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Razing Awareness: The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building

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Buffalo State
Department of History and Social Studies
Museum Studies

Razing Awareness: The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building

A Project in
Museum Studies

By

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of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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I. PROJECT ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to fulfill the final requirement for candidacy for a M.A. in Museum Studies from SUNY Buffalo State. The project consisted of the planning, research, design, and outreach associated with the organization of a museum exhibit at a Buffalo-area museum. The author had a working relationship with the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York starting in summer 2012. Being born and raised in Western New York with a sharp interest in local history, it seemed natural to be drawn to the Steel Plant Museum. Curator Spencer Morgan enthusiastically supported the idea for an exhibit.

This work presents evidence of the preparation and methodology inclusive of the museum exhibition design process. The chapters progress from initial ideation of the exhibit concept and topic, through to historical research to support the educational and interpretive components of the exhibit and then to media and publicity outreach including fundraising for the exhibit.

The chapter dedicated to the results of the exhibition explores the opening of the exhibit and is followed by a project summary. These chapters will summarize the project and address the relevant scholarly sources used to support the educational thinking behind the design and interpretive elements of the exhibit. Also included is a chapter of photographic evidence of the museum exhibition, opening gala event, and interpretive panels.
II. INITIAL IDEATION

When Spencer Morgan was approached with the idea of hosting this Masters Project at the Steel Plant Museum, he was enthusiastic and immediately had ideas for the topic of the exhibition. It was decided, rather quickly and definitively, that the topic of the exhibition was to be the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building in nearby Lackawanna, NY that had been demolished in March 2013. We decided that the time and place was ideal for an exhibition addressing the tragic loss of the building. The Steel Plant Museum is less than a ten minute drive from the site and the majority of the museum’s collection consists of artifacts from Bethlehem Steel’s Lackawanna plant. In addition, the Old North building, as it was often called, is the most photographed building included in the museum’s collection of photographs.

Taking these factors into consideration along with the controversy that surrounded the building’s demolition, the choice for a topic was easy. Immediately ideas for community involvement and who could collaborate with in order to make this exhibit multi-faceted and inclusive began to take shape. This included artists and preservationists, and Spencer Morgan placed a call for artwork and artifacts relevant to the building. This step was taken knowing that the building had been heavily photographed prior to its demolition, and even painting by a local group called Painting for Preservation, which depicts threatened buildings in artworks. Happily, the museum received several responses and began to assemble a collaborative exhibit that would hopefully appeal to as many people as possible.

The author had participated in a self-established internship immediately after acceptance into SUNY Buffalo State’s Museum Studies M.A. program. Having no prior museum
experience before application to the program drove the decision to dive into some experiential learning before classes began in the fall of 2012. After emailing several Buffalo-area museums, the Steel Plant Museum responded and created a curatorial internship there in the summer of 2012.

The Steel Plant Museum of Western New York was founded in 1984 in the basement of the Lackawanna Public Library on Ridge Road in Lackawanna, primarily by workers who had been employed at Bethlehem Steel in Lackawanna. They sought to interpret and preserve the history of Western New York’s steel town. The museum eventually outgrew its space in the bottom of the library and moved into the Heritage DiscoveRY Center (HDC) at 100 Lee Street in Buffalo’s First Ward in 2011-2012. The collaborative museum environment at the HDC has spurred more growth for the Steel Plant Museum, and in 2013 it finally received its official charter as a museum and non-profit from the New York State Board of Regents.

It was with this heritage in mind that the exhibit for the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York was prepared. Knowing full well that the topic was a sensitive one, effort was made to portray a feeling of quiet sadness at the loss of the building and to create a pseudo-burial ceremony of sorts for the building. While celebratory in nature, the exhibit certainly had a funerary air to it, as well as deep pride of the steel heritage that the City of Lackawanna seemingly tried to demolish.

The topic selection for the exhibition was thrilling and meant the opportunity to work with such a “hot topic” in the current timeframe following the effort to save the building and its eventual demolition. The selection of this topic was sure to engage the community, draw in
visitors to the museum and urge visitors to ask questions about their own sense of place and
the role of historic preservation in Buffalo, Lackawanna, Western New York, and beyond.
III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. THEORETICAL MODELS

Several relevant and scholarly sources were cited and applied to the design, planning, and execution of “Razing Awareness”. These sources guided the exhibit as well as the writing of this binder and exhibit methodology.

*Reinventing the Museum*, published 2012, is a collection of contemporary museum studies article selected and edited by Gail Anderson, a 35+ year veteran in the museum world and a current museum consultant.¹ She is president of her own firm, and served as chair of the Museum Studies department at JFK University.² She also served on the board of the American Alliance of Museums and a published author of works such as *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity* and is currently working on another book.³

Several articles appearing in Anderson’s book are used in this project binder. One such article is “Savings Bank for the Soul”, written by Elaine Heumann Gurian. Gurian is also a museum consultant and former deputy director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.⁴ She also served in the administration of the Smithsonian Institution and has published her own book, *Civilizing the Museum: the Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian*.⁵ “Savings Bank for the Soul” addresses the social and societal value of museums. Gurian

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¹ Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum*, “About the Author”, 540.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid, footnote p135.
⁵ Ibid.
claims that museums are one of the institutions that keep civilized society, civilized. I would tend to agree.

Lisa C. Roberts’ “Changing Practices of Interpretation” was used to explain the methodology behind the importance of interpretation and what it hopes to accomplish within a museum exhibit (other than the relaying of basic facts). Roberts is also a museum consultant and served as a director at the Chicago Park District in Chicago, Illinois. She also wrote *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum* in 1997. In her article, she discusses the importance that museum educators have on exhibit design and their role in creating interpretation. Her advice was used for the writing of interpretation for the exhibition. Writing labels that are approachable, understandable, and still factual is a paramount of any exhibit.

Pam Locker’s book, *Exhibition Design*, is part of a series of books addressing the basics of interior design published in Europe. In my studies in the Museum Studies program, I have come across a large amount of material in this field that originates from Europe, and specifically the United Kingdom. This book is no different, as Pam Locker has experience in this field in Great Britain. Locker has taught at the University of Lincoln as a Principal Teaching Fellow and is a member of both the Higher Education Academy and the Chartered Society of Designers.

John Falk is a well-known name in the museum studies academic world. His book, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* was one of the most important driving factors

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7 Ibid.
behind the design of “Razing Awareness”. Falk had an article that appeared in Anderson’s compilation, but I chose to take pieces from his own book. A proponent of free-choice learning environments, his classification of museum visitors into several categories allows museum exhibit designers to create exhibits that appeal to a greater amount of people.

By understanding what visitors want to engage in and in what manner he or she is most likely to engage with an exhibit, a designer can provide experiences to suit visitor needs. Falk has a myriad of experiences to back up his writing career and museum studies works. He has taught at Oregon State University and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. In addition to founding his own research institution, Falk has authored several museum studies books on a range of topics from free-choice learning environments, learning in cultural institutions and business models for cultural organizations.

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10 Ibid.
B. HISTORICAL SUPPORTING MATERIAL OF EXHIBITION

Steelmaking in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century brought almost unparalleled prosperity to Western New York and more specifically, Lackawanna. The blast furnaces of Bethlehem Steel towered over the massive plant along the shores of Lake Erie, keeping watch over the thousands of workers that filed in and out of the plant. Those workers more than likely filed past a stately Beaux-Arts building prominently situated on Route 5, or perhaps collected their hard-earned paycheck from within its walls. Officially, it was the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. Colloquially, locals called it “Old North” or the “Old Main Office”.

