

## JAMES MARSTON FITCH

PRESERVATIONIST: 1909 - 2000

**J**ames Marston Fitch, educator, author, and architect, passed away on April 10, 2000, just a month shy of his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. Fitch, as he was lovingly known, was the guiding spirit of the modern preservation movement. On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, friends, family, and colleagues gathered at St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University to commemorate his life. Many impassioned accolades were spoken, as each individual rose to give testament to the treasured legacy of the man they knew. Some of the

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## ADOLF PLACZEK

AVERY LIBRARIAN: 1913 - 2000

**A**dolf Kurt Placzek, architectural historian and beloved Avery librarian, passed away on March 19, 2000 at 87 years old. Placzek served as director for the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University from 1960 to 1980. During his tenure he amassed a collection that spanned the gamut from Piranesi's original drawings for an addition to San Giovanni in Laternano to a superb Frank Lloyd Wright Collection, in the process, transforming the library into one of the finest repositories of architectural books and drawings in the world.

Born in Vienna on March 9, 1913, Placzek was schooled primarily in the humanities at Wasa Gymnasium in Vienna. He pursued his passion for Art History at the Vienna University beginning in 1934, but his education was cut

short by a fateful moment in history. In March 1938, the day after the Nazi's marched into Austria, Placzek was summoned to the office of his director of studies and quietly expelled. He would not receive his degree until 50 years later when an honorary degree was conferred upon him in the very next room.

Throughout his career, the women in his life supported Placzek-starting in London in 1939 when he met his first wife Jan Stuther, author of *Mrs. Miniver*. The couple were married in 1948. From London, Placzek made his way to New York in 1940 to join his mother in the United States. Through her connections, Placzek secured a place at library school. It was here that he began his love affair with books. In

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

By now, most of you have heard the sad news of the passing of James Marston Fitch and Adolf Placzek. These two men, who have been so important to lives and careers of so many of us in Preservation Alumni, passed away within a month of each other. While it has been a sad year for PA members, it was also wonderful to get together and reminisce with each other. In April - ironically, the day before Jim Fitch's death - friends and colleagues of Adolf Placzek gathered in Avery Library for a memorial service for the former Avery Librarian. Barely a month later, friends and alumni gathered again, this time at St. Paul's Chapel, to honor and remember Jim Fitch, the founder of our program.

It is no accident that these services drew so many friends and alumni up to Columbia. Each year, when PA solicits donations from its members, the most popular funds to which people donate are the Clio and James Marston Fitch prize for outstanding work by a first year student in the Columbia Preservation program, and the Adolf Placzek fund for the purchase of trade catalogs at Avery Library. I hope you will join us on September 21, as we award these prizes for the year 2000, and once again remember the great men in whose honor we bestow these awards.

On a happier note, I am pleased to report that on heels of these memorial services, PA held an event of its own in honor of Shirley Driks. As the article in this issue points out, this was by far the best attended PA event in recent memory, a testament to the years of service Shirley gave to the Historic Preservation program, and most importantly, to the students and alumni of that program.

In other PA news, the Board of Directors is about to embark on its 2000-01 term with five new members. I am happy to welcome to the Board: Lisa Kersavage, Patty Miller, Kirsten Moffett, Jen

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FROM PAGE 1

Morris, and Bethany Rueffener.

Last of all, it gives me great pleasure to welcome RuthAnne Kunke as the editor and chief writer for PA Memo. RuthAnne, a second year student in the Preservation program, has done a great job in pulling together this, her first issue. In recent years, PA has expanded its alumni outreach through its email announcement list (for more info, send a message to [preservation\\_alumni@usa.net](mailto:preservation_alumni@usa.net)). At the same time, Memo – which requires a great deal of effort to produce – has been allowed to languish. With the addition of RuthAnne, we hope to put Memo back on a regular production schedule. As always, we welcome your comments and contributions to Memo (see back page for contact info). Look for our next issue in your mailbox this December.

Ward Dennis  
President

## NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

### MENTORS NEEDED

Under the direction of Board member Jill Cremer, PA has just completed its pilot Alumni Mentor program. With the lessons and success of the one semester, PA is ready to implement this program on full-time basis. For this, however, we need more volunteer mentors.

The mentor program is separate from our internship and job placement efforts. For the benefit of students and mentors alike, the program is kept as flexible as possible. Alumni are asked to be available to one or two students per year, to answer questions about the profession and to provide insights and information. As we expand the mentoring program, we hope that it will also become an opportunity for alumni outside the New York area to get more involved with PA and the HP program.

Alumni and friends interested in serving as a mentor to a current student, please contact Jill Cremer via email at [preservation\\_alumni@usa.net](mailto:preservation_alumni@usa.net).

