

PRESERVATION CONNECTICUT NEWS

Demolition pandemic

By Jordan Sorensen

The Coggshele-Robinson house in Colchester was unexpectedly demolished in August 2020.

Colchester Historical Society

A component of Preservation Connecticut's work in preservation is tracking demolition notices. Of our 169 towns, 59 have enacted a Demolition Delay Ordinance whereby a citizen may object to the proposed demolition of a historic building, which in turn triggers a waiting period (often 90 days, but up to 180 days) before the building can be knocked down. The idea is to allow time to discuss alternatives to demolition. The ordinance also allows for anyone to be informed of such notices upon written request. Out of the 59

towns for which Preservation Connecticut has requested notification, only 19 comply.

Many of the demolition notices that we receive are posted on Preservation Connecticut's website. We also track data on these properties internally, including address, square footage, year built, and materials. In 2020 we saw a dramatic increase in demolition notifications, and with that an alarming increase in the loss of historic materials to landfills. There appears to be no end in sight, as this trend steadily continues in 2021.

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Environmental Protection Act cases multiply

One important tool for fighting the demolition pandemic affecting historic places in Connecticut (see page 1) is the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). This law allows any citizen to sue to prevent the unreasonable demolition of buildings listed on or under consideration for the National Register of Historic Places.

It isn't an easy or certain solution. First, there has to be someone willing to file a lawsuit, knowing that if the suit fails they could be liable for the owner's legal costs as well as their own. In most successful CEPA cases, the Attorney General has played a leading role, bringing the resources of the State to the effort.

A second hurdle is determining what is 'unreasonable demolition.' The Act itself does not define the phrase. However, cases have succeeded where preservationists were able to produce alternative plans that met the owner's goals or identified a party willing to buy the property at a price agreeable to the owner.

In the eyes of preservationists, the most successful cases are the ones that never go to court. Rather, they are ones where the possibility of a lawsuit is enough to convince the owner to consider alternatives to demolition.

Where CEPA is invoked, Preservation Connecticut typically works closely with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Attorney General's office, to engage owners in conversation, to identify potential buyers or alternate plans for the property, and if necessary to offer support and testimony at trial.

Over the past year or so, the number of cases where PCT and SHPO have invoked CEPA has been particularly high. This may be related to the broader pandemic of demolitions; however, many of these cases have roots reaching before the emergence of Covid-19.



The Connecticut Environmental Protection Act was helpful in preventing demolition of this historic house at 151 East Main Street in Clinton.

CEPA successes

In several recent cases, the Environmental Protection Act played a role in a decision not to demolish an historic building.

25 Edwards Street, Manchester:

Union Village historic district. In 2020 Manchester Mazda applied for a demolition permit for this Queen Anne-style house built in 1896 in order to expand its parking. When preservationists objected, the business offered to discuss options with them. Executives at Manchester Mazda said they did not realize the house had any historic designation. This is frequently the case, and often owners become invested in demolition schemes and are unwilling to consider other approaches. Fortunately, Manchester Mazda was more flexible and eventually agreed to leave the house standing, to be used for offices.

151-153 East Main Street, Clinton:

Clinton Village historic district. Resync Property Solutions planned to raze these buildings, a Federal-style house built about 1800 and a corn crib with a large modern addition. The developer wanted to construct 32 condominiums and claimed the access road had to go through the site of the house. Preservation Connecticut

worked with Crosskey Architects to sketch out a site plan showing how the house could be retained, and local resident Peggy Adler launched an online petition that eventually garnered 805 signatures. When discussions with the developer broke down, the Attorney General's office indicated it would file for an injunction blocking demolition. Shortly after, Resync announced it would withdraw the application for a demolition permit and would incorporate the house into its development. In the meantime, the corn crib, shorn of its additions, has been moved to another historic property in Clinton.

Charles Strong house, East Hampton:

Belltown historic district. Another save, at least for the moment, is this brick house built in 1858 and located on the edge of the district. The owners of a neighboring gas station/convenience store wanted to demolish the house as part of a larger proposal to redevelop several adjoining properties. An online petition calling for the building to be preserved had more than 725 signatures. In June, the planning and zoning commission voted not to approve the project. However, although another proposal could be prepared.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As vaccinations rose and caseloads decreased, Preservation Connecticut has gradually and carefully increased in-person activity. During the summer, staff will continue to work primarily remotely, with in-person hours at our boarding house transitioning into a hybrid model of home and office work. It's been a joy to visit historic places again and meet people whom we've only seen on our computer screens. At the same time, we are continuing to use online technologies to extend our reach where appropriate.

Olmsted in Connecticut, Preservation Connecticut's joint project with the Connecticut State Historic Preservation office to document the Olmsted landscape heritage in the state, is getting off the ground. The project, conceived to recognize the 200th anniversary of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.'s birth in 2022, will document Connecticut's contributions to Olmsted's life and thinking, as well as the Olmsted firm, and record existing Olmsted landscapes in Connecticut.

In May, a team led by the heritage firm **Red Bridge Group** was selected as consul-

ants for the project. Currently, the team is working with PCT and SHPO to organize, research, and identify sites to survey. We're getting assistance from **Pat Wallace**, a graduate student intern from Central Connecticut State University. If you are the owner or steward of an Olmsted landscape or have first-hand information about one please get in touch with Deputy Director Christopher Wigren.

