertaken to resolve the structural concerns with the building.

A concluding chapter will tie the narrative to concepts in the relevant literature in the field of preservation and planning, and isolate various elements that have contributed to the ability of the old Athenaeum to continue to survive. The original decision to place the building on the city's main square, the adoption of a design unique to the surrounding areas, its civic education function and popular use by the community, public regret over highly publicized demolitions taken during the 1960s urban renewal, and its transference to county and then state ownership, re-adaptive use and continued occupation, combined with a set of well-defined historic preservation procedures, ensured this building's continued existence. These various factors outweighed a series of other mitigating circumstances that could have otherwise argued for the demise of the building, including structural flaws and space inadequacies, the wave of demolitions within a block of the Athenaeum, and limited direct economic benefits to a city grappling with loss of business in the downtown area.

Finally, since case studies in historic preservation lend themselves so readily to visual interpretations, photographs and images are included generously throughout the paper to provide further illustration.

## Research Methodology

Research undertaken for this study has devolved to four overlapping, complementary arenas. First was an archival search of the Athenaeum records, which are stored in the local history section of the current Berkshire Athenaeum. These include library annual reports, architectural drawings and structural engineering reports, communications between city and library officials and civil engineers and newspaper articles. Biographical information on the original donor and the architect is also available at the local history section of the Athenaeum. Next, the literature review traces the evolution of historic preservation in the United States, from its original purposes to instill civic patriotism through eras focusing on aesthetic and architectural concerns and then to an emphasis on economic justifications, social and cultural change, and finally community building. This will include a summary of the highlights of federal, state and local laws and regulations designed to codify procedures for historic preservation decisions and community participation.

A third area of research incorporates personal interviews with state, city and library officials, architects and contractors, as well as librarians and their clients who discuss their personal experiences and memories of the old Athenaeum, its place on the central square in the city, and decisions taken related to the disposition of the building and the current preservation project. Finally, tracking the current preservation has involved attending weekly meetings taking place with the architects and the contractors, state DCAMM officials, and current occupants of the building.

## Definitions and Ambiguities in Historic Preservation

Weekly meetings of those most intimately involved with the preservation construction – the architects, contractors and facilities managers -- reveal their fluency in a highly specialized and technical, almost foreign, language. Some of these terms go beyond the scope of this paper, such as product descriptions and specifications. However, others (for example, tracery, capstones, cames, joists, bed mortar, piers and anchors) are unavoidable, but will be defined in context and as they arise. More broadly, the field of historic preservation has adopted a set of terms with specific connotations, approaching regulated definitions, particularly with the involvement of governments and their role in adjudicating financial incentives. Even the term "preservation" refers to the field connecting history to architecture, landscape architecture and planning, dedicated to protecting buildings, sites, districts and landmarks. However, it also connotes a specific approach to that protection. Preservation is the least invasive of treatments employed, which the National Park Service describes as "the retention of all historic fabric through conservation, maintenance and repair."[7] A second least intrusive treatment, rehabilitation, involves retaining and repairing the historic materials with some replacement due to deterioration and damage. Restoration refers to methods allowing for the retention of original materials, and removal of those from subsequent eras. Reconstruction allows for re-creating a site using all new materials.[8] Specifically related to masonry preservation is stabilization that refers to "structural reinforcement,

[7] National Park Service, "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties,"http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/overview/choose_treat.htm, accessed 3/6/2014.
[8] Ibid.

weatherization, or correcting unsafe conditions."[9] The hierarchy of these terms and methods extends back to the early nineteenth century, captured best in a dictum attributed to a French art historian: "It is better to preserve than to repair, better to repair than to restore, better to restore than to reconstruct."[10] This paper refers to the various projects aimed at repairing and stabilizing the Athenaeum as preservation, generalizing to the broader definition of the field, rather than the specific treatments. In the technical terminology of treatment approaches, these projects cut across the preservation and rehabilitation means.

The effort to "codify" the definitions for preservation comes from its multiple uses and, as a result, its ambiguity. It has, on the one hand, attempted to replace what Carol Rose, a professor of law at Yale University, called "the little-old-lady aura" in preservation with a professional, technical status.[11] On the other hand, attempting such precision has become a legal, procedural requirement as ambiguity creates opportunities for contested space, politically and commercially. Developers adopt preservation terms to mask the fact that they are actually razing and re-developing historic districts. Such was the case with the creation in the 1930s of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, characterized as "a thin veneer of history applied to an urban renewal project."[12] The addition of tax incentives, grants and other financial

[9] National Park Service, "Standards for Preservation and Guidelines for Preserving Historic Buildings," "http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/preserve/preserve_approach.htm, accessed 3/8/2014.
[10] A.N. Didion, as quoted in Diane Maddex, National Trust for Historic Preservation, ed., *All About Old Buildings, The Whole Preservation Catalog* (The Preservation Press, Washington DC, 1985) p. 273.
[11] Carol Rose, "Preservation and Community: New Directions in the Law of Historic Preservation," *Stanford Law Review*, Volume 33, 1980-1981, p. 477.
[12] Bluestone, op.cit., p. 140.

benefits for preservation projects has evolved into a billion-dollar industry requiring greater definitional precision over what constitutes preservation.

In fact, the field is replete with terms that are imprecise or ambiguous and thereby assume contested natures principally because of their inherent subjective qualities, despite efforts to codify definitions at the governmental level. "Historical significance" allows for a property's inclusion on national and state historic registers; the federal government and state counterparts have established criteria to qualify for a determination of significance, including architectural aesthetics or association with historic individuals or events. Yet, even those criteria open themselves up for debate as the considerations of what constitutes a historic event at a "significant" level varies among individual property owners and community groups or among ethnic and racial groups. Another term, "integrity," refers to the authenticity of a structure or landscape through its incorporation of original material and design. Again, the National Park Service seeks precision in identifying seven qualities of integrity in historic landscapes including "location, setting, feeling, association, design, workmanship, and materials."[13]

Finally, even the name of the building requires explanation. Since the public library, still known as the Berkshire Athenaeum moved in 1976 and the old structure was renamed the Bowes Building in 1980, this paper uses three different names for the same building. Prior to 1976, it is referred to as the Berkshire Athenaeum; afterwards both the Bowes Building and the old Berkshire Athenaeum refer to the structure currently being preserved.

[13] National Park Service, "Guidelines for the Treatments of Cultural Landscapes, http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/terminology.htm accessed 3/8/2014.

## CHAPTER 2

## WHY AND HOW TO PRESERVE? - A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historic preservation literature relies heavily, but not exclusively, on the case study. Examinations of distinct buildings, landmarks and districts tell a broader thematic story about the nature and history of preservation and about the roles of government and civic groups in that history. They underscore recurring issues that arise from evolving views of significance in preservation to the politics of race and class and sustainability. Daniel Bluestone defends the case study model "that addresses actual places, using them to frame a broader set of ideas and values."[14] While some cases do convey technical information about the methods and materials of preservation, much of the extensive body of practical information is conveyed in specific architectural texts and manuals, which largely lie outside the realm of this study.

Taken together with the adoption of procedures to arbitrate the decisions made to preserve historic structures, the cases provide a backdrop to the evolution of the old Berkshire Athenaeum. This building's preservation takes place amidst the changing attitudes towards and techniques of preservation, especially when the Athenaeum's very existence was most threatened in the two decades following the end of World War II. Thus, a review of the history of the field, both in its traditional chronological sense and along more thematic lines, will help situate the preservation of the Athenaeum. In addition, case studies reveal, as Bluestone indicates, a series of thematic clusters which

[14] Daniel Bluestone, op.cit., p. 15.

appear on the canvas of the Athenaeum– the economics of preservation, social and cultural notions of memory and place and the political uses that preservation serves.

## History of Historic Preservation - The Influence of Charles Hosmer

The earliest historic preservation efforts in the United States were taking place within the same mid-nineteenth century period as the establishment of a public library in Pittsfield and later the construction of the Athenaeum in 1876. Initial efforts to protect structures, as sectional divisions wracked the country and in the face of social changes wrought by industry and immigration, also helped motivate the decision to build a library as an enduring aesthetic monument that would help educate Pittsfield's own immigrant workforce. Charles Hosmer is credited with the first history of preservation in his landmark *The Presence of the Past*, where he cites the Hasbrouk House in New York as "the first success of the American preservation movement, though there was no real organized effort involved" because the State of New York purchased it in 1850.[15] Even in his retelling the story of this initial case, several themes emerge that still resonate in the field. Here, where George Washington made his headquarters at the end of the Revolutionary War, the first success was achieved through public moneys, in a field where the lines of responsibility between public and private entities have been a constant only in their fluidity. Public funding for preservation was not the norm in the earliest days of the field that saw private civic groups coalescing to preserve structures, most often for their "associative value," as they represented a link to historic figures and

[15] Charles Hosmer, *The Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1965) p. 35.

thereby helped build a patriotic identity.[16] Hosmer continues narrating the subsequent landmark preservation achievements, with private groups convening around an effort to preserve buildings for their associative value. He uses a regional focus as an organizing principle, moving from Virginia's Mt. Vernon, Jamestown and the Robert E. Lee Arlington mansion to New England and the case of the Old South Meeting House in Boston where the high rhetoric used to save the historic building influenced other efforts in the region to preserve structures associated with New England's independence movement and further back to its colonial era.

Hosmer points to his case study of Jefferson's Monticello that opened up a second phase of the history of preservation movement, one that shifted from historical figures and events to "a sensitivity to the architectural importance of old buildings."[17] Led first by antiquarians "interested in all kinds of ancient buildings not merely the select few that had superlative historic importance," this emphasis on aesthetics found its case studies in the architecture of buildings, with early notable buildings including the Charles Bullfinch Old State House in Boston and the Octagon House in Washington DC, purchased for preservation by the American Institute of Architects. Hosmer bemoaned the weak and disappointing early involvement of architects, but found their contribution significant for lending technical expertise to the field. The more amateur interest of antiquarians still exerted considerable influence, especially as Hosmer recounts the involvement of William Sumner Appleton and the creation and transformational impact of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, a private organization he

[16] Walter Muir Whitehead, Foreword, *The Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1965) p. 8.
[17] Hosmer, op.cit., p. 192.

started "on the theory that eternal vigilance is the price of the preservation of our remaining colonial houses."[18] The Society documented historic buildings and created a survey of buildings worthy of preservation. Appleton's enduring contributions, according to Michael Holleran, also included new techniques for funding preservation (the revolving fund), finding new uses for protected buildings as an early model for "adaptive use as a preservation tool," a focus on "modest buildings," in lieu of structures associated with historic figures, and a bias against heavy restoration.[19]

Hosmer traced as well the development of criteria that would guide the movement in determining which buildings merited preservation. His criteria paralleled the two poles of preservation -- historic or artistic merit -- with both emphasizing a "preponderance of original materials." Patriotic, local and ethnic pride weighed heavily on his selection of criteria, but also the potential for commercial, largely touristic, advantage and hard-to-define concepts of an appeal to "the nobility of character."[20]

Devoting so much space to Hosmer reflects his influence. Noting the difficulty of extending the historical scholarship in the field, Max Page and Randall Mason claim that "more than any other historical undertaking, preservation scholarship has been dominated by a single work," Hosmer's three-volume historic series.[21] Page and Mason objected to Hosmer's "linear narrative" as well as to a conventional wisdom that preservation has fallen to the exclusive domain of "wealthy individuals." Still, the linear narrative remains foundational in that the broad outlines of its movement from associational to

[18] William Sumner Appleton, quoted in Hosmer, op.cit. p. 243.
[19] Michael Holleran, "Roots in Boston, Branches in Planning and Parks," in Max Page and Mason, Randall, eds., *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (Routledge, New York, 2004, Kindle edition) location 1993.
[20] Hosmer, op.cit., pp. 261, 265.
[21] Max Page and Mason, R., *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (Routledge, New York, 2004, Kindle edition) location 154.

aesthetic concerns define the early period, are repeated, if not directly quoted, by many in the field.[22]

David Lowenthal, though, traces a different linear narrative, more tied to broad themes than specific case studies in his rough chronology, beginning in the late 18th century through to the end of the 19th century and includes approaches outside the United States. First came an awareness of history, "each epoch unrepeatable, tangible monuments and physical relics became crucial to historic understanding," with a premium placed on authenticity that lent impetus to their conservation. A second impulse was to promote national identity, "relics lent continuity to tradition and served as visible guarantors of national identity." A third motive came from "a sense of loss resulting from unexampled change," change related to the impact of industrialization. Moving from national identity to individual identity constituted a fourth motivation, as "attachment to the locales of one's own past aroused the impulse not only to see them again, but to have them kept in their remembered state – and to grieve when they were not. A final motive came with the "rediscovery of ancient sites and monuments (that) excited sentiment for preserving them."[23]

In *Domesticating History*, Patricia West also uses a linear narrative, but only in her detailed accounts of four case studies with a focus on the role of women in historic preservation. Her studies narrate the efforts to secure and preserve four house museums: Mt. Vernon, Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, Monticello and Booker T.

[22] See, Michael Holleran, op.cit;, Diane Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos A Tribute to Enduring Ideals," in Robert Stipe, ed., *A Richer Heritage, Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill NC, 2003, Kindle Edition); Carol Rose, "Preservation and Community: New Directions in the Law of Historic Preservation," *Stanford Law Review*, Volume 33, 1980-1981.
[23] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985) pp. 391-5.

Washington's birthplace. With a focus on disenfranchised women, West uses these museum stories as "documents of political history, particularly of women's relationship to the public sphere."[24] Despite this initial impetus from women, who were at their core "politically engaged" in order to meet their goals, West notes that preservation "was reoriented to reflect the interests of male politicians, museum professionals, and businessmen, giving the house museum its modern cast."[25] In this way the field came to be dominated by men such as Sumner, Horace Albright and Hosmer.

**The Roles and Tensions of Government in Historic Preservation**

Charles Hosmer's influence extended to another transformational moment in historic preservation, propelled by urban renewal programs. The publication of his history, *Presence of the Past*, in 1965, came at the tail end of a decade of progress and growth at the expense of the nation's past. Diane Lea is but one of many scholars who cite the loss of "historic neighborhoods by cutting them up for major street and highway projects…. And programs that encouraged the redevelopment of whole sections of cities."[26] The controversy over these urban renewal programs had been the focus of Jane Jacobs' sharp critique in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961. In it, she traces the origins of urban renewal back to the 1893 Columbia Exposition in Chicago and Le Corbusier's utopia of a "Radiant City" that contributed to the ideal of a monumental city that "is irrelevant to the workings of cities."[27] Jon Teaford narrates the history of urban redevelopment and renewal, starting in the 1930s as a local effort to stem

[24] Patricia West, *Domesticating History, The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Smithsonian Museum Press, Washington DC, 1999) Kindle location, 3557.
[25] Ibid, Kindle location, 3565.
[26] Lea, op.cit. location 264.
[27] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Vintage Books, 1991) p. 23-25.

"decentralization and blight" that was exacerbated by the automobile that allowed for people and businesses to leave city with declining property values and blight in their wake.[28] The federal government's involvement by providing grants to cities, came about later, as laid out by Ashley Ford and Hilbert Fefferman, first, with the passage of the 1949 Federal Housing Act in 1949 and then, with its 1954 amendment. This latter act replaced the term "urban development" with "urban renewal" and allowed for rehabilitation of neighborhoods, not just wholesale clearance of blight.[29] The sociologist Herbert Gans added the racial dimensions of urban renewal outcomes as programs disproportionally displaced African Americans.[30]

In the midst of this controversy over urban renewal, Charles Hosmer was tapped to write the introduction to a landmark document propelling government action in historic preservation, *With Heritage So Rich*, a collection of essays in report form which was published in January 1966 as a collaboration between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the United States Conference of Mayors. The contributions from historians and scholars pressed their case for new federal preservation legislation through a sweeping review of U.S. history by geographic regions, followed by accounts of the history of preservation in the country, case studies of buildings saved and lost, the creation of historic districts, the inadequacies of models for preservation at that time and comparative frameworks and experiences of European countries. All led to a series of

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[28] Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance, Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1990) p. 42.
[29] Ashley A. Foard and Hilbert Fefferman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," in James Q. Wilson, ed. *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy* (The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966) p. 96.
[30] Herbert J. Gans, "The Failure of Urban Renewal," in James Q. Wilson, ed. *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy* (The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966) p. 539.

findings and recommendations for new legislation to strengthen the role of the federal government to promote historic preservation actively through grants and tax incentives and to coordinate state and local governmental efforts with those of both private and non-profit entities. *With Heritage So Rich* stimulated the National Historic Preservation Act adopted in October 1966 which re-shaped governmental roles, programs and procedures for historic preservation. With language remarkably similar to the report, the new legislation was "a product of prosperity, based on a concern for the destructive growth ethic in a society that was losing touch with its past."[31] It was not the first piece of national legislation, as the 1906 Antiquities Act and the 1935 Historic Sites Act preceded it. However, the 1966 law is widely held as a transformational law, launching preservation into an era of growth built on a set of established governmental procedures and incentives, even while acknowledging in its preamble the preeminent role played "private agencies and individuals."

An introductory text outlining the partnership between the various levels of government and the private sector as well as major preservation issues can be found in *A Richer Heritage, Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century,* edited by Robert Stipe. In it, John Fowler traces the involvement of the federal government from that legislation despite a "well-established but narrow effort up to that time."[32] He cites four central elements of federal involvement: "maintaining the national inventory of historic

[31] Charles Hosmer, Introduction, *With Heritage So Rich* (National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington D.C., 1983) p.12.
[32] John M. Fowler, "The Federal Preservation Program," in Robert Stipe, ed., *A Richer Heritage, Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill NC, 2003, Kindle edition) location 548.

properties, protecting them through a planning process, providing financial assistance for the public and private sectors, and constructively managing federally owned resources."[33]

The state level of involvement was also transformed by the 1966 law, according to Elizabeth Lyon and David Brook, who emphasize the role established for State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) in surveys, registry determination, technical expertise and review and compliance as "the central point and the critical mechanism for the administration of the national-state-local historic preservation partnership."[34] The review and compliance measures that were enacted in Section 106 of the 1966 law allow for states to review federally funded projects and enter into memoranda of agreement in order to mitigate adverse effects. Massachusetts extends those review procedures to its own state properties and state registry, directing the Massachusetts Historical Commission to determine if "any project either undertaken by the state body … will have any adverse effect, direct or indirect, on any property listed in the State Register of Historic Places."[35] Each year in Massachusetts, the Commission undertakes a review of approximately 2000 properties under the federal section 106 and another 10,000 projects under the state review mechanism.[36] In addition, the state has since 1994, operated a Historic Curatorship Program to protect properties through continued use, underscoring

[33] Ibid., location 623.
[34] Lyon, Elizabeth A. and David L.S. Brook, "The States, The Backbone of Preservation," in Stipe, op.cit., location 1118.
[35] Massachusetts General Law Chapter 9, section 26; Massachusetts 950 CMR 71.00: Protection Of Properties Included In The State Register Of Historic Places, http://www.lawlib.state.ma.us/source/mass/cmr/cmrtext/950CMR71.pdf, accessed 3/6/2014.
[36] Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Plan, 2011-2015 (Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston 2011), p. 19.

in tangible ways the preference for ongoing maintenance and management of properties that occurs with use in lieu of leaving buildings vacant.[37]

Recognizing the "grassroots" tradition of the preservation movement, amendments in 1980 to the National Historic Preservation Act devolved powers to localities, including "National Register nominations, environmental reviews, and finding decisions."[38] Cofresi and Radtke laid out the tools available to local governments from creation of historic districts and design ordinances to the incorporation of preservation in municipal planning.

The increasing involvement of government has led to technical specialization. Hosmer noted the participation of architects in the nineteenth century, but, as previously mentioned, labeled their contributions weak and disappointing. Lowenthal tied the new specialization to the need to stem loss: "The more the past is destroyed or left behind, the stronger the urge to preserve and destroy. Threatened by technology, pollution, and popularity, surviving vestiges command attention as never before, and painstaking expertise is devoted to their care."[39] The result has been the establishment within the National Park Services of the Technical Preservation Services that has produced over 150 publications, a set of standards and guidelines for preservation and 47 "Preservation Briefs" that "recommend methods and approaches for rehabilitating historic buildings that are consistent with their historic character."[40] In contrast, at the state level in

[37] Department of Conservation and Recreation, "Historic Curatorship Program," http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/curator/general-info.pdf, accessed 3/16/2014.
[38] Lina Cofresi and Rosetta Radtke, "Local Government Programs, Preservation Where it Counts," in Stipe, op. cit., location 1618.
[39] Lowenthal, op. cit., p. 399.
[40] National Park Service, "Preservation Briefs," http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm, accessed 2/27/2014.

Massachusetts, technical expertise is confined to historic planning, preparing survey reports, and supporting local commissions.

The set of criteria, standards and guidelines for preservation established with the regulations implementing the National Historic Preservation Act reflects the history of preservation and its contested political deliberations. Thus, criteria include structures or landmarks of associational significance, either for individuals or periods of history. A third category reflects the aesthetic or architectural characteristics of the structure, and a fourth incorporates structures or sites that convey archaeological information, extending preservation beyond physical buildings and structures. Such standards were established as Carol Rose points out to "avoid the appearance of unpredictability and caprice."[41] Municipal codes, according to Rose, seek to reduce the debates over community control between developers, homeowners and preservationists. Other government entities established their own sets of criteria; Atlanta, for example, expanded significance to include any structure that "because of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable feature if its neighborhood."[42] Despite these efforts to codify preservation and reduce its contested ground, issues over what constitutes "significance" or "integrity" are unavoidably subjective. The case of the demolition of the Maxwell Street Market in Chicago is highlighted by Mark Brookstein as an example of contested interpretations of significance by local and state authorities and the lack of an appeal process.[43] Other debates swirl around the concept of authenticity that have centered on

[41] Carol Rose, "Preservation and Community: New Directions in the Law of Historic Preservation," *Stanford Law Review*, Volume 33, 1980-1981, p. 503.
[42] Cited in Rose, op. cit., N. 31.
[43] Mark Brookstein, "When History is History: Maxwell Street, 'Integrity,' and the Failure of Historic Preservation Law," Chicago-Kent Law Review Vol. 76, 2001.

such recreated sites as Williamsburg, Mystic Seaport and Plimoth Plantation, which Richard Todd describes as attempting "to re-create the past in real life proportions," but in the latter case is "made up out of whole cloth."[44] The guidelines established by the National Park Service address the issue of authenticity and cover nearly all aspects of preservation, stating unequivocally a preference for preservation that "places a premium on the retention of historic fabric."[45]

These standards were established in order to inform decisions related to tax incentives administered also by the Technical Preservation Services of the National Park Service. Tax credits at both the federal and state levels have been responsible for transforming preservation into a viable commercial enterprise. Lowenthal noted the dramatic change, in the first 20 years of the tax incentives included in the 1966 law: "In the United States, preservation in 1960 was still the hobby of a small well-to-do elite; by 1980 more than half of American construction work involved rehabilitation, and in fiscal year 1983 more than two billion dollars' worth of such projects received preservation tax credits."[46] Even with the recurring threats to weaken and dismantle tax incentives and funding, they still, in the year 2012, were able to claim support for 744 completed projects and $3.15 billion in rehabilitation work.[47]

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[44] Richard Todd, *The Thing Itself, On the Search for Authenticity* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2008, Kindle edition) location 958.
[45] National Park Service, "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties," http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/overview/choose_treat.htm, accessed 3/6/2014.
[46] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985) p. 387.
[47] "Federal Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, Annual Report, for Fiscal Year 2012", National Park Service, http://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/taxdocs/tax-incentives-2012Annual.pdf, accessed 2/27/2014.