### PRESERVATION HIGH SCHOOL

What began as an innovative concept in 1993 is slowly becoming a reality. In March 2000, the New York City

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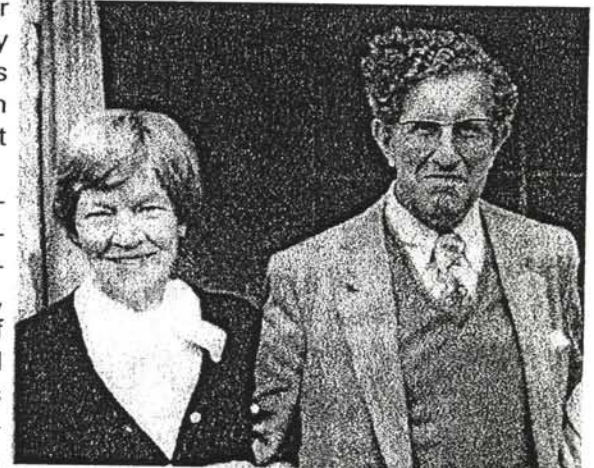
1957, following the death of his first wife in 1953, Placzek remarried Beverly Robinson. Robinson served as his companion, adviser, translator and kindred spirit for the last 44 years of his life.

Placzek began his career at Avery Librarian as a junior librarian in 1946, and slowly worked his way up to director. At the end of his tenure in 1980, Placzek was made an emeritus professor of Columbia University. Placzek was immersed in his work, and his passion was evident. As his London Times obituary so eloquently stated: "he saw no reason to resist the temptation to spend a morning with a visiting scholar, taking rare books out of boxes and enthusing over them in an Austrian accent which he never lost. He did not allow bureaucracy to get in the way of what he saw as the interchange of ideas between knowledgeable and dedicated art historians."

Among his other notable accomplishments, Placzek was the editor-in-chief of the four-volume Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, founding editor to The Buildings of the United States, and editor and one of the author's of Avery's Choice: Five Centuries of Great Architectural Books, published in

1977. In addition, he served as a Commissioner of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission ensuring the preservation of what he called the "ABCCBA rhyme-schemes" of brownstone facades.

The Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University truly epitomizes the legacy of Adolf Placzek. His dedication to architecture and its preservation, whether in built form or published work, enables future scholars to continue to benefit from his life's work. Let us also take a moment to remember the man - a poet, enjoyer of good wine, and lover of Mozart and Beethoven - who's friendship and passion for his life and work will be always be treasured by those who had the privilege



Above: Bev and Dolf Placzek (courtesy Angela Giral)

## STUDENT CRUISE

This year's orientation for the first year preservation students began with a splash - literally. On Wednesday, September 6th, first and second year Historic Preservation students and area alumni were invited for a trip aboard the fireboat John J. Harvey, a restored 1931 New York City Fireboat. The owners of the Harvey include Huntley Gill, a 1977 graduate of the CU Preservation program, treated guests to a river tour of Manhattan, complete with fantastic water displays.

John J. Harvey was the first large modern fireboat built in the U.S., and when retired held the record as the

longest serving fireboat. The boat is named for the pilot of the fireboat Thomas Willett, who died in the line of duty on the 11th of February 1930. The Harvey was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 15, 2000.

The current owners rescued Harvey from the scrap yard on February 11, 1999, and since then have invested close to \$200,000 in the ship. In order to ensure its continued restoration, the owners are turning it over to Save Our Ships New York, a not-for-profit, state chartered historical society.



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## ALUMNI & FRIENDS GATHER TO HONOR SHIRLEY DRIKS

In one of the best-attended PA events in recent memory, over 100 alumni, friends, faculty and students gathered at the Old Merchant's House Museum in New York City to honor Shirley Driks for her 20 years of service to the Historic Preservation program at Columbia.

The event was a chance for students in the Preservation program to celebrate the successful end of the school year, and for alumni and friends to recognize Shirley's tremendous contribution to the program. Former students came from as far away as Puerto Rico for the chance to see Shirley. Ward

Dennis presented Shirley with a plaque and flowers on behalf of Preservation Alumni. Faculty member Françoise Bollack, and former students Mary A. C. Jablonski and Michael Henry Adams each took time to recall Shirley.

Shirley retired from Columbia in 1999, after 19 years of service in the Historic Preservation program. During her tenure, Shirley worked for five program Directors, and was the guiding light for hundreds of students. Shirley and her husband continue to live in New York, and look forward to hearing from former students.

## NEW COURSES AT COLUMBIA

In his second year as Director, Paul Byard is introducing a series of new classes for second year students. The first class, *Design Workshop: Design with Historic Architecture* will, for the first time officially, join the forces of architecture and preservation at GSAPP. Students from every sector (conservation, planning, history, and design) of the Historic Preservation as well as students from the Urban Planning program will work jointly with students in the Third Year Additions Design Studio of the Architecture program.

The Studio's design project is a

major addition to an important modern building. A successful solution requires an understanding of the meaning of the old building, and the ways in which that meaning might or might not be extended, enriched or brought forward by the addition. Design Workshop will be taught by Paul Byard and Kathryn Dean.

