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# The Sentinel

Spring 2019

## SPECIAL ★ EDITION

Most Endangered:

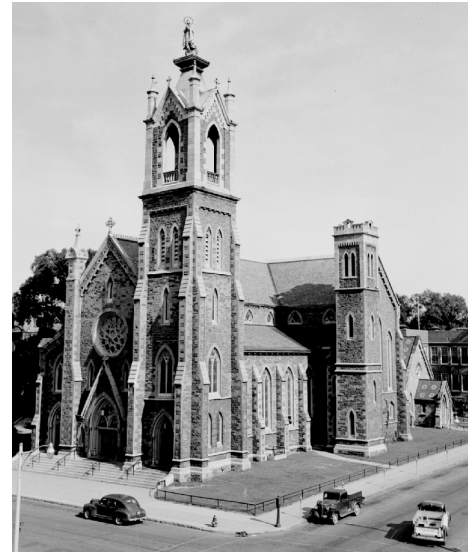
### **Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

*Marge Allard*

The first Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, built from 1863 to 1868 of Isle La Motte stone, was included as part of the compound of the attached St. Patrick’s Chapel and a large rectory capable of housing the numerous clergy needed for staff. Earlier in the 20th century, a grade school and a high school were part of the complex, which dominated its Cherry/Pine/Pearl/St. Paul Street neighborhood. The schools were gone by the night in March 1972 when a former altar boy and student started a spectacular fire, which destroyed the cathedral.

*continued on page 2*

Courtesy of the Fleming Museum



*Immaculate Conception Cathedral, 1950.*

Karyn Norwood



*Current Immaculate Conception Cathedral.*

★ ★ ★

*A unique and singular Modernist building and landscape in Burlington are in danger. Designed by two nationally-acclaimed Modernist architects, the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception is for sale. We at Preservation Burlington are issuing this special edition of our newsletter to highlight the property’s architectural and historical significance to our community. We hope that this significant property, which has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, can be reused with its historical and architectural integrity intact. As one of a few Modernist buildings left and our only Modernist landscape in Burlington, the cathedral and its grounds are a critical part of our built environment and our story as a community. We must make every effort to save this property.*



## Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

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NEWSLETTER DESIGN: Andrea Gray

Urban renewal in the decade previous to the fire had removed the neighborhood closest to the church, home to many church members. The bishop, John Marshall, was reluctant to rebuild since the very large St. Joseph's church was only a couple of blocks away. However, the Cathedral parishioners were adamant, and the decision was made to rebuild. The result could hardly have been more unlike their former church.

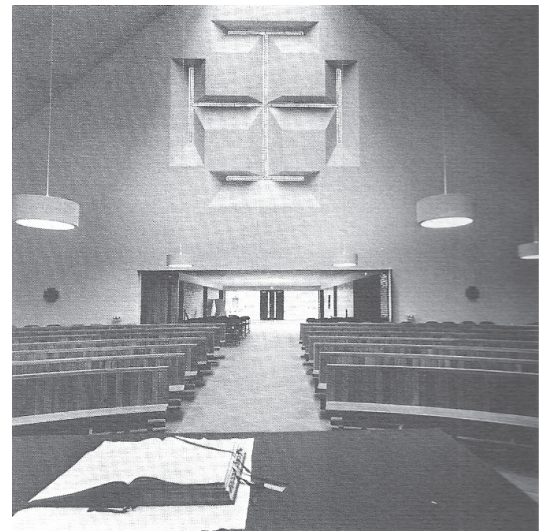
Vatican II had happened in the previous decade: with it came changes in church liturgy and architecture. Edward Larabee Barnes of New York was chosen as architect. He designed an unusual tent-like structure with an extensive copper roof and walls of glazed green and brown brick, placed in the center of the grounds, which Dan Kiley, renowned Vermont landscape architect, surrounded with a grove of 123 locust trees. The effect was that of a small, peaceful urban park in the center of a busy downtown. The huge bell from the former cathedral was hung

in a free-standing steel bell tower near the corner of the lot.

Parishioners entering the new cathedral may have been startled by the unaccustomed austerity. The floor and the perfectly simple altar were of Bennington, Vermont slate. The interior was lighted by small demi-lune windows and a large skylight sixty feet overhead. Over the main entrance was a blue glass Jerusalem Cross window. The walls were white; the wood used was white oak. Probably most surprising to the people of the parish was the lack of statuary. Aside from a statue of Mary at the main entrance in the vestibule, there was only a small crucifix near the tabernacle. It was a bit hard for some folks to accept! Over the following years, some pastors made changes to remedy the unfamiliar simplicity, not all of which were sensitive.