Seen by many cruising along Route 5, the building stood there until it became the center of a storm between preservationists and politicians. The ghosts of the steel industry locked horns with future-minded politicians in a struggle to save the building. The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building drew national attention from preservationists and historians who were called to action to protest any plans for demolition. However, some questionable motives and misguided intentions brought the building down, to the horror of those who fought to protect it. This section briefly examines the history of the building, its life during the years of Bethlehem Steel and its controversial demise in 2013. The building had various names throughout its history, and they will be used interchangeably throughout this work.
The building’s history begins in the eastern portion of Pennsylvania, in the hills of Lackawanna County. The Lackawanna Steel Company was derived from one of the oldest steel mills in the United States, Scranton & Platt, located in or around Scranton, PA in the early parts of the 1800s. In 1853, Scranton & Platt renamed itself and became the Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company, and then merged with the Scranton Steel Company in 1891. After the merger, the company’s name changed slightly to Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company. Lackawanna Iron and Steel continued to grow, as steelmaking in the United States increased. Heading towards the new century, the company’s administrators looked for opportunities to grow and profit. Their answer came in the form of several prominent and successful businessmen hundreds of miles away in Buffalo, New York.

Those who lived in Buffalo and Western New York are familiar with the names John J. Albright, and John G. Milburn, successful entrepreneurs from the area around the turn of the 20th century. These two men were crucial parts of a delegation of businessmen who met “...[with] the purpose of ...complet[ing] plans for enticing Lackawanna Iron & Steel Company to the shores of Lake Erie...” The businessmen pitched their case to Lackawanna Iron & Steel, sharing their plans to construct a “...completely new, gigantic, modern plant...just south of Buffalo.” The Buffalo group’s efforts proved to be successful, as the Lackawanna Iron & Steel Company packed its bags and started the trek towards Lake Erie. The company officially

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Thomas E. Leary, Elizabeth C. Sholes, From Fire to Rust, Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society, 7.
15 “Lackawanna Plant Celebrates 75 Years...”, 1979.
relocated in 1900, to a section of West Seneca that was later renamed Lackawanna, after the company that had decided to call it home.\textsuperscript{16}

Construction on the new plant started in 1900, although the Wall Street Journal did not announce the company’s plant until February 15, 1902, stating that $40,000,000 in capital and equipment were slated for Lackawanna Iron & Steel’s opening near Buffalo.\textsuperscript{17} Several months later, in June, the Wall Street Journal heralded the new venture which “...promises to seriously add to the competition with the United States Steel Corporation...”\textsuperscript{18} Even though the Wall Street Journal did not report it until 1902, there is no doubt that the financiers and the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company had high hopes for the newly constructed plant. It was hailed as “…the Eighth Wonder of the World”, when the plans were publicly announced.\textsuperscript{19} The massive plant would not be completed until 1902 (when the Wall Street Journal recognized it), but the site’s administration building was erected and opened within a year.

The North Office Building, as it was first called, was constructed in 1901 and opened on September 30 of that year.\textsuperscript{20} Architect L.C. Holden designed the building, which was one on the very first built and completed at the new Lackawanna Plant.\textsuperscript{21} It held a prominent position on the Hamburg Turnpike, making it easily visible to travelers and commuters along Route 5 between the Village of Hamburg to the south and the bustling city of Buffalo to the north. The Administration Building was one of Holden’s finest structures, who employed the Beaux-Arts

\textsuperscript{19} Bethlehem Steel, “Lackawanna Plant Celebrates 75 Years of Steelmaking”
\textsuperscript{20} Gerald Halligan, John Koerner, 43.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 48.
architectural style for several buildings in his body of work. Despite never reached fame as an architect comparable to Frank Lloyd Wright, H.H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan or others, Holden was an important (if underrated) member of the American architecture world around the turn of the century.

Even though he was a member of the American Institute of Architects, the records of his life are largely incomplete and not verified. According to one source, he was born in 1858 in Rome, New York.\textsuperscript{22} He attended school for architecture in Utica, New York before travelling to Buffalo, New York for more education.\textsuperscript{23} After the completion of the Lackawanna Steel Administration Building, Holden received an honorary degree from the College of Wooster in Ohio.\textsuperscript{24} He also completed works around the northeast, mostly in Scranton, Pennsylvania, but also including the impressive Beaux-Arts Ossining Bank for Savings in Ossining, New York.\textsuperscript{25} His architectural output was limited, and instead he is most well-known for his involvement with the American Institute of Architects (AIA). According to the American Institute of Architects, Lansing C. Holden joined as a member in 1901, and was then elected as a Fellow in 1912.\textsuperscript{26} He also served as President of the New York Chapter of the AIA.\textsuperscript{27}

After being elected Fellow, Lansing was probably most remembered for his work on the AIA’s code of ethics and its adoption by the institute.\textsuperscript{28} Starting in 1908, Holden was the

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27}archINFORM, http://eng.archinform.net/arch/73301.htm
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.
President of the Bronx Refrigerating Company and the Tri-Boro Refrigerating Company. In addition to the offices held in these companies, Holden served as a member of “...the Board of Examiners of the City of New York” in 1916, the Board of Standards and appeals from 1916 to 1918, and “… a director of the Engineers Club.” Lansing C. Holden died on May 15, 1930, at his home around Carmel, New York.

Holden’s architectural profile heavily favored the Beaux-Arts style, which he employed for his design of the Lackawanna Steel Administration Building in 1901. The name derives from the French national school of architecture (L’ecole des Beaux-Arts) located in Paris, and quickly “...became the preferred expression for all manner of professional buildings—state capitals, courthouses, banks, libraries...” around the turn of the 20th century. In “Rust Belt” cities, and especially Buffalo and its surrounding areas, this style of architecture is prominent (along with Art Deco). This makes sense, as according to the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission (PHMC), “The Beaux Arts style was most often seen in places where turn-of-the-century wealth was concentrated...” For those familiar with Buffalo and Western New York history, the wealth began to flow into the area right around the turn of the 20th century as manufacturing and particularly steelmaking in the United States exploded, as embodied with Lackawanna Steel & Iron’s move

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30 archINFORM, http://eng.archinform.net/arch/73301.htm
31 AIA, “Lansing C. Holden”
32 “Nobody Asked Me, But...”
to Western New York. That accounts for the typical use of the Beaux Arts style on the Lackawanna Steel Administration Building. Around this time, the American public was witnessing industrial progress that had been previously unseen, and therefore took great interest and pride in these developments. Grand buildings like the North Office were an “...expression of both corporate...and civic pride.”35 The PHMC also states that the style was popularized by the use of it at the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893, which means the use of Beaux Arts gained steam and developed for 8 years until its employment in Lackawanna.36

Beaux Arts is described as a “classical style”, that has its roots in Greco-Roman architectural features, including “...the column, arch, vault, and dome.”37 Buildings that are designed in this manner boast “...an eclectic use of historic architectural themes and elements.”, and the North Office is no exception, as seen in the photograph below.38

This photograph, courtesy of the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York, shows the building soon after its completion in 1901. It is easy to see the ornate, luxurious detailing on the building’s façade. Beaux Arts buildings

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35 PHMC, “Beaux Arts Style”
36 Ibid.
38 PHMC, “Beaux Arts Style 1885-1930”
usually have “A single architectural element set as a grand gesture—often an over-scaled archway...”, which this building clearly has above its main entranceway, highlighted by the staircase leading to it.\footnote{Jonathan and Donna Fricker, 4.} This served as the entrance which thousands of people utilized over its years as the administrative center of the Lackawanna Plant.