The second class, *Planning Workshop: Current Issues in the Preservation of Cultural Landscapes*, will be taught by David Sampson, the former Executive Director of the Hudson River

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words used to describe him were scholar, activist, guru, bon vivant, humanist, preservationist, reformer, pioneer, mentor...the list goes on and on.

To his friends and colleagues, Fitch was known for his genteel southern roots, and his love of good food, wine, and company. He thrived on interaction, feedback and new ideas. As a preservationist, he was a pioneer – tenacious in his efforts to further his cause.

In 1965, Fitch established the Columbia University Historic Preservation program to educate professionals to serve the army of amateurs who dominated the field. Adele Chatfield Taylor, a former student and now the president of the American Academy in Rome and National Trust trustee, recalled the early days of the program stating, "I do not mean any disrespect when I say that in those days, the Fitch program was not very well organized. At times, therefore, learning things was more a matter of being in the presence of the guru than following a prescribed course."

The program continued to grow and expand, as did Fitch's involvement in the Preservation movement. Fitch helped establish the National Council for Preservation Education, the Association for Preservation Technology, and the Victorian Society in America. He served as Director of Historic Preservation at the New York City architecture firm of Beyer Blinder Belle for twenty years. Fitch was a well-respected international authority on architecture, publishing more than 200 books, articles, reports, and reviews in the United

States and abroad. His love for learning and teaching was matched by his generosity. Fitch personally underwrote the James Marston Fitch Charitable Foundation, a fellowship in historic preservation at the American Academy in Rome, and a challenge grant gift toward an endowed chair in preservation at Columbia University's Graduate Program in Historic Preservation.

Fitch truly embodied both the passion and discipline of the preservation movement, and was never shy about getting involved. His highly personal and unorthodox approach left a powerful imprint. As urban theorist Jane Jacobs wrote, "among my many fond recollections of Jim Fitch is the memory of him in all his dignity—which at the age of 60 was impressive—standing on a chair during a rally against the proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway. He was happily stunning his rapt and motley audience by telling them that the district which the highway would demolish—the district now known as SoHo—was an architecturally splendid piece of the city and that preserving it from destruction was a noble cause."

Page Cowley recalled "while awards and public recognition, of which Jim received many in his lifetime, often measure success, his influence was more far reaching than one would have expected. Our beloved teacher, colleague, mentor and friend, James Marston Fitch, will truly be missed, but the legacy of preservation he left us will forever be fostered by his inspiration."

tory will teach students how to use state-of-the-art techniques and equipment for non-destructive analysis and identification of materials. Processes studied will include polarized light microscopy, x-ray diffraction analysis, water vapor transmission, particle analysis, and scanning electron microscopy. The class, which consists of lectures and field trips as well as individual projects, is open, with a fee, to past graduates of the program.

## NEWS AND NOTEWORTHY

FROM PAGE 2

Board of Education approved the establishment of the Brooklyn High School of the Arts (BSA) with a special interdisciplinary focus on preservation, as well as fine, visual, and performing arts. Now New York City high school students can begin to learn what many of us had to wait until graduate school for.

BSA opened its doors in Fall 2000 to an incoming freshman class of 250 students. Each year a grade will be added until the total enrollment of 1,000 students in grades 9-12 is met.

The BSA curriculum is modeled after a pilot project established by the New Jersey Institute of Technology for Architecture and Building Science Research (NJIT Center). It is constructed in such a way that allows students to experience history as a living dynamic-focusing on a specific historic structure or artifact. Each subject will be examined in relation to its creation, preservation, and interpretation. The interdisciplinary focus will produce a comprehensive historic preservation-based learning approach which will help teach students how different humanities and other academic disciplines are integral to one another and can be adopted into workplace activities.

The establishment of the Preservation High School has been a long-standing project of a number of Preservation Alumni members, among them Kate Burns Ottavino (1984).

PA congratulates everyone involved with the establishment of this high school program on the successful completion of years of hard work.

### CONFERENCE SEASON IS HERE!

Columbia alumni will be getting together at the upcoming APT and National Trust Conferences – join us!

At the APT conference in Philadelphia we will gather at 8:30 PM on Thursday, October 12, 2000, at the Lowes Philadelphia Hotel (PSFS Building) Restaurant on the Lobby Level following the Conference Reception.

At the Los Angeles National Trust Conference, we will get together at 7:00PM on Thursday, November 2 at the rooftop Bonavista Lounge.

Both events are cash bar, and open to all alumni and friends of the Columbia program.

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Valley Greenway Communities Council. It will focus on the Hudson River Valley, examining issues that make the valley important as a cultural landscape and that simultaneously put it under such stress. The course will discuss innovative local and regional planning strategies designed to address such situations.

Finally, the new *Conservation Workshop: Advanced Conservation Labora-*