## The Economics of Preservation

Donovan Rypkema underscores the benefits of the cost-benefit equation of an economic justification for historic preservation: in seeking to attract businesses or heritage tourists, "it is the differentiated product that commands a monetary premium. If in the long run we want to attract investment to our communities, we must differentiate them from anywhere else. It is our built environment that expresses, perhaps better than anything else, our diversity, our identity, our individuality, our differentiation."[48] Rypkema, who authored a guide for community leaders with a list of 100 arguments to justify preservation from an economic perspective, cites the labor intensity of preservation in contrast to the material intensity of new construction. He also quantifies the impact of heritage tourists, who "stay longer, visit more places, and spend more per day than other tourists."[49] In his analysis of the economics of preservation, Nathaniel Lichfield examines a building's economic obsolescence as the point when the benefits of conserving a structure for as full a use as possible of the initial investment are overtaken by the economic costs of high operational maintenance or of the building's inability to meet the functions of its original design. Lichfield cites a Canadian government attempt to quantify a grading system for determining the value of buildings, which incorporates a scale of points for characteristics in categories of architecture, history, environment, usability and integrity, tied to the extent of the treatment required.[50] He acknowledges that preservation cannot be seen in an exclusive economic framework as memory blurs

[48] Donovan Rypkema, "The Economics of Historic Preservation," speech to the Preservation Resource Center, New Orleans, LA, October 27, 2009, http://blog.prcno.org/economics/, accessed 1/22/2014.
[49] Rypkema, op.cit., p.6.
[50] Nathaniel Lichfield, Economics in Urban Conservation (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1988) p. 179.

the line between cost and benefit for historic structures: "People will express a demand for the new stock… but concurrently would have an attachment to the past through nostalgia, familiar way of life, etc."[51]

The difficulty of putting an economic value on cultural heritage approaches resistance to the idea among preservation advocates. David Throsby claims that notions of "historical value, the meaning of objects and sites to people… can't be captured by processes of monetary exchange."[52] He argues for their consideration as cultural capital, as "things we have inherited from the past and are going to transmit to the future," and require investment to maintain and preserve.[53] Daniel Bluestone worries that the economics of preservation seeks precision in terms of employment and financing, a precision that is lacking in trying to muster social or cultural justifications for preservation. Moreover, he claims that "traditionally the market has been a destroyer of value of historic sites more than a savior of them."[54] Randall Mason does see some value in an economic approach to preservation "by clarifying some basic insights about individual behavior, economic institutions, politics, and the essential economic functions of society," particularly in its concepts of scarcity and competition for resources, in understanding markets and in defining certain arenas of economic activity outside the market as a public good.[55] He goes on to define the preservationists' view of public good

[51] Ibid., p. 34.
[52] "The Economics of Heritage Conservation: A Discussion," *Economics and Heritage Conservation* (The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) p. 19.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p. 20.
[55] Randall Mason, "Economics and Heritage Conservation: Concepts, Values, and Agendas for Research," *Economics and Heritage Conservation* (The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) p. 9.

as something that can "be generated contingently, by social, historical and cultural processes."[56]

Economics is one component of a more recent approach to preservation that closely aligns preservation to conservation: sustainability. The initial emphasis of green building seemed to favor new construction, as Robert Young writes in his comprehensive review, *Stewardship of the Built Environment, Sustainability, Preservation and Reuse*.[57] Young lays out the sustainability arguments in favor of preservation, including less landfill from demolishing old buildings and less development on the periphery of cities dependent on the automobile. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has taken a leading role in promoting sustainability in preservation, with their four core tenets of stewardship: reuse, reinvest, retrofit and respect. Richard Moe, former President of NTHP, makes an economic efficiency case by "focusing public and private reinvestments in areas where infrastructure is already in place, already paid for."[58]

**Social Identity – Displacement, Attachment and Memory**

As a public good, preservation cannot escape the competition of the political arena, and advocates seek out economic arguments to justify historic preservation methods and tools for the benefit of communities. However, the plight of communities lacking political power and the social costs of preservation have come more sharply into focus. Sarah Conde offers up three case studies of neighborhoods in Washington DC where preservation attracted opposition due to displacement of residents, loss of community character, lack of funding to maintain new design review rules, all

[56] Ibid., p. 12.
[57] Robert A. Young, *Stewardship of the Built Environment, Sustainability, Preservation and Reuse* (Island Press, Washington DC, 2012, Kindle edition) location 335.
[58] Richard Moe, quoted in Young, op. cit., location 832.

compounded by a decision-making process controlled by narrow, elite groups. She advocates for flexibility in the implementing preservation rules and speaks to a current characteristic of preservation: the formalization of the process that "does risk alienating the residents who would otherwise participate."[59]

Luis Aponte-Parés links the issue of gentrification and displacement of ethnic minorities to memory and attachment to place. "The spaces created by the settlement of Puerto Ricans over the past century have been all but destroyed, with an attendant loss of memory."[60] He recounts the efforts by Puerto Ricans in New York City to recapture their attachment to their home through the construction of neighborhood "casitas," informal wood-frame shelters transplanted from the Caribbean island to Puerto Rican neighborhoods on the mainland. Attachment to place comes from intimate experience, according to Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place, The Perspective of Experience*. He postulates that "deeply loved places are not necessarily visible," as the experience of living overshadows the realization of place. It is through the "evocative power of art architecture, ceremonials and rites…..and the functional rhythms of personal and group life" that place becomes real and visible.[61] Lowenthal argues that attachment promotes identity through "familiarity and recognition, reaffirmation and validation; identity and group identity; guidance; enrichment and escape."[62]

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[59] Sarah Conde, "Striking a Match in the Historic District: Opposition to Historic Preservation and Responsive Community Building," Scholarship@Georgetown Law, Georgetown University Law Center, 2007, p. 37.
[60] Luis Aponte-Parés, "Appropriating Place in Puerto Rican Barrios, Preserving Contemporary Urban Landscapes," in Alanen and Melnick eds., *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2000) p. 94.
[61] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place, The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1977) p. 178.
[62] Lowenthal, op.cit., p. 38.

A decades-long battle to save the Mecca, first a hotel and then an apartment building in Chicago, presents another case of attachment and then displacement. Daniel Bluestone in *Buildings, Landscapes and Memory* notes that the Mecca's interior atria and its decorative metalwork on three levels of railings provided a social space for generations of tenants to build up experience, familiarity and identity. However, the post-World War II push to modernize and the lack of political power of the Mecca's then African-American tenants made the building vulnerable to the expansion of the neighboring Illinois Institute of Technology's plans for expansion. The Mecca took on a sense of a "building unworthy of a longer life, a building that had slipped so far from its intended social station that it failed to stir a sense of historic veneration. Yet, the tenants anticipated loss."[63]

It is this sense of loss that resonates powerfully in the literature of historic preservation, whether it is the specter of the demolition of the Hancock House in Boston, Penn Station in New York or the cases cited above by Conde, Aponte-Pares or Bluestone. David Glassberg notes the loss felt by residents of West Northfield, Massachusetts in his public meetings there, where "the loss of the railroad station, the bridge and many local farms….were cited as evidence of their 'second-class status' compared with neighbors on the other side of the river."[64] Loss can be transformed into a success, as Michael Holleran states in describing the razing of the Hancock House in Boston that "had all the ingredients of successful preservation, except the success."[65] That loss helped propel and

[63] Bluestone, op. cit., p. 206.
[64] David Glassberg, *Sense of History, The Place of the Past in American Life* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA, 2001) p. 142.
[65] Michael Holleran, "Roots in Boston, Branches in Planning and Parks" in Page and Mason, op.cit., location 1696.

motivate civic groups to preserve remaining historic structures. Its power can translate into political power as the loss of Penn Station is cited repeatedly as a motivating force behind the passage of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. Even the threat of loss can propel political mobilization as occurred when the proposed demolition of the Old Post Office in Washington DC motivated the establishment of the preservation group Don't Tear It Down.[66]

As buildings carry a physical reminder of place and experience, they also convey social meaning. As noted earlier, Charles Goodsell seeks to identify social meaning in his study of municipal buildings and courthouses; he argues that "architectural styles may be exogenous and elitist, but they are also integral to the generalized cultural milieu of an era."[67] He cites the late 19th century as an era for civic space that is "monumental in size and elaborate in style, expressing community pride and faith in future economic expansion."[68] Dvora Yanow extends this notion of social meaning to policy analysis, in that the structure and design of buildings also reflect policy priorities for organizations. Her review of community centers in Israel that "tell a policy story" cites characteristics that are pertinent to the construction of a large public library in a New England town in the late 19th century. The central siting and the size are signs of wealth, power and control, that "tell a story of otherness and difference" for many in the community.[69] "By visiting the Centers to participate in their activities, local residents would 'acquire' the values, beliefs, and feelings that the Center buildings embodied."[70] Histories of the early

[66] Rose, op..cit., p. 39.
[67] Ibid., p. 15.
[68] Ibid., p. 21.
[69] Dvora Yanow, "Built space as story: The policy stories that buildings tell," *Policy Studies Journal*, Fall 1995, p. 3.
[70] Ibid., p. 4.

libraries confirmed the meanings these buildings conveyed, in descriptions of large, church-like, reverential spaces in urban and industrial settings. The large spaces conveyed Yanow's sense of otherness as the early establishment of libraries were intended for the "humble as well as … the learned," intent on uplifting the working class through education, inculcation of civic values, and the prevention of alcoholism, delinquency and crime.[71]

**Preservation as a Tool for Community Building**

The introduction of cultural and social realms of preservation brings into sharp relief the distinction between the way professional preservationists and members of the general public approach historic preservation. Ned Kauffman defines the differences thus: the professionals "debate problems of authenticity, integrity, architectural quality, stylistic purity, and significance, (while) citizens seem to worry more about the loss of character, pleasure or usefulness in the places they inhabit and love, and of the ability to recall the past in them."[72] Both remain relevant to the experience of the Athenaeum, in its history and its current restoration. However, the way in which historic preservation has become a tool for community development and mobilization helps explain how this building made a transition from barely surviving the 1950s and 60s to the almost routine, certainly non-polemical decision to spend $4.3 million to repair and restore it now.

The concept of historic preservation as a tool emerges in the effort to revitalize downtown areas, in the wake of decades of residential and commercial exodus away from city centers, a consequence of the ease of automobile transport. Donovan Rypkema

[71] Sidney Ditzion, *The Arsenals of a Democatic Culture* (American Library Association, Chicago 1947) p. 23.
[72] Ned Kaufman, "Moving Forward, Futures for a Preservation Movement," in Page and Mason, op.cit., Location 6320.

states it most boldly: "I cannot identify a single example of a sustained success story in downtown revitalization where historic preservation wasn't a key component."[73] Carol Rose, in her review of preservation law, argues that this emphasis on local community-building constitutes a third period of preservation, and can be seen as early as the 1960s when the book sponsored by local governments, *With Heritage So Rich*, opened the way for national legislation. The subsequent passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, though, strengthened the codes and procedures surrounding preservation that Rose claims, are even more important than the actual protection of historic structures, sites or districts for "providing procedural vehicles for community organization and activity.[74]

The appearance of Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in the early 1960s may also have helped propel the National Historic Preservation Act. Her criticism of urban renewal and urban planning reflected the same concern over the unforeseen consequences in the resulting deterioration of the fabric of cities and communities. Her case for "diversity of uses" in cities continues to drive urban design and planning today.[75] She argues that one way to ensure diversity of uses is through the preservation of old buildings. Older buildings allow for multiple uses, including the neighborhood retail stores and the studios and galleries that "feed" but cannot afford the new construction preferred by chains and well-endowed theaters and museums.[76]

The most important part of nurturing these mixed uses in cities and communities is their attraction of the pool of human talent needed for economic growth. Richard

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[73] Donovan Rypkema, "The Economics of Historic Preservation," speech to the Preservation Resource Center, New Orleans, LA, October 27, 2009, http://blog.prcno.org/economics/, accessed 1/22/2014, p. 3.
[74] Rose, op. cit., p. 479.
[75] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Vintage Books, 1991) p. 14.
[76] Jacobs, op. cit., p. 188.

Florida, an urban planner at the University of Toronto, emphasizes the role of one particular group, the "creative class," in helping to spawn innovation and thus economic growth in urban centers. Attracting artists, writers, musicians and other creative professionals can help raise local property values and stimulate the local economy. A principal factor in attracting the creative class, according to Florida, is the aesthetics of place, and historic buildings add to the sense of beauty in a community. "Many older communities," writes Florida, "have a wonderful mix of natural features and industrial age buildings. They are filled with old warehouses, historic homes, and terrific neighborhoods."[77] Elsewhere, he underscores the terms associated with preservation in identifying "places (are) valued for their authenticity and uniqueness" and adding that historic buildings help foster a sense of authenticity.[78] Preservation as a tool for economic development and revitalization is also underscored by Annaliese Bischoff who does not see the incompatibility of preservation and development as both draw on "intelligent and creative planning."[79]

Using the tools of preservation can also serve communities to minimize the sense of loss described earlier. Verrey and Henley build the case that these procedural tools available to preservation can be used as "part of a tactical arsenal available to residents as

[77] Richard Florida, *Who's Your City, How the Creative Economy is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life* (Basic Books, New York, 2008, Kindle Edition) location 1861.
[78] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life* (Basic Books, New York, 2002) p. 228.
[79] Annaliese Bischoff, "Historic Landscape Preservation, Saving Community Character," in Elzabeth Hamin, Linda Silka and Priscilla Geigis, *Preserving and Enhancing Communities, A Guide for Citizens, Planners, and Policymakers* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst MA, 2007) p. 222.

they struggle to retain a modicum of control over the character of their neighborhoods."[80] Preservation of historic buildings supports communities pursuing smart growth strategies in guiding them to develop "a unique sense of community and place."[81] However, community participation and awareness is often strongest, not in building support for preservation, but as a result of a perceived threat: "unless residents perceive an imminent force threatening the survival of their community, individuals are unlikely to endorse historic designation and its concomitant call for relinquishment of some property control."[82] Case studies cited earlier such as the Hancock House in Boston, the Old Post Office in Washington DC and the Maxwell Street district in Chicago support this conclusion, limiting the success of preservation as a community building tool. One such case, the hollowing out of Corning, New York's main thoroughfare, Market Street, mobilized a local grassroots effort to "stabilize the downtown area" in 1977 and to launch a program to arrest deterioration in other cities, called the Main Street program, under the auspices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.[83] City officials and civic groups in Pittsfield have drawn on many of these tools in their efforts to revitalize the downtown core and spur economic growth.

Preservation is more than a tool for communities to develop economically or protect community character. Dolores Hayden links the power of place in historic

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[80] Robert Verrey and Laura Henley, "Creation Myths and Zoning Boards, Local Uses of Historic Preservation," in Brett Williams, ed., *The Politics of Culture* (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC, 1991) p. 94.
[81] American Planning Association, quoted in Elzabeth Hamin, Linda Silka and Priscilla Geigis, *Preserving and Enhancing Communities, A Guide for Citizens, Planners, and Policymakers* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst MA, 2007) p. 2.
[82] Verrey and Henley, quoted in Conde, op. cit., p. 10.
[83] W. Brown Norton, "What Do We Preserve and Why?" in Robert Stipe and Antoinette Lee, eds., *The American Mosaic, Preserving a Nation's Heritage* (The United States Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, Baltimore, 1987) p. 174.

buildings to evoke social memories but with a caveat: "if and only if they are complemented by a strong community process that establishes the context of social memory."[84] She has a jaundiced view of preservationists as elitists pushing an agenda of preserving monumental sites of architectural excellence and even gentrification, divorced and aloof from the community. It is a view shared by others, including Carol Rose and her comment on the "little old lady aura," and Thompson Mayes who cites commonly held beliefs that preservation is "simply a frivolous exercise of the 'taste police.'"[85] The role of the community in preservation is critical in moving beyond these stereotypes, as pointed out by Sarah Conde: "the credibility of historic preservation today demands substantial input from neighborhood residents, including dissident voices."[86]

## Why Preserve - Future in the Past

One unifying thread of all these thematic clusters is the search for justifications to preserve. Whether to inspire or to uplift, to develop economically or mobilize communities, the list of reasons to preserve runs long and is varied. Connecting the past to the future runs as a constant theme through much of the literature, though. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen have found a predilection among Americans to use the

[84] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place, Urban Landscapes as Public His*tory, (The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995) p. 76.
[85] Rose, op. cit., p. 10; Thompson Mayes, "Preservation Law and Public Policy," in Robert Stipe, op.cit., location 2062. The stereotyped characterization of women in preservation is unfortunate in that it belittles the commitment and extent of political negotiation that women engaged in, especially in bringing the issue of preservation to the nation's agenda, and during a time of sectional crisis, in the case of the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association that Patricia West describes in *Domesticating History*.
[86] Conde, op.cit., p. 3.

past in their everyday lives, "to establish identity, morality, immortality and agency."[87] The transformational legislation, the National Historic Preservation Act, alluded in its preamble to the relevance or preservation "to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our Nation."[88] Daniel Bluestone incorporates the contested, political space preservation inhabits as it "provides the grounds for us to critically understand and thoughtfully negotiate the relationship between the past and the future."[89] Charles Goodsell captures the last item in a more populist tone, as he values preservation in this manner: "walking into old spaces is, perhaps, the closest we can come to entering a time machine."[90]

Still, it is the responsibility to the future that also underlies many of the currents of preservation. As far back as the 19th century, John Ruskin wrote that "it is again no question of expediency or feeling whether we shall preserve the buildings of past times or not. We have no right whatsoever to touch them. They are not ours."[91] Similarly, the economist Nathaniel Litchfield captured the essence of this responsibility to future generations in stating "With the conservation process, we are creating a future heritage not preserving an historic one."[92]

This creation of a future heritage lies at the painstaking effort to preserve the old Berkshire Athenaeum, even as far as maintaining those physical elements that cannot be visibly seen, that may lie behind the stone walls and the plaster. Interviews with people

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[87] Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past, Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1998) p. 205.
[88] National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, As amended through 2006, http://www.achp.gov/docs/nhpa%202008-final.pdf, accessed 3/30/2014.
[89] Bluestone, op. cit., p. 17.
[90] Goodsell, op. cit., p. 8.
[91] John Ruskin, John, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (Dana Estes and Company, Boston, 1849 Kindle edition, 2011) location 2897.
[92] Litchfield, op. cit., p. 67.

connected with the current project repeatedly reveal statements such as “They don’t build them like this anymore.” Ensuring that future generations have the ability to see and to learn from the way buildings used to be built weaves through much of this particular preservation project, even as previous generations may not have seen this building in the same way. However, it is more than building techniques that link the history of the Athenaeum to future generations; it involves the identity of a city with a proud history of industry and immigration, and of a city working to recover from the decline of that industrial past.

# CHAPTER 3

# IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK

## The Benefactor and the Architect – Origins of the Athenaeum

When a group of civic-minded business leaders convened in 1871 to incorporate the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield had a population of 11,112 people. That was more than double its population in 1850, due to a rapid rise in its foreign-born population. Then just a town, Pittsfield had repaid its debts incurred by the war and looked forward to a period of increasing growth and prosperity. The old library, under the auspices of the Berkshire Library Association, had opened in 1850, but consisted of only a small space on the second floor of a building on the Pittsfield's main thoroughfare, North Street. As one local historic preservationist described it, this was essentially "a reading room for gentlemen," charging an annual fee to be able to borrow books.[93] By 1868, the library had outgrown its quarters, and three of those business leaders purchased property on Park Square, the town's public square since the 1790s, intersecting streets from each direction in its central core.

The gentlemen on the new board included the wealthiest and most influential leaders in the town. They were owners of woolen mills and banks, a clergyman and author, a judge on the Massachusetts Supreme Court, a retired General and hero of the Civil War, a United States Senator, and a part-time resident and western railroad magnate. Their motivations were laid out in their incorporation statement: "for the purpose of establishing and maintaining, in the town of Pittsfield, an institution to aid in

[93] Interview with Gay Tucker, 12/8/2013.

promoting education, culture, and refinement, and diffusing knowledge by means of a library, reading rooms, lectures, museums and cabinets of art, and of historical and natural curiosities."[94] Implicit was the provision of expanded services for their own workforces, to attract both managerial talent and immigrant labor in competition from Boston, Albany, New York, and other towns and cities in between.

Two decades before Andrew Carnegie would donate his first library in the United States and five years before the next library was built in Berkshire County, Thomas W. Allen, one of the trustees, offered to donate $50,000 to build a new facility for a public library and museum.[95] In return, he had several conditions. First, additional financing for the building's maintenance should be provided, and the Town Council complied, agreeing to dedicate $2000 annually for its upkeep. The town also met one of his other conditions for sufficient space and provided an additional $22,400 to purchase adjacent property for building a large structure.

Thomas W. Allen came from a family steeped in the history of the region, in both religion and politics, often mixed in the early days of the colony and commonwealth. During the Revolutionary War, his grandfather, the Reverend Thomas Allen, earned his nickname as the "fighting parson" for recruiting soldiers to fight the British from Park Square. The parson of the Congregational Church in the center of Pittsfield was

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[94] Quoted in "The Berkshire Athenaeum," unattributed record in archives of Local History Section of Berkshire Athenaeum.

[95] Sidney Ditzion, in his classic history of libraries, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture*, writes of the long birthing pains for the earliest free public libraries in Peterborough, New Hampshire in 1833. The establishment of libraries in Boston and New Bedford, Massachusetts anticipated Pittsfield's first library in 1850 by just a few years. New Hampshire preceded Massachusetts in passing state legislation authorizing towns to create at first fee-based libraries in 1849. By the time the Athenaeum was built in 1876, the state had allowed for the waiver of fees, and the growth of public libraries nationally had expanded such that a professional organization, the American Library Association, was launched.

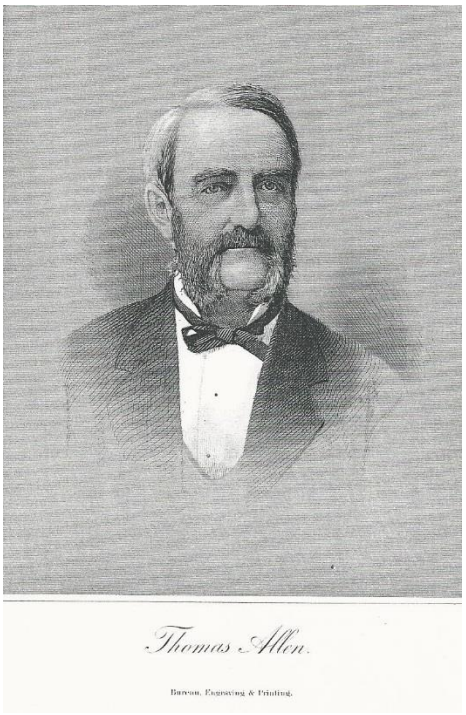



Figure 3.1. Thomas Allen, in J.E.A. Smith's *History of Pittsfield*.

presumably supporting his cousin Ethan Allen in the latter's military campaign in Vermont. Thomas Allen's son, William, a graduate of Harvard left his post as President of Bowdoin College in Maine to follow his father as pastor of the Congregational Church. With a large family, William was able to provide his third son with a college education at Union College in Schenectady, New York, but little else. After graduation in 1832, the young Thomas started his legal studies in Albany, but left due to his family's financial situation. He moved to New York with only $25 to his name, secured a clerical position in a law firm, and worked as a writer for a city magazine. In 1837 at the age of 23, Thomas W. Allen left Pittsfield for Washington D.C. where he founded and began writing for *The Madisonian*, a new paper with strong conservative Democratic Party leanings. This seemed a logical path for the young Thomas, whose uncle Phineas Allen had founded in 1800 *The Pittsfield Sun*, another conservative Democratic paper in a decidedly Federalist region.

