



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**SECRETARY GALVIN TO PRESENT 2012 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO
BAIRD AND BENTON BLOCK / COLLEGE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT THE BERKSHIRE CENTER, LEE**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the Baird and Benton Block in Lee, to receive a 2012 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. The restoration and adaptive reuse of the Baird and Benton Block has returned the building to active use as a significant community resource, revitalizing downtown Lee.”

The Baird and Benton Block was constructed in 1879 for brothers George and Prentice Baird and their partner, William Benton, members of two significant Lee paper manufacturing families. The building is an excellent example of an Italianate commercial building, and is prominently sited next to the 1874 Memorial Hall, which formerly served as the town hall and as a courthouse. An important commercial presence along Main Street, over the years the building was home to the Lee Cash Grocery, the Knights of Columbus, the Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, Lee Bowling Alleys, and Johansson’s 5 & 10. By the 1950s, however, the top two floors were vacant, the exterior had undergone alterations that obscured the original storefronts, and the building was falling into disrepair. For the next sixty years, the building was only partially occupied. The rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Baird and Benton Block converted the building into a new facility for the College Internship Program, which provides college and career support for students with Asperger’s syndrome, ADD, autism, and other learning differences. Using state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits, the interior and exterior of the building were fully rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s standards, including the removal of non-original storefronts to expose original masonry and support elements. The façade was returned to its original grandeur with a replicated cornice and masonry and storefront restoration, and windows were repaired or replaced with historically appropriate materials. The building was updated with new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and sprinkler systems, as well as a new elevator. The building’s long-vacant top floors now house the College Internship Program, while two new retail operations have joined the two previously existing businesses on the first floor.

This is the 34th 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 will present the awards at an afternoon ceremony on May 30, 2012, at the Massachusetts Archives Building at 220 Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester. The Baird and Benton Block restoration project is one of 12 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

State House, Room 337, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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