

**SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORIANS**

11 February 2022

Ms. Patricia Woertz
Chairman, CEO and President
Archer Daniels Midland Milling Co.
415 Franklin Street
Buffalo, NY 14202

Re: Support for the preservation of the Great Northern Grain Elevator, 8 City Ship Canal / 250 Ganson Street, Buffalo, NY

Dear Ms. Woertz:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) strongly supports efforts to preserve the Great Northern Elevator in Buffalo, NY. Constructed in 1897, the massive grain elevator was, at the time of its completion one of the world's largest. The Great Northern Elevator is one of the last remaining "brick box"-type grain elevators remaining in North America. We understand that the owner, Archer Daniel Midlands (ADM), has applied for an emergency permit to demolish the structure in response to loss of brick cladding during a December 2021 gale.

The Great Northern Elevator was designed by Maz Tolz, a bridge engineer with the Great Northern Railroad. D.A. Robinson, a prominent grain elevator builder from Chicago, led its construction. The vast structure had a capacity of between 2.52 and 3 million US bushels, distributed amongst 48 large steel bins. Thirty of the bins are 38 feet in diameter, and the remainder are 15.5 feet in diameter. The elevator's brick envelope serves as a weather barrier, but does not bear the weight of the cupola or grain bins, which are supported by a network of steel I-beams. As originally constructed, three nine-story high corrugated iron legs moved along iron tracks, and transported grain to the top of the bins. These were destroyed by a storm in 1922, and replaced by two 145-foot marine leg towers. A concrete-framed flour mill addition was constructed in 1924.

During its prime, the Great Northern Elevator was powered by electricity generated at Niagara Falls, 20 miles to the northwest of Buffalo. Grain arrived at the elevator by rail cars and boats, and was delivered into the silos by a series of hoppers and conveyors. The Great Northern Railroad sold the elevator to the Mutual Elevator Company in 1903, which in turn sold it to a local Buffalo group called the Warehouse Corporation in 1921. In 1935, the facility was purchased by the Pillsbury Company, which owned and operated the facility until 1981. Buffalo's leading role in the nation's grain business faded by the middle of the 20th century and, in 1981, the facility was shuttered. The significance of its industrial history was acknowledged in 1990, when it was recognized as a local landmark, two years before its sale to ADM.

Threats of demolition are not new. Pillsbury filed for a permit to demolish the Great Northern Elevator in the late 1980s. Following the sale to ADM, the new owner filed for demolition in 1996 and again in 2003. In their most recent demolition application (15 December 2021), ADM cited studies that suggest the elevator is not structurally sound. ADM further claims to have invested \$100,000 in exterior building maintenance between 2003 and 2019. That is the equivalent of \$6,250 per year, a pittance for such a substantial structure, let alone one with a significant maintenance backlog. In a section cynically titled "Opportunities

to Enhance Historical Preservation and Access," ADM states that while the "GNE cannot safely be maintained intact, there may be opportunities to make the historical significance of the structure more available and valuable to the community." This head-scratcher is followed by "... it may be possible to preserve and donate significant artifacts, many of which are inside the structure and now completely inaccessible to the community. In addition, if it can be done safely, the structure itself might be inspected, studied and documented at appropriate times during the demolition process in ways that may not otherwise be possible."

In mid-January 2022, despite objections from state and federal lawmakers and local preservationists, the City of Buffalo approved the demolition permit. In response, New York State Appellate Court Justice Tracey Bannister granted the Campaign for Greater Buffalo History, Architecture & Culture a temporary restraining order, preventing, at least for the moment, the City of Buffalo and ADM from demolishing it.

We write in support of the preservation of the Great Northern Elevator, and to oppose any efforts to demolish it. The Great Northern Elevator is essential to an understanding of industrial architecture in the United States, and is integral to the understanding of the role of Buffalo as one of the most significant industrial cities in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B C G" followed by a horizontal line.

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc: Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Ms. Mary B. Brush, FAIA; Mr. James Buckley, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms. Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee; Mr. Daniel Mackay, NYSHPO; Mr. Byron Brown, Mayor, Buffalo; Mr. Darius Pridgen, President, Buffalo Common Council; Ms. Jessie Fisher, Executive Director, Preservation Buffalo Niagara.

CUT BELOW:

CC:

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