



LOS ANGELES

CONSERVANCY

news

AWARENESS
ASSISTANCE
ACTION

VOLUME 33
NUMBER 6

NOV | DEC 2011



The 1929 North Spring Street Viaduct (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #900). Photo © Douglas Hill.

Innovative Solution Proposed for North Spring Street Viaduct

by *Adrian Scott Fine*

If a historic bridge is widened and substantially altered, and it no longer looks like it did when it was built, is it still a historic bridge? That is the fundamental quandary the Conservancy has been grappling with regarding Los Angeles' extraordinary collection of historic bridges. An innovative approach has come together for one bridge that could serve as a test case and ultimately have broader implications for preservation down the road.

The 1929 North Spring Street Viaduct has been a major advocacy issue for the Conservancy for years (see cover story, July/August 2010). Its proposed widening has garnered much public attention in terms of how to balance historic preservation principles with engineering and traffic standards. In this case, a compromise has emerged that just might satisfy both.

Fourteen bridges within the City of Los Angeles, built between 1909 and 1938, are designated as Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCMs). Like many of the city's bridges, the Beaux Arts-style North Spring Street Viaduct (HCM #900) was built during the era of the City Beautiful Movement. Its design sought to complement the classical motif of the adjacent 1910 North Main Street (HCM #901) and 1911 North Broadway (HCM #907) bridges.

Though they form a significant collection, each of the Los Angeles River bridges is unique, with a distinct character and specific preservation challenges. With the North Spring Street Viaduct, the City's Bureau of Engineering (BOE) seeks to make seismic retrofits while

Please see VIADUCT on page 6

Kronish House Saved from Demolition

by *Cindy Olnick*

The Kronish House has dodged the wrecking ball! Facing imminent demolition mere months ago (see cover story, September/October 2011), the highly intact home in Beverly Hills has been purchased by a buyer who intends to restore it.

This outcome is a testament to the very hard work of many people, the willingness of the City of Beverly Hills and the owner to give preservation a chance, and the power of public support. To everyone who wrote a letter, attended a hearing, made a phone call, or spread the word about the plight of the Kronish House, THANK YOU! Your efforts made a crucial difference.

Designed by modernist master Richard Neutra and completed in 1955, the Kronish House is one of only three Neutra designs ever built in Beverly Hills, and it's the only one that remains intact (one was demolished, the other completely altered). It spans almost 7,000 square feet on a nearly two-acre lot at 9439 Sunset Boulevard (it is not visible from the street).

The home was sold in a foreclosure auction in January 2011 for \$5.8 million and placed on the market in April for nearly \$14 million. Over the summer, the owner began the demolition process by applying for a permit to cap the sewer line.

The Conservancy, its volunteer Modern Committee, Dion Neutra, and others launched a range of intense advocacy efforts. Nearly

Please see KRONISH on page 4

I N S I D E

Conservancy News	2
Preservation Issues in the News	3, 6
Programs	4
Volunteers	5
Membership	7



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The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works through education and advocacy to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

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Conservancy News is published bi-monthly.
Printing: Jano Graphics

Thanks to the Getty Research Institute for access to the Julius Shulman photography archive.

Mitch Bassion Joins Conservancy Staff as Director of Development



We are very pleased to welcome **Mitch Bassion** as the Conservancy's new director of development. In his fifteen-year fundraising career, Mitch has acquired experience in every major component of a development program. Mitch is a Philadelphia native and relocated to Los Angeles in 2007 to work for Los Angeles Opera. He served as a senior member of its development team, focusing on leadership gifts. Mitch previously worked for prominent cultural organizations in Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Seattle. He has found a home in Los Angeles and has developed a deep respect for its rich history and diversity.

As director of development, Mitch will oversee all contributed revenue from membership, major gifts, and special events. He is excited to help increase the Conservancy's base of supporters and advance the extensive programs that connect Angelenos to the community. Please join us in welcoming Mitch to the Conservancy family. Adrienne Kisson continues at the Conservancy as development manager, where she will focus on working with Cornerstone members, planning events, and writing grants.

