Greater Portland Landmarks, Congratulations on 50 years from all of us at Wright-Ryan!

The last decade has been a time of growth and change for Portland’s historic neighborhoods. In the past ten years, we’ve seen new developments, revitalization projects, and a dedication to preserving our city’s character. Here are some highlights from the past decade:

1. Congress Street Historic District: This district was designated in 2010, recognizing the importance of this corridor for Portland’s identity and economic vitality. The district includes nearly 1,000 structures, from early 19th-century buildings to modern developments.

2. Historic Preservation: Over the past decade, we’ve seen a rise in interest in historic preservation, with more residents and businesses taking an active role in maintaining and restoring our city’s heritage.

3. Community Engagement: The Landmarks Institute has worked closely with community organizations, residents, and businesses to ensure that development projects are consistent with the character and values of our historic neighborhoods.

4. New Development: While preserving our history is important, it’s also crucial to adapt to changing needs. We’ve seen new developments that respect the historic fabric of our city, such as modern lofts and mixed-use buildings.

Looking back, we’re proud of what we’ve accomplished and excited for the future. As we move into the next ten years, we’ll continue to work together to ensure that Portland remains a vibrant, thriving, and historically rich community.

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District Designation Leads to Great Streets

When I moved to Portland in 1993, Congress Street was a dark and dreary place—empty storefronts and few people, a place to avoid if possible. Who would have thought that 20 years later, in 2014, it would be named one of the Great Streets in America by the American Planning Association, in company with Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., King Street in Charleston, South Carolina, and Broadway in New York City.

Many factors played into Congress Street’s revitalization, still very much in progress, including the other Arts District, strategic investments in major downtown office buildings by philanthropist Elizabeth Noyce, and the adaptive use of the former Porteous Department Store by the Maine College of Art.

As important, was the Portland City Council’s unanimous approval in 2010 of the Congress Street Historic District which encompasses the length of the street from City Hall to Bramhall Square. The street reflects Portland’s early development and the emergence of its principal commercial center through an eclectic range of architecture from the Longfellow House (1785-86) to the First Parish Church (1825-26), to the J. Brown Memorial Block (1882-83) and the Portland Museum of Art (1983). The renovation of the Portland Public Library and new construction projects are continuing the evolution of the City’s main street.

His historic district status has spurred the nationally-recognized revitalization of two of Portland’s most important streets – and we believe designation could have equally positive results for India Street. T oday, Congress Street is an attractive destination for businesses, galleries, restaurants, arts, and enlivens the street’s visual experience and public realm. Congress Street wins on all those counts.

The same thing happened along Commercial Street after it became a historic district in 1990. Investors rehabilitated former warehouses to become offices, restaurants, and retail spaces, bringing new vitality to the historic waterfront area. In 2008 that street too was identified by the American Planning Association as a Great Street.

The American Planning Association criteria for Great Streets emphasize the elements of street character and personality that create memorable places. Among them are architecture and urban design features that reflect local culture and history, encourage community vitality and social activities, and enliven the street’s visual experience and public realm. Congress Street wins on all those counts.

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Edith Sills: Preservation Visionary

On July 10, 1964, seven individuals gathered in the law office of Peter N. Kyros, Sr. to sign the document to incorporate a new organization to promote historic preservation in Greater Portland. In addition to the author of this article, those who founded Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc. that afternoon were architects John Calvin Stevens II and Philip S. Wadsworth, maritime historian Robert G. Albion, Maine historian-an Elizabeth Ring, Portland Museum of Art director John E. Pancoast, and community leader Edith Sills.

The need for such an organization was first advanced by Mrs. Sills in 1962 in the wake of the destruction of Portland’s Union Station in 1961. Responding to the concern of many of her fellow citizens over the loss of such a prominent landmark, Edith Sills invited prominent local leaders and historians to her home at 134 Vaughan Street to discuss strategies for historic preservation. From February, 1962 to June, 1964, she held monthly meetings of the Sills Committee, which led to the formation of Greater Portland Landmarks.

