



BUILDING BLOCKS

Mills Group Newsletter

In This Issue..

[Social, Economic, and Environmental Design...](#)

[Summer Interns](#)

[Preservation of the Un-built Heritage](#)

[Historic Projects- Where do you start??](#)

Quick Links

[The Mills Group Website](#)
[Firm & Staff Profile](#)
[Newsletter Archive](#)
[Other Projects](#)

Welcome to another issue of Building Blocks and our connection to you on the news and events of the Mills Group. We are finding the schedule for the summer and fall with many large new home projects, interior home renovations, and a couple commercial projects keeping the whole staff very busy.

You will find this issue sharing with you a conceptual design for a new Bartlett House facility that embodies economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Additionally this issue highlights our summer interns and a personal perspective on the preservation of family legacies. The technical article for this issue focuses on where to start with your next historic project.

We look forward to your comments and input with our newsletter.

Michael J. Mills

Social, Economic, and Environmental Design...

Bartlett House - Morgantown, WV



Given the role of the Bartlett house in providing residential and support services to Morgantown's homeless community, the design of the new Bartlett House facility aims to create an environment that fosters personal growth and tries to break the cycle of homelessness. In doing this, the three pillars of sustainability: social responsibility, economic responsibility, and environmental responsibility were used as the driving force to determine how the design would flesh out.

In balancing the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the building was arranged in "4-winged" single story plan focusing on a central "inner core." This 27,000 sq. ft. arrangement allows for natural daylighting and ventilation of all major spaces, provides for a large central gathering spaces focusing on a planted atrium space, and allows for future expansion of the facility without major building restructuring. All of these features and considerations will be utilized as we pursue LEED Silver certification through the USGBC LEED rating system.

Summer Internship at the Mills Group....

Matthew Riffle

A senior at Fairmont State University pursuing his Bachelor of Science in Architecture says "After achieving my undergraduate degree I plan on attaining my Masters degree in Architecture. I am now an intern for the Mills Group and it has been a great experience and has helped improve my understanding of the process involved with 'Real World' design. It is my hope to use the knowledge and experience gained here with my education to improve and refine my design process".

Alexandra Snyder

Completed her freshman year at Carnegie Mellon University- five year program for a Bachelor of Architecture.

Alex spent the summer at the Mills Group working on residential construction document, concept design for a commercial building using Sketch-Up 3-D software, and performing existing condition documentations.

Preservation of the Un-built Heritage

A month ago I had the privilege of being invited to speak at my High School Alumni Reunion at Whitcomb High School in Bethel, Vermont. This was a special occasion for me because I am part of a legacy from this school. I celebrated my 20th year reunion, my Dad celebrated his 45th reunion and my grandfather Mills celebrated his 70th all this year.

With my Dad and Grandfather in the audience of 140 people spanning from ages 18 to 94, I was able to share the importance of preserving family histories and heritage. In my talk I shared the perspective that we run an architecture firm in the historic down town of Morgantown, West Virginia and work daily to preserve the heritage of the country while giving others the ability to appreciate it well into the future; thus keeping the past alive. We also help folks realize their dreams with new structures that are sensitive to their site and strategic in the concept of place making. The Mills Group's Mantra is "Designing on the principles of the past and preserving for the future".

Today our work continues on buildings but we have also been very focused on the integration the stories of the communities that supported the architecture; the owners that financed the buildings, the contractors that built them and the architects that design them. Too often the legacy of the un-built is lost even after the buildings are preserved. We are currently working a project for the West Virginia's Governor's Mansion which will be a mural memorializing the history of the mansion between 1863 and 1930.

I encouraged folks to preserve their own family memories with oral history documentation/recording, photo documentation, sketching, scrap booking, and maintain the open ear for when elders want to share their stories.

I concluded my talk with my personal mantra, words that I live by, which come from Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*: "How will we know it's us without our past?": So never forget the family that brought you up, the town's that raised you (it takes a whole village to raise a child), and the friend's that will always be there for you. Preserve and celebrate your own family legacy while the resources are still with you.

Historic Projects-Where do you start??

The approach to historic preservation and rehabilitation projects starts with a thorough understanding of the physical and cultural evolution of a building, which results from a detailed research effort and time spent on the site to get the full breadth of the building's issues and opportunities.

Sensitive and responsible preservation and restoration work must be responsive to the category of historical significance of the building. Each building provides a unique set of requirements and conditions; so too, each solution is unique. But regardless of the building's significance, we apply the physician's dictum - "Do no harm". This basic philosophy guides us through all phases of a project. Moreover, this philosophy instills respect for the fabric of the structure and encourages judicious use of the latest preservation techniques and remedies, guided by past experience and on-going research on preservation techniques both from academia and the preservation trades.

As the preservationist moves into executing the "Rehabilitation Objectives" of a project, a very systematic approach to the building's assessment is established. The assessment phase of any project is the time at which the building is evaluated in its rarest form of components, starting with the substructure up through the exterior envelope and roof system with a detailed breakout of each component's conditions. Specialized consultants are utilized at the assessment phase of the project, providing scientific data and technical information on material conservation.

The conclusion of the assessment phase of any project leads to a period of decision making related to the findings of the fieldwork and with respect to the project budget. The decisions are often incremental in nature due to reviews with preservation and regulatory review agencies.

Having acquired the historic structure it is then that the assessment survey, the stabilization, the planning and programming, the design, and the construction begins. It is important to be realistic about your project's objectives and goals as well as the budget. In doing a historic rehabilitation project to meet the Secretary of the Interior Standard's there are very few shortcuts to be taken. The means and methods of achieving the desired end result vary significantly, yet the efficiencies, and thus the cost savings in the end, come from hiring knowledgeable design and trades persons that have a proven track record with historic structures. The analogy can be drawn that a person does not go to a dermatologist for heart problem but rather goes to a cardiologist. A person would not go to just any cardiologist but one that is recommended by others and has a good track record.

Designing on the Principles of the Past and Preserving for the Future

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