Connie Humberger Retires from Conservancy Staff

After twenty-four years on the Conservancy staff, our volunteer coordinator, **Connie Humberger**, retired in October. Connie started volunteering with the Conservancy in 1984 as a walking tour docent and joined the staff in 1987. She was a member of the original volunteer committee for Last Remaining Seats, now one of our signature programs. It's impossible to mention all of Connie's contributions to the Conservancy over the years, but perhaps the most significant is building such a large, strong, and dedicated group of more than four hundred volunteers. We asked Connie to reflect on her time here, in her own words (see page 5). We can never thank Connie enough for all she has done for the Conservancy and for preservation in Los Angeles. To say we will miss her is a tremendous understatement. We wish her a wonderful, well-deserved retirement—and we know she will always be part of the Conservancy family.

Karina Muñiz Leaves Conservancy Staff

We also bid farewell to **Karina Muñiz**, who left her position as community outreach coordinator in October. In her three years on staff, Karina assisted members of Latino communities, built relationships with neighborhood organizations, and encouraged a dialogue with Latino residents to help identify and protect significant cultural resources. She was instrumental in securing official recognition of the former Self Help Graphics & Art building; organizing Los Angeles (LA) Conversación, a dialogue with local community leaders engaged in Latina/o cultural heritage; co-founding the Eastside Heritage Consortium; and fostering crucial relationships with residents of the Wyvernwood Garden Apartments. Karina is relocating to San Francisco to pursue writing and consulting on interdisciplinary projects that involve historic preservation, urban planning, cultural work, and place-based storytelling. We will miss Karina, but we wish her all the best.

Thank You to Longtime Member William Ziegler

The Conservancy offers our deepest thanks to longtime member **William Ziegler**, who recently donated more than 200 books to the Conservancy's library (which is open to the public during regular business hours). The books range in subject matter from Los Angeles history, to Los Angeles and California architecture, to art and design. We greatly appreciate his support of, and wonderful donation to, the Conservancy!

Preservation Issues in the News

by Flora Chou, Adrian Scott Fine, Karina Muñiz, and Marcello Vavala

For more information about these and other issues, please visit our website at laconservancy.org.

Historic Post Offices

The Conservancy and others are working to protect historic post office buildings throughout Los Angeles County. With an annual operating deficit of more than \$8.5 billion, the United States Postal Service is calling for the closure of nearly ten percent of its 32,000 facilities nationwide. This translates to more than a hundred sites in California—around thirty in Los Angeles County, a number of which are in historic buildings. Two specific sites currently threatened are a 1939 post office at 313 Grand Boulevard in Venice and a 1938 facility at 3270 Firestone Boulevard in South Gate.

Wyvernwood

At press time, we were anticipating the release of the draft environmental impact report (DEIR) for the \$2 billion mixed-use development that would replace the 1939 Wyvernwood Garden Apartments in Boyle Heights. The public comment period for the DEIR will likely be forty-five days; it may end before you receive your January/February 2012 newsletter. If you'd like to comment on this project and stay informed on this issue, please visit our website and/or subscribe to our Preservation Action Alerts (see "Sign Up for E-News" on our home page).

533 South Broadway

In August, a 1931 building at 533 South Broadway in downtown Los Angeles received a dramatic, and illegal, facelift. Portions of the second-story marble façade (remodeled circa 1944), including a prominent *intaglio* (engraved design) of a classical maiden, were removed without permits. The building's owner received a stop work order, and the matter is currently under review by the City. The structure is part of the National Register-listed Broadway Theatre and Commercial Historic District. This incident has renewed



LEFT: 533 South Broadway with portions of the marble façade removed. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy. RIGHT: This *intaglio* (engraved design) of a classical maiden was removed from the center of the façade. Photo by Annie Laskey/L.A. Conservancy.

discussion of stiffer penalties and procedures to address the illegal demolition or alteration of historic structures in L.A. The office of City Councilmember José Huizar is coordinating a working group (including Conservancy staff) to develop policy recommendations.

East Los Angeles Survey

In October, the Eastside Heritage Consortium released a community-based survey of historically and culturally significant sites in unincorporated East Los Angeles. More than two hundred people participated in the survey, which identifies over twenty sites, including the former Self Help Graphics & Art building (1927), Golden Gate Theatre (1927), and Anthony Quinn Library (1914).

