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## A Devil in the Queen City

*Brennan Gauthier*

Most Burlington history buffs are familiar with the general accounts of Burlington's passing brush with fate when America's first serial killer, Dr. H.H. Holmes sought safe haven after escaping his Chicago murder castle in 1894. Having attended a year of medical school at the University of Vermont, Holmes was likely familiar with the city.

Holmes, under the alias of J.A. Judson, arrived at the Burlington railroad depot on October 31st, 1894 and quickly rented a room at 19 George Street. He also rented an apartment from a Mrs. Thomas G. Richardson at 26 North Winooski Avenue in order to spirit away Mrs. Pitezel, a woman he held in captivity as part of an elaborate insurance scheme. During his two week stay in Burlington, Holmes planned his

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# The Sentinel

Fall 2014

## Burlington's Most Endangered

*Liisa Reimann Rivera*

### St. Joseph's

Just south of Lake View Cemetery, the former St. Joseph's Providence Orphan Asylum and Hospital (or, simply, "the orphanage" as it's locally known) was completed in 1884 for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington. The enormous brick building contained recitation rooms (or classrooms) in the north and south ends, a large kitchen in the southwest portion of the basement, and a laundry room in the back annex, next to the boiler room. Under the oversight of the Sisters of Providence from Montreal, the institution would eventually house some 200 orphans and elderly residents. This led to the construction of additional classrooms,

dormitories and a gymnasium on the south circa 1941. By the late 1960s, however, numerous civic organizations charged with caring for children and the elderly had been established and St. Joseph's ceased operating in its original capacity. The Diocese continued to maintain its headquarters in the 1940s section until 2010, when it sold the property to Burlington College. In 2013 the college unveiled an ambitious master plan designed to help retire a sizeable chunk of the \$10 million debt it had incurred in purchasing and converting the property for academic use. This plan included a new residential neighborhood and adjoining academic campus. On the residential side, the new housing would be comprised of senior housing, market-rate and subsidized rental housing, and single family homes. For its own purposes, Burlington College would add residence halls, a student center and an amphitheater. Large tracts of green space would include a park, edible orchard and sustainable agriculture field.

In its proposal to the city, Burlington College indicated its choice of local developer Eric Farrell as the lead. Champlain Housing Trust was to develop the affordable rental housing and Cathedral Square the senior housing. The three recently partnered on the housing complex that occupies the former Thayer School and DMV property in the New North End.

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## 2014 PB Historic Preservation Awards

### Our Business Members

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NEWSLETTER DESIGN: Andrea Gray

Preservation Burlington is seeking nominations for its 2014 Preservation Awards. Awards are given in the following categories:

- Residential Property
- Institutional Property
- Commercial Property
- Historic Outbuilding
- Spirit of Preservation
- Ray O'Connor Award

With the exception of the Spirit of Preservation Award, which is given to property owners who have demon-

strated ongoing care and maintenance of their historic property over the years, the other property awards are given to acknowledge restoration projects completed primarily during the 2014 calendar year.

The Ray O'Connor Award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the betterment of the community.

If you would like to nominate a property or person for an award, please contact Preservation Burlington at [info@preservationburlington.org](mailto:info@preservationburlington.org)

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### Historic Building Markers

Preservation Burlington Historic Markers celebrate the age of your home!

Cost: \$75 includes:  
 basic research on your home,  
 a marker, and one-year membership  
 to Preservation Burlington.

### Endangered

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Groundbreaking on the Burlington College plan was scheduled for 2015.

Given Burlington College's recent financial troubles and administrative upheaval, where this plan now stands is unclear. As presented, it appeared sensitive to the property's history and context. The original 1884 building

would retain its prominent position and, although the proposed apartment buildings to the south would be quite large, they appeared clearly subordinate to the orphanage. Whether Burlington College will survive and the plan will go forward as envisioned is debatable. The 32-acre property, which extends from North Avenue to Lake Champlain, is highly desirable as one of the few remaining undeveloped waterfront

lots in the city. Preservation Burlington's interest in the project stems from the potential for an abandonment of the original plan in favor of a more lucrative sub-division plan that could completely erode the historic context of this significant property. For this reason, we have added St. Joseph's Providence Orphanage Asylum and Hospital to our most endangered list and as "one to watch" in the coming months.

