

Pullman Architectural Newsletter



Pullman and the Burnt-over District

Non-conformist upstate region incubates railroad magnate George M. Pullman's early entrepreneurship

What could our church's historic benefactor and Gilded Age industrial baron, George M. Pullman, have to do with "The Burnt-over District," New York's epicenter of 19th century religious furor? Turns out George Pullman called the Burnt-over District "home."



CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Young George M. Pullman

What exactly was the burnt-over district? Originally, much of the area was "burnt over" to clear unwanted forest growth during early pioneer times, until the 19th Century brought a second meaning. From Lake Erie in western New York to Cayuga Lake at the eastern end of the Finger Lakes, **Central New York was the site of countless 19th Century religious tent revivals.**

There was so much religious revival fever happening that the major evangelist of that period, Charles Grandison Finney, ran out of souls to convert or "harvest" in upstate and gave it this scorched earth "burnt-over" title. Albion, where Pullman Memorial Universalist Church is located, is nearly dead center in this ethereal region.

Originally a frontier opened by the Erie Canal, the "district" not only gave Finney's non-conformist religious devotees breathing room to try out their

ideas, but was the upstate home to many other original thinkers in the abolition, early feminist, and utopian communal movements, just to name a few.

The Burnt-over District "frontier" atmosphere was also an incubator for the innovative sensibilities of George Pullman and his family. After moving his ten children - including George - from Chautauqua County to Albion, **George's father Lewis became a lay preacher for the breakaway Christian sect of Universalism.** Universalism earned its non-conformist reputation by taking a pass on the concept of eternal damnation and coming out in favor of a loving, rather than punishing, God.

While Pullman's father Lewis preached, young George first worked in the family furniture-making business in Albion, and later he was the entrepreneurial originator of house moving technology to accommodate upstate canal expansion. With George's early work in and around Albion on wood craft, and then large moving structures, we begin to see the key elements of Pullman's greatest achievement, the luxury passenger train "palace car," coming together.



Pullman Company photograph from the Smithsonian Institution collection. Glass/collodion negative no. 1977. Lounge car exhibited at the Columbian Exposition, Chicago. 1893.

The Burnt-over district remains a site of interest to history buffs worldwide. In a relatively small area, you can explore the origins of Free Methodism, Spiritualism, the Social Gospel, and other innovative thought.

By George, We Got It!

Sacred Sites Grant Award



New York Landmarks Conservancy's Mural by Cliff Leigh

Pullman Memorial is pleased to announce receipt of a grant award from The New York Landmarks Conservancy's Sacred Sites program this spring.

Pullman restoration plans by central NY architects

Proceeds from the award will fund plans and specifications prepared by the Syracuse firm of Crawford and Stearns Architects and Preservation Planners to guide our building repairs and restoration.

Preserving Pullman's heritage

Many thanks to New York Landmarks Conservancy philanthropists who see the value of our unique S. S. Beman designed pink Medina sandstone building in Albion's historic district.

We couldn't have done it without your help!

Deep appreciation is also in order for the members of Pullman Memorial Universalist Church who found the time in their busy lives to expedite the grant application to the Landmarks Conservancy.

Heartfelt thank you's go to Pullman members and staff: preservation architect Andrea Rebeck, Orleans County Historian C. W. (Bill) Lattin, outgoing board chair Christine Loss, and church celebrant H. Lee Richards.

The Value of Religious Art

Untapped Local Tourism Asset

Tom Rivers, successful author and founding editor of popular online newspaper *The Orleans Hub*, was first in our area to point out the value of Albion and Orleans County's ecclesiastical (religious) art to area tourism.

His story, "**Tourism promotion efforts should include religious art**" (*The [Batavia] Daily News Online*, February 7, 2013), cited Pullman Memorial's fine Tiffany and Company decorations and stained glass windows as examples of these underutilized tourism assets in Orleans churches.

Pullman Memorial appreciated Tom's coverage of our unique building. We wholeheartedly agree with Tom about extending public access to these beautiful

historic assets. Our church has always been available for touring by contacting us through our website at pullmanmemorial.org.

Albion is already an historical tourism destination for Erie Canal travelers, and people researching family genealogies according to our village librarians. **Ecclesiastical or religious art and architecture will now be available to tourists** during Pullman Memorial's open hours for guided tours every **Wednesday from 9:30 am to 12 noon** throughout June, July, and August of the 2013 summer season. Tours will be hosted by Orleans County Historian and Pullman Memorial member Bill Lattin. First Presbyterian Church across Albion's historic district's courthouse square will also be open for tours at the same time.

What makes something "ecclesiastical art?" According to Jacob Falke's 1876 monograph of the same title, it has no particular style, yet ecclesiastical art is distinct because of its religious subject matter, intended sacred location, and independence from the whims of "conventional" or secular art's rapidly changing styles.



Tiffany decoration of Johnson pipe organ. Pullman Memorial Universalist Church. Photo: Tom Rivers, Orleans Hub.

Falke elaborates further that ecclesiastical art tropes (think of a visual sound bite or an online picture "meme") form the alphabet of its "language."

Falke, a contemporary of Pullman Memorial's designer Solon S. Beman, maintains that some sects favor and repeatedly reproduce a particular style, such as the Roman Catholic Church favoring Baroque and Rocco embellishments at the time of Falke's writing. Other churches, said Falke, like the German Catholic church or the Church of England, tended to build in earlier and simpler Gothic styles.

Pullman Memorial Universalist, like many protestant churches of the late 19th Century, was adept at mixing popular spiritual art themes with the best of contemporary secular decoration to make a strong visual case for our particular religious viewpoint. We think Pullman's architect, S. S. Beeman, was very successful executing the latter design strategy. Come for a tour, and see if you agree!

Pullman Memorial Universalist Church
10 East Park Street
Albion, NY 14411
pullmanmemorial.org pmuc.albion@gmail.com
(585) 589-7181 or (585) 454-9450