Through Elizabeth Ring, chair of the Deering High School Booster Club and as the author of this article, add to the list of those who founded Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc. that afternoon were those who founded Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc. that afternoon were Robert G. Albion, Maine historical architect John Calvin Stevens II and Philip S. Wadsworth, maritime historian Robert G. Albion, Maine historian Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Director Maine Historic Preservation Commission Maine State Historian.

Mrs. Sills was fastidious in their care for the building, as well as the workmanship on our copper flashings and gutter system. They communicated well at every step as the projects progressed. We are very pleased with the final result, and we have recommended their work to others.” - Craig and Libby Owens, 104 West Street Portland, Maine 2007

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Landmarks in the Last Decade

Greater Portland Landmarks has its roots in protest, from a time when Portland needed to halt destruction to its historic fabric. Now the organization has a seat at the table.

With Greater Portland Landmarks marking a half-century of activism in historic preservation, there are many accomplishments to note in just the past decade.

One of the most visible is the organization’s rehabilitation of Safford House, which allowed Landmarks to put into practice what it preaches, says John Knox, who served on the board for six years and as president of the organization from 2005-07. Taking the steps to preserve an old building and rehabilitate it so that it can serve as modern offices and last another 100 years was important, he says. It spurred Landmarks’ largest capital campaign, boosted by a $400,000 National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant, raising over $2 million toward the organization’s goals.

After much deliberation, in 2004 Landmarks sold the Crockett-Hunt house at 165 State Street, home since 1977. That launched the effort to find a highly visible location with more space closer to downtown. The Safford House, built in 1858 and designed by Charles Alexander, fit the bill. Landmarks bought and began rehabilitating it in 2009.

Forty years before, the corner of High and Spring streets where Safford House sits was the site of one of Landmarks’ early victories: the halt to the widening of Spring Street thanks to the recognition of the Spring Street National Register Historic District.

Congress Street Becomes a New Historic District

“As exceptional, observable, and gratifying as the acquisition of Safford House has been, another major accomplishment of the decade was the 2010 unanimous City Council approval of the Congress Street Historic District. Landmarks had been advocating for it for over 20 years, and the district designation affords protection to another 300 historic properties,” says Hilary Bassett, Landmarks executive director since 2000. The new district chronicles Portland’s development over time with an array of building styles and types from the 1780s to the present.

In a joint venture with Maine Preservation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Landmarks hired its first Preservation Services Advisor in 2009 to offer expanded technical expertise and support for preservation initiatives to the greater Portland area. The Maine legislature’s 2007 approval of upgraded historic preservation tax credits made Landmarks’ new program especially important as property owners responded enthusiastically to the new incentives.

As environmental sustainability became a strong public concern, energy efficiency was a theme for the Preservation Directory and the Old House Trade Show.

Landmarks published The Energy Efficient Old House in 2012 and presented workshops to provide information for owners of older buildings.

In 2012, Landmarks launched Places in Peril — its endangered properties program — which Sally Oldham, president from 2009 to 2011, says is one of the principal ways to recognize and protect important components of an area’s architectural fabric. “I think Places in Peril is probably the most important single things that we have done in the last 10 years,” she says. “We’re identifying endangered properties ahead of a major crisis. It allows you to be a player in a different way than if a crisis happens. This way, we’re thinking ahead, articulating what’s important to us and the action we’d like taken.”

Unanimous Council approval of the Congress Street Historic District in 2010, was a key accomplishment in protecting the City’s historic resources.

Purchase and rehabilitation of the Safford House allows Landmarks to demonstrate preservation best practices.
**Education for People of All Ages**

Landmarks continued to manage the City-owned Portland Observatory, raising attendance to over 10,000 visitors annually, and obtained National Historic Landmark designation for the signal tower in 2006. In 2014, Landmarks revised the City is a Classroom workbook to support the local history curriculum for the third grade. The award-winning workbook is distributed to elementary schools throughout the greater Portland area.

