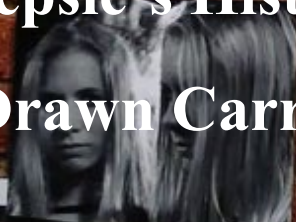


Hudson Valley



Poughkeepsie's Historic Trolley Barn Goes From Horse-Drawn Carriages to Downtown Art Hub



Sabrina Sucato September 11, 2019

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There's a trolley barn in Poughkeepsie.

Trolley barn, you ask? The building, which was constructed in 1873 on Main Street, was once a home base for the trolley lines that provided public transportation within the city. Originally drawn by horses, the trolleys of the Poughkeepsie City Horse Railway connected the Hudson River

Railroad depot with Smith Street. In 1872, a second line was added, thereby bridging the gap between the riverfront and Vassar College to the east.

As the years passed, the trolley system adapted, electrified, and ultimately discontinued use. Without its multi-wheeled occupants, the building changed hands – and functions – throughout the decades before eventually succumbing to vacancy in the early 2000s.



Outside the Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn / Photo by Roy Budnik

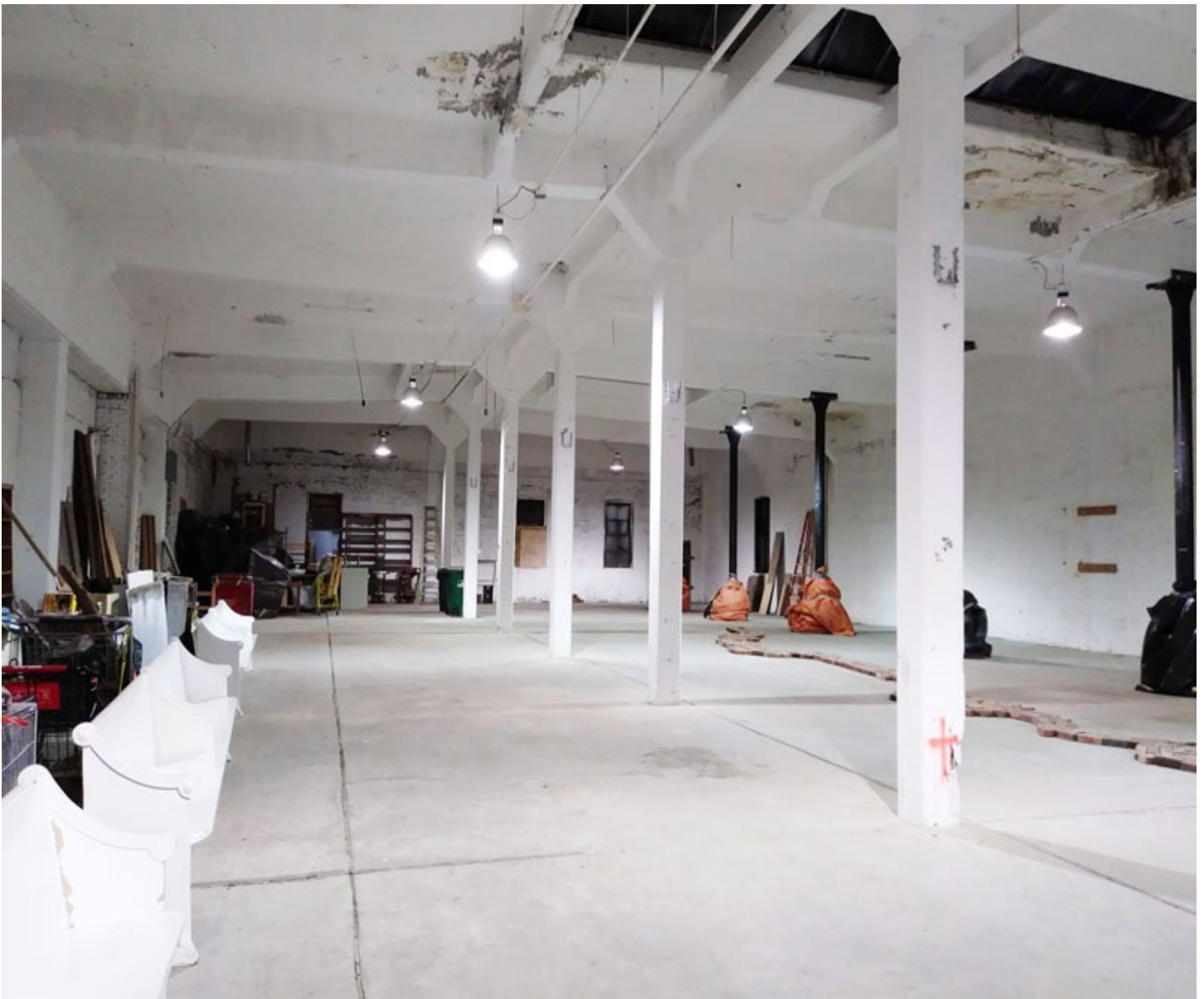
The Rise of the Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn

In its heyday, the Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn was an integral hub for comings and goings in the city. With a prime location on north Main Street between Clinton and Cherry Streets, the unit functioned as an indoor parking lot for the horse-led carriages that trekked locals from one corner of the city to another. The lengthy car barn comprised a large part of the interior, while an adjoining stable and feed room offered a sheltered home for the horses.

A popular mode of transportation for locals during the period, the Poughkeepsie railways and the Trolley Barn were purchased by leading Poughkeepsie businessman James William Hinkley in 1892. Hinkley, the newspaper man behind the *Poughkeepsie News Press*, *News Telegraph*, and *New York Daily Graphic*, took over the Poughkeepsie City Horse Railway and extended its purview when he rebranded it as the Poughkeepsie City and Wappingers Falls Electric Railroad Company in 1894.

By that time, however, horse-drawn carriages were no longer the most efficient mode of transport. To update the trolley lines, Hinkley electrified them and added two new loops – a northern one along Parker Avenue and a southern one along Hooker Avenue – to reach a wider range of passengers. At that point, the barn had room for up to 25 trolleys, thanks to a renovation that doubled its size.

After Hinkley's passing in 1904, the trolley operations passed to his sons. Soon after, tragedy struck when a fire sparked from inside the building's maintenance shop in 1906. After tearing through the property, the blaze left the roof and the interior of the main building destroyed. Because the surviving walls were weakened as well, the entire property required reconstruction. The original aspects of the trolley barn that survive today date back to the 1906 development.



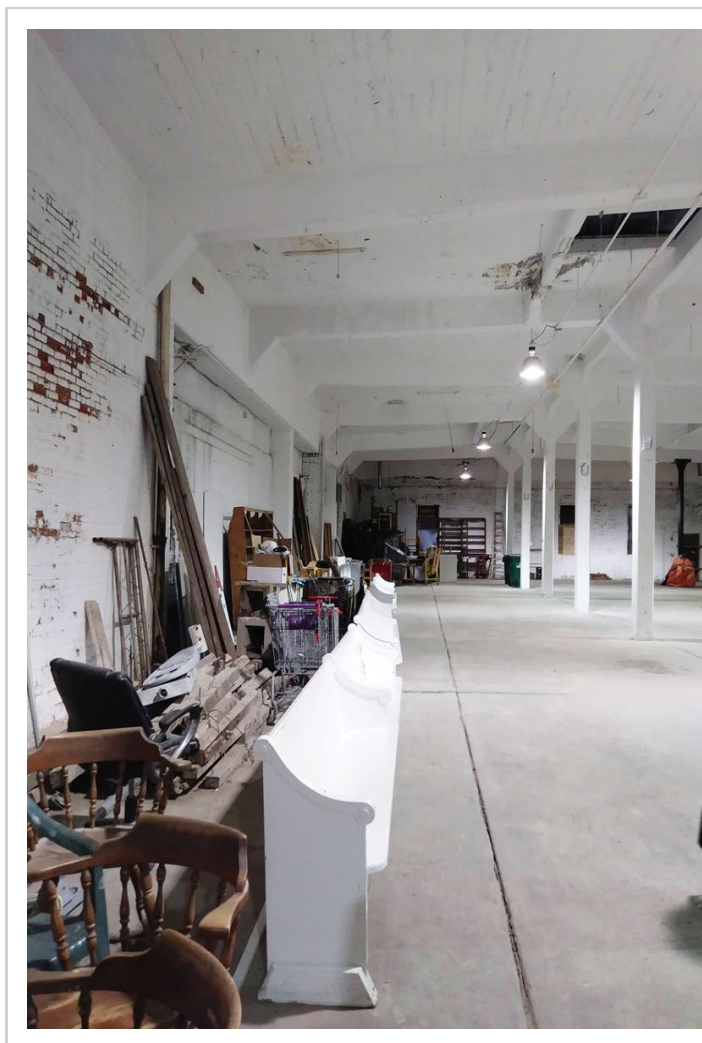
The back room of the Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn awaits completion. Photo by Sabrina Sucato