Another intern is **Mary Falvey**, also studying in the same program (also executive director of the Hartford Preservation Alliance). For her main project, Mary is updating the National Register nomination for the Laurel and Marshall Streets district in Hartford. In addition, she will assist in some of PCT's fee-for-service work.

Also in May, staff wrapped up a digital marketing assessment with students from the **Yale Social Impact Club**, a student organization at the School of Management that provides pro-bono management consulting services to New Haven area non-profit organizations. Thank you to Cathy An, Ankita Sukthankar, and Cameron Danesh-Pajou for their valuable recommendations.

The 2021 **legislative session** wrapped up in June with a budget that avoided cuts to the Community Investment Act, a reliable source of preservation funding in the state. Two bills of interest to preservationists were passed. The first, HB 6542, sets up a working group to consider historic preservation measures, including a statewide revolving fund. The bill includes PCT as one member of the working group. Second, HB 6107, which revises land use regulations as promoted by Desegregate Connecticut, was passed with some modifications to increase local control. With careful attention to specifics, this measure could promote redevelopment of historic neighborhoods and buildings.

In June, President Biden nominated PCT's former board chair **Sara Bronin** to chair the U.S. Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, which, according to its website "encourages and supports community efforts to preserve and enjoy our priceless cultural and natural heritage." An architect and attorney, Sara taught land use and historic preservation law at the University of Connecticut School of Law before moving this year to Cornell University. In an interview with WSHU radio, she said that working with PCT paved the way for her nomination. "Seeing the range of projects that we have, the potential for preservation to be an economic development tool, to help us understand our history, to connect us

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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

August 4, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

— Virtual Meeting

September 1, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

— Virtual Meeting

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

State Historic Preservation Board

September 17, 2021 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

Preservation grants total \$144,235

Hotchkiss Library of Sharon

This spring, Preservation Connecticut processed \$144,235 in grants to help organizations throughout the state carry out the basic repairs and maintenance that are crucial to keeping their historic buildings going for the educational, institutional and religious activities that serve their local Connecticut communities.

1772 Foundation grants

For eleven years, Preservation Connecticut has administered a matching grant program for The 1772 Foundation, which provides grants for historic preservation in the New England states, plus other grants nationwide. PCT assists nonprofit organizations in defining projects and writing applications, reviews the applications, and recommends recipients for final approval by The 1772 Foundation.

This year, funding was set at \$100,000 and the program received 87 letters of inquiry and 25 full applications. The following twelve projects received grants:

Pine Orchard Union Chapel Association, Branford: \$6,000 for painting (1897; NR*)

Adam Stanton house, Clinton (1791; NR): \$10,000 for roof repairs

Farmington Land Trust: \$10,000 for window restoration at the Wilcox-Bushley house (c.1807)

Guilford Keeping Society: \$5,000 for painting at the Thomas Griswold house (c.1764; NR; LHD)

Connecticut Landmarks, \$9,000 for window repairs for the Isham-Terry house, Hartford (1854; NR)

Hebron Historical Society, Hebron: \$2,000 for cupola repairs for the Old Town Hall (1838; NR)

New Haven Museum: \$9,000 for roof repairs for the Pardee-Morris house (c.1779; NR)

Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven: \$10,000 for painting the Charles W. Blakeslee, Jr., house (1875)

Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center, Ridgefield (c.1713; NR): \$9,000 for painting



The stone chimneys at the Hotchkiss Memorial Library in Sharon will be repointed with grant funding from The 1772 Foundation.

Hotchkiss Library of Sharon (1893; NR, LHD): \$10,000 to repoint chimneys

Torrington Historical Society: \$10,000 for porch repairs to the Hotchkiss-Fyler house (1900; NR)

Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society: \$10,000 for painting at the Thomas Darling house, Woodbridge (c.1770; NR)

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Facebook: Glastonbury Restoration Company, Architectural and Historical Preservation

*NR: National Register of Historic Places
LHD: Local Historic District

House work

By Marena Wisniewski

The New Britain Museum of American Art, chartered in 1853 as the New Britain Institute, is home to an impressive collection of more than 10,000 individual works, including 18th century portraits, Hudson River School landscapes, impressionist scenes, and a WPA mural.

These works are housed in a facility that includes the former home of two of New Britain's most influential industrialists. The Landers House, constructed in 1909 for William Hart, then-President of Stanley Works, was sold to Grace Landers, widow of George M. Landers, founder of Landers, Fray & Clark, who bequeathed it to the institute in 1934. The collection had previously been located in a building that is the current New Britain Public Library. The Museum employed William F. Brooks, of the firm of Davis & Brooks, who had designed the museum's first home on High Street, to convert the private residence for public use. On July 1, 1937, the New Britain Museum of American Art officially opened its first home dedicated solely to its burgeoning collection.

The house allowed the Museum to establish itself in a permanent, dedicated space. As part of the museum conversion, interior spaces were rearranged; most



The lounge of the Landers house, part of the New Britain Museum of American Art, after rehabilitation

notably, windows were replaced with false panels meant to mimic the previous windows, while providing additional wall space for artwork, and protection against sunlight. As the collection expanded, so did the museum. A new wing was constructed in the mid-20th century, and the house was repurposed into offices. Further expansions in 2006 and 2015 left the Landers house underutilized.

In 2019, plans for the rehabilitation of the Landers house were shared with the State Historic Preservation Office. To better utilize the space, the museum proposed rehabilitating rooms that had been used for flex space back to formal spaces they would have been during the building's time as a residence, to be used as members lounge and maker space. This provided a unique challenge, as initial probes revealed that entire portions of the wall, along with the windows, were missing. Historical documentation was scarce. Working with the architect, SHPO helped in the selection of new elements that, while distinct from the historic fabric, would not overwhelm existing features.

