

NOMINATING PROPERTIES TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER:

Q&A with the Owners of the John Mollenhauer House, Bay Shore

SPLIA sat down with homeowners, Christopher Jend and Arnbjorn Toset, who purchased the historic John Mollenhauer House three years ago after relocating to Bay Shore from New York City. Settling into their 1893 Shingle Style house on Awixa Avenue, the couple began a lengthy research and documentation process to nominate their house to the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Why did you feel it was important to nominate your home to the National Register of Historic Places?

We wanted to promote awareness and appreciation of our house and similar historic places in Bay Shore by archiving and making our research available to the public. We also wanted to be able to take advantage of the New York State Homeownership Rehabilitation Tax Credit.

Describe the nomination process.

When we decided to start the National Register nomination, we contacted SPLIA and received a sample National Register Request for Determination of Eligibility. We then wrote a similar two page document and submitted it to the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The Long Island representative for SHPO made a site visit and discussed our research. Given that Christopher is an architect and had already completed the research, it made sense for us to write the nomination ourselves. SHPO edited the final draft and was extremely helpful in organizing the document.

If someone has the interest, it really becomes a hobby. We still continue to research the house! With all the materials available online (Google books, Suffolk County Historical Newspapers, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online), it is easier than ever to discover the history of a property. The Bay Shore Historical Society was a great resource, and after that, the Brooklyn Public Library, the New York Public Library, and the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University provided sources for more in depth research.



John Mollenhauer House, Circa 1910



John Mollenhauer House, Awixa Avenue, Bay Shore, 2013

Did you have any exciting or unexpected research discoveries?

From the 1880's through the 1940's, Bay Shore was a summer resort for wealthy families from Brooklyn and Manhattan many of whom built houses on Awixa Avenue. After learning that our house was designed by architect, E. G. W. Dietrich, we discovered that he designed three other houses on our street. Dietrich is best known for his collaboration with Gustav Stickley on the first "Craftsman House" design for *Craftsman Magazine* in 1903, but he was also a prolific designer of Shingle Style and Colonial Revival residences as well as churches, schools, libraries and commercial buildings. We discovered that one of Dietrich's sons was tragically killed by a lion while working as a lion-tamer for his fiancé. We also uncovered a Mollenhauer family scandal; if a family's name appeared in the newspapers, it was not always a good thing.

What advice might you give another homeowner interested in nomination?

The research process is a lot of work but for those interested, it is also a lot of fun. Going through the research process helps one to understand and appreciate the place where one lives. Owners of old buildings can turn to local historical societies or libraries. Neighbors who have lived in the area for a long time can also be a great source. We went so far as to track down descendants of two previous owners.

What's next for the preservation of the Mollenhauer House?

We have a lot of work ahead of us. We were attracted to the house because of all the original details but that also comes

with many required updates. Given the size and scope, we will break things up into smaller projects to take on each year. One goal we have is to restore the original stained shingle exterior with red and green painted trim emphasizing the house's original Shingle Style design.

Homeowners with properties listed on the State/National Register may qualify for the New York State Historic Homeownership Rehabilitation Tax Credit. One of the requirements is that the house be located in an eligible census tract. How did you determine whether or not your house qualified?

It was easy, and we did it all online. Once we determined our census tract, we went to the SHPO website and looked at a list of qualifying census tracts for the tax credit, which fortunately included ours. Then we contacted the SHPO office just to double check we were correct.

Any final thoughts you would like to share about your experience?

One of the biggest misconceptions people have is that listing one's home on the State/National Register binds them in a straightjacket with regard to renovation work. There are many resources and publications made available to assist historic property owners at both the national and state levels. The tax credit program does require SHPO sign-off on renovation projects that will be counted toward the credit, but in our case, that is not an issue as following the historical guidelines has been our plan all along. Listing a property helps to understand the significance of the built world around us and also raises awareness of our shared history on Long Island.