In 2010, Landmarks published Deering: A Social and Architectural History, a companion to the Portland book and an important contribution to the understanding of Portland’s growth. Written by Patricia McGraw Anderson and William David Barry, with essays by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. and Joel Eastman, the book is the first to chronicle the development of the city’s off-peninsula areas from the 1600s to the 1940s.

**A Seat at the Table**

Perhaps most profound is Landmarks’ continued evolution from a grassroots protest group to a proactive organization with clout, and the past decade has been especially significant in that regard, say past presidents from those years. As Portland continues its steady growth, city officials, developers, and concerned citizens grapple with balancing the demands of various constituencies. And Landmarks is now always there.

“It’s amazing and it’s been helpful that some of the people involved with the founding of Landmarks are still involved,” Knox says. “Starting out in the mid-60s and into the 70s, Landmarks was important to the revitalization of the Old Port and so much of the good new construction that’s taken place. It’s been important that so many people in the organization, like Pam Plumb and others, were also active in the government, which helped lead to the establishment of the historic preservation review committee that the city now has.”

That milestone alone, the establishment of the city’s Historic Preservation Board, has made a difference in the city’s approach to development, says Oldham.

Still, Landmarks must stay vigilant and communicate, through Places in Peril for example, whenever historically significant properties are likely to be sold, or are in danger of deteriorating or being lost. “The city has a very strong historic preservation program, but it is understaffed, so it’s a challenge for them to be working proactively,” Oldham says. “In a way, Landmarks supports them by talking through with them what would happen when those properties are at risk.”

Landmarks’ pivot from its original fight after the fall of Union Station has meant that its mission has expanded to education and advocacy that includes all players, including developers, property owners, architects, and city officials, says Geoff Melhuish, a historic preservationist and architectural historian at til-architects in Portland, and president from 2003 to 2005. “More and more, architects and developers have called on Landmarks and are doing that early on in the process,” Melhuish says. “When I first got involved, we were often coming in too late. That’s changed. Landmarks has been welcome, accepted, and that again goes back to no longer being a reaction, but helping and educating along the way. That has allowed architects and developers and the city to accept Landmarks’ position, and I think there is a seat at the table.”

Clockwise from above: Celebrating Earle Shettleworth’s preservation leadership in song at the Masonic Temple; Honoree Earle Shettleworth and Landmarks Board President Tom Elliman; Trustee Karyn Pellow, Jim Pellow, Carolyn Russ, and former Executive Directors Pam Plumb and Joel Russ; Event Chair Candice Thornton Lee with the Union Station cake; 50th Anniversary Chair Sharon Miller, Dan Miller and Dodo Stevens; Advisory Trustee Seth Sprague presents certificates from Christopher Monkhouse. 

Landmarks’ 50th Anniversary Founders Night Gala

Photo Credit: Ben Gross

www.portlandlandmarks.org

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Francesca Galluccio-Steele, known as Cesca, moved to Portland’s West End 10 years ago from the greater New York area. She and her husband, Phil, have always lived in or owned historic homes in various places in the US. Galluccio-Steele is a conservationist and finds historic preservation an especially important method of reuse and recycling, as well as an opportunity to employ 21st century energy efficiencies in old buildings. “Why tear down a beautiful old building when it can be rehabilitated?” she says.

As a retired elementary school principal, she relishes the opportunity Landmarks provides to educate people of all ages about historic preservation and about Portland’s rich history as reflected in its buildings.

How long have you been in Portland?
We moved here 10 years ago from Westchester County, New York, although I am a born and bred New Englander, originally from Boston. We live in the historic district of the Western Promenade. Our house was originally built in 1910 as the carriage house to the adjacent house, but was turned into a second family home in 1915. We love old houses full of character, history, and design opportunity.