Demolition revealed further challenges and considerations—windows in the sunroom, thought lost in the 1930s, were found to be intact and in good condition. SHPO recommended the retention and repair of the two original windows, which were incorporated into the new design. Wood surrounds removed in the 1930s were recreated using fragments that were unearthed during construction.

A much bigger challenge was the wood paneling in the Board Room. Initial suggestions were to paint it, to hide damage. SHPO, however, argued that the paneling was a character-defining feature of the formal space, and that it should be repaired. The Museum agreed, and the paneling was repaired and refinished to its original appearance.

Though the result was significantly different than what had been originally proposed, the Museum was pleased that the Landers house was able to see new use while maintaining its historic integrity.

Jeffrey Mainville, Director of Operations, stated, "The staff at the State Historic Preservation Office were fabulous to work with; knowledgeable, patient, and open to discussion about our project... [They] provided clear guidance and helped us to shape a plan that would revitalize the space, yet retain the historic elements of the 1909 house, an important part of the museum's history. The result was spectacular, and an outcome that benefitted all of us. The New Britain Museum of American Art is grateful to the SHPO team for their hard work".

A rededication ceremony was held on July 1, 2021, the same day that the Landers house opened as the museum's permanent home 84 years before—still serving its community by putting new uses into old spaces. 🌿

The New Britain Museum of American Art is open Wednesday-Sunday: 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and Thursday: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; visit www.nbmaa.org.



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Twentieth-century sites recognized

Places newly listed on the National Register of Historic Places include five sites dating from the 20th century. Two industrial facilities, one from early in the century, and one from its middle years, track changes in Connecticut's industrial sector. Then, two Modernist houses of worship reflect religious developments in the rapidly growing suburbs of the 1950s and '60s. Finally, one civic building—a National Guard armory—bridges the century, with significance both from its original construction as well as from later periods. Together, these places enrich our understanding of Connecticut's development in the early decades of the century and of the wide-ranging changes of the post-World War II years.

The **Edward Bloom Silk Company factory**, in New London, was constructed between 1920 and 1960. Edward Bloom, a notable silk manufacturer in Paterson, New Jersey—nicknamed “America’s Silk City”—came to New London through his connections with the local Chamber of Commerce, in an effort to expand and diversify the city’s industrial activity. Bloom completed his first building by December 31, 1920, and by the end of 1922 had expanded the plant twice to meet growing demand.

Before the plant closed, in 1936, it employed hundreds of local workers, many of them recent immigrants and women. After Bloom, the Templeton Corporation used the space to produce radio and television transmitters for the military and consumer markets from 1945 to 1949. Since then, the complex has housed small enterprises.

The Bloom factory is the only remaining large textile mill in New London. Constructed during a period when many northern textile manufactures were closing or moving to the South, the buildings are rare examples of 1920s textile factory construction, differentiated from earlier mills in being only two stories in height and having long, narrow footprints. Trussed roofs and central girts provided large open spaces that could accommodate electric power looms and other machinery of varying types.

Overlooking Interstate 95 and New Haven Harbor, the **Armstrong Rubber Company building**, completed in 1970, is a defining artifact from New Haven’s mid-20th century urban renewal program. Armstrong, then the fifth-largest tire maker in the world, moved to the site from West Haven, where it had been located since 1922.

The building’s design was a compromise between former New Haven Mayor Richard Lee’s desire for an architectural monument, to match the scale of the adjacent highway and attract the attention of passing motorists, and Armstrong’s need for warehouse, research, and office spaces. Visually proclaiming the separation of the functions it houses, the structure has a two-story base designed for research and development laboratories (part of which has been demolished), and a five-story office tower which housed corporate offices.

Heritage Consultants, LLC



Ryan Cameron, MacRostie Historic Advisors



The building’s most eye-catching feature is the two-story void that separates the masses. To accomplish this architectural feat, the internationally renowned architect Marcel Breuer and his partner, Robert Gatje, worked with engineers from Weidlinger Associates to create an innovative cantilevered steel truss structural system that suspends the office tower above the base.

Also known as the Pirelli building for a later occupant, the building has been vacant since the 1990s but is now being converted to a hotel by the architecture and development firm of Becker & Becker.

As seen in examples such as the Armstrong Rubber building, mid-20th-century Modernist architecture is generally defined by its radical break with earlier classical and vernacular styles. However, Modernism sometimes could be open to traditional designs.

Saint Mark’s Episcopal Church, built between 1959 and 1961 in the Modernist hotbed of New Canaan, is indeed Modern in its use of materials such as precast concrete, its downplaying of orna-

Gretchen M. Pineo



C

- A** Edward Bloom Silk Company factory, New London
- B** Armstrong Rubber Company building, New Haven
- C** Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, New Canaan
- D** Congregation Mishkan Israel, Hamden
- E** New Haven (Goffe Street) Armory, New Haven

Bill McMullen and Karen Lang Rogers



E



D

Karen Lang Rogers

the 1950s it decided to follow many of its members to the suburbs. There, it constructed a sprawling Modernist complex designed by the German-born architect Fritz Nathan and featuring artworks by Ben Shahn and other influential artists.