The Steel Plant Museum of Western New York has a copy of L.C. Holden’s original front elevation for the building, which points out several of the architectural and structural features of the building. Much of the ornamentation is noted to be Terra Cotta, as Holden marked these elements with the letters “T.C.”\footnote{L.C. Holden, Front Elevation of North Office Building, courtesy of the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York.} However, these elements seemed to be made of light-colored stone instead of Terra Cotta. Windows are marked with the letters “P.G.”, standing for “plate glass”. The most interesting part of the front elevation, however, may be the notations around the roof and the roofline of the North Office. The roof material is labeled “red slate” on the original plans, with directions for copper roof ornamentations (the dormers, window frames, and lions’ heads).\footnote{Ibid.} However, the roof of the building was never red slate and instead was installed with copper—the same as all the ornamentation along the roofline. Several large dormers surrounded the windows along the roof, and dozens of cast copper lions’ heads lined the roof end to end.

The lavish façade of the building drew attention from the very moment it was completed. This building, “...along with the rest of the plant, captured the imagination of many in the scope of this enterprise.”\footnote{Gerald Halligan and John Koerner, \textit{Images of America: Lackawanna}, 48.} The attention to detail and beautiful stonework embodied the
hope and optimism that the financiers and industrialists had for the Lackawanna plant. An article published in a Buffalo newspaper from the era lauded the architectural features of the building, stating that “It looks more like a museum, even suggesting in general outline the building of the Buffalo Historical Society in Delaware Park.”\textsuperscript{43} The Greek-influenced classical style of the Buffalo History Museum certainly has a presence in Beaux-Arts style structures—in terms of the North Office, the columns lining the exterior are a dead giveaway of this influence.

The decades that immediately followed the opening of the North Office in Lackawanna saw both the steel plant and the administration building grow. In 1901, a south wing was added on to the building, and in 1917, the façade was extended and another wing added on the north side of the office.\textsuperscript{44} The wings added on the building did not mimic the architectural style of the North Office, with the exception of the extension of the façade on the north end of the building. The additions, making the building roughly into a block “C” shape, were square and utilitarian. The building remained the same for years to come, but arguably the largest change to the Lackawanna plant came in the roaring 20s.

Not far from Lackawanna Iron & Steel’s birthplace in eastern Pennsylvania is a small city called Bethlehem, located between Scranton and Philadelphia. Nestled in the hills of coal country, the city was geographically advantageous for industrial undertakings. One of the earlier iron works in the United States was the Saucona Iron Company, “…a small iron works established in 1857 Bethlehem, PA.”\textsuperscript{45} In 1859, this venture took on the new name Bethlehem Rolling Mills and Iron Company, and then changed it again in 1861 to the Bethlehem Iron

\textsuperscript{43} Thomas E. Leary and Elizabeth C. Sholes, \textit{From Fire to Rust}, 7.
\textsuperscript{44} Halligan and Koerner, 48.
\textsuperscript{45} Public Affairs Department, Bethlehem Steel, \textit{Recollections: In Celebration of 75 Years}, Bethlehem, PA: 1981, 2.
In 1904, the company took on the moniker that reached icon status in the United States: Bethlehem Steel. Eighteen years later, in 1922, Bethlehem Steel moved into Western New York by announcing that it intended to purchase the Buffalo-area steel plant from the Lackawanna Steel Company.

The decades that followed Bethlehem’s move into Lackawanna were marked by growth and expansion, concretely defining Lackawanna as a company town. Life revolved around the steel plant, and if someone did not work at Bethlehem Steel themselves, they had a relative or knew someone who did. As life revolved around the steel plant, it also did the same around the Old North Office, the place where paychecks were issued and worker housing mortgages were paid. Life in Lackawanna went on for decades around Bethlehem Steel until the 1980s. After steady decline and increasing competition from foreign markets combined with labor woes, Bethlehem Steel announced the closure of its Lackawanna plant in 1982.

The site remained fairly untouched for the better part of the next thirty years. The harsh Lake Erie winds and snow whipped and walloped the building, causing great amounts of damage and decay amplified by the neglect the structure faced in Lackawanna. The site started to gain some attention again heading into the late 2000s and early 2010s. A student in the Urban Planning Department of SUNY Buffalo (UB) tackled the issue of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building for his final project. Darren Cotton submitted and published “Heritage Tourism: Adaptive Re-Use in a Post-Industrial City, Lackawanna, NY” in 2012. He explored the

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46 Bethlehem Steel, Public Affairs Department, *Recollections*
47 Ibid.
48 Bethlehem Steel, “Lackawanna Plant Celebrates 75 Years of Steelmaking”
building and imagined ways to re-use it, most notably as a cultural center anchoring a large lakefront park in Lackawanna.

His observations of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building’s interior were bleak. He wrote that it was

“...evident that the building was not secured properly and had become the target for vandalism. A majority of the windows had been broken and no effort had been made to board them up...Most of the ceilings had collapsed along with those staircases that hadn’t already been pillaged.”

The degradation of the building’s interior was a fact accepted by both sides of the battle to save the building. Where they differed, however, was if the interior was bad enough to threaten the structural integrity of the building and if it could be saved and rehabilitated. Cotton seems to agree with the camp that claimed the interior was unable to be saved, but he did comment on the condition of the exterior of the building. In his report, he states that “While most of the interior would be unsalvageable...the façade and masonry work of the exterior are in remarkably good condition.” He moves on to comment that there did not seem to be any “...noticeable shifts or cracks in the foundation”, and that all the walls of the structure seemed to still be upright and “structurally sound”.

On May 21, 2012, the Gateway Trade Center (owners of the building) received an emergency demolition court order to proceed with the demolition of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building.

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52 Ibid, 4-5.
Administration Building. Rumors of the building’s demise had filtered through Buffalo and Western New York’s preservationists prior to the official demolition order being released, and several groups had formed to oppose Lackawanna Mayor Geoff Szymanski’s efforts to destroy the building. One of the leading groups is “I’m Steel Standing”, a website (imsteelstanding.org) dedicated to railing against the demolition efforts and touting historic preservation and material culture as reasons to save the building.

The grassroots organization made up of primarily preservationists, activists, and historians tried to raise questions about the City of Lackawanna’s intentions and reasons for demolishing the building on the website’s “Background” page:

“Why is the mayor doing everything he can to demolish his own city’s heritage?

The mayor of Lackawanna, Geoffrey Szymanski, has been quoted as saying, ‘I am tired of hearing about our glorious past. I think preservation societies are only trying to preserve what once was, as opposed to moving our region in a positive direction.’

What was deemed questionable was the process that the City of Lackawanna engaged in in order to proceed with ordering the demolition of the building. Lackawanna City Common Council member Henry Pirowski sat on a panel dedicated to public discussion of the building’s future, and implied that the proper legal channels may not have been followed. In an article in ArtVoice, reporter Rebecca Bratek wrote that according to Pirowski, any policy decisions and

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financial controls have to pass through the City’s council and that the mayor seemed to have acted outside of this system.\(^5\)

Pirowski stated that “There was no discussion with the council. There was no telling us the reasons why this is being done. It was simply done on the mayor’s part.”, and stated that the “…decision to demolish the building was made without the council’s consent.”\(^6\) Mayor Szymanski was absent for that panel in June 2012, and continually dodged invitations to public discussions of the building and consistently declined to comment on the anything related to the demolition of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. Bratek ended her article with another quote from Pirowski:

> “I believe that there should at least be discussion before you knock down a building on such a historic site…Lackawanna’s history is in the steel plant. Everyone who is in Lackawanna—guaranteed one of your grandparents worked at the steel plant. So to knock down this building without public discussion—I just think that’s wrong.”\(^7\)

The criticism of Mayor Szymanski and of the City of Lackawanna’s attitude toward the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building was not just contained to Lackawanna. Neighboring Buffalo and its surrounding suburbs took personal interest in the broiling controversy, as all of Western New York had ties to the Bethlehem Steel plant and the manufacturing might it brought to the region. The tens of thousands of workers that once labored there had relatives

\(^{5}\) Bratek, “Old North Still Standing”


\(^{7}\) Ibid.
across Western New York and beyond. One of the most scathing criticisms came from the writing of Donn Esmonde, a columnist for the Buffalo News.