Automobiles and New Owners

The arrival of automobiles in the Hudson Valley signaled the end of an era for local trolley lines. After implementing a number of operational changes to cut costs, the Hinkley family made the decision to close the trolley system in 1935 in order to replace the lines with buses. Less than 20 years after that, the bus routes closed down as well.

In 1956, the Hinkley family waved goodbye to the trolley barn so that Walter Deising could take the reins. The owner of an automobile parts store on Main Street, Deising renovated the space for the store's use. In 1994, he passed it along to the Alamo Transportation Services Company, which converted it for dispatching and warehouse storage.

The trolley barn began its true decline in 2004, when the New York City investors who purchased it left it vacant for years. Although a fleeting attempt was made to convert the space into a restaurant and boxing gym, it soon failed, leaving the downtown edifice to slowly wear away in the heart of the city.



Left to right: the back of the Trolley Barn; the mezzanine overlooking the front room / Photos by Sabrina Sucato

New Life in Poughkeepsie

Then Roy Budnik arrived. A longtime Poughkeepsie resident, Budnik first came across the space in 2013 when he purchased the building next door for Mid-Hudson Heritage Center, a Poughkeepsie-based arts organization now known as **Fall Kill Creative Works**. As he parked his car on the way to the center's ceramics studio, he couldn't help but notice that the trolley barn was empty, time-ravaged, and perpetually for sale.

"I could see the benefit to enlarging the arts and culture offering in the city," he says. "And, we could use the parking lot."

After a detailed inspection of the history and layout of the space, Budnik purchased the Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn in 2015. Immediately afterward, he set about clearing the parking lot and opening it up for use by the ceramics studio. When it came to settling on a role for the building itself, however, he wanted to hear the community's feedback first. To do so, he and the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center hosted a series of vision sessions that were open to locals, then collected 300 surveys off the street. Based upon the information obtained, the group determined that converting the edifice into an art center was the way to go.

"I wanted to fill the front with glass so it was attractive to people outside and so it honored the history of the building," Budnik explains, adding that the indoor-outdoor feel was a critical factor in determining the barn's role within the city. With its central downtown location, the edifice sees a frequent stream of passing cars, not to mention a significant amount of foot traffic along Main Street itself.



The Art Effect welcomed the Poughkeepsie community for a show at the Trolley Barn in January.

Photo by Sabrina Sucato

As the primary business owner, Budnik knew he would not be able to obtain the grant funds the barn required for successful renovation. So he offered the building to **Hudson River Housing** for the grand old fee of \$1, a charge he later waived. Hudson River Housing accepted the deal and, soon after, the City of Poughkeepsie secured a \$1,000,000 grant for the renovation of vacant and dilapidated buildings.

And thus the work began. Under the expert eye of Charles Liscom, of Liscom, McCormack, and VanVoorhis, the Trolley Barn entered into a total overhaul period beginning in fall 2017. After gutting and renovating the interior of the front sector and upper apartment of the edifice, the barn opened to the community on January 1, 2019.

