



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**SECRETARY GALVIN PRESENTS 2016 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO
OLD BERKSHIRE ATHENAEUM IN PITTSFIELD**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the Old Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, to receive a 2016 Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Preservation Award.

Secretary Galvin presented the award at a recent ceremony in the Massachusetts Archives Building, Dorchester. The Old Berkshire Athenaeum is one of 12 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

“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 extensive rehabilitation and restoration of the Old Berkshire Athenaeum ensures that this prominent and beloved public building will continue to serve the community for years to come.”

Constructed in 1876, the High Victorian Gothic Old Berkshire Athenaeum stands in Pittsfield’s historic downtown, where it held a special place in the community as a social and learning center for more than 100 years. William Appleton Potter designed the athenaeum early in his career, before eventually becoming Supervising Architect for the United States. Potter’s design for the Old Berkshire Athenaeum included a prominent skylight and two large, stained-glass windows, multicolored courses of stones and slate tile, and a grand arch over the main entrance.

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State House, Room 337, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

When the city built a new library in 1975, Pittsfield residents feared the building would be lost. Then-County Commissioner James Bowes worked to repurpose the building as a courthouse and registry of deeds, and those functions continue there today. For his efforts to save the building, it was renamed in Mr. Bowes's honor. The Old Berkshire Athenaeum is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Park Square Historic District.

Since its construction, the building had been plagued with structural issues, and historic documents reveal repeated maintenance and major repairs to shore up bulges and address cracks and leaks. Strategies previously used to stabilize the building had included foundation work, roof replacement, and installation of steel beams. Five years ago, while completing a project at the adjacent Superior Court Building, lead architect Bill Gillen noticed that the Old Athenaeum was leaning back from the street, and he convinced the state's Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to investigate the extent of the building's problems.

Studies revealed that exterior stonework stood out from the building as much as five inches. Then the project team discovered that the back-up wall had deteriorated to dust, leaving nothing to which they could anchor the stones. Work halted to reassess the building's safety and the weight of the roof on the façade. The team devised a new plan to shore up the structure with steel and build an entirely new back-up wall. As the stones were re-laid, concrete was poured into the cavity behind the wall. To preserve as much historic fabric as possible, extensive research guided selective demolition of individual stones and the placement of tracery around stained glass. The original mortar color and texture were also identified and replicated. DCAMM took advantage of the project to upgrade electrical work and improve the building's accessibility.

Impressively, the entire project was undertaken without relocating or closing the courts and registry, and the building's occupants did not lose a single workday.

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L to R: Michael Mucci, Carol Gladstone, Secretary William F. Galvin, Patricia Harris, Frank Clare, William Gillen

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