The sarcasm evident in his headline “Demolition Paves Path to ‘Progress’” set the tone for his following comments, starting with stating Mayor Szymanski’s attitude towards historic preservation “…makes it seem like the last 20 years never happened. It’s as if he lives in Latvia, not Lackawanna.”, Esmonde wrote. Esmonde pointed to the successes that neighboring Buffalo had in terms of historic preservation. Speaking from several standpoints, Esmonde’s perception of historic preservation is accurate.

With national trends in tourism pointing more and more to heritage tourism, historic preservation is more than ever in the spotlight and focus. Saving historic structures and preserving cultural built landscapes and assets are the best way of keeping a place’s heritage and identity intact. Szymanski’s stance flies in the face of these efforts—“It’s time we got more progressive,” he stated, “Bring down that building, bring down...the grain elevators, and let’s get this city moving.”

Buffalo’s progress is due to the saving of historic structures, not in tearing them down. Esmonde wrote that in Buffalo “…stands a collection of reclaimed buildings—and the rents, jobs, and visitors they bring...the benefits of revival are impossible to ignore.” Yet somehow the reports of the benefits of such efforts seemed to have been ignored completely by the Lackawanna mayor’s office. Noting Szymanski’s fondness for the wrecking ball, Esmonde takes

59 Ibid.
60 Esmonde, “Demolition Paves Path to ‘Progress’”
aim at Lackawanna’s beloved Our Lady of Victory Basilica: “Why stop with Bethlehem...Why not demolish any evidence of the city’s character, history, and sense of place? Hey, there’s nothing wrong with that old Basilica that a few whacks from a wrecking ball wouldn’t cure.”

It seems that the battle in Lackawanna pitted two opposing viewpoints against each other: the effort to save and celebrate its steel-making past versus the effort to distance Lackawanna from the painful decline it has endured due to Bethlehem Steel’s closure. The efforts to demolish the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building were a severely misguided manifestation of what is a fundamentally positive notion of moving Lackawanna forward. However, that movement should have included the history that the city has.

“The empty Bethlehem building is not an embarrassing symbol of decline. It is emblematic of the place which produced the steel for everything from WWII battleships that obliterated tyranny to the vehicles that powered America’s auto industry. What’s not to be proud of?”

Esmonde also wrote that “...Demolishing an iconic building without so much as a reuse study is like a conviction with a trial.”, a sentiment repeated by I’m Steel Standing, who called the loss of the building “a criminal loss to our regional heritage and waterfront.” It was a heartbreaking moment in March 2013 when, in spite of every effort made to the save building, the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building’s façade was torn open by demolition equipment and piece by piece, the ornate exterior tumbled to the cold Lackawanna soil.

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61 Esmonde, “Demolition Paves Path to ’Progress’”
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 I’m Steel Standing, homepage, [www.imsteelstanding.org](http://www.imsteelstanding.org), accessed December 2013.
The Campaign for a Greater Buffalo, a local preservationist organization, failed in its bid to have the New York State Supreme Court halt the demolition, and Gateway Trade continued taking the building down after the temporary restraining order was lifted. Tim Tielman, speaking for the Campaign for a Greater Buffalo, remarked that “No one wins today. It’s a loss for all the citizens of Western New York.” The loss to the heritage of the region came after several attempts to stop demolition of the building and numerous issuances of restraining orders, the lifting of those orders, and other suits. After all the legal channels were exhausted, preservationists finally ran out of ways to prolong the life of the building and the Bethlehem Steel icon was torn down.

The demolition of the building and the controversy surrounding it fostered incredibly high tensions and hard feelings between the opposing parties. When a victor eventually emerged, the wrecking ball swung. However, eyewitness accounts to the demolition observed something unusual about the way the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building was demolished. It seemed that the demolition crew, with the defeated preservationists looking on, specifically attacked the features of the building that they had fought so hard to save:

“Initially the demo began at the rear of the building and it appeared as though the demolition crew would work their way to the front. However, when the TRO [Temporary Restraining Order] was lifted the wrecking equipment moved to the

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66 Ibid.
front of the building. The crews smashed the large pediments, ripped off the ornate copper trimmed dormers, and punched holes all over the façade.

Unfortunately, I’ve watched many demolitions in WNY and every building was strategically demolished, i.e. starting from the front to back or left to right. No other demolition I’ve witnessed began as haphazardly as Bethlehem Steel. The attack on the only architectural features was completely deliberate.  

--Views on Buffalo

The intentional demolition of the architectural features of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building was a final dagger into the hearts of everyone who tried so hard to rally support for the building’s preservation or wanted to see it saved. No official record of the haphazard demolition has emerged, of course, of why it was completed in such a manner—which leaves one to draw a conclusion as to why. Was it a rude act of final defiance to those who tried to save it?

The wind off Lake Erie prevails, but instead of blowing by the Bethlehem Steel Administration, it easily passes by the space where it once stood. The emptiness of the site fits in with the other acres of demolished steel plant, leaving almost no extant reminders of what once stood there. The towering wind power generators on the site of the Bethlehem Steel plant now preside over a space of lost industrial heritage in Lackawanna. The loss of the building is not only felt among those who directly fought for it, but for those interested in the history of

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Western New York as a whole. Luckily, a few pieces of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building have survived and are now part of the collection of the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York. A terra cotta capital, brass building sign, and most notably (among others) one of the ornate copper dormers are now all safely housed in the museum. Conflicting rumors of the existence and survival of other pieces still float around. Some pieces may be gone forever; some may have been stolen, sold, or taken as a spoil of war.

The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building was one of the very last reminders of the greatest manufacturing power that Lackawanna and Western New York ever had. It was the last remnant of the steel giant that made the materials to win World War II, build the American auto industry and construct the buildings that distinguished American cities. For thousands, the sight of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building was a connection to the past, to their relatives who fought for a new life in the United States or to those just trying to provide for their families. It is a connection that now, thanks to misguided visions of progress and hubris, is now gone forever.
V. EXHIBIT METHODOLOGY

Foreword:

This section of the project aims to embark on a narrative-style walkthrough of the exhibit, moving from area to area and one artifact case to another while discussing the contents and design direction behind each case. Woven into the narrative are pieces of relevant ideological and scholarly pieces of museum studies literature that drove me to lay out the cases in the manner that I did. Photographs are embedded into the piece as the narrative moves throughout the exhibition.

The first section of the methodology concerns the planning process and activities that were engaged in prior to the actual mounting of the exhibition. From there, the methodology moves into the narrative walkthrough of “Razing Awareness: The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building”. Media outreach, publicity, and fundraising are discussed in the next section in greater detail. Copy of all interpretive panels and labels are provided in the supporting materials portion of the project.
After the initial ideation and selection of an exhibition topic, the next step was to begin assembling participants and collaborators to contribute to the exhibit. Steel Plant Museum Curator Spencer Morgan, already planning for the exhibit in spring of 2013, placed a call of artwork out to artists in hopes of receiving responses of artwork and photography to use in the exhibition. Emails were sent to relevant organizations (such as Painting for Preservation), Facebook groups dedicated to photographing the building, as well as out to the members and volunteers of the Steel Plant Museum. Through these channels, and word of mouth, responses began to come to the museum.

