

A PASSION FOR PRESERVATION

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*This is only the second occasion on which I've presented a paper at Athenaeum, both of which have been out of order. The first occasion was the result of an emphatic request, and this time (against the advice one gets in the military about doing it) I volunteered. With any luck this will put me at the very bottom of the list.*

*For my first paper I was resolute about preparing something other than a topic that related to my chosen field of endeavor. But, it's the second time around, and the gloves are definitely off.*

So, tonight we enter the wonderful world of architecture and look at - among other things - some remaining key monuments in our City, that are gateways to both our past and our future - which fortunately to date have been preserved for us and future generations. We will further examine the reasons that these structures are important, and should continue to be preserved.

With 67 years of observation under my belt, I've come to the conclusion that many successful professionals had an early fire in the belly about their chosen life's work. Most, if not all of you in this room I'm sure can readily identify with that condition. This passion can be all consuming, and at the very least sets one on the path to his or her major and minor life achievements.

In my case it started very early and was, is, and most certainly will remain architecture. From the earliest moments that I can recall, I've been fascinated by beautiful historic homes, churches and commercial buildings. So far as churches go, I was fortunate to spend every Sunday of my

formative years at Grace Episcopal Church - an outstanding example of neo Gothic architecture - with a hammer beam ceiling, rose window (and at that time) a marvelous circular stair to the balcony in the left section of the narthex. Sadly this wonderful stairway was abruptly removed when I was still a child.

We knew Nell Winfree, whose home - the 1835 Temple Form, Greek Revival building known as Lone Oak - is now my place of residence.

I was there frequently in my teen years because Nell's grandson ran in our crowd - and had to be collected and delivered weekly, as he had no car.

Lone Oak is one of only three known examples of the Temple Form Greek Revival Style to ever have been built in Hopkinsville. The other remaining example is the Dillard House, formerly Gordon Cayce Antiques and now Planters Bank. Both of these homes were from separate pattern books of New York architect Minard LaFever. The third house, torn down around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was the F. C. Sharp house on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, off of Walnut.

When I was quite small and we would drive by Lone Oak I'd repeatedly ask my parents why the windows upstairs didn't match the ones downstairs. (I'm sure they thought that I was a ripe candidate for early admission to Western State.) The ready answer is that two rooms were added upstairs in 1880 above the principal downstairs rooms, and the new owners - the Hickman family - simply purchased 4 pane Victorian windows that were easily available at the time - instead of having custom 6 over 6 sashes made which would be in keeping with the original downstairs windows.

During my university days I contemplated going into law (too much Perry Mason perhaps), and in fact majored in Political Science as a prerequisite - which featured one or two law courses. I must say that I was enthralled with that experience, and it was a strong #2 choice.

Persuaded instead by a close friend who said “all you ever talk about is old houses” I chose ultimately to enroll at Parson’s School of Design in New York and make design and preservation my career.

In that context, in 1966, I decided to make a run to the top and sought a position at the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, when Robert R. Garvey was at the helm. I was readily accepted, and thought (while still in school) that my career pattern was set. However, then President Lyndon Johnson ELIMINATED funding for the arts as a line item in the National budget, and I got a call from Richard Howland at the Trust informing me that I still had the position - but there would be no money to pay me. I responded that “my parents forgot to be rich” and I would therefore have to make other plans.

I stayed on in New York for 40 years, and seven of those were spent at Theo. Hofstatter (new York’s oldest design firm). Following that experience, I formed my own company. During the ensuing 33 years, whenever possible, I took jobs that involved restoration work on old houses, apartments, banks and other commercial buildings. The place that I attained in my profession was suitably rewarding and opened up many new worlds, ones that I never even dreamed existed. And that is what I hope to do here tonight - open up new worlds - regarding Hopkinsville’s architectural heritage.

When I returned, and made Hopkinsville my home in 2006, I was at liberty to pursue what I like to think of as my second career - historic preservation.

At that time Lone Oak was derelict and in eminent danger of being lost. The costly and year long process of making it habitable as my new home was begun. Next, my attention turned to the Carnegie Library - which many if not most of you in this room are only too familiar with from your school days.

By looking back at where preservation has been (in the scope of things) we may be able to provide a key to where, hopefully, it is going.

