

Buildings of Connecticut

Richard Platt

G. Farmer



David Merwin house,  
Milford

going ...



... going ...



... gone.

## A Cautionary Tale

It looked as though Milford had scored another preservation victory with the David Merwin house, built around 1790 overlooking Gulf Pond, an inlet off Long Island Sound. In recent years the pressure to replace the house and its surrounding farmland with new housing had grown intense. In February of last year the City of Milford bought the property, which had already been divided into five building lots. Two lots were retained as open space and the remaining three sold to developer Westwood Ranches LLC. The lot containing the Merwin house sold for only \$200,000 because the city added deed restrictions requiring that the house's exterior appearance be preserved.

Milford has an admirable record for preserving historic properties. More than any other municipality in the state, it has been willing to buy endangered buildings with public funds and re-sell them with preservation restrictions. The process began when a developer announced plans to demolish the John Downs house, an 18th-century structure in a National Register district (see CPN, September/October 1999). The city obtained a state grant to buy the house and has partially restored it with plans for resale.

Milford since has bought and preserved two other houses, the Treat house on Gulf Street and the Stowe farm at Walnut Beach, and work is currently progressing on a third, the William S. Pond house, also on Gulf Street. Richard Platt, the city historian and a leading local preservationist, praises the city's commitment to preserving these buildings.

With this record, Platt understandably wasn't very worried when an anonymous city employee telephoned last fall to say

that Westwood wanted to take down the Merwin house. Not only was there the preservation restriction, but Milford also has a delay of demolition ordinance requiring that Platt, as city historian, be informed of any proposals to demolish historic buildings in the city, a provision that allows time for preservationists to try to find alternatives to demolition.

But on December 3, Platt heard that workers had in fact begun taking down the house. Within a few days nothing remained but piles of timbers and stones. Westwood's plan, it turned out, was to re-erect the house on the same lot, only farther from the road, and turned 90 degrees to face the view. The house would look just the same, Platt was assured.

Platt and Benjamin Blake, chairman of Milford's Board of Aldermen, were furious. Blake said that the developer had "betrayed" the city, and ought to be forced to pay damages.

### What happened?

A review of the preservation restriction reveals several flaws in the process. First, the easement agreement isn't clear about

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## From the Executive Director

We were saddened by the death in October of former trustee Lillian Brown of Waterbury. Representing the Trust at the memorial service, Jane Talamini, another former trustee, described Lillian's achievements and her contributions to planning the gala at the Wauregan Hotel in 2006 in the face of trying health problems. All of us join Jane in extending our sympathy to Lou and the rest of Lillian's family.


Here is another cautionary tale. In 2001, the Trust launched its first special-subject website, [www.towngreens.com](http://www.towngreens.com). In the early 1990s the Trust, supported by a grant from the then Connecticut Historical Commission, surveyed 173 town greens in Connecticut. The survey forms grew dusty in the Trust's library until the late 1990s, when the new electronic age inspired us to make the survey information, and much more, available to all via a new web site. After two years of research and planning, all supported by the Connecticut Humanities Council, [www.towngreens.com](http://www.towngreens.com) made its debut. The site's underlying and very special feature has been that it can be edited and added to when interested scholars and community members submit information to our office, without having to involve technology experts, a feature that won both state and national awards. Over the years, we have corrected errors in the original data, re-drawn maps, added memorials and flagpoles and gazebos to the greens, and even answered e-mails about what town events will occur on a particular green on a par-

ticular weekend. This last we never had an answer for!

Last summer, we learned that the web site was not on line. After much effort to make human contact with the hosting company, we found out that the site had been deleted for non-payment of hosting fees. The non-payment occurred because the automatic charges to our credit card didn't work once the card's expiration date occurred. Rather than contact the Connecticut Trust, the hosting company simply deleted the site. We straightened that out. A few months later, the site was deleted again, while "migrating" to a new server. This time we were informed that key data was lost and could not be recovered. Did we have a back up? Before we could find that out, the site came back on line and then immediately went off line again for non-payment based on the old account. The earlier payment was recorded on a new account, the old account was not deleted, and now the billing department did a permanent delete based on this faulty information. They did not back the site up

before deleting; it was truly gone, we were told. We dealt with this mess for weeks. Finally, the hosting company found part of the site, and we located a back-up, but one containing only the original information, not the changes over six years.

So, the site is back as it was in 2001. I tell you this story for two reasons: First, as a reminder to make sure you and your hosting company back up your wonderful web sites ALL THE TIME. Second, to ask that you look at [www.towngreens.com](http://www.towngreens.com) and let us know what we need to add to make the information on your town's green (or greens) as accurate as possible.

