



Left, Members of AGBANY protest the demolition of Pennsylvania Station, 1962. Middle, Weinman’s maiden at the left, holding the garland of sunflowers, represents “Day”; her comely sister at right, “Night.” Right, a large fragment of the stone maiden “Day” – with her gentle face and silken robes, sunflower garland and bayberry wreath – dumped into a trackage landfill, as a lone train crosses the bleak horizon, 1968.

A Call to Action

In August 1962, a group of architects in New York City formed a new organization called the “Action Group for Better Architecture in New York.” Its first and primary cause was the preservation of historic Penn Station. The group organized a protest, launched a letter-writing campaign, ran newspaper ads, spoke up at hearings and held a grand rally in front of the station that drew hundreds of supporters. They carried signs that read “DON’T AMPUTATE, RENOVATE,” “DON’T DEMOLISH IT! POLISH IT!” and “SAVE OUR HERITAGE.” One sign simply read “SHAME!”

On October 28, 1963, the demolition crew appeared with jackhammers, and the “monumental act of vandalism” began. Although all 22 stone-carved eagles (created by the great sculptor Adolph Alexander Weinman) that adorned the station were saved, most of the travertine and granite – including several of Weinman’s paired stone maidens “Day” and “Night” that once graced the four entrances – were dumped into a trackage landfill in Secaucus, NJ. By 1966, all traces of the monumental gateway were gone. The demonstrations to preserve Penn Station could not save it, but they did spark what became the architectural preservation movement in the United States.

Here in Hudson, in early 1962, the First National Bank of Akron was making plans to tear down its Hudson branch building and construct a new modern drive-in facility. Known as the Brewster Store at 5 Aurora Street and located directly across from the Clock Tower, the building was built in 1839 and had been designated as “the oldest commercial brick edifice in constant use in the Western Reserve.” Residents of the village were outraged by the announcement and were “ready to do battle” to keep the building from being destroyed. By late March, petitions and petitioners took to the streets, asking First National Bank to change its mind about tearing down one of Hudson’s historic structures. One bank official reacted to the protests by saying, “They’re a little premature. They should wait and see our plans for the new building.” When the plans were completed, bank officials planned to meet with village residents to try to convince them that the construction of the new building, and the demolition of the historic Brewster Store, would do no harm to the Western Reserve tradition.

Hudson residents spoke out, with many writing protest letters to the local paper. “This is all we have left of Ohio’s beautiful past and I love it. Save it!” wrote one resident. “This brick building has stood on the square in Hudson since 1839 and is regarded by most of us as a personal friend, treasured as one of the few remaining old buildings which make our square so beautiful,” wrote another.

On Monday, April 23, the paper reported that petitions were in the mail and that “the postman here had quite a bundle to dispatch.” Petitions carrying more than 800 signatures of persons wanting the old bank building to be preserved, went into the mail to the First National Bank. “The destruction of this splendid old building would detract seriously from the quality that makes Hudson something more than a commonplace village” read the protesting documents. The voice of David Hudson’s great-great granddaughter, Anna Lee, “joined firmly in the community chorus to preserve the heritage of the town he founded,” the paper reported. Noting the importance the building had played in community life, Ms. Lee wrote to bank officials in part, “Hudson is no recent development. It has taken almost 200 years to acquire its beauty and stature. Businessmen have exploited Hudson’s reputation at no expense to themselves. Surely it is only just that you shoulder some small part of this burden now.”



1839 Brewster Store – First National Bank, 1962. Right, 1927 Hudson High School, Main Entrance with Grand Staircase.

In neighboring Peninsula there were similar immediate threats to the Bronson Episcopal Church, built in 1839 and the GAR Hall, built in 1851. By April, a group of women from Peninsula and Hudson had organized and headed to Washington, D.C., to meet with the director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) and Chief Historian for the National Park Service (NPS). The Akron Beacon Journal wrote that the “three fast-talking women won some support for their campaign to preserve historic sites in Hudson and Peninsula.” In that meeting, it was agreed that both the NTHP and NPS would send representatives to assess the historical value of the disputed sites. The women returned to Hudson and Peninsula and suggested the next step would be to organize a committee.

On June 17, 1962, after a two-day study of the communities and a presentation by NTHP and NPS officials, the Hudson Heritage Association was formally organized and named. And in August, the group interested in preserving the scenic and historic beauty of the Cuyahoga Valley was formed and named the Peninsula Valley Heritage Association, now the Peninsula Foundation. Both the Bronson Episcopal Church and GAR Hall buildings were eventually saved and preserved, as well as the prominent Brewster Store building that proudly stands, among many other historic structures, safeguarding the perimeter edge of our beautiful historic Village Green.

More recently, in the fall of 2016, the Hudson City School District released its Master Facility Plan with multiple options (including demolition) identified for the future of the original 1927 Hudson High School (now the middle school) located on Oviatt Street. Concern over the fate of the 1927 building prompted Hudson residents to rally together once more. Under the leadership of the Hudson Heritage Association, work began on educating the residents of the Historic District with flyers, door-to-door conversations and a neighborhood meeting with the superintendent.

