



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

Contact: Brian McNiff
Telephone: 617-727-9180

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**SECRETARY GALVIN TO PRESENT 2014 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO
FREDERICK AYER MANSION, BOSTON**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the Frederick Ayer Mansion, Boston, to receive a 2014 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. Through meticulous planning and a high level of craftsmanship, the Ayer Mansion has been beautifully preserved, saving the only known surviving example of a Tiffany-designed architectural exterior for future generations to enjoy.”

The Frederick Ayer Mansion, a National Historic Landmark located in Boston’s Back Bay, is a rare surviving example of the residential work of renowned artist and designer Louis Comfort Tiffany, best known for his work in stained glass. In an unusual union of ornament and architecture, Tiffany designed the Classical Revival-style mansion’s lavish mosaic exterior for wealthy entrepreneur Frederick Ayer and his wife Ellen. Constructed between 1899 and 1902, the mansion façade boasts more than thirty different patterns of mosaic panels and banding. These multicolor stone mosaics in the Byzantine and Moorish styles define nearly every element of the façade. Elaborate stained-glass windows, copper-clad doors, and stone columns with inset glass echo the mosaic designs. With its bold, light-stone façade and unadorned windows, the building also is an early example of the modernist tendencies that would flourish later in the 20th century.

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State House, Room 337, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

In 1964, the Trimount Foundation purchased the mansion, and the building has since served as the Bayridge Residence and Cultural Center—a nonprofit residence for women attending undergraduate and graduate schools in Boston. Although well cared for, the building began to show signs of decline over the years, as acid rain, mortar loss, water infiltration, and structural stress caused pieces of the mosaics to spall and flake. Some mosaic panels disintegrated altogether. Open mortar joints across the façade, and rusting steel in the base of the balcony parapet, weakened adjacent mosaic elements.

In 2013, a team of preservation architects, stone conservators, mosaicists, preservation masons, and stained-glass conservators restored the Ayer Mansion’s balcony and façade, guided by an exhaustive 2009 study of the mosaics, and partly funded by a Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund grant. Conservators carefully cleaned the façade and temporarily moved the balcony to a stone conservator’s shop, where the missing panels were recreated using hand-cut stones that matched the originals, and surviving mosaics were restored. Careful repairs replaced the bandings’ missing fabric. The results of the project restored an exceptional and unique property.

This is the 36th 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.

Secretary Galvin presents the awards at an afternoon ceremony today, May 16, at the Massachusetts Archives Building at 220 Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester. The Frederick Ayer Mansion, Boston, is one of 10 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

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