In the meantime, the Trust's historic barns initiative continues to draw attention to these important but often threatened resources, and it is also providing helpful publicity for the Trust itself. Preservation Services officer Todd Levine appeared on NBC-30-TV's morning program this month, where he was able to announce the new barn grants, see page 11. 

—Helen Higgins

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

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Connecticut Commission  
on Culture & Tourism

### Upcoming Meetings of the Connecticut Historic Preservation Council

December 6, 2008, at 9:30 a.m.

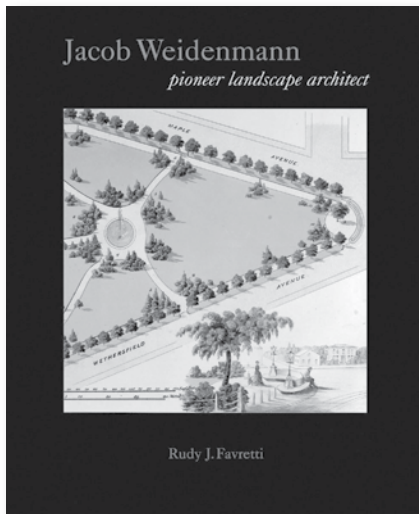
March 13, 2008, at 9:30 a.m.

### State Historic Preservation Board

March 13, 2008, at 9:30 a.m.

All meetings take place at the Commission on Culture and Tourism, 1 Constitution Plaza, Hartford

For more information call  
(860) 256-2800



*Rudy J. Favretti, Jacob Weidenmann: Pioneer Landscape Architect (Hartford: Cedar Hill Cemetery Foundation, Inc., in cooperation with Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 192 pages, \$49.95.*

Buildings last, but landscapes are much more changeable. Nevertheless, they can be very important. Interest in landscape design and its role in shaping the places where humans live grew immensely in the 19th century, as the Romantic movement fostered appreciation for nature and inspired designers to make buildings that harmonized with nature.

This resulted in the creation of a new profession, that of landscape architect. Early names that are well known include Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted. Much less well known is Jacob Weidenmann (1829-1893), whose life and work are described in a new book by Rudy Favretti.

Born in Switzerland, Weidenmann early recognized his interest in landscape. At a time when the term landscape architecture did not yet exist, he managed to cobble together studies in architecture, engineering, sketching, and botany, all of which would be of use to him in his career. Weidenmann supplemented his studies with travel to California, Panama and South America before settling in the United States in 1856. After living in New York for a few years, he moved Hartford. Professional reversals led Weidenmann to move to New York in 1874, where he spent the rest of his life, except for a brief and unsuccessful to establish a practice in Chicago. Fortunately, whenever things

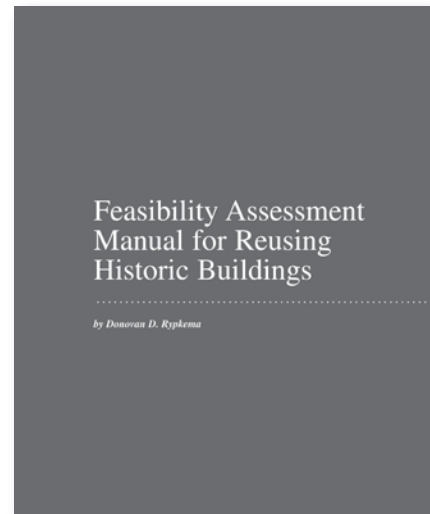
seemed bleakest, Olmsted managed to help him find work.

Hartford boasts the largest collection of Weidenmann's surviving works: Bushnell Park (1860), the nation's first urban park built with public funds; Cedar Hill Cemetery (1863), Hartford's contribution to the rural cemetery movement; and the gardens of the Butler-McCook house (1865) on Main Street, owned by the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society. He also oversaw implementation of Olmsted's and Calvert Vaux's plan for the Retreat for the Insane, now the Institute for Living (1861). Other works include the grounds of the Iowa state capitol and a park in Saratoga, New York (both of which also survive), as well as work for the U.S. government in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas, and residential landscapes in Connecticut, New York, and the Midwest. In Favretti's words, all these works "feature[d] the natural landscape, with curved and flowing walks and drives working in concert with the natural contours, with plenty of green lawn between them, all enhanced with trees, shrubs, and bodies of water."