## Ici Repose Le Corp De Felix Piché

*Barry Trutor, Cemetery Commissioner*

A few months ago, I attended a city-wide Neighborhood Planning Assembly meeting in Burlington. Since we came from all seven of the city's wards, we went around the table and introduced ourselves. I said, "I am a cemetery commissioner this year." During a break in the meeting, the gentleman on my right told me he had a cemetery problem. He told me that several large locust trees on the fence line of Mt. Calvary Cemetery on Pomeroy Street were dropping limbs in his condo's backyard. I told him that a church cemetery like Mt. Calvary wasn't under my purview. He said he had already been in touch with the Diocese and the Catholic cemetery supervisor. Hearing about these trees and this cemetery, which I had not visited, piqued my interest.

The next Saturday I headed for Pomeroy Street in Burlington's Old North End and discovered Mt. Calvary Annex, the huge locust trees, the condos on the other side of the fence line, and the grave of Felix Piché. I had never seen a headstone like that of Mr. Felix Piché. Made of 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch O.D. (outside diameter) galvanized water pipe and fashioned into the shape of a cross, it stands 48 inches high and 40 inches wide. The intersection of the cross is fitted with a standard galvanized T. The  $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch steel name plate is extremely complex in shape and has embossed letters that read:

ICI REPOSE LE CORP DE  
FELIX PICHÉ  
DECEDE LE 10 MAI 1923.  
A 'AGE DE 58 ANS.

"Here lies the body of Felix Piché died May 10, 1923 at the age of 58 years," it translates from the French. Mr. Piché is buried up against the fence line with the locust trees. I am sure that the cemetery road is running over his feet. In fact there are numerous graves along this fence line with their feet out in the road and the locusts are giving the fence line a run for its money.

You can see how my mind works ... who is Felix Piché and why does he have a galvanized pipe marker? Being Saturday, I couldn't go to the City Clerk's to look at the death records. I got it! I'll email my daughter-in-law. She is a super genealogist. My son married well. By Sunday evening she forwarded the following information:

*I found his death certificate (DC) and from that found that his parents were Victor Piché and Delima (possibly Rose Delima) Chastenay. Looks like the whole*



*The unusual headstone of Mr. Felix Piché.*

*family came down (from Canada) around 1880. He has multiple siblings and is living with his mother and sister in the 1900 census. The men seem to have been masons. Cross-referencing the parents and siblings and his year of birth with the 1871 Canadian census suggests that he was Felix Almansor Piche. Perhaps he went by Felix in the US, though you could still find a random record that says Mansor or Almansor. I'm attaching his parents' DCs, his DC, his sister's DC, the 1900 census with them living on Germain St. (Bur-*

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## A Devil

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grand finale — a massive explosion that would take out Pitzel, her two children and the house on North Winooski Ave. The details of the plot are best recounted in an August 9th, 1895 *Middlebury Register* newspaper article:



26 North Winooski Avenue

*Mrs. Pitezel had begun to grow suspicious of Holmes' mysterious actions and decided to go to the basement and see what he was doing. She found him working with his coat off. He had torn up the flooring and was digging in the soft, black earth with some tool he had found in the cellar. When he saw Mrs. Pitezel he appeared disconcerted. He told her he was digging a hole to bury a box of valuable papers, and asked Mrs. Pitezel not to mention the circumstances to anyone.*

*A few days afterward Holmes suddenly started for Boston on the strength of a telegram from Chicago. In Boston the detectives finally ran him down, and almost the first act he did was write to Mrs. Pitezel. He told her if she would look in a certain place under the flooring of the cellar she would find a bottle of nitro-glycerine. He said that it was in a dangerous place, and directed her Mrs. Pitezel to carry it up to a room in the attic. Holmes had arranged a trap door to fall on the bottle if it was disturbed on the approach of*

