

# Pow! It's Good-by History, Hello Hamburger

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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## Architecture

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**I** SUPPOSE you could call the pictures on this page a sight gag. See the 116-year-old historic house. See it being knocked down. See the hamburger stand in its place. Pow. America, of thee I sing; sweet land of the Burger King.

The house was Mapleside, built solidly of sandstone with the classical graces characteristic of the mid-19th century. It stood in Madison, Wis., until last year, when it was bought and demolished by the hamburger chain, which professed to be ignorant of the building's esthetic and historical worth. Last-minute attempts by preservationists to raise \$100,000 to save it failed. Good-by history, hello hamburger. From historic home to "home of the whopper" with a swing of the wrecker's ball.

This hamburger stand got an extra onion. It was given as part of the "orchids and onions" awards program of the Capital Community Citizens, a lively environmental action group in Dade County, Wis. The incident was reported in the "Wisconsin Architect" and "Preservation News." As far as I know, there is no plaque on the hamburger stand.

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Usually landmarks are demolished for parking lots. Blacktop without onions. This is one of the most popular sports in cities. Urban renewal has drawn its demolition lines around uncounted (has anyone ever counted?) historic buildings and districts. Waterfronts, Federal survivals, Greek Revival enclaves, anything that has meaning in terms of the history, style or sense of place of American communities is x-ed out first as the oldest, shabbiest and easiest to demolish.

Within the last few years, as the nature of the losses became distressingly apparent, protests mounted. Federal legislation has been passed to amend original urban renewal law so that historic preservation can be assisted in renewal areas. Local

agencies are being backed, pushed and pulled into revision of plans by concerned citizens, with either overt or covert resistance. The struggle goes on, while the historic areas stand and rot, touched with the peculiar blight, stagnation and decay that comes with renewal designation and inaction.

Maybe we need the gags to relieve the despair. But the humor is pretty black.

Consider Newburgh, N.Y., for example. Newburgh is a Hudson River town in every sense: it is a product of the era when the river was celebrated in the arts and its spectacular hillside sites were romanticized by a variety of Victorian styles. Today the city has every kind of blight and problem going, and the renewal it charted for itself wrote "good riddance" across the map to its past. There is a curiously simplistic belief in

troubled towns that wiping out a city wipes out its problems. Actually, the bulldozer only pushes them around, while eliminating the city's real assets.

In the midst of its difficulties, Newburgh came up with a gag that made national headlines. Demolition lines in the urban renewal plan, as usual, were drawn around one of the city's best buildings — the Dutch Reformed Church, a prime and elegant Greek Revival structure built in 1835 by Alexander Jackson Davis — now on the National Register. Right next to it was the line of the rehabilitation area. The rehabilitation area, it was pointed out by the Times-Herald-Record in a fine exposé, contained Big Nell's, the city's most notorious brothel. Big Nell's, listed as a single family house with 16 bedrooms, was eligible for Fed-

eral fix-up funds and might even get a nice new entrance street at government cost to replace one closed by the urban renewal plan. The church was eligible only for demolition.

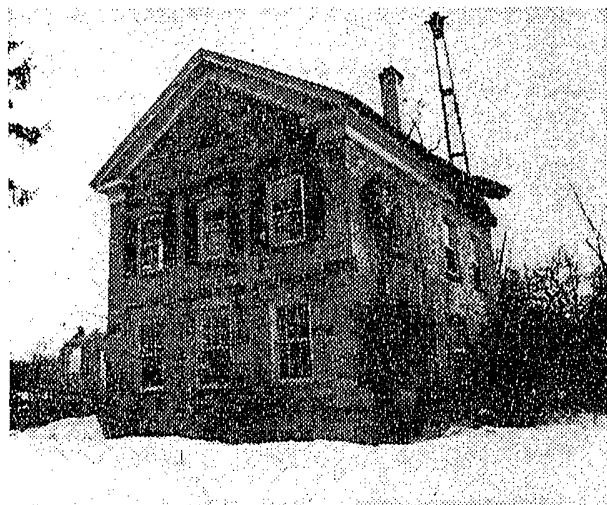
There was enough fuss to reprieve the church and close Big Nell's, although the renewal agency, located in a building within sight of both the church and Big Nell's, has done some conspicuous foot-dragging in remapping. The municipality is now being backed, dragged and pushed toward a plan to utilize the landmark constructively.

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In Hudson, N. Y., the same kind of senseless urban renewal plan has claimed the 1837 Greek Revival General Worth Hotel. The Hudson YWCA was willing to take over the building and the Hudson River Valley Com-

mission, the State Historical Trust and the National Trust for Historic Preservation urged that it be saved. But political heads prevailed and Hudson demolished its National Register property. Ready for the biggest gag of all? Read it in the Hudson Register-Star:

"A modern Dairy-Queen Drive-In will be constructed on the site of the historic General Worth Hotel that fell victim to the bulldozers last year. The Common Council in special session voted to sell the site for \$1,700. If plans progress according to schedule, the drive-in should be opened by fall. Council President Thomas Quigley said the purchase 'was a step in the right direction to develop downtown Hudson.'"  
*America the beautiful, let me sing of thee; Burger King and Dairy Queen from sea to shining sea.*



One, two, three, and a 116-year-old landmark house in Madison, Wis., gives way to a hamburger stand  
*"America the beautiful: Burger King and Dairy Queen, from sea to shining sea"*



Capital Community Citizens and Wisconsin Architect