In Europe, the idea of preserving one's architectural past has always been much more engrained in the public mind that it ever has been in the United States. The National Trust for Historic Preservation wasn't formed in the US until 1949. While throughout the ages there have always been vest pockets of preservation minded people and organizations, preservation as a serious undertaking didn't really take off in America until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Preservation now co-exists in the context of the "gen y" age we live in, as so vividly outlined for us last December in a paper by Jason Powell.

It will be incumbent upon us in the future to mesh with this group as we move forward.

In Lexington alone, in the recent past, a number of historically significant Federal blocks were leveled - this in spite of the fact that Kentucky's pre-eminent architectural historian, Clay Lancaster, was an active preservationist, and had been in their midst for years.

For much of my life, whenever I saw some building of architectural merit falling by the wayside, I quickly and conveniently blamed the local, state or federal government or some developer for this horror.

Like King Lear who was taunted by his Fool for getting old before he grew wise, I have since come to realize that the real fault is the fact that preservationists haven't ever and still don't get the message out. In short, the general public has never been exposed in school or elsewhere to the importance of their architectural heritage.

Identifying the architectural style of a house, I hasten to add, is not rocket science. With very little tutoring anyone can easily recognize and subsequently appreciate the merits of any of our major architectural styles. The most important result of this kind of education for the general public is that it will allow concerned citizens to rise up *en masse* when important landmarks that are part of our cultural heritage are endangered.

I know of no house museum in the US, no matter how well run - as many of them now are - that gives the visitor any information on the architectural style of the house itself. And worse still, a number of them - which sadly includes Federal Hill (that we know as My Old Kentucky Home) - now look like a New York Decorator's showcase instead of a historic private home. Houmas House, near New Orleans (where Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte was filmed) has likewise been tarred with the decorator's brush - so much so that I feel no need to ever return.

The education of the public who visit historic houses and public buildings is a project that I am directing my attention to, and I've had substantive conversations with the directors of both Wheatlands - the 1827 Federal home of President James Buchanan in Lancaster, PA - and The Hermitage about this subject. Howard Kittell, the Hermitage's new director, is most sympathetic -and soon I will be discussing with his staff the prospect of having a fold out sheet available to every visitor which simply tells the architectural story of the house. It's an interesting story.

The Hermitage was built in the Federal style in 1819, and substantially remodeled in 1831. A subsequent fire caused the house to be partially rebuilt and remodeled from 1834 to 1835 in the new and *now* popular Greek Revival style.

The Hermitage is a great teaching tool, because both upstairs and down of the left side of the entrance hall everything is in the Greek Revival mode (this was the damaged area of the house) and on the right exclusively Federal. If you stand outside at the left corner of the front of the house, it is quite obvious that the massive columned porch and the frontispiece of the dining room are later additions.

Run by the Ladies' Hermitage Association since 1889, The Hermitage is America's second oldest house museum. Mount Vernon was the first. It is interesting to note that we had these two prominent house museums up and running long before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Architecture is of paramount importance because it is the only visible link with our past. It's just as important as our dna or genealogy. It's a visible record of our past achievements. Consider for a moment the devastating and irreplaceable loss if Notre Dame, St Peter's in Rome, St Paul's in London, the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, The White House, The New York

Public Library or any of Hopkinsville's still existing important residential or commercial buildings were to suddenly disappear. It can and does happen in the twinkling of an eye. To date Hopkinsville has only 25% left of that which should have been preserved.

Here in Kentucky we were most fortunate from 1917 until Christmas day of 2000 to have with us gathering and spending (mostly gathering in his case) the pre-eminent architectural historian Clay Lancaster. Like our own William Turner, he began in childhood to collect pictures of old homes. He also photographed extensively and made detailed sketches of Kentucky's vanishing past. He chronicled all of this information and produced a number of important books - my favorite being *Antebellum Architecture of Kentucky*. As with Mr. Turner in Hopkinsville on the local level, his photographs of the middle and eastern part of Kentucky ARE the architectural record we have, and without his contributions there would quite simply be nothing.

Clay Lancaster's home Warwick, a unique Federal structure, is now open to the public in Mercer County. It would be a wonderful detour on your next trip to Lexington.

In Hopkinsville, having lost 75% of the residential and commercial architecture which should have been preserved, it is of vital importance for those who come after that a concentrated effort be made to save what's left.

