

# *The Chautauquan Daily*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

One of my favorite activities each summer as I return to Chautauqua is to wander the streets and discover the changes to the landscape and architecture made during the off-season. Each of my 40 plus years on the grounds has seen continuous evolution and change. Sometimes the work has been unfortunately shoddy and pedestrian, but often it has been exciting and inspired. In many ways, Chautauqua has never looked better, the colors of the houses and plantings, the care, the investment in the infrastructure has been remarkable.

The Institution has played an important leading role in this area during the last year. I applaud the adaptive reuse of the Main Gate and the Hultquist Center. Both are successful examples of creative modernization of historic structures. I find it especially gratifying when the institution takes the lead to expand the “architectural envelope.” My two favorite examples that I have seen this summer are the recent changes to the Post Office and to the Girls’ Club Building.

In both cases the architect has made a creative and playful gesture to enliven the project. In the serpentine wall at the rear of the Post Office, we have a tongue-in-cheek nod to the historic origins of the Plaza. The open quad of the University of Virginia Lawn (1817-1826) by Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, Virginia, which was then “closed” with additions by Stanford White of

McKim, Mead and White in 1895, established the basic elements repeated in our Plaza. We see the pattern of rectangular central greensward surrounded by variations of neoclassical vocabulary expressed in red brick with white trim and stone details. Flanking the main quad of the Lawn, Jefferson used serpentine walls to define the private spaces of a series of gardens. It is entirely appropriate then for the architect of the Post Office addition, Peter Di Pietro, to use a nicely detailed, post-modern interpretation of a serpentine wall to define and shield the back of the Post Office.

The Girls’ Club Building is a well-proportioned late 19<sup>th</sup> Century clapboard structure. The late 20<sup>th</sup> Century program use and building code necessitated a fire escape, secondary entrance to the second floor on the north side of the building. Mr. Di Pietro, also the architect for this project, has cleverly recognized that this stairway could never be something than other than an obvious add-on to the historic structure. The solution was to turn the stair into a quasi-like lattice, “growing” up the side of the building.

These two recent projects on the grounds are strong, successful reminders that Chautauqua should not be seen as an architectural museum, but rather as a living work in progress.

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