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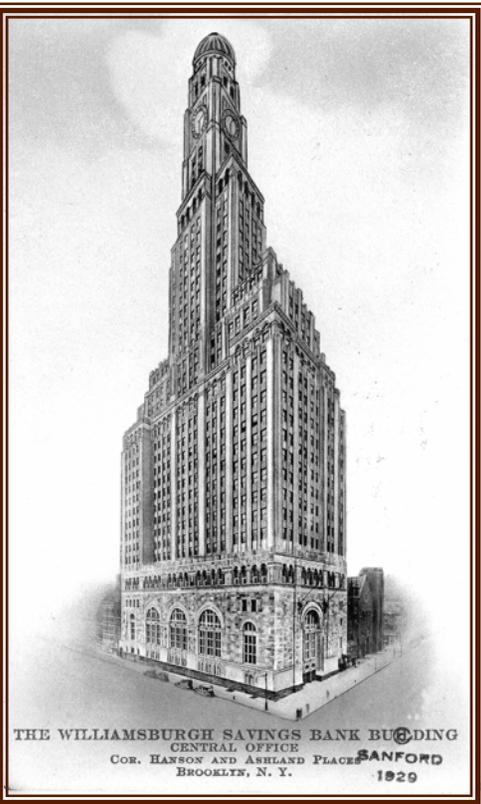
H I S T O R I C Fort Greene Association N E W S L E T T E R

SEPTEMBER, 2005

Summer Vacation?

What about that promised summer hiatus? I was told that it was something of a tradition for community groups and civic organizations to take a break during July and August. "Relax" they said, "nothing much happens during the dog-days". Yea, right! This summer has been extremely busy in our corner of Brooklyn, and much has happened. On some issues there has been real progress. On others, there is more to do. This issue of the FGA newsletter has information on some of the summer's activities - and the FGA website has even more. It sure has been an action-packed summer.

Phillip Kellogg
FGA Chair



Williamsburgh Bank Tower Condo?

By Alfred A. Chiold

The Williamsburgh Savings Bank Tower has been Brooklyn's most prominent building since its completion in 1929. It has been home to HSBC since January 2000, and before that Republic Bank (1993-1999), Manhattan Savings Bank (1990-1993), and its namesake, Williamsburgh. Now the tower will begin a new life as it is converted to condominiums on the upper floors, while a new range of retail possibilities awaits the magnificent banking space on the ground floor. This seemingly bright future raises some important questions that need to be considered. What will be the impact of hundreds of luxury apartments instantly added to the Fort Greene mix? Will there be any remaining public space as the bank is now? Will there be needed affordable housing?

Plans are for the creation of 216 condominium apartments, with the Corcoran Group acting as exclusive broker for the

residential space. The former observation deck (closed since 1977, except for some special open houses in conjunction with the Fort Greene House Tour) will become part of the residential condos. Understanding the community's widespread concern about the fate of this beloved neighborhood landmark, our Councilperson Tish James took the lead and called a June meeting involving representatives from each of the two development partners, the Borough President's Office, and from the FGA. At this meeting Councilperson James outlined her constituency's following concerns: possible alteration of the interior bank lobby; displacement of the dentists and other tenants; the effects of these lost businesses on local employment; and the need for affordable housing. The Dermot Company representatives gave assurances that there would be no demolition of the bank hall and any alteration to be space would be brought before the Landmarks Preservation Commission for approval. Both Councilperson James and the Borough President's representatives made commitments to encourage and enable The Dermot Company to include 10-20% affordable housing in the condo conversion.

Since then, there has yet to be a confirmed retail tenant. In recent days, however, there has been some talk that Barnes and Noble has expressed an interest in occupying the grand space. As for the historic preservation of the bank interior Tish James has been assured from B&N that they "are committed to the historic preservation of the bank interior." For its part the FGA is asking the membership to pursue concepts and tenants for the bank interior and make them known to the FGA Landmarks Committee and Councilperson James's office.

The current HSBC branch will be closing September 30. Hours are Monday-Friday, 8:30 am to 4 pm. Make the time to visit this remarkably splendid banking room in its original state before renovation begins.