In addition to designing landscapes Weidenmann worked to establish landscape architecture as a recognized profession. To educate the general public he published three books on landscape architecture. To ensure a supply of well trained, professional landscape architects, he took apprentices into his office as well as proposing curricula for professional education. Unfortunately Weidenmann died before Harvard established the nation's first degree program in landscape architecture, in 1900.

Like Weidenmann, Rudy Favretti is a landscape architect, author, and educator. He has studied and restored historic landscapes from Florida to New Hampshire, written numerous books on the subject (some with his wife, Joy), and taught for more than 30 years at the University of Connecticut. With his wife Favretti spent some 40 years studying Weidenmann's life and career, traveling to see his works, visiting his homeland, and patiently following leads from across the country. *Jacob Weidenmann* is clearly a work of love, and a valuable resource for understanding 19th-century landscape design. 🌿

—Christopher Wigren



*Donovan Rypkema, Feasibility Assessment Manual for Reusing Historic Buildings (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2007), 108 pages.*

"That old building isn't good for anything—let's demolish it and start fresh."

Preservationists know otherwise, and a new publication available from the National Trust's Preservation Books series will help them make an informed and realistic argument for reuse.

The Feasibility Assessment Manual for Historic Buildings, by real estate consultant Donovan Rypkema, provides a step-by-step process and a set of questions to enable an assessment team to determine whether or not a building project is feasible and then prepare a written report to support the team's findings. Following the steps set out in the manual, the feasibility team begins by identifying objectives, gathering and evaluating information, and finally reaching a conclusion as to feasibility of reusing the building. A CD-ROM includes Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to help team members calculate capital costs, income and expenses, and operating costs.

The manual includes an outline for the final report, which allows the team to organize its research into a logical format to answer the question, "Is the project feasible?"

Order from Preservation Books, [www.preservationbooks.org](http://www.preservationbooks.org), (202) 588-6296. 🌿

—Reprinted with permission from [www.ptvermont.org](http://www.ptvermont.org), website of The Preservation Trust of Vermont

# Civic Improvements

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Connecticut's booming industrial economy sparked not only population growth in the state's cities and towns but also an increase in civic consciousness. Among other things, this consciousness expressed itself in religious, cultural and social organizations as expressions of cultural enlightenment and as means of providing social grounding in the increasingly impersonal cities. Another expression was renewed greater interest in urban planning and embellishment. Four buildings recently added to the National Register of Historic Places illustrate these trends, as described in excerpts from their nominations.

## Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, New Britain.

For more than 110 years this building was the home of the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church; it is now being re-used as a performing arts center known as Trinity-on-Main. The church is a stellar and extremely intact example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style and one of the highlights of the career of architect Amos P. Cutting (1839-1896). Cutting's design displayed one of the prevailing architectural styles of the period on the exterior while containing a classic example of the "Akron Plan" on the interior. The building's prominent location and striking design testify to a time when New Britain was at the height of its economic power and when the congregation was robust and optimistic. 🌿

—James Sexton

## Schlaraffia Burg, New Haven.

This building stands as a testament to the efforts of the German immigrant community to congregate, socialize, and preserve their culture during the turmoil of the inter-war period. Unlike many other ethnic groups in the city, the New Haven German community left few written records or visible traces, apart from this structure, constructed in 1926 for the Schlaraffia Nova Portus German and Educational Social Club, a branch of an international fraternal order founded in Prague in 1859. Originally a venue for theater, literature and music in mock-medieval settings, in

America the organization focused on language preservation, but the building's castellated design reflects Schlaraffia's traditions. The organization's membership dwindled during World War II and in 1946 the building was transferred to the Swedish Historical Society. Today it continues its social and ethnic functions as a clubhouse for the Knickerbocker Golf Club, whose members are primarily African-American. 🌿

—Leah Glaser

## The Former Old Saybrook Town Hall and Theater

housed town government offices from 1911 until 2004, as well as providing a theater and meeting hall. The combination of town hall and theater was common at the turn of the 20th century, but few municipal buildings were constructed with such broad-based community support or with such an emphasis on the role of the arts in civic improvements. Construction was truly a home-grown effort, sparked by

the Old Saybrook Musical and Dramatic Club—which contributed the land and \$1,332.50 toward construction costs—and spearheaded by leading citizens. Designed by New London architect James Sweeney, the building is a fine example of the Colonial Revival style. It is currently being renovated as the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center. 🌿

The architectural design of the Schlaraffia Burg wedded the building's function with its form: a castellated building to compliment the medieval-inspired traditions of the Schlaraffia.