Apart from its architecture and art, Congregation Mishkan Israel is significant for the contributions of its leadership and congregants to the local and national civil rights movement. Members of CMI are representative of the progressive Jewish activists who advocated for civil rights. They played a high profile role in the greater New Haven community by joining protests against racial discrimination, canvassing to raise awareness of inequality issues, and inviting prominent leaders of social justice movements to speak at the synagogue, with such events open to the public. Rabbi Robert E. Goldberg, the spiritual leader of CMI between 1948 and 1982, inspired much of this activity.

As one indication of the depth of CMI's involvement in civil rights, Rabbi Goldberg invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to speak at the building's dedication in 1960. King was unable to attend, as he was arrested in Atlanta shortly before the dedication; however, he did speak at CMI in 1961.

Completed in 1930, the **New Haven Armory** (also known as the Goffe Street Armory) served as a headquarters, social center, and storage facility for the 102nd Regiment of the National Guard and other military units, notably New Haven's Second Company Governor's Foot Guard (an arm of the Connecticut state militia).

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ment, and its abstracted forms. However, the church still has a traditional long narrow plan with altar at one end, vaulted ceiling, and stained-glass windows. The architect, Willis Mills of the Stamford firm Sherwood, Mills and Smith, wrote that the design "expresses in today's idiom and materials those Gothic principles which are still relevant in terms of simplicity and strength."

Likewise, the landscape, by landscape architect Vincent C. Cerasi, combines traditional and Modernist elements, including the cloister-like courtyard between the attached Church, Church School, and Parish Hall, and the wide Great Lawn that demonstrates Modernist sensibilities, making use of materials and landscape elements native to the site or area.

The conservative modernist design of St. Mark's reflects currents in post-World War II American society and religion towards a recognition of modern culture and issues and the use of new architectural vocabularies. Yet it also reflects the meaning that broad segments of the population continued to find in traditional design.

Another suburban house of worship is **Congregation Mishkan Israel** (CMI) in Hamden. Founded in 1840 by Bavarian immigrants, CMI is the oldest Jewish congregation in Connecticut. Originally located in downtown New Haven, in

Demolition pandemic, cont'd from page 1

The numbers are troubling. In 2020 those nineteen towns sent us roughly 191 demolition notices. For comparison purposes, in 2019 those same nineteen towns sent us 121 demolition notices. That's over a 50 percent increase in demolition of typically sound, well-built historic structures in the course of one year!

What's more, those 191 demolished buildings contained approximately 769,659 square feet of wood framing (the area of more than thirteen football fields!), plus brick chimneys, stone foundations, wood flooring, and historic windows, not to mention carpeting, linoleum, drywall and other non-historic materials that wound up in landfills. Now, think about the fact that these numbers represent only eleven percent of towns in the state! What would the number be for all 169?

Here are two buildings recently lost:

Coggsbell-Robinson house, Colchester (c.1800-1816). Even designation on the National Register of Historic Places does not guarantee protection. In April 2019, at the request of the local community, Preservation Connecticut staff met with the property owner to help reimagine this house as part of a larger develop-



The Coggsbell-Robinson house before demolition

ment. Involvement by PCT and the State Historic Preservation Office, plus the possibility of a lawsuit under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act, produced a plan to renovate the house and construct affordable housing behind it. Despite support from town officials, the house was unexpectedly demolished in August 2020.

Warner house, Branford (1894, 1927, 1980s). Starting as a compact stone summer cottage in the shoreline neighborhood of Pine Orchard, this house was expanded with the addition of a double-height

music room housing a pipe organ in 1927 and gained elaborate carved woodwork in the 1980s. The house was sold to a developer in January and demolished in May. Preservationists were allowed to photograph the house to document it. While they advocated salvaging architectural elements, it is likely that only some wood paneling was saved, along with the organ, which was donated to a church in Virginia. Local builders told reporters that the house was unlivable because of its outdated floor plan and lack of air conditioning.



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The Warner house, in Branford's Pine Orchard section, was demolished for new construction

Warner house, Branford



What are the reasons behind this rise in demolitions?

One significant reason is that the Covid-19 pandemic created an exodus from metropolitan areas, such as New York City, to suburban and rural locations, including nearby Connecticut. With that came a rise in demand for the real estate market, strong housing sales, and consequently a high rate of demolition requests in favor of new construction.

High prices created further incentives to maximize value by dividing large lots and razing quirky old buildings for newer, flashier models. This exacerbated a trend already prevalent in high-priced markets like much of Fairfield County or shoreline waterfronts.

Zoning plays a role, often creating incentives for denser development and, in many cases, making it difficult or even impossible to incorporate historic structures into new construction. For developers looking to maximize profits, it's quicker and easier simply to clear the site and build from standardized formulas than to think about how to work with non-standardized existing structures. It is also possible that under pandemic restrictions some of the notification and permitting processes that might have offered opportunities to encourage and assist in reusing historic buildings were not fully carried out.

What are the lessons to be learned?

Education is key.

We cannot assume that the public knows about preservation tools, and it's the mission of preservationists to inform them. Preservation Connecticut offers a variety of educational resources that are immediately available including:

- **Circuit Riders.** The field staff of Preservation Connecticut is available to take calls or emails and address any preservation-related questions.
- **Talking About Preservation.** We host weekly chats on preservation topics to highlight the importance and benefits of protecting historic buildings.
- **Restoration Workshops.** We partner with craftspeople to offer lessons on how to properly restore and preserve features of their historic homes.
- **Preservation 101 Presentations.** Our team is always happy to speak to communities about preservation basics whether it be for a neighborhood, local historic district, or the whole town. Please reach out to us if you would be interested in this type of presentation—at no cost!
- **Preservation Connecticut News.** Preservation Connecticut's bi-monthly newsletter is a great source of all things preservation in Connecticut. We cover a plethora of topics and many years of back issues are available online and at our Hamden office.

