

## Martin Tower: Not all icons were built to last (4)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Martin Tower, Serious Issues February 10, 2019

*(4th in a series on Martin Tower)*

Gadfly has felt ripples and rumblings about the fate of Martin Tower.

An old controversy whose closure has not been fully digested in some quarters. No surer sign of the recognition of that reality in the minds of some (probably inclined to be vocal) residents than this *Morning Call* article by our past Mayor.

The Cunningham piece has the feel of a strategic attempt by the business/developer community to get out in front of resurgent public controversy over demolition.

The article has the feel of an attempt to preempt a resurgence of controversy, at least over the fact of demolition.

This Cunningham essay is, frankly, a rhetorically effective and powerful piece of writing.

It would have received an “A” in Gadfly’s writing class.

If there is to be a fight over Martin Tower, as Gadfly strongly suspects there will be, its focus must squarely be on the nature of future development. Which Cunningham does not raise here.

Not at this point wasting grief or grumble, however justified, over the fate of the building itself or the process by which that fate was determined.

Or do you disagree?

What do you think?

*Don Cunningham, “Business Sectors: Not all icons were built to last.”  
Morning Call, February 7, 2019.*

Selections, but you need to read the full article:

“There’s a historic gem hidden on a wooded hillside of South Mountain in the tiny borough of Fountain Hill. It’s just beyond the southern end of Lechauweki Avenue where the road dead ends at Moravia Street and the mountainside.

The casual visitor won't notice much. There's a small pond with a gazebo, a nature trail and lots of trees just beyond a borough sign that reads 'Lechauweki Springs: a public recreation area'."

"The hillside looked much different 140 years ago, in the late 1870s. It was home to the Lechauweki Springs Hotel resort. There were three buildings on the site that could house up to 120 guests. Wealthy travelers from New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia came by horse-drawn carriage to rest and relax on this hillside and to drink and bathe in the mineralized natural springs of Lechauweki."

"Lechauweki Springs was known for its exquisite cuisine. Gourmet meals were prepared by a French chef who served all that was fresh and in season from the area countryside."

"Lechauweki Springs Hotel resort lasted about 20 years from 1872 to 1891. The end came when a fire destroyed the main building. . . . Today all that remains other than the springs and the rebuilt pond and gazebo are some fascinating stone cisterns dug into the ground around the hill and three former resort cottages on the west side of Lechauweki Avenue that are now six twin homes. Lechauweki Springs Hotel resort disappeared almost as quickly as it surfaced."

"About two miles across the river as the crow flies in west Bethlehem another economic icon of its day is about to meet a similar fate. . . . Martin Tower, the last corporate office home of the Bethlehem Steel Corp., on Eighth Avenue in the Lehigh County section of the city will be taken down this year. It's been vacant for 12 years."

"The construction of Martin Tower for \$35 million was just one example of a corporate leadership often more focused on building monuments, golf courses, country clubs and leasing suites at the Waldorf-Astoria than modernizing steelmaking operations and remaining cost competitive with international steelmakers and American mini-mills."

"There are some who don't want to see the tower go. I understand what underlies that sentiment. I was not alive to see the grand hotel of Lechauweki Springs but whenever I hike the site I wish it were still there. Of course, it can't be there because its time came and went. Today, it would be antiquated,

unsafe, wouldn't meet modern building codes and couldn't be cost competitive enough to stay in business. Just like Martin Tower."

"All can't be preserved just to make us feel better."

"If something can be saved and repurposed it should be. The first inclination should not be to tear down and start anew."

"But, there's also a difference between something old and something historic."

"The history of Bethlehem Steel happened on the South Side. . . . It was in those blast furnaces that raw materials were cooked into molten iron. And, it was in those mills where tens of thousands toiled to produce those iconic I-beams. We are fortunate the blast furnaces, former corporate offices and many of the mills remain there to remind us of our past."

"Martin Tower is the youngest of all the steel buildings in Bethlehem. The company occupied it for just 30 years. Some things disappear nearly as quickly as they come. That often happens."