(Williamsburgh Savings Bank image courtesy of Park Slope Gallery www.ParkSlopeGallery.com)

"Say NO to the Brooklyn Bridge Park Plan"

By Judi Francis, Parks Chair,
Willowtown Association

The Willowtown Association has joined Community Board 6, The Cobble Hill Assn., DUMBO Neighborhood Assn., Vinegar Hill Assn., and the Friends of Brooklyn Bridge Park to oppose the current Brooklyn Bridge Park plan. The Willowtown Association is urging residents in Fort Greene to join us in advocating for a great, accessible and affordable park, and rejecting the current plan.

Since the 2000 Vision Plan was accepted by the Local Development Corporation and celebrated by Brooklyn residents, the Empire State Development Corporation has completely changed the vision and

design of this park. Their plan will turn the shoreline into a luxury condo community that blocks access to the park and the water for all but those who will dwell inside it. They have eliminated the pool, skating rink, baseball fields, tennis courts, amphitheater, skateboard areas and year-round recreation facility and replaced them with 2 luxury high-rise towers and a hotel. Long-sought recreation has been replaced by an enlarged marina area for 40-foot yachts and kayaking.

Please write to our elected officials and to the Empire State Development Corporation to voice your concerns. For more details, photos and contact information log on to: <http://www.willowtown.org>

FGA Fights for Admiral's Row

The venerable structures known as Admiral's Row, which once served to protect our country, are once again under attack but this time from the City of New York. In a plan which has been underway since 1996 the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation [BNYDC] plans to demolish the historic structures and replace them with a large cinder block retail store. Terribly neglected by their current owner, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, seven of the ten original houses built between 1864 and 1901 still remain, some in quite good condition. It is the opinion of the FGA and historic preservation groups like the Historic District Council [HDC] that they could be restored to serve again as vital components, both historically and practically, for the neighborhood. In recognizing this potential Simeon Bankoff of the HDC said "They could easily be incorporated into the Navy Yard plans and provide much needed retail or commercial space for the community." Locking heads with the FGA and others who see this as a dual opportunity to honor the history of the Navy Yard and provide services for the surrounding neighborhood, BNYDC refuses to entertain any notion of adaptive reuse of the buildings.

Hoping to alter the BNYDC opinion, the FGA has garnered the support of both community groups and commercial developers alike who see the historic and economic potential in restoring these structures. Since airing this issue many commercial developers have contacted the FGA with interest in developing the site with historic preservation in mind. While foes of historic preservation often portray the movement as elitist and hampering to economic growth, the opposite is actually true and has been especially demonstrated in Fort Greene. Historic preservation stimulates economic growth and simultaneously provides the community with a rich history on which to build its future. To help preserve Admiral's Row for generations to come visit <http://www.historicfortgreene.org/admiral.html> to see what you can do.

Irreplaceable Artifacts

By Robbin Gourley

I just got back from three days on the most exquisite beach in South Carolina. Too bad cheap over development and poor land use planning have ruined it. There was a wall of terribly designed high-rises that blocked views of the ocean and choked the beachfront. Too many cars, too many people, just beyond the beach were a multiple array of identical malls, all behemoths and unattractive. And to quote Ry Cooder, all with "zero content. . . where no memories will be created or associations made, or good times. . . simply directing you into the act of taking your credit card out of your wallet." I was happy to get back to New York and more to the point, my beautiful urban oasis, Fort Greene.

I came to live here in 1999, fleeing from a greedy landlord in Tribeca. We had a beautiful loft there with views of the Towers. But the landlord had eyes on our space and rather than fight an expensive legal fight we cut our losses and bought a boarded up, former crack house on Adelphi Street, the only building we could afford. I was charmed by the neighborhood but my senses at that point were consumed by the task of making our new home habitable for two young children on a shoe string budget, all the while going to work and resuming as normal a life as possible. Over time I realized I was falling deeply in love with our neighborhood. I had always enjoyed wherever we lived but this was different.

By day I am a decorative artist you might say. I am a watercolorist who makes a living crafting children's books. Fort

Greene and Clinton Hill began to speak to my soul with its streets decorated with trees and flowers, wild urban gardens, rosettes and curves carved out of stone and wood, cut and colored glass, moldings, the shapes of the buildings, cornices, colors, the Fort Greene Park with its stately trees and paths, the grandeur



of mansions, scaled rooms and high ceilings, carved marble and decorative tile. This neighborhood was and is crafted by artisans who care deeply for their art and the visible legacy they leave for future generations. We are a neighborhood full of endangered, irreplaceable artifacts.