A deceptively large location on Main Street, the Trolley Barn sits on approximately two-thirds of an acre. The interior consists of two main segments: the actual trolley barn in the back of the building, which totals about 9,500 square feet, and the front room, which claims 3,700 square feet. Above the front room, a small upper level that is currently fitted as a livable apartment sits at 1,400 square feet. As it currently stands, the front part of the building, including the main room, a mezzanine, and the apartment, is complete and in use, with the larger barn segment slated for future development.



Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn is an arts hub in the city. Photo by Roy Budnik

The Future of the Trolley Barn

The Trolley Barn may be less than a year old, but it's already a hub for the Poughkeepsie community at large. Since the space's inaugural event, a **Teen Visions art exhibit** with The Art Effect, the barn has welcomed Vassar College for its annual Modfest programming and Dutchess Outreach for free food distribution in the winter months. It's also been a destination for a number of

private groups, including birthday parties, lectures, nonprofit meetings, and even a wedding reception.

“It’s become something of a landmark,” Budnik observes. “People are talking about the Trolley Barn.

They are, indeed. Thanks to its close relationship with the Poughkeepsie Underwear Factory and Fall Kill Clay Works (formerly Art Centro) next door, the Trolley Barn is part of the **transformative wave** that’s rushing across the city. While Fall Kill Creative Works helms the makerspaces in the region – its clay studio is at 485 Main Street, the print works are on the second floor of the Underwear Factory at 8 North Cherry Street, and Story Works resides in the Historic Glebe House at 635 Main Street – its collaboration with Hudson River Housing allows for the upcoming creation of the Fall Kill Textile Works in the Trolley Barn. It also incentivizes the extended community to make use of the interior on a long-term basis.

“We have four different dance groups and some theater groups interested in being located there,” Budnik shares. At the moment, he, Fall Kill Creative Works, and Hudson River Housing are in the process of selecting groups for permanent residency. At the same time, they continue to work to secure funding for a build-out of the back room and the basement area, which Budnik mentions could become a theater.

As far as he’s concerned, however, Poughkeepsie is officially on the up and up.

“My work is finished,” he happily declares. “When I first started back in 2010 with Mid-Hudson Heritage Center, I wanted to promote arts and culture for the community. There are now a lot of other galleries opening. The ball is rolling.”

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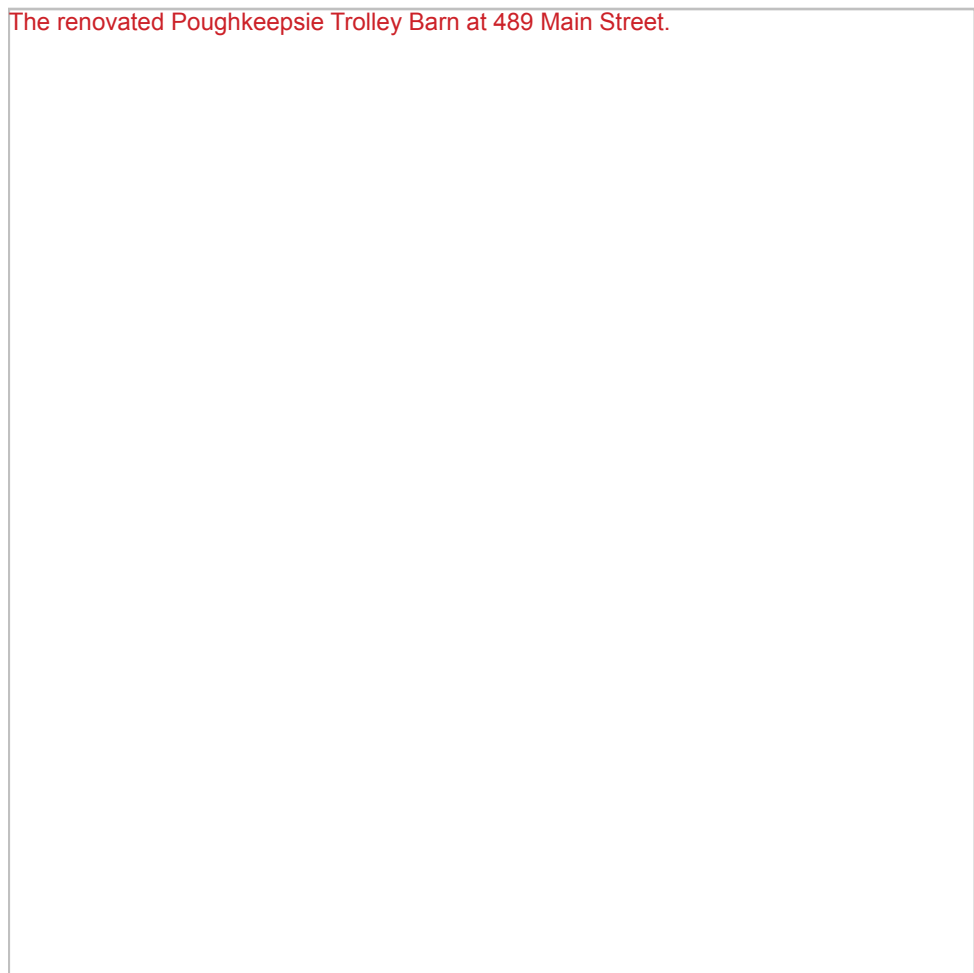
Poughkeepsie's Trolley Barn Chugs Along

