

PS 6

**1 LIBERTY STREET
NEWBURGH NY, 12550**

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OVERVIEW

The Liberty Street School was Newburgh's sixth grammar school, a designation still seen carved over the doorway of this once elegant, now dilapidated building. After years of neglect and a recent ill-conceived "renovation," **RipRap LLC** took ownership of the property and plans to restore the Liberty Street School as a home base for creation and learning. When refurbished, Frank Estabrook's stunning brick building can again be a place for exploration, experimentation and self discovery, serving creatives and small business owners from the Hudson Valley region and beyond. It is our hope that the reinvented "PS 6" will contribute to Newburgh's revival as a whole and provide residents with opportunities for art-making, light manufacturing and community building.



The building at 1 Liberty Street is a shell that hints at its former glory. Once a grand school house with expansive hallways and high-ceilinged classrooms, the present venerable but derelict structure entranced RipRap's owner who has a deep love of old buildings. With this in mind, RipRap will take the history of the building into consideration during the renovation process and return PS 6 to the original splendor of Frank Estabrook's late-19th Century design. While utilising the existing classroom layout, the building will be upgraded with the latest in passive technologies and innovations to benefit generations to come. As with RipRap's other projects in Newburgh, we want this building to represent a "low carbon footprint gift for the future."

In keeping with our desire to nurture and inspire artists and entrepreneurs, RipRap will make the school building at 1 Liberty into a multi-use creative space. PS 6 will include artist studios, exhibition and office space as well as shared shops for pottery, 3D printing and other emerging light manufacturing techniques. The top floor (the site of of the old gymnasium) will be devoted to film and television production and post-production workspaces. The cavernous halls of the first two floors will be turned into informal gallery spaces for sharing work and information, hopefully tapping into the "show-and-tell" spirit of school days past. As significant as our business-minded pursuits, RipRap also plans to foster community involvement in the form of an afterschool youth art and trades program. Additionally, the building will offer no-cost space for

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community meetings and non-profit events. RipRap hopes to create a harmonious relationship between PS 6 and the surrounding neighborhood and contribute to the overall reinvigoration of the City of Newburgh.

P.S. 6 - HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

From 1880 to 1891, Newburgh's manufacturing companies multiplied and expanded. New roads, railroads, and access to the Hudson River made Newburgh an attractive option for entrepreneurs and those seeking employment. Housing and schools were necessary components of industrial growth.

By the time Liberty Street School began construction in 1891, two other city schools had been enlarged, one three times. The City of Newburgh hired Frank E. Estabrook, a Newburgh native, to design a new school. Estabrook had studied architecture at Boston Polytechnic School and returned to Newburgh in 1891 to begin his career. One of his first commissions was the design of the Liberty Street School for which he was paid \$725. He would go on to design the Broadway School, the Newburgh YWCA, the Quassaick Bank, The Wheelmen's Club, as well as other buildings in Newburgh and schools, civic, and residential buildings throughout the region.

Estabrook designed the Liberty Street School in the Richardsonian Romanesque fashion - a style noted by masonry walls with ashlar stonework; round towers with conical roofs embedded in the walling; bands of windows; asymmetrical facades; decorative stone plaques; and wide, round arches above doors and windows. This type of architecture was popular in civic and public buildings between 1880 and 1900 throughout the country.



Photo of 1 Liberty from the early 1900s--shared on the Save The Liberty Street School Facebook group.

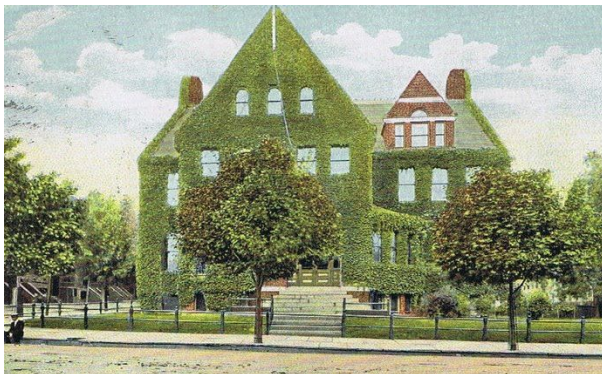
On January 4, 1892, 500 people gathered in the auditorium of the new Liberty Street School to celebrate its opening and the future it promised. The school had cost \$28,000 and was constructed of brick and trimmed in Warsaw stone (a blue sandstone from a quarry in Wyoming County, NY). One of the speakers on this occasion, Mr. Chauncy M. Depew, noted that, "In Europe education is a privilege – here it is a duty." Eight classrooms held about 335 students. The basement contained furnaces and dry closets (a toilet system where there was no indoor piped water). The first and second-floor halls were lined with ventilated clothing closets through which cold air was pushed from the basement. These closets opened into the classrooms.

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Unlike older schools, Liberty Street School was furnished with single desks that were positioned to allow natural daylight to fall on the left side of the desks (the assumption being that all students were right handed). The building was fitted with electric lights and a state of the art heating system. The third floor was dedicated to an assembly space that could seat up to 500 people. The City and its residents could be proud that their children were educated in a building that promoted a healthful learning environment with every modern convenience.