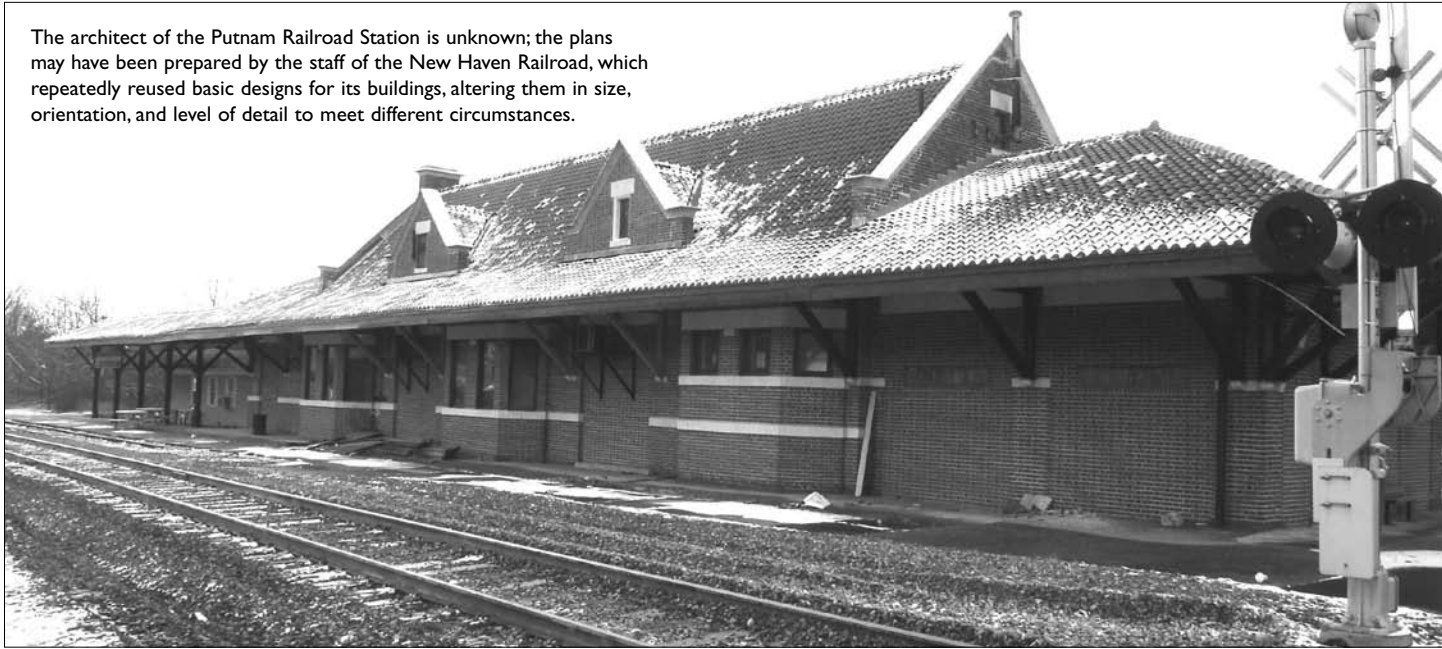
Old Saybrook's former Town Hall and Theater, with its monumental portico supported by two pairs to two-story-tall Doric columns, is still an imposing presence on the town's Main Street.

Kate Ohio



C. Wigen

The architect of the Putnam Railroad Station is unknown; the plans may have been prepared by the staff of the New Haven Railroad, which repeatedly reused basic designs for its buildings, altering them in size, orientation, and level of detail to meet different circumstances.



**The Putnam Railroad Station** recalls the importance of rail transportation in making Putnam into a city and connecting the community with the larger world. It was the coming of the Norwich and Worcester Railroad in 1840 that transformed Putnam from a series of discontinuous mill villages to a single settlement with its own character. The addition of a second railroad in 1870, the Boston-to-New York "Air Line," made Putnam into a

rail junction, and an even busier place. The present station was built in 1905-1907 as a civic improvement project, creating not only a new and more functional passenger depot, but also re-routing streets, widening a key railroad underpass, and enlarging the local railway express facilities. The station also embodies several key characteristics of early 20th-century architecture, such as its Mediterranean Revival Spanish-tile roof and its Tudor/Elizabethan Revival

patterned brickwork, leaded windows and terra-cotta gable coping. It remains one of downtown Putnam's most distinguished turn-of-the-century buildings. 🌻  
—Bruce Clouette


*"I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future."*

*John F. Kennedy - October 26, 1963*

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**New Haven.**

Fire devastated a block in the Ninth Square National Register district on December 12.

