

“ *Pittsburgh’s Civic Arena ... is a dramatic symbol of the re-visioning and rebirth of the city in the 1950’s and 60’s; it’s transformation from a polluted industrial city to a spectacular new metropolis. It is unique in the world for its ingenious retractable stainless steel roof, built of the material most associated with the City of Pittsburgh.*

— Frank E. Sanchis III, Program Director for the United States, World Monuments Fund

## CURRENT PROJECTS

1

### Civic Arena

As you may be aware, Preservation Pittsburgh has advocated for the Civic Arena, including a better public process and government transparency, on many fronts spanning many years. In July, Preservation Pittsburgh filed a federal suit over the Civic Arena *process* (go to [www.preservationpittsburgh.org](http://www.preservationpittsburgh.org) to see the press release).

Though Preservation Pittsburgh’s request for a preliminary injunction to halt Civic Arena demolition was denied, our federal case was not dismissed from the appeals court. Preservation Pittsburgh received good news in late October when the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals denied the Sports & Exhibition Authority’s motion to summarily affirm the lower court’s dismissal of our case. The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals will therefore consider the merits of our appeal and will hear our case. If we win the appeal, then the case goes back to District Court and we can make another request for an injunction to halt further demolition. This time, we would have a better chance of getting the injunction. Thus, we have an active legal case pending and are waiting for our day in court!

Our federal suit boils down to holding our government accountable to existing preservation law. The heart of our case surrounds the fact that \$28 million of federal funds have been requested to redevelop the Arena site. Because the Civic Arena is eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Sports & Exhibition Authority must conduct a proper federal review before demolition. However, since the federal funds have not yet been approved, the Sports & Exhibition Authority feels that it can legally proceed with demolition. At the same time, the Federal Highway Administration failed to warn the SEA that demolition could jeopardize future federal funding. This case could be precedent setting in that it provides a loophole for government agencies to demolish historic structures. In a recent *Post-Gazette* article, Mark Belko reported that the city might call the Arena site blighted to seek federal funds. This story certainly confirms suspicions that the Sports & Exhibition Authority would try to flout the spirit, if not the letter of the Historic Preservation Act!

Though demolition is proceeding, we believe it is still prudent to proceed with legal action.

**CURRENT PROJECTS (CONTINUED)**

2

**The Former St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church, North Side**

A building's adaptive reuse is sometimes a long process that can take years to develop (the Armstrong Cork Factory lofts, Pennsylvanian, and Bakery Square all sat vacant for years but now have found a new purpose).

For more than 10 years, Preservation Pittsburgh has worked collaboratively with Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation and more recently the North Side Leadership Conference on St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church, North Side. The scope of the project is not limited to the church but also has saved approximately 50 homes on Troy Hill, will connect to the river trail, and avoid an unsightly Penn DOT concrete retaining wall in favor of the green hillside. A feasibility study found that turning the St. Nicholas into a national immigrant museum and a trailhead for the river trails is a very viable option.

At the Historic Review Commission (HRC) meeting on August 3, the Catholic Diocese asked for permission to demolish the church due to safety reasons. In 2001, the City of Pittsburgh designated the church as a city historic structure and thus the Diocese needed HRC permission to demolish the landmark. Fortunately, St. Nicholas and surrounding buildings were extremely well constructed by architect Frederick Sauer in 1901 and are suffering only from a lack of maintenance over the past six years since the Diocese took over management from the former congregants. The buildings were found to be structurally sound in the feasibility study by Astorino Architecture Engineering Interior Design in October 2009. Experts on both sides gave their opinion on the condition of the church and whether it poses any real safety threat. Given the complexity, the HRC tabled the final decision until their September 7<sup>th</sup> meeting where they denied the Diocese's demolition request.

Following this decision, the Diocese's requested permission to demolish St. Nicholas Church due to economic hardship. At the November 2 HRC meeting, many objected to this request including State Representative Adam Ravenstahl and City Council President Darlene Harris. The hearing was continued to enable the HRC to obtain more information. Testimony is being accepted until the December 7 meeting when the HRC may decide to announce their decision.

3

**August Wilson House Receives PHMC Grant!**

Preservation Pittsburgh recently received a \$5,725 grant from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission to write the National Register nomination for the August Wilson house in the Hill District. Preservation Pittsburgh and the Daisy Wilson Artist Community will provide pro bono time and marketing assistance for the proposed community education event tentatively scheduled for spring 2012 (possibly to correspond with Wilson's birthday or as part of National Historic Preservation month).

**WE ENDEAVOR TO BE A RESOURCE, NOT A ROADBLOCK!**

1

**Consulting Party Work**

Did you know that Preservation Pittsburgh is increasingly asked to be a consulting party on bridges, buildings, and other projects? We are currently a consulting party to the Buncher Corporation's proposed plans for the Produce Terminal building in the Strip District, which is going through a Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation code. The first meeting with consulting parties was on August 15 and more updates will follow.