Along with economic prosperity came a rapidly growing population, and within five short years (in 1897), the student body had outgrown the space at Liberty Street School. In order to accommodate, the school held half day classes with two sessions per day. In 1898, the Board of Education Committee on Buildings noted a need to enlarge the school and improve the facilities. Once again, Frank E. Estabrook was chosen as the architect to design an addition with nine new classrooms for an additional 372 students. The dry closets were removed and new “closets” were installed in the basement and second floor in an attempt to improve sanitary conditions.

The school continued with strong attendance until a smallpox outbreak in 1908 closed the school for two weeks. New Board of Education rules on vaccines reduced enrollment by over 100 students that year. A 1912 survey of State Education Department standards in Newburgh schools found Liberty Street School deficient in proper lighting and space for each pupil. Within 15 years, the school had gone from a model educational environment to one in need of attention. New research on the spread of disease and studies on education efficiency prompted changes.



1 Liberty classroom circa 1951, shared by Save The Liberty Street School Facebook group

In 1958, Liberty Street School was renovated. An updated heating system and boiler room were installed. Toilets were removed from the basement and constructed on the first floor. Two classrooms on the first floor were combined to create a lunch room, and

provisions were made for administrative and health facilities. The renovations reduced 17 classrooms to 11, which reflecting the changing enrollment needs of the community. This trend continued until calls to close the school started surfacing in the 1970s.

Despite protests and petitions, Liberty Street School shut its door permanently in 1980, so that the school district could complete the racial integration program ordered by the state Department of Education. When it closed, the school was 60% Hispanic, 22% black, and 18% white. It educated 360 students from the neighborhood who had to be reassigned to schools

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further from home. The building has remained empty since that final day of school in June, 1980.

For almost 90 years, Liberty Street School symbolized an era of prosperity for the City of Newburgh and also its commitment to bettering the lives of its diverse population through education. It also demonstrated a movement across the country to standardize school architecture and building systems to provide the safest and healthiest learning environment for children. Though the original structure has deteriorated, the building's classic architecture and materials still evoke a sense of permanence. With proper attention, the building at 1 Liberty Street can once again become a community anchor, providing business and educational opportunities to the surrounding neighborhood, and enrich the City of Newburgh as a whole.

INTRODUCTION TO RIPRAP LLC

RipRap, LLC was established in March 2015 by Thomas Burr Dodd and his wife, Pearl Son-Dodd, when they purchased their first home in Newburgh. It also marks the the first step in a journey to build their future life. The inspiration for the company's name comes from the blend of broken stones piled up to protect the shoreline of the Hudson river. This rock armour (also called riprap) is defined by its strength and diversification, allowing water and ice to flow through it without causing erosion. The Dodds hope to build a similarly strong foundation in Newburgh that also works naturally with the forces around it. Newburgh has so much to offer, but has struggled with many of the issues plaguing other industrial towns that have watched as their factories were shuttered. The owners of RipRap believe that to create a new, durable bedrock for a bright, creative, evolving future, they must start by embracing the diverse parts, history and talent that already exists in the City.



This hope for the future of Newburgh is grounded in a deep love for its architecture and history. The Dodds do not want to promote a rapid gentrification of the area that displaces locals. They like Newburgh just as it is now; there is an energy that they were drawn to immediately. By instilling enthusiasm, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and a DIY attitude, the Dodds hope to create jobs and provide mentorships accessible to all residents.

Soon after acquiring their first property in Newburgh, the Dodds became aware of the obstacles residents faced buying and renovating a home. In order to address issues faced by the community, the Dodds initiated a monthly meeting called *Navigating Newburgh*. These meetings, open to the public (and archived on a blog for anyone unable to attend) strive to help

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Newburgh residents learn their options for becoming homeowners, as well as create a forum to share resources and knowledge to assist fellow homeowners in navigating the often complicated processes of restoring and rehabilitating properties in the Hudson Valley. These meetings have also become an opportunity to discuss environmentally conscious building techniques and talk to elected local officials in a non-politically charged environment.

The Hudson Valley is rapidly changing, in part because of the influx of artists and entrepreneurs. Artists, artisans and small business owners in New York City have faced a losing battle for decades to retain their creative spaces. In order to nurture the development of Newburgh as a whole, we need to encourage micro-manufacturers and makers to consider planting their roots in the area to help fill the void left by the large industries that have disappeared. In this new economic model, revenue comes from multiple sources. Rather than try and replace one large industry with another, perhaps it's better for the community to have a multitude of smaller ones that may better serve a diverse population. If the current situation is an indicator, people will need to learn to wear many hats to survive.



Light Manufacturing at BFP (organic vegan bath products shown here).

The Dodds are extremely excited to be laying down their foundation in Newburgh and to explore its rich and deep history for decades to come. They have chosen to purchase buildings that they feel are important to preserve, but will also provide space for mentorship, habitation and renewal. They want to raise Newburgh up without destroying its unique character. In doing so, they hope future generations will be reminded of the “can-do” spirit this country was founded on.