Just five years later, though, Thomas would leave Washington and join his wife in her state of Missouri. By 1849, after joining the chorus advocating for the construction of railroads, he was elected President of a Missouri-based railroad company dedicated to building a line to the Pacific. The following year, still as a railroad president, he became a state senator, using his position to secure a state loan for the railroad and a grant of public lands from the U.S. Congress. He resigned from the railroad in 1854, but went on to

become president of two other regional railroads, a quarry and a banking firm. By 1858, he had amassed enough wealth to buy the family property in Pittsfield and build "an elaborate stone mansion," which he called "Eagle's Nest," a summer residence taking up two modern city blocks in the heart of Pittsfield.[96] Two years later, the town turned to Allen (and likely his grandfather's legacy as the "fighting parson") to underwrite Pittsfield's first volunteer militia in the Civil War, securing the name "Allen Guard" for the unit which departed for Baltimore shortly after the first engagement at Ft. Sumter. Following the war, Allen continued to pursue his business and political goals, becoming President of the Iron Mountain Railroad in 1867.[97]

Allen's ties to Pittsfield, through his family history and his prominent summer residence, remained strong enough to compel him to join in purchasing the land in 1868 on Park Square for an eventual library building. Within five years, Allen made known his willingness to donate the $50,000 for the construction of the building. His generosity was matched by the bequest which his childless cousin, Phineas, heir to the *Pittsfield Sun*, left to the library on his death that same year.

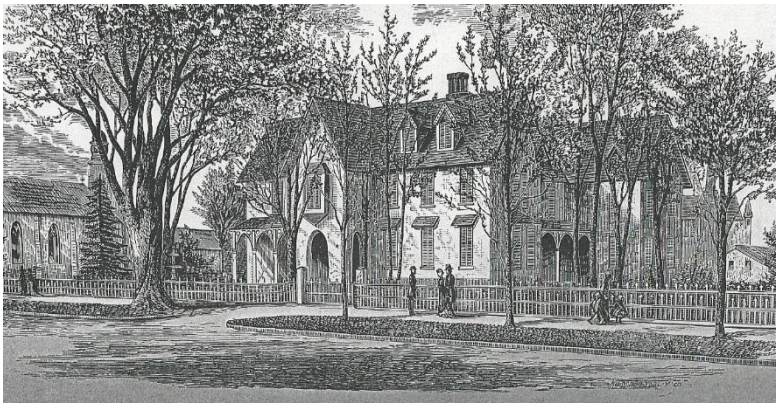


Figure 3.2. Eagle's Nest, Thomas Allen's summer mansion. Photo, Courtesy of Berkshire Historical Society

[96] George F. Willison, *The History of Pittsfield, Massachusetts 1916-1955* (City of Pittsfield, Pittsfield MA, 1957) p. 63.
[97] Details of Allen's biography are gleaned from J.E.A. Smith's *History of Pittsfield, From the year 1800 to 187*6 and "Memorial Addresses, Life and Character of Thomas Allen, June 23, 1882," delivered in the House of Representatives and Senate (Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1884.)

These magnanimous gestures came against a backdrop of the Great Panic of 1873, set off with a speculative bubble in railroad companies. Across the country, banks collapsed, individual savings vanished, and people were out of work. In Pittsfield, the biggest employers, the textile mills, cut back their operations. Shortly before construction began on the new library in 1874, two of the town's ten mills went out of business. The lingering recession lasted for years, leading to the establishment in 1878 of the Union for Home Work, a private social welfare organization to provide for the "relief of the poor, the reform of the bad, the prevention and decrease of pauperism and begging at the door."[98] Thomas Allen, however, had already earned his wealth on the "up" side of the speculative bubble, as early as the 1850s. While his railroad, banking and political interests continued into the 1870s, they were no longer speculative, but entrenched. He was to sell his railroad interests to the financier and railroad "robber baron" Jay Gould in 1881, and, a year later, during his first term as a U.S. Congressman, he died, leaving an estate worth an estimated $25 million.

Allen's personal success hinged on a pattern of anticipating the trends propelling the still-young nation forward. His early advocacy of a railroad line to the Pacific pre-dated by almost two decades its eventual connection. Allen could lay claim as "the first cottager" in the Berkshires since his "Eagle's Nest" built of stone on Park Square in 1858 was the first of many grand estates in the county, "cottages" for the likes of the Carnegies, Vanderbilts, Westinghouses and others, but only later in the 1890s.[99] Decades before Andrew Carnegie endowed libraries across the station, Allen had made such a gift

[98] Willison, op.cit., p. 64.
[99] Carole Owens, *Pittsfield, Gem City in the Gilded Age* (The History Press, Charleston, S.C., 2007) p. 20.

to his home town. The library became the model for other gifts to the town from its most prominent citizens who in the final decades of the 19th century embarked on a building spree, which included a new hospital, a retirement home and a museum.

Even Allen's personal selection for the design of the new library fit this pattern of being ahead of his time. The new trustees of the library received many proposed designs for the building, but Allen pushed for the proposal from a relatively young architect, William Appleton Potter, from New York. Potter held several advantages. Like Allen, he also was a graduate of Union College, and the grandson of the university's longest-serving President, Eliphalet Nott, whose tenure included the years that Thomas Allen was in attendance. As an alumnus, Allen would likely have known about the new library at Union College, a sixteen-sided domed library designed by Potter's older brother, Edward, in 1858. Influenced by the British architect John Ruskin who had praised the City of Venice's Gothic buildings, Edward Potter's design for the Union College library was the first of its kind in the U.S. in the style of High Victorian Gothic.[100]

The younger Potter who trained at this older brother's firm had already received commissions to design four buildings on the campus of Princeton University, including its new library, the Chancellor Greene Library in 1871, an octagon Victorian Gothic reminiscent of the Union College library. By contrast, H.H. Richardson completed his first libraries in eastern Massachusetts in 1876, differing from Potter's Princeton library in exterior style (Romanesque vice Victorian Gothic) but not in elaboration or division of

[100] Eric D.Kelly, "The Berkshire Athenaeum," *Berkshire History*, Volume I, No. 1, Spring 1971, p. 16.

space for multiple functions.[101] Potter's design for the Springfield, Massachusetts, South Congregational Church was described then as "a rather bold departure from ordinary models, being much like an amphitheater and entirely unlike any other church building in Springfield."[102] Potter's proposal for the Pittsfield library would also be a "bold departure." In the same High Victorian Gothic style, it stood apart, unlike any other civic, religious and commercial building on Park Square, a monument in the center of Pittsfield to Thomas Allen and to the purposes of civic education. Finally, his choice of stone, to include red granite from a Missouri quarry, would serve as a counterpoint to the stone mansion which the Missouri resident had built as his summer residence, just across Park Square from the library.

[101] Abigail Van Slyke, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995)
[102] Quoting Springfield City Directory 1873-4, in National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, prepared March 24, 1976.

Allen might have been drawn as well to the Potter family lineage, probably more prominent and overachieving than his own. William's father, Alonzo Potter, also studied at Union College, where his impression on the college President extended beyond his studies and intellect. Alonzo fell in love with his daughter. They were married, and after Alonzo became an ordained priest, he accepted the post of President of Hobart College at the age of 25. He later went on to serve as Vice-President to his father-in-law at Union, just a few years after Thomas Allen had graduated. Alonzo left Union College when he was elected a Bishop in the Episcopal Church, moving his family to Philadelphia to serve in that capacity in 1845, when William was just three years old. The ninth of ten children, all but one of whom were boys, William grew up surrounded with learning, religious values and achievement. He followed his brothers and sister to the finest schools and to vacations to Europe, and watched them as they took up positions as Congressman, Civil War General, bishop, President of Hobart College, musician and architect. The sense of privilege and accomplishment permeating the family was captured tellingly in the family history, written by the youngest son, Frank. By putting the family's achievements to pen, Potter descendants could learn of "what their forbears were and did, and of standards which



Figure 3.3. Bishop Alonzo Potter and his ten children. William Appleton Potter is third from the right, back row. Photo, Henry Codman Potter, *The Seventh Bishop*

they set for all of us to live up to if we would be worthy of our family traditions. 'Noblesse oblige.'"[103]

Within a year of his design selection for the Pittsfield library, and before the building would be occupied, William Appleton Potter would go on to become, at the age of 34, the Supervising Architect of the Department of Treasury in Washington D.C. Selected for his own incorruptibility in the waning days of the scandal-ridden administration of Ulysses Grant, Potter designed government buildings as far afield as Georgia, Montana, Tennessee, Indiana and Illinois. All continued to reflect the same predilections for the Gothic and Romanesque styles increasingly favored in the era, albeit less elaborate than the Athenaeum. After just 18 months, Potter resigned this position, claiming the routine demands of the office took him away from his study of architecture. Still, his departure did not prevent him from being dragged into later allegations of mismanagement of funds. Two years later, Potter was indicted and arrested for a contract which had been initiated by his predecessor in the Grant administration, but who himself could not be indicted as the statute of limitations had run out. Potter's Congressman brother bailed him out of jail, and the young architect was later exonerated. It is not hard to see how this experience confirmed his distaste for politics. Potter returned to private practice and continued to win commissions for churches, university buildings and private residences, mostly in the northeast and all reflecting Potter's preferences that "originality be coupled with beauty."[104]

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[103] Frank Hunter Potter, *The Alonzo Potter Family* (Tuttle Antiquarian Book, Inc., Rutland Vermont, 1923) dedication.
[104] Lawrence Wodehouse, "William Appleton Potter, Principal 'Pasticheur' of Henry Hobson Richardson," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Hist*orians, Vol. 32, No. 2 (May 1973) p. 189.

While those aesthetic qualities in the Athenaeum partially account for its endurance, the legacy left by the architect and the benefactor has been overshadowed by its structural flaws. Potter outlived Thomas Allen, by 27 years, but neither man was likely aware of the ongoing troubles presented by the library building. Allen passed away in 1882 before those troubles became manifest. For his part, Potter simply had too many other commissions to return to an earlier work, and there is no record of correspondence between the Athenaeum's board and Potter in trying to fix those problems. By the end of the century, Potter's heart was failing, and, in 1902, he moved permanently to Italy where his sister had moved after marriage to the renowned sculptor, Launt Thompson.[105] Potter died there in 1909, having lost many of his own records when the ship carrying his belongings to Europe sank.[106]

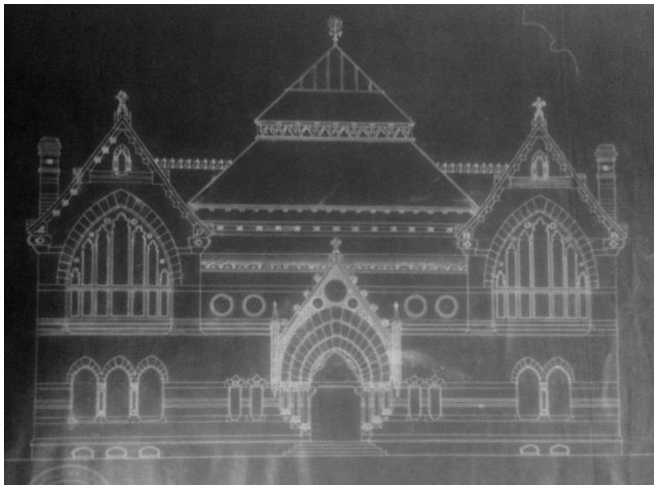


Figure 3.4. Potter's drawing of the north façade of the Athenaeum. Courtesy, Berkshire Athenaeum

## Growing Pains – The Athenaeum from 1876 to 1945

No exact year marks the beginning of The Gilded Age in the United States, but historians use either the end of the Civil War in 1865 or the end of Reconstruction in

[105] By coincidence, the Berkshire Athenaeum owned two of Thompson's busts of Berkshire County residents, the poet William Cullen Bryant and the Civil War general Thomas Plunkett (Pittsfield Sun, September 27, 1876).
[106] Potter, op.cit., p. 59.

1876 as a dividing line for the start of the extended golden age of prosperity that followed.[107] It was Mark Twain who coined the term The Gilded Age in his novel of the same name, published in 1873, where he satirized the political corruption also associated with the era. The prosperity also stimulated a golden age of art, architecture and interior design. All drew on the styles and grandeur of past European empires as the nation pushed to claim its status as the next great empire. Artists and architects such as John Singer Sargent, Mary Cassat, Augustus St. Gaudens, Louis Tiffany, Henry Hobson Richardson and even the brothers Edward and William Potter traveled and studied in Europe before returning to the U.S. and leaving a body of work marked by elaborate decoration.[108] The art of the era marked "the growth of the state from the scattered and struggling colonies of the Atlantic seaboard to the Imperial Republic stretching from ocean to ocean."[109]

[107] Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age, From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York University Press, New York, 1993) Kindle edition, location 139.
[108] Ironically, it was Edward T. Potter who in 1871 designed Mark Twain's own Gilded Age house in Hartford, Connecticut, pre-dating publication of his novel by the same name by two years.
[109] Charles M. Shean, President of the National Society of Mural Painters, quoted in Cashman, op.cit., location 2972.

Such nationalist sentiments were on the mind of Thomas Allen when he took the podium on September 23, 1876, at the official dedication of the new library, The Berkshire Athenaeum. His remarks gave a hint as to the importance of this building for him, for the growing town and for the nation. Traces of his own remarkable journey from a New England parson's son and grandson to a Missouri railroad owner of considerable wealth could be identified in the new library, even beyond the inscription above the front entrance: "This tribute to science, art and literature is the gift of Thomas Allen to his native town."[110] Allen was instrumental in the three aspects of the Athenaeum that helped secure its claim as a unique landmark: function, location and design. All three have contributed to its ability to endure.

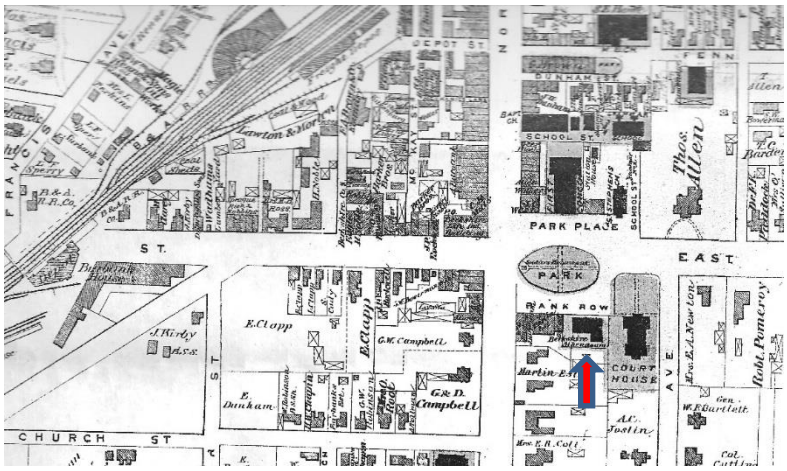



Figure 3.5. Downtown Pittsfield, 1876 Beers Map. Courtesy Berkshire Athenaeum.

"This country is to be saved, if at all," Allen noted in one of many addresses that day, "by the cultivation of patriotism and the diffusion of intelligence entered into the motive."[111] Putting the new library in nationalist tones evoked the centennial celebrations just two months prior. His reference to saving the country, though, may have been prompted by the seared memories of the Civil War. The soldier's monument

[110] Owens, op.cit., p. 24.
[111] Edward Boltwood, *The History of Pittsfield Massachusetts: from the year 1876 to the year 1916* (Eagle Printing and Binding, Pittsfield, MA, 1916), p. 175.

sculpted by William Potter's brother-in-law Launt Thompson, stood at the far end of Park Square, dedicated almost to the day four years earlier and built with contributions from many town residents, including Allen. The value Allen placed on education sprang deep from his family, and he knew his own schooling had been instrumental in whatever success he had attained. He may have been thinking as well that his contribution to this library would also "save" his home town, with its growing population, fed by the influx of a large number of migrants moving to the town to work in its many textile and paper factories. By the time the library opened, not only were two-thirds of the town's residents born elsewhere, but fully one-quarter were foreign-born.[112] All segments of the town's population would push this new facility beyond its status as a "gentlemen's club," especially as library membership had become free only in January 1876, while the new building was under construction.[113]

Locating the Athenaeum on Park Square would give the library a place of civic centrality to the town. The square stood at the intersection of four streets heading off in each direction, with an oval green park in the middle. Town lore places the beginning of the square in 1791, with the construction of a new "meeting house" for Parson Allen's congregation, designed by Boston architect Charles Bulfinch. The placement of the church meant cutting down a prominent elm tree. According to the legend, a neighbor, Mrs. Lucretia Williams, threw herself in front of the tree to prevent its removal. Her husband resolved the issue and offered to donate land south of the tree, if the church

[112] Ibid., p. 15.
[113] *Berkshire County Eagle*, January 30, 1873, p. 2.

would move its site northward. The public common surrounding the elm tree became the oval of Park Square.[114]

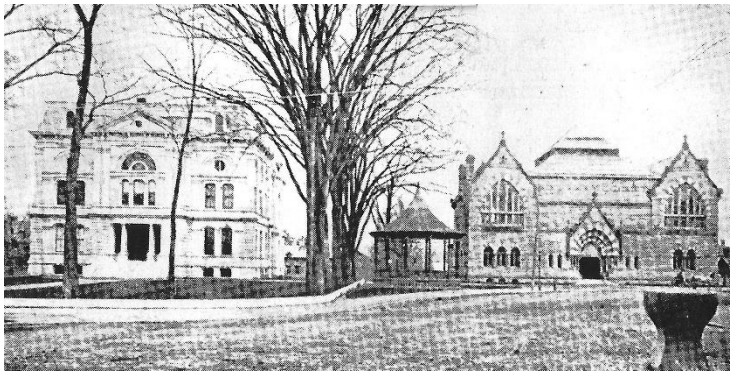


Figure 3.6. An early photograph of the courthouse (left) and the Athenaeum. Photo, courtesy of Berkshire Athenaeum.

The new library stood out on the town's central square, not only because of the stone work, but because it claimed the largest continuous front façade on the south side of the square. Extending 90 feet, and a depth of 60 feet, the Athenaeum was squeezed in between a row of wood and brick commercial storefronts and a three-story Italian Renaissance county courthouse, made of white marble stone. It had been completed in 1870 in order to accommodate the shift of the county seat to Pittsfield in 1868, the same year the trustees purchased the adjacent property for the library. Set back slightly from the courthouse, the Athenaeum did not appear as tall as its neighbor, despite the slightly higher elevation of its skylight. Two churches -- one stone and the other wood-frame -- and a brick town hall dominated the opposite side of the square. Next to these churches, just off the northeast corner of Park Square, stood Allen's prominent summer residence. The other major structures on the park began to mirror the eclectic taste of the age, with differing styles, ranging from Colonial and Federal to Gothic.

The Athenaeum's High Victorian Gothic style, an architectural fashion for a relatively short period in the mid-19th century, also accounted for its bold uniqueness on

[114] Wilson, op.cit, p. 30.

Park Square. The style came to prominence with the advent of architectural journals in the United States that lauded the grand imperial architecture of Europe. It was a style that looked back to the medieval cathedrals and chateaus of Venice and France but also forward to an American empire to match Europe's. Ironically, this gesture to a European past came into favor with the earliest manifestations of concerns for preserving the nation's own history, with the movement to save Mt. Vernon, George Washington's grand Virginia home. American High Victorian, of which the Potter brothers were the "two most important practitioners," was costly, requiring "several colors of stone or brick, polished granite column shafts, and quantities of carved stone and wood decoration."[115] Building with stone marked a break from the heavy predominance of wooden frame structures, especially in New England, and came to represent stability and endurance. Yet, it was its ornate design, with forbidding arches and large stained glass windows that characterized a style most suited for churches. By the end of the 1870s, its cost and its limited functional use for commercial or residential purposes led to its demise as a popular style.

The Athenaeum includes all these elements. A grand entrance with four overlapping arches and granite columns is flanked by two large symmetrical front gables which extend to the rear, with large stained glass windows in all four gables. The central core is set off with an imposing skylight, and multi-colored slate, hip roof. The design of the different colored stones – dark blue limestone from Great Barrington, Massachusetts, red free stone from Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and red granite brought from Allen's adopted state of Missouri -- create multiple colored horizontal lines across the façade

[115] Sarah Bradford Landau, *Edward T. and William A. Potter, American Victorian Architects* (Garland Publishing, 1979) p. 3, 5.

providing contrast to the arches with their own alternating colored stones above the doorway and the stain glass windows. The roof alternated lined patterns of three different colors of slate. All these decorative geometric patterns and outsized windows, front entrance and gables give this building its uniqueness on Park Square, a monument to Allen and to the importance of education which the library represented. Resembling a church, all it lacked was a steeple. In fact, Potter's design for the South Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, completed right before the Athenaeum, has almost the exact same entrance and many of the other features.

The interior of the building was divided into thirds, creating nine different spaces for a central lobby and six surrounding smaller rooms for offices, meeting space for the Trustees, storage and delivery rooms and a reading room. The southeast corner room extended out into a one-floor, rectangular ell-addition on to the central block, doubling an area to house the stacks which could not be accommodated in the cut-up space on the central core of the first floor. A grand staircase leading to the second floor on the western side of the lobby entrance also cut into space available for the library. Similar to Henry Hobson Richardson's Winn Library in Woburn mentioned previously, the division of smaller periodical and reading rooms

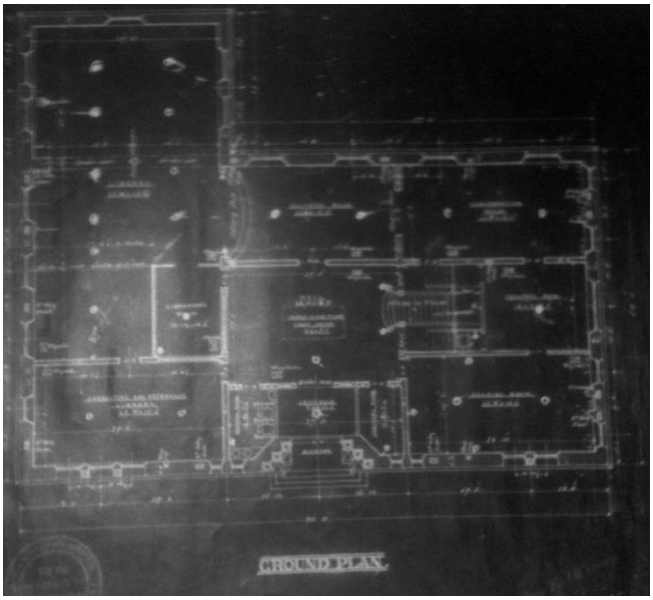



Figure 3.7. Potter's drawing of the first floor. He placed the books in the far left-hand rear of the building, broken up by smaller reading and reference rooms around the central core. Photo, the author.

accessible to the public had an "almost domestic scale," and yet, the books and book operations were relegated away from the central part of the building, unlike the Winn Library with the books stored in a central, large space.[116]

Potter reserved the grand space of the Athenaeum's design for the second floor museum. His drawings included a section of glass ceiling between the first and second floors to allow for the light from the skylight to reach to the entrance lobby. The second floor was reserved for museum space to house art, history and natural science collections donated by town residents.



Figure 3.8. Under the skylight on the second floor was the art museum.
Photo, courtesy of Berkshire Athenaeum.

With this new library building joining the county courthouse on Park Square, Pittsfield was not unlike many cities around the country that built their civic space in "overdone versions of neoclassical, Gothic, or Renaissance structures of Europe," that were "monumental in size and elaborate in style."[117] Yet, almost immediately, though, the realities of space and structure presented themselves. Here was a building where form did not follow function, as the noted architect Louis Sullivan would preach in the

[116] Van Slyck, op. cit., p. 4. Professional librarians liked neither style, according to Van Slyck, who points to dissatisfaction voiced as early as 1879, condemning "the layout of libraries designed by architects." (p. 5.)
[117] Landau, op. cit., p. 21.

next century.[118] The library, which opened with 8,000 books, was originally intended to hold up to 30,000 volumes on the main floor, along with reading rooms. Within three years, 3,211 residents were library card holders accounting for a circulation of 25,008 books.[119] It did not take long for the growing population of the town, which was incorporated as a city in 1891, to overtake the space limitations of the building. William R. Plunkett, one of the original trustees and then the President of the Board, wrote in 1895 that "the proper administration of the free public library is much embarrassed by inadequate accommodations."[120]

By then, Plunkett and his board had begun serious consideration of a new addition. With the bequest of Phineas Allen finally available in 1891, the trustees had an endowment from which to draw on to pay for the new space. In a letter to an architectural firm outlining the issue, Plunkett described several issues that needed to be corrected including the "diminished capacity of the present building" and, referring to the stacks occupying the southeast corner, "the



Figure 3.9. Original, rejected addition design from Peabody and Stearns. It included the cathedral shape attached to rear of Athenaeum, leaving exposed stained glass.