In this context, I think of the analogy of abused, neglected or abandoned children. If you have ever worked (as many of you judges, lawyers, child protection agency personnel and I have done) with these children you know only too well that all you have to work with is what's left of

the child's psyche. You can't bring back what has been destroyed. Architecturally speaking, the 75% loss factor is enormous here.

A major and dangerous misconception about preservationists is the idea that we wish to preserve everything in sight that is old, and we are sometimes therefore eyed with suspicion - and in rare cases even dreaded.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. If it's old and ugly ... let 'er rip! My classic and often used example of this is our own Abbitt Hall at Grace church. Built around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as our Rectory and later the Sunday School building when I was growing up, it had no architectural merit either inside or out. It was just plain ugly viewed from any angle. Its former location has given way to a functional open space behind the Church, which now includes a columbarium (or resting place for those departed from this life in their faith and fear).

What should be preserved are the numerous buildings that have architectural merit or are in some way inextricably a part of the fabric of the community ... or both, as in the case of the Carnegie Library.

The Carnegie Library served our community from 1914 until 1976 when the community outgrew the facility. Off and on the building lay dormant, and rapidly deteriorating until October of 2008, when it was taken over by a 501 c 3 corporation. It is currently being restored.

To date, the funding received for this project totals just over \$65,000 and has come exclusively from private sources. \$500,000 is needed to bring the building up to code. Grant money is currently being pursued, and when the facility reopens it will be as a multi purpose cultural facility.

Its principal function will be what its title suggests - The Hopkinsville Carnegie Library of Kentucky Architecture. It will be a repository for books, pictures, drawings and models of Kentucky architecture, and its architects. There is no other facility of its type in the State, so when it is up, running and receiving materials, researchers will be drawn to Hopkinsville. As one Kentucky historian recently put it, "we have just as much good architecture here as in Virginia, but without the attitude".

In Philadelphia, the Athenaeum is devoted strictly to period architecture. They have an average of 100 people visiting their important historic landmark building every day, and about 10,000 people daily log onto their website. These two quite impressive figures indicate that throughout the country there is viable interest in the subject of historic buildings, their builders and architects.

While we don't anticipate 100 visitors a day or 10,000 people on our website, the Carnegie Library will be a viable and exciting cultural addition to our City. It will also encompass a gallery space - with exhibitions that change every 60 days (thus 6 exhibit's a year), be a lecture facility and performance space. It had, and will have again, a stage on the first level where recitals can take place. Marshall Butler still remembers performing there in his youth.

In addition, a one-on-one after school tutoring program is being formulated to assist students with their writing skills. Staffed principally by retired teachers, it will accept students who are willing and anxious to learn and have at least one parent who is committed to the program.

Before we examine some of our Hopkinsville buildings there are a few names to ring in your ears. We have already mentioned Clay Lancaster, Kentucky's pre-eminent architectural

historian, and I run it by again, as it is a name every Kentuckian should have in the memory bank - drawing interest.

Gideon Schryock - a native of Lexington - is another icon in the annals of Kentucky architecture. He designed the old Capitol building in Frankfort, and was Kentucky's most influential architect from 1827 until 1837.

The granddaddy of them all however is Benjamin Henry Latrobe. British born, Latrobe was America's first professionally trained architect. He designed the first Greek Revival building in America, the Bank of Philadelphia in 1800 - thus ushering in, however slowly some 20 years hence, the Greek Revival period in America. Pope Villa in Lexington - a neo Palladian house thought to be his best domestic work - is currently being restored. William Strickland, who designed the Capitol building in Nashville was a disciple of Latrobe.

Briefly there are three American periods in architecture that predate the Victorian, in which the buildings we look at tonight are lodged.

The English Georgian Period from 1700 to roughly 1800 was the basis for our principal "Colonial" designs. Mount Vernon built in 1743 falls into this category, as does Locust Grove from 1790 in Louisville, and two others in a brochure in front of you.

The Federal period goes from roughly 1795 through the mid 1830's, and in Kentucky notable examples are the 1795 Federal Hill (my old Kentucky home), the 1814 Hunt Morgan House in Lexington, Farmington in Louisville (1815) and the late Federal Orlando Brown House in Frankfort dating to 1835.