For now, the oasis in the middle of Burlington's downtown remains. Will a way be found to repurpose the building and its locust grove? One may hope!

photos: Sanders Milens



*Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 1977.*

## History of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

*Liisa Reimann*

The present cathedral was preceded by another, earlier and much beloved landmark. When the congregation outgrew St. Mary's, an early parish church, Burlington's first Catholic bishop, Louis DeGoesbriand began planning a spectacular replacement. Though his fundraising efforts were hampered by the developing Civil War and an inexplicable (but temporary) case of facial paralysis, DeGoesbriand started construction on his cathedral in 1863. Designed, as were some 600 other Roman Catholic buildings in the Northeast, by Patrick Charles Keely, the cathedral was built in the Gothic style out of locally quarried redstone. Because of a labor shortage, volunteers did much of the construction—after work. The going was slow and, though it wasn't fully completed, it was dedicated in Mary's name and opened to the public on schedule: December 8, 1867, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. It took another 36 years to fully finish the seat of the state's Roman Catholic Diocese—the cornerstone tower wasn't added until 1904. DeGoesbriand didn't live long enough to see it. He died in 1899 (the bell, which had been brought over from St. Mary's, cracked the same year and had to be replaced in 1900) and was eventually interred in the cathedral's crypt.

On March 13, 1972, 22-year-old Timothy Austin burst into police headquarters to report that the cathedral was ablaze. Eight neighboring fire departments responded and battled through the frigid night, aided by countless volunteers. It was the eighth in a string of

major fires that had plagued Burlington over thirteen months: Burlington High School, the Strong Theater, the Ethan Allen Club, the Mayfair Hotel, a block of businesses on North Street, a large chunk of the Old North End, and even neighboring St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral had all burned. Urban Renewal was in full swing, and the city was changing rapidly. Coming in shifts, those who

Courtesy John Fisher



weren't part of the firefighting effort stood vigil. The tower fell shortly after midnight, sending the 4500-pound bell crashing to the ground. By dawn, the cathedral lay in ruins, unsalvageable. Bystanders took chunks of rubble home, and grieved.

Investigators determined that Austin, a former altar boy, had been the one to set the fire—in the confessionals after the priests had retired to the rectory for the evening. There, the fire was all but hidden until it was out of

control. What motivated him to set, or report, it isn't clear. Judge Edward J. Costello (namesake of the courthouse right around the corner on Cherry Street) presided over the trial; Austin pleaded innocent by reason of insanity.

The (approximately) two-million-dollar insurance policy would pay for the replacement. Barnes and Kiley envisioned a site in which the church and its setting could give respite from the frenetic activity of the downtown core. Where the original cathedral needed to accommodate a rapidly growing congregation, Barnes' building had to reconcile a shrinking one—without overt emphasis. The new cathedral looks massive, but was actually designed on a relatively small scale. Barnes' plan called for seating for 300, with accommodations for up to an additional 500. The interior design also included parish offices, a library, sacristy, meeting rooms, classrooms, and a social center. Deliberately oriented on an east-west axis, it would capture sunlight at sunrise and sunset.

Dedication was scheduled for December 8, 1976, 109 years to the day of its predecessor's. But by the end of April that year, the steel was almost two months late. The construction committee grew anxious, even as it tried to come to agreement on the design and color of the stained glass windows and explored the possibility of a pipe organ rather than an electric one.

Where the bell tower was the last to be completed on the previous cathedral, here it was the first. At 65 feet, the freestanding structure held the salvaged bell which chimed (albeit electronically) for the first time in five years in March, 1977. Five years to the day of the fire, on March 13, 1977, the

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## Why the Recent Past Matters

*Devin Colman*

In 1872, the Vermont Seminary in Montpelier completed the construction of College Hall, the grand centerpiece of its campus. Built in the French Second Empire style of architecture that was popular at the time, College Hall symbolized progress and modernity. In the early 20th century, however, College Hall was criticized for its “ugly angular style of 1872” and considered an eyesore. Finally, in 1975, College Hall was listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance.

In Burlington, the Flynn Theater was a premier example of Art Deco design when it opened in 1930. By the mid-1970s, however, its elaborate stenciling had been painted over and the theater was lit by glaring fluorescent lights. Thanks to an extensive rehabilitation in the early 1980s that removed these unfortunate alterations, the building was saved and continues to serve our community today.