[118] U.S. Conference of Mayors, *With Heritage So Rich* (National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington D.C., 1983) p. 51.
[119] Bolton, op.cit., p. 176.
[120] William R. Plunkett, letter to Frank W. Rockwell, attorney representing Mrs. Thaddeus Clapp (whose property abutted the rear of the Athenaeum and was needed in order to extend the building,) January 19, 1895.

awkwardness of operating a library from the end instead of from the center."[121]

It took several more years to overcome two legal controversies. First, because of the tight space facing Park Square, the only direction to add on was towards the south, but the owner of that property was the widow of one of the original trustees, Mrs. Edward Clapp. She refused to give up the land to the library, so the trustees pursued the controversial path of acquiring the one-quarter acre needed through a petition to the state legislature invoking eminent domain. Settlement of her claim would not be finalized until well after the addition had been completed. Second, the first architects contacted for the addition, Peabody and Stearns, proposed a plan that proved too elaborate and expensive. When the trustees switched to a new firm, Hartwell, Richardson and Driver, the original designers threatened legal action, necessitating reassurance that the new plans did not use any of their ideas.

That the trustees never contacted the original architect, William Appleton Potter, may speak to several concerns. Presumably, Potter was available since he was still active in the profession in 1895. The original impetus for the addition stemmed from the "awkwardness" of Potter's design alluded to above, and its insufficient space, despite its size. Furthermore, the trustees opted for a simpler, cost-efficient plan. Finally, structural issues had already arisen. At the same time as building the extension, the trustees asked the architects to tend to structural concerns with the roof: "We trust you will see your way clear to have the old roof recovered as proposed. No one can tell when it may give out and cause serious trouble."[122]

[121] William R. Plunkett, letter to Peabody and Stearns, architects, June 29, 1895.
[122] William R. Plunkett, letter to Hartwell, Richardson and Driver, architects, April 27, 1897.

By 1897, an addition extended the depth of the main building another 80 feet with a width the same size as the original building. The addition used the same colored stone patterns, but much like a Gothic church, reversed the side gables on the front with a central two-story gable and one-story wings on either side. This allowed for continued use of the stained glass windows on the rear-facing gables of the original building. The long extension achieved the desire of the Trustees for the principal operations of the library to be located centrally. The main entrance lobby now moved straight to a waiting area and front desk and then into the addition: a church-like space for the stacks and tables which was open to the roof and supported by prominent, exposed quartered-oak trusses and paneling. The surrounding area, in the single-story sides of the addition and the first floor of the original central block, incorporated a large reference room, a periodical room, offices, work areas and meetings rooms. The original staircase remained, leading to the second floor where the art and natural history museum was located and also expanded to house its growing collection. The addition also had a basement for work space, but connecting this to the original building exacerbated structural issues which became apparent later.




Figure 4. Cathedral-like ceiling of addition, with quartered oak trusses. Courtesy, Berkshire Athenaeum

One additional requirement for the renovation reflected a major change in the course of the city over the next century: the installation of electric lighting. Electricity had been

available in Pittsfield as early as 1883, so it was likely already installed in the original building. In 1887, William Stanley, a collaborator of George Westinghouse, had moved from Pittsburgh to Berkshire County, and helped established the Pittsfield Illuminating Company for electrification of the city. Stanley, though, was more interested in developing machines for alternating current. His transformers that could step up or down the strengths of the current allowed for the transmission of electricity across great distances. By 1890, he had incorporated the Stanley Electric Manufacturing Company in Pittsfield to manufacture transformers for distribution across the country. The tight circle of business leadership in the city at this time becomes clear as the lawyer to effect this incorporation was William R. Plunkett, the President of the Board of Trustees of the Athenaeum and the driving force behind the new addition.

Stanley's company grew from employing 16 men in 1891 to 300 in just two years. Pittsfield, so long reliant on textile manufacturing, had started its shift to a city linked with the production of electric power. Ten years later, a new factory had been built outside the city center and employed 1200 people. This growth in employment opportunities helped account for the growth of the city, reaching 21,766 by the turn of the century.

Even with a new addition, the Athenaeum could not keep pace with the demands put on its services by this double-digit population growth. At the turn of the century, the library's collection had reached 34,000 volumes, and its circulation was approaching 100,000 books per year. Even though the addition had been intended to increase space to hold up to 70,000 volumes, both the library and its second floor museum faced pressures to expand. Finally, in 1902, Zenas Crane, the owner of Crane and Company paper

manufacturing which, among other contracts, became nationally known as printers for paper money for the U.S. Treasury, offered to donate funding for a separate museum. By the following year, the new museum had opened on South Street, with the corners of the rears of both buildings standing less than 20 feet apart. Built of brick and limestone in the style of Renaissance Revival, the museum bore little semblance to the Athenaeum. The library's space problems remained, however, as it would not get full access to its second floor until 1915, after several additions were completed to the museum. Both the library and the museum remained under the same management until 1932.

Pittsfield continued to witness double-digit population growth into the first decades of the new century. In 1903, the year the museum was built, Thomas Edison's old company, General Electric of Schenectady New York, had bought out Stanley Manufacturing. Rapid expansion of the company continued so that by 1915, it employed over one-sixth the population of the city across an expanse that incorporated twenty-two different factories. Three years later, General Electric in Pittsfield branched off in another major direction, when it opened a new plant to produce plastics, which were used as insulating materials for the electrical industry. The extent of General Electric's hold on the city rose so that on the eve of the Depression, the company employed over 8,000 workers, a substantial proportion of all the wage and salaried workers in the city. By then, the city's population had grown to 50,000.[123]

During the first four decades of the 1900s, the Athenaeum would begin to show unrelenting signs of deterioration. Leaks in the roof that had been evident during the 1897 construction of the addition continued unabated and necessitated repairs to attend to

[123] Willison, op. cit., p. 454.

the roof, leaks in the basement and structural concerns with the strength of the building walls and corners. In 1926, a second floor over the reading room which extended into the addition was built to provide more space. By 1930, cracks and bulging appeared in the stone work, so that the "entire building (was) readjusted and repointed."[124] Just four years later, under the Works Progress Administration, another major project was undertaken to repair the skylight and, for some unknown reason, to remove the second floor added just eight years earlier over the reading room.[125]

The annual reports from the decade of the 1930s reflect two trends. First, even though General Electric's building campaign by and large insulated Pittsfield from the worst effects of the Depression, the Athenaeum's offerings of free services drew large membership and circulation in a tight economy. Second, the annual library reports continued to underscore problems in keeping up with the deteriorations. In 1938, Frances Henshaw, the librarian, wrote that "many things require immediate attention -- the roof (particularly the cupola,) the outside woodwork and stonework."[126]

The tolerance for these structural problems had reached its limit. Henshaw's 1941 library report moved for the first time in a different direction when he floated the idea of the need for a new facility. "The building is old," he wrote, "and the only genuine solution to its inadequacies is replacement with a new and modern plant."[127] Henshaw and his Board of Trustees sought out two related but different commissions after the 1941 report. They asked for a "structural inspection" of the current facility to be completed by

[124] "Maintenance and Building Improvements 1930-1945," Berkshire Athenaeum historic records, Local History Section, Berkshire Athenaeum.
[125] Eric D. Kelly, "The Berkshire Athenaeum," *Berkshire History*, Volume I, No. 1, Spring 1971, p. 20. Also listed in "Maintenance and Building Improvements, 1930-1945," internal Berkshire Athenaeum document.
[126] Berkshire Athenaeum, Annual Report, January 1938.
[127] Berkshire Athenaeum, Annual Report, January 8, 1941.

Matthew Hiller, an engineer from New York City. Hiller submitted a report in 1944 that was most damning, exposing multiple flaws in both the original design and the attachment of the addition. Settling of iron piers and columns caused windows and masonry to move and crack; the north and south walls "show(ed) a decided bow;" brackets carrying the roof support "were never strong enough to carry the load imposed upon them."[128] In short, Hiller wrote, "the support of the roof as it now stands is not safe under any accepted engineering standards."[129] Hiller recommended an "immediately necessary" solution of installing steel trusses under the roof and shoring up the cellar piers.

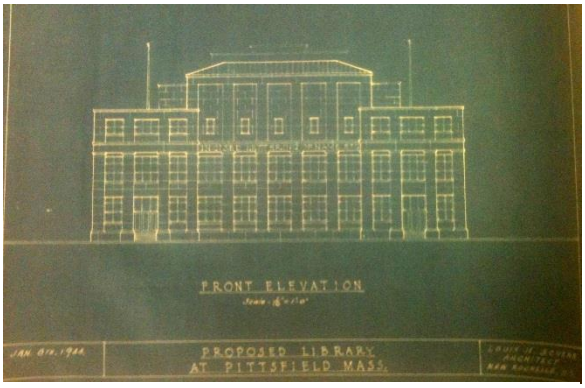



Figure 5.11. The façade of the library proposed by Louis Schene. Original architectural drawing, courtesy of Berkshire Athenaeum.

At the same time as Hiller's report, the Trustees hired the architect Louis Schene from New Rochelle, New York, to draw up a plan for a new building to be located on the same site. For the first time, the library management gave serious and public consideration to the idea of starting over, pulling down the High Victorian monument to Allen's lofty vision of a city cultivating patriotism and intelligence. Schene's drawings of a three-story library and 600-seat auditorium appeared on the front page of the *Berkshire Evening Eagle*, and in the 75th anniversary pamphlet for the Athenaeum. The Friends of Library proposed that the new building would serve as a war memorial to Pittsfield's fallen soldiers.

[128] Letter, Matthew Hiller, Jr. to Francis H. Henshaw, librarian, October 27, 1944.
[129] Ibid.

The aesthetics of the original, unique Athenaeum building were not enough to outweigh the cost of regularly occurring repairs and inflexibility in functional design, especially on the eve of another era of unbounded progress and growth. Building a new library, though, was not a high priority at this time, before the end of a debilitating war. The emergency tone of Hiller's report of structural problems could not be overlooked or delayed. The trustees proceeded with his recommended solutions, including the delicate operation of installing steel beams under the roof and jacking up piers and columns to prevent further settling. Still, the idea for a new building had been broached for the first time, and over the next 30 years, the clamor would continue to grow.

**Barely Standing – The Post-war Years**

In May 1945, only days after Germany surrendered in Europe, the Athenaeum's most complicated stabilization project took place, just as Mathew Hiller recommended in his engineering report submitted the previous year. Steel girders which weighed 3700 pounds and were 50 feet in length were placed through holes drilled through at the roof line, atop reinforced concrete piers. These, Hiller projected, would help shift the weight of the roof on to the masonry



Figure 3.12. Original skylight and steel beams placed in 1945. With a suspended ceiling added in the 1978 renovations, the skylight is no longer visible. Photo, courtesy Ron Salice.

walls as the existing brackets were insufficient. He concluded that "the original design for the roof was structurally unsound."[130] Hiller believed that the bowing in the walls that had been manifest for years was caused by "lateral thrusts" from the weight of the roof.[131] In addition, the settling taking place on the rear of the original building was addressed with new concrete footings and a reinforced brick pier in the basement.

Neither these emergency repairs nor the lack of funding for a new building quelled the clamor for a new facility or stalled the deterioration. Less than a year later, the Municipal Recreation Association included a new library in its proposed design for a city hall, auditorium and recreational facilities, including a swimming pool.[132] The maintenance record for the building continued to list roof repairs undertaken every 2-3 years, indicating ongoing water damage from a leaking roof and skylight and insufficient flashing on the arches over the windows and front entrance. The annual reports from the librarian Robert Newman and the Board of Trustees contained increasingly dire pleas for a new facility. Newman's 1947 annual report read "With each succeeding year, the ancient central building becomes less adapted to library service." The 75th anniversary pamphlet issued in May 1947 hardly celebrated the building: Newman wrote that, "instead of Victorian Gothic originating in the past, an efficient structure of contemporary and future needs may be anticipated…… Ample light, air conditioning, sound absorbent materials, economical heating (perhaps under the floor,) efficient arrangement and maximum facilities for readers and staff will contrast with the absence

[130] Hiller, op.cit.
[131] Ibid.
[132] "Design for Municipal Building is Presented," *Berkshire Evening Eagle,* April 6, 1946.

of these characteristics in the old Berkshire Athenaeum."[133] Two years later, he could not contain his frustration "when the normal difficulties are made worse by inappropriate original construction, overcrowding and a limited budget for repairs."

Newman's language reflected the broader mood of the country and city in the early years after the war. The emphasis was on the future, putting behind the painful immediate memories of war and depression. Historic structures were deemed "ancient" and unable to meet the modern needs of a rapidly growing city and economy. After a decade of stagnant population growth in the 1930s, Pittsfield increased by almost 4,000 people during the build-up of a war economy to reach a total of 53,560 residents. Full capacity at General Electric's plant helped draw labor to the city, as it reached peak employment during the war of 13,645, having recovered from a Depression-low workforce of 2,400. Over ten percent of the city's total population had served in the armed forces during the war and were returning home. This forward-looking attitude driven by the return of soldiers with access to employment and higher education from the G.I. Bill and the return to prosperity after the decade-long Depression ushered in an extended period of growth. Furthermore, the overcrowding in the library that Newman referred to in his report was reflected even more in the schools. The library, despite its independent status, still received an annual budget from the city. Absent another philanthropic donor like Thomas Allen, any funding for a new facility would have to come through city resources. In the first years after the war, municipal building priorities were highest for schools, with the addition of three new elementary schools and a senior high school. A community council survey in 1954 spoke directly to the issue of

[133] Robert Newman, "The Next 75 Years," the 75th anniversary pamphlet of the Berkshire Athenaeum, May, 1947.

financing in recommending that "plans for a new Athenaeum be expedited as soon as necessary financing can be arranged."[134]

The decade of the 1950s saw the Athenaeum fall into a pattern of major repairs and annual reports repeating the litany of problems and inadequacies of the building. Water continued to enter the building necessitating ongoing roof repairs and interior wall and ceiling repairs from water damage. This kind of water damage was especially disconcerting, as the Athenaeum had in 1953 received a collection of materials from descendants of Herman Melville. The library dedicated one of the gabled rooms on the second floor to a memorial room, containing some of Melville's own library, correspondence with his family and furniture and articles owned by Melville, including his desk and paintings. Melville had lived in Pittsfield from 1850 until 1863 when he wrote *Moby Dick,* a work which he never lived to see receive either critical acclaim or popular success. The dedication of a room to Melville reflected his rise in standing as an American literary genius only since the 1920s.[135] Joining Harvard University and the New York Public Library as one of three institutions holding Melville collections, the Athenaeum added protecting these materials to the weight of its concerns with the building's deficiencies.

[134] Annual Reports of the President, Treasurer and Librarian for 1954, The Berkshire Athenaeum, p. 10.

[135] Melville's writing reclaimed literary stature with the publication in 1921 of Raymond Weaver's biography, *Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic* and Weaver's editing and publication of a lost manuscript, *Billy Budd.* Melville had written the novella after "the long hiatus of a failed literary career," as John Updike writes in his introduction to *Herman Melville, Complete Shorter Fiction (*Everyman's Library, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1997.) Both literary and public interest reached a peak at the same time as the opening of the Melville room with a succession of three Melville biographies that appeared in the early 1950s.

The first signs of problems with a city relying so heavily on one company for its prosperity emerged as well during the 1950s. General Electric workers in Pittsfield joined a nationwide strike in 1946 that ended in a $1.50 per day raise, "a crushing defeat" for GE managers.[136] The company embarked on a new strategy – part public and community relations and part relocation – to ensure a stronger bargaining position in subsequent rounds of negotiations. In Pittsfield, with a payroll exceeding $1 million, GE first shifted some of its transformer business when it built a new $25 million plant in Rome, Georgia in 1952. Three years later, it built another new transformer plant in North Carolina and moved Pittsfield's industrial heating operations to Indiana. While GE employment in Pittsfield remained steady at 10,000 through the decade, labor unions decried these moves, especially as they had seen all but three woolen mills move south. Still, with the prosperity of the city still high and the population still growing, few anticipated the impact of GE's complete exodus in a few decades.

Nowhere was this optimism more evident than in a report commissioned in 1960 by the Athenaeum's trustees on the future of the building. That report, prepared by John Humphrey, the Director of the City Library of Springfield, and Philip McNiff, the Associate Librarian at Harvard, foresaw unending growth of the city's population, reaching over 71,000 people by 1990. Compared with other libraries, the Athenaeum already had a higher circulation than the eight other cities of its size, and even outranked 55 larger cities. With a population expected to grow, the "outdated and inefficient physical plant" was not only structurally flawed and could not be repaired, but it could

[136] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands, The Business Crusade Against the New Deal* (W.W. Norton, New York, 2009, Kindle edition) location 1803.

not be expected to meet the needs of the city.[137] In their internal report to the Board, the two recommended purchasing adjacent property and razing the building: with the added property on an expanded site, "a rectangular building could be planned….This would provide on three levels 35,000 square feet."[138]

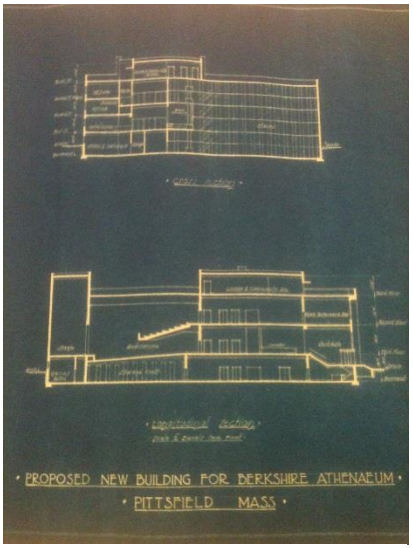



Figure 3.6. New library proposal, architectural drawing, Alderman and McNeish, 1961. Courtesy Berkshire Athenaeum.

The survey led, a year later, to the hiring of the architecture firm of Alderman and McNeish of Springfield, Massachusetts, to draw up plans for a new building, rectangular with a large extension to the rear. Their design included two full stories for library purposes, a condensed third story for meeting space, a large auditorium and a full basement for storage. The building was to be placed on the same site as the Athenaeum. The project advanced to the extent that the Trustees and staff worked out a plan for the library's operations during the period of construction.

Their drawings coincided with a larger planning effort in the city to stem the loss of employment and business in the city's downtown business district, due to the ease of automobile access to new shopping areas on the outskirts of the city. As early as March, 1958, Pittsfield had taken the initial steps toward a "consideration of Urban Renewal for downtown Pittsfield," when an official from the Federal Housing and Home Financing

[137] "Humphrey-McNiff Survey of the Berkshire Athenaeum," submitted to the Board of trustees and the Library, October 20, 1960.
[138] Ibid.

Administration addressed the City Council and the Capital Outlay Committee.[139] It took several years before the elaboration of a "Comprehensive Master Plan" for the city's Planning Board that envisioned a 20-year project encompassing two areas to the north and west of Park Square, just one block from the library.[140] The report recommended a new circulation system that would facilitate traffic access into the downtown area, expand the retail shopping district and clear out blighted buildings.

While the focus of the report fell on extensive urban renewal projects in two areas to the west of the library (Columbus Avenue and Jubilee Hill,) the authors repeated the recommendation of Humphrey and McNiff for a new library. Citing contrasts in population and circulation since the library was built, the plan recommended "the construction of a new library building on the same site, enlarged to the rear."[141] This report served to fuel the momentum mounting for a new facility. In 1963, Amy Miller, the President of the Board of Trustees, broached the subject for the newspaper after the annual meeting of the board, directly touching on the trade-off between aesthetics and economics.[142] "Expensive restorations in 1934, 1935, 1939 and 1945," she wrote, "have not improved conditions sufficiently to justify further expenditures on reclaiming it…..Although it is beloved by some as a colorful landmark, it is in reality an

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[139] "Pittsfield City Report, Bicentennial Issue," 1961, p. 50.
[140] Candeub, Fleisseg & Associates, "Comprehensive Master Plan, City of Pittsfield, Massachusetts," prepared for the City of Pittsfield Planning Board, December 1962.
[141] Candeub, Fleisseg & Associates, op.cit., p. 42.
[142] Amy Miller, always referred to as Mrs. Lawrence Miller in public documents, had served as Chair of the Board since at 1943, the first woman to hold the post. Miller, married to the editor of the Berkshire Eagle, also helped start Hancock Shaker Village in the 1960s. (See Friends of the Athenaeum "Newsletter," Summer 2013, http://www.pittsfieldlibrary.org/Friends%20Newsletter%202013%20summer.pdf (accessed 4/8/2014;) see also obituaries in the *New York Times* and the American Antiquarian Society proceedings: http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/26/us/amy-miller-90-a-founder-of-shaker-village.html (accessed 4/8/2014;) http://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44539550.pdf (accessed 4/8/2014.)

extravagance to maintain."[143] Six months later portions of plaster fell in the library's second floor music room, during library hours when patrons were in the room.

Throughout this period, the library sought funding for a new building. The trustees had established a building committee to begin to raise private donations and to seek outside funding from public sources. For years, the library petitioned the mayor to be placed on the city's capital outlay campaign, but with an even larger urban renewal plan now in process, the library continued to rank low on the annual priority listing.

To strengthen their case, the trustees fell back once again on the idea of commissioning in 1966 a structural engineering inspection, returning to the architectural firm of Alderman and MacNeish, who had drawn up the 1961 new building design. The engineers reviewed the original plans of the building and its addition, as well as the structural reinforcements made in 1945. They still found evidence of advanced deterioration: bowing of walls, separations of the walls on both interior and exterior of building, of the front wall from the side of the building, numerous cracks in plaster, exterior walls and lintels of the windows as well as sagging floors. The firm recommended a more complete survey, and then added, advancing their prior design, "unless the building is to be abandoned soon."[144]

In addition, the library sought to tie itself into the Mayor's urban renewal program, perhaps in the hope that their best chance at a new facility was to fall under the umbrella of this major effort, already approved, with significant federal financing. The Board invited Joseph Wasserman, a consultant conducting studies for the downtown

[143] "Officers, Trustees Renamed; New Building Need Stressed," *Berkshire Eagle*, January 17, 1963.
[144] Letter, A.S. MacNeish to Robert Newman, Librarian, February 21, 1966.

redevelopment, to review the architectural plans designed in 1960 for a new facility. His conclusions surprised the Board and served to re-direct their thinking. First, Wasserman indicated that the current site was "too tight and constricted" for the size of the library needed in the city.[145] Then, he criticized the 1960 design that "lacked 'graciousness,'" and the individual rooms were not large enough to accommodate patrons.[146] Wasserman even went so far as to propose two new sites for the library, still in the central downtown district.

One more study reinforced Wasserman's view. As the extent of the urban renewal project grew, the city sought an outside opinion, from the non-profit Urban Land Institute.[147] In their extensive report, they moved outside their core area of focus and made recommendations on the status of the Athenaeum. Their conclusion also weighed the balance of aesthetics and economics, citing a justification that would increasingly be used to promote the broader urban renewal: newer buildings would enhance the city's tax base. "The old library building," read the ULI report, "could be demolished and …. re-developed into a substantially higher taxpayer to the community. The city would gain a new and certainly more attractive use for this corner, one of the most important in Pittsfield's core area."[148] The corner the Institute referred to was not the site of the Athenaeum, but a residential lot a block to the east, on the corner of Wendell and East Streets.

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[145] "Alternate Building Sites Proposed for New Library," The Berkshire Eagle, September 21, 1966.
[146] Ibid.
[147] The Urban Land Institute, a research non-profit, sponsored by the National Association of Real Estate Boards, was active as early as the 1940s with urban redevelopment in major cities around the country. See Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance, Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1990) pp. 26-27.
[148] Urban Land Institute, "A Report on the Redevelopment of the Central Business District, Pittsfield, Massachusetts," Washington DC, September 1966, p. 42.