The use of artwork throughout the exhibition was a fundamental part of both the design and educational goals of “Razing Awareness”. First and foremost, the inclusion of artwork in the exhibition diversifies the way that information is presented to visitors and offers more avenues for engagement. By including artwork and photography in addition to historical artifacts and interpretation, visitors who learn better by seeing and observation are included in the overall message of questioning one’s one sense of place and the role of historic preservation in that.

Museum consultant Gail Anderson edited a collection of scholarly articles in 2012 addressing the paradigm shift of museums into the 21st century, entitled *Reinventing the Museum*. This collection of articles chronicles the attitude shift in museums from elitist social organizations to community-centered places of lifelong learning. “Moving Toward Modern”, an article discussing this very idea, was written by the author and published in SUNY Buffalo
State’s history journal, *Exposition*, in Spring 2013. The Steel Plant Museum embraces this shift and especially so through “Razing Awareness” with both the involvement of artists and photographers who submitted works and the inclusion of multiple forms of interpretation. This involvement fortifies community engagement in a new way and draws in another audience to the museum. By loaning the museum their works, the artists are becoming a part of the narrative surrounding the history of the building and its remembrance.

Juxtaposing paintings, photographs, and artifacts makes “Razing Awareness” both a historical exhibition as well as an art show. Howard Gardner has long been a favorite learning theorist of museum professionals. His “Theory of Multiple Intelligences” amplifies the fact that people are not cookie-cutter learners, and that individuals gather and organize information in a variety of ways. Gardner organized learning preferences into various categories including but not limited to *verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematic, spatial visual, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal*.

Those who learn best by *verbal-linguistic* avenues will gather the most by interpretation written next to artifacts and information written on panels. People who are *logical-mathematical* will excel in interpretation that deals with numbers, measures in time, and architectural figures. Visitors who prefer auditory stimulation and observation of artwork and photographs are most likely *spatial-visual* learners. By incorporating artwork and historical

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material into the exhibition, “Razing Awareness” embraces the differences in learning styles and makes it message accessible to the largest amount of people without losing the cohesiveness of a planned and organized museum exhibit.

The efforts to save the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building were grassroots and collaborative in nature, and it was essential that the attitude of collaboration and community was present in the design and layout of “Razing Awareness”. Following the loss of the building, the community that had fought to save it was owed a debt and perhaps a sense of closure, something that “Razing Awareness” hoped to do. Elaine Heumann Gurian writes about the effects of museum on society in her article “Savings Bank for the Soul”, and her writings ring true for the spirit behind this exhibition. Gurian penned that “Some institutions, by their very existence, add to the stability of our society.”

She continues by saying that “Encouraging peaceful congregant behavior is one of the essential elements of reestablishing community,” which is something that “Razing Awareness” was intended to do. By displaying pieces of the building alongside pieces of art into which people poured much emotion and heart, the exhibition sought to gather those who attempted to save it and offer one last moment with the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. By hosting this exhibition and its contents, the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York took on

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71 Ibid, 137.
the role of what Gurian calls “…forums for balanced conversations on issues of the day” and urging them to engage in that conversation take on “…the transformed role of participants.” 72

It is always the hopes of an exhibit organizer/designer to put together an exhibition to take visitors and transform them into the role of participants, as Gurian wrote. From the initial entrance to the exhibit space through the visit to what they think of on the way home, what visitors take from an exhibit is the primary concern of the designer. In “Razing Awareness”, the exhibit sought to draw in the visitor right away and guide them in a journey through the life of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. While there is a desired visitor flow/pattern (see floor plan in supporting materials section), the design of the exhibit does allow for a degree of free-choice learning as well.

Upon entrance to the museum, the visitor is faced with a large red wall with “Steel Plant Museum” mounted on it to clearly mark where in the Heritage DiscoverY Center the museum resides. The first artifact case is in plain view from the entrance to the museum. To left of this case on the wall parallel to the visitor is a large television monitor below a panel inscribed with the exhibition’s title, printed in large black letters with __________________________

72 Ibid, 140.
a font type that matches the rest of the interpretation in the exhibit as well as all promotional materials created for the opening. The television features two films playing on a loop. One film is a basic history of the Bethlehem Steel plant in Lackawanna, and the second concerns the Administration Building. The second film features pictures, video from news interviews from Buffalo news stations and video clips of rallies to save the building. As mentioned before, the visual and auditory stimulation of the video is meant to engage all visitors, but especially those who fall under visual-spatial in Howard Gardner’s “multiple intelligences”.

Following the implied path (based upon the chronology of the building’s life), the artifact case to the right of the television is meant to familiarize the visitor with the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. A copy of the building’s original front elevation is displayed above a large color photograph of the building in relation to a portion of the Bethlehem Steel plant.

The front elevation was drawn by architect L.C. Holden in 1901, and the photograph below was taken by Patricia Layman Bazelon. Bazelon is well-known in the Buffalo area as a photographer who focused on the city’s industrial ruins and abandonments. Her pieces are also included in the collection of the Buffalo History Museum and the Burchfield Penney Art Center at SUNY Buffalo State. Both the front elevation and
photograph are accompanied by interpretive labels.

The interpretive labels for “Razing Awareness” were typed in Garamond font, 16 point size. This allowed the text to be readable to visitors while not overpowering the artifacts themselves. The labels were placed immediately adjacent to the artifacts which they were describing, and printed on plain white paper with black ink, cut and mounted on black paper.

The writing of interpretive labels is a lynchpin in museum exhibitions. A good exhibit can become great through creative and sufficient label-writing. Poorly written interpretation can ruin the best exhibits. Interpretation is “…about communication; and effective communication require[s] bridging the world of the expert and the world of the layperson [the visitor] in language that [is] intelligible to the latter without being a misrepresentation of the former.”, according to Lisa C. Roberts. She wrote “Changing Practices of Interpretation” and urges museum professionals to write text that fits the needs of the professional and the visitor. In other words, museums must write text that both positions themselves as knowledgeable while being accessible to someone learning the material for the first time. It was this attitude with which the text for “Razing Awareness” was written.

The interpretive panel between the first and second artifact cases offers an introduction to the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building’s architect, L.C. Holden. It highlights his career and gives the first human element of the building’s history. The material for this portion of the panel was researched and provided by Dana Saylor. Saylor is a local research historian who was at the forefront of the effort to save the Administration Building. In the spirit of involving those who fought so hard to save it, she contributed the material (and a piece of artwork) to “Razing Awareness” and became part of the exhibit. She is credited directly on the interpretive panel, therefore keeping her contribution and the collaborative nature of the exhibit intact even beyond the exhibit’s time at the Steel Plant Museum.

The second artifact case holds two of the premier pieces of the entire exhibition. The painting *Buffalo Steel—Lost*, by Margaret J. Raab, focuses on the ornate cooper-forged lions heads that once adorned the building’s roof line and paints them in their pale green color (due to the copper oxidizing from exposure to the elements). The beautiful painting, with the artist’s permission, was the image used on the promotional material for the exhibition and its opening gala. Immediately below the painting is one of the copper lion heads. Its majestic form is one of the very few still surviving—and is privately owned. The owners anonymously loaned the lion head to the exhibition, and it
being displayed under the painting gives new context to both itself and the painting above. By seemingly plucking the subject of the painting right off the canvas, these two pieces together are complementary in the best sense of the word.

Roberts’ comments on museum interpretive practices also pertain to the display of artifacts, and in this exhibition, especially to the case with the lion head. She writes that

“...exhibition can now be viewed as an eminently interpretive endeavor: not just that the information exhibits present is subject to multiple interpretations, but the very act of presentation is fundamentally interpretive.”

The case holding Raab’s painting and the lion head is the best example of what “Razing Awareness” is: blending together art, history, and interpretation to discuss the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building through various mediums to appeal to multiple types of visitors. Again, traditional interpretation accompanies the artifact in this case.