*any one. Mrs. Pitezel, however, started to search for the bottle in the opposite direction, and by doing so missed the trap he had laid for her. Mrs. Pitezel afterward related the incident to Mr. Petty of the Fidelity insurance company, and he had Detective Geyer investigate the matter. The detective found the nitro-glycerine in the place where Holmes had first placed it. But he saw at a glance that Mrs. Pitezel had overlooked, the deadly trap which would have fallen on the bottle and exploded it if Mrs. Pitezel had followed his directions more carefully.*

A hidden trap door and a bottle of explosive nitro-glycerin?

This wasn't the only thing Holmes secreted away in the 26 North Winooski basement. He also confessed to hiding a ten-ounce bottle of chloroform, one of his favorite murder weapons, in a secret niche behind an overhead floor joist behind the basement staircase. The cubby hole and bottle were found after Burlington Police detectives scoured the house in a massive search for evidence of Holmes' devilish plot to kill Pitezel and blow up the house.

The building stills stands today, all thanks to a mistake made by Mrs. Pitezel in her search for the bottle of nitro-glycerin. Holmes' final victim would've been an 1850s Greek Revival brick house in the heart of Burlington.

Brennan Gauthier, a new PB Board member, will highlight interesting and obscure facts about our city's history in upcoming issues of *The Sentinel* in a column called "Brennan's Corner."

## Ici Repose

continued from page 3

lington), and the 1871 census with the whole family and his Almansor (middle) name. Having trouble finding him in the census after 1900, but he must have still been around.

Looking over the documents, I find his death certificate indicates his occupation is "mason" and the 1900 census indicates "stone carver," and that his residence on the death certificate was 52 Hyde Street. A trip to 52 Hyde finds a two-story brick house with one those interesting windows that have the stained glass squares all around the border. Out back is another smaller two-story brick building. I wonder if that could have been a stone carver's workshop. I wonder if Felix did the brickwork.

The Fletcher Free Library yields up his Free Press obituary on microfilm. He died on the 12th at 6:30 AM at his sister's home, was buried on the 14th at 7:00 AM, and was a mason and bricklayer. Checking through the yearly Burlington City Directories, there is no mention of Felix in 1923 or 1920 or 1915 or 1909. However, I do find out that Felix' in-laws are residing at 52 Hyde and 52½ Hyde which is the brick building out back. About ready to give up, I tried 1903. Success! *Piche Felix, stone cutter, bds* (boarder) *16 German* (street). The 1898 directory has him residing at 242 North Winooski Avenue....

Oooops! I came here to see a man about a tree. I got a little far afield. When you take your next walking tour of Burlington's beautiful homes and you gaze into the past, maybe look for Felix' stone work.

## City Council Puts Off More Landlord-Friendly Zoning Changes —

Urged by Planning Commission and Zoning Department Pending Outside Parking Study

*Norm Williams*

For the second time this year, the City Council has turned back an effort by the Planning Commission and Department of Planning and Zoning to substantially reduce residential parking requirements. Earlier, the Council rejected a Planning Commission proposal to eliminate all such parking requirements downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods. This time, it tabled a zoning amendment to cut off-street parking requirements by more than half in a number of residential areas throughout the city.

Currently, the zoning ordinance requires two off-street parking spots per “residential unit” (apartment or condominium) in so-called “neighborhood parking districts,” and one space in “shared parking districts.” The proposed amendment would have reduced the requirement from one parking spot to one-third of a spot in shared parking districts for one-bedroom units and studios. It also would have taken areas now in the “neighborhood district” and put them in the “shared parking district.”

Both residents and Preservation Burlington representatives expressed concern that the new requirements would encourage landlords to cut up single family houses into studio and one-bedroom apartments rather than renting to families. They also worried that the change would further degrade the quality of life in residential neighborhoods by increasing the number of cars with no place to park. Residents

showed city councilors photographs of cars and SUVs parked illegally on lawns and sidewalks, complaining that parking spaces are already at a premium while there is virtually no enforcement of parking regulations. Residents took issue with the Zoning Department’s contention that there is already more than sufficient parking available.