Both Wasserman and the Urban Land Institute study recast the ideas of the Board in their plans for a new building. By the end of 1966, they had settled on relocating to a new site, and they had selected the site recommended by the Urban Land Institute. The building committee tried to downplay the financial burden on the city, indicating they had received a bequest from a donor. In addition, they committed to using money from its annual apportionment and seek federal funding, adding up to close to half of the expected cost of over $1 million. Again, they asked to be included in the priority list of the city's capital outlay, but Mayor Remo del Gallo flat out refused. A new library, he said, "cannot be high on our priority list…. There is strong sentiment in favor of the present building."[149]

If there was strong sentiment, it was not coming from the library or its leadership, understandably, because of their deteriorating working conditions. What is largely missing in this period up to the early 1960s is any discussion of the Berkshire Athenaeum as a historic structure, and its value as such to the community. By today's standards, it had passed the 50-year threshold to be considered a historic structure in 1926. References to its age are largely negative. The Athenaeum is "old" or "ancient," with direct implications that it is difficult to maintain and cannot meet the modern requirements of a library. No discussion existed of its attachment to Thomas Allen or his family's importance in Pittsfield history. Neither was there concern about the impact on Park Square, as the historic center for the city. Even from an aesthetic point of view, this Victorian Gothic seems to confirm the views of Potter historian, Sarah Bradford Landau, that until the 1960s, buildings in this style "were generally looked upon as anomalous and

[149] "Del Gallo Sees Low Priority for Library," *The Berkshire Eagle*, August 21, 1967.

even freakish until the 1960s," not everyone agreed on the merits of the Athenaeum's aesthetic.[150] The Pittsfield historian writing in 1955 conceded as much when he called the building "the odd stone pile, bastard Gothic in style," that others have "pronounced (it) ugly, a 'monstrosity.'"[151]

In his comments arguing against a new library, Mayor del Gallo was probably reflecting the views of the young Pittsfield Historical Commission, that had been established in September 1964, as allowed under the laws of Massachusetts.[152] At the first meeting of the Commission, just ten days after being sworn in, the members identified a short list of "points of interest in Pittsfield," that included the library.[153] A month later in their second meeting, the members reviewed the project of Pittsfield's Bicentennial Commission in 1961 to identify the city's historic landmarks. Discussion, as reflected in the minutes, focused on Park Square, and then inevitably the library. "The consensus was that these expanded and better services are urgently needed and should be provided without defacing or destroying the exterior of the present library building. It is an historic landmark and an attractive part of Park Square….This was not only the opinion of the members of the Historical Commission, but in their opinion reflects the feeling of a large percentage of Pittsfield citizens."[154]

Both the emerging preservationists and the urban renewal advocates agreed, if for different reasons, that a new library was needed, but not on the current site. What the

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[150] Landau, op.cit., p. 4.
[151] Willison, op.cit., pp. 4, 61.
[152] A full three years before the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, Massachusetts had created a statewide historical commission and enacted legislation to allow cities and towns to establish their own commissions. See "State Historic Preservation Plan, 2011-2015", p. 5. The first Chair of the Pittsfield Commission was Lee Lincoln, and Lena Isringhaus served for many years as the Commission's secretary.
[153] Minutes, Pittsfield Historical Commission, September 15, 1964.
[154] Minutes, Pittsfield Historical Commission, October 20, 1964, p. 2.

Athenaeum leaders lacked was political support needed to garner the funding for a new building. If anything, they had learned patience since their initial calls for a new building more than twenty-five years earlier. They could wait, and they did, until a new Mayor was elected in 1968.

## End Game: From Library to Courthouse

The Berkshire Athenaeum reached a crossroads in the mid-1960s that coincided with two other developments, one local and the other national. The passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 followed a period of increased public awareness of the importance of preserving the nation's architectural heritage. That landmark legislation capitalized on a growing, albeit uneven, movement to protecting the history that surrounds and shapes communities; it provided tools and rules by which those communities could preserve and highlight their heritage in their buildings and landscapes. The NHPA pushed authority down to the state level, and encouraged states to establish their own historic preservation officers, acknowledging that a few states had already done so, including Massachusetts in 1963. Shortly after its passage, though, Pittsfield followed through on the urban renewal plans first developed in 1960, razing entire city blocks, seemingly impervious to the broader campaign to save historic buildings.

These two developments, local and national, aligned to exert influence on the survival of the Athenaeum. As scholars attribute the enactment of national preservation legislation to the preceding decade of highway construction and a few high profile

demolitions, such as the old Penn Station in New York City, Pittsfield's urban renewal contributed its own case studies.[155] The two highest profile examples, the demolition of Union Station and the preservation of the Old Town Hall, weighed prominently on the minds of those making the decisions about the Athenaeum's future.

Local preservationists were not only aware of broader national developments in preservation, but worked to utilize the new tools available through both state and national legislation to influence the shape of the urban renewal efforts. In its October 1964 meeting, the Pittsfield Historical Commission discussed two articles that had appeared recently in the *New York Times,* "proof that sufficient interest can be developed to pursue similar efforts in Pittsfield."[156] The Times article spoke of a preservation movement "gathering momentum throughout the country …. (due to) increasing public dismay over the vanishing of landmarks under the onslaught of urban renewal and other construction."[157] The members discussed the projects of "urban renewal, expansion of highways and by-passes and the resultant impact on the community in the removal of private homes," and they concluded that "the end result did not wholly justify the loss of this property to the community."[158]

[155] See Daniel Bluestone, op. cit., p. 14; Jane Jacobs, op. cit., p. 23 and Carol Rose, op. cit., p. 475. Max Page and Randall Mason bemoan the familiarity of the Penn Station story as it "seem(s) to tell all we need to know about preservation." (op. cit., location 150.)
[156] Minutes, Pittsfield Historical Commission, October 20, 1964.
[157] Thomas Evans, "Campaign to Preserve Historical Landmarks in Pressed Both Here and Abroad," *New York Times*, October 19, 1964.
[158] Minutes, Pittsfield Historical Commission, October 20, 1964.

Armed with both its Comprehensive Master Plan and the outside study of the Urban Land Institute, the city moved into the implementation phase of urban renewal by 1962. With mayoral and city council approval and financing made available, the project fell to the Pittsfield Housing Authority to implement, first conducting a survey of the 55 buildings that would need to be demolished, 42 of which were deemed substandard or blighted.[159] A reimbursement system for owners losing their properties needed to be worked out, so the groundwork for the renewal project would drag on for several years before any structures were razed.

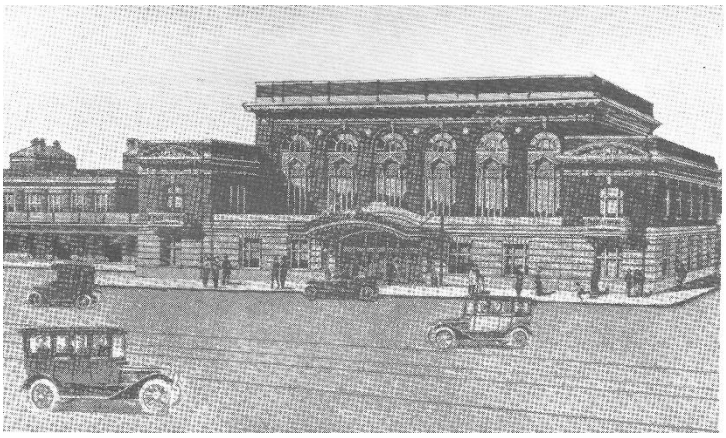


Figure 3.14. Union Station, Pittsfield MA.
drawing courtesy Berkshire Historical Society

By October 1966, the members of the Pittsfield Historical Commission requested a meeting with the Housing Authority to hear directly of the urban renewal plans. They had undoubtedly read of the Urban Land Institute's recommendation that "Union Station had to be torn down because it stood in the path of the proposed central bypass route."[160] During the meeting, the commission members differentiated between the large number of buildings slated for demolition, which were deemed of "little historical value," and Union Station, the city's railroad depot that had been built in 1914.[161] Designed in the Beaux Arts style favored in the early 1900s, the station's façade was graced with marble walls

[159] Pittsfield Housing Authority, Columbus Project, 1965.
[160] "Pittsfield Housing Authority Has Earmarked the Station for Demolition," *The Berkshire Eagle*, October 1, 1966.
[161] Meeting Notes, Pittsfield Historical Commission, October 26, 1966.

and grand arched windows which lit up an impressive interior domed hall, replete with chandeliers and extensive wood paneling. In its very first meeting, the Commission members had cited the station as one of the city's landmark properties, "an example of many different styles, but characterizes the railroad at its height."[162] Two issues weighed against the station's survival during the urban renewal period. First, by the 1960s, with greater use of the automobile, rail traffic had declined to the point that the station was too expensive to heat and maintain, and its main rooms were closed. Second, it was owned privately by New York Central Railroad which wanted to establish a smaller, more efficient station on the eastern side of the city. Still, members of the Commission told the Housing Authority of their suggestion that Union Station be adapted for use as a transportation center, encompassing not just rail but also bus and taxi modes.

Within a year, the members of the Commission invoked their new authorities to weigh in on the project. The Housing Authority made a formal request for Historical Commission approval to demolish buildings. The commission minutes give no indication of the response, but it probably hued to the earlier differentiation between the bulk of the 55 buildings involved and Union Station. The combination of urban renewal and private ownership eased the way for demolition to begin in October 1968, razing Union Station, the empty, historic Hotel Wendell on the corner of North and West Streets and dozens of other buildings of "little historic value" in a 4-5 block radius. The station which had been presumed deteriorated to the point of falling down, turned out to be "a structure so solid the wreckers had trouble bowling it over."[163]

[162] Meeting Notes, Pittsfield Historical Commission, September 15, 1964.
[163] Grier Horner, "The West Street That Was," *The Berkshire Eagle*, January 16, 1984.

While the Historical Commission was pondering its assessment of the downtown urban renewal project, its members had also been concerned about another building, one that stood on Park Square, opposite the Athenaeum, but even closer to the area designated for renewal – the Old Town Hall. The only Federal-style brick structure on Park Square had been built in 1832 and had served continually as the town and then the city hall for Pittsfield. As the city administrative functions grew, it, like the Athenaeum, became constrained by both space and deterioration. As early as 1957, before the first forays into urban renewal, the city held a referendum to consider the building of a new City Hall. One of the proposals was to construct the new building on the site of the Athenaeum across Park Square. A taxpayer group formed rejecting the high cost of a new City Hall, and they proposed adapting a junior high school building for the municipal functions. Again, similar to the Athenaeum, debate over the dispensation of the City Hall continued until 1967, by which time the present building "had been partially condemned" and the city had hammered out a deal to convert the main post office into a new municipal building.[164]

With the new City Hall dedicated in March 1968, just 6 months before the demolitions started to the west, the Mayor, the Historic Commission and concerned citizens turned their attention to the dispensation of the original Town Hall. Mayor Del Gallo set up a Town Hall Architectural Commission made up of private citizens to come up with a proposed plan for the old structure. This ad-hoc committee turned to Berkshire County Savings Bank which bought the building and paid for its restoration, turning it into its main office building. When the Old Town Hall was re-dedicated on September

[164] "Fisher Named Architect for City Hall," *The Berkshire Eagle*, January 25, 1967.

27, 1970, the city invited Bernd Foerster, the Dean of the Architecture School at RPI to make remarks at the ceremony. Foerster who had been a consultant on the preservation project spoke about the Town Hall's place on Park Square, "the visual center of Pittsfield. It is the most memorable spot in town. This area makes Pittsfield unique."[165] Against the backdrop of demolitions that had left a gaping hole still unfilled a block away, Foerster used his address about the preservation of one Park Square landmark, to speak to another building on this unique central common: "But there is an exceptionally fine building that deserves our special attention. If there is need for a new library, the present structure on the south side should not be lost. It is a remarkable local example of a past style of architecture."[166] In his remarks, Mayor Butler praised the ad-hoc committee for its work, and then said he had another project in mind for them: the Berkshire Athenaeum.

Throughout the decade, the public commentary about a new public library building took place in a major building environment in the city and with a growing national and local awareness of the importance of preserving historic structures and landscapes. The city and library leaders, as well as its citizens and patrons, had two prominent reference points in their deliberations over the building of a new library and the dispensation of the old building. Prior to this era, though, the pressures for a new building were such that had funding been available ten years prior, a new library surely would have been built then. The library had the resources to commission new designs and engineering studies, but it would depend on some combination of public and private financing to foot the bill for the construction of the building. The bulk of that funding

[165] Bernard Foerster, "Park Square and the Joy of Architecture," address, Town Hall dedication, Pittsfield, MA, September 27, 1970.
[166] Ibid.

would have to come from the city, and those studies served to put pressure on city officials to approve this project.

In 1968, with Daniel Butler as the new and more receptive Mayor, the library approached the city again. This time, the trustees put together a $2 million package that would include $300,000 of their own privately obtained endowment, a request for $1.2 million from the city that would make possible the approval of a federal grant for the remaining $500,000. Holding out the eligibility of a federal grant became one more tool to put pressure on the city that would have to approve the funding or else lose a half million dollars for a new building which would eventually be needed. The lawyer for the building committee, Lincoln S. Cain, added one more offer: "deed the old building over to the city."[167] Such an offer would mean the city would not just be spending money, but it would also acquire a property for whatever purposes it deemed necessary.

For six months in 1968-9, the fate of the new library fell into the swirl of local politics, heavily influenced by both the cost of the major urban renewal project taking place at the same time and the early manifestations of a taxpayer revolt against the heavy rates paid at both the local and state levels in Massachusetts. In December, 1968, Mayor Butler placed the library's proposal on a fast track, requesting the City Council for an appropriation of $1.8 million. Council members, though, were more deliberate, and several were openly opposed to adding to the taxpayer burden. The Council tabled the proposal, asking for a list of building priorities before approval. The delay allowed the library to secure formally the federal grant, less than originally expected but still $340,000 towards the total. However, with private donations coming close to $650,000,

[167] "Top Priority Put on New Building," *The Berkshire Eagle*, May 3, 1968.

the request to the city remained constant. The federal grant was still contingent on funding coming from other sources, and furthermore, the city would have to approve those funds before the end of June 1969, or risk losing the grant.

In its reluctance to approve the new financing requirement for the city, the council in May 1969 found a provision in Massachusetts law that allowed for a referendum challenge on any bond issue. Council members opposed to the new library funding knew that a referendum would take the issue beyond the June 30 deadline to secure the federal funding. Mayor Butler and the library trustees appealed through their state representatives to get the state to pass a law allowing for a referendum to take place in June, ahead of both the normal November electoral schedule and the June deadline. The Massachusetts legislature did pass a law to fast track a referendum scheduled for June 13. Opponents on the City Council were not done, though. They submitted the library proposal for an up or down vote in the Council, a week before the referendum was to take place. Perhaps they feared losing the referendum, but even if they did not, they did not want to risk such a loss. The Council defeated the measure, thereby precluding the need for a referendum. The June 30 deadline passed, and the city lost its ability to secure federal funding for a new library. Six months of intensive effort by the library leadership in conjunction with the mayor came to a full stop. A new library building, which had seemed so close, now seemed further away than ever.

The attention of the library moved to its centennial anniversary. It is interesting to note that the year chosen to celebrate was 1971, 100 years after the legal incorporation of the Athenaeum as an organization, not the year the building was completed, or even started. The library's leaders had mentally already moved beyond the physical structure,

intent on viewing the Athenaeum as an organization not connected with its current space. At the end of the centennial year, Amy Miller, the President of the Board of Trustees, announced their intention to start a new effort. Further, she connected that effort to the climate of building taking place in the city: "let us all unite in forwarding plans for a new building. Let us take the attitude that it will be in step with present plans for a renewed downtown Pittsfield."[168]

At the same annual meeting, as a first step towards the renewed effort, the head of the building committee proposed a new comprehensive engineering survey as proposed by the recommendation of the 1966 inspection. Through a grant from the city council, the library hired the William T. Hill engineering firm of Dalton, Massachusetts which brought in Tim O'Shea, an engineer from Latham Massachusetts. By October 1972, O'Shea had completed his report, repeating the results of the 1966 inspection, but in much greater detail, that the building suffered significant deterioration: cracked and damaged ceilings and walls, bowing of walls, cracked frames and sills of the stained glass windows, leaking, through the roof and flashings, and settlements "caused by failure to properly underpin the south wall and column footings of the original building when the 1896 south portion was constructed."[169] The north façade is "not being held horizontally at the floor line," and the trusses supporting the skylight and roof "have rotated and twisted under load."[170] The stained glass windows were "badly cracked" and "should be removed and rebuilt as necessary or replaced with masonry."[171]

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[168] Mildred Wallace, "As Library Enters Its Second Century, New Try for New Building is Promised," *The Berkshire Eagle*, January 20, 1972.
[169] Hill Engineering Survey, October 31, 1972, p. 7.
[170] Ibid., pp.9-10.
[171] Ibid.

O'Shea gave a breakdown for the repairs needed, dividing work into separate phases with cost estimates ranging from $92,500 to $535,000 to make the building viable for a long-term period.[172] The first phase would attend to roofing and leaking issues, involving new roof decking, flashing and shingles, and the removal of the highest stones and reinforcing brick on the parapet walls of each of the five gables. A second phase would address the bowing and extend the building's life for only another 5 years. This would involve installing a new steel foundation inside the building to which could be attached steel wall ties on the exterior, to prevent further bowing on all 4 walls of the original structure.[173] At the City Council meeting where O'Shea reported his findings, he indicated that the building "is not in danger of collapse." Still, stonework had fallen off the front of the building. The council members debated the expense of trying to repair the current structure contrasted with the cost of new construction. The newspaper report of the meeting carried quotes from three of the City Councilors to preserve the building, one voicing the view that the "people of the city don't want to lose that building," perhaps referring to the loss of Union Station four years prior.[174]

Armed with this information, the library approached the City Council, composed of new members, with a proposal to fund a new building. This time, the library's proposal included the possibility of $1 million in federal revenue-sharing finances and $500,000 from the library. Sensing the need to move quickly and avoid another divisive referendum, the City Council had appropriated $1,997,220 and authorized a bond issue

[172] Grier Horner, "19th Century engineering is seen as culprit in Athenaeum's troubles," *The Berkshire Eagle*, December 12, 1972
[173] Timothy O'Shea, Cost Estimate, Structural Repairs, Berkshire Athenaeum, October 1972.
[174] Grier Horner, "Council learns about art treasure belonging to Berkshire Athenaeum," *The Berkshire Eagle*, December 13, 1972.

by May 10, 1973. The library identified and secured several properties, including a municipal parking lot and a synagogue on the Wendell Avenue site one block east of the current Athenaeum - property that had also been proposed in 1969 for a new library building. By October, the Pittsfield Library Building Commission had been formed and two months later, on December 15, 1973, had broken ground to build a new library. The chief librarian did not try to conceal his emotion: "For the first time in over 30 years, you will not hear in these reports appeals for a more adequate or safer building."[175] Two more years would pass for construction and relocation of equipment and materials before the new library re-opened in the summer of 1975.

Another five years would pass before new tenants had moved in to the old Victorian Gothic structure. The public discussion that had taken place over the future of the site and the building for the past 20 years did not let up with the departure of the library, because of the uniqueness of the design, its structural problems, its prime location on Park Square and the swirl of building and demolition and preservation in the downtown area. Even as funding for the new library building was approved, local officials began to weigh in on proposals and ideas for the old Victorian Gothic Athenaeum. The library trustees had indicated they would turn ownership of the building over to the city in exchange for financial support for the new building. Following the example of the old town hall, in 1973, the City Council appointed a new municipal board, the Berkshire Athenaeum Preservation Committee, whose name alone indicated the official preferences.

[175] Robert Newman, Annual Report, Berkshire Athenaeum, January 1974.

City leaders resurrected the idea of a land swap with the county that had been proposed in conjunction with the building of the new city hall. Since then, the city had sought property owned by the county in the Morningside section of the city to expand a school. In this way, county officials also began to ponder proposals for the old library building. During the 1969 referendum debate over the new library building, the county, which owned and operated the courthouse next door, went public with their desire for the space. As demands on the courts were expanding, with the county registry of deeds squeezed into the courthouse annex, the option within eyesight seemed logical.[176] The county again began to consider the property once the funding for a new library building was secured, but with mixed views on whether to tear the building down or save it. James Bowes, the Chairman of the Berkshire County Commissioners, noted interest in the building as "an ideal seat for the Berkshire County Probate Court."[177] However, he thought "the most economical thing would be to tear it down, but if we have to go along with a condition (in the exchange with the city) that the main, or front, portion of it be saved, then we'd save it if at all possible."[178]

It may have been Bowes' comments that spurred the city's preservationists into action. While members of the Historical Commission had long identified individual buildings around Park Square as landmarks, they now worked with the state commission and the Berkshire Historical Society to nominate Park Square as a historical district to the National Registry of Historic Places. Their nomination, which was approved in July 1975, incorporated eight buildings around Park Square, including the Athenaeum, the

[176] "Deeds Register Again Seeks More Space," The Berkshire Eagle, November 26, 1969.
[177] "Bowes Expresses Interest in Saving Athenaeum," The Berkshire Eagle, August 17, 1973.
[178] Ibid.

county courthouse, the old town hall, two churches and three commercial buildings. While the national registry approval listed the historical significance as local, the form claimed national significance, as the park had hosted the first county agricultural fair in the country in 1807.

With the preservationists advocating the registry nomination, a few blocks away, the promise of urban renewal lay wasted. A few major tenants, including the First Agricultural Bank and the Hilton Inn, had moved into the vacated space, and had provided more taxes for the city than all the prior buildings had paid. Still, what came to be known as the "big hole" dominated the landscape west of downtown where 55 buildings had been razed, as plans for a downtown mall remained unfilled. New developers would enter with proposals, only to turn away when their conditions for expanded space or changes were denied. One frustrated developer complained, "The old was holy, and the new was threatening."[179]

Compounding the problem of finding occupants for this barren space was the decline in employment and population in the city. Far from the 1960 Humphrey-McNiff report, which projected population growth reaching 71,000 by 1990, Pittsfield saw its population stagnate for the first time in the decade of the 1960s, with the closing down of the last woolen mills and the continued transfer of GE investments to the south and overseas. The decade of the 1970s, saw the largest decline in population in the city's history, falling from 57,020 to 51,974, reflecting the loss of the transformer business in GE.[180] A crippling strike in 1969 into the early days of 1970 saw the company accelerate

[179] "New Downtown Mall Finally Dedicated," *The Berkshire Eagle*, September 29, 1973.
[180] U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980 Census of Population, Massachusetts, p. 10, http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980a_maABC-01.pdf, accessed 2/2/2014.

its trend at decentralizing plants. The loss of young workers, estimated at almost 9,000 between 1970 and 1985, added to a sense of hollowing out of Pittsfield's downtown economy.[181]

The immediate example of that empty space and controversy over a downtown mall could not have been far from the minds of the city officials and the residents they represented. By 1974, the outlines of a deal emerged, whereby the county would use the property for its Probate Court and Registry of Deeds. Still, a series of complex, sequenced legal maneuvers, involving the library trustees with city, county, state and even federal officials needed to transpire before this could be formalized. First, the library trustees had to fulfill their commitment and transfer the building and property to the city, a move that became complicated as the city spent several years trying to turn the private, self-perpetuating library board into a public board with members appointed by the Mayor. The land swap deal between the city and the county had to be finalized. Bowes and the county commissioners were committed to come up with funding, including tapping into federal sources. Finally the state had to authorize, through legislation, to clarify and approve the entire property exchange. On September 21, 1976, a year after the library had vacated the premises, the city transferred the deed to the county.

