



# “A Dog With a Bone:” New Wood Book Reveals Bard’s Secret Passion

By Adrian Untermyer, Archive Project Board Member

The New York Preservation Archive Project is proud to be the fiscal sponsor of *Servant of Beauty: Landmarks, Secret Love, and the Unimagined Life of an Unsung New York Hero*. A version of this article first appeared in the Archive Project’s Fall 2024 newsletter.

COVER PHOTO Archive Project founder and chair emeritus Anthony C. Wood penned a new biography of civic leader Albert S. Bard. Here, Wood is pictured at the Hoboken Terminal while recreating Bard’s daily commute from East Orange, New Jersey to his longtime office at the Broad Exchange Building in Manhattan. Wood’s volume is due from Rowman & Littlefield in May 2025 | Courtesy of NJ TRANSIT Rail Operations

**The New York  
Preservation  
Archive Project**



Archive Project founder and chair emeritus Anthony C. Wood is the foremost living expert on Albert Sprague Bard (1866–1963), the grandfather of the New York City Landmarks Law (1965) and namesake of our annual fundraiser. Wood’s new biography on the attorney and civic leader, entitled *Servant of Beauty: Landmarks, Secret Love, and the Unimagined Life of an Unsung New York Hero*, is due from Rowman & Littlefield in May 2025.

“Bard had the tenacity of a dog with a bone,” concludes Wood. Ugliness offended Bard so deeply that he wrote a statute intended to spread historic preservation across New York State. After over 40 years of his steadfast advocacy, his 1956 Bard Act ultimately granted localities the freedom to pass legislation like the New York City Landmarks Law, which turns 60 next year.

Nationally, Bard battled the Outdoor Advertising Association of America in his campaign against billboards. Locally, he was known to rip down illegal advertising as he strolled city sidewalks. And twice, he successfully bested Robert Moses, the infamous power broker.

But until Wood’s new book, the full sweep of Albert Bard’s passion remained a secret. Through his archival research, Wood uncovered Bard’s decades-long infatuation with a dashing man, Gordon Switz, who would go on to become a Soviet spy and marry a woman. “The notion of Bard as a confirmed bachelor with a singular, all-consuming civic focus,” shares Wood, “has now been replaced with a fuller picture of the man.”

Wood found that Bard was “one of the many gay men who came to New York looking for a different life.” Born and bred in Norwich, Connecticut, a stately New England commercial hub, Bard ultimately decamped for New York, a place of theater, architecture, and refinement.

“Bard was basically a closeted gay man at that point,” explains Wood. Fraternity connections led Bard to Gordon Switz, a troubled younger man of suave charm. Gordon was the type to motor a Ford Cabriolet through the South of France, become an aviator, and clandestinely liaise with foreign spymasters. Gordon would even work as a silver-tongued

Pepsi-Cola salesman, converting grizzled fountainneers who had previously only poured Coke.

Bard’s infatuation with Gordon bloomed, and others took notice. “Turn on your tape recorder,” Gordon’s wife Marjorie remarked after the topic arose in an interview for Wood’s book. Once on the re-

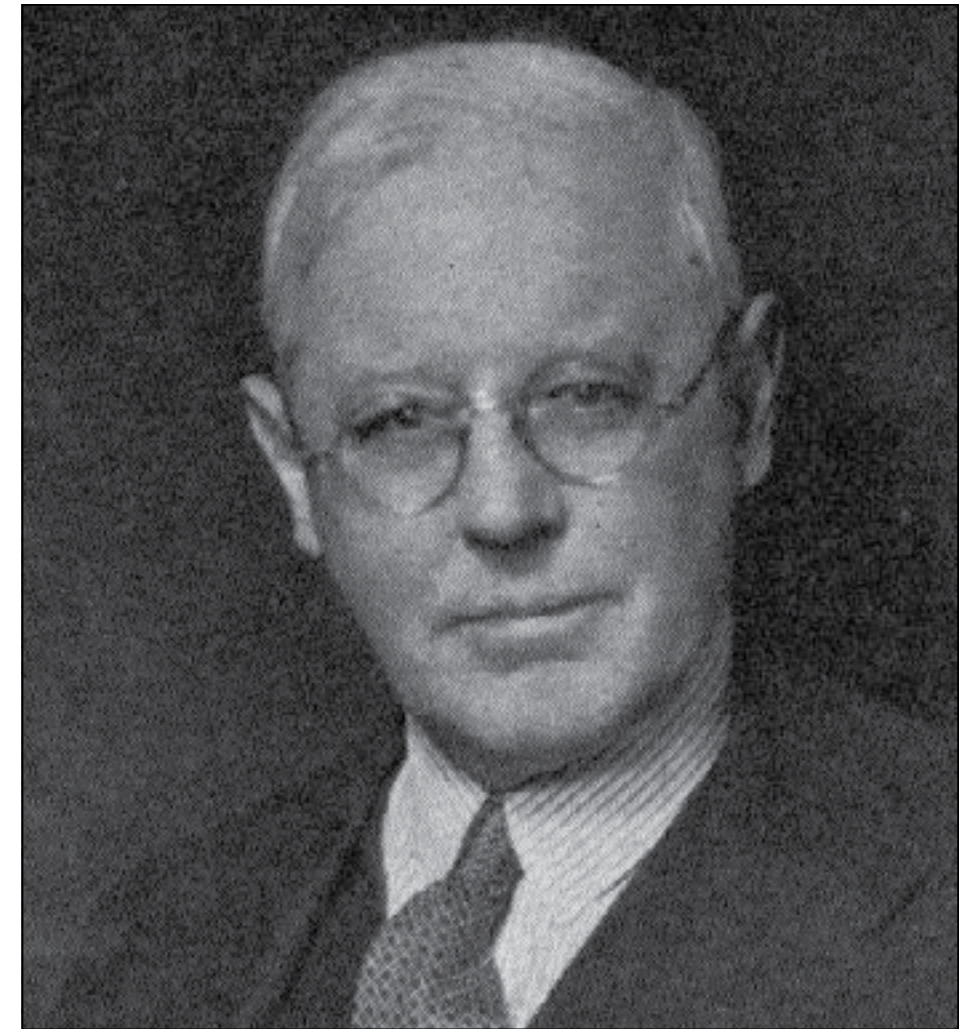
cord, Marjorie confirmed Bard’s love for her husband with a hearty “of course.”

Wood’s book continues to document how Gordon became “the emotional center of Bard’s life.” But Bard’s passion came at a price. Gordon’s dance with communism led to arrest and international scandal, with newspapers fingering Gordon and Marjorie as Soviet spies – and intel agencies erroneously speculating that Bard was their handler. Ever-devoted, Bard used his legal background, deep connections, and financial resources to assist Gordon and Marjorie, all while maintaining a full civic agenda with groups like the City Club and the Fine Arts Federation.

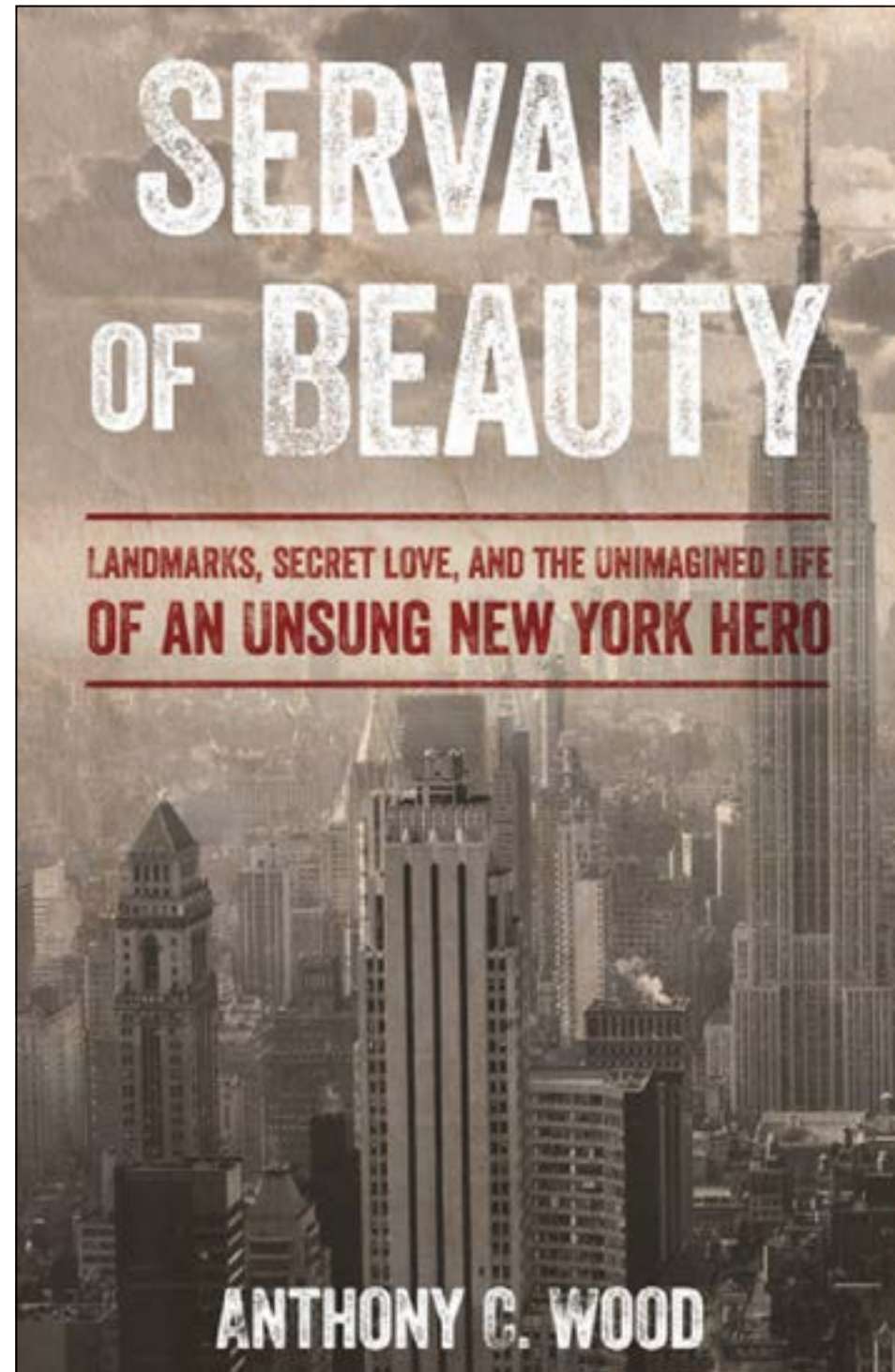
The dust settled, and Bard’s bond with the Switzes strengthened over the years. Bard moved into the home of Gordon’s mother in East Orange, New Jersey, where he boasted rooms of his own, a crop of de facto grandchildren, and a cat named “Spiffy.” Throughout it all, Bard maintained his ties to New York by commuting in on the Lackawanna Railroad, a journey Wood retraced while researching the book. “He kept raising a stink,” quips Wood, “even from the wrong side of the river.”

Bard’s strategic acumen, dedication, and perseverance, often in the face of personal and professional disappointments, are an inspiration to today’s preservationists. Active until the end, Bard passed in 1963. Pennsylvania Station’s demolition began that same year at the order of Bard’s fraternity brother, railroad president Allen J. Greenough. But thanks to the Bard Act, Grand Central Terminal would later be spared and the constitutionality of preservation laws would be upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States.

None of those victories would have been possible without Bard, as Wood’s volume points out. But would Bard have been possible without his devotion to Gordon?



Albert Bard, namesake of the Archive Project’s annual fundraiser, was the grandfather of New York’s Landmarks Law and nursed a secret devotion to a dashing Soviet spy | Courtesy of the New York Preservation Archive Project



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— Anthony C. Wood

To answer that question, Wood looks to the archives.

“To understand the man, you have to understand his environment,” Wood explains. “This is why we do what we do – because without archives, you can’t bring people like Bard to life.” §

*Servant of Beauty: Landmarks, Secret Love, and the Unimagined Life of an Unsung New York Hero* is available for pre-order now at [www.rowman.com](http://www.rowman.com).

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