This is a common process for many buildings that embody a specific architectural style or period of architectural

history. Once the pride and joy of their community, they fall out of favor as styles and tastes change. Then, once enough time has passed, they are valued once again because they represent a bygone period of history.

Buildings of our recent past (built within the past 50 years) are typically the most endangered, for several reasons: the general public may lack appreciation for their design and view them as obsolete; they may be subject to development pressures and proposed for demolition; or, in an effort to “update” them, they are unsympathetically remodeled. Buildings of the recent past are often too new to be

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Courtesy John Fisher



*The Cathedral ablaze, March 13, 1972.*

Courtesy Fleming Museum



*Urban renewal area.*

Courtesy John Fisher



### History

*continued from page 3*

mother church of the Roman Catholic Diocese in Vermont welcomed back its community. It was dedicated amid much fanfare two months later, on May 26. Catholic leaders from around the world attended the consecration—as did local leaders of different religious communities, including Ohavi Zedek Synagogue and the Episcopal diocese.

The next 30 years were relatively quiet. In 2006, plans for a new

public transportation facility on St. Paul Street (the northern boundary of the cathedral site) prompted an intensive study and awareness campaign surrounding the significance of both the cathedral and its site—and the transportation center’s potential impact.

Four decades later, still-dwindling attendance, a global sex-abuse scandal, and reorganization of the Catholic Church prompted significant

change in the Burlington diocese. In April, 2018, the St. Joseph Co-Cathedral was designated as the cathedral for the diocese, and renamed. With approval from the Vatican, Immaculate Conception Cathedral Parish was “reduced to Immaculate Conception Parish...suppressed and merged with Cathedral of St. Joseph Parish including all assets and liabilities.” Six months later, the diocese announced it was putting the former Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception up for sale.

## The Architects Behind the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

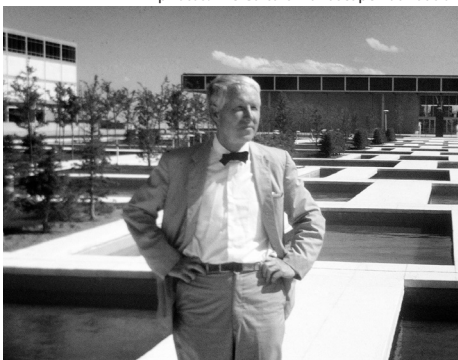
*Karyn Norwood*

When walking by the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception, I'm always struck by both the organized, diagonal lines of trees that draw the passerby to the almost camouflaged angular lines of the cathedral. I find myself pulled in all too often, walking along a row of trees until I reach the building, where I run my hands along the smooth glazed bricks as I walk along. The nationally-significant architects of the landscape and the building created a peaceful sanctuary amid a busy city—a singular Modernist property that helps define Burlington's diverse architectural landscape and the story of our community. When asked to dig into the background of architects of this unique property, I was amazed to learn of just how prominent these men were in shaping the Modernist movement of architectural design.

### Dan Kiley (1912–2004)

Known as a pioneer of Modernist landscape design, Kiley created over 1,000 landscapes worldwide during his prolific career which spanned the mid to

photos: The Cultural Landscape Foundation



*Kiley standing in front of the U.S. Air Force Academy landscape he designed in 1968.*

late 20th century. Kiley apprenticed under Warren Manning (who worked with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted) in the early 1930s, where he learned with great detail how to work with diverse plant materials. He continued his studies at the Harvard landscape architecture program, which was followed by a stint in the military during WWII. While in Europe, he was inspired by the orderly, expansive grounds of great French gardens. It was there, he said, that he truly found his inspiration, "THIS was what I had been searching for—a language... to reveal nature's power and create spaces of structural integrity. I suddenly saw that lines, allées and orchards/bosques of trees, tapis verts and clipped hedges, canals, pools and fountains could be tools to build landscapes of clarity and infinity, just like a walk in the woods."

In 1951, Kiley moved his family to Vermont, where in the post-war building boom, he opened up his own architecture office, and partnered with some of the most famous Modern architects of the time, including Eero Saarinen, I.M. Pei, Louis Kahn, and Gordon Bunshaft. Some of his most famous landscapes from this period include the St. Louis Arch (1946) with Saarinen, the garden of J. Irwin Miller (1955), the approach gardens for Saarinen's Dulles Airport (1963), and the grounds for the U.S. Air Force Academy (1968).