The fire began on Center Street, in a building housing the Brass Monkey nightclub, and spread to four other neighboring buildings. The most prominent was the former S. S. Kresge store, an L-shaped structure facing both Church and Chapel streets. The city hopes that the Church Street facade can be saved, but as CPN goes to print it is not sure that the owner is willing to do so.

The fire represents a setback in the Ninth Square district, where revitalization has been steadily progressing for many years. McCormack Baron Inc., a St. Louis developer, converted a number of the district's buildings to apartments in the 1990s, although street-level commercial spaces have been slower to fill in. In more recent years, additional buildings have been redeveloped as condominiums (see CPN, November/December 2004). Two of the condo buildings were evacuated during the fire, but suffered no serious damage.

Understandably, the City's main concern is clearing the mess and helping the displaced merchants, but the long-term health of the shopping district will be helped by sympathetic infill building and uses.

In the meantime, there was continued activity in the district as just a block away, Becker & Becker Associates were breaking ground for a new mixed-use development on the Shartenberg Block, a parcel that had stood vacant since being cleared under Urban Renewal in 1976. 🌱



The Kresge Building in New Haven, damaged by fire in December.

**Westport.**

The town Historic District Commission (HDC) has completed restoration of a town-owned building to provide affordable housing for municipal employees and demonstrate good preservation practices.

The Emily McLaury house, located at 99 Myrtle Avenue, was purchased by the town of Westport in 1972 for the purpose of expanding the municipal parking lot behind it. Since that time, the town has rented the house. By 2005, however, increased appreciation for the house's architectural character, along with the first selectman's desire to provide affordable housing, especially for emergency responders, prompted the move to preserve the structure.

Charles E. Cutler, one of Westport's most prominent architects, designed the modest dwelling in the early 1920s for his wife's cousin, Emily McLaury. Executed in the Colonial Revival style the house retains nearly all of its important original features. It was designated as a Local Historic Landmark in 2005 and is also listed in the State Register of Historic Places. Cutler's daughter served on the restoration committee. She provided historic photos that

allowed recreation of missing elements such as the porch benches.

Funding for the \$268,000 restoration has come from the town funds, and HDC chair Morley Boyd reported in November that the project was expected to come in just under budget.

"From a historic district commission standpoint it's really been a boon," says Boyd. "It's in a very high visibility location, with a big sign saying 'Restoration in progress.'" In addition to providing needed housing, the project has helped the HDC demonstrate the benefits of preservation to developers, builders and the public. Boyd says that it has inspired some local builders to reconsider reusing rather than demolishing historic houses—a near-miraculous result in a town where a local affairs website features the "Teardown of the Day".

Boyd concludes, "It's given us a certain credibility that we wouldn't have had." 🌱

*For more information and more photos, visit [www.westportct.gov/government/boards/mclauryhouse.htm](http://www.westportct.gov/government/boards/mclauryhouse.htm). The "Teardown of the Day" can be found at [www.westportnow.com](http://www.westportnow.com).*

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**Colt Amory, Hartford (2001).**

On December 5, the Landmarks Committee of the National Park Advisory Board voted unanimously to designate Coltsville as a National Historic Landmark. This is not the final step, but it was the important one, and the remaining steps are expected to follow automatically. The vote will be approved by the full Advisory Board at its next meeting, and then the Secretary of the Interior will make a formal designation. This process could take six months, but worries regarding Landmark designation are now over.

Just over a year earlier, the Landmarks Committee had turned down the site for listing, on the grounds that conversion of the factory buildings to apartment and office uses would damage the site's historic integrity (see CPN, November/December 2006).

Two months after the Landmark Committee's vote, the National Park Service agreed to reconsider the nomina-

tion. Connecticut preservationists revised the nomination to address the issue of historic integrity. They also expanded the area being considered to include not only the factory buildings, but also the former workers' housing on Huyshope and Curcombe Streets, Colt Park, the buildings at the Church of the Good Shepherd, and the Colt houses on Wethersfield Avenue (Armsmead, Samuel and Elizabeth Colt's mansion, is already a NHL in its own right).

A leader in the effort was Representative John Larson (D-1st District). In August he said, "Recognizing Coltsville's heritage and the role of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt in shaping Hartford and revolutionizing American business will be an important step in revitalizing the city. The whole community, including federal, state, and local government officials have worked together to make great improvements to the application for National Historic Landmark status. I will continue to work closely with everyone gathered tonight to see this project through

to its successful completion."