The Crown Jewel of a Dedicated Arts Campus

By Anne Pyburn Craig

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The renovated Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn at 489 Main Street.



The renovated Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn at 489 Main Street.

Since the announcement last March of \$1 million in Restore New York Communities funding for the Poughkeepsie Trolley Barn, the property's owner, Roy T. Budnik, has been a very busy man. Now, the latest jewel in Poughkeepsie's cultural crown is open and hosting events—but there's even more to come.

Budnik is the founder and board member of the **Mid Hudson Heritage Center**, a community arts and culture nonprofit, which he has charged with running the Trolley Barn as one of four event spaces. The nonprofit, which was founded in 2010, is firmly rooted in the Middle Main heart of downtown. Art Centro, located at 485 Main, is a pottery studio

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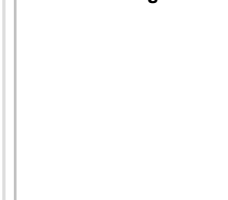
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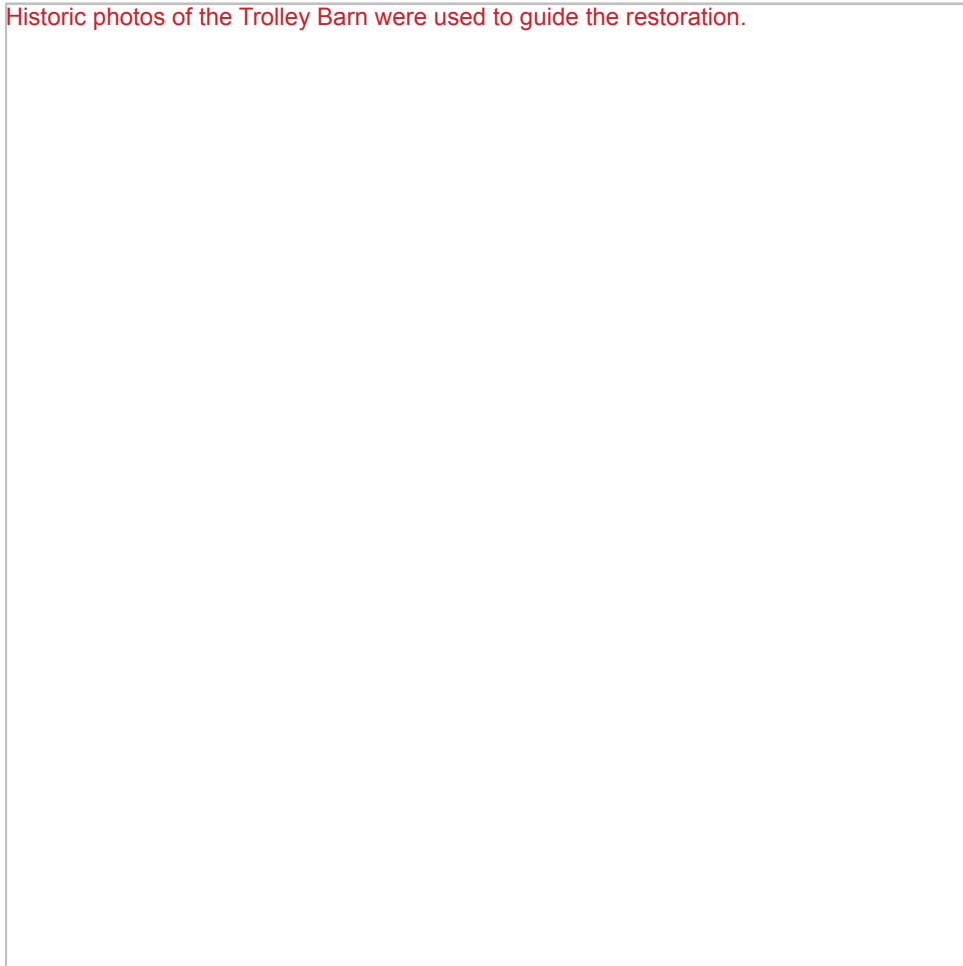


