



# SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY

## NEWSLETTER

Volume Three Number 3

May 1974



Mt Clare in full bloom, c1 890. Natl Museum of H & T, B&O Colln

### † THE PASSING OF MT CLARE †

One of the more depressing bits of recent news came with receipt of a listing of tools and equipment up for sealed-bid auction by the Baltimore & Ohio, representing the entire contents of its historic Mt Clare Shops in [Baltimore W 590494]. The earliest RR shop facility in this hemisphere (if not the world), opening in 1829, it was at its height perhaps the most comprehensive, self-contained shop complex in all railroaddom, producing with no strain whatever—from scratch in most cases—everything from steam locomotives, freight, and passenger cars, to bridges, signs, and small hardware. They cast, forged, machined, worked wood, made boilers, &c, &c.

Operations have been diminishing there for many years. As craftsmen retired, more and more work was handled elsewhere on the system, and more and more equipment was purchased. By the end of May all will be still; the end of an era when the railroads were nearly independent empires.

Prospects for the site are uncertain, although it will remain B&O/C&O property, used for other purposes. The famed B&O Museum and Mt Clare station at the NE corner will, of course, survive; a thorough physical renovation (SIAN 2:4:1) even now is underway. The Museum may, in fact, expand into some of the adjacent early shop buildings, several of which date from the 1860s. (See: Lawrence W Sagle, "America's Oldest RR Shops," in *RR History*, Oct 1972, pp 22-40.)

### The AIA

The Assn for Industrial Archaeology, whose imminence was noted in Sept, has now been formally organized, the result of a growing realization in Great Britain that efforts there in all areas of IA have been rather too fragmented and parochial. The AIA's goals are closely parallel with those of the SIA: to encourage work in the preservation, adaptive use and recording of industrial and engineering structures; study of the relationship of IA to other fields & disciplines; and the coordination of IA efforts, at all levels, particularly within GB. A bi-monthly *Bulletin* is being published. Membership: \$5.00/year. Information: the Secy: Neil Cossons, Church Hill, Ironbridge, Telford, Salop, TF8 7RE, England.

### PIANO FACTORY CONVERSION

There is no doubt that New England is showing the way for the adaptive use of industrial structures. With the exception of the Boott Mill project in Lowell (SIAN 3:2) these are not the spectaculars of the far west or the Chattanooga Choo Choo (sic), but rather the solid, workaday, forthright projects, fulfilling genuine community needs, that are what industrial preservation should be about, and that will, in the long run, sustain the constructive re-use of our industrial heritage.

In mid-April Piano Craft Guild was opened, providing 174 living/working units, designed for the particularized needs of artists and craftsmen, in the renovated Chickering Piano Factory at 791 Tremont St, Boston [S Boston MA 28428926]. Built by Jonas Chickering in 1853, it was at the time reputed to be the largest building in NA except for the US Capitol. It was in production until the mid-1930s when Chickering moved, then was converted into highly subdivided commercial and industrial space. By 1971 it had fallen on hard times, was in poor condition, and becoming a liability when the Boston architectural, planning, and development firm, Gelardin/Bruner/Cott acquired the building. Through a market study they determined the need for a specialized facility for area artists and craftsmen. Such special features as darkrooms, oversize doors, shop space, studios, and a display-sales area have been provided, in addition to apartments.



The conversion has been architecturally straightforward with no attempt to falsely modernize the building's original character nor to falsify new elements into period. The 1 to 3 bedroom living units range from 500 to 1740 sq ft and in rent from \$91 for low-income units to \$355 for "market-rate" units. Construction cost was \$10.50/sq ft. The venture was financed by a \$3.4 million loan from the MA Housing Finance Agency. Information: G/B/C 543a Green St, Boston 02139. (617) 661-0235.

**1975 Annual Conference.** It is to be in . . . Baltimore . . . one of North America's richest cities from the standpoint of Industrial Archeology. The sites deriving from early rail transportation, manufacturing, textiles, public works, and general engineering are so plentiful as to be almost embarrassing. Mark: **26 & 27 April.** *Other organizations please note.*