The conversion, by Robert MacFarlane of Homes for America Holdings, is one of Hartford's most prominent redevelopment projects, slowly progressing despite numerous difficulties and setbacks. Rebekah MacFarlane, of Homes for America Holdings, said that although NHL status might bring some money to the project, the recognition was more important. Landmark designation is also seen as a step in the process of creating a national park at Coltsville.

Historian Bruce Clouette, who co-authored the National Register nomination for the Colt complex in the 1970s and collaborated on the NHL nomination, commented, "My hope is that this will now be the first in a series of positive outcomes, as we look forward to continuing the process for National Park Service participation at the site and as we wish the MacFarlanes well as they navigate through these difficult economic times." 🌿

Westport Historic District Commission



Restoration of the Emily McLaury house in Westport included repairs to historic windows and replication of the original shutters.



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what could and couldn't be done to the house. It contains language about preserving the house's "historical, architectural, and cultural qualities"—which could be interpreted as referring to actual historic material—and also about preserving its "appearance"—which doesn't necessarily require preserving historic building materials. Preservationists, focused on the first phrase, have decried the loss of so much historic material. The developer and mayor, concentrating on the second, emphasize the preservation of what the public sees.

Further, the document seems to contradict itself about what specific alterations are to be permitted. On one hand, "the exterior location of windows, doors, porches, chimneys and rooflines may be altered, moved, removed or otherwise changed." On the other, "the exterior architectural features of the existing structure shall remain as closely as possible to the present configuration."

Another problem is that enforcement of the easement is put into the hands of the mayor. While the current mayor, James Richetelli, is interested in historic preservation, there is no guarantee that his successors will share that interest, much less that he or they will have any expertise in dealing with historic properties.

When asked in an interview, Richetelli says no one ever thought to include the Historic District Commission even in an advisory role. In fact, an alternative to an easement would have been to designate the property a local historic property under the jurisdiction of the HDC, without creating the new mechanism of an easement. Again, the mayor says the city never thought of this possibility.

According to Richetelli, the city's efforts to craft an effective agreement were limited by the difficulty of negotiating with the owners, who had no attachment to the house and merely wanted to sell the property as quickly as possible, for as much money as possible. "We cut the best deal that we could to stop demolition," Richetelli said. "If we had pushed harder, the house would have been demolished."

While the agreement specifically allows the house to be moved, what has happened is actually something different: the building has been taken entirely apart. Some

parts have reportedly been saved, but a vast amount has been disposed of, including plaster, lath, and perhaps interior trim. Is this demolition or disassembly for eventual re-assembly?

Richetelli insists that it is disassembly, not demolition, citing a letter written in August on behalf of Westwoods by Grosso Custom Builders LLC, of Stratford and saying, "...we intend to dismantle the house located at 72 Old Field Lane. A new house will be built on the property using the post and beam structure, and other various items from the dismantled house, and as per the guidelines set forth in the Historic Preservation Covenant..." The mayor justifies the disassembly on the grounds that extensive rot and mold made it impossible to move the structure intact.

The preservationists insist that what has happened is demolition. Platt says that, while observing the process, he noted random piles of building materials, not the neat stacks required for reassembly. None of the framing members appeared to be marked so that builders would know how they fit together. "This isn't going to be the Merwin house," he argues. "It's going to be an entirely new house with a few old beams stuck on for atmosphere."

Demolition or disassembly? What seems like a semantic squabble actually has deeper meaning for preservationists. Connecticut state law regulates demolition more closely than disassembly; there are requirements that hazardous materials be removed and utilities be cut off. There are requirements for licensing, to ensure workers' safety by

requiring that only qualified contractors may demolish buildings. However, there is no licensing requirement for contractors disassembling historic buildings for reassembly.

In addition, towns can enact waiting periods for the demolition of historic buildings, to allow consideration of alternatives. Milford has such a delay ordinance, which mandates a 45-day waiting period before demolishing any structure constructed before 1902, unless the both the building inspector and the city historian waive the delay. The delay was never invoked for the Merwin house, and Platt was never informed of the pending demolition, because officials judged that no demolition was taking place.

A basic problem is that Connecticut law never defines what is meant by 'demolition.' This lack has led to numerous tales of developers who left only a few sticks of an old house standing in order to circumvent stiffer regulations on new construction, and it could conceivably offer unscrupulous developers a way around preservation laws.