Poughkeepsie: Strong at Heart

with classes, studios, gallery space and events. Glebe House, at 635 Main, is city-owned and being developed as a history center. Nearby, the PUF (Poughkeepsie Underwear Factory) Studios offer printmaking facilities and classes. At 489 Main Street, the Trolley Barn is poised to take center stage as a huge multi-arts facility. "Phase I is complete. We had an event last night and two today," Budnik said last week. "The whole building is going to be the centerpiece of a dedicated arts campus."

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Historic photos of the Trolley Barn were used to guide the restoration.



Historic photos of the Trolley Barn were used to guide the restoration.

Originally built as a stable for trolley horses in 1874, then remodeled and enlarged when trolleys were electrified in 1894, and rebuilt after a 1906 fire, the Trolley Barn's overhead doors and large windows "make it easy for people to walk in off the street," Budnik says. "I hope they will. I'm optimistic. I used to have the one gallery in town, and now they're opening up all over the place."

Multiphase Development

Phase I included the build out of the front 3,000 square feet with bathrooms, offices, and gallery/event space, restoration of the facade, and installation of utilities. Phase II will include finishing out an apartment for use by artists and renovation of the 9,000-square-foot main trolley room and 2,000-square-foot annex. The final phase will be renovation of the basement/lower level to include a small black-box theater, and additional gallery space.

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The Trolley Barn pre-renovation.

The Trolley Barn pre-renovation.

Past events include an art exhibit entitled “Hudson River of Bricks” last fall, a Reformed Church event, and a teen art show, which was a fundraiser for the newly formed **Art Effect**. Budnik takes great delight in the range of events and services the MHHC will be empowered to offer.

“Dutchess Outreach and the Hudson Valley Food Bank do their distribution here,” he says, “and the **Vassar College ModFest** is holding the premiere event here, a performance bringing together chamber music and hip hop. Vassar is giving us a Steinway and offering music lessons. So this is a place for everybody, whether you need food or want to take piano lessons on a Steinway. We’ve got art from Poughkeepsie High students hanging with art from kids from an expensive private school in Millbrook. Quite the spectrum.”

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Poster for the "Teen Visions" art exhibit at Trolley Barn.