An interpretive panel hangs between the second and third cases, this one discussing the early history of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. The next case holds another painting,

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“Steel Beaux/Still Beauty” by Mary Ellen Bossert above two more artifacts from the building itself. The original doorknob from the building and a terra cotta capital (ornamentation on the building’s façade) are displayed below the painting. The doorknob is emblazoned with an interlocking “L”, “S”, and “C”, signifying the building’s original owner: the Lackawanna Steel Company. Both this doorknob and the terra cotta capital are accompanied by traditional interpretive labels. On the glass shelf above, Mary Ellen Bossert’s artist statement and a short poem she wrote flanks her painting. The inclusion of artist statements from the majority of the artists included lends a human element to the exhibition and shows the visitors that those who contributed to the exhibit have a personal stake in what is being displayed.

The next case, the fourth, holds a painting by Vincent Alejandro that portrays one of the massive dormer windows that stood on the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building’s roof. Next to this painting is an uncredited photograph from the Steel Plant Museum’s collection that captures the front entrance to the building. On each side of the building’s entrance in the photograph are large bronze signs that read “Lackawanna Building” (the
official/original name of the building when it was built). One of these signs is displayed below the photograph in this case, in order to replicate the same effect as in the second case (with Raab’s painting and the lion head).

The last case in this set of three, the fifth case, holds numerous photographs that were loaned by photographer Gerry Maira that portray the building in its state of abandonment. These photographs follow along the implied chronology of the building, moving from construction to occupancy and now abandonment. The interpretive panel to the left of this case discusses the life of the building and the closure of Bethlehem Steel’s Lackawanna plant. It briefly touches the controversy surrounding the building’s demolition and the fight to save it.

The next case (photo on the next page), to the right of the interpretive panels, features photographs of the building in various states of decay and demolition. The photographs in the upper part of the case, loaned by photographer Paul Borden, are similar in content to the ones below by Leslie Horowitz. All the photographs show pieces of the building standing amidst the ruins, with a blank and empty sky behind them. The purpose of this case was to evoke a feeling of loss and emptiness in the visitor as the building finally met its end. The observant visitor would have noticed the scraps of copper lining the bottom of the cases—a reminder that
despite the exhibit’s celebration of the life the building, the building has been demolished and is gone.

Small details like the copper at the bottom of the cases are a design decision intended to draw the visitor into the exhibit experience and tell this building’s story. The narrative of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building starts with its construction and ends with its demolition. Storytelling, according to exhibit designer and author Pam Locker, is a key way museums connect with visitors. “Here the activity of storytelling will most often engage with history, conservation, preservation, and education.”—all of which are goals of “Razing Awareness”.  

Storytelling within exhibitions not only more effectively communicates information, but it makes the museum as whole more accessible to visitors and “audience-focused and ambitious in creating engaging, communicative learning experiences.”

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76 Ibid.
The theme of neglect and demolition continues into the next and final case, on the wall perpendicular to the case featuring Borden and Horowitz’s work. This is the largest case in the exhibition and showcases seven photographs by John Gerovac (donated to the Steel Plant Museum’s collection), two lights from the building itself and two pieces of copper also rescued from the building. The photographs show elements of the building decaying and falling apart, clearly showing age. These photographs were not framed upon receipt at the museum, and had to be framed using frames in the museum’s possession. The frames used are varying sizes, in
various states of condition and in several colors. The glass had to be carefully cleaned in order to house the photographs. These frames were chosen with the design decision of keeping the exhibition’s pieces in a theme of decay and neglect—clean, new frames would not have matched the overall feeling and tone of Gerovac’s photographs. The colors of the frames themselves also reflected the colors in the building.

This case shares a wall with doors into two offices, and beyond these doors lies another interpretive space. This wall space is used to hang a panel thanking all of the artists who loaned their pieces to the museum for “Razing Awareness”, and also to showcase three photographs by photographer Michael Pietrocarlo. The large photographs together make a set entitled “Unmanned Posts” which focus on the abandonment of the building on the inside. The photographs depict places that, in a normal workday, would face constant human interaction and presence. However, here in post-Bethlehem Steel Lackawanna, the desks and washrooms stand empty, stained and tattered from the years of neglect.
As interesting and beautiful the photographs and historical artifacts are around the perimeter of the room, the star of “Razing Awareness” commands attention from every vantage point. In the center of the room and of the exhibition, one of the massive dormer windows that graced the roof of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building acts as the centerpiece of “Razing Awareness”. It was saved and donated to the Steel Plant Museum of Western New York and is now one of the largest and most recognizable pieces of the museum’s collection.

Displayed inside the window is a piece of artwork by preservationist and historian Dana Saylor. It is untitled, but features the words “This Place Matters”, a reference to the campaign made by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The piece was made for Buffalo’s “City of Night”, an arts event that took place a few months prior in Buffalo’s towering grain elevators at Silo City. Placed inside the negative space of the window, the piece seemingly placed into the building itself, in a sense. It communicates to the visitor who peers inside, “this place matters”.
The stanchions around the window are meant to keep visitors from touching the window, but it encourages them to get as close to it as possible and appreciate the sculpture that decorates the dormer and the frame. By allowing visitors to interact with the artifacts as much as possible (and as much as is safe for the artifact and the visitor), it creates a more positive museum experience for all. Allowing access to the window appeals particularly to museum visitors that John Falk refers to as “explorers”, “professional/hobbyists”, and “facilitators”.  

These three types of visitors primarily seek experiences, actively seek learning and have a genuine interest in the topic of whatever exhibit they are seeing. “Razing Awareness” is primarily aimed at these people: historians, preservationists, activists, and those who have direct ties to Bethlehem Steel. Falk also targets another type of visitor, the “recharger”. The recharger, according to Falk, wants a “peaceful and aesthetically pleasing corner of the world in which to relax.” While the exhibition was far from peaceful and quiet the night of its opening gala, it will regain that atmosphere during its six-month run at the Steel Plant Museum. There are benches in the room, where one could sit in peace in front of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building’s dormer window and contemplate the series of events that brought that window to the museum. With visitors able to quietly contemplate and reflect on the exhibit’s message, “Razing Awareness” can have a greater impact on those who require a little solitude.

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79 Ibid, 230.
“Razing Awareness” also has two small interactive elements to encourage visitors to engage with the exhibit on another level. Located between two artifact cases is a small “stamping station”. The Steel Plant Museum has two large stamps bearing Bethlehem Steel’s iconic I-Beam logo and allows visitors to stamp themselves a logo to take home from the exhibit—a lasting memory from a visit to “Razing Awareness”. A red ink pad and paper are provided, making the stamp a completely free souvenir. Not only does the stamp give visitors something to take home from the exhibit, but it also allows visitors to handle and interact with an actual artifact from the Steel Plant Museum’s collection. So often, visitors are not able to handle artifacts—here, they can hold something that was actually used at Bethlehem Steel’s Lackawanna Plant.

Between the two doors to museum offices is a large dry-erase board, equipped with various colored markers and a simple sentence: “If I could describe the building in 1 word, it would be...” It encourages visitors to pick up a marker and leave a comment directly at the site of the exhibit and in a public manner. Some responses include “classical”, “immortal”, and “inspirational”
in addition to the predictable replies of “demolished” and “extinct”. The dry erase board being a part of the exhibit itself was intended to let visitors make their own mark on the character of the exhibit and leave a little piece of themselves behind. It also lets the exhibit designer know that visitors are paying attention, becoming invested in the story of “Razing Awareness” and actively participating in the learning experience at the Steel Plant Museum.