Dismantling a building entails as much risk of injury as demolishing one, so it seems logical that a permit ought to be required in either case. Similarly, delay of demolition periods ought to apply to the dismantling of historic buildings, which always entails the loss of historic material, as well as of historic setting and context, not to mention the possibility that the promised reconstruction could never take place. The Connecticut Trust is exploring the possibility of working with legislators to correct this lack.

The sorest point of the Merwin house's story has been the lack of involvement by

*continued on page 9*



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## Delay of Demolition Ordinances: Suggestions from North of the Border.

"Delay of demolition ordinances provide a window of opportunity, not a guarantee of preservation," the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Christopher Skelly told attendees at a Connecticut Trust Preservation Organizations Roundtable on November 9. Skelly, Director of Local Government Programs for the Commission, offered basic advice on making delay of demolition ordinances as effective as possible.

### What triggers the delay?

Skelly described three methods of determining what buildings are covered by the delay. The first, and Skelly's preferred method, is **age based**, that is, it applies to any building over a set age, provided the building is also found to be significant. This system is simple, particularly if the town doesn't have a thorough survey of its historic resources, although determining a building's age isn't always easy.

The second method is by **category**, such as State Register, National Register, or Historic

Resources Inventory. This provides a clear list of buildings, but Skelly discourages it, as he finds it useful to be able to claim that surveys aren't regulatory tools, so that property owners will be more willing to cooperate with surveying. Further, surveys aren't always complete, nor does inclusion in a survey necessarily mean that a building is significant.

The third method is **list-based**—simply drawing up a list of street addresses. As with the category-based system, it provides a clear list of what is covered, but there should be a provision for adding buildings to the list.

### Other provisions

Skelly encouraged the inclusion of a provision for *lifting the delay* if the local historical commission determines that the building is not significant or that there is no realistic hope of preservation.

He also recommended stiff *penalties* for demolishing a building before the delay period expires, such as: daily fines until the demolished portion

of a building is reconstructed (Skelly knows of no town that has imposed this penalty under a delay of demolition ordinance, but it has been used in local historic districts) or a "poisoned ground" provision, which forbids new construction for a set period, such as 2 years.

More than anything else, Skelly emphasized that a **successful of delay of demolition ordinance depends on the willingness of someone in the community to use the delay period to work to find a viable alternative**. Otherwise, the delay is simply a delay, and not an opportunity for preservation.

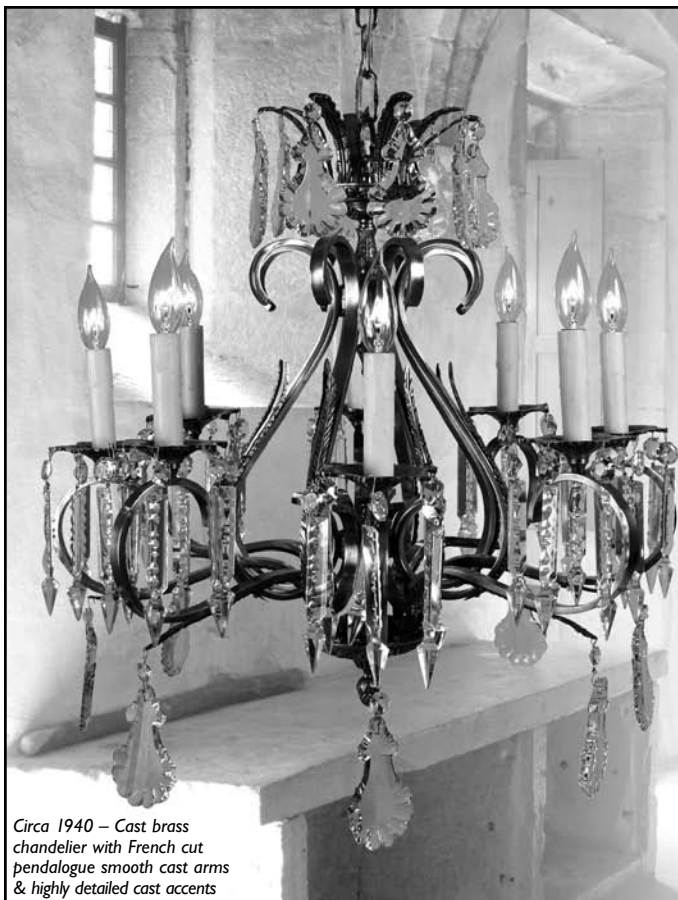
*The Connecticut Trust is working on a sample delay of demolition ordinance, based on its own research and on Skelly's advice. For more information, call the Trust at (203) 562-6312.*

Milford preservationists. While it may be a simple oversight, this lack smacks of a deliberate effort to exclude them from the process. Richetelli has told newspapers that he knew from the start of the developer's intention to dismantle the Merwin house, but the preservation community never got the message.

