



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

Contact: Brian McNiff
Telephone: 617-727-9180

June 3, 2015

**SECRETARY GALVIN PRESENTS 2015 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO
ACADEMY OF MUSIC THEATRE, NORTHAMPTON**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the Academy of Music Theatre, Northampton, for a 2015 Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Preservation Award.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is proud to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of this year’s awardees,” said Secretary Galvin. “The projects the Commission is recognizing this year are particularly diverse and represent the many creative ways that significant historic resources are being preserved across the Commonwealth. This sensitive rehabilitation and restoration, combined with the Academy of Music Theatre’s ongoing commitment to investment in and care of its facilities, secures this building’s future as an architectural resource in Northampton, as well as a cultural treasure.”

Secretary Galvin presented the award recently in a ceremony at the Massachusetts Archives Building, Dorchester. The Academy of Music Theatre is one of 11 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building in the Northampton Downtown Historic District, the Academy of Music Theatre was constructed in 1891 with funding from businessman Edward H. R. Lyman. Architect William C. Brocklesby designed the building in the Classical Revival style, and it was deeded to the city of Northampton in 1895, becoming the nation’s first municipally owned theater.

-more-

Considered an architectural jewel of western Massachusetts, the theater has presented local and international talent onstage and on screen for more than a century. Theater and music stars such as Sarah Bernhardt, Ethel Barrymore, Boris Karloff, Mae West, John Philip Sousa, Jeannette MacDonald, and George M. Cohan have all graced the Academy of Music's stage. A trap door cut into the stage for Harry Houdini's disappearing act is still used in theatrical performances today.

The 820-seat theater has a full-fly proscenium stage with one of the few full-fly hemp systems remaining in the nation. The Academy's continued success rests in part on its maintenance and preservation of the building's architectural features. In 2000, a state grant funded the repair of the damaged and leaking main roof, along with masonry repointing, a newly accessible entrance ramp, and upgrades to the heating and cooling systems. In 2008, a Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund grant allowed the Academy of Music to design and install a new marquee, featuring the historic and iconic neon sign and an electric reader board. This grant also helped leverage two rounds of Community Preservation Act funding to repair and replace, where necessary, damaged doors and windows.

The Academy's most recent rehabilitation project, completed in 2014, focused on a much-needed comprehensive restoration of the auditorium, as well as completing repairs to the roof. Prior to restoration, the auditorium's seats were worn and damaged, with some more than 50 years old, and there were no seating positions that complied with accessibility codes. Plaster walls and ceilings had large cracks and bulges, and many of the original ornaments on the balcony and box seat facades were broken or missing.

Auditorium rehabilitation included repair or replication of ornamental plasterwork and moldings, and repairing, reinforcing, and resurfacing the ceiling. Prior to the project, the auditorium's color scheme dated to the 1970s. In-depth paint analysis and newspaper research informed a new, historically appropriate color scheme, and a new historically inspired stencil pattern was applied to selected wall areas.

-more-

The new ceiling paint emphasizes the auditorium's ornate beams and moldings, and the coffers been painted with a historically appropriate glazing pattern. Energy-efficient LED aisle lighting was installed to improve safety while lowering the overall light levels in the auditorium during shows. Historically appropriate new seating now meets current code for dimensions and fire-retardant fabrics, and the seating plan was modified to provide additional wheelchair positions without decreasing the number of seats. The asphalt-shingle roof over the stage was stripped and replaced over rigid foam-board insulation, improving energy efficiency.

At every stage in this successful rehabilitation, the Academy strived to make historically appropriate choices in materials, techniques, and design, and the recent rehabilitation will help to serve the organization's mission and expand its regional appeal.

This is the 37th year of MHC's Preservation Awards program. Projects are considered annually for awards in the categories of Rehabilitation and Restoration, Adaptive Reuse, Education and Outreach, Archaeology, Stewardship, and Landscape Preservation. Individuals are considered in the categories of Individual Lifetime Achievement and Local Preservationist. Secretary Galvin serves as the chair of the 17-member Massachusetts Historical Commission.



(left to right) Andrew Crystal, Board President, Academy of Music Theatre; Debra J'Anthony, Executive Director, Academy of Music Theatre; Secretary William F. Galvin; Sarah LaValley, Conservation, Preservation, and Land Use Planner, City of Northampton; Thomas Douglas, Thomas Douglas Architects. (Photo by Wyeth Lilley)

-End-