With the legal issues resolved, finding the funding to stabilize the building and convert it to a courthouse meant continued political wrangling and further delays in getting any project started. Federal funding would only be available if it did not "replace

[181] June C. Nash, *From Tank Town to High Tech, The Clash of Community and Industrial Cycles* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989), p. 235.

funds already available for a project from other sources."[182] However, in 1975, the state had already authorized a $1 million bond issue proposed by the county, but the county commissioners did not want to tap into those funds immediately for fear of jeopardizing the federal loan. Yet, with the deterioration of the building becoming increasingly evident and urgent, the county decided in December 1976 to borrow against the state bond to pay for design and engineering studies and to conduct emergency repairs. Those included installing supporting braces inside the building for the roof and the large stained glass windows and a prominent brace over the entrance extending onto the sidewalk to prevent further outward thrusts of the masonry work on the arch.

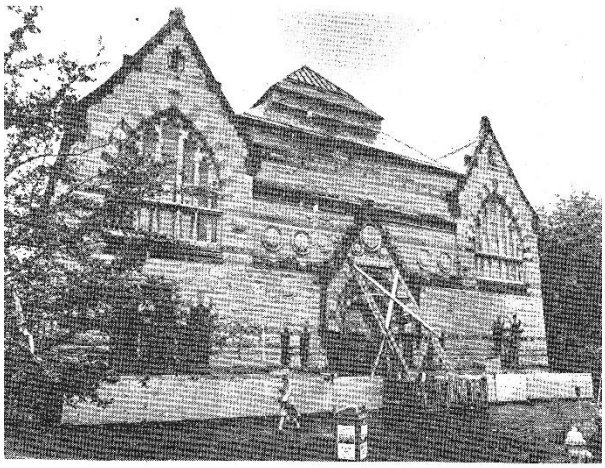


Figure 3.15. The first stabilization repair to the Athenaeum in 1979.
Photo, courtesy of The Berkshire Eagle.

Within weeks, city and county officials learned that federal aid would not be forthcoming, as the renovation of the Athenaeum fell low on the list of the public works approved for Massachusetts. This prompted the county to move in its first meeting in January 1977 to vote in favor of issuing the bonds already authorized by the state. Still, work could not start, awaiting further state legislature approval. The bid solicitation process was contested, and then finally in October 1978, work began amidst concerns that the building could not withstand another winter of neglect.

[182] "Funds for Former Athenaeum Voted Despite Peril to Aid," *The Berkshire Eagle*, December 15, 1976.

Transforming the old library into two courthouses and a registry of deeds required significant restructuring of internal walls. The one staircase to the second floor was removed in favor of two smaller staircases on either side of the entrance lobby. Initial plans for a court room in the 1896 two-story reading room extension were discarded on the grounds that it would be "too grandiose" for a family court.[183] A floor dividing the reading room was built, housing the registry over the court. In addition, a ceiling was suspended on the second floor of the original building blocking views of the skylight. Prominent on the exterior were the steel ties that the 1972 engineering report had recommended to prevent further bowing of the masonry walls on all four sides of the original library building. Repointing of all the mortar of the stones was also undertaken.





Figure 3.16. 1979 repairs. Above, the new second floor holding deed records allows for exposure of oak buttresses. Below, the steel ties, still visible in 2013. Photos, the author.

Just as the final touches on the conversion project were completed in May 1980, James Bowes, the County Commissioner who had been so instrumental in trying to save the building, died. A week later, the commission voted to rename the building, the Bowes Building, in his memory. By August 1980, with the resolution of final space and

[183] "Installation of Floor Favored for Old Library," *The Berkshire Eagle*, October 17, 1975.

furnishings issues, the Bowes Building was ready for its new occupants, the Berkshire County Probate and Family Courts and the Middle District Registry of Deeds.

The trend to abolish county government in Massachusetts reached Berkshire County in July 2000, thereby transferring jurisdiction of the courts and registry to the state and ownership of the property to the state. The new owners became aware of structural issues that continued to plague the building. The roof still leaked despite new flashing installed, so the state set out to replace the slate roof along with the rotted wooden decking under it, to form new internal drains for the points where rain collected at the junction of the gable roofs and hip roof of the central block. In addition, probes discovered rotting of the wood frames of the skylight, so the entire skylight was removed and restored.



Figure 3.17. Removing the skylight in 2001. Photo, courtesy Ron Salice.

While the roof was being replaced, masons noticed gaps in the mortar between some of the stones on the north façade. They filled the gaps with mortar remaining from their work on the flashing and drains on the roof. Thirteen years later, those gaps had reappeared, the most tangible evidence that despite the steel ties from 1980, the walls were continuing to protrude out a little each year. Thus, the stage was set for the Life Safety, Exterior and Accessibility Project that started in August 2013.

For 137 years, the old Berkshire Athenaeum has survived, through a roughly 20-year cycle of construction projects designed to make short-term repairs, but also to correct its original design flaws to allow it to fulfill its library functions for a growing city and stabilize in-built structural deterioration. All buildings require repair and maintenance, yet the repairs to the Athenaeum over the course of its history tried to halt the movement of walls and foundations that threatened the life safety of its occupants. Municipal and library leaders were aware of the structural deficiencies and certainly weighed carefully the option of starting afresh, to the point of public advocacy for its demolition. Yet, the bulding managed to outlast the repeated calls for starting over. The public climate for historic preservation had shifted substantially enough by 2012, when state officials deemed it necessary to undergo another major project to bolster the building. At that point, there was no consideration to demolish the building, and no public advocacy needed to save the building.

# CHAPTER 4

## CONNECTING TO THE PRESENT

### Rebranding Industrial Pittsfield as a Cultural Mecca

The loss of population and employment in Pittsfield continued to take its toll on downtown Pittsfield. When General Electric shut its last factory in 1986, the city lost the employment base it had relied on since the early years of the century.[184] Fewer jobs meant fewer consumers affecting the commercial and residential areas adjoining North Street, the main thoroughfare in the city leading away from Park Square. The vacant lots from the urban renewal of the late 1960s to the west of this downtown core remained into the 1980s. The hollowing out of Pittsfield's downtown was supported by U.S. Census data in 1985 that documented "a 10-year decline for the central business district." Ironically, retail sales in the city showed growth (although unadjusted for a period of sharp inflation in the country,) but they shifted away dramatically from the former downtown shopping district to Coltsville, a suburban neighborhood at the eastern border of the city: "In 1972, downtown had 76.5 percent and Coltsville had 23.5 percent of combined sales of $62.9 million. By 1982, the proportion of their combined business -- grown to $190 million – had shifted to 44 percent for downtown and 56 percent for Coltsville."[185]

[184] When it left Pittsfield, GE was at the beginning of an extended period of investigation and administratively ordered clean-up of the PCBs it had been releasing into the Housatonic River for over 40 years, according to its own annual reports. In 1998, GE reached an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency and state and city officials to clean up the facility and surrounding areas. See "EPA Cleanups: GE-Pittsfield/Housatonic River Site," Environmental Protection Agency, http://www.epa.gov/housatonic/sitehistory.html, accessed 4/13/2014.
[185] Margaret Partridge, "After Decade of Decline, a New Retailing Optimism," *The Berkshire Eagle,* September 9, 1985.

Similar to the "urban renewal" efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, the old Berkshire Athenaeum stood on the periphery of this debate, and yet, its status as a landmark, historic building that had survived continued to contribute to the thinking behind ways to revitalize the downtown area. The historic Park Square district that retained its character as the central draw to the downtown, was surrounded by civic, religious and commercial buildings that had been largely immune from the economic downtown. Unlike the emptied storefronts and boarded-up buildings on North Street, these Park Square structures served as a reminder of a more promising past.

This central issue of a neglected downtown area drew the energy and focus of Pittsfield's municipal, business and civic leaders in the three decades following 1980. In 1983, a group of business leaders with interests in the downtown area convened to form the Pittsfield Central City Development Corporation, in an effort to arrest and reverse the decline of the business district. One of their first acts was to hire Owen Kugel Associates, a Pennsylvania developer specializing in downtown revitalization, to conduct a study of Pittsfield's potential to attract business. That Pittsfield was far from alone in confronting this issue of urban decline in small cities is evident from Kugel's own consulting business that brought in multiple clients from Pennsylvania and North Carolina.[186] He presented a 186-page report to the corporation whose findings included the identification of buildings in the central core that represented commercial potential.

Much of the attention to the downtown area took the form of streetscaping and "beautification" as a way of attracting both business and customers back to Pittsfield's

[186] "Developer Kugel Files in Bankruptcy Court," *The Star News*, December 20, 1987 (http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1454&dat=19871220&id=GztOAAAAIBAJ&sjid=JBQEAAAAIBAJ&pg=3577,1944168, accessed 2/6/2014.)

central core. A group of North Street retailers formed as Pittsfield Downtown Associates, and they lobbied the city to launch their own "Main Street" program, a concept promoted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 1985, the associates sponsored a workshop and invited Richard Wagner, the Director of Urban Demonstration Programs for the Trust, to explain their Main Street Program. Once affiliated with "Main Street," the city supported a façade improvement campaign that provided design guidelines and funding for businesses and developers to rehabilitate their buildings facing North Street. A group of architects and engineers, including Terry Halleck, who had designed the conversion of the library to courthouse space, offered their services voluntarily to those businesses in the downtown that launched projects to upgrade the façades of their buildings.

At the same time, development proposals continued to surface as the city struggled with large re-designs to fill the empty lots and buildings. Mayor Anne Wojtkowski proposed in 1989 a plan to develop a multi-modal transportation hub to the west of North Street, a common space around the new city hall and the conversion of an abandoned cinema into a "Quincy Hall" marketplace. (The former two were eventually completed.) With federal funding, the city was able to provide over $1 million each year to low and moderate income neighborhoods confronted with blight.[187]

In 1993, Pittsfield's planning board released a "Comprehensive Development Plan" whose principal goal was to strengthen the economic sector of the city, including to "ensure that Downtown Pittsfield maintains its traditional role as a regional center for

[187] Lynne Daley, Block Grants Promote Business, Services," *The Berkshire Eagle*, April 8, 1991.

commerce, services, civic life and the arts."[188] Its 35-page report had over 70 different recommendations, ranging from the creation of mixed-use business parks and technical assistance programs for businesses. It cited the need for new zoning laws, as changes in the past had encouraged flight of professional office space to the perimeter areas of the city. Its final pages were devoted to ten recommendations for preserving the city's heritage, including designating new historic districts, providing assistance to encourage reuse of existing buildings that "are often reasonably priced and aesthetically pleasing," continuing cooperation between the Historical Commission and the Office of Community and Economic Development, and building public awareness of the city's historic resources.[189] Scattered in various places was language referring to the need to "promote reuse and redevelopment of existing sites and buildings" and for "repositioning Downtown as a cultural, historic, and recreational center for the region."[190]

The language emphasizing culture in that report picked up the thread of an idea first seen as far back as the early 1980s, mainly that, in the promotion of the arts in Pittsfield, there lay the potential for revitalizing the downtown core. The city's mayor from 1980 to 1987, Charles Smith, gave an initial political push to the role that arts could play in economic development. In his second inaugural address, he highlighted "Artabout," a downtown arts festival in 1980 that "joined the artistic community with the retail and business community to the benefit of all."[191] Smith envisioned a Pittsfield distinct from an increasingly shrinking industrial past to one that took advantage of a prominent,

[188] Pittsfield Planning Board, "Comprehensive Development Plan, City of Pittsfield, Massachusetts," April 12, 1993, p. 5.
[189] Ibid., pp. 33-35.
[190] Pittsfield Planning Board, op.cit., pp.16, 14.
[191] Charles Smith, quoted in Landi, Pamela, "Public Art – Purposes and Benefits: Exploring Strategy in the New England City of Pittsfield, MA," Master's Thesis, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Massachusetts, May 2012, p. 59.

regional concentration of the arts (Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow Dance, Shakespeare Theater) and not just for the promotion of tourism, but also for the quality of life for its residents. Smith appointed his first cultural affairs commissioner in 1985, Kitty Lichtenstein, a local philanthropist who had bought a historic building a block away from city hall to serve as an art gallery.

The city tapped into the expertise at the University of Massachusetts Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning who submitted in 1998 a report which foresaw the redesign of Park Square as a "Gateway" block to the city. The UMass plan allowed for the creation of a pedestrian corridor ending at the western side of the old Berkshire Athenaeum and converting the traffic lines in front of the building to parking, so that traffic would no longer go around Park Square.[192] Integral to this plan was the encouragement of the arts to attract people to this gateway center, through support for festivals, creation of new cultural institutions, and the restoration of the Colonial Theater on South Street as an anchor for the this cultural revitalization of the city center.

The suggestion to restore the Colonial emanated from a group of concerned citizens who launched a formal organization, the Friends of The Colonial Theatre Restoration, in 1996. Built in 1903 at the same time as the museum offshoot of the Athenaeum, the theater closed in 1952, and was sold to a private businessman, George Miller, who cared for the building and operated it as a successful arts supply retail company. In 1997, the Massachusetts legislature allocated $2.5 for the purchase of the property and restoration costs. The project also had the overwhelming support of the community, with an 89 per cent approval, according to a 1998 poll. Impetus came as

[192] D.R. Bahlman, "Plans for Gateway Project Revealed," *The Berkshire Eagle*, October 10, 1998. Scott Stafford, "A Vision for Pittsfield,

well from the federal government, when the National Park Service designated the theater as a National Historic Treasure and First Lady Hillary Clinton visited the building in July 1998.[193] It would take another 6 years of continued fund-raising, legal maneuvering, project design and contract bidding, before ground was broken in November 2004.

The restoration of the Colonial Theater was one of the recommendations as well in a private study commissioned by the city in 1999, the "Cultural Action Strategy, An Arts and Entertainment Economic Development Plan." The strategy advocated the development and heavy promotion of the development of downtown arts district to boost the city's economy, relying principally on tourism, rather than the local market which was deemed "weak."[194] The plan identified a series of "strategic links" for the zone, listing the Colonial Theater only behind the Berkshire Museum in importance to achieving the overall goals. It highlighted the preservation of historic buildings in Pittsfield that "provides the character and image that will be the backdrop for the Cultural Action Strategy."[195] The first structure identified to implement this goal was the old Berkshire Athenaeum, which "represents one the city's finest architectural examples and should be repositioned as a museum or other public attraction."[196] However, before such a step could be undertaken, the city would have to "determine higher use potential and act to relocate the county tenant."[197]

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[193] Berkshire Theater Group, "The Colonial's Amazing History," http://www.berkshiretheatregroup.org/about/history/history-of-the-colonial-theatre.html, accessed 4/11/2014.
[194] Hunter Interests, Inc., "Cultural Action Strategy, An Arts and Entertainment Economic Development Plan," 1999, p. 1.
[195] Ibid., p. 8.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid, p. 63

Perhaps feeding off the public and political commitment of support for the high profile effort to restore the Colonial Theater, various arts projects continued to crop up as grassroots activities, including the Artabout annual events, Berkshire Artisans, a community arts center, a mural project, and the Storefront Artists program started by Norman Mailer's daughter, Maggie Mailer, herself an artist. She worked with downtown landlords to fill their empty office space with temporary artists' studios. When a new mayor, James Ruberto, was elected in 2003, he continued to struggle with the revitalization of the downtown, but saw that "the only element in the community that truly seemed energized was the art community."[198] Ruberto moved early in his administration to take advantage of this energy by throwing his support behind the final phase of the restoration of the Colonial Theater with an infusion of $1 million in city funds, picking up on recommendations in the earlier Gateway and Cultural Action Strategies.

Ruberto's interest in tapping into the arts as a means to revitalize Pittsfield's downtown drew him to a lecture at the Clark Institute, an art museum 30 miles north in Williamstown in January 2004.[199] The speaker was Richard Florida, whose best-selling book, *Rise of the Creative Class*, had been published the year before.[200] The mayor must have heard confirmation of his own thinking on the role of culture in economic revitalization. Florida addressed the transformation in American society since the 1950s, whose "real driving force is the rise of human creativity as the key factor in our economy

[198] Bob Oakes and Lisa Tobin, "Pittsfield, Once a 'Speed Bump,' Now a Destination," WBUR, September 24, 2010, http://www.wbur.org/2010/09/24/pittsfield-turnaround, accessed 2/11/2014.
[199] Landi, op.cit., p.75.
[200] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life* (Basic Books, New York, 2002)

and society."[201] He underscored the need for communities to have "access to talented and creative people (who are) to modern business what access to coal and iron-ore was to steel-making."[202] Florida's ideas found their way into Pittsfield planning documents, when his concept of 'creative economy' first showed up in the Economic Development Chapter of the 2004 Community Development Plan, prepared by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.[203]

Mayor Roberto continued to act on his own cultural inclinations, now reinforced by Florida. In 2006, the same year that the restored Colonial Theater opened, the city council designated the central core as the Downtown Arts Overlay District, "to enhance vitality in downtown by fostering a mix of uses through increasing downtown housing opportunities and fostering arts-related development and activities."[204] That effort earned the city a statewide Smart Growth Award. Later, the city re-branded itself, calling itself "Creative Pittsfield," and displaying signage along North Street to that effect.[205]

The staying power of Florida's influence on Pittsfield's effort to revitalize its downtown is reflected in the city's master plan, "Planning to Thrive," which quoted Florida directly in a section entitled "Seeking the Creative Class."[206] This plan differed from the private study conducted 10 years earlier that advocated for the establishment of an arts district, as the earlier study focused on the economic benefits resulting from

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[201] Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class,* p. 4.
[202] Florida, op. cit., p. 6.
[203] Landi, op. cit., p. 75.
[204] Jim Thierren, "Pittsfield Downtown Arts Overlay District expansion in works," *The Berkshire Eagle,* August 5, 2013, http://www.berkshireeagle.com/local/ci_23795824/pittsfield-downtown-arts-overlay-district-expansion-works, accessed 2/13/2014.
[205] Roll Barresi & Associates, "Creative Pittsfield," http://www.rollbarresi.com/creative-pittsfield-id/, accessed 4/6/2014.
[206] City of Pittsfield, "Planning to Thrive: City of Pittsfield Master Plan," March 2009, http://71.6.170.26/revize/pittsfield/images/downloads/Pages%20from%20Planning%20to%20Thrive%20Final-03.30-Chapter%201-reduced2.pdf, p. 16.

tourism. The city's 2009 plan, however, looked beyond just an appeal for tourism and focused on residents and workers, who can "choose to live anywhere in the world," and whom "Pittsfield must seek ways to attract them to this city – to set up enterprises and put down roots."[207] It cited the many attractive assets, including its "historic and urban character" and refers to Florida's conclusions that "creative and innovative people want to live in centers (that) contain a vibrant, often historic, urban experience."[208] The planning process incorporated significant public outreach and participation, from workshops, surveys that had a 38.4 percent return, interviews and information sessions. Out of this emerged a common pattern of seven themes, one of which called for the "preservation of historic and urban characteristics."[209]

This concerted focus on revitalizing the downtown core began to see some success by the mid-1990s, although some of the pronouncements may have come from a tendency of boosterism from local businesses and politicians, rather than hard reality. Still, by the end of 1996, *The Berkshire Eagle* was proud to report that "thirty-seven new businesses have moved into downtown in the year.[210] Weeks later, it ran a weekend section on the revitalization of the downtown, announcing a reversal of the trend noted in the 1993 Comprehensive Master Plan of empty space above the ground floor of commercial buildings on North Street. Citing a local realtor, the report concluded that

[207] City of Pittsfield, op. cit., p. 1.
[208] Ibid., p.17.
[209] "Planning to Thrive," op. cit., p. 14. Dolores Hayden cites this trend as "notable efforts to integrate the preservation of vernacular buildings with local economic development." (op. cit., p. 53.) Steven Malanga, in a critique, notes that urban planners are "rushing to implement Florida's vision," in places like Pittsburgh, Austin, Montreal and San Francisco. Malanga lists cities with the highest job growth, showing they do not correspond with Florida's cities that have attracted creative clusters. See Steven Malanga, "The Curse of the Creative Class," *City Journal*, Winter 2004, http://www.city-journal.org/html/14_1_the_curse.html, accessed 4/11/2014.
[210] Mary Jane Tichener, "Downtown Effort Accelerates," *The Berkshire Eagle*, December 20, 1996.

"the rental market bottomed out in the early 1990s, but has rebounded."[211] The sharpening of focus is best typified by the new name adopted that same year for the Pittsfield Central City Development Corporation: Downtown Pittsfield Inc. The growth extended into the next decade. Between 2005 and 2010, the city's largest private employer, General Dynamics, added 700 jobs. Its Vice President, Michael Tweed-Kent confirmed both Florida's and Ruberto's assessment on the importance of the arts in attracting workers. Tweed-Kent understood that a focus on the arts by itself doesn't add jobs, but it helps in the competition for talent among businesses, "not only for the employees, the 1000-plus people who work here, to have that kind of richness and culture to go along with what we have, with Tanglewood and the other arts in the area."[212]

By the time work started on the old Berkshire Athenaeum in September 2013, the shift was complete, away from reliance on heavy industry that had characterized the city since the early 1800s to a city using the arts to revitalize its downtown core. With new paving and pedestrian walkways completed the previous year on Park Square and North Street, with the Colonial Theater hosting major arts performances and a restored multiplex cinema on North Street, tangible traces of a turnaround were evident, but still not complete. Focus lay principally on the commercial district along North Street, but certainly the historic architecture and the stability of the urban landscape of Park Square anchored the move to a cultural re-branding of the city.

[211] Susan Etkind, "Upstairs Downtown, Pittsfield's North Street is not as Dead As It Seems, Just Take a Look at What's Happening Above the Street Level," The Berkshire Eagle, !2/8/1996.
[212] Oakes and Tobin, op. cit.

## Coordinating the Complexity of Preservation

The current preservation effort of the old Athenaeum falls principally outside the purview of the Pittsfield municipal government since the building is owned and operated by the state. Still, it is taking place aware of and against this backdrop of the city's new focus on the arts. While the impetus, the funding, the design and the oversight of the work is all in the hands of the state, connecting with the city has taken place through the extensive permitting and inspection processes, through negotiations concerning work approaching city property at the sidewalk, and through interaction with the Pittsfield Historical Commission and its link with the city planning office. As the architect and manager of the project for the state, David Fang, noted, "We knew and commended what the city had been doing to preserve Park Square."[213]

According to Fang, the deterioration on the old Athenaeum first came to the attention of officials from the Division of Capital Assets Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) during a study phase for accessibility ramps on the Superior Court next door to the old Athenaeum. The architect, Bill Gillen, remembered working on the Superior Court next door and the wall of the old Athenaeum looked like it was leaning back 6 six inches; he thought the bulges above either side of the front entrance "frightening" in their

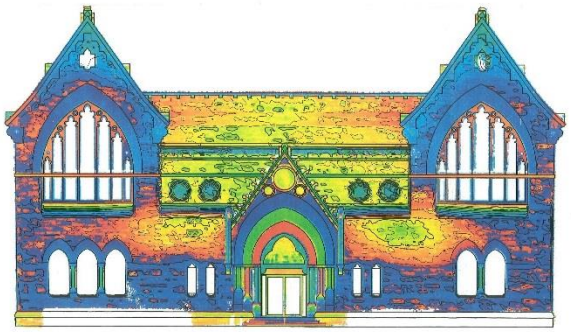


Figure 4.1. 3-D imagery showing masonry bulging (in yellow.) Image by CT Male Associated.

