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THE JOHN S. SOLENBERGER HARDWARE STORE'S BEGINNINGS ON NORTH LOUDOUN STREET

BY KAREN CLAY



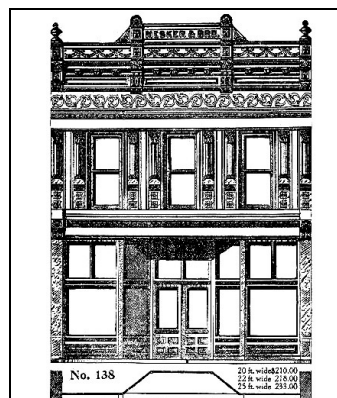
This decorative column was the key to uncovering the history of the façade at 146-148 N. Loudoun St.

During the late 1880's in the building (150 N. Main St.) where Thomas Keating was an agent for the distribution of the Cumberland and Braddock Rye Whiskey Brewing Company, you could purchase "Winchester's largest glass of beer for five cents." This was the gentlemen's end of town with cigar stores, bars, men's clothing, and hardware. After all, the Taylor Hotel was diagonally across the street with male travelers coming and going. Next door to Keating's business at 146-148 North Main Street (present North Loudoun Street) was the American Stock Company, a dry goods store, and the John S. Solenberger Company: stoves, hardware and tinware. Today we know this building by its last occupant, the Blind Faith Guitar Store. Though this structure is in disrepair and poorly maintained, it continues to represent the history of so many businesses that had their beginnings within its walls.

In the mid 1880's the brick structure was used as a dry goods establishment, but by 1897 the building was divided in half to house the American Stock Company Dry Goods and Clothing Store on the north and the John S. Solenberger Hardware and Tinware Shop on the south. Solenberger's built an addition extending to the east which was to house the tin shop and warehouse.

Tin had become the "plastic" of its day and by 1887 it was being used as a less expensive alternative to the decorative work achieved with iron or masonry on building facades. About the turn of the century, the Solenberger Store was sheathed with a stamped sheet metal façade manufactured by the Mesker Brothers Company of St. Louis, Missouri. Mesker Brothers shipped their metal work throughout the United States and Winchester is the recipient of one of their facades (to see others, visit www.therostel.com). The Mesker Company continues to be in business today in Huntsville, Alabama.

By 1908 Solenberger's Hardware Store moved next door, across the alley to the larger space at 140 North Main Street, the building we refer to today as the "old Solenberger's store." The store they vacated was then occupied continually as a dry goods and clothing shop: Moling & Seal, Heller & Co., Joliffe & Joliffe, Bell Clothes and Eleanor Clothing Store. **(Continued on page 5)**



The facades, like this 1904 design, were advertised in Mesker & Bro. catalogs, along with other metal accoutrements for buildings, such as fire escapes, windows, ceilings, and exterior hardware.

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TAYLOR DEMOLISHED TODAY!

BY BILL BUETTIN

REPRINTED FROM THE OCTOBER 20 OPEN FORUM IN THE WINCHESTER STAR

Don't wish to see this headline? Remember 'authenticity.'

"Once an important part of downtown Winchester, the Taylor Hotel was demolished today."

OK, so that hasn't actually happened (yet), but there is a very real possibility that a headline such as this could appear in this paper in the near future. I, for one, think this would be a travesty and a real setback to the revitalization of the downtown walking mall.

As I understand it, there are two options on the table right now. The first option is the current owner (Lafayette Plaza LLC) sells the property to a new owner (Taylor Hotel LLC), who renovates the property and removes the "blight" as determined by the city. The second option is the city declares the property blighted (which they have already done) and then abates the blight by demolishing the building. The proverbial fork in the road is set to occur on or before March 31, 2011, according to the City Manager's comments in this newspaper Sept. 4.

If, like me, you'd like to see the demolition option taken off the table if a deal with Taylor Hotel, LLC doesn't work out, then time is of the essence to come up with an alternative plan.

Personally, I would like to see the city explore a third path, which is the option of acquiring the property, either by reaching an agreement with the owner or through eminent domain, investing funds to stabilize the building and engage partners who can bring the building back to life.

I've been thinking about this issue a lot lately. I believe the argument boils down to three main questions. First, why save the building? Second, can it be saved? Third, is "eminent domain" fair?

