

Crash threatens historic Kate Mullany House

by Deborah Ward

The painstaking, \$500,000 restoration of the landmark Kate Mullany House in Troy was almost complete when an SUV careened down Hoosick Street and plowed into the back wall of the historic building, home in the 1860s to union organizer Mullany.

Paul Cole, founder and head of the American Labor Studies Center that owns the site, hurried to the scene. As he maneuvered through a phalanx of rescue vehicles and flashing lights, Paul was horrified at what he saw.

Although no one was seriously hurt, damage to the back wall was so extensive that engineers worried the second floor might collapse.

"It was pretty devastating to see it because we were so close," Paul said.

In the wake of the Nov. 10 accident, the restoration, a three-decades labor of love on behalf of women's, immigrant and labor history, was left teetering.

But not for long.

"I'm undaunted," said Cole, a former social studies teacher who served for many years as secretary-treasurer of the state AFL-CIO and on the NYSUT Board. "We are rebuilding. This is a unique and important site like no other in the country." Donations are urgently needed for costs uncovered by still pending insurance claims. (See below on "How You Can Give.")

Kate Mullany was an Irish immigrant who in 1864 organized and led the 300-member Collar Laundry Union, the first sustained all-female union in U.S. history. Kate's home, an apartment in the three-story Hoosick Street building, in 2004 received the prestigious designation of affiliated National Historic Site, thanks to the efforts of then-Sen. Hillary Clinton and Rep. Mike McNulty.

"It was almost restored with very few things left to do," Paul said. The undamaged first floor houses display space on Irish immigrant, labor and women's history, including posters on successful strikes Mullany led. The second floor houses ALSC offices. The third floor contains Mullany's apartment, "99 percent" restored. Still needed: a Troy-built kitchen stove, circa 1869, and Jenny Lind beds for the four bedrooms, each so small that a modern single bed would not fit.

The project, initiated and championed by Paul, has benefitted from the support and the donated labor of many unions. NYSUT Vice President Jolene DiBrango chairs the ALSC board. "Other than the beds and the stove which are still needed, it looks exactly as it did when Kate Mullany lived there," Paul said.

Cole has been working to preserve Mullany's legacy for 30 years and is passionate about the site's importance: "There are only 88 National Historic Sites in the whole country. Of those, almost all are the homes of the rich and famous. This is the only one in the national park's history that brings together labor, women's and immigrants' history."

The building's back wall remains boarded and shored up by two-by-fours until engineering plans and insurance claims are complete. Donations are "very much needed and welcome not only for this but for continuing restorations," Paul said. The goal: A grand opening later this year.

HOW YOU CAN DONATE

Make out your tax-deductible check to the **American Labor Studies Center** and mail it to:
Slocum and DeAngelus, Accountants

**974 Albany Shaker Road,
Latham, NY 12110**

For more info: katemullanyhs.org and www.labor-studies.org