[213] David Fang, interview, February 11, 2014.

instability.[214] The contractor, Mike Mucci of Allegrone Masonry, felt the issue of the movement of the stones on the front façade "had been brewing for years;" architect John Krifka recalls it "started out as a simple repair to the masonry, but upon investigation it was a lot more than that."[215] DCAMM conducted a study using 3-D imagery to determine that "certain areas of the façade had six inches of displacement" of stones away from the back-up reinforcing wall, thus earning the project emergency status.[216] DCAMM initially allocated $1 million for the project, but as the cost passed the threshold, the project triggered accessibility upgrade costs, as new regulations required two accessible entrances for each state building. The decision to rehabilitate or find new space for the inhabitants never seriously entered the discussion. Fang relates that, on an inspection tour of the building, he and several other officials came upon clients inside the Registry of Deeds who saw the hard hats they were carrying. Several of the clients "shouted at us not to demolish the building."[217]

Because the building is listed in both the State and National Registries of Historic Places as one of 8 buildings in the Park Square Historic District, the construction triggered a review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) to determine if any of the plans constituted an adverse effect on the historic property. The Commission cited the section of Massachusetts law that allows for reviews of projects undertaken by a state body. In their review, the Commission identified an adverse effect, and entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance to mitigate that effect. That document stipulated three mitigation measures

[214] Bill Gillen, interview, March 17, 2014.
[215] Mike Mucci, interview, March 4, 2014.
[216] Ibid.
[217] David Fang, interview, February 11, 2014.

which DCAMM would undertake, including changing the railing selected on the accessibility ramps, completing photo documentation of the exterior of the building, and incorporating a photographic display of the building and the current work. The architects had initially planned for a wrought-iron vertical railing, but the MHC thought the multiple post-rails would obstruct the view of the front of the building, so they opted for a horizontal, stainless steel railing, which would leave the stone work behind it more visible. The Commission also recommended that the architects hire a consulting firm that specialized in preservation and could advise them on details related to the masonry work: removal and replacement of the stones, colors and texture of mortar used and structural issues. The firm chosen was Building Conservation Associates (BCA,) a consulting firm based out of New York that "specializes in both the technical and historical aspects of restoring buildings."[218]

Every Tuesday since August 2013, architects, engineers, contractors, sub-contractors, representatives of various Massachusetts agencies and tenants and managers of the Bowes Building have met to discuss work progress, schedule and immediate issues. Attendees drive from Boston, Northampton, Amherst, Albany and Lee to join the Pittsfield residents for the meeting. Spreadsheets of logs for submittals (contractor plans on how work will proceed or materials purchased,) contractor requests for information and decisions from the engineer and architects on products or detailed drawings and change orders are reviewed along with an updated schedule focusing on the three to four week "look-ahead" period. Invariably, each week at least one issue tends to dominate both time and discussion, varying from complicated procedures of mortar testing or stone

[218] Building Conservation Associates, Inc., http://www.bcausa.com/info/about-bca, accessed 2/25/2014.

removal to the bureaucratic necessities of securing state certification for sub-contractors. One DCAMM representative at the meeting is responsible for overseeing the finances – costs and payments – and rigorously questions cost differentials from the original contracts and specifications. The combination of care, oversight, attention to detail and technical expertise around the table that attends to the project allows for a multiplicity of perspectives to solve problems and advance the work. The specialization that cuts across professional and jurisdictional lines makes construction more deliberative and consensual, different from being a contractor on a private site where the contractor is in control of the work, according to Mike Mucci.[219]

One notable aspect for the layman is the level of complexity, not only in the technical aspect of the construction itself, but in the interactions between these various public and private agencies and in the production and flow of paper, especially in comparison to earlier renovations and construction related to the old Athenaeum. William Appleton Potter's original drawings are housed in the Local History Section of the current Berkshire Athenaeum. There are no more than 20 blueprints related to the original construction. According to Tom White, the historical architect at Princeton University where four other Potter buildings still stand, it was likely that the masons in the original construction had little in the way of specification from the architect, so they built in the way they were trained. The bulging of the stone walls, according to him, may have had as much to do with masonry practices at the time as it did to structural deficiencies in the design. The level of detail for each of the subsequent renovation and stabilization projects undertaken at the Athenaeum since the 1890s has increased in

[219] Mike Mucci, interview 3/4/2014.

complexity, many to meet the increasingly technical building codes. Architectural drawings for the current project number into the hundreds, since the original designs are supplemented by updated drawings passed back and forth by e-mail on the most detailed aspects of the project, ranging from the wainscoting in the front entrance of the building to the concrete joints on the accessibility ramps. The book of specifications for each aspect of the contract runs hundreds of pages, filling a large notebook, a copy of which is in the meeting room and regularly referred to in the meetings, in the side-discussions following the meetings and during the week when architects and officials are away from the site. Four to six pages of notes from each of the meeting are distributed, as well as the submittal spreadsheets, which will constitute a detailed, historical primary source record of the project.

Many of the aspects of the current Life Safety, Exterior and Accessibility project on the surface appear peripheral to preservation, but given the age of the building, the historic features inevitably impinge on almost every aspect of the work. Electrical wiring for a new computer room and new light fixtures is impeded by solid brick walls behind the plaster surfaces with limited space to meet the code for current wiring. Loose silt and rubble deposits from earlier construction lay underneath the proposed accessibility ramps providing insufficient stability for the ramps and requiring more extensive foundation work. The placement of a small strobe beacon on the front façade as an emergency alert encounters concerns of impact on historical integrity.

Two core areas of interest directly involve historic preservation: the work on the stone masonry to arrest the bowing walls and the repair of the two large stained glass windows in each gable, also damaged by the movement of the walls. Previous efforts to

arrest, rehabilitate and prevent further wall movement included wrapping the original core of the building with steel ties around the four walls; retrofitting a steel structure to remove weight from the masonry walls by placing steel beams under the roof on top of interior concrete piers; enhancing roof flashing and drainage systems to keep water from seeping behind the stone walls; and shoring up corner foundations between the original building and the addition. Masonry mortar repointing accompanied each of these efforts to repair cracks. In contrast, little as extensive had been undertaken in relation to the stained glass windows, which were cracked in many places and which had short-term temporary fixes, including placement of colored plastic covers over broken glass.

The masonry work is extensive and comprehensive. As Allegrone contractor Mike Mucci indicated, "if all it involved was taking the stones down and re-placing them, this would be fairly straightforward."[220] According to Mucci, removal and re-building of masonry walls on historic buildings is increasingly common. Prior to this project, Allegrone had completed similar stone removals on the restored Beacon Cinema on North Street in Pittsfield and on St. James Church in Great Barrington, where Mucci remembered that the rumble of a passing train caused a large section of stonework on one elevation to collapse. The South Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, that Potter also designed had similar removal work done in 2010. Even with the prior experience, Mucci indicates that the "solution to the Athenaeum is specific to this project," as it involves taking off the masonry from the front elevation and tying it back to the east.[221]

[220] Mike Mucci, Project Meeting, 2/11/2014.
[221] Mike Mucci, Interview, 3/4/2014.

Weeks before starting the removal, Mucci delivered a five-page submittal outlining the method his crew would use to remove the stones. The first step, prior to the removals, involved an extensive documentation procedure. The façade was divided into 4' by 4' quadrants by a series of horizontal and vertical plumb lines. Photographs were taken of each quadrant, and each stone was assigned a number for each lettered quadrant. Each stone was then entered into a detailed, stone-by-stone drawing of the façade identifying each quadrant. The photographs were labeled identifying each stone; for just the east gable, these photographs were part of a 69-page submittal from the contractor.

The week before the removal "demonstration," the architects and the contractor discussed in an hour and half phone call the process with the BCA architectural historian contracted at the request of the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The BCA historian probed each facet of the removal – what tools were going to be used to remove the mortar and loosen the stones; how the stones would be wedged to allow for a canvas strap to be fitted for hoisting by the crane; where, when and how the stones would be cleaned and numbered; where they would be placed and on what material, how they were to be transported to the storage site; what kind of protection the site had to accommodate for the stones; how the stones would be placed at the storage site for later access. Advice on materials – burlap instead of plastic covers, wooden wedges – and avoidance of shaving the stone in removing mortar was underscored.

The first stones to be removed were labeled a "demonstration project," whereby the BCA contractor came up from New York City to observe the work. Final preparations included the removal of mortar samples for testing analysis, so that the replacement mortar would match both in color and texture original mortars. In addition,

Allegrone masons used a metal detector across the gable wall to determine if any of the stones had been anchored during subsequent renovations. Any such anchors would necessitate sawing through the metal to remove any pins anchoring the stones to the reinforcing wall. While metal was detected at various spots along the wall, the initial removals indicated no anchors existed.

The demonstration project involved removing 8 stones in an all-day effort. Snowfall over the weekend delayed the removal by a day, and despite a clear sky, the work started in temperatures below 8 degrees and warmed only to 15 degrees in the afternoon. Starting with the keystone on top of the east gable, three masons chipped at the mortar, loosening the 300 pound stone from its coping stone neighbors joining the wall and the roof. One mason was responsible for cleaning, documenting and numbering each stone once it was lifted, a process that took over 90 minutes for the keystone. The BCA consultant observed the entire process, leaning forward periodically to examine in detail the loosening of the mortar and the securing of the stone to the hoist. Others present at the top of the five-story scaffold included periodically Mike Mucci, the contractor, DCAMM



Figure 4.2. Hoisting the keystone from the east gable. On six stories of scaffolding, an Allegrone mason readies the hoisting system. Photos, the author.

representatives, and masons cleaning up the mortar rubble that fell off the stones. Below, in a heated cab, was the crane operator who communicated via radio with those at the top of the scaffold. The stones were wrapped in plastic and placed on top of a pallet for transport to a site owned by the contractor, covered and out of the elements. Once the stones were removed, the wall of the building was covered in plastic.

With the demonstration confirmed by the consultant and architects, the masons proceeded to move down the east gable removing, cleaning, numbering and matching each stone to the documented drawings and photographs completed earlier. In the process, the steel ties added in the 1979-80 stabilization effort and extending the length of the front façade have been removed and will not be replaced. The original plan was to complete the removal of the east gable, then move to the west gable, leaving as much as possible of the center core of the façade intact. The stones and reinforcing wall behind them in the center were to be repaired in place without removal. This sequencing and repair in place were deemed necessary as the front façade carries the weight of the roof. The contractor had installed a temporary roof shoring system for additional support during the removal. When the façade is re-built, Mucci indicates, "most of the load will be transferred back to newly built structural wall."[222]

The contractor Mucci sees that the key to the structural integrity of the new wall lies behind the stones where he will re-build "a newly reinforced structural wall that meets today's code."[223] That wall is currently deteriorating in some places to the point where masons can reach into the bricks and pull out dust and rubble. As many as possible of the old bricks that are still uniformly solid will be re-used in building the

[222] Mike Mucci interview, 3/4/2014.
[223] Ibid.

back-up wall. In re-placing the stones, steel ties or anchors will be positioned into masonry that connect to the newly reinforced back-up wall, preventing movement away from the building as the two walls will be connected. Special epoxy filled anchors will be used to tie in the stones at the corners and in the center portion where stones were not going to be removed. If the central core of the front façade were uniform, this would be much more straightforward, but as it consists of elaborate arches, with sills, decorative stonework and granite columns, the masons prefer to repair much of it in place. Further complicating the work has been the discovery of rotting wooden support beams connecting to the reinforcing wall from the interior frame that will have to be repaired as well. When the capstones are re-positioned, the contractor will add a "through flashing system," metal sheeting that will, according to Mucci, "be carried underneath the entire capstone, so any water in the back side can't get down into the wall cavity" between the stones and the new back-up reinforcing wall.[224]

The masonry work started in February and has proceeded in sub-zero temperatures with significant snowfalls, while the building remains open to both staff and the general public. In March, as the stone removals were completed on the east gable, the masons were ready to start on the west gable. Before this, they conducted a series of probes in the center to test their plan to repair in place. They discovered that the back-up wall had significantly deteriorated, giving them nothing to support the anchors they intended to install by drilling holes through the exterior mortar. This will involve removal of more stones than they originally intended in order rebuild the back-up wall. As a result, instead of completing work in three stages – east gable, west gable, and

[224] Ibid.

central core – work on the east gable will proceed over into the adjoining eastern half of the central core. Then, once that wall is reinforced, they will move to the west gable and proceed towards the adjoining other half of the center. The contractor Mucci summed up this change to the plan: "This is an extreme job, a great challenge. Every day I see something different than I thought from two days before."[225]





Figure 4.3. Removing the stained glass. Above, Chuck Woodard pulls out a storm window in order to document and then tape the panels. Below, David Guarducci chips at caulking holding the panel to the stone frames. Photos, the author.

Re-laying the stones and fixing them to the support wall will relieve pressure on the stained glass windows as well. David Guarducci and Chuck Woodard are replicating the removal of stone on the front façade with a similar thorough, comprehensive removal, repair and re-placement of the two large windows on each front gable. While the work of the two – stone and glass – is quite distinct, technical procedures of documentation, storage, repair and re-placement are present in each. It is preferable to repair stained glass windows in place, and Guarducci and Woodard note this is what has transpired with previous efforts to

[225] Mike Mucci, meeting 3/18/2014.

repair the glass. However, as is the current status of the Athenaeum, "a window sagging or bulging more than 1‡" (38mm) out of plane has reached the point where it should be removed from the opening to be flattened out."[226] Extensive documentation starts the process with photographs of each of the 23 panels on each of the two gable windows. Identification of broken panes of glass are recorded on drawings of each panel. For the Athenaeum, the deterioration of the windows is extensive. Guarducci and Woodard estimate that more than twenty percent of the panes are damaged – chipped, cracked, or missing altogether – a higher percentage than they normally see on restoration projects.[227] The lead came that ties and holds each pane in place is significantly weakened, requiring taping each panel on the inside and outside so that when the window is lifted out, the entire structure does not collapse. With *in-situ* documentation and taping complete, the ties fixing the panels to horizontal braces supporting are cut. Then the mortar holding each panel to the stone frame is removed; the entire process of removing the 23 panels on the first gable, including the small, round tracery panes embedded in the stone takes a week with three men working full time.

Transferred to the studio, each panel is stored in a wooden crate and shelved until ready for the next stage. Again, documentation starts the next process, where two rubbings are taken of each panel, one for a historical record, and the second as a model on which to rebuild the window. The panel is then dismantled, removing the lead came holding the glass panes together, and the came is disposed of, recycled for future use. (It is the glass itself, not the supporting lead, that has the historical value.) Each glass piece

[226] Neal A. Vogel and Rolf Achilles, "The Preservation and Repair of Historic Stained and Leaded Glass," Preservation Brief 33, National Park Service, http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/33-stained-leaded-glass.htm, accessed 2/21/2014.
[227] Chuck Woodard and David Guarducci, interview 2/20/2014.

is cleaned and laid out back in the storage panel awaiting reassembly. Panes that are chipped or cracked are repaired, but a number are either missing or damaged and have to be replaced. Guarducci and Woodard have stockpiled glass from different eras and can match the texture from the Athenaeum. Harder to match will be the color, even though the patterns were fairly simple, with elaborate design only in the top panels. With panes removed from the lead came, it became clear that the original colors, protected by the came, are quite different from the glass exposed to years of weather and dirt. Woodard will have to stain the replacement glass to match the exposed colors.

With the glass cleaned comes the work of rebuilding the panels. The rubbing taken when the panel first arrived at the studio will guide this process. The rubbing is placed on a wooden board, and the cames are nailed into place so that each piece of glass can slide into the came grooves, laid down on top of their original position as marked by the rubbing. The next came border is nailed into place on the other side of the panes; once all the panes and cames are in place, they are soldered together so that the nails holding the cames in place can be removed. A solid, reinforced panel using the original glass is then ready to be re-placed, back into the opening, on the re-built wall.



Figure 4.4. Stained glass and tracery. The most ornate glass pattern is at the top of each window; here as well can be seen the small, circular stained glass ornamentation that require precise measurement in the re-cast concrete tracery frame. Photo, the author.

A multiplicity of smaller historical issues that have arisen ranging from the front door selection to security screens over the windows on the ground floor. The front door had originally been planned as a sliding door to meet ADA requirements. However, because sliding doors allow for cold weather to enter at the security stations, the architects opted for an outward opening door, that actually better adheres to historic accuracy. The stained glass windows on the second floor have interior storm windows, which will likely be replaced, but the plan for safety screening on the exterior was scrapped, as it was deemed to impair the visual appeal of the windows. The ground floor windows, also stained glass but not being removed, though, will have security screens to prevent access to court offices.

Despite the extensive work over an 18-month period, this project does not incorporate a full preservation/rehabilitation treatment of the entire building. Only the front façade, where the most serious bowing has taken place, is included. The steel ties around the other three elevations will remain in place, and they appear to be effectively arresting the extensive bowing that had appeared in the 1972 engineering surveys. In addition, while the skylight was restored in the 2001 project, it remains covered from the interior with the suspended ceiling added in 1979. Plaster from the walls leading to the skylight has been falling and collecting on the suspended ceiling. The current project will involve a temporary repair to the plaster and a system to catch any further plaster, but re-exposing the distinctive feature of that skylight to the second floor will have to await another preservation effort in the future.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into the full technical detail of the architectural history and preservation of the old Athenaeum. This brief summary is

intended to underscore the complexity involved. The technical details of just the work involving hundreds of pages of drawings and specifications, scores of contractors and hundreds of employees engaged over a period of 15-18 months cannot be easily described in a few pages. However, the complexity extends to the negotiation and communication on a daily basis between the various entities overseeing and implementing the work. An additional layer of complication to both the work and the negotiation of this particular project are the critical life safety issues as both courts and the registry continue to function throughout the length of the project.

Scheduled for completion in the winter of 2014-15, the $4.3 million project does, however, hold out the promise of giving the building an extended life, able to serve as a functional state office building. Future uses may vary, but its unique design, that people interviewed have characterized as "phenomenal," "lovely," and simply "wow," will also be able to continue to serve as a signature on Pittsfield's main square, one that evokes memory to residents and visitors of an age of prosperity, but also of home and community.

## CHAPTER 5

## INTERPRETING THE ATHENAEUM

"Unlike history and memory, the tangible past cannot stand on its own.
Relics are mute; they require interpretation to voice their reliquary role."[228]

If this study had taken place in 1976, on the centennial of the opening of the Berkshire Athenaeum, that Victorian Gothic structure would have stood empty, its contents removed to a new library building on the next block. The overriding assessment of that 100-year old structure and its history would have been one of architectural failure. Almost forty years later, though, the building survives and, from this vantage point, it will continue to survive into the foreseeable future. In a society that prides itself on second chances, the old Berkshire Athenaeum had weathered many attempts to make the structure work for its intended function, until the pressure from frustrated library officials and the prevailing mood in the country pushed the building to the edge of demolition. Yet, one more opportunity remained, another chance to stabilize and make useful this structure so that it could continue to fill one other implicit function that its designer and principal donor also envisioned: a unique, landmark monument standing on the central square, announcing to the visitor and resident that this is Pittsfield.

In that span of forty years, much has changed in the field of historic preservation and in the attitude of the public towards its cultural heritage, both nationally and within Pittsfield. Different owners and different but ongoing uses for the building justify the preservation costs on grounds other than emotional attachment. These changes helped avoid in 2013 the kind of contentious and divisive public debate in 1969 over whether to

[228] Lowenthal, op. cit., p. 243.

finance a new library. Finally, new technologies and methods in the architectural field of preservation make more feasible the decisions and plans to embark on profound efforts to stabilize masonry and repair stained glass. They, in turn, increase the likelihood that such measures will succeed in sustaining the structure for future generations.

Isolating each of the elements that brought the building to near demolition and that have worked to ensure its survival supports concluding interpretations that speak to preservation efforts beyond this one building.

## Function

Almost from its earliest days, the old Berkshire Athenaeum failed to fulfill its intended purposes. Even though the trustees selected as the architect William Appleton Potter, because he had designed other libraries, including Princeton University's, his style focused more on his sense of architectural beauty than function. Large entrance lobbies and grand staircases could handle flows of people, but did not leave enough space to hold books or room for people to sit and read or study. Within the first 20 years, the library had outgrown the space, requiring an addition to extend the building. Despite multiple pronouncements that the library could hold up to 30,000 volumes, the space available for the stacks of books could barely hold its collection of 8,000. An addition helped rectify a design that the trustees called awkward in that library operations were conducted "from the end instead of from the center."[229] Shortly thereafter, more space became available when the museum contents taking up the entire second floor moved to an adjacent building. A second floor to add more space proved insufficient and was removed under Depression-era works. Space constraints became even more pronounced in the post-

[229] William R. Plunkett, letter to Peabody and Stearns, architects, June 29, 1895.

World War II era, with increased demand coming from a rapidly growing population. Repeated re-designs of the interior sought to identify space for new purposes: a children's reading room, the Herman Melville Collection, a music library. After World War II, library leaders clamored every year for a more functional design to accommodate a population that, in the prosperous days of the late 1950s and early 1960s would continue to expand.

During the transition in the late 1970s to a courthouse and registry of deeds, the interior of the old Athenaeum was divided up and re-purposed to accommodate the new functions. The large space is able to meet the needs of the occupants, sufficient for offices and courtrooms. Adding back the floor in the cathedral-like extension not only made the courtroom less "grandiose" and likely less intimidating, but also opened up space for the extensive records available to the public in the registry.[230] The only limiting factor seems to be waiting space for court attendees, who spill over into the corridor and entrance lobby when the court is in session. Even though the current construction project includes upgrades unrelated to historic preservation, reconfiguring the interior space has not featured in this effort. One of the two major issues that the library faced for almost 100 years in terms of a lack of functionality is no longer present for the state in its courts and registry.

**Structure and design**

The other major issue of structural flaws, either in design or workmanship, emerges through an extensive history of engineering surveys and subsequent maintenance and stabilization efforts. From its earliest years, the old Athenaeum showed signs of

[230] "Installation of Floor Favored for Old Library," *The Berkshire Eagle*, October 17, 1975.

water damage necessitating an unending cycle of roof repairs. Settling, bowing of the walls, cracks in the plaster and in the mortar and concrete tracery also recurred, despite repeated efforts to stabilize the building. These issues exceeded normal maintenance and repair on buildings, and raised the costs of library operations for what was essentially a private foundation running the library, but receiving municipal funds. The burdens placed on their budgets from extensive repairs impelled them to call for a new facility as early as 1941, reaching a crescendo in the 1950s and 60s.

When the architects at Ford-Gillen began their work in 2012, they were puzzled by the causes behind the bulging and reached a hypothesis in a design flaw: the buttress support on either side of the openings created for the stained glass windows is not wide enough to carry the thrust of the stained glass window arch.[231] This corresponds to an earlier conclusion from Tim Shea, an engineer who inspected the building in 1972. He told *The Berkshire Eagle* that he found two flaws original to the design: "The brackets (supporting the huge central skylight) were never quite strong enough and put outward thrust on the masonry wall."[232] The addition to the original building caused a second problem, as pressure from a lower cellar in the addition undermined the footings of the original building, cracking the masonry so "that they were no longer able to support the outward movements caused by the big arches over the stained glass windows."[233]

The Athenaeum is not the only design by William Appleton Potter to expose structural flaws. Two of the buildings on the Princeton University campus, Alexander Hall and the Chancellor Green Library, have both experienced load bearing issues. Like

[231] Interview, John Krifka, November 26, 2013.
[232] Grier Horner, "19th century engineering is seen as culprit on Athenaeum's troubles," *Berkshire Eagle*, December 12, 1972.
[233] Ibid.

the Athenaeum, Alexander Hall has a steel ring, but on the interior of its dome, to provide additional support as walls were bulging outward. The trusses holding up the octagonal roof on Chancellor Greene are "right on the edge" of splitting and beginning to separate, according to Princeton's architectural historian.[234] Another early design by Potter, the South Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, also has had its stonework removed and replaced. Several of Potter's other designs, including the Green School of Science at Princeton and the Belleville Avenue Congregational Church in Newark, also incorporated a similar element as the Athenaeum which could have affected the load-bearing structure: "arches which were thinnest at their haunches and deepest at the crown."[235] All these issues in Potter's designs lend support to the conclusion that Tim O'Shea offered in 1972: "they were trying to do something different, and it didn't succeed."[236]

As the current project proceeded, the removal of the stones and inspections of the reinforcing wall system behind the stones have revealed another important contributing factor for the bulging. The original stone wall was placed directly up against a back-up brick reinforcing wall. Since the early 1900s, masonry walls included a cavity to help cushion and move with ground changes, but this one had no cavity. Over the building's history of 137 years, the stones had bulged away from the brick, creating the cavity that was not supposed to be there. The culprit seems to be water.

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[234] Interview, Tom White, November 1, 2103.
[235] Laurence Wodehouse, "William Appleton Potter, Principal 'Pasticheur' of Henry Hobson Richardson,"
*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol 32, No. 2 (May 1973) p. 177.
[236] Grier Horner, *Berkshire Eagle*, op.cit., December 12, 1972.