As stated earlier, the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building is the most photographed building in the Steel Plant Museum’s collection. There was an effort to show every piece possible, but with such limited space, the exhibit could easily become cluttered and busy. As a solution, historic photos of the exterior through the decades of the building’s life were displayed in a temporary case behind the large dormer window in the center of the room.

The photos show the building from when it was newly built in 1901 through to the 1970s when the building was power-cleaned to celebrate the plant’s 100 year anniversary. Additionally, a pedestal with a binder of dozens of other photographs was also available for visitors to flip through at their leisure. This way, an intrigued visitor can investigate other photos without bombarding others with a visual overload.
“Razing Awareness”, as a whole, sought to convey its message to as many people as possible through as many mediums as were practical. Whether it was through artwork, photography, historical artifacts, or audio/visual components, the exhibition intended to push visitors to consider their own sense of place and the role of historic preservation in defining a municipality’s character and history. The exhibit continues the spirit of community efforts that were gathered in an effort to save the building. Here, material heritage was lost in Lackawanna despite the outcry of preservationists and concerned citizens. It is also a rally cry for those on the fence to become more involved and stand up to save the culture that defines Western New York and makes this region so special and different from the rest of the United States.

“Razing Awareness” was designed with great consideration for different learning styles and personalities. As discussed earlier, Howard Gardner’s “Theory of Multiple Intelligences” and the idea of the 21st century, engaging museum (championed by Graham Black, Pam Locker and others) were driving forces in the design and execution of this exhibition. It is the hope that at the end, after viewing the majesty and tragedy that encompassed the life of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building, visitors were able to appreciate their surroundings and the built environment that makes their home special, and the urge to actively protect it.
VI. PRESS, MEDIA, PUBLICITY AND FUNDRAISING

One of the museum professionals whose writings had great influence on “Razing Awareness” is Graham Black, whose book *The Engaging Museum* guides museums into the 21st century. He wrote entire chapters on engaging and building new and sustainable audiences for museums. Keeping his advice in mind, the efforts to advertise and raise awareness of “Razing Awareness” started in September 2013 with the intention of getting as many people in the exhibition as possible on the night of the opening gala on Friday, November 15, 2013.

Black writes that “…ignorance of your existence is a major barrier for many who might be potential visitors.”80 It is this ignorance that had to be overcome in spreading the word about the opening gala. The first method of alerting interested parties to the exhibit was the initial outreach to raise funds for the exhibit. The outreach and cold mailing proved to be entirely unsuccessful, as the Steel Plant Museum did not receive a single reply and therefore no funders. However, a family friend with a connection to a local company, GlobalQuest Staffing Solutions, Inc., was able to secure $500.00 in funding to donate to the museum—making up the vast majority of money raised.

The Steel Plant Museum’s forays into the vast world of social media were also utilized to spread the word about “Razing Awareness”. The museum’s Facebook page, run by curator Spencer Morgan, advertised the opening gala as well as an online fundraising drive for the exhibition. The Steel Plant Museum’s Twitter account (@SPMofWNY), my and the account of Thinking Outside the Square, Inc. (@TOTSBuffalo) were also key in advertising the opening. A

publicly accessible event page on Facebook

(https://www.facebook.com/events/169781893218908/) was created and through the network of family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and beyond, just under 300 people were invited to the opening.

Keeping the grassroots nature of the preservation effort to save the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building in mind, outreach to bloggers in the Buffalo area who focused on local events and the Buffalo cultural scene was one of the first steps taken to advertise the exhibit. Thankfully, every blogger contacted replied enthusiastically and produced blog entries discussing the exhibition opening. Particularly exciting were the entries on BuffaloRising.com (http://buffalorising.com/2013/10/razing-awareness/), and on Buffalo’s NPR affiliate, WBFO (http://news.wbfo.org/post/art-exhibit-pays-tribute-fallen-bethlehem-steel-building#.UoY9JMb_ShU.twitter). The entry on NPR/WBFO was accompanied by a brief phone interview that aired on the radio station, 88.7FM, the day of the opening gala.

Preservation Buffalo-Niagara circulated news of the exhibition in its weekly newsletter for approximately three weeks prior to the opening. ArtVoice, a weekly Buffalo newspaper, carried the opening gala in its events section (http://calendar.artvoice.com/event/48519/opening-gala-for-razing-awareness-an-exhibit-that-focuses-on-the). Other blogs and authors that posted entries are:


• The Buffalo News: http://www.buffalonews.com/events/20131030/200800/34372/pbscedetails_IDID_obj ectclass4

• Beautiful Buffalo: http://beautifulbuffalo.com/2013/10/02/buffalos-bethlehem-steel-lackawanna-building-is-gone-but-not-forgotten/

• Metro WNY: http://www.metrowny.com/news/477-Bethlehem_Steel_Administration_Building_A_Work_of_art.html (was also placed into print in the Cheektowaga edition of the paper)

• WGRZ.com: http://events.wgrz.com/Opening_Gala/200541519.html

• Michael Pietrocarlo Photography: http://www.michaelpietrocarlo.com/exhibits/

One of the reasons bloggers were reached out to was to create personal investment in the exhibition from interested parties. As Black wrote, a “…museum must be positioned in a way that relates positively to people’s attitudes and interests, and then should take a proactive approach to ensuring information on the museum and its programme reaches the target audience.”

Directly involving potential audiences in spreading awareness of the exhibit achieves these goals directly. It aligns the museum favorably with potential audiences by having news of a new exhibition come from common, local, trusted, and likeable sources.

81 Graham Black, The Engaging Museum, 78.
Fliers were also designed (next page) and posted at various places around Buffalo and Erie County. They were posted at public libraries in Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Lackawanna, Orchard Park, Hamburg, Lancaster, and West Seneca. In addition to the libraries, they were also posted in local Starbucks and SPoT Coffee locations in the Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Depew, and Amherst. Fliers were also printed and distributed at the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site and the University at Buffalo.
"Razing Awareness: The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building"

An exhibit that weaves together history, artifacts, and artwork inspired by this beautiful structure that was tragically demolished in 2013.

(artwork featured above by Margaret J. Rash)

Opening Gala,

Free and open to the public:

Friday, November 15th, 2013

6:00pm—9:00pm

Hosted by the

Steel Plant Museum of Western New York

At the

Heritage Discovery Center

100 Lee Street, Buffalo, New York
VII. RESULTS AND SUMMARY

The opening gala for “Razing Awareness: The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building” was incredibly well attended. At final count, the attendance was just over 150 people, at approximately 153-157 visitors. The audience consisted of family and friends, but also attracted a large amount of visitors from the general public. Preservationists, historians, steelworkers, classmates, colleagues, museum members and volunteers all attended the opening gala.

A reporter from Metro WNY newspapers also attended, the article written circulated in the Cheektowaga edition of the paper in print, and on the newspaper’s website (link in the previous section). Several of the artists and photographers who loaned works to “Razing Awareness” also attended the opening. From speaking with them, the artists made it clear that they were pleased with how their pieces were shown and hung. While the Steel Plant Museum did not charge admission to the exhibition, the museum earned income from a 50/50 raffle, donations, and gift shop sales. Remarks from visitors are overwhelmingly positive, some even stating that they had to leave the space as they were overcome with emotion over the loss of the building.

The photographs that follow show the exhibition after the opening night, and during the gala. Visitors are clearly engaging with the exhibit, discussing its contents and remembering the building during its existence in Lackawanna. The attendance of just over 150 people exceeded expectations, and even better, the visitors seemed constantly engaged and genuinely interested in what the exhibition had to offer.
Photographs of the overall exhibition:
Photographs from the Opening Gala: November 15, 2013
IX. SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Interpretive Panel Copy:

The Architect (Panel 1)

Lansing Colton Holden was born in 1858 in Rome, NY to William and Ann Holden. William was an English immigrant who owned a marble yard. Lansing attended school in Utica and Buffalo, and by 1875 he was working as a draftsman for an architectural firm in Buffalo. In 1903, he received an honorary Master of Arts degree from the College of Wooster in Ohio.