The Consortium formed in 2010 to help preserve significant places throughout East Los Angeles. The group includes the Conservancy and local historians, cultural workers, preservationists, and community activists. The Consortium now aims to develop a framework for a potential community preservation plan, including the creation of an East Los Angeles heritage trail.

Papoo's Hot Dog Show

A fixture of Riverside Drive in Burbank for sixty-two years, Papoo's Hot Dog Show closed in August after being purchased by a

new owner who plans to redesign the building for a new restaurant. The Burbank eatery opened in 1949 as part of a chain of small walk-up food stands; it later expanded to include interior dining space. Its eye-catching façade was designed to mimic the curtained proscenium arch of an Old West vaudeville show. The Conservancy's Modern Committee and several community members have urged the new owner to preserve the building's unique character while renovating it for new use. The wood-and-neon hot dog from the façade, as well as the restaurant's distinctive pole sign, have been removed and are in safe hands with the Museum of Neon Art.

Maravilla Handball Court

The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery soon may be officially recognized as a cultural landmark in East Los Angeles. In late September, the Conservancy and the Maravilla Historical Society (MHS) nominated the site for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. The County Historical Landmarks and Records Commission reviewed the nomination in October; it will go before the State Historical Resources Commission early next year. Thank you to the MHS volunteers and to Shannon Davis of ASM Affiliates, who donated extensive pro bono work for the nomination and the site's Historic Structures Report.

KRONISH continued from page 1

600 letters and e-mails to the City of Beverly Hills made all the difference in buying much-needed time for the house.

At a City Council meeting on August 2, the Conservancy strongly urged the Mayor and City Council of Beverly Hills to take action as soon as possible to prevent the imminent demolition of the Kronish House. The City negotiated with the owner to delay demolition until at least October 10.

Without the leadership of the City Council in securing this delay, the Kronish House would have been demolished in August. We are grateful for the City's willingness to stand up for the preservation of such an important architectural resource at a very critical point.

With the clock ticking, the Conservancy and many others focused our efforts on finding a buyer for the home. Interest in the house increased considerably, and the realtor representing the seller worked hard to meet with all potential buyers and showcase the unique value of the property.

As the October 10 deadline passed, the preservation community grew increasingly concerned about the likely imminent demolition of the home. Fortunately, final talks were under way with a buyer who had come forward with an interest in restoring the home.

The sale price was reported as \$12.8 million, though the name of the buyer had not been disclosed as of press time. As details unfold, we will post updates on our website at laconservancy.org.



Historic view of entry by Julius Shulman. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Used with permission. Julius Shulman Photography Archive, Research Library at the Getty Research Institute (2004.R.10).

Do You Believe in Santa Claus?

Miracle on 34th Street is coming to town! First presented by the Conservancy in 2006, the holiday classic *Miracle on 34th Street* is returning to Broadway on **Sunday, December 4 at 2 p.m.** Starring Maureen O'Hara, John Payne, and a very precocious and skeptical nine-year-old Natalie Wood, this 1947 film has remained a beloved seasonal favorite for well over sixty years.

The real star of this holiday event may well

be the theatre in which it is presented: the beautiful **Million Dollar Theatre** (1918)! The first of Broadway's true "movie palaces" was designed by Albert C. Martin and features ornate terra-cotta exterior sculptures by Jo Mora. The interior, designed in an opulent Spanish Baroque style by William Lee Woollett, originally seated 2,300.

The matinee screening offers a perfect way to kick off the holidays. Bring family and friends, come early or stay late, do some holiday shopping, go ice-skating at Pershing Square, dine at downtown restaurants, and enjoy a special discount from nearby Grand Central Market!

Tickets for this special event are \$15 for the general public, \$10 for Conservancy members, and \$5 for children 12 and under. For details, tickets, and a special discount offer, visit laconservancy.org. Special thanks to the event sponsor, Bank of America. Happy holidays!



Edmund Gwenn as Kris Kringle and Natalie Wood as Susan Walker in the 1947 classic *Miracle on 34th Street*. Film still courtesy Twentieth Century Fox.

Help Preserve the City You Love: Give a Gift Membership

Looking for that perfect holiday gift this season? Share your passion for architecture and history by giving a Conservancy gift membership to a loved one!