As early as 1895, complaints of water entering through the roof were recorded, and evidence of water damage to interior plaster walls have resulted in repeated repairs attempting to fix. Water filtered through the tight spaces between the brick and stone, coming from inadequate roof protection, cracks in the masonry due to the stresses mentioned above, and weather pushing through the mortar. This leads to what Mike Mucci, the Allegrone contractor, called the "freeze and thaw" phenomenon, where the strength of expanding frozen water can easily push out stones away from the back-up reinforcing wall.[237] Evidence of water in this cavity between the stones and the bricks is seen in the deterioration of the bricks, which is greatest on the outward facing surface. The sides of the bricks flush against the interior walls are strong and firm, but the sides exposed to that interior cavity are weak enough "to put your hand through."[238] The erosion of this material also fell into the cavity, expanding it over time.

The masons have also discovered that there were no measures put in place mitigating against this phenomenon. They were prepared, as they removed stones, to find metal anchors holding the stones to the support wall, and saw through the metal. However, they found none. Furthermore, there were no "through stones," those turned perpendicular to the wall attaching the outer stone wall to the interior support structure. This discovery lends credence to the views of the architectural historian at Princeton, who indicated that prevailing mason practices may also account for the movement of the stone wall, especially when compounded by the weight of the roof with insufficient support, and the impact of freeze-thaw in the cavity.

[237] Mucci, interview, 3/4/2014.
[238] Mucci, meeting, 3/18/2014.

Arriving at a consensus view on causal factors has reassured the architects, contractors and preservationists that their planned corrections will have major implications for the building and its long-term future. Past efforts focused on the weight of the roof laying directly on the stones, or insufficient buttress strength around the gables, arches and stained glass windows, or uneven foundations and piers, causing settling at the corners of the original building and the addition. Water has been a focus as well, with extensive and repeated repairs to the roof and flashing. Steel ties around the building have helped on the south, east and west elevations, where bulging and settling were most in evidence in the 1970 survey; the steel bands, though, have not been able to arrest the bulging on the front façade, another indication pointing to water seeping behind the stones there. This current project, the first to see the condition of the back-up wall, will allow for its rebuilding with appropriate and reinforced structural supports of columns and piers. Then it will involve the re-placement and anchoring of stones to the back-up wall on almost the entire front facade, holding the promise of an enduring repair.

**Changing climates – internal and external**

An inability to meet the functional requirements of a library and the excessive cost of continued repairs certainly weighed against the survival of this building in the late 1960s. At this critical moment, a referendum to secure city financing for a new library failed, delaying and effectively halting the Athenaeum's inclusion in the broader urban renewal plan. That delay proved decisive. It lasted initially two years before the library's leadership began once again to develop funding streams and political support for a new building, but ones that preserved and handed over to the city the existing structure. However, that pause also gave the building another 40 years, during which time the

external climate, both nationally and locally, changed dramatically in its valuing of historic structures.

The city of Pittsfield reflected the prevailing mood of an optimistic nation in the post-World War II period, especially concerning continued growth and prosperity, with the Humphrey-McNiff planning study estimating the city's growth to over 70,000. Prosperity led to the rise of an automobile culture and resulted in urban renewal plans to re-route traffic around the downtown area and new zoning laws that allowed commercial and professional businesses to relocate to the periphery of the city. Those plans razed 4-5 city blocks and over 50 buildings, intending to replace them with a downtown shopping mall. Modernist architectural styles favored function, efficiency and spare lines, and "eschewed ornament, rejecting what they saw as the frivolous strokes of Victorian and art nouveau styles."[239] These attitudes influenced decisions about the Athenaeum, a building that was old and inefficient, even labeled a Gothic "monstrosity."[240] Library officials were not only aware of plans to replace the Wendell Hotel on Park Square with a 12-story Hilton Hotel and to raze other buildings just off the square; they also drew on the same commissioned plans and studies that incorporated proposals for a new library.

At the same time and in response to the same pressures nationwide for urban renewal and highway construction, momentum built for a reassessment of historic sites, buildings and districts and led to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The delay caused by the failure to secure funding in 1969 to replace the Athenaeum allowed for those new regulations and transformed attitudes to take hold and

[239] Sudip Bose, "What is Modernism?" *Preservation*, May/June 2008, http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2008/may-june/what-is-modernism.html, accessed 3/13/2014.
[240] Willison, op.cit., p. 61.

influence the decision to save the building. When ground was broken for the new library, local preservationists were busy preparing a nomination of Park Square as a historic district, including the Athenaeum as one of eight contributing elements. The nomination was approved in 1975.

In the midst of these changing attitudes towards preservation, the trend in population growth reversed itself and the decade of the 1970s saw the greatest loss of population. The flight of business from the downtown area left a hollowed-out core that became the preoccupation of successive mayoral administrations and civic organizations. As early as the 1980s, a grassroots arts movement in the central core of the city began to make its presence and impact known to those concerned with reversing the decline of the downtown. Since then, various projects, from the Main Street program, façade renovations and tax incentives to the creation of an arts district allowing mixed property use along North Street, built on and advocated for historic preservation in this central area. Planning documents for the city and the Berkshire region incorporate historic preservation as "a tool for economic development, neighborhood revitalization, green building, and landscape conservation."[241] These plans openly acknowledged that they relied on the work of Richard Florida in citing the value of historic buildings to attract a "creative class" and talent to live and work in cities.

By this time, the field of historic preservation had also advanced to a level of professional and technical expertise that methods such as removing and re-placing masonry work on buildings, with stones held in place by hi-tech anchors and epoxy for

[241] The Berskhire Regional Planning Commission, in its most recent 2014 planning proposal, decided to add historic preservation as a separate focus of planning for the first time. See "Sustainable Berskhires, Community Strategies for a Sustainable Future," http://sustainableberkshires.org/#, accessed 3/13/2014.

corner stones and capstones were more commonplace. Guidelines for preservation proliferate from the National Park Service, as specialized consulting firms emerge to fill commercial opportunities. Regulations concerning federal and state reviews of historically-designated buildings have become routine, to the point where thousands are conducted each year in Massachusetts alone.

All these changes – in value and techniques of historic preservation, filtered down to the local level in Pittsfield -- intervened in the years since the 1960s when the library's very existence was threatened. This very different climate accounts for the lack of debate and the straightforward decision-making process surrounding the current construction project.

**Preservation influences**

Critical to the shifting mood among the general public in Pittsfield towards preservation are readily identifiable, and remembered, models and case studies within the immediate experience of the residents. While several new businesses, including the Hilton Hotel and the First Agricultural Bank, moved in to occupy the land vacated by the demolitions in the 1960s, the north side of West Street lay empty for years, with residents referring to it as "the big hole."[242] More specifically, the loss of the railroad station, Union Station, has repeatedly come up in interviews conducted for this study, among residents and officials, reflecting how prominent those demolitions continue to weigh on the minds of both the public and the city leadership, as they have considered the disposition of the Athenaeum. Also raised in those interviews are references to models of successful preservation: the Old Town Hall, the Colonial Theater and the Beacon

[242] Grier Horner, "Urban Renewal Brings Tax Bases to Pittsfield," *Berkshire Eagle*, March 28, 1977.

Cinema. Speakers at the re-dedication of the Old Town Hall in 1970 pointed to the Athenaeum across the park as the next project meriting preservation; the Colonial Theater demonstrated the effectiveness of preservation for the arts revitalization and the Beacon Cinema preservation work was completed by the same masonry firm doing the work on the Athenaeum. Not only do these models of success lie within the immediate memories of Pittsfield officials and residents, they are directly and tangibly tied to the ongoing preservation of the building.

**State ownership**

When Bill Gillen, the architect for the current preservation project, briefed the Pittsfield Historical Commission on the construction plans in the summer of 2013, the room was crowded with city councilors and concerned citizens, the largest gathering for a historic commission memory in recent memory, according to both the city planner and its chair. The crowd was not present to hear about the old Athenaeum, though. They had come for the second part of the meeting, to voice their concerns over a proposal to demolish an old Crane factory warehouse on the eastern border of the city. The Commission denied the permit and opted for a demolition delay, its second in a year after denying another request to tear down an old school building in the downtown area in favor a Dunkin Donuts. The confluence of the three projects, obviously with their own distinctive elements, points up one other factor critical to the survival of the Athenaeum. It is a public building, owned and operated by the state, and the other two properties belong to private owners whose own interests bump up against the interests of the community.

Transferring ownership from the library trustees in 1976 to the city and then to the county was a tortuous legal process that required legislation at the state level and came about only after prolonged wrangling between the city, the county and the library. The building stood vacant during this interval, threatened by neglect. Referring to the architect for the new library building, the local paper reported on the threat: "(Terry) Halleck and others here had been concerned that if rehabilitation of the building kept being postponed the deteriorating structure might fall beyond the point where it could be saved."[243] The county was able to leverage state and city financing to adapt the library building to a courthouse, but, even more importantly, to arrest the deterioration from vacancy and neglect. Once the state assumed ownership with the dissolution of county governments in 2000, it allocated funding for a preservation project to repair the roof and skylight. Within 13 years, the state had returned to tap into its capital budget for the current project. Absent was the need to identify multiple funding streams as had been the case in 1972. Also absent was the divisiveness of a protracted political debate over financing as had been the case in 1969.

Perhaps the absence of debate can be tied to the fact that the project has never been officially considered a "preservation" project; it was called, and justified, as a Life Safety, Exterior and Accessibility Improvement project. The total project cost reaches $4.3 million of state funding. Moreover, the contractor estimates that well less than half of his $2.8 million contract can be specifically tied to masonry and stained glass preservation.[244] The rest is for upgrading electrical work, elevator, accessibility ramps

[243] "Permit Exempt from Federal and State Taxes is Issued to Remodel Library," *The Berkshire Eagle*, 1/1/1978.
[244] Mike Mucci, Interview, 3/4/2014.

and a new computer server room, making this upgrade very affordable, especially when contrasted with the alternative of building new a courthouse and registry. Mike Mucci of Allegrone also reinforces Rypkema's calculation that in preservation projects, labor costs outweigh materials, providing more benefit to the local community. Allegrone is contracting out to as many as 15 different local sub-contractors, and alternating on site every day are at least 5-6 Allegrone employees, as work is sequenced among the various trades.[245]

Thus, the state's ownership of the building has been critical in saving the building and continuing to preserve it. The provisions in both federal and state preservation law that mandate the administration and control of federal and state owned properties may seem minimal and peripheral to the overarching body of cultural heritage outside those jurisdictions, but many of the most significant monuments and landmarks do fall under those jurisdictions. While this increases the importance of public ownership of cultural heritage, it cannot translate into prescriptive recommendations to exclude private ownership for obvious political and cultural tendencies.

**The role of the community**

The state's ownership of the old Athenaeum and control of this project has added a routine, procedural overlay to decisions that in the past caused much divisiveness and delay within the community. This is not to overlook the extensive, protracted interaction between the various state entities involved in this current project: the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance; the owners of the building, the Massachusetts Court System; and the tenant, the Registry of Deeds through its parent department, the

[245] Ibid.

Secretary of the Commonwealth. However, in the process, the local community has been peripheral. In recognition of this, the state has reached out to officials and the broad public on several different levels. First, it had to seek approval for its plans with the city, whose control of pedestrian and auto traffic in front of the building would be affected by the construction. Building permits and inspections proceeded, much as with any other construction project. Secondly, the state has extended regular information updates to city offices, from the Mayor to the city planner and the historical commission, reflecting both courtesy and also consultation on decisions as diverse as placement of emergency lighting on the front façade to archiving documents created during the construction, according to city planner C.J. Hoss and historical commission members Will Garrison and Kathleen Reilly.[246] In addition, efforts to inform the broader public came through public hearings, such as the one noted in the introduction, and through several resulting media stories. Anecdotally, the contractor has noted heightened public interest in the project, from pedestrians passing by and clients entering the building. Finally, this study and the accompanying video had their genesis in the architects' desire to let the broad public know more about this major preservation effort. It was in recognition of this need to educate and inform the public that the agreement between the Massachusetts Historical Commission and DCAMM included as one of three recommendations a display of historic photographs in the interior of the building.

[246] C.J. Hoss, interview, 3/4/2014; Will Garrison interview 3/18/2014; Kathleen Reilly, interview 3/11/2014.

As multiple case studies in the literature attest, community involvement is heightened more so when historic buildings and sites are threatened.[247] This has been the case in Pittsfield recently with proposals cited earlier to tear down the Crane factory and to replace an old school building with a Dunkin Donuts. Even the well-defined historic preservation procedures in the case of the old Athenaeum would have likely resulted in public criticism had a decision been made to demolish the building and start over, according to city planner C.J. Hoss.[248] Still, the professionalization and regularization of historic preservation, while working to save this building again, needs to find a way to mobilize community involvement. The lack of broad public awareness or interest in preservation is not prevalent in the city, given that several groups have formed to save Springside House, an abandoned historic building a mile away from the old Athenaeum. If historic preservation is "not about buildings but about people," as Massachusetts Historic Commission representative Chris Skelly stresses, then the involvement of the public has to occur even when no building is threatened.[249]

**Memory and attachment to place**

This amorphous "community" is already involved in a more abstract manner in its identification of the Athenaeum as a landmark attached to memories, individual and shared memories of working, living and visiting Pittsfield. Interviews nearly all use the word "unique" to describe the aesthetics of the building - its distinctive blend of triangles, arches, round and square stained glass windows, horizontal lines; its siting on the central

[247] Verrey and Henley, quoted in Conde, op. cit., p. 10. See also earlier references to cases such as the Old Post Office in Washington DC, the Hancock House in Boston, Maxwell Street and the Mecca in Chicago.
[248] C.J. Hoss, interview 10/31/2013.
[249] Chris Skelly, Presentation before the Western Massachusetts Historical Commission Coalition, Springfield, MA, December 9, 2013.

square and at busy intersections; its grand, cathedral-like entrances and interior. These contribute to evoke memories of shared experiences, from public ceremonies in the square to the ordinary, daily circulation around it and in front of the Athenaeum. Its history as a public library, and all the associations connected to that function, help shape the story and identity of the community: a free service started, in Thomas Allen's words, to help save the nation. Intended by its benefactors but also used fully by its patrons in a growing, largely working-class, and heavily immigrant community, to offer educational opportunities, it fulfilled the functions of a public library as envisioned in the Massachusetts library law, passed in 1851: "universal diffusion of knowledge among the people must be highly conducive to the preservation of their freedom, a greater equalization of social advantages, their industrial success, and their physical, intellectual, and moral advancement and elevation."[250] Above all it was a busy, active and social place, with records showing continual growth and pressure on the limited space. Even up to its final years, patrons -- like Kathleen Reilly, who studied there every day after school as a high school student in its last years -- remember it as a traditional, quiet library, but full, busy and social.[251]

Left open is how memories of this building and its contributions to community identity will change as the function for over 30 years now has been a courthouse and registry of deeds. With the general public entering for different purposes and screened for security (unlike the current library,) shared memories related to function will undoubtedly diminish, but remain for its aesthetics and siting.

[250] Quoted in Ditzion, op. cit., p. 18.
[251] Kathleen Reilly, interview, 3/11/2014.

The urban historian Dolores Hayden outlines concisely the traditional uses of historic preservation, but implicitly criticizes those limitations: pride in a nation of immigrants, examples of stylistic excellence, adaptive re-use, and use of historic buildings for local economic development.[252] The story of the Athenaeum touches on each of these. Even though her focus is less on grand architecture and more on the vernacular in architecture, the old Athenaeum as a free, public place continues to contribute to how this community tells the story of its past and shapes its identity. The story of the Athenaeum for the city speaks to eras of growth and prosperity, of immigration and industry, as well as to eras of decline and flight and of efforts to revitalize and attract people and industry. This is a narrative not unique to many parts of the country, especially in Massachusetts and across the old industrial northeast.[253] What is unique is the building itself, its history and its ability to connect to the future.

## Preliminary Recommendations

That this case study reflects so many different elements in the field of historic preservation implies that insights gleaned here carry broader implications for application within Pittsfield and beyond. What follows is a list of preliminary recommendations, many of which reinforce and expand on procedures many jurisdictions already have in place.

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[252] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place, Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995) p. 53.

[253] In *The Lowell Experiment, Public History in a Postindustrial City* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2006) Cathy Stanton describes many of the same historic trends and challenges facing Lowell, Massachusetts with the benefit that the National Park service has readapted the mills for use as a museum. Likewise, Richard Florida in *Who's Your City?* refers to the loss of population in cities like Pittsburgh that have a "wonderful mix of natural features and industrial age buildings," similar to Pittsfield. (Kindle location 1858.)

- Delay - Delaying the decision to rebuild the library from 1969 to 1972, in this case unintended but effective, has been incorporated in many municipal ordinances through demolition delays of 6-18 months. The transition from library to courthouse took more than this and argues for longer delays, though they are rarer in the state.
- Continual use - The continued occupation and re-use of the Athenaeum mirrors the motivation behind the Historic Curatorship Program which the Department of Conservation and Recreation in Massachusetts exploits in its program to lease unoccupied buildings in exchange for maintenance and restoration upgrades. It applies only to buildings that that agency operates, but such a program could be extended to other state and even city-owned properties.
- Financial incentives - Public ownership of historic buildings, in this case particularly, aided its survival. Most structures, though, are privately owned, and run up against issues of control and market forces in regards to the disposition of the property. Obviously, states and localities cannot buy up these properties, but they can provide incentives to re-use and adapt. Tax credits and loans for historic renovation projects are available, but there is a need for further incentives to support private owners to take full advantage of the benefits which investors made years ago in the initial construction. Pittsfield has adopted a Downtown Arts Overlay District to provide for more flexibility to adapt historic buildings within that district for mixed use purposes, to encourage continued use of empty buildings. The Community Preservation Act passed in Massachusetts in 2000 allows localities to set up dedicated funds from a small increase in taxes to devote to preservation and the state has a matching fund to aid preservation projects. Currently 147 communities in the state have signed on to

the act and set up funds, but Pittsfield and many other large locales have not yet done so.[254]

- Community participation - Passing ordinances that create a local preservation fund or extend demolition delay periods requires community involvement to push elected representatives to provide both incentives to preserve and disincentives to build new elsewhere. Building into preservation a role for the community is, as Dolores Hayden, acknowledges "an emerging area of interdisciplinary work," and one for which there are no "simple guidelines."[255] Sherry Arnstein identifies levels of community participation, reserving harsh criticisms for those token efforts to involve community groups without delegating some level of control.[256] Many programs and models appear in the Massachusetts Preservation Plan, but most are aimed at the professionals and individuals and groups already involved in preservation. To the credit of many involved in the current Athenaeum project, they are aware of the need for efforts at informing and educating the community about its status, its purposes and its benefits. The opportunity made available to this author, an architectural layperson, to shadow the project from its beginnings, has opened up what could be most fascinating aspect of educating the community: a first-hand look at the challenges of removing stone and stained glass, an appreciation for the workmanship involved and for the adoption of technical solutions to problems that to the layperson seem insurmountable.

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[254] Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Plan 2011-2015 (Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston, 2011) p. 35.
[255] Hayden, op..cit., 76.
[256] Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, *The City Reader* (Routledge, New York, 2011)

It is understandable from both a safety and technical expertise perspective the state officials and the professionals on the site need space away from the public to complete their work and to deliberate on proposed methods. However, incorporating broad, authentic community participation can build more extensive public support for preservation in general, including providing the support needed to secure public financing, through such programs as the Community Preservation Act. Informing the public through a study such as this is a beginning, and will continue following the conclusion of the thesis. Enhancing community participation beyond this level, though, in a project as technical as this, and managed by state authorities, though, has so far been elusive. The case of the effort to save Springside House, just down the street from the old Athenaeum can be instructive, as citizens met at the end of March 2014 and discussed a range of options for uses of that building, prior to any preservation undertaking.

The value that public historians could bring to a field so highly specialized and routinized as preservation may be in the outreach to and involvement of the community. Interpretations would open up for communities opportunities, as David Glassberg advocates, "to see what ordinarily cannot be seen; not just the memories attached to places but the larger social and economic processes that shaped how the places were made."[257]

[257] Glassberg, op. cit., p. 162.

# CHAPTER 6

## A PROVISIONAL EPILOGUE

The original schedule for the current preservation project extends to December 2014, well beyond the deadline for this academic study. That timing makes any epilogue only provisional, necessitating still another one, to be completed later perhaps, but unlikely under the current academic calendar. This study, though, will inform a planned video documentary of the project where that final chapter will be written/screened.

When this study was first envisioned, its scope included one objective (to promote community awareness) and one question (to identify the reasons for the bulging of the walls, despite repeated efforts at repair.) The decision to undertake a research study did not necessarily hold out the prospect of promoting public awareness, except through the video documentary mentioned above. The architects certainly had viable hypotheses for the bulging, noting that William Potter's church in Springfield had undergone similar problems and repair work. Early on in the research on the building, though, frequent references to structural problems and space inadequacies appeared, going as far back as 1895. This resulted in a new focus for the research: to identify why the building was still standing at all, given these serious problems and the clamoring voices to tear it down over a 20-year period. Examining the nationwide urban renewal effort and its local manifestation in Pittsfield underscored just how close the Athenaeum came to demolition, both in terms of geography and in the planning considerations. The prolonged and divisive debate over securing financing to replace the library proved unsuccessful and delayed the decision, allowing for the loss of the other buildings to urban renewal to sink in and build a case for no more high-profile demolitions. When a proposal for a new

library building re-surfaced in 1972, no one was arguing to demolish the Athenaeum, even if the negotiations to identify alternative uses were difficult.

Thus, the survival of the Athenaeum seemed secure, and the research could then focus on other issues. With the decline of the city's downtown core, the study turned to trying to determine the value of the Athenaeum and of historic preservation in general to the city's revitalization. At first it seemed minimal, since the building was off the main commercial area, and, as a courthouse, it would not attract either customers or business, much as the preserved Colonial Theater and Beacon Cinema were capable of accomplishing. Upon discovering the city's overt acknowledgement of following a path laid out by Richard Florida in trying to provide the environment to attract a "creative class," the value of the Athenaeum became clear. Less explicit, were the sentiments of interviewees who often echoed regret over the loss of the railroad station and the value of the Athenaeum as a permanent reminder of their attachment to this city.

Then, towards the end of the research period, as the preservation work on the building was proceeding, the issue of the very survival of the old Athenaeum reappeared. As briefly described earlier on page 107, the gradual removal of the stones across the front façade revealed more significant deterioration of the back-up brick wall than previously thought. This brought the work on the façade to a halt in order to re-examine the sequence of removals and re-building. Concerns over the support of the roof and the pressure on the remaining wall has been, at this writing, the focus of examinations and consultations between the architects, engineers, contractors, preservation consultants and state officials.

Such an occurrence may take place with any extensive construction project, as unforeseen circumstances arise during the course of the work. The technical work of historic preservation adds to the likelihood given the structural issues hidden behind walls or the unusual and uneven workmanship. Indeed, one participant at the meeting noted that the goal of fixing the bulging was always structural, not aesthetic, allowing that it may not be possible to make the wall level, but only "pleasing to the eye."

While the survival of the Athenaeum is still not in doubt, despite the challenge that this repair represents, this unexpected situation does highlight the precariousness of our cultural heritage. At this writing, one option for the repair of the brick wall behind the stones may involve reaching the bricks from the interior of the building, preventing further removals of the stones. Still, this current impasse provides one more palpable example, if it was needed, of the complexity of such an undertaking. It also shows the lengths that the collective of state officials and private professionals are going to save this building.

Unstated in all the discussions, because it does not need to be, is the importance of this monument to the city and to future generations. As residents and visitors walk and drive by the building, they will likely not appreciate the extent of the current challenges in its preservation, or its history of structural problems and its near demise. That knowledge is not necessary, though, to appreciate its status as a unique signature for the city, a recognizable feature that lends a sense of attachment and place to the community.

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