

Sherwood Award to Brian Pinnola
Comments by Paul Bentel
Saturday, January 25, 2025

I am humbled to be asked to speak briefly about Brian Pinnola as the recipient of the Howard C. Sherwood Award. This award is named for the founder of Preservation Long Island and given for lifetime achievement in preservation. It is one of the highest honors PLI can bestow. I can't think of anyone more deserving of this award than Brian.

Brian and I were fellow members of the Board of PLI. We worked together for many years on its Preservation Committee. In that capacity, I knew Brian as an earnest advocate of the preservation of buildings and places. His character was low key. Always sporting a blazer, shirt and tie, he was reserved and gentlemanly as many have said. But that demeanor disguised a passion to protect languishing old buildings and sincere empathy for the communities who would be most impacted – sometimes unwittingly - by their loss.

The best example of this is his work in Garden City. There, he showed himself to be an ardent preservation advocate who strongly “encouraged” local government to properly maintain its physical heritage as demonstrated by his on-going effort to “save” the Saint Paul's School. But, to me, his most notable accomplishments were those less widely celebrated such as his nurturing of the Garden City Historical Society, his work to solidify its important archives, his community outreach through tours, lectures and pamphlets including those addressed to children with an underlying goal of explaining how the history of that place was their history.

Brian was a special kind of preservationist. For many people in this field, the calculation of what has “value” as a building or a place is arithmetic, a calculation which relies on adding known values defined by historical facts or aesthetic qualities. Brian was certainly prepared to make that argument as his work in maintaining the archives of the historical society shows. But, in my brief exchanges with Brian, it was clear to me that his sense of “value” in things worth preserving was based on a higher standard. It grew from an ethical calculation that it is wrong to stand by while an underappreciated old building or place is threatened. One could sense his indignation when confronted with a cost benefit analysis that purported to show the logic of the demolition of an old building too costly to repair. For him, it was not just the building being threatened. A community and its collective identity was at risk. Numbers alone could not prove a point when Brian confronted the loss of heritage.

We are here to celebrate Brian's work as a preservationist and to his consummate public service through heritage conservation which touched so many, inspiring their own caring about buildings, places and people.

It is my honor to present the Howard C Sherwood award to Brian Pinnola's partner Maureen Soltren in his honor.