The Greek Revival period stretching from 1820 - 1860, only began to pick up speed in the mid 1830's. Two of the most important Greek Revival houses in America are the Biddle home Andalusia near Philadelphia (1811 - 1835) and the Hermitage in Nashville, home of our 7<sup>th</sup> president Andrew Jackson (1819-1835). Both of these houses were actually Greek "revitalized", having started out life as Federal homes.

You have at your table this evening two brochures, one of which is a list of historic homes that are open to the public in the State of Kentucky, where you will find a number of the homes mentioned above.

The other is a downtown walking tour brochure produced jointly by the Carnegie Library and the Christian County Historical Association.

Please take special notice of the labyrinth, which was recently installed in the space in front of Grace Episcopal Church. It is for the use of all Hopkinsville and Christian County citizens.

*Another like brochure is currently in the works, which will be a downtown walking tour of private homes.*

Six buildings of particular interest in your walking tour brochure are the Sudden Service Station, The First Presbyterian Church, the Pennyroyal Area Museum, the Cumberland Telephone & Telegraph building, the Court House and the Alhambra.

The Sudden Service Station is an odd survivor, which was moved from its original location at 12<sup>th</sup> and Main. It is a good candidate for restoration in terms of its condition, and restoration is in fact currently being contemplated.

The First Presbyterian Church is what I like to call Presbyterian Gothic, simply because (although not a recognized architectural term) that's what it is. If one looks at period American churches long and hard enough, it becomes fairly easy to examine a particular building and by its architecture alone determine the denomination of the church.

The Pennyroyal Area Museum in the Classical Revival style was erected in 1913-1914 (at the same time that the Carnegie Library went up). What a big deal that must have been to see two major structures in close proximity going up at the beginning of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reminiscent of the splendor of classic Greece and Rome.

This reversion to classical forms came about at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a direct result of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. World Fairs have dazzled audiences since their inception, beginning with London's Great Exposition of 1851 ... but the Chicago World's Fair (or the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893) outshines them all. It's twenty eight million visitors saw white buildings that stretched a third of a mile. It also housed the world's first Ferris Wheel. The architectural impact of this event stretched well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Pennyroyal Area Museum's design can be directly attributed to it.

Hopkinsville's only Flemish Renaissance building, the 1903 Cumberland Telephone & Telegraph building on East 9<sup>th</sup> Street, is of a rare gable end façade design, and arguably

Hopkinsville's most sophisticated commercial building. Mercifully it has been well preserved and it remains in very good condition.

Our Court House (the third on the site) was begun in 1867 and completed in 1869. I refer to this style as Victorian Neo Classicism, because its first and foremost it is Victorian, as evidenced by its date and long narrow Victorian windows. The overall effect however is that of a neo-classical structure, with its Ionic columns, pronounced pediment, rusticated stone work, pilasters and decorative cornice. Over time it has had two cupolas (the second of which is now gone), and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (unfortunately) the original interior was completely removed - including the grand staircase - and replaced with something else. It appears on page 173 of 1978 Horizon Press book - *Court House*. Of all of the courthouses in America from which to choose, the photographer Richard Pare must have considered our Courthouse as something special.

The Alhambra Theater building was the first in Kentucky built from a union of funds from the City, County and State. It was appropriately named the City County Building. The 1928 interior was of a style popular just after the turn of the century, reminiscent of the interior backgrounds in silent movies. A friend of long standing refers to this period as "early reign of terror." As originally built, the theater entrance was in the second bay from the left and had a prominent marquee. In less than a decade, the Art Deco style - made instantly popular through the movies - had taken hold here and the entry we see today was installed.

Hopefully this new look at what is hiding in plain sight will awaken sleeping flavor (as the food ads say) and more importantly interest in our local architectural treasures.

*When each of us contemplates what his or her individual contribution to the future will be, the ability to come to an intelligent decision emerges through looking at the past. In every culture, surviving architecture - more than anything else that springs readily to mind - is the visible and most enduring link with history. From the Pyramids to Paris to Philadelphia - AND HOPKINSVILLE - we can still today (all over the world) walk where great civilizations flourished and still see some (and in some cases much) of what they saw.*

## **SOURCES**

**Antebellum Architecture of Kentucky, Clay Lancaster**

**Court House, Horizon Press, Richard Pare**

**The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Fazio/Snadon**

**The World's Columbian Exposition, Bolotin & Lang**