Each gift membership comes with all the benefits of a one-year Conservancy membership, plus a voucher for two to enjoy any of our regularly scheduled walking tours.

In addition to keeping your friend or family member up to date on preservation issues in Los Angeles County, your gift will add to the Conservancy's strength in numbers. Each and every membership contributes directly to our mission of protecting and revitalizing Greater L.A.'s historic resources. Support the Conservancy this holiday season by giving the gift of membership!

To purchase gift memberships, please visit laconservancy.org or call (213) 430-4201. Thanks, and happy holidays!



Photo by Larry Underhill. Bow by Tom Davies.

Connie Humberger, in Her Own Words

As told to Cindy Olnick



Photo by Andrea Humberger.

After twenty-four years on staff, our volunteer coordinator, Connie Humberger, retired in October. Connie has made an immeasurable impact on the Conservancy, particularly in building such a large, dedicated volunteer corps. We asked Connie to reflect on her time here and offer some parting words.

What was the Conservancy like when you first got involved?

When I started as a volunteer walking tour docent in 1984, the Conservancy office was a closet with a phone and an answering machine. The membership records were kept on index cards in a shoe box!

How has the Conservancy changed since?

The biggest change is in the size of the staff, membership, and volunteer corps. When I look around and see all the people and all the things that get done, it's very exciting to see.

How has historic L.A., or people's appreciation of it, changed?

I had the privilege of growing up in downtown Los Angeles, which I remember as very vibrant and alive. Then I saw it decline as people moved away after World War II. But I've been fortunate enough to be downtown for many years since, to see it slowly climb back and become vibrant in a different way.

What specific fond memories do you have of working here?

It's quite exciting to see the groundswell of support when there's a very prominent advocacy issue—when a threatened building is a favorite of the citizens of Los Angeles. The

rallying of troops, letters of support, attendance at hearings, when so many people come together to try to save a particular building. Sometimes we win, and sometimes we don't. But it's exciting to be part of it.

Any misadventures?

You know, the best-laid plans... Once, we had arranged to use a schoolyard for special tour parking. We'd made all the arrangements, checked and double-checked. On tour day, we arrived to find the gates locked and no one there! And this was before cell phones. We were running around, looking for phone booths, climbing fences, talking to neighbors, doing anything to find the school principal! We finally found her just as the tour guests started to arrive.

In all you've seen and done at the Conservancy, what are you most proud of?

The big moments—finding a new owner for [the former Cathedral of] St. Vibiana, helping return the fixtures to Bullocks Wilshire, the major issues. I'm even proud of efforts that didn't succeed, because I know everybody tried their absolute hardest. Personally, I hope I have respected our volunteers. That was a goal of mine—to enjoy working with them and to support them, but also to respect each one of them.

What sets Conservancy volunteers apart from others?

I've never seen such a talented group of volunteers. Their passion, enthusiasm, dedication, longevity, and diversity (particularly in terms of age) all set them apart.

What advice do you have for the Conservancy going forward?

I'd want the Conservancy to continue working for laws to protect historic properties, partnering with other groups, and supporting other preservation organizations.

Any specific plans for retirement?

I really haven't thought about it yet, but I'm sure it will include volunteering for the Conservancy!

Volunteer Profile: DON SOLOSAN

by Connie Humberger

Meet DON SOLOSAN, the man behind many of the images you've seen of (and at) Last Remaining Seats (LRS)! A member of the Historic Theatres and Last Remaining Seats committees, Don has spent countless hours behind the scenes taking photos,



Photo by Larry Underhill.

producing videos, and creating photo/storyboards to promote LRS and other special events.

A native of Michigan, Don joined the Navy after high school, starting with the "Smoking Tigers" squadron in Key West. He deployed aboard the USS Enterprise and visited Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, and the Philippines. He later analyzed reconnaissance photography for the Fleet Intelligence Center for Europe and the Atlantic.

With an academic background in screenwriting and film production, Don came to Los Angeles, where he wrote screenplays and worked on commercials, music videos, and a TV pilot, among many other pursuits.

After taking a Conservancy walking tour, Don bought a digital camera and started to document historic Los Angeles. He developed a passion for historic downtown, particularly the Broadway movie palaces. Don shot hours of footage at this year's LRS, creating a series of terrific videos on YouTube.