Did you renovate?
The house needed a ton of work, beginning with a new slate roof. Our architect found the original plans, so we were able to take the house back to its original state. We were also able to make it energy efficient by repairing the original windows, adding storms, installing efficient appliances, adding gas heat, weatherproofing the basement, and making the third floor habitable with lots of insulation. We’re benefitting from heat, weatherproofing the basement, and making the third room habitable with lots of insulation. We’re benefitting from cost savings thanks to these energy efficiency changes.

How have you seen Portland change since you arrived?
There are many new construction projects and many preservation projects that have enlivened the city and made it more of a destination. As a result of this renaissance, the community has greater pride of place, which creates a positive cycle of more renovations and improvements and more pride. I also see the city becoming more diverse, and its small size allows our diversity to be mixed into the city rather than separating everyone into their own separate neighborhoods. And of course all the new restaurants are fantastic!

What do you think of Landmarks’ role?
The past year has been absolutely amazing for Landmarks in terms of the number of historic preservation projects for which we’ve been able to advocate and on which we’ve been able to collaborate. I think over the years Landmarks has inspired a preservation ethos in our community that is strongest here. This has led to a resurgence of projects that have enlivened the city and made it more of a destination. As a result of this renaissance, the community has greater pride of place, which creates a positive cycle of more renovations and improvements and more pride. I also see the city becoming more diverse, and its small size allows our diversity to be mixed into the city rather than separating everyone into their own separate neighborhoods. And of course all the new restaurants are fantastic!

What do you do at Landmarks?
I sit on the Education and Preservation and Advocacy/Public Issues Committees — which I really see as interrelated — and I’m part of the Spring Street Task Force. I just became second vice president, which means I’m involved with developing the next strategic plan. My learning curve is very steep right now as I want to be a full contributor to each of these. I have to thank the energetic people who started Landmarks 50 years ago! It’s amazing to see what a grassroots commitment can accomplish and how it evolves into a formal, effective organization recognized as an integral part of the community.

What is your profession?
I’m a retired elementary school principal. Yet when I was a kid I desperately wanted to be an architect. My bedroom floor was covered with block houses and I filled notebooks with floor plans. Give me a beach and I drew houses in the sand! I had a high school guidance counselor who worked very hard to discourage me from going into a “male occupation.” Now I’m so grateful to know many successful women architects my age who didn’t succumb to that barrier. As an educator I love Landmarks’ award-winning workbook about local historic buildings, which is distributed to schools around Portland. It’s a great accomplishment. Now I’m thinking about additional ways that we can build preservation consciousness in children. For me as a child, and when I raised my own children, there’s great wonder in being able to step into the past, as at the Tate House. Now that’s better than any history book! You are actually touching the past and becoming immersed in it.
Upright Frameworks, has learned that preservation is not a luxury, but lines or designates an historic district, a strategy Landmarks the 70 historic buildings of the neighborhood which tell quality design, and appropriately-scaled to complement lots in historic zones – like the India Street Neighborhood. These longstanding preservation concepts encourage adapting existing buildings for contemporary purposes terms “rehabilitation” and “adaptive reuse,” which rep- ects are unaware of the financial and practical benefits of preservation. Like zoning that favors greater density, preservation also confer added value, including access to state and federal historic preservation tax credits, which together can amount to 45-50% of rehabilitation costs. Other financial incentives for preservation include prefer- ential access to grants, and federally tax-deductible preservation easements. Tax-credit leveraged, income-producing historic reha- bilitation projects can be both small and large in scale, and are available to owner-occupied building projects as well as commercial developers. Historic district designa- tion and rehabilitation projects stabilize neighborhoods, increase the local property tax base, create construction jobs and add new affordable and market-rate housing stock – all at varying project scale, without necessarily displacing neighborhood residents. Property owners benefit from the added value that historic district designation attributes to their buildings. Local historic district designation is an effective, professionally- advised system for managing change in swiftly evolving neighborhoods – where historic resources are at risk of increment- al loss and demolition. These areas, like India Street, typically include a diversity of historic buildings – in significance, form, scale, plan and density – along with affordability, all features attractive to sin- gles, young families, and empty-nesters. Federally designated National Register Districts recognize culturally-significant historic areas and landscape heritage, drives in-migration, and results in higher, more stable and resilient property values.