Residents also pointed out that transportation professionals, including both the Urban Land Institute and Institute of Traffic Engineers, recommend at least one off-street parking place per housing unit in residential neighborhoods. Cities similar to Burlington, such as Saratoga Springs and Portland, Maine, also require at least that many. One speaker suggested that the proposed requirement of one-third of a parking spot per unit had no basis other than wishful thinking, since few people own one-third of a car.

In the end, the Council adopted the suggestion of Emily Lee, a Preservation Burlington board member and the only member of the Planning Commission who had voted against the measure. She noted that, since the City has contracted for an outside parking study which is only now getting underway, it seems only prudent to await the results. The Council voted not to proceed with the amendment for now, just as it had with respect to the earlier proposal to eliminate all residential parking requirements downtown.

## Events

### Smugglers’ Notch Ski Ticket Giveaway!

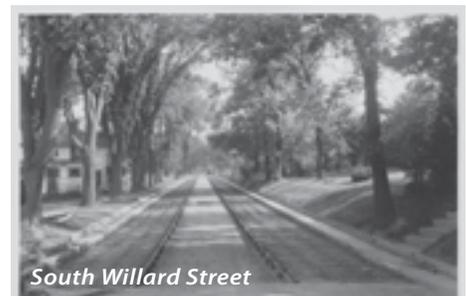
If you were at the 2014 Mardi Gras parade in Burlington, then you must have seen the great Preservation Burlington float. It was so good that it won an award — ten single-day lift tickets to Smugglers’ Notch ski resort. The Board has decided to give the tickets away to our supporters, in appreciation of your interest in Preservation Burlington. Here’s how to enter:

Go to the Preservation Burlington Facebook page, and click on the “GIVEAWAY” tab under the photo heading. Follow the directions to enter the contest — either “Like” Preservation Burlington, or select “I’m a Fan” if you’ve already “Liked” our page. That’s it! The winner will be selected at random on November 4, 2014. Good luck!

### Walking Tours

Burlington’s fascinating history and alluring architecture come alive through guided walking tours. Our knowledgeable guides will entertain you with stories of the past and introduce you to Burlington’s diverse architectural styles. Spring/summer 2015 tours will be listed in the spring Sentinel.

We are more than happy to arrange a special tour for your school or community group any time of the year.



*South Willard Street*

## Behind the Green Marker

*Marge Allard*

### 161 North Street

Traveling on North Street, just a couple buildings east from the Lawrence Barnes Sustainability Academy, you'll be sure to notice 161 North Street. Painted in a vibrant scheme of red and yellow, this Italianate style worker's house is just one example of the significant number of residential houses constructed in Burlington during the 1870s. The structure, which is part of the North Street Historic District, retains many of its original features, including its remarkable Eastlake detailing and elaborate front door. Its present owners, Mark Davidson and Kelly Kaeding-Davidson, received a Preservation Burlington Award earlier this year for the restoration of the building which now houses Kelly's business, the Vermont Center for Acupuncture & Wellness.

According to the earliest deed discovered, Peter Lander, Jr. bought a house on the south side of North Street from William G. Shaw, an attorney, in March 1880. The house is believed to have been built in 1875. Interestingly enough, there were apparently four men named Peter Lander living in Burlington at the time, two of whom lived on North Street (Peter Lander, Sr., and Peter Lander, Jr.).

Peter Lander, Jr. (Peter) was a veteran of the Civil War, who in 1863 enlisted at the age 16. He served in Company M of the 1st Vermont Cavalry. (As you would expect, all of the cavalry's horses were Vermont Morgans.) Peter went right into action in Virginia, taking part in the Kilpatrick



161 and 163 North Street

raid — an attempt to liberate Union soldiers held prisoner in Richmond. He was an aide to General Hancock during the Battle of the Wilderness. He fought in the Battle of Cedar Creek, once was captured, and escaped the same night. He was discharged after the war, apparently in good condition, but lost his right arm back home when a cannon exploded during festivities honoring General Phil Sheridan.