In early December 2016, more than 80 Hudson residents attended a Hudson City Schools meeting to learn more about the district’s plans for the building. Residents expressed concerns about the demolition of this cornerstone structure in the Historic District and argued that it was an important contributor to our residential neighborhood and the surrounding distinctive streetscape. One resident noted that “losing the 1927 building would have a deep and lasting impact on the historic fabric of Hudson.” During that meeting, a petition was also presented with over 1,000 signatures of Hudson residents who supported saving the 1927 building. In early 2017, the district retained a Cleveland architectural firm to conduct a feasibility study on the adaptive reuse of the building, which also identified three renovation options.

In February 2018, the concept for the “1927 Building Study Committee” was developed with feedback from the Board of Education. Members from representative groups of the Hudson City Schools, the City of Hudson and community organizations were invited to participate in March 2018. The 1927 Building Study Committee held its first meeting on September 19, 2018, and has met monthly to determine what action steps are needed to make a recommendation to the Board of Education, that provides an acceptable use of the building for the community as a whole.

While it appears that there are viable options to save, restore and re-purpose the building, the fate of its adaptive reuse and future owner have not yet been determined.



Baldwin-Buss House Foundation “THIS PLACE MATTERS” Rally on October 5, 2019.

Another rally of sorts recently took place on Hudson’s west Village Green earlier this month. The rally, “THIS PLACE MATTERS,” was organized by the newly formed Baldwin-Buss House Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission is to acquire, restore and preserve Hudson’s second oldest structure, the Baldwin-Buss Merino House. The rally drew close to 125 Hudson residents who came out to show their support to preserve and protect the Hudson Village Green and the Baldwin-Buss Merino house and property. As one speaker noted, “we cannot rely on dumb luck to safeguard what distinguishes this community from its neighbors. Once lost, old buildings are gone forever!”

Following the success of the “THIS PLACE MATTERS” campaign rally, we were shocked to discover the demolition of a historic 1907 house the day before, at 37 North Oviatt Street, just down the street from the 1927 Hudson High School. This was a complete surprise to not only residents in the community but particularly those living in the Historic District and on Oviatt Street. They immediately began to voice their concerns. As one Oviatt Street resident described, “This was a shock to everyone on Oviatt. The work started only this past week. We understood this to be a rehabilitation of the house. As work started it was obvious that the interior was going to be gutted. Then the exterior wall in the rear and sides began to be removed. I came home on Friday, and the entire house was gone! This was not the plan. It was a brazen act of disregard for our regulations and the historic district legislation.”

A few days later at the start of the Architectural Historic Board of Review (AHBR) meeting at Town Hall, on October 9, the City of Hudson provided a status report on the 37 North Oviatt Street property, “There has been significant interest and concern within the community. The site currently has a zoning certificate, which was issued for the relocation of the house several feet to the north and a completion of a significant renovation, including side and rear elevation additions. Site work has commenced with the historic facades being set aside for reinstallation on a new foundation. Staff has issued a “Stop Work Order” on the project and we’re currently evaluating the work to date and determining any appropriate measures which are needed.”

A public comment period followed with several residents in attendance and speaking out. One resident noted that “What was done clearly sets a dangerous precedent for properties throughout the Historic District. It appears that the owners have applied a very broad and liberal interpretation of the terms preservation, restoration and reconstruction. Were others who desire to demolish and build new homes in the Historic District to follow the same course of action, many of the irreplaceable structures in our community could be lost, and the entire fabric of Hudson could be compromised. Hudson has become a very special community because of its diligence in preserving its history and its historic structures. Steps need to be taken to ensure that we do not allow that to be compromised in the future.” Community/resident concerns initially expressed to the Hudson Heritage Association in the hours following the demolition were also provided to the AHBR Board.



Demolition of the 37 North Oviatt Street House on October 4, 2019.

As one friend recently and poignantly described to me what defines Hudson, “People who come to Hudson either to visit or to live recognize the town’s unique charm. They may not be able to define it, but they sense it. It is the absence of neon signs, big box stores, and fast-food chains. It is the presence of historic homes and neighborhoods that impart a sense of continuity and permanence in our lives. It is the strict attention to detail in our historic core – from paint colors, to siding and materials, to windows. All of these components create a sense of place and define our architectural and cultural heritage.”

We cannot forget the power of one collective voice and what can be accomplished when a community comes together. Now more than ever, the Baldwin-Buss Merino House, the original 1927 Hudson High School building, and the recent loss of the 37 North Oviatt Street house deserve our immediate attention. Hudson has a long tradition of residents who are passionate about preserving the history, character and culture of our community. I am confident that Hudson will rise to the occasion once more and that together, we will rally to support these important initiatives that are so integral to our community and the future of Hudson.

Christopher Bach
Board Member
Baldwin-Buss House Foundation

Note: *This article originally appeared in the Hudson Heritage Association’s October Newsletter and the Hudson Hub-Times, Sunday, October 27, with updates after the recent and sudden demolition of a historic house on Oviatt Street in the Historic District of Hudson.*