Christopher Closs
Landmarks’ Preservation Services Advisor (207) 809-9102
ccloss@portlandlandmarks.org
Providing historic preservation technical assistance and tax credit pre-assessments.

Modestly scaled historic residences in the neighborhood tell Portland’s Immigrant Story.

Benefits to Business, Property Owners and Communities

Unfortunately, some design professionals and developer, lacking experience with historic rehabilitation proj- ects are unaware of the financial and practical benefits of preservation. Like zoning that favors greater density, preservation also confer added value, including access to state and federal historic preservation tax credits, which together can amount to 45-50% of rehabilitation costs. Other financial incentives for preservation include prefer- ential access to grants, and federally tax-deductible preservation easements. Tax-credit leveraged, income-producing historic reha- bilitation projects can be both small and large in scale, and are available to owner-occupied building projects as well as commercial developers. Historic district designa- tion and rehabilitation projects stabilize neighborhoods, increase the local property tax base, create construction jobs and add new affordable and market-rate housing stock – all at varying project scale, without necessarily displacing neighborhood residents. Property owners benefit from the added value that historic district designation attributes to their buildings. Local historic district designation is an effective, professionally- advised system for managing change in swiftly evolving neighborhoods – where historic resources are at risk of increment- al loss and demolition. These areas, like India Street, typically include a diversity of historic buildings – in significance, form, scale, plan and density – along with affordability, all features attractive to sin- gles, young families, and empty-nesters. Federally designated National Register Districts recognize culturally-significant historic areas and landscape heritage, drives in-migration, and results in higher, more stable and resilient property values.
Thank you for sharing in Landmarks 50th Anniversary Celebration

Greater Portland Landmarks extends a hearty thank you for joining us in celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2014. As we move into the New Year, Landmarks looks forward to engaging in advocacy and education to preserve the extraordinary historic buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes that make greater Portland and increasingly popular place to live, work and visit reflects Landmarks’ thanks our 50th Anniversary lead sponsor, the Dead River Company, and supporting sponsors, J. B. Brown & Sons, The Danforth Group of Wells Fargo Advisors, and an Anonymous Donor, for an outstanding celebratory year!

Programs & Events

The Preservation of Portland Since 1961
Fridays, Feb. 6 – March 20, 11 am – 1 pm
First Friday, Feb. 6, 5-8 pm
Landmarks will be open to view our new large scale murals depicting the evolution of Preservation in Portland in images and text in the Gregory W. Boulos Gallery of Architecture and Design at Landmarks’ Safford House headquarters, 93 High Street, Portland

Portland’s History Docents (PHD) Training Program
Thursdays March 5 – April 30, 9 am – noon
Learn about Portland’s history and architecture in preparation to become a volunteer docent giving tours at one of 8 local historic sites, including the Portland Observatory. To register contact Marjorie Getz, PHD Program Coordinator, 774-5561 ext. 120 or volunteer@portlandlandmarks.org

Old House Trade Show
Saturday & Sunday, March 28, 10 am – 5 pm
March 29, 10 am – 4 pm
Meet the artisans and tradespeople who can help you repair and renovate your old house. Learn from the experts in workshops and Q&A sessions on topics from repairing windows to planning your project. Find out about energy efficient practices and design solutions to update older homes. Bring photos, plans and measurements to better assist your conversations with the experts. Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland.

Art Exhibition: The Paintings of John Calvin Stevens
April 21 – July 15, 2015
An exhibition featuring the landscape paintings of noted architect John Calvin Stevens, many painted en plein air with a group of local artists known as the Brush’uns who depicted scenes in Cape Elizabeth, Casco, Scarborough, Stroudwater and more. University of New England Art Gallery, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland.

For more information, and to register for events and programs:
www.portlandlandmarks.org or call 774-5561

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