Why save the building? Sometimes, and typically to the chagrin of my lovely wife, I like to answer questions with questions. So I would ask why do people visit downtown Winchester and how do we keep it relevant in today's big-box, chain-store environment?

Conveniently, the answer to all three questions is a one-word answer: authenticity. In today's world people want to visit places that are real, aren't replicable, and have unique character. Adaptive re-use of historic structures is happening in cities, towns, and neighborhoods all across this country. This isn't a fad or lefty, tree-hugging propaganda. It's about how to create an environment where people want to live, work, shop, play, and worship. It's about being a vibrant community in the 21st century.

I'm not saying the fate of Winchester rests on the survival of the Taylor Hotel, but its demise certainly would be a setback because it's a highly visible location and has such a rich history.

If you can agree that the building is worth saving, the next question is: Can it be saved? The answer is yes, in part, according to knowledgeable sources who've inspected the building. The front building, including the façade, can and should be saved. The one-story building facing the alley probably isn't worth saving. The fly tower in the back can be demolished or renovated as determined by the future developer. The middle portion that housed the theater is the trickiest and its preservation would likely be a point of contention.

Lastly, if the city chooses to acquire the property through eminent domain, is that really fair? I'm a property-rights advocate, so I don't answer this question lightly. But the clear answer is yes.

The clearest way of articulating the relative fairness of eminent domain in this case is to contrast it with the alternative. If the city continues along the current path and demolishes the building to eliminate blight, the current owner gets to keep what's left of the property. This is the most compelling argument against eminent domain.

However, the owner is left with a vacant lot located in a flood plain, which will limit anyone's ability to build something else there. Also, the city attaches a tax lien to the property equivalent to the demolition costs. The owner is left with an unmarketable property and a huge liability so the only alternatives are foreclosure by the owner's bank or the city taking title through a tax sale. How fair is that?

If the city chooses eminent domain, it is required to pay the owner "just compensation" that is decided by a local judge and a jury of his peers. It is based on the fair market value of the property as determined by an independent appraiser. There are rights and remedies in the Virginia Code that simply don't exist in the blight code.

Sure, there are localities across the country that have taken eminent domain way too far, the most famous case being *Kelo v. City of New London*, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005. Unfortunately, these abusers have turned eminent domain into a polarizing issue even though it has been used throughout history for more good than harm. I don't believe our elected officials are prone to go on an eminent domain binge.

The situation with the Taylor Hotel is an isolated and unique case and should be viewed as such. If you feel as I do and want to preserve an important landmark in our community, please contact your elected city representative and ask them to consider acquiring the property through eminent domain, or seek other alternatives that don't involve demolition. ♦

Check each item that you are willing to volunteer your time and return to **PHW, 530 Amherst St. Winchester, VA 22601**

PHW Activities

- ☐ Newsletter
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Community Relations
- ☐ Special Events
- ☐ Membership Campaign
- ☐ Revolving Fund

Holiday House Tour

- ☐ Docents
- ☐ House Chairmen
- ☐ Decorators
- ☐ Publicity
- ☐ Bough and Dough Shop

Name:

Phone:

E-Mail:

Homes for the Holiday

Celebrate holiday traditions
with PHW's 34th Annual
Holiday House Tour.



Enjoy the stately homes, festive
atmosphere, freshly cut greens and
local handicrafts of the Bough and
Dough Shop while you bask in the
holiday spirit.

Holiday Tour Sites

101 North Washington Street



The Long House
*Home of Mr. and Mrs.
Thomas Rockwood
Mary Scully Riley,
House Chair*

Built around 1785 by Robert Long I, this frame house occupies the corner lot at North Washington and Amherst Streets. The Rockwoods received a PHW Award of Merit in 2007 after they removed the stucco to expose the original façade. This vernacular Federal style home welcomes visitors through its multi-paned front door to the main hallway graced with a carved newel post, delicate stairway and carved plaster ceiling medallion. The Rockwoods' home is furnished with art and collectibles from both sides of the family.

209 North Washington Street

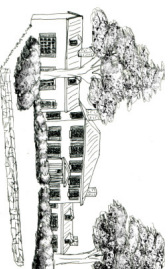


*Home of Mr. and Mrs.
Rich Rizzetta
Mark Lore, House Chair
Mary Dale Jackson and
Sandy Lore, Decorators*

One of Winchester's delightful vernacular Italianate style homes welcomes all visitors to its Tuscan columned wrap-around porch and beckons all to enter through its front paneled door lit by sidelights and a three-pane transom. This two and a half story, caves front structure built c. 1875 and covered in shiplap siding, has its seam metal gable roof supported by the characteristic bracketed cornice of the Italianate style. Two-over-two sash windows on the second story also exhibit the decorative woodwork of this

style with carved lintels. A two-story ell extends the house into the well manicured backyard.