Designations do matter.

Yes, National and State Register of Historic Places designations are honorary. They do not directly protect a building, BUT they do two very important things:

- Bolster pride of place for owners and the wider community by recognizing the historic significance of the site.
- Provide eligibility for incentives like Connecticut's historic tax credit programs so owners can reap economic benefits for caring for their building.

National Register designation also provides more direct protection to historic sites through the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act—see page 2 for more information.

This isn't over, yet.

We know we can do more. The front-page article in the Spring, 1980, issue of our newsletter noted that the prior year had been "a great one for demolitions." What the authors of that article said then is still true: "We must be able to explain why, aesthetically, socially, and economically, preservation makes sense...Even more crucial than effective last-minute action, however, is planning ahead. Preservationists must establish a preservation mentality in their cities and towns—to make sure that government officials, businesspeople and developers as well as the preservation community understand the social, aesthetic and economic benefits of preservation." (D. Felske, V. McVarish, T. Morrison)



Please share with us your ideas to educate our communities. Join our efforts to stop the trend of demolishing valuable historic properties and make 2021 a year to cherish, rather than destroy, our history.

Briefly noted

Enfield/Thompsonville. ►

A promising redevelopment opportunity for an historic industrial site was lost when the Westfield Plate Company factory was destroyed by fire on March 24. Built in 1893, the factory produced coffin hardware and other funeral products until 1952, then housed a maker of gauges until 2005. The Town of Enfield had slated the building for retail and housing as part of a wider revitalization effort around a new commuter rail station. Fire officials believe the fire was caused by a person but have not determined if it was accidental or deliberate. In a sad twist of fate, the State Historic Preservation Board was scheduled to review a National Register nomination for the factory just two days after the fire; instead, the nomination will serve as documentation of the building's appearance and history.



Making Places

Hamden. ►

Preservation Connecticut and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) have found common ground in efforts to salvage historic building materials and reduce the waste stream from demolition. Over several weeks in April, May, and June, the two organizations worked together at a State-owned Greek Revival house on the edge of West Rock Ridge State Park. PCT contracted William Gould Architectural Preservation LLC to perform the salvage work. Materials taken for sale and reuse included chestnut rafters and other framing members, wood flooring, old-growth boards, mantels, doors, hardware, foundation stones, and a stone well cap. Preservationists and Connecticut officials have struggled for many years about what to do with unused historic structures on State property. DEEP contracted Preservation Connecticut for this pilot project which we hope will lead to more opportunities to work together to preserve, reuse, or salvage historic structures within parks and protect the environment by keeping more construction debris out of landfills. For more information visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Reduce-Reuse-Recycle/Construction-and-Demolition/Deconstruction>.



R. Triber

Crosskey Architects, LLC, 1994



Town of Old Saybrook Land Use Department



◀ Hartford.

The Hartford Financial Services Group announced in June that it will donate \$1 million to restore blighted buildings in Asylum Hill near the company headquarters. Established in 1810 as the Hartford Fire Insurance Company, The Hartford has been located in Asylum Hill since 1920 and last year celebrated its hundredth anniversary in the neighborhood by committing to a five-year improvement program. The new grant is in addition to that program. The nonprofit developer Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA) will rehabilitate 27 blighted buildings with this funding from The Hartford as well as funding from the Connecticut Redevelopment Authority and Historic Homes Rehabilitation Tax Credits from the State. One of the first buildings to be tackled is the Linus Plimpton house (1884, NR; pictured). Currently a group home, it will be redone as two residential rental units.

◀ Old Saybrook.

Nearly-lost historic advertising is being restored on Main Street. Since 1853, the Sheffield building has long housed prominent local businesses which advertised their wares or services through painted signs on the building's side wall. Today, remnants survive of three signs—for the Stokes Brothers' store, Old Colony package store, and James A. Crowley Real Estate Agency. The faded signage, known as "ghost signs," provides a public link with the town's history. With the owner's permission, the town Historic District Commission hired John Canning and Company to recommend how best to conserve and restore the faded signs while keeping their aura of age. Funding came from the commission's budget and local donations plus matching grants from Sustainable Connecticut and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County. Half the sign was restored in the fall of 2020; fundraising is now underway to complete the project.

Middletown. One of the thorniest difficulties for preservation is neglect. The City of Middletown has taken a step to address this problem by passing an ordinance that allows city officials to abate property taxes for up to ten years on buildings that are rehabilitated. Among other things, owners must show that: taxes threaten the proper-

ty's continued existence; a significant rehabilitation has taken place, in compliance with the Secretary's Standards; and most of the rehabilitation work was to preserve historic building fabric and features. The work must be approved by the Design Review Preservation Board and the Economic Development Committee before

the Common Council approves a tax abatement. State law authorizes municipalities to enact such tax abatement ordinances (see Connecticut General Statutes § 12-127a), but to date few, if any, have done so.



HISTORIC PROPERTIES EXCHANGE

Threatened Buildings and Easement Properties Available — July/August 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, or contact Christopher Wigren, Deputy Director.