Missing the green of Michigan, Don is taking a hiatus from Los Angeles to spend time in Seattle. We'll miss him, though we look forward to his return—there are more historic buildings to photograph!

VIADUCT continued from page 1

enhancing traffic separation and access for pedestrians and bicycles. The solution most often suggested for addressing these issues—with the North Spring Street Viaduct and elsewhere—is to widen the existing bridge substantially. Yet can this happen while retaining the bridge’s authentic character?

Well, it depends. Opinions vary across the country, and no one seems to agree on a single approach. Unlike historic buildings, which can be successfully adapted, retrofitted, and even added onto—all while maintaining their eligibility as historic resources—preserving historic bridges requires more creative thinking.

The Issue in Brief

The BOE first proposed to retrofit and widen the North Spring Street Viaduct in 2006; the plan lingered without any action until March 2010. Since then it has undergone an accelerated environmental review process on an extraordinarily fast timeline, due in part to secure federal Highway Bridge Program funding that would otherwise be lost.

The BOE proposed to widen the bridge by approximately forty feet (twenty on each side) to accommodate new eight-foot-wide sidewalks, five-foot-wide shoulders, and a center median with left-turn lanes at each end. As originally conceived in design and scope, this plan would likely have destroyed the North Spring Street Viaduct’s eligibility as a historic resource.

Initially, the Conservancy advocated an alternative that would leave the historic bridge intact and construct a stand-alone pedestrian crossing alongside it—a strategy that has succeeded elsewhere across the country. The BOE ultimately rejected this option, partly because this type of approach would not qualify for available funding. The BOE proceeded with the environmental impact report (EIR) at a rapid pace, much to the anger and frustration of people concerned about the bridge. Adding insult to injury, the EIR failed to consider a single alternative that would maintain the bridge’s historic status. Conservancy members and supporters came out in full force, responding to our action alerts with

more than seventy letters to the City and speaking against the proposal at public hearings.

A turning point came in December 2010, when the project was brought to the Mayor’s Design Advisory Panel for review. Panel members strongly supported the preservation of the North Spring Street Viaduct and criticized the widening proposal. The panel directed the BOE, bicycle advocates, and the preservation community

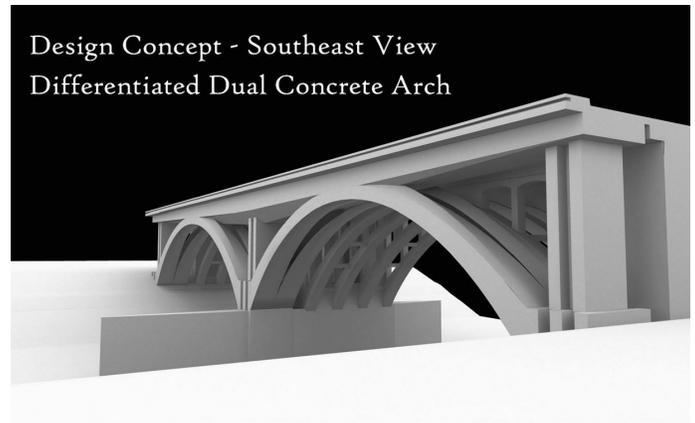
to work together to develop a more creative approach that would not irreparably harm the bridge or jeopardize its eligibility as a historic resource.

What a Difference a Year Makes

Since then, the project has evolved considerably. The new proposal would widen the bridge by around half of the original plan (twenty-one feet instead of forty), and it would widen it on only one side, to the south. This approach meets all minimum traffic and safety standards and still allows for dedicated pedestrian and bicycle access.

While the scale of the widening was reduced greatly, the design treatment for the bridge was still very much an issue. Initially, the BOE presented a design that would replicate (or otherwise imitate) all the design features on the south side of the bridge.