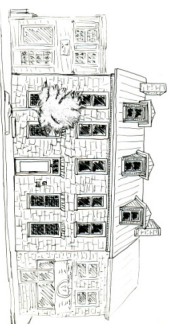
311 Fairmont Avenue Fair Mount



*Home of Mr. and Mrs.
Richard Helm
Bruce Downing,
House Chair
Brookie Phillips, Decorator*

Large American boxwoods guide visitors up the slate walkway to one of Winchester's earliest houses. Constructed in the first decade of the 1800s, this house is an excellent example of a transitional Georgian style to Federal style dwelling. Fair Mount was built for Joseph Tidball by a local carpenter named Lewis Barnett. The two-story white stucco main structure is flanked by one and one half story service wings which were added shortly after the central portion was built. The graceful interior woodwork illustrates the influence of national tastes on local builders. The first-floor plan is comprised of four rooms with a lateral stair in the main hall, which is in contrast to the highly formal and sophisticated five-bay Georgian-style façade.

35 West Piccadilly Street

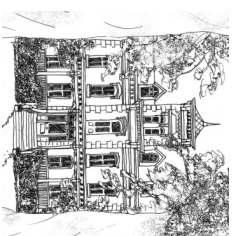


George Reed House
*Home of the Rev. and
Mrs. Dan McCoig
John Barker and Emily
Skiles, House Chairs*

The "Rev." George Reed House was built circa 1787. The main wing is a solid example of a late-Georgian/early American stone house. The main wing has two rooms on the first floor, two rooms on the second floor, and two dormer rooms on the third floor. The west and south wings, both of which are two stories, are brick and were completed before 1810. Nearly all of the architectural woodwork is original. Notable items include five fireplace mantles, especially the mantles in the east and west front parlors, the central stairwell, and the original back door. The McCoigs restored the home to a private residence in 2008, receiving a PHW Award of Merit for their efforts in 2009.

Preview Party and Candlelight Tour

Miss the crowds and enjoy a special candlelight tour of the homes on Saturday, December 4 from 6 to 9 p.m. RSVP for the preview party by 12/2/2010.



**303 Fairmont Avenue
Belvedere**
*Home of Mrs. Joseph Manuel
Franklin Wright, House Chair*

This grand High Victorian Italianate style home, known as Belvedere, was built in 1876-1877 by Dr. Philip W. Boyd. The house exhibits a glorious array of Victorian ornamentation. Upon entering the house, the high first floor ceilings create a feeling of grandeur for the Christmas tree in the entry hall. A spruce tree decorated with prisms and placed between two mirrored piers in the ballroom, spreading the wonder of the holidays to all guests.

Ticket Order and Reservation Form

Daylight Tour

Adult Advance Tickets _____ x \$12
Child (12 and under) _____ x \$6

Tickets the day of the tour are \$15 for adults. Advance tickets are also sold at Kimberly's, Throx Country Store, The Final Yard, Union Jack Pub & Restaurant, Winchester Book Gallery, the Hexagon House, and the Bough & Dough Shop at the Centre Friends Meeting House.

Preview Party & Candlelight Tour

PHW Member _____ x \$25
Non-Member _____ x \$35

PHW members, please visit or mail in your orders to the PHW office to receive your discounted ticket price!

Total: \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Return to:

PHW, 530 Amherst St., Winchester, VA 22601

WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE TAYLOR?

BY RICHARD BELL

What is to become of the Taylor Hotel? This is the question I have heard so often over the past few months. Any answer would be purely speculative but the closer the current owners, or the city, get to a true course of action then the divergent paths are becoming more clear.