In the late 20th century, Kiley started a partnership with Ian Tyndall and Peter Ker Walker. Significant gardens from this period include the Dallas Museum of Art and the National

Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.. In his later years, he created some of his more prominent residential gardens, including Kenjockety in Westport, New York, just across the lake from us!

To see more of his architectural works and to learn more about him, I highly recommend visiting the Cultural Landscape Foundation ([www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)).

### Edward Larrabee Barnes (1915–2004)

One of the premier post-WWII architects, Barnes got his B.A. and M.A. in architecture at Harvard. A student of Modernist architects, Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, Following WWII, he began designing prefab houses in Los Angeles. In 1949, he opened up his own firm in Manhattan, where



he would design a wide range of buildings: from offices, to museums, to residential houses and botanical gardens. Some of his most famous works include the IBM Headquarters at Madison Avenue in 1983, the Dallas Museum of Art (with Dan Kiley; 1983–84), and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (1966–71). He was also involved in many significant academic buildings and campuses, such as the arts facilities at the Emma Willard School and Bowdoin, as well as the campus design of the State University of New York at Purchase and the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. In 2007, Barnes received the American Institute for Architecture's highest honor, the AIA Gold Medal. Barnes is known for his emphasis on geometric simplicity in design and site-sensitive approach.

## Case Study: **Saint James Place, Great Barrington, Massachusetts**

*Britta Fenniman-Tonn*

Saint James Place (SJP) is a non-profit cultural center which occupies a former church in downtown Great Barrington, Massachusetts. With just over 7,000 residents, Great Barrington features a historic downtown that is the commercial center of southwestern Berkshire County. Shops, restaurants, galleries, hardware stores, theaters, a grocery store, banks, offices, churches, a motel, and the Town Hall are packed into a few dense, vibrant blocks situated along the Housatonic River. Remnants of former industrial infrastructure and mill buildings dot the length of the Housatonic River, a stark contrast to the picturesque, bucolic nature of the surrounding countryside.

Situated in the midst of this vibrant community is the St. James Episcopal Church, located on Main Street adjacent to the town hall. St. James is an early example of Gothic Revival-style

architecture in the Berkshires, constructed in 1857 of locally-quarried blue dolomite stone and designed by Springfield architect J. Washburn. The building has a Tudor Revival-style parish house addition and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource to the Taconic and West Avenues Historic District. It sits on a large, almost one-acre lot surrounded by grass lawn and mature vegetation.

Despite its historic and architectural significance, several years ago, the fate of the church building was uncertain. The church was forced to close in 2008 for reasons shared by many shuttered churches: a dwindling congregation and a building that was ailing and too expensive to maintain or repair, facing major structural issues. In 2010, the congregation seriously considered demolishing the building when the

insurance company forced it to make a decision as to whether or not it would move ahead with necessary (and expensive) structural repairs.

Fortunately, two passionate former parishioners, Fred and Sally Harris, were able to set up a foundation to purchase the building and assembled a team of motivated people to complete renovations and modern upgrades. Recognizing the importance of the building to the community, the SJP team refused to allow it to be demol-



ished and instead capitalized on its prime location and inherent beauty to adaptively reuse it to serve the community. According to the website, “SJP was created to save the historic St. James Episcopal Church and Parish House, and to preserve and repurpose the buildings for use as a permanent home, creative hub and year-round quality performance venue for cultural and educational nonprofit organizations.” By 2014, enough money was raised by grants and donations for significant structural and cosmetic work to begin on the building.

SJP finally opened in 2017 and has done much to enhance the community of Great Barrington and greater southwestern Berkshire County. It serves as an exhibit and performance venue for arts groups and musicians, offering a

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## From Church to Center for the Arts

*Karyn Norwood*

Many communities face this dilemma in Vermont: what do we do with our historic religious spaces when congregations diminish? These buildings are prominent structures in our towns and cities, places where people have built relationships, found hope, and worked together to improve the common good. I first visited the Montgomery Community Baptist Church, built in 1866, while in graduate school. Later, I worked with the Montgomery Historical Society to write the national register nomination for the church. They wanted to find a way to reuse the church, a central and dominant building in the community. In fact, when you drive into Montgomery Center, the Greek Revival church quite literally at the center. An excerpt from a poem written by Montgomery citizen Irene Scott in 1945 about the Baptist congregation sums up its importance: “Your church was the very first church in town. With only ten members it was started in 1820. Therefore its history is very long and of renown, With many and varied incidents a-plenty” (Irene Scott, “Reminiscence,” in *Montgomery, Vermont: The History of a Town*, W.R. Branthoover and Sara Taylor, 101).