Whenever possible, the Conservancy aims to ensure that rehabilitation projects meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. The Standards are national principles for preservation that are often used to help guide projects to make sure changes are done in a way that retains a structure’s eligibility as a historic resource. While the Standards are somewhat subjective and they set forth no definitive approach for bridges, any alterations or modifications should generally be differentiated from the original so that they



Under the Bureau of Engineering’s current proposal, the north side of the North Spring Street Viaduct would remain intact (see cover photo), while the south side would be expanded with a new, subtly differentiated design, such as the one in this preliminary rendering (courtesy of the BOE).

do not present a false sense of history. The design should also be implemented in a way that is reversible, so that it could be removed in the future without impairing the essential form and design of the original bridge.

The Conservancy opposed the initial “full replication” design based on our opinion that it would not meet the Standards. Fortunately, the BOE was very responsive to the concerns of the Conservancy and the broader community, as well as to guidance from the Mayor’s Design Advisory Panel and the office of City Councilmember Ed Reyes, whose district includes the bridge.

The plan now calls for a subtly differentiated design for the south side of the North Spring Street Viaduct. Instead of being replicated at a wider scale, the bridge would stay original on the north side and be widened on the south side with a new, yet compatible, design. The new design features a more modern, articulated double-arch span that complements the original north side.

Pending further refinement, this innovative design approach appears to meet the Standards. According to the BOE’s preservation consultant, the design would likely retain the bridge’s status as a Historic-Cultural Monument—which is the Conservancy’s primary goal. The result of much community input and participation is a design for the North Spring Street Viaduct that reflects out-of-the-box thinking, and perhaps a path for moving forward on other bridge projects currently in the works.

AUGUST 3 / SEPTEMBER 30 MEMBERSHIP REPORT

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We greatly appreciate your ongoing support of the Conservancy through your annual membership. As you plan your year-end giving, we'd appreciate your consideration of an additional gift of any amount to the Conservancy's **Preservation Advocacy Fund**.

We created this fund in 1996 in the wake of one of our most controversial, costly, and ultimately successful preservation battles: halting the demolition of the 1876 former Cathedral of St. Vibiana and preserving its landmark status. Since then, the Preservation Advocacy Fund has become a crucial resource to sustain the Conservancy's advocacy efforts.

Your support of the Preservation Advocacy Fund will provide an extra gift, above and beyond your membership. This additional support will help us respond to issues such as ongoing threats to historic resources posed by developers who are seeking project approvals now, in order to act quickly once the economy rebounds.

To contribute, please visit laconservancy.org or call (213) 430-4204. We thank you for your generosity and attention to the key preservation issues that help shape Los Angeles' cultural legacy.

**CONSERVANCY
WALKING TOURS**

Walking tours begin at 10 a.m. except where noted. Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; \$10 for the general public. Walk-ins are accepted on most tours. Pre-payment is required on Angelino Heights, Biltmore Hotel, and Broadway. For reservations, visit laconservancy.org. Questions? Call the Conservancy office at (213) 623-2489.

WEEKLY TOURS

Art Deco

Every Saturday

Biltmore Hotel

Every Sunday, 2 p.m.

Broadway: Historic Theatre & Commercial District

Every Saturday (except 11/26, 12/24, and 12/31)

Historic Downtown

Every Saturday

BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS

Angelino Heights

First Saturday

Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main

Second and Fourth Saturdays (except 12/24)

Downtown's Modern Skyline

First and Third Saturdays

Union Station

Third Saturday (special tour 12/24)

Youth, family, and group tours by arrangement; call the number above for information.



Los Angeles Conservancy

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UPCOMING EVENTS



Larry Underhill

AT HOME WITH HISTORY TOUR
Sunday, November 6
Mid-City

Visit six private homes in "the trip-let," three adjacent mid-city historic districts: Country Club Park, Wilshire Park, and Windsor Village. For details and tickets, visit laconservancy.org.



Courtesy Twentieth Century Fox

MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET
Sunday, December 4, 2 p.m.
Million Dollar Theatre

Ring in the holiday season with the Conservancy at our annual holiday matinee. Join us for a screening of the 1947 classic *Miracle on 34th Street* at the beautiful 1918 Million Dollar Theatre. See page 4 for details.



Larry Underhill

**NOW IS THE TIME TO ORDER
THE PERFECT HOLIDAY GIFT**

For holiday gifts that make a difference, consider giving a Conservancy membership. They're easy, affordable, and instrumental in protecting and preserving our rich architectural heritage. See page 4 for details.