

# GRANT AT WORK

SAVE AMERICA'S TREASURES

**OLD FORT NIAGARA** The fort, near Lake Ontario, is one of New York state's premier landmarks, receiving a \$240,000 matching grant for roof and structural repairs along with other much-needed work. Built in 1755, Old Fort Niagara was pivotal in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Located on a bluff above the lake at the mouth of the Niagara River, it was a strategic point in the struggle for control of North America. Today part of the state park system, its highly intact military architecture and fortifications—plus living history events, exhibits, and collections—attract more than 100,000 visitors a year.

**BUFFALO STATE ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE** One of the city's architectural treasures, the asylum—today being reborn as an architectural center, a regional visitors center, and a boutique hotel—is undergoing major rehabilitation with the help of an SAT grant. The spectacular Gothic complex, with its signature twin towers, was begun in 1870, and construction continued over 20 years. A collaboration between H.H. Richardson and Frederick Law Olmsted, its buildings and grounds were designed according to ideas on psychiatric care at the time. The rehab is being done by the nonprofit Richardson Center Corporation, with the state putting in \$76.5 million to leverage development and heritage tourism.

**PAN-AMERICAN BUILDING** When the Pan-American Exposition came to Buffalo in 1901, only one building was meant to be permanent, a scaled-down version of the Parthenon erected near Delaware Park's Hoyt Lake. The Pan-American Building, which served as the state pavilion, hosted an endless string of receptions for visiting dignitaries, among the eight million visitors wowed by the expo's demonstrations of a dazzling new technology, electric light. The structure, faced with Vermont marble with bronze entrance doors and sculptures depicting local history, was designed by local architect George Cary. Today it houses the Buffalo Historical Society. An SAT grant helped stabilize the portico and terrace walls.

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## Darwin Martin House >>

Chicagoland will always be the mecca for Frank Lloyd Wright architecture, but second up might just be Buffalo. The architect bestowed the city with six notable residences—and the most impressive of the group, the Darwin D. Martin House Complex—is undergoing an unprecedented renovation seeded by a 2001 Save America's Treasures grant. Built between 1903 and 1905 for soap magnate Darwin Martin and his wife Is-



abelle, the site features all the trademarks of the Prairie style—horizontal lines, overhanging eaves, open interiors—as well as Wright's signature shaping of the total space. The commission, Wright's most elaborate in the style, is largely considered its premier example. "This is the project that catapulted him to international prominence," says Mary Roberts, executive director of the site, now a catalyst for heritage tourism. It is not just a house but a compound of six linked buildings including the main living quarters and conservatory, with a glass-enclosed pergola connecting the two; the Barton House, a smaller residence built for Martin's sister and brother-in-law; a carriage house with chauffeur's quarters and stable (later converted to a garage); and a gardener's cottage. A national historic landmark, the site symbolizes the architect's lifelong friendship with Martin. With Wright having done a house for his brother in Oak Park, Illinois, Martin got him the job of designing a building for the Larkin Soap Company, where he was an executive (a since-demolished masterwork). He was so taken with the architect that he had him design a house, too. Unlike those before it, this one had

**ABOVE:** A skylit sculpture of the Nike of Samothrace, focal point down a hall into the reconstructed conservatory. **RIGHT:** Isabelle Martin, circa 1912, arranging flowers in the Wright masterwork.







ABOVE, RIGHT BIFF HENRICH COURTESY MARTIN HOUSE RESTORATION CORPORATION

few monetary or design limits, allowing Wright to freely explore his emerging ideas. "The design of the tables and chairs, the stained glass, the mosaics around the fireplace . . . all of that was his opportunity to show what a total creation of space can be when it's done in creative hands," says the architect's grandson in the documentary *Frank Lloyd Wright's Buffalo*. Decades after, Wright even called the site, which boasts almost 400 pieces of his art glass, his "opus." After having the architect create yet another masterwork (a summer estate, Graycliff, also an SAT recipient), Martin went broke in the stock market crash of 1929, barely able to pay the property taxes. He passed away in 1935, followed by his wife 10 years later. Eventually everything was razed but the main quarters and the Barton House. Purchased by the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1967, it was used for a wide range of school activities, Roberts



LEFT AND ABOVE: Two views of the complex, a million-dollar grant recipient. says. In 1992, the school donated the site to the non-profit Martin House Restoration Corporation. An ambitious rehab and reconstruction, overseen by Hamilton Houston Lownie Architects, began in 1996. A million-dollar SAT grant went to foundation repairs; installation of HVAC, fire protection, and security systems; and restoration of masonry, tile, and concrete. All the structures are standing again, and include a new interpretive center. When the restoration is complete, the complex will look just as it did in 1907. "The house is a lynchpin for architectural tourism in western New York," says Roberts, receiving around 25,000 annual visitors. "This is a smart growth investment that will pay for itself."