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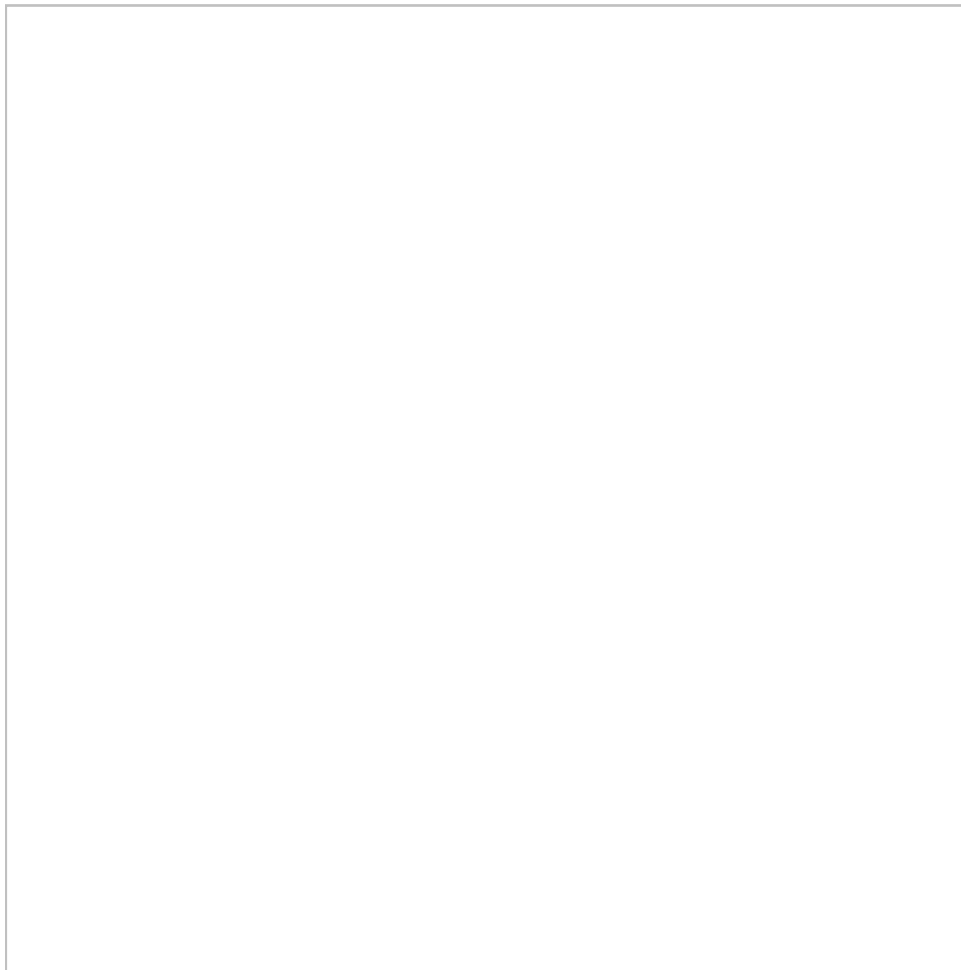
A community-based studio for textile design and production, a collaboration with staff from [Marist College](#) and the [Fashion Institute of Technology](#), will hold its opening celebration on February 15. Staff at Vassar College have proposed a lab at the Trolley Barn for teaching digital imaging/design technologies and applications. According to the City of Poughkeepsie's current funding application, the Trolley Barn project is a "model of alliance and revival." The final, total cost of the project is estimated at \$5 million. Along with the state funds, some funding has come from the federal NeighborWorks program.

Of the People, For the People

So what's going on in the 11,000 square foot space? Pretty much whatever Poughkeepsie folks have said they need. Five visioning sessions have been held, bringing in over 150 collaborators to help plan studios, classrooms, and offices for the community, and more input is welcome.

"I'm still open to suggestions," Budnik says. "I want to make it a venue for everyone. Over the summer, while the front was boarded up, kids would walk by and be so curious and excited that something new was happening on Main Street, and we'd ask what they wanted. One of them yelled, 'Do something for us!' and that's what we intend to do."

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The "Hudson River of Bricks" installation, by Julia Whitney Barnes traces the rivers path to New York City in bricks, a historic product of the region.

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By Hudson River Housing Nov 7, 2019

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