Right before Christmas, Patti Hagan called me and asked me to do a little

watercolor of the Peralta bodega on the corner of St. Marks and Carlton. A new landlord bought the building and would be turning the space into a "fancy French restaurant." The neighbors around the store were grieving over the loss of their beloved corner store, which had been there for a long, long time. I sided with Patti, shaking my head over change we don't want. I worry about the future of our neighborhood. I want to protect it as much as possible. If I need a dose of mall shopping, I can always find it. They are springing up everywhere.

FGA Transit

The FGA received word from the MTA that the opening of the South Portland exit has been delayed, and that the exit should be opening up by the end of August. We will keep tabs on this and put the pressure on the MTA should the exit remain closed by Labor Day.

The FGA has demanded that the DOT study the light sequence at the intersection of Lafayette and Fulton. Automobile and pedestrian traffic is extremely hazardous at this location, and the FGA feels that a three-light intersection and a crosswalk from Fort Greene Place to Fulton is in order.

The MTA is beginning to study the possibility of a single-seat link between lower Manhattan and JFK. One option that would have a huge impact on Brooklyn would be to use the express tracks on the A-line for this service and move all subway service to the local C-train tracks. If you wish to comment and/or provide alternative suggestions, the MTA encourages you to log on to

<http://www.mta.info/mta/planning/lmlink/>

HISTORIC Fort Greene Association

Box 170563, Brooklyn, NY 11217-0563

On the September 19 Agenda:

Meet the Candidates-

**BROOKLYN
BOROUGH PRESIDENT**

Invitations have been extended
to the incumbent and each of
the challengers.

NEXT FGA MEETING September 19th, 2005

7:30PM- Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, 85 South Oxford Street, Fort Greene

GOINGS ON

MEETINGS

Fort Greene Association - Meets Mondays at 7:30 pm, Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, 85 South Oxford Street, Fort Greene.

September 19, October 17, November 21, February 27, March 20, April 17, May 22. Participate in our OPEN FORUM.

Community Board 2 - Meets 2nd Wednesday of the month, 6 pm. Call CB2 office, 718.596.5410, for location. Attend.

88th Precinct - 3rd Tuesday of each month, 7:30. Call 718.636.6511 ext 526x for location.

Brooklyn Artists Breakfast - 3rd Wednesday of the month, 9am, BODEGAS restaurant, 868 Fulton Street at Clinton Ave (open for breakfast at 8am). Questions: 718.624.5719.

NEWS CENES

CAFÉ MARQUET - Food & Pastries. 680 Fulton Street. 718.596.2018. Newly reinvented and serving an expanded menu. Stop by and meet new manager Fernando Romero and wife Paola Ramirez, charmers both. M-F 7-8, Sat 8-8, Sun 8-6 Give yourself a treat.

MIRAI Nail & Spa - 670 Fulton Street. 718.875.0369. Congratulations to our long time friends, Kay and Bruce Lee, who just opened their 3rd business here. MARAI means "future" for which we wish them the very best. Check the salon's elegant space.

HABANA OUTPOST - 755 Fulton Street. 718.858.9500. Come for food and fun - Cuban sandwich, Mexican corn (a specialty), mango salad - and have a swing in the swing. Owned by neighbor Sean Meenen. T-F 4-midnight, Sat-Sun noon-midnight (closed winter- Nov1-May 1) Look for the bright green corner at Fulton and South Portland. Say hello to Anna.

LUZ - Latino Restaurant. 177 Vanderbilt Avenue. New trendy spot to have drinks & or dinner. You'll love the décor especially the red door leading to the kitchen. Kudos to chef Lopez, what a great menu. Be sure to try the beet salad, it's excellent. Lunch daily 11a- 4p; dinner, Sun - Wed 5:30p-11p Th - Sat till midnight.

FARMER'S MARKET RAFFLE - Drop by Dines Farm and ask Mary for a raffle ticket for Maggie Brown's Restaurant. While you're at it pick up some of the best hot dogs you've ever tasted for some late summer grilling.