10 State Street, Ansonia (c. 1876) \$275,000

Ansonia's original First Baptist Church and accompanying apartment on quarter-acre lot available for purchase. Church is roughly 3,000 square feet and includes vaulted ceilings and original wood carvings. Below church are offices and kitchen.

Apartment includes two bedrooms. May be eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places to obtain historic rehabilitation tax credits.

Contact: Peter Kopchik, Keller Williams, (203) 521-2366, peterkopchik@kw.com



350 Hartford Pike, Killingly (c.1880) \$399,000

Former St. Joseph's Catholic Church and accompanying parish hall and residence on five-acre lot available for purchase. Established c.1880 to serve the growing French-Canadian Catholic population who were immigrating to the region to work in the textile mills. Closed in 2017 after merging with parishes in neighboring towns. Church is 3,200 square feet and includes stained glass windows and vaulted ceilings. May be eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places to obtain historic rehabilitation tax credits.

Contact: Amy Rio, Executive Real Estate, amyrio@buyexecutive.com, (860) 916-6048



556 East Main Street, Norwich (c. 1849) \$495,000

Redevelopment opportunity of historic industrial building. Constructed c.1849 for the Norwich Fishline Company which occupied the plant until 1872. Later occupants included the Willimantic Silk Company, the Reliance Worsted Company (woolen and worsted goods), the Reliance Yarn Company and the final occupant, Trinacria Specialty Manufacturing Company (textile mill supplies). 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. Building area is 25,000 sq.ft.; 0.85 acres; in Opportunity Zone.

Contact: James McCall, Coldwell Banker Commercial, james.mccall@cbcnrt.com, 203-376-9650





Penfield Reef Lighthouse (1874)

Long Island Sound, Bridgeport

Opportunity to own Second Empire style lighthouse mounted on granite pier off the coast of Bridgeport. The property contains a 51-foot-tall octagonal lighthouse and a two-story, 1,568 square foot keeper's quarters. Includes boat dock. Weatherized and restored in 2015. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Currently being sold via online auction.

Contact: Sonia Allon-Singh, U.S. General Services Administration, 617-306-8615, Sonia.allon-singh@gsa.gov

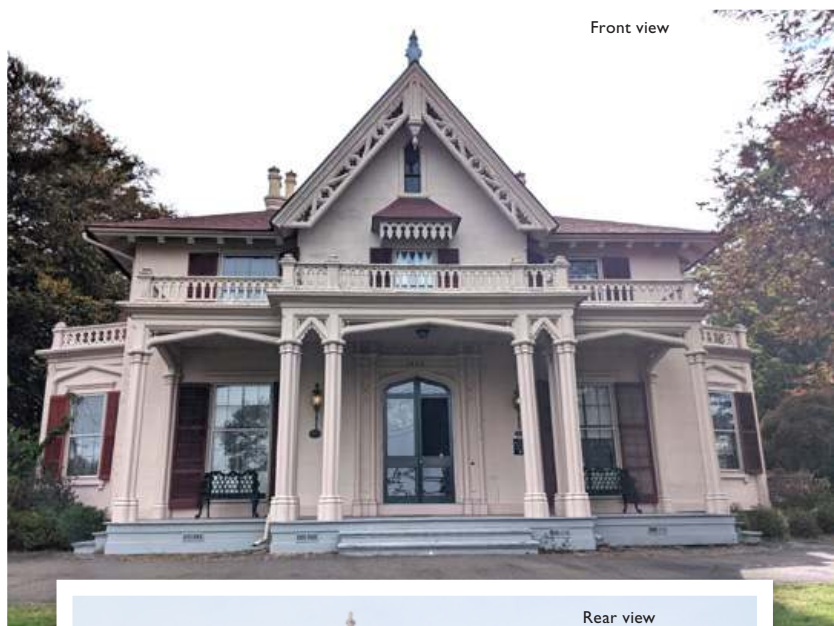
Raynham (c. 1804)

709 Townsend Avenue, New Haven

\$2,250,000

After more than seven generations in one family, 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 rehabilitation tax credits.

Contact: Joanna Dresser, Landvest, Inc, 617-584-6855, jdresser@landvest.com



Deadline for the next issue is August 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.

Neither advertisers nor Preservation Connecticut are responsible or liable for any misinformation, misprints, or typographical errors contained in Historic Properties Exchange. To list a property or learn about properties listed, contact Kristen Hopewood at khopewood@preservationct.org, or call (203) 562-6312.



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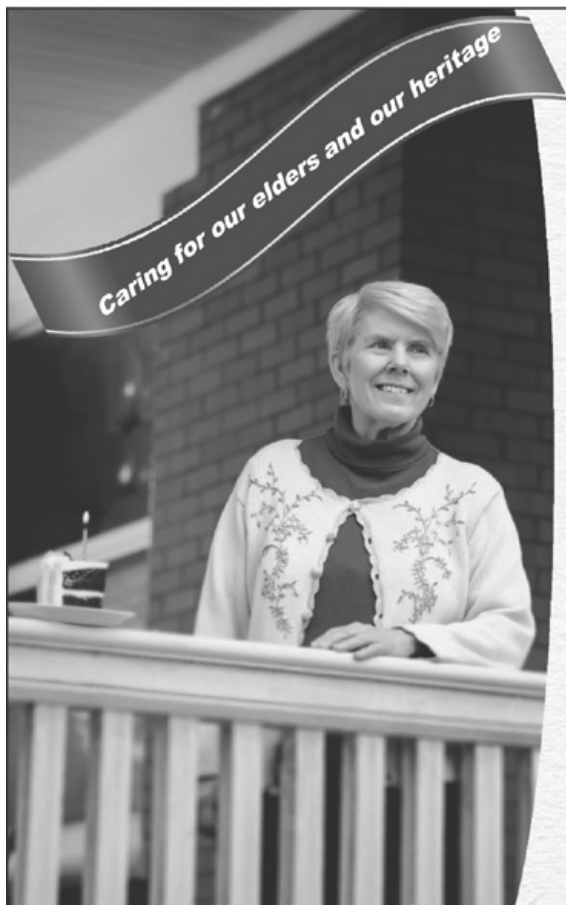