2

**Preservation Pittsburgh Book Donation to University of Pittsburgh Library**

Preservation Pittsburgh donated its collection of books that were bequeathed by the late founding member Roy Lubove to the University of Pittsburgh library where they will be more accessible to the public. Topics include urban planning history and theory from the 1970s and 80s.

3

**University of Michigan Masters of Urban Planning Student Visit**

In September, students from the University of Michigan's masters program of Urban Planning met with Preservation Pittsburgh board members for a presentation and tour of past and recent preservation projects. Sites visited were the Civic Arena, Market Square, the Alcoa building, and Mellon Square. Preservation Pittsburgh board members were greeted by highly inquisitive and bright students with an overall interest in the city's urban planning and preservation ideas. As an advocacy group concerned about the future of our city, Preservation Pittsburgh strives to educate and involve the next generation in preservation advocacy. Thank you to all those who attended!

4

**Preservation Matters – Why we do what we do . . .**

This past August marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the demise of the Syria Mosque and subsequent founding of Preservation Pittsburgh. This is a time to reflect on the destruction of the building (still a parking lot) and the relevance of our organization. Unfortunately, preservation groups are still very necessary in the City of Pittsburgh. We now have three organizations (Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, Young Preservationists Association, and Preservation Pittsburgh) plus a number of neighborhood and community development groups. One might think there is redundancy here, but this is not the case and we wish there were more groups to serve as protectors of our shared heritage.

Preservation Pittsburgh endeavors to work cooperatively and proactively with politicians, developers, and other groups and is increasingly invited to serve as a consulting party on regional projects. We acknowledge that some of our advocacy projects, like the Civic Arena, are controversial — but in addition to recognizing and preserving our historic, architectural, cultural, and environmental heritage, Preservation Pittsburgh strives to hold our political and business leaders accountable to existing preservation laws.

With regard to the Arena and other matters, we find ourselves not only advocating for various buildings and neighborhoods, but also taking on a watchdog role at the local, state, and federal level. We also need to educate government appointees and elected officials about the importance of Preservation, demand public and open process, and strengthen protections for historical resources. This is a huge task, but our recent dealings have demonstrated a glaring need for this.

**FOND REMEMBRANCE**

**Rebecca Lynn 'Becky' Smith (1981-2011)**

By: Laura Schwartz, Preservation Pittsburgh Board Member

On Saturday September 24, 2011 the preservation community lost a beloved friend and advocate of historic preservation. Becky Smith lost her life after being injured in an automobile accident. After receiving a Master's Degree in Historic Preservation, Becky proudly moved to Butler to become the Main Street Manager. It is rare in this field of work to find someone who shares so many similar interests, desires, and enthusiasm for preservation advocacy. I lost the friend who inspired me to attend new events, fight for what is right, and strive to make a difference in my community. Becky will be missed by many. Next time you attend a preservation advocacy event or take a tour of a beautiful historic building, please remember Becky and all she did to inspire people to preserve our communities and let her inspire you to do the same.

**COVERAGE OF PAST EVENTS**

**May 12, 2011 Annual Meeting at Allegheny Observatory**

Despite rainy weather, we had a good turn out of about 40 people. We were not able to see the stars, but had a tour of the building and a lecture given by Observatory staff. Board Member Jeff Slack spoke about his work through Pfaffmann+Associates in renovating the Observatory (which explained the scaffolding). He thanked the University of Pittsburgh who owns the Observatory and mentioned his work in applying for building renovation grants. Thanks to everyone who attended!

**ON THE HORIZON**

**Preservation Pittsburgh's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary/Annual Meeting**

At the end of August 1991 the Syria Mosque was demolished. Twenty years later, it is still a parking lot. Soon after the demolition, Preservation Pittsburgh was formed to try to prevent these needless mistakes from happening again. Preservation Pittsburgh is planning to celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at our next Annual Meeting (2012, date TBD).

**Sewickley Valley Historical Society Annual Meeting**

On May 16, 2012 at 7:30 pm Sewickley Valley Historical Society will host its Annual Meeting at the Old Sewickley Post Office. Featured speaker is Scott Leib of Preservation Pittsburgh on *The Efforts to Preserve Pittsburgh's Civic Arena*.

**OTHER RESOURCES**

Carnegie Mellon University's Martin Aurand has compiled a Postwar Pittsburgh Architecture Bibliography and posted it along with the other resources on their Architecture Archives website:

<http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ma1f/ArchArch/index.html>

<http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ma1f/ArchArch/postwarPGHarchbibliography.html>

This project emerged from efforts to support student research on Pittsburgh architecture in Kai Gutschow's "Post-War Modern Architecture & Theory 1945-1975" course over the past few years. This resource will help us to better understand Pittsburgh's postwar architectural legacy.