Whatever the reason, the result has been unfortunate. Had preservationists been involved, they might have been able to draw on additional resources to strengthen and clarify the easement, or to suggest the alternative of local historic property status. They might have been able to evaluate the

house's structural integrity and provide leads to experienced restorers who could reinforce the structure without taking it apart. And their involvement would certainly have forestalled the public rancor and the loss of trust that have besmirched Milford's real accomplishments. 🌿

—Christopher Wigren



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## More Exciting Discoveries at the Venture Smith Archaeology Site: A Window into the Life of an 18th-Century African Prince, Ex-captive, and Free African American Merchant-Farmer

By Lucianne Lavin, Ph.D.

On a gently sloping hillside above the Salmon River in Haddam Neck lie the unassuming stone ruins of the Venture Smith archaeology site. The average hiker might dismiss the stonework and depressions as talus deposits and tree throws. Nothing could be more mundane and uninspiring. Or could it? Things are not always what they seem, for in this case those cultural features helped uncover a very inspiring story of one man's endurance, resolve, and courage in the painfully restrictive and racist world of 18th century New England.

It is the story of Broteer Furro/Venture Smith (ca. 1729-1805), the eldest son of a West African prince who was kidnapped and sold into slavery when he was about 6 or 9 years old. In 1738 he was bought by Robertson Mumsford, the steward on a slave ship out of Rhode Island, for four gallons of rum and a piece of calico. Mumford changed Broteer's name to Venture and brought him to toil at his family estate on Fishers Island. Venture was sold or pawned several times. After many hardships and much hard labor, he eventually saved enough money to buy his freedom in 1765. Venture the free man was 36 years old; he had been a slave for about 30 years.

For the next ten years Venture toiled to buy the freedom of his wife Meg and their three children; he then moved to the Connecticut Valley and in 1775 bought ten acres of land on Haddam Neck. By 1798, Venture's homestead had grown to over 100 acres with three houses. We know this because Venture dictated his autobiography to a local white schoolteacher, who published it in that year as *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa: But resident above sixty years in the United State of America. Related by Himself*. In the book, Venture credits his success to frugality and a strong work ethic.

The *Narrative* touches lightly on Venture's economic endeavors to win his family's freedom and provide for them in Haddam Neck. One sentence mentions a "farm", and two sentences report his involvement in "fishing and trafficking business" possessing "of boats, canoes, and sail vessels, not less than twenty."

Elizabeth Malloy, Director of the Haddam Historical Society, introduced the Connecticut Trust's readers to Venture Smith in her article, "Archaeology and Preservation at Haddam Neck" (see CPN, May/June 2006). In it she discussed some of the initial findings of excavations directed by Dr. Marc Banks and myself. That archaeological project was completed in 2007. This article summarizes some of our findings. They show how archaeology can support and add to what we learn from written records.

The archaeological finds confirm the vague references to farming and boats in Venture's *Narrative* and provide previously unknown information on his daily life, economic status, and moral standards. More than 49,000 artifacts and at least eight or nine structures including three houses, a blacksmith shop, a wharf, and a "pull in" for boats were discovered. Some artifacts represent architectural remnants and everyday domestic activities such as window glass, nails, hardware and padlock, broken dish and cup fragments, vessel glass, a bone knife handle, metal cutlery, and food remains. Interestingly, no liquor bottles or smoking pipes were found that date to Venture's time, suggesting that he neither drank nor smoked.

Other artifacts represent clothing, weaponry, and recreational activities, such as metal and bone buttons, an early 19th century pistol, and mouth harps. Some indicate farming: ox and horse shoes and the remains of a barn complex with agricultural tool fragments.

Several hand-made nails were identified by the staff of the Mystic Seaport Museum as a special type used for building small boats. A boat caulking iron, boat-related hardware, and lead baling seals for shipping goods were also recovered. These artifacts and the "pull in" support Venture's statement that he was a mariner, and they show that he repaired and possibly built his own vessels. Some of the metalwork was probably accomplished in the adjacent blacksmith shop.

In effect, these archaeological remains symbolize maritime activities that provided the cash income to free and sustain



Clinch nails from the Venture Smith site, used in small boats restored by Douglas Currie of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum.