

# PRESERVATION CONNECTICUT NEWS

The Arthur Building, in New London, was a center of Black activism in the 1920s. Now it is being renovated.

Guy Rogers Clements

## PRESERVING AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

# The Arthur Building, New London Center for Black resilience and activism being renovated

*By Mary Beth Baker and Laura Natusch, New London Landmarks*

Built in 1924, the Arthur Building at 38 Green Street in the Downtown New London National Register district became a center of Black resilience and activism in the late 1920s, when it housed both the New England Peoples Finance Corporation (NEPFC) and the United Negro Welfare Council (UNWC).

The NEPFC and UNWC were linked by Sadie Dillon Harrison, who served as executive secretary to both organizations and whose half-brother, Benjamin Tanner Johnson, founded and managed the NEPFC.

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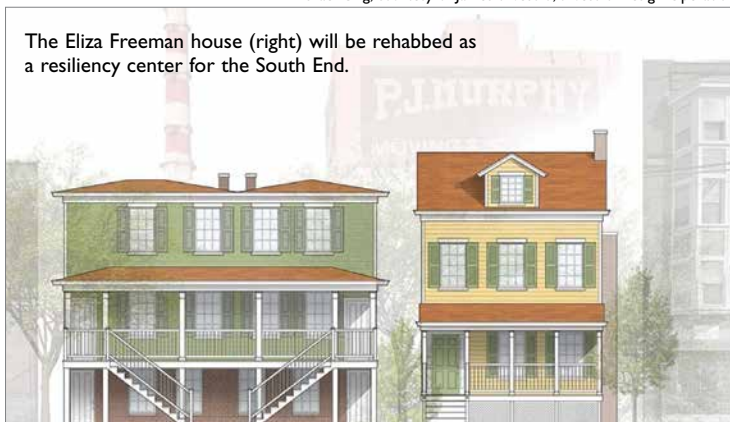
# The Freeman Center promotes history, resilience, and neighborhood revitalization in Bridgeport

By Maisa L. Tisdale

Most people know the Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community as the steward of the Mary and Eliza Freeman houses (c.1848; NR), the last original structures of Little Liberia, a thriving antebellum community of Native and African Americans in Bridgeport. In fact, the Center's mission extends beyond restoring the houses. We also aim to teach the history of Black people in Connecticut; revitalize the surrounding South End community; and facilitate the preservation and revitalization of other African American, and greater Bridgeport, historic and preservation communities.

So, it seemed a wonderful opportunity when MASS Design Group offered its pro bono services to the Freeman Center in 2018. We knew MASS Design as the designers of the National Memorial

The Eliza Freeman house (right) will be rehabbed as a resiliency center for the South End.



for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama—the nation's first memorial dedicated to the victims of racial terror lynching. The award-winning, nonprofit architectural design firm believes in “expanding access to design that is purposeful, healing, and hopeful”—in short, it would be the perfect partner to help us revitalize our neighborhood!

Bridgeport's South End is a marginal-

ized community with complex and intertwined socio-economic issues. Nonetheless, this community holds fast to positive aspirations. Since the 1980s the South End has consistently articulated the desire to pursue a path of arts- and culture-based economic development, but residents have not had the expertise or resources to create a

viable design plan to promote to government, foundations, investors, or developers. Climate change further exacerbated this challenge.

Our neighbors, everyday people, share a community abound with cultural assets that tell a compelling American story. Roughly 300 families live in housing listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, near vacant historic mills.

*continued on page 6*

This rendering by the MASS Design Group shows proposed neighborhood revitalization plan created for the Mary and Eliza Freeman Center in Bridgeport.

MASS Design Group



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Happy New Year! 2020 certainly was memorable, but on behalf of Preservation Connecticut I wish you a bit less excitement in 2021. We all look forward to resuming many of our normal activities in the coming months, as the hoped-for vaccines are distributed and other public health measures, we hope, greatly reduce the rate of infections.

One of the legacies of 2020 is a heightened awareness of our responsibility to expand our preservation work to include people whose history has not been fully recognized in the past, particularly African Americans. So we begin this year of *Preservation Connecticut News* with several stories of Connecticut places that are important in Black history. Furthermore, we plan to continue to highlight sites from the Connecticut Freedom Trail on the back page of the newsletter throughout the year.

This fall, we received a generous bequest of \$363,000 from Edward Currie of Southbury, a longtime member of Preservation Connecticut who divided his estate among Preservation Connecticut,

Historic New England, and Historic Deerfield. Following established policy, the money will be added to PCT's endowment. We are grateful to Mr. Currie for his gift, and only wish we could have thanked him for it in person. If you decide to include Preservation Connecticut in your estate planning, please let us know, so that we can express our gratitude and honor you in our Legacy Society.

Trustee Olivia White resigned after two years on the board. She served as Secretary and provided inspiration and guidance for our Saving Faith initiative. Mary Jean Agostini has been elected Secretary in her place.

We are grateful to a team of MBA students from the University of New Haven, Emily L. Baker, Rose Keithan, Zeynep Guven, Khalid Alnaimi, Jewel Burnett and Nicholas Debiase, under the tutelage of Dr. Ronald Kuntze, who analyzed our social media output and are providing valuable recommendations to improve engagement.

In December, Historic New England

held a virtual celebration for its annual book prize. Christopher Wigren's *Connecticut Architecture: Stories of 100 Places* was a 2020 Honor Book Award recipient. Congratulations, Chris!

Sadly, we closed 2020 by learning of the deaths of two valued Preservation Connecticut leaders. Edmund Schmidt, of Darien, served on PCT's board for twelve years and as chair from 2010 to 2014. A distinguished attorney and an enthusiastic local historian, Ed authored *Noroton Heights—A Neighborhood for Generations*, served as president of the Darien Historical Society, and re-erected an 18<sup>th</sup>-century tavern from Lebanon as his own home.

Mary Anderson, of Noank, died in October. In addition to serving on the board of Preservation Connecticut from 2001 to 2007, she was an author and historian, a long-time leader of the Noank Historical Society, and personally active in local preservation activities. One of Mary's last projects, undertaken with her husband, Robert P. Anderson, was to buy and restore the Greek Revival home of his great-grandfather, shipyard owner Robert Palmer. We will greatly miss these wise and generous partners 🌿

*Jane Montanaro*

Jane Montanaro

Preservation Connecticut is a statewide nonprofit membership organization established as the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation by a special act of the State Legislature in 1975. Working with local preservation groups and individuals as well as statewide organizations, it encourages, advocates, and facilitates historic preservation throughout Connecticut.

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**Connecticut**  
still revolutionary

## Upcoming Meetings

### Connecticut Historic Preservation Council

February 3, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

— Virtual Meeting

March 3, 2020 at 9:30 a.m.

— Virtual Meeting

To participate contact Jonathan Kinney  
(860) 500-2380; Jonathan.Kinney@ct.gov

### State Historic Preservation Board

March 26, 2020 at 9:30 a.m.

— Virtual Meeting

To participate contact Jenny Scofield  
(860) 500-2343; Jenny.Scofield@ct.gov

For more information call (860) 500-2343



*Arthur Building renovation*, cont'd from page 1

### United Negro Welfare Council

By the 1920s, Negro Welfare Councils, in one form or another, could be found in many northern U.S. cities. Also known as Negro Urban Leagues, they aimed to improve economic, social and cultural life for Black Americans, particularly for recent migrants from the Jim Crow South.

In his memoir, *A View of the Sixties: The Black Experience in Southeastern Connecticut* (2001), former New London NAACP president Linwood Bland, Jr. traced the beginnings of New London's UNWC to World War I, when community leader Elizabeth Jeter Greene organized The Canteen, a group of young Black women who assisted Black soldiers stopping in New London en route to war theaters in Europe. After the war ended, the group, now known as the United Negro Welfare Council, provided a social safety net for New London's Black residents, helping with food, rent, utilities and other necessities.

Although Bland describes the UNWC as providing tangible assistance for people in financial need, Sadie Dillon Harrison's work indicates that the organization also championed civil rights. In February of 1927, she testified in Hartford in support of state legislation that would have prohibited racial discrimination in places of public accommodation, saying that although she considered it "pathetic" that anyone should still have to plead against racial discrimination, it remained necessary. Connecticut's State Senate rejected the bill, which would have penalized violators with fines of between \$100 to \$500, jail time, or both, on the advice of the Judiciary Committee, concluding that "present laws were adequate."

The following year, Harrison testified in court in New York State, stating that she and two other diners at a Southampton luncheonette were discriminated against when they were denied service at a vacant table and told they would only be served at the counter.

After Connecticut failed to pass the anti-discrimination legislation, Harrison, with the help of correspondents in more than three hundred cities connected through the Welfare Council network, compiled a list of hotels and boarding houses where Black travelers would be welcome. She published the resulting

The Arthur Building, in an undated photo, probably taken about 1980.



directory with lawyer/poet Edwin Henry Hackley as *Hackley & Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers* in 1930 and 1931.

As Harrison pointed out in the book's introduction, while she was compiling the directory W.E.B. Du Bois contacted her in her capacity as UNWC Secretary to ask where in New London he might find accommodations. He ended up staying at her house, 73 Hempstead Street in New London, which was listed in both her guide and in Victor H. Green's *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. *Hackley & Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Negro Travelers* is the only known precursor to the Green Book, which it predated by seven years.

In 1928, the UNWC outgrew its headquarters in the Arthur Building and relocated a few blocks away to 39 Tilley Street.

### New England Peoples Finance Corporation

Sadie Dillon Harrison's half-brother, Benjamin Tanner Johnson, moved to New London in 1927 from Canton, Ohio, where he had served as executive secretary to the Canton Urban League and from which he had fled the KKK, according to Johnson's grandson, Dr. Kenneth Johnson. In 1928, he shows up in New London's city directories living in Harrison's house on Hempstead Street.

Johnson, a graduate of Howard University and the third Black graduate of Harvard's School of Business, had been inter-

ested in forming a lending institution for Black entrepreneurs since the early 1920s. In January of 1922, he asked W.E.B. Du Bois for his support in starting a bank in Harlem, writing, "Are you willing to use your influence and money along with a few other conservative men—white and colored—toward helping to make a place in the commercial world for colored business America?"

In New London, Johnson was able to realize his dream of starting a lending institution to serve Black borrowers and investors. According to a December 10, 1927, article in the *New York Age*, he was the primary organizer of a regional conference held at New London's YMCA to discuss "plans for the larger economic freedom of the Negro in New England." At the conference, attendees elected a temporary board of directors for the New England Peoples Finance Corporation, located in the Arthur Building.

Johnson managed the NEFPC in the Arthur Building until the organization's



Parker Benjamin

Developer's rendering of the Arthur Building.



closure in 1934. He then maintained a real estate office in the former NEPFC office for several years before joining the Works Progress Administration as a Connecticut state supervisor and the Social Security Board as a junior administrative assistant. In 1939 he left New London for opportunities in Boston. He later earned a law degree, taught finance at Howard University, and opened his own law firm.

### The Arthur Building today

The vacant three-story Arthur Building is currently being rehabilitated by Parker Benjamin Real Estate Services through a subsidiary, PB Projects V LLC. When complete, it will be an energy-efficient, mixed use space with sixteen micro-loft apartments, a restaurant and a rooftop solar array hidden behind the building's parapet. The State Historic Preservation Office has reserved Connecticut Historic Rehabilitation tax credits to offset 30 percent of the \$1,050,000 project's cost. Parker Benjamin has also applied to the National Park Service for federal tax credits which, if approved, will offset an addi-

tional twenty percent. The rehabilitation is expected to be completed in March of 2021. 🌿

*Tom Schuch and Tambria Moore helped with research for this article.*

## CONNECTICUT PRESERVATION AWARDS - 2021

Preservation Connecticut's Awards recognize outstanding achievements in protecting and enhancing Connecticut's significant buildings, landscapes and communities. Awards will be presented May 5.

**Connecticut Preservation Awards honor exemplary efforts** in the preservation and enhancement of historic places throughout Connecticut, including:

- significant efforts in the restoration, preservation or adaptive use of historic resources
- significant preservation projects associated with the history of minority communities
- Significant preservation projects that bring new life to neighborhoods or communities
- excellence in sustainability of historic places
- effective leadership in preservation
- young preservationists who demonstrate achievement or potential—the Mimi Findlay Award

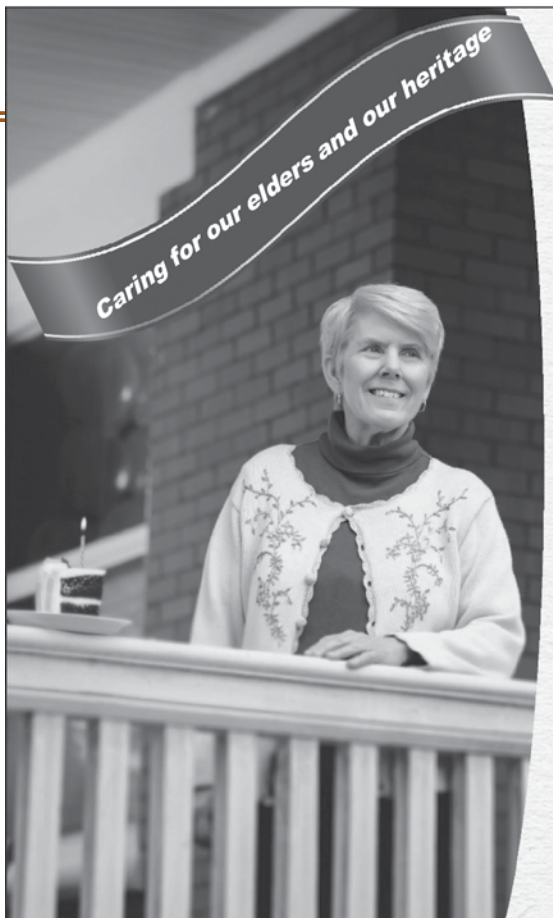
Any individual, organization, or project involved in historic preservation in Connecticut is eligible to receive a Connecticut Preservation Award. Nominated projects must have been completed since January 1, 2015. Nominations must be made by members of Preservation Connecticut. Trustees and staff of Preservation Connecticut are not eligible for awards during the period of their active service.



### NOMINATION PROCEDURE

For forms and further information, visit [www.preservationct.org](http://www.preservationct.org) or call (203) 562-6312 or email [cwigen@preservationct.org](mailto:cwigen@preservationct.org).

Nominations must be received by 4:00 p.m., March 5, 2021



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## Freeman houses, cont'd from page 2

They live in the footprint of Little Liberia, on ancestral land of the Paugussetts. They enjoy and maintain Seaside Park (designed by Frederick Law Olmsted). Soon, about 100 acres of South End land will come up for sale, and it became clear to the Freeman Center that residents lacked the means to participate in land use discussions, on equal footing, with those deciding their fate.

This spring, work on a community plan began with MASS Design Director Caitlin Taylor. The Freeman Center convened the first community meeting (of several to come) with a representative group of neighbors. The resulting plan, unveiled on November 18, 2020, was the very first step — the initial concept for a climate-resilient, cultural heritage site in Bridgeport's South End. It proposes a phased redevelopment, beginning with the restoration of the Freeman Houses. Other proposed elements to be accomplished over time include an expanded Freeman Center campus with community gathering, educational, and museum spaces built on historic footprints of Little Liberia structures. New affordable housing to be built on now vacant land, surrounded by a floodable park of recreational, constructed wetlands to increase neighborhood flooding capacity. Finally, a heritage trail with connections beyond the Freeman Center into other historically significant areas of the South End.

In the meantime, the Freeman Center is working with Resilient Bridgeport, a HUD-funded, Connecticut Department of Housing program for resilience strategy. The restored Eliza Freeman House will serve as a unique Resilience Center that provides: climate focused humanities programming and community meeting space, a central location for dissemination of resilience information, and storage for supplies to assist storm-related recovery efforts. The first phase of rehab work is scheduled to begin in the spring supported in part by grants from the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development.

The Freeman Center is pleased to be a leader in the revitalization of the South End, and looks forward to facilitating



In 2018 the National Trust for Historic Preservation included the Freeman houses in its list of Eleven Most Threatened Historic Places.

efforts by its neighbors and the City of Bridgeport. We believe the South End can be a cultural heritage site that attracts tourism, investment, and new residents without displacement of current residents and gentrification. We believe the area's history and cultural diversity are that compelling! 🌿

*Maisa L. Tisdale is President and CEO of The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community and a former Trustee of Preservation Connecticut. For more information, visit [freemancenterbpt.org](http://freemancenterbpt.org).*

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**860-212-3750   [www.glastonburyrestoration.com](http://www.glastonburyrestoration.com)   [Stevebielitz@yahoo.com](mailto:Stevebielitz@yahoo.com)**  
**Facebook: Glastonbury Restoration Company, Architectural and Historical Preservation**

## A few resources for researching and preserving African American sites

*Preserving African American Places: Growing Preservation's Potential as a Path for Equity*, by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Free download at <https://savingplaces.org/equity-report>.

Release materials describe this report as presented as animated around one central question: How can preservation be a force for advancing equitable development and social justice in African American neighborhoods and other communities of color? Contents include the development of historic African American neighborhoods through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; current neighborhood change, including changing demographics and barriers to equity in historic preservation; and recommendations for building a more inclusive preservation movement.

*African American Connecticut Explored*, edited by Elizabeth J. Normen, with Stacey K. Close, Katherine J. Harris, and Wm. Frank Mitchell (Wesleyan University Press, 2013).

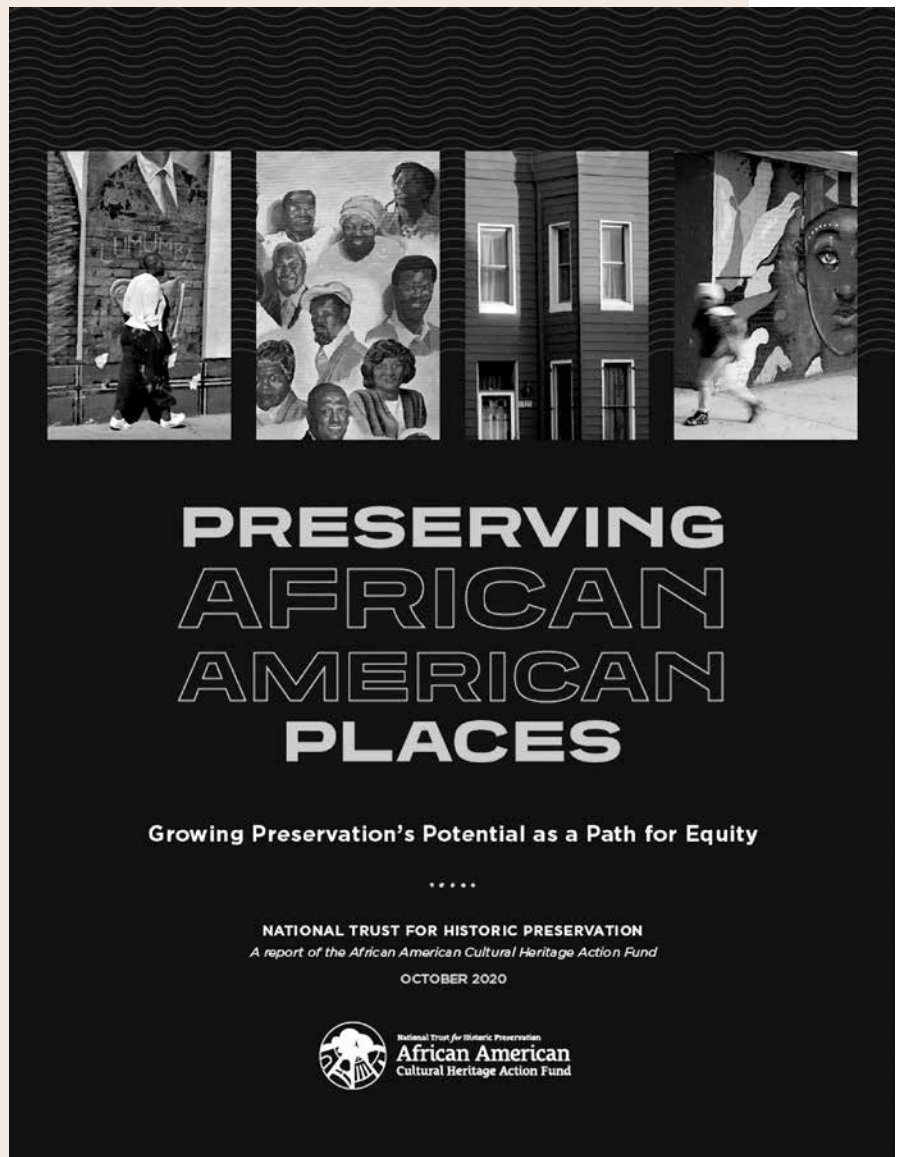
A basic source for Black history in Connecticut from settlement to the Civil Rights era, this book compiles essays reprinted from *Connecticut Explored* magazine with original material.

*I'm Buildin' Me a Home*. Exhibition, Yale Divinity School, September-December 2020; online at [www.buildinmeahome.com](http://www.buildinmeahome.com).

No understanding of Black history or culture is complete without recognizing the vital role of the Black church as a center of religion, community, and activism. Jathan Martin, a student at Yale Divinity School, has collected oral histories of Black churches in New Haven. The exhibition based on this material includes a timeline, thumbnail histories of New Haven churches, and oral history recordings.

**National Register of Historic Places**, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AdvancedSearch/>.

A search of the National Register elicits only twenty Connecticut places under the category of Black History. This search misses some listings, such as the Austin Williams carriage house and house in Farmington, which played a role in the *Amistad* story. However, there are many other eligible sites that could be added to the Register, and many sites already listed but where the current documentation does not recognize African American history.



**National Trust for Historic Preservation, African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund**, <https://savingplaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage>.

Grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund are designed to advance ongoing preservation activities for historic places such as sites, museums, and landscapes representing African American cultural heritage. The fund supports work in four primary areas: Capital Projects, Organizational Capacity Building, Project Planning, and Programming and Interpretation. Grants range from \$50,000 to \$150,000. Applicants for 2021 grants were required to submit letters of intent by January 15, 2021; however, organizations should keep the program in mind for 2022.



## Connecting the threads

By Marena Wisniewski,  
Connecticut State Historic  
Preservation Office

In an effort to expand the reach and breadth of the stories of Black people's struggle for freedom and full citizenship, the Connecticut Democracy Center at Connecticut's Old State House received a two-year grant of almost \$250,000 to help manage, interpret and promote the Connecticut Freedom Trail, which is administered by the State Historic Preservation Office.

The Connecticut Freedom Trail documents and designates sites that embody the struggle toward freedom and human dignity of the state's African American community, that celebrate their accomplishments, and that promote heritage tourism. Founded in 1996, the Trail now comprises 147 sites located within 61 towns across the state.

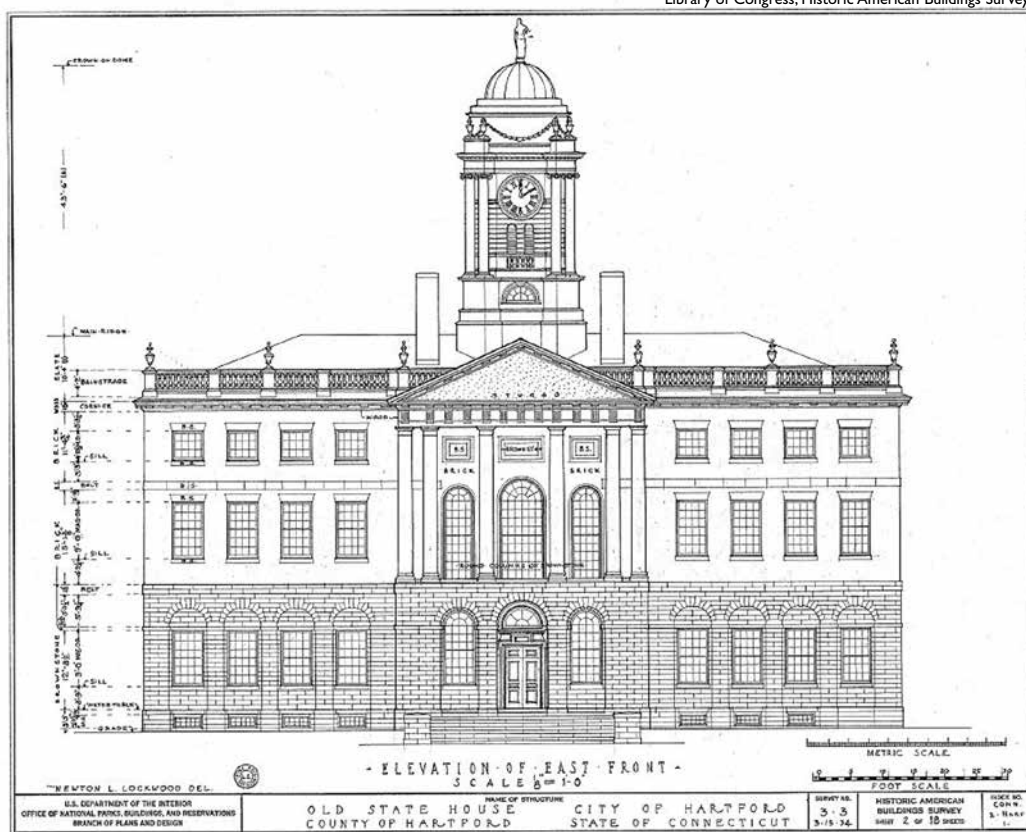
In 2008, a comprehensive strategic plan was created, calling for creating a cohesive narrative, connecting sites under broad themes, like abolitionism or the history of Black civic groups. Others were proposed to be concentrated on tracing the life and experiences of individuals, such as Amos Beman, from his school days in Colchester and activity with the Talcott Street Church in Hartford, to abolitionist activism in New Haven and his final resting place at the West Burying Ground in Middletown. All are listed on the Freedom Trail.

Creating continuing threads between sites emphasizes that these places and stories did not and do not take place in isolation; rather, they are all part of a continuous tapestry of history, woven together by those who experienced them firsthand and those who inherit them.

In addition to providing connections between existing sites, the grant also proposes outreach beyond traditional sources to reach those that can lend authentic voices to these stories and places. The grant specifically allocates

Additions to the Connecticut Freedom Trail are being made by the Connecticut Democracy Center at the Old State House, in Hartford, site of the first of several trials held to settle the fate of the Mende Africans of *La Amistad*.

Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey



funding for a program coordinator to work with communities of color to help bring to light "hidden sights" not always grasped by White interpreters. This also has the added benefit of educating Freedom Trail committee members and site managers about the resources they steward in a way they have not experienced.

These connections will help to build programs and course curricula that focus on how sites and stories on the Freedom Trail intersect with pressing social issues of today, including housing, education, civic engagement, and public policy.

Beyond creating programs and written materials, the grant also provides for an updated comprehensive survey of sites on the Freedom Trail, as well as expanding digital access to archival materials related to sites and major themes. All of these resources will be available on a new Freedom Trail website, providing vital community connections, especially during a time where physical spaces and repositories are restricting public access.

Created in 1998 as the Connecticut Public Affairs Network, the Connecticut

Democracy Center strives to provide educational opportunities for stronger citizenship while empowering individuals and groups to take action in their own communities. Programs run by the Connecticut Democracy Center include Connecticut History Day and Connecticut's Kid Governor. The Center is housed in the Old State House, which served as the site of the Amistad Trials. It is listed on the Freedom Trail for its association with both the Trials and the passing of the notorious "Black Law," which led to the closure of Prudence Crandall's Canterbury Female Boarding School, also a site on the Freedom Trail.

By partnering with the Connecticut Democracy Center through this grant, the State Historic Preservation Office gains a chance to expand the reach of the Freedom Trail, not just to scholars but to a wide range of communities and individuals interested in telling the story of the struggles for freedom and full citizenship. 🌿

Visit the Connecticut Freedom Trail at [ctfreedomtrail.org](http://ctfreedomtrail.org).



# Eastern Connecticut Land Bank becomes a reality

Communities in eastern Connecticut took note in 2017 when the state legislature passed Public Act 17-214, which authorizes the creation of “brownfield land banks” whose purpose is to help municipalities facilitate the clean-up and reuse of brownfield properties.

The rivers in their towns—the Quinebaug, Moosup, Shetucket, and Yantic—had provided opportunities to harness waterpower for industry, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the region became a locus of textile manufacturing. Historic mills and mill sites are at the heart of many towns and villages in the region. As manufacturing declined and factories closed, often the historic and architectural legacy of industry devolved into one of blight and pollution.

Sometimes, when the right conditions converge—e.g. the interest of a developer with vision, upward market trends, investment in infrastructure, available economic incentives—factories are transformed to housing, offices, or retail shops. Perhaps the most prominent recent example in eastern Connecticut is the Lofts at Ponemah Mills in Norwich. For other sites, the unknowns of environmental condition or clean-up costs deter developer interest.

Municipal officials in eastern Connecticut towns know only too well how these properties can detract from the economic vitality of their communities through lost tax revenue and stunted economic opportunity. At the same time, they recognize the possibilities inherent in bringing them back to life through

new uses, but they don’t always have the resources, technical or financial, to do so.

Brownfield land banks offer a variety of tools to assist communities in identifying and implementing strategies to return properties to productive use. Working with municipalities, they can acquire title for the environmental clean-up, clear liens, and sell for redevelopment. For brownfields with historic buildings, land banks can abate lead and asbestos in building materials and make repairs to the structures themselves, further enabling preservation of historic industrial, public, or commercial buildings. Or a land bank can simply contract technical staff to assist municipalities with brownfield projects. Since they are structured as nonprofits, land banks can apply for federal and state grants to fund acquisition, assessment, and remediation. Land banks can also qualify for environmental liability relief.

After the brownfield land bank legislation was enacted, Plainfield Town Planner Mary Ann Chinatti and Wayne Bugden, Licensed Environmental Professional and Ashford resident, called a meeting in October 2018 to learn how a land bank could help towns in eastern Connecticut and to gauge their interest. And in 2019, the work of organizing the Eastern Connecticut Land Bank began.

From the outset, those interested sought a collaborative approach to the formation and direction of the new land bank. The board includes members of local town governments, environmental


consultants, engineers, and preservation advocates. The organization has reached out to the Department of Economic and Community Development for direction and funding. It has partnered with the UConn Connecticut Brownfield Initiative for assistance through student programs that gather site inventory information and prepare EPA grant proposals. Members have introduced the nascent land bank to the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments and have begun speaking directly with municipal representatives about their local brownfield priorities.

This past year, the Eastern Connecticut Land Bank was incorporated, obtained its 501(c)(3) nonprofit filing status from the IRS, was certified as a Connecticut Brownfield Land Bank by DECD, and was chosen to be a recipient of UConn’s Brownfield Initiative Fall 2020 Municipal Assistance Program. The UConn class helped prepare a grant application for EPA funding for the new nonprofit. In 2021, the ECLB will focus on identifying and beginning its first municipal collaboration for a brownfield site clean-up. 🌱

*To find out more, contact Mary Ann Chinatti, President, Eastern Connecticut Land Bank, at [zeo06332@hotmail.com](mailto:zeo06332@hotmail.com) or (860) 705-1646.*

*For an explanation of how land banks work, see “Brownfield Land Banks: A New Tool for Community Revitalization and Historic Preservation” in the September/October 2017 issue of CPN.*

C. Wigren



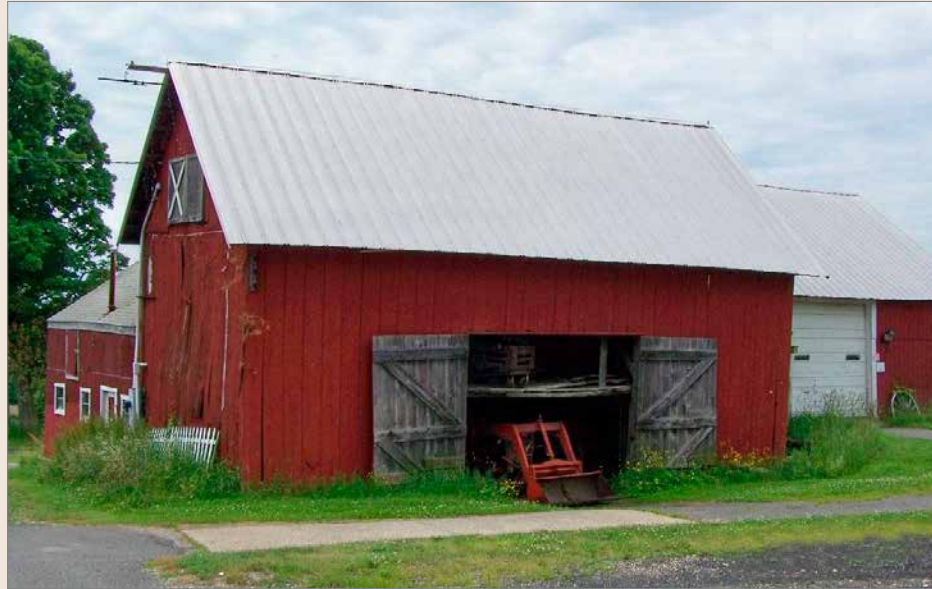
The former Union Mills factory in Plainfield produced cotton cloth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and aerospace equipment in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, the factory site could be a project for the ECLB.



## Briefly noted

### Bristol. ►

Solar panels will be installed on 16 acres of the former Minor's Farm. Verogy, a Hartford-based solar company, obtained approval for the project from the State Siting Council and is expected to begin construction in late winter or early spring. According to ConnecticutBarns.org, the farm had been in operation since at least 1888, but the Minor family closed its farm store in 2018. The *Hartford Courant* reports that although city officials hoped to preserve the 28-acre farm, no buyers appeared with plans to continue farming the property. Verogy has a 35-year lease on the land; when that ends, the company plans to remove the solar panels. At that point the land could be developed or, conceivably, returned to agriculture. Farmland is attractive to solar providers because it is open and tends to be relatively level, and often is available, given the challenges of farming profitably.



R. Tribert

### Glastonbury. ►

The Town Council approved buying the ruins of the former Hartford Manufacturing Company mill in Cotton Hollow. The stone mill, constructed in 1814 was one of the first cotton textile manufacturing enterprises in the state and continued to operate until it burned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Local preservationists advocated for the move after the private property owner began tearing down the mill ruins last January. That work was done without proper permits, and was halted. The incident sparked a local effort to protect the ruins, with more than 6,000 people signing an online petition. The town is paying \$225,000 for a one-acre parcel which will be incorporated in the Cotton Hollow Preserve. The sale was scheduled to be completed in early December.



### West River Restoration

18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century structural repair, restoration and recreation.

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### ◀ New Haven.

In December the Board of Zoning Appeals granted a variance to allow conversion of a downtown office building to laboratories. Erected in 1972 as an annex to the historic Connecticut Savings Bank (1906; NR), 55 Church Street currently has no historic designation but the eight-story building is documented in the New Haven Preservation Trust's New Haven Modern website as part of the city's significant collection of Modernist architecture. The zoning application, by developer David Goldblum of The Hurley Group, notes that current zoning allows many uses but limits testing laboratories to 2,000 square feet in any single building. However, with growing demand for biomedical research in New Haven and particularly near Yale-New Haven Hospital, converting vacant commercial spaces for tech use could be a significant alternative to residential conversion for historic buildings.

### ▼ Norwich.

Restoration of the Sunnyside Street bridge has recently been completed. Built in 1908, the bridge originally served as the entrance drive to the mansion of mill owner Erastus Winslow Williams. It shares its granite construction with the Yantic Woolen Mill (c.1868; NR) as well as the fire station and Episcopal church, giving coherence to the village of Yantic. Repair work, by Alfred Benesch & Company, involved dismantling and resetting parapet walls; disassembling the retaining wall between spans and constructing a new concrete retaining wall with existing stone as a veneer; and re-roofing guard turrets at the bridge's western end. All this was accomplished while keeping the bridge open for access to homes across the river.

*continued on page 18*

Patrick McLaughlin, City of Norwich





## From farm to city

Recent additions to the National Register of Historic Places reflect Connecticut's development between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from a rural, agrarian society to an urbanized, industrial one. That development can be traced in changing forms and styles of housing, facilities to meet the practical and social needs of Connecticut citizens, and the ever-changing face of the state's cityscapes.

Connecticut's agricultural heritage is highlighted at the **James Alexis Darling house**, in Woodbridge. The third generation of a prominent local family, James Alexis Darling worked briefly in the family's mercantile business in New York before returning home in 1814 to help manage the farm established by his grandfather, Thomas Darling. In addition to farming, Alexis served in the state legislature and served as guardian to two nieces. His modest cottage, built in 1842, combines 18<sup>th</sup>-century building traditions with an up-to-date Greek Revival doorway. The house remained in the family until 1956; today it gains added significance from its surroundings which include open fields, stone walls, and his grandfather's more imposing colonial dwelling (1772; NR) with its barns, located just across the road.



Pond's factory, High Street historic district, Clinton

Primarily residential, the **High Street historic district**, in Clinton, shows the town's development through its mixture of Colonial houses from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, homes of captains and others involved in the coastal trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and residences of employees at the Pond's Extract Company factory in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Pond's, later a division of the Dutch conglomerate Unilever, produced witch hazel extract and, later, cold cream and vanishing cream. Its

prominent Art Deco façade, constructed in 1929, reigns over the district. The nomination was prepared with funding through a Vibrant Communities Initiative grant from Preservation Connecticut which allowed the town to consider village district zoning and promote reuse of the Pond's factory, which closed in 2012.

Towns and cities needed infrastructure to develop. Winsted, an industrial city in the town of Winchester, built a water works in

James Alexis Darling house, Woodbridge

Charlotte R. Hitchcock



Ragg Brook reservoir, Winsted Water Works, Winchester





1860, but outgrew it within a generation. The **Winsted Water Works**, constructed between 1893 and 1895, diverted water from the Mad River and Ragg Brook into two new reservoirs, formed by five dams and two dikes; a canal and a stone-lined tunnel linked them to each other and to a water treatment plant (now replaced). The water supply was carefully balanced between industrial power generation and community needs. With one of Connecticut's largest masonry dams and one of only four masonry water tunnels in the state, the Water Works is a significant example of 19<sup>th</sup>-century engineering and urban planning, which still fulfills its historic purpose.

The **Lodges historic district**, in Norwalk, documents another sort of infrastructure—the fraternal organizations that provided social and support networks in growing cities, in many cases across social and ethnic lines. In the years between the world wars, two fraternal lodges, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Loyal Order of Moose, constructed buildings next to each other in the commercial and manufacturing center of South Norwalk. The Odd Fellows building (1921-1923) contains lodge spaces as well as two floors of commercial rental space which provided income to the organization. The building currently is being renovated, using historic rehabilitation tax credits. Next door, the Moose building (1932) contains only lodge space. Since 1997 it has housed a Masonic lodge with a predominantly Black membership.



Moose and Odd Fellows buildings, The Lodges historic district, Norwalk

In New Haven, the developer of a new mixed commercial and apartment building has proposed moving the **William Pinto house** (1810/1811), listed on the National Register in 1985. Left at its original site, the elegant Federal-style house would be surrounded, and dwarfed, by the new building; relocated 87 feet to a neighboring lot, it will join a cluster of three other historic structures. As a rule, moved buildings lose National Register status; however status may be retained if the move is done so as to preserve historic features

that give them significance. To qualify, the National Park Service must approve plans beforehand, as well as the result. In the case of the Pinto house, the before-move documentation has been approved; the developers hope to begin the move in the spring. 🌱

*For more information on the National Register of Historic Places in Connecticut, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Services/Historic-Preservation> and click on "Historic Designations."*

Gretchen Pineo and John Daly, Public Archaeology Lab, Inc



In New Haven, the William Pinto house will be moved to approximately the site of the parking office.



C. Wigren





# HISTORIC PROPERTIES EXCHANGE

Threatened Buildings and Easement Properties Available — January/February 2021

Preservation easements protect the historic character of old buildings, structures and landscapes and require approval of proposed changes. When one of the many properties throughout the state on which Preservation Connecticut holds

easements is on the market, we may list it here. To learn how to safeguard your property for future generations through an easement, explore Stewardship on our website, [preservationct.org/steward](http://preservationct.org/steward), or contact Christopher Wigren, Deputy Director.

## Orient Lodge (1904)

247 Old Long Ridge Road,  
Stamford  
\$770,000

Outstanding Arts-and-Crafts style log bungalow with boulder chimney located in Long Ridge Village Historic District available for purchase. Features include diamond-paned plate-glass casement windows and overhanging eaves with exposed rafters as well as a variety of Oriental details. 3,700 square feet with exposed log walls, 25-foot beamed ceilings, and original floor-to-ceiling fireplace. Over 2-acre property originally housed saw and grist mills, now includes detached two-car garage and separate cottage. Bungalow is in need of TLC. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and may qualify for Historic Home Rehabilitation Tax Credits.

Contact: Gene Shklover, AG Prime Realty,  
203-984-8228, [info@agprimerealty.com](mailto:info@agprimerealty.com)



(AG Prime Realty photos)



## Cohanzie Elementary School (1923)

40-48 Dayton Road, Waterford  
\$795,000

Former Cohanzie Elementary School available for mixed-use or multi-family redevelopment opportunity. Located on over 10 acres, this Neoclassical building has been vacant since school's closure in 2008. Site remediation and demolition of 1954 and 1972 additions have been completed by the town. Listed on the State Register of Historic Places and may be eligible for historic tax credits.

Contact: Vance Taylor, Commercial Real Estate Group, 860-482-9695, [vance.taylor@snet.net](mailto:vance.taylor@snet.net)







Front view



Rear view

## Raynham (c. 1804)

**709 Townsend Avenue, New Haven**  
**\$2,250,000**

After more than seven generations of Townsend family ownership, New Haven's largest single residential landholding is for sale. Property is over 25 acres on two contiguous parcels. The main house is a Gothic Revival-style residence originally built in about 1804 by Kneeland Townsend in the Federal style. The house was extensively altered in the 1850s, giving it Gothic Revival features by applying the design principles

and some design patterns of Calvert Vaux, a major proponent of Carpenter Gothic architecture. The estate includes a carriage house, caretaker's house, a variety of agricultural outbuildings, and three structures, including a gazebo, added in the 1920s. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and may qualify for Historic Home Rehabilitation Tax Credits. Currently only offered to public agencies and non-profit organizations, the property will be listed on the open market on March 1, 2021.



**Contact: Joanna Dresser, Landvest, Inc,**  
**617-584-6855, [jdresser@landvest.com](mailto:jdresser@landvest.com)**

## Bailey Manufacturing Company

(1888, c.1920, post-1947)

**207 Church Street, Wethersfield**  
**\$1,100,000**

This historic industrial building was constructed for the Bailey Manufacturing Company, which made patented letter-copying machines and copying pads. Later occupants included the National Machine Company (printing presses), the Gra-Rock Company (ginger ale), and the Clearinghouse Auction Gallery. Preservation Connecticut's Making Places industrial heritage project identified the property as potentially eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places, which would allow it to qualify for historic rehabilitation tax credits. Property currently has no historic designation and is listed for redevelopment or demolition. Building area is 21,510 sq.ft.; 0.88 acres; zoned Mixed Use.



**Contact: John Zubretsky, Jr., Weichert, (860) 263-2121 x 101**

**Deadline for the next issue is February 20, 2021**

Historic Properties Exchange is published to advertise endangered properties in Connecticut by Preservation Connecticut, a statewide nonprofit organization located at 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, Connecticut 06517. Real estate advertised in this publication is subject to the Federal Housing Act of 1968.

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## Old Saybrook/Old Lyme. ►

Connecticut has been awarded \$65 million in federal funding to begin the replacement of the 113-year-old Connecticut River Bridge that carries trains over the river near its mouth. Built in 1907, it is eligible for the National Register, but was not listed due to owner objection. The bridge has a bascule, a movable span that is raised up to allow boats to pass. Over the years, the bridge has been renovated several times but it has increasingly suffered in recent years, causing delays on the nation's busiest railroad corridor. According to planning documents, Amtrak conducted a 2006 inspection, which determined the bridge was structurally deficient and determined that periodic rehabilitation work was no longer sufficient to keep the century-old bridge functional. Current plans call for the new bridge to be built just to the south. Like the current bridge, the replacement will be a bascule bridge, but it will be higher above the water level, allowing many boats to pass underneath and reducing the frequency of openings. Construction is expected to begin in 2024.



M. Forino



## Scotland. ►

Preservation Connecticut Circuit Riders worked with the Governor Samuel Huntington Trust and the State Historic Preservation Office to develop preservation strategies for an unusual early-20<sup>th</sup> century concrete barn at the Huntington Homestead, a National Historic Landmark. PCT used its Technical Assistance Consultancy (TAC) program to hire a structural engineer to assess the barn's condition and to develop a plan for short- and long-term stabilization. The TAC program provides mini-grants for quick assessments to develop strategies and solutions

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for endangered buildings or challenging building issues. This assistance can break logjams or provide second opinions, which helps inform stakeholders' decisions and can get a preservation effort off the ground. With its assessment report, the Huntington Trust is shoring up the barn to stop further deterioration. Circuit Riders continue to work with the Trust to develop a long-term preservation strategy.

### Plum Island, New York. ▼

Although not part of Connecticut, Plum Island is located nearby in Long Island Sound, and many state residents have been following the federal plans to sell the island, with an eye to preserving its natural and historic resources, which include a lighthouse (pictured) and a fortification established in 1897. Daniel Mackay, New York's State Historic Preservation Officer, reports, "We have finalized an extensive editing process for the Fort Terry National Register district nomination. This is a long-overdue document that the Department of Homeland Security has been preparing as part of their deaccessioning obligations. Now complete as a result of our office's review and edits, the nomination will require a signature from a current or future designee at DHS to proceed to the National Park Service. The proposed district covers the entirety of the island save the existing research station in the northwest quadrant."

J. Sorensen



and James L. Smith, by Arna Bontemps (Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

Mars was freed at the age of 21 and spent much of his life in Hartford and Norfolk. Always active in the church, he became a deacon of Talcott Street Congregational Church in Hartford. Mars helped organize meetings to promote freedom for enslaved people and to improve conditions for free African Americans. In 1842, he petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly in an effort to gain the right to vote, which was denied to African Americans in the state's constitution.

Mars lived his later years in Norfolk and supplied information on the history of the town, which appeared in the 1900 publication *History Of Norfolk*,

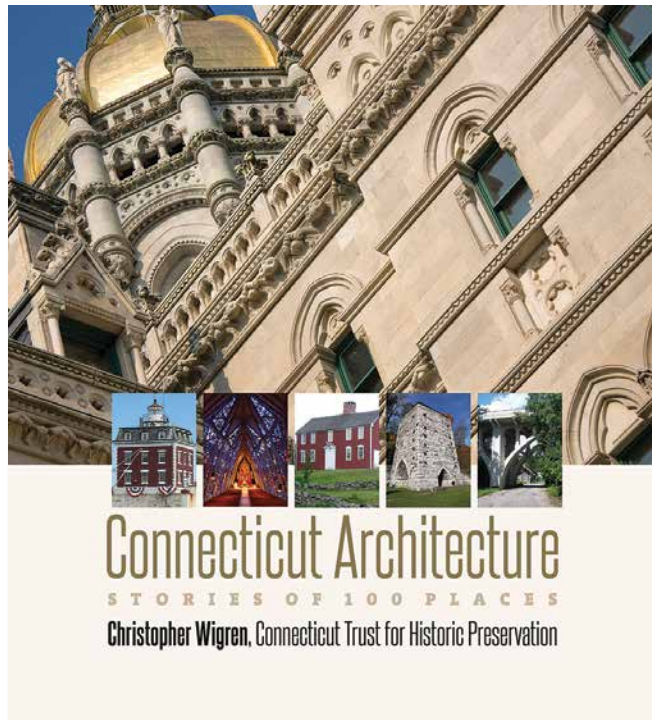
written 20 years after his death. Mars is buried alongside his father, Jupiter Mars, who served in the American Revolution. Nearby are graves of the Freedom family, who are also mentioned in the above town history. These stones are located to the rear and left of the first entrance into the cemetery. To the right of this entrance, near the wall next to Old Colony Road, is the grave of Alanson Freeman, who served in the all-black Connecticut 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment during the Civil War. 🌿

*James Mars' grave is located in Center Cemetery on Old Colony Road (off Route 272), in Norfolk. For more on the Connecticut Freedom Trail, visit [ctfreedomtrail.org](http://ctfreedomtrail.org).*

*Editor's note: The Connecticut Freedom Trail documents and designates sites that embody the struggle toward freedom and human dignity of the state's African American community, that celebrate their accomplishments, and that promote heritage tourism. In 2021 each issue of Preservation Connecticut News will feature one of the stops on the Freedom Trail.*

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## Stops on the Freedom Trail

# James Mars gravesite, Norfolk

James Mars was born into slavery in Connecticut in 1790 and became free through the gradual emancipation law enacted by the state in 1784. Mars wrote a pamphlet about his experiences, which can be found reprinted in the book *Five Black Lives: The Autobiographies of Venture Smith, James Mars, William Grimes, the Rev. G. W. Offley,*

*continued on page 19*

The grave of James Mars, whose memoir recounts his life under slavery and freedom in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Connecticut.