INTRODUCTION TO BROOKLYN FIRE PROOF/BFP

(Parent company of RipRap LLC)

Brooklyn Fire Proof is a complex of six interconnected and thriving creative businesses in the industrial Bushwick/East Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. Thomas Burwell Dodd incorporated Brooklyn Fire Proof Inc. (BFP) in 1999. BFP originated as studios and a makeshift gallery space built into a vacant factory building in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

What began essentially as a venue for Thomas to “show and tell” the work of under-represented artists quickly grew into a full-blown gallery. In collaboration with his future wife, Pearl Son, they added a performance space, curated larger shows and built more studio spaces in the neighborhood. With the studios covering much of the business’ overhead, Thomas and Pearl were able to focus less on making sales in the gallery and more on developing a friendly environment that encouraged kindness, creativity, experimentation and risk in the arts above marketability.



The original BFP in Williamsburg, NY--Thomas rented the former Brooklyn Fireproof Sash & Door building and transformed the interior into studios and gallery space, retaining the name of the defunct company and eventually using it to brand his own company.

BFP

*a creative spaces
company*

When Brooklyn Fire Proof moved to its current location in East Williamsburg/Bushwick, the Dodds expanded the company to include more studios (bfpworkspaces.com), sound stages (brooklynfireproofstages.com) for film and television productions, a gallery space called Temporary Storage (temporystorage.info) available to tenants and independent curators, and Brooklyn Fire Proof East, a café and bar (now Terra Firma).

BFP also returned to showcasing the artwork Thomas loves with its newest company, BFP Creative (bfpcreative.com). BFP is now a sprawling 170,000 square feet of Creative Spaces that services a community of diverse makers.

With the rising costs of operating within the increasingly popular Bushwick/East Williamsburg in Brooklyn NY, it is becoming difficult to maintain the affordability that has always made Brooklyn Fire Proof an inclusive and wonderfully varied community. Gentrification is neutralizing our creative incubators. Hard-working artists and other small business owners continually seek out

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affordable, struggling neighborhoods and help these communities to thrive, only to find themselves and their neighbors priced out by skyrocketing rents. The Dodds believe that the next logical move is out of New York City. They hope to build a new creative community in the Hudson Valley by restoring and “upcycling” dormant infrastructure (as they did with Brooklyn Fire Proof), but with deeper roots and a renewed focus on passive building technology. BFP Inc., through its newest addition RipRap LLC in Newburgh, NY, is committed to helping residents participate in this growth. In addition to investing in this Hudson River community, RipRap is also interested in helping artists and entrepreneurs plant their roots there, so they can be owners in the community they contribute to and help invigorate.



Artist's studio at Brooklyn Fire Proof



Bobby Flay filming Beat Bobby Flay at BFP

ABOUT THE FOUNDERS

Thomas Burwell Dodd, “Burr”

Thomas was born in Connecticut and raised there and in Colorado. He graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in photography, having developed a deep love of abstract art and old buildings. When he moved to New York City in the early 90s, Thomas was confronted with a cold, exclusive art world, which at the time was migrating from Soho to Chelsea. Longing for a more open, accepting and experimental environment, Thomas started his gallery Brooklyn Fire Proof in Williamsburg as a place to showcase artwork he cared about, much of which was outside of what established galleries deemed saleable and would not show. When he moved the business to Bushwick, it was with the intention of creating jobs and building a community so that makers of all kinds and persuasions could survive and thrive.

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After a seven-year-hiatus dedicated to building Brooklyn Fire Proof, Thomas has returned to his own art-making practice and is fully aware of the difficulty of balancing creation and the requirements of paying bills. As an insider to the art world, rather than an outside developer, Thomas has earned the trust of his community in Bushwick and East Williamsburg, and is now determined to help others survive and prosper in this challenging economic environment. BFP is both a victim and a beneficiary of gentrification, and Thomas has been actively searching for possible solutions to maintain the integrity of the creative incubators that have made New York City the center of the artistic galaxy.



Artist studio at BFP

Pearl Son-Dodd

Pearl considers herself to be a New York City native even though she was born and raised in a small suburban town in Connecticut. Her parents immigrated from Korea to become doctors of medicine, but they greatly appreciated art and culture, and they raised their eight children with a love for the arts as well. Throughout her childhood, Pearl's parents planned trips into New York City; to museum shows, Broadway openings, performances at Lincoln Center, often followed by late night dinners in Chinatown. Her family outings and the city itself deeply inspired her. After completing her BA at Cornell University, she came to New York to pursue a second degree in fashion design at Parsons School of Design.

Fashion became her life, but after 9/11, and a decade-long career working for Ralph Lauren, she was looking for a change. She took her first subway ride out to Brooklyn one night with a friend who introduced her to Thomas. Her life changed soon after. At first she volunteered at Thomas' art gallery Brooklyn Fire Proof in Williamsburg while still moonlighting in fashion. Nine years later, Pearl and Thomas moved the company to Bushwick and expanded, working together as a couple and a tag-team. Shortly after that, they started a family and are now raising their two children while running their collective businesses.