Leffingwell House, Norwich (c. 1675)



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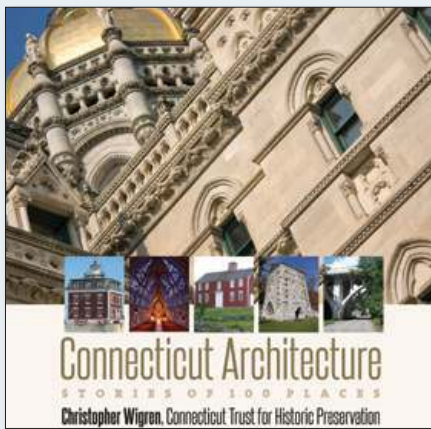
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From the Executive Director, continued from page 3

with tribal resources, all of that has given me different perspective, in addition to my academic perspective, that I hope will help me to be a good chair." The nomination now goes to the Senate for confirmation.

As we begin the summer, we offer thanks to the faithful members and supporters who kept PCT going through the past year. We look forward to seeing you soon! 🌿

—Jane Montanaro



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1 Old King's Highway, Norwalk: *Silvermine historic district.* This small Cape-type house was built about 1812, according to the National Register (local historians believe parts of it could be older), with additions and alterations about 1925 and in 1980. Both the original construction and the 1925 alterations contribute to the district's significance, which encompasses Silvermine's origins as an industrial village as well as its 20th-century incarnation as an arts colony. Earlier this year, the property was bought by Andrew Glazer, who had renovated the Silvermine Tavern but intended to demolish the house. At a hearing held by the Historic Preservation Council in May, he agreed to withdraw the demolition permit and work on plans to remodel the house. However, he remained noncommittal about how much historic material he could retain.



In East Hampton, the Charles Strong house escaped demolition, at least for now.

G. Farmer, 2016

Current threats

Despite these apparent successes, preservationists are currently working to engage with owners of historic buildings that remain under threat.

Bridgewater Grange: Bridgewater Center historic district. For several years, First Selectman Curtis Read has pushed to raze the Grange building and replace it with a new community center. Built in the 1850s as a school, the building has been vacant for several years and has structural issues which have been exacerbated by neglect. In 2018 the Historic Preservation Council voted to ask the Attorney General to take action to prevent demolition. Since then, SHPO and PCT staff have presented designs and funding plans for renovating the building. A group of town residents created a new organization, the Bridgewater Preservation Association (BPA), which offered to take possession of the building and renovate it. On May 22, town citizens voted down a proposal to sell the Grange to the BPA. Nonetheless, a lawsuit could go forward; if it did, the BPA's offer would strengthen the argument that demolishing the building is unreasonable.



The Bridgewater Grange remains under threat of demolition, even though a local nonprofit group offered to renovate it.

Blickensderfer Typewriter Factory, 79 Garden Street, and 130 Henry Street, Stamford: South End historic district. With highway and railroad access, water views, and a building stock of factories

and modest housing, Stamford's South End has become a target for aggressive developers. Perhaps the most aggressive is Building Land & Technology (BLT), which for several years has targeted two late-19th century houses and most of a vacant factory in connection with a residential tower project. The company insists it must remove the houses to widen Garden Street for

access, and at least half the factory building to remediate contamination. (A later section of the factory, listed in the National Register as noncontributing because it was less than fifty years old at the time of the nomination, already has been demolished.) Armed with a fat legal purse, BLT has resisted any discussion of alternatives.

continued on next page

During the turbulent 1960s, the armory was ground zero for National Guard responses to civil rights, counterculture, and anti-war demonstrations in New Haven. Guard units based in the armory intervened in race riots in the Dixwell and Newhallville neighborhoods in 1967 and the May Day rally on the Green on May 1, 1970, organized to protest the Vietnam War and support members of the Black Panther Party who were facing murder and kidnapping trials in New Haven.

For the broader New Haven community, the armory essentially functioned as a convention center, hosting large events ranging from dances to sports meets, political conventions, and auto shows. Users included the Black Coalition of Greater New Haven, which in 1972 and for several years after hosted an annual "Black Expo," a cultural event similar to others held in cities across the United States, at the armory. Military use of the armory ceased in 2009; the building reverted to the City of New Haven and currently sits vacant. ❖

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Deborah Chapel, Zion Hill Cemetery, Hartford: Frog Hollow historic district. Another long-vacant building is this mortuary chapel built in 1886 by the Ladies' Deborah Society of Congregation Beth Israel, Hartford's oldest synagogue. The structure has been of concern for several years, landing on the Hartford Preservation Alliance's Ten Most Endangered Properties list in 2015. In 2019 Beth Israel applied under Hartford's preservation ordinance to raze the chapel, saying that it was rundown and an attrac-

tive nuisance. When turned down by the historic preservation commission, the congregation appealed, and in March of this year a Superior Court judge agreed that saving the building was not economically feasible. The City of Hartford has appealed this ruling. Among the advocates for the chapel are the Friends of Zion Hill Cemeteries, which proposed renovating the building, possibly as cemetery or community offices and caretaker apartment, and board members from the Frog Hollow Neighborhood Revitalization Zone. ❖

Hartford Preservation Alliance



Deborah Chapel, built by Hartford's Congregation Beth Israel, stands vacant and under threat of demolition.

