

# Historical Society Recalls *Forgotten New York*

BY THOMAS COGAN

**T**he Greater Astoria Historical Society's guest speaker at its December meeting was Kevin Walsh, author of the book, *Forgotten New York*. Because it was December there was some holiday tribute too, in the form of music from some Astoria stalwarts: Natalia Paruz, a well-known crosscut saw instrumentalist, and a quartet of the Goliard Singers. There was also the sad announcement that Thomas L. Jackson, local historian and author, one of GAHS' most valuable members, had died of a massive stroke on Thursday, November 30, at the age of 56.

Walsh was introduced by Richard Melnick, new GAHS president, who said the author is a native of Bay Ridge and that he compiled the book after running the Web site [www.forgotten-ny.com](http://www.forgotten-ny.com), since 1999. Walsh is a stocky man with wild hair and thick eyeglasses but a calm demeanor, whose essays and descriptions in the book and on the Web are well written. He presented a PowerPoint show of more than 20 buildings, signs and sundry objects he had photographed since 1998. The signal fact about nearly all of them is that they no longer exist or are no longer visible.

He began with a truly wretched-looking, graffiti-covered house that he identified as the Lord family residence on Claremont Terrace in Elmhurst. The Lords were of the Lord & Taylor department

stores, but the generations who lived in the house were long gone by the time Walsh photographed it in 1998. He said there was some effort to save and restore the house, but it was torn down this year. He followed that with a shot of the factory in Williamsburg where Old Dutch Mustard was once made. That building might have been converted to residences in a gentrified Williamsburg, but plans fell through and it was razed. Flessel's Tavern in College Point, which he described as one of many beer gardens that once stood in what was a resort area, was operational until 1997, a year before he photographed it; some five years later, it was torn down. He described the wall sign for Reckitt's Blue laundry bluing ("The Purest and Best"), located in Brooklyn at Washington and Dean Streets, as "the best old painted ad I've seen". Unfortunately, new construction now hides the wall and the ad. He showed a picture of a diner on Rockaway Boulevard in Ozone Park that was apparently closed for some time when he discovered it but which had many of its small items, such as sugar shakers, in place as if customers were still coming in. It too was torn down.

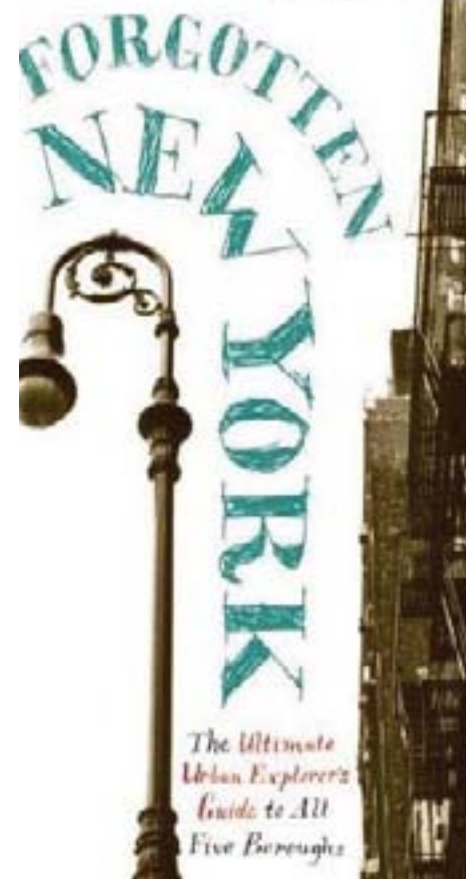
He presented many of the pictures without heavy editorializing, as if to say that some things are bound to be replaced, but was a bit indignant when showing the Greenpoint Terminal building on West Street in Brooklyn, which was destroyed earlier this year, seemingly by an act of

arson. The deep red bricks and corrugated metal connecting corridors appealed to moviemakers, he said, and many crime movie scenes, depicting nefarious encounters in an isolated place, were shot at that location. He was also angry about something dear to him and many others: the Trylon Theater, a movie house on Queens Boulevard in Forest Hills. He showed a picture he took of the mosaic covering the ticket booth, depicting the trylon symbol from the 1939-40 World's Fair. The theater was opened at the same time as the fair, 1939, and remained a commemoration of it for another 60 years. After it was closed and its ultimate fate put in doubt, however, the new owner destroyed the tiles and the ticket booth.

Walsh even mentioned St. Saviour's, a church on Rust Street in Maspeth that one developer wants to clear away for housing. He said it represents the Landmarks Preservation Commission's confused state about its mission. According to him, the LPC doubts St. Saviour's fitness as a landmark because of extensive renovation on the 1840s structure after a fire occurred there in 1970. The instances of St. Saviour's and the Trylon Theater, whose cause also failed to attract the commission's interest, struck him as examples of a lax or obtuse attitude on the part of the LPC.

Other interesting parts of Walsh's talk covered such things as old iron lampposts,

KEVIN WALSH



which he said were first exhibited at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. He was not impressed with the current return to them in several parts of the city, saying that the city in the 21st century should develop 21st century innovations.

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