Previous to designing what would become the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building, Holden worked with Isaac G. Perry on the New York State Capitol in Albany. Holden then completed a number of commissions in Scranton, Pennsylvania, ranging from private homes to grand public buildings and offices.

In July of 1900, he submitted plans for the Beaux-Arts Lackawanna Steel administration building. Constructed in 1901, it was a realization of his evolving and masterful design sense. In 1908, he drew up plans for another Beaux-Arts structure, the Ossining Bank for Savings. At the time, this architectural style was at the height of its popularity.

L.C. Holden moved to New York City in the midst of his career and was elected a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, and was largely responsible for the adoption of the institute’s code of ethics. Holden died at his summer home at Kent Cliffs, near Carmel, NY on May 15, 1930.

--Sincere thanks for this panel go to Dana Saylor, who contributed the information on architect L.C. Holden--

Starting to Build (Panel 2)

The Old Main Office Building (one of many nicknames the building had) was built in 1901 to house the administrative offices of the Lackawanna Steel Company. Buffalo-based investors convinced the steel company to move from Pennsylvania to the shores of Lake Erie in an effort to build the largest steel plant in the world.

Completed on September 30, 1901, the Lackawanna Building (as it was then known) welcomed an office staff from Scranton, PA and began overseeing the Lackawanna Steel Company’s operation at the new plant. The new office building had 3 fireplaces, a billiard room, library, private dining room, and executive washrooms equipped with a bathtub. The cornice, made of copper, featured intricate ornamentation and sculpted lion heads that lined the building’s roof.
Beaux-Arts architecture (which Holden employed for the Lackawanna Building) is well known in the United States for being one of the desired styles for buildings with official purpose. Characterized as having grand elements, extensive and lavish ornamentation, and luxurious detail, these buildings stood out from others around them.

Its prominent location on Route 5 commanded the attention of those who passed by and embodied the wealth that the Lackawanna Steel Company, and later the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, possessed.

**Expansion to Decay to Demolition (Panel 3)**

The Bethlehem Steel Administration Building underwent several changes in the decades to come. A southern wing was constructed in 1910, and another on the northern end of the building was added in 1917.

The copper lion heads that lined the building’s roof were taken down in the 1960s. The copper roof was cleaned in the 1970s, washing away the familiar green color of the oxidation that occurs when the copper interacts with the elements. The roof eventually regained its green patina. However, the next decade saw the end of Bethlehem Steel in Lackawanna.

In December 1982, Bethlehem Steel announced the closure of its Lackawanna plant citing a variety of reasons including economic conditions, foreign competition, and labor woes. As the massive steel plant went dark and empty, so did the Administration Building. It stood abandoned until a demolition order was given in May of 2012.

Preservationists from around Western New York and beyond rallied to save the building. Blaming a questionable decision-making process, local activists appealed to the City of Lackawanna to save the building. Tragically, the appeals failed and the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building was demolished in the spring of 2013.

**Preservation and Inspiration (Panel 5)**

Despite the loss of the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building, many have found inspiration in the building’s architecture and history. Even though the building could not be saved, it is still available to look at and appreciate through a variety of artistic mediums. Painters, photographers, and others have been drawn to and inspired by the building as an object, proving that buildings can be preserved in other ways.

A special thank you to all of the artists who submitted their beautiful works to this exhibit. They are each listed next to the piece they have created.
Samples of Interpretive Labels (printed at 16pt font, Garamond typeface—as they appeared in the exhibition):

Margaret J. Raab, *Buffalo Steel—Lost*, 2013, Oil on Board
  Courtesy of the artist

John Gerovac,
  *Untitled Photographs*
  2013, digital prints

Lesley Horowitz,
  *Requiem 1*
  2013, photographic print

This terra cotta capital was part of the façade of the Administration Building until the day it was torn down. Taking the appearance of a Grecian column, it adds to the building’s Beaux Arts style which strove for as much ornamentation as possible.

There were dozens of copper lion heads that lined the roof of the building until the 1960s. One of them, on display here, emphasizes the great detail that went into the design and ornamentation of the building. The copper here has gained the familiar green coating that occurs when copper is exposed to moisture and weather.

This bronze sign was hung by the entrance to the building when it opened in 1901. It was known as the “Lackawanna Building” then, as it was built by the Lackawanna Steel Company. It would not become property of Bethlehem Steel until 1922.
This doorknob appeared on the building when it was owned by the Lackawanna Steel Company, as suggested by the interlocking “L”, “S”, and “C” molded into the doorknob.

The elevation drawing of the exterior shows the aesthetic plans for the building’s façade and ornamentation. The pediments and sculpted features are labeled as “TC” (Terra Cotta), windows as “PG” (Plate Glass) and the dormers and lion heads as copper. It is interesting to note that the original plan here called for a “red slate” roof—not the copper that actually appeared on the structure.
VIII. CONCLUSIONS

“Razing Awareness” accomplished so much more than anyone involved expected. It brought more visitors in than the goal (100) with just over 150. The exhibit’s existence became well-known in Buffalo’s preservationist and historian communities and word of mouth in addition to publicity efforts played a key role in that. Everyone who visited seemed to have connected with the building in some way, and left impressed if not emotional. Among those who attended were family and friends in addition to colleagues and members of the interested public.

The benefits of putting this exhibition together have been numerous. The experience in coordination between multiple parties to achieve a common goal is a task and skill that will be applicable in every endeavor that one takes in the professional world. It also allowed those involved, including the author, to make professional contacts and build a portfolio, which this exhibit most definitely did. The Steel Plant Museum went above and beyond the call of duty, and was both hospitable and helpful at every chance they had to be.

The most difficult part of the exhibition was fundraising, and the disappointment that all involved felt when no replies were made to the cold mailing. However, it is easy to understand why. Funding is difficult to come by, especially outside of the formal application for funds from government sources and private foundations, both of which were not options for “Razing Awareness”. Essentially, the exhibition required fast funds from private sources. The universe did align, however, and a source stepped up with $500. All of it was not used, and whatever was left over (roughly $200) was given to the Steel Plant Museum for use.
The most difficult part of the exhibition was, by far, the actual arranging and mounting of the exhibit. That is not saying that it was strenuous or physically difficult, but the achievement of the desired aesthetics was. The constant switching and swapping of artifacts and pieces to create the best possible matches and displays were the most stressful part of creating this exhibit. Spencer Morgan’s input was extremely valuable in this part of creating the exhibit.

In the end, the exhibition’s greatest achievement was its effects on those who visited it. It was the hope that “Razing Awareness” had an air of memorial and celebration, but those who saw the exhibit did feel a sense of sadness and mourning. In that sense, “Razing Awareness” could be interpreted as a eulogy for the Bethlehem Steel Administration Building. It celebrated the life of the building and what it meant to the tens of thousands of people who passed it on their way to the steel mills. If the exhibit provided the proper memorial for a building that represented so much, then that is all that could be expected of it.

The loss of the building was a major blow to the built environment and cultural heritage of Lackawanna. What visitors should get from visiting the exhibit is the feeling of a sense of loss and the feeling of getting cheated out of a great cultural treasure. By learning about the loss of the building, visitors should think of their own homes and hometowns and construct their own sense of place. “Razing Awareness” is all about urging visitors to appreciate the history surrounding them in their own built environments and advocate for their preservation.
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