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Walters Memorial suffered severe damage from Super Storm Sandy in 2012, just after completing repairs from a hit by Hurricane Irene the year before. Since then, church activities have taken place in the adjacent Walters Center. In June, PCT Circuit Rider Stacey Vairo and engineer Amy Jagaczewski of GNCB Consulting Engineers visited the church to assess the damage and explore ways of repairing it.

In the most visible spot of the sanctuary, directly above the altar, a stained-glass window depicts a Black Jesus as the Good Shepherd, cradling a lamb in his arm. For a congregation that often suffers hardship and discrimination, the image of a caring God who became one of them must be a source of comfort and strength. 🌿

Walters Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is located at 12 Gregory Street, Bridgeport. For more about the church visit www.waltersmemorial.com. For more on the Connecticut Freedom Trail, visit ctfreedomtrail.org.



Walters Memorial's building suffered damage in two consecutive storms.

Maintenance and repair grants

Preservation Connecticut offers Maintenance and Repair grants to religious organizations, which are not eligible for some other grant programs. The one-to-one matching grants can be used for exterior repairs as well as fire detection, lightning protection, or security systems. This funding is made possible through the support of the State Historic Preservation Office with moneys generated by the Community Investment Act.

This year, PCT received twenty-one pre-applications; ten congregations were invited to apply, and the following projects were funded:

South Congregational Church, New Britain (1865; NR): \$5,325 for roof repairs.

Ridgebury Congregational Church, Ridgefield (1851; NR): \$15,000 for exterior repairs and painting.

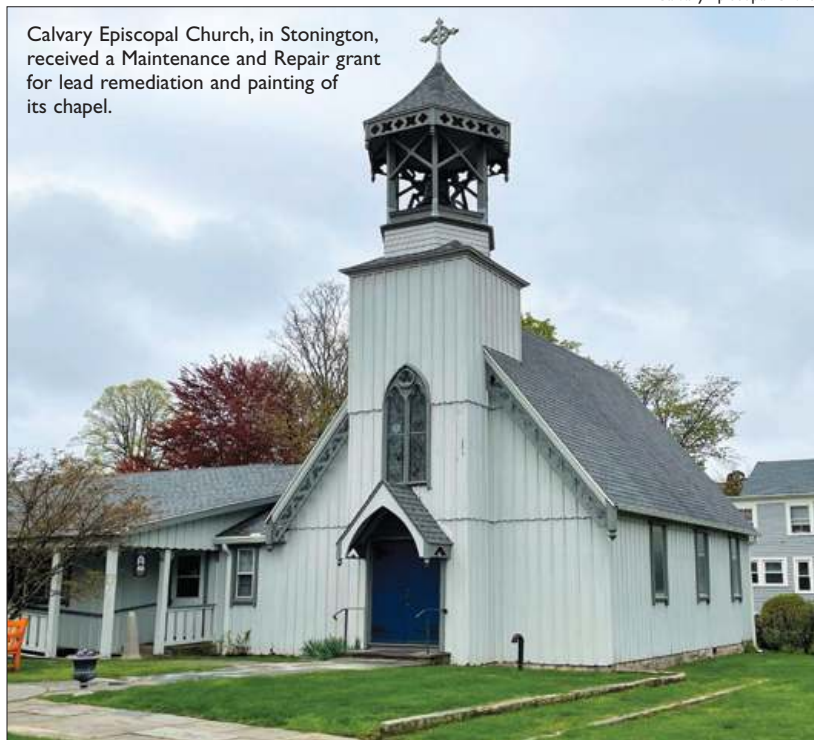
Calvary Episcopal Church Stonington: \$9,000 for exterior painting and lead remediation of the chapel building (1859; NR)

First Congregational Church, Woodstock (1820; NR, LHD): \$15,000 for exterior painting.



For more information about grant funds available through Preservation Connecticut, visit preservationct.org/fund or email Mike Forino, mforino@preservationct.org.

Calvary Episcopal Church



Calvary Episcopal Church, in Stonington, received a Maintenance and Repair grant for lead remediation and painting of its chapel.



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Stops on the Freedom Trail

Walters Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Bridgeport

Editor's note: In 2021 each issue of Preservation Connecticut News features a stop on the Connecticut Freedom Trail, which marks sites that embody the struggle toward freedom and human dignity of the state's African American community, celebrate their accomplishments, and promote heritage tourism. The first paragraph of this article was adapted from the Freedom Trail posting.

Walters Memorial African American Episcopal Zion Church was founded in 1835 and has been located at this site since 1882. When its original structure was destroyed by fire in 1951, the current building was erected on the surviving foundation. The church is one of few remaining reminders of an African American community known as "Little Liberia." Made up of free blacks, migrants from the South, former slaves and their descendants, this community supported two churches, a school, a hotel, and a number of individual homes. The Mary and Eliza Freeman houses nearby on Main Street are the only two remaining homes.

continued on page 19



C. Wigen