From Montgomery’s rise in industry, wealth, and population in the mid-1800s to the town’s decline in population and rise in communal spirit in the 1920s, the church was a prominent and telling aspect of the community. That community, come mid-2010s, was faced with reality that the building could no longer serve a religious purpose. What to do?

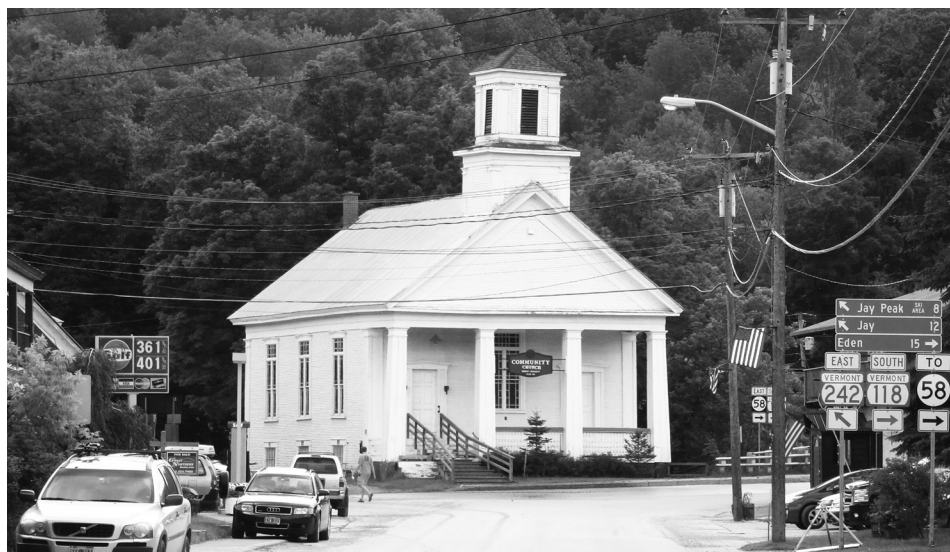
Fast forward to 2018, three years after the building was officially listed on the National Register for Historic

Places, and the structure once again became a community hub. This time, it was for the arts. Sebastian Araujo and his partner moved here from New York and immediately were drawn to the structure. Sebastian partnered with the historical society and other community members to make it into a community center and performance space. Almost

daily, there are activities at the church ranging from yoga and ballet to painting and corn-hole tournaments.

I recall when I first visited the empty church in this small town and wondered what precisely could fill the space with people again. The reality is that there are endless new possibilities for these important religious buildings. The success of the Montgomery Center for the Arts shows that with creativity, passion, and many minds

*continued on page 8*



## The Afterlife

Gweneth Langdon

Since the early 2000s, America has been facing a new type of health issue: our churches are dying. An estimated 6,000 to 10,000 churches close their doors permanently each year. The issue is not for a lack of faith; actually, 70 percent of the United States population claims to be Christian. Rather, it is that these worshippers no longer have the need for congregational participation. In addition to this change, donations and tithing are on a decline, leaving our elderly houses of worship penniless. Closure and sale are often the only options for these churches.



Devin Coleman

Church of Immaculate Conception.

Religious structures are typically located in town centers, are easily accessible, and sit on very large parcels. It is a developer's dream come true for a property of this nature to become available. Location, location, location! Fortunately, for us preservationists, there are some challenges preventing the quick and easy sale of a religious property that may include zoning issues, price negotiations, and pushback from the community. Our churches are symbols of our communities and house the

many stories of those who worshiped within. So what are we to do with these vacant buildings?

Adaptive reuse can be successful and rewarding when done with community input and innovative teams of architects and designers sharing in a collective goal. Although it may be difficult to see our cherished churches close and change use, a sensitive new use for these buildings would be a much better alternative than their demolition and replacement with a new, high-rise building. There are great examples of churches throughout the country that have been trans-

formed into residential spaces, restaurants, community centers, performance venues, and markets. The case studies referenced in this issue are two examples of successful adaptive reuse projects involving churches in downtown centers that had closed. With the closure of the Church of Immaculate Conception and

preeminent sale, Burlington is faced with a challenge that many cities across the country share. We should look at this challenge not as another vacant space to fill with boxlike structures for housing; rather, we should view it as an opportunity for creative development that honors the past while serving a modern use. Let's give the local community and even the country an example of cutting edge design and innovative, thoughtful community use that sets us above the rest.

### Saint James Place

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beautifully inspiring space and excellent acoustics. In addition, the non-profit food shelf the People's Pantry recently relocated to SJP, taking advantage of its central location and proximity to the bus route to help maximize the food pantry's accessibility. Finally, much of the parish house addition has been converted to affordable office and meeting space rented to local, non-profit groups. To help generate revenue, SJP hosts events of all kinds, including weddings, conferences, galas, reunions and receptions. SJP is governed by a board of directors, who are currently engaged in a Capital Campaign to eliminate construction debt and build operating reserves for maintenance of the building so that it can serve the community far into the future.

### Montgomery Church

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working together, there are sustainable ways to keep these community buildings vibrant and welcoming.

We can reuse the Cathedral for Immaculate Conception for our community, too. We could make it into a community space and landscape and that welcomes future generations and brings people together. Anything is achievable when a community comes together. The Montgomery Center for the Arts is case in point.

**PRESERVATION  
BURLINGTON  
NEEDS YOU!**

*Please become a member and  
support our organization!*



## Events

### Recent Past

*continued from page 4*

considered historic, but old enough to be dismissed for being out of style.

Another hurdle that buildings of the recent past face is the fact that there are often people in the community who remember when the building was built. In some cases, they even remember what was torn down 45 years ago to build what is there today. It can be difficult to convince these people that the newer building has historic value.

The task of protecting resources from the recent past is more important than ever. The built environment of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s tells an important story of American growth and prosperity in the decades after World War II. Many buildings designed in a Modernist style embody the progressive and optimistic spirit of the nation, pointing the way to a bright future. They embraced new building forms, technologies, and materials and influenced the way we live, work, worship, shop, and go about our daily lives.

Does this mean that we should now be protecting everything ever built, regardless of age or quality? Of course not. Buildings need to be evaluated thoughtfully and objectively, which can be difficult to do if a building is only 30 or 40 years old. But with increased land values and development pressures, waiting until a building is 50 years old to advocate for its preservation can be too late, and there may be nothing left to save at that point. As preservationists, we need to do everything we can to ensure that the architectural achievements of the recent past survive long enough to become part of the historical and architectural narrative, alongside the older buildings of previous eras that we know and love today.



Preservation Burlington

### NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

**April 6, 2019**

**2:00 – 4:00 P.M.**

Business Meeting/Program

**The UVM Alumni House**  
61 Summit Street, Burlington, VT

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, pursuant to the applicable provisions of the Vermont Nonprofit Corporation Act and the Preservation Burlington bylaws, that the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Membership will be held at the UVM Alumni House, 61 Summit Street, in Burlington 05401, on Saturday, April 6, 2019, from 2:00 to 4:00 P.M., for the following purpose:

To consider proposed amendments to Preservation Burlington bylaws (copies of the proposed revised bylaws and a summary of the changes will be available at the meeting and are currently posted on the Preservation Burlington website: [preservationburlington.org](http://preservationburlington.org)

### Join Us for the Annual Meeting and Preservation Awards Celebration!

Preservation Burlington wishes to invite you on Saturday, April 6th from 2:00–4:00 P.M. at the UVM Alumni House to join us in celebrating the annual meeting and awards. There will be a cash bar and light refreshments provided. More details to be announced soon!

### 2019 Preservation Burlington Homes Tour

Preservation Burlington's 2019 Homes Tour will be held on Saturday, June 8 from 12–4 P.M. The Homes Tour Committee is hard at work compiling a list of beautiful and historic homes for you to tour. If you are interested in having your home on a future tour (or know someone who would), or would like to volunteer on the day of the tour, please contact Matt Viens at 802-864-7391 or [mlviens@comcast.net](mailto:mlviens@comcast.net). The Homes Tour is Preservation Burlington's biggest fundraising event. Proceeds from the tour go towards the organization's many educational programs.

### Exhibit: The Landscape Architecture Legacy of Dan Kiley at the Henry Sheldon Museum

Organized by The Cultural Landscape Foundation, this traveling photographic exhibition and retrospective features 45 vibrant photographs chronicling the current state of 27 of Kiley's more than 1,000 projects worldwide.

On display at the Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History in Middlebury, May to August 2019. A series of related educational programs will accompany the exhibit. Please visit [henrysheldonmuseum.org](http://henrysheldonmuseum.org) for more details.

### **Preservation Burlington T-Shirts**

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### **Historic Building Markers**

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Cost: \$100 includes:  
basic research on your home,  
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