Peter worked as a customs officer at the lumber yards, as a night watchman, and finally, as a carter, the driver of a horse and cart, like his father before him. He was quite popular and reportedly a great storyteller. He died in 1937 at age 89, some months after acciden-



tally burning himself while making coffee at a gas stove. He was Burlington's last Civil War veteran to die.

Peter's children continued to live in the house until 1961. During this time the house became a 2-unit dwelling (now 161 and 163 North Street). In 1961, they sold the house to William Meunier. Joyce Meunier was the owner briefly in 1972 before selling it to George Cronk. Dennis and Jennifer Morehouse sold the building to its current owners.

## President's Corner – Matt Viens



Those of us who live in Burlington, and therefore likely in close proximity to our neighbors, understand the meaning of the old adage “good fences make good neighbors.” That’s why the prospect of confronting a neighbor about his or her property can be so stressful. The angst is even worse when the issue involves a potential code violation. Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to contact code enforcement anonymously, thereby avoiding neighbor-to-neighbor conflict? Better yet, how about if the city established a system not based on complaints, anonymous or otherwise?

There are two basic types of code enforcement in the United States — complaint-driven and proactive. The first relies on community members to report violations, whereas the second is driven by municipal employees who actively seek out violations. Burlington’s system is largely a complaint driven one, and requires the filing of a written complaint, signed by a complainant, before

any action will be taken. Bill Ward, Burlington’s director of code enforcement since 2010, views the city’s enforcement system as both complaint-driven and proactive.

In support of this contention, Ward points to Burlington’s relatively recent adoption of the *SeeClickFix* system. *SeeClickFix* is a web-based system that allows residents to notify code enforcement of things such as illegal trash dumping, cars parked on lawns, or potholes. You can then monitor the city’s attempts to rectify the problem. According to Ward, enforcement staff has investigated and responded to approximately 2,400 complaints in the first two years it has been in use. While this new system is a good first step, its application is limited. More serious code violations, especially those concerning zoning violations, still require formal written complaints to be filed with the code enforcement office.

In Ward’s estimation, the greatest problem facing the office of code enforcement when he became director was not

that the system is complaint-driven, but rather that Burlington had gone without consistent code enforcement for years. Problem property owners, most notably owners of rental properties, flagrantly violated local ordinances without the fear of enforcement or penalty.

How can Burlington achieve consistent enforcement? Use of a proactive enforcement system, while perhaps not the only way, would certainly help. Burlington’s current system, because it relies on the filing of written complaints, produces erratic enforcement. Just because a zoning violation was spotted and reported in the South End does not mean an equally egregious violation in the New North End will be. By way of comparison, just imagine if the city’s police department operated on a solely complaint-driven system of law enforcement. A system that is driven by code enforcement staff actively seeking out violations on a city-wide scale would be far more likely to produce consistent results. It is time for a more proactive approach!



## Meet the Board Member – Daniel Goltzman

Born and raised in Montreal, Daniel Goltzman has lived in Burlington since 2011 and joined the Preservation Burlington board in 2012. A practicing architect for 10 years in New York, Colorado and now Vermont, he has been involved in historic restoration and renovation of numerous commercial and residential build-

ings. The unique architectural heritage of Montreal was his main inspiration for becoming an architect and his view of preservation was influenced by the willingness to respect context while boldly mixing old and new in his home town.

Daniel is devoted to protecting the historic fabric of Burlington while committed to its continued growth through sensitive and contextual inter-

ventions, which help to keep the city relevant and vibrant.

He now works as a project manager for local developer Redstone. After many years as a designer it is through this avenue that he feels he can most positively influence his adopted hometown’s continued evolution.

Daniel lives in the south end of Burlington with his wife Jessica and two sons Adam and Jacob.



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