First, let us face some of the current realities. While the roof collapse of 2007 has been mostly stabilized by the actions of the current owner there still exists a public safety concern; as such the building is still classified as unsafe for access by firefighters in the event of a call to action. The property has been officially blighted this past summer putting clear requirements on the owner (or the current contract owner) to correct the noted items creating the blight condition. The actions approved by the city further authorizes immediate corrective actions if these blight conditions are not effectively addressed in a timely manner. The most likely action by the city would be a total demolition of the property as this would represent the least complicated method and the least likely future liability upon the city. The city has a legitimate position to contain its potential expenses of taxpayer funds and limit its liabilities. We have been advised by the city manager that we should not expect any formal actions to move on any demolition until March 2011 at the earliest. There is nothing we are aware of that anchors this date other than the word of the city manager.

One minor fact of note is that the entire property is located in a flood plain. Now in the case of an historic rehabilitation project the property can be granted exemption from the costs and limitations associated with flood insurance and flood proofing. Once demolished, however, any new development would certainly be subject to strict adherence to the flood program. And, one other minor note, Preservation Virginia (www.apva.org), which recently named the Taylor Hotel to its top ten list of endangered buildings and sites in Virginia, has also recently selected Winchester for its annual state wide meeting set for September 2011. This will be a great opportunity to showcase, to the state and beyond, the successes of Winchester as a community committed to preservation.

We have also been advised by the current contract purchaser (www.wishneff.com) that they would very much like to pursue the project but there is an economic gap in the budget even with utilizing historic rehabilitation tax credits. We are in discussions with the Wishneff group to better define this economic gap relative to the overall project plan. We have confirmed with Virginia Department of

Historic Resources (DHR) that any selective demolition of the property (ex. demolish all but the original Taylor Hotel) would likely risk any use of tax credits for the residual. If the project has an economic gap with the full utilization of tax credits then putting tax credits at risk would just move this property closer to becoming nothing more than a vacant lot. Wishneff has also confirmed that their plan of a redevelopment of the property in its current state with new infill construction between a rehabilitated Taylor Hotel (back to its original design) and an adaptively reprogrammed "fly tower" to include punched windows for residential spaces have been viewed as acceptable and eligible for tax credits by DHR. Any demolition to correct the current blight will work to take away any current or potential economic value of the property until such time as market conditions can justify such a large infill project without subsidy or tax incentive.

So, with this knowledge, what is to become of the Taylor Hotel? I find it difficult to accept the loss of such a large part of our community heritage, the removal of a significant portion of the streetscape of our pedestrian mall or even the protracted existence of a vacant lot as some positive step forward. This issue is core to the existence of PHW and yet this issue is so much larger than PHW. This property is truly an economic redevelopment project as much as it is one of preservation of our history and culture. This community has been long in search of vitality for its downtown core and the pedestrian mall in general. Great efforts are being made towards this end by Shenandoah University's redevelopment of the former Solenberger Hardware store for student housing and by Yount, Hyde and Barbour's current efforts of the former Jones Funeral home, recent projects by the Oakcrest Companies and the downtown improvement projects completed by the city. We should work towards capitalizing on these efforts as well as the opportunities before us to revitalize our downtown and bring a level of vibrancy towards our greater potential. Preservation is good business and the city has got to see the economic advantages of supporting a redevelopment of the Taylor Hotel as a far greater option then it would be to erase it from existence.

I would encourage each of you to reach out to your elected officials and ask that they strongly consider the potential impacts of demolishing this property and that a redeveloped Taylor Hotel could have huge economic advantages over the long haul. ♦

SOLENBERGER (CONT.)

Previous to the Solenberger Hardware move, the 146 N. Main Street side of the building held a moving picture house, a cigar store and pool hall and eventually it became the Crystal Confectionary run by J. Sempeles and S. Yeatras. The Crystal Café remained well into the 1960s. The last long term occupant of this space was the Valley Photo Centre.

We tend to forget that it is the less grand commercial spaces in our downtown that have supported and nurtured so many important businesses during Winchester's history. Seed buildings where a commercial venture takes hold are necessary to the economic vitality of Winchester. We look to 146-148 North Loudoun Street to once again contribute to our city's economic wellbeing. ♦



The Valley Photo Centre and Eleanor Clothing Store were the tenants at 146-148 N. Loudoun St. when the photographs were taken for the 1976 Architectural Inventory.

CULTURAL RESOURCE SURVEY BEGINNING NOVEMBER 2010

EHT Traceries, Inc., in concert with Maral S. Kalbian, LLC, is pleased to be conducting the Survey of Buildings and Properties within the National Register Winchester Historic District. The project is possible thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, plus a shared sponsorship from Preservation of Historic Winchester, Inc. and the City of Winchester, both of which contributed \$12,500 to the project. The objective of this project is to document the remaining 600-800 properties in the historic district, beginning on the east side of Loudoun Street, where the 2008 survey concluded, and moving westward.

The scope of work includes a reconnaissance-level (exterior only) survey of all properties with sketch site plans, location maps, black-and-white and color digital photographs, and detailed descriptions of each associated resource including dates of construction and alteration(s). The goal is to provide concise documentation that will be available for all to use when studying the architectural development of properties in the National Register Winchester Historic District. The survey information will be added to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' Data Sharing System (DSS) database, which is available for researchers and public agencies. The collection of this information and its professional presentation will lead to a more efficient and effective process of further preserving the historically and architecturally significant resources of the City of Winchester. The project is expected to begin at the beginning of November, when the leaves will no longer obstruct views of the city's architecturally significant buildings, and will conclude in the spring of 2011.

When completed, the survey will open the door for more properties in the Winchester Historic District to be eligible for historic tax credits during a certified rehabilitation. Part of the process to determine eligibility for historic tax credits is the designation of the property as a "certified historic structure." According to the National Parks Service, a certified historic structure "is one that is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or

located in a registered historic district and certified by the Secretary of the Interior as being of historical significance to the district." In this case, all buildings deemed contributing in the new survey will become certified historic structures. These tax credits are available for both homeowners and income-producing structures, from 25-45% of the qualified rehabilitation expenses for contributing structures on the state and federal level. Even commercial structures deemed non-contributing/non-historic to the district can benefit from a 10% federal tax credit. The expanded opportunities for tax credits will build on the existing revitalization projects to keep historic Old Town Winchester a vibrant and vital part of the City.

Based in Washington, D.C., EHT Traceries, Inc. is a research and consulting firm specializing in architectural history and historic preservation. Maral S. Kalbian is an historic preservation specialist who has been practicing in the Shenandoah Valley and Piedmont areas of Virginia for 22 years. Both Traceries and Maral Kalbian provide a wide range of services related to historic and cultural resources, including research, survey, identification, evaluation, and preservation. Their extensive efforts have resulted in the documentation of over 40,000 properties that resulted in the nomination of over 55 individual properties and more than 70 historic districts.

To learn more about historic tax credits, visit the National Park Service online at <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/index.htm>, the National Trust for Historic Preservation's guide to tax credits at <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/rehabilitation-tax-credits/federal/>, and Virginia's Department of Historic Resources at http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/tax_credits/tax_credit.htm. David Edwards, the Regional Director for the Department of Historic Resources, can also be reached at (540) 868-7030. ♦

**Preservation
of Historic
Winchester**

Hexagon House ♦ 530 Amherst St. ♦ Winchester, VA 22601

NEWS

Fall 2010

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Winchester, VA

UPCOMING EVENTS

Holiday House Tour

This year's tour, "Homes for the Holiday" will be held December 4 and 5. We will be visiting homes in the North Washington and Fairmont Avenue area of historic Winchester. Check the inserted flyer for more information!

Holiday Office Hours

To prepare for the Holiday House Tour ticket sales, the PHW office will be open Monday-Friday, 10 AM to 6 PM from November 15 to December 3. The office will be closed November 25 for Thanksgiving Day. Be sure to stop by!

Downtown Revitalization

The City has released an overview of the recent and ongoing revitalization efforts in Old Town Winchester. Projects from small façade "facelifts" to multimillion dollar rehabilitations are highlighted in this 30 page packet. See what's been happening downtown in this PDF brochure, available at <http://www.winchesterva.gov/econ/documents/revitalization-marketing.pdf> ♦

PARTING SHOT



The Conrad House (c. 1790) was located directly across from City Hall on North Cameron Street. The home was demolished in 1970 following a six year struggle for its preservation. The lot was leveled to accommodate a parking lot, and later the Joint Judicial Center.

ARE YOU A PHW MEMBER?

Preservation of Historic Winchester, Inc., is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting Winchester's architectural heritage. PHW depends on income from membership and contributions to achieve its goals. *All contributions above membership are tax deductible.*

Join today by completing this form and returning it to PHW, 530 Amherst St., Winchester, VA 22601.



____ Individual \$25
____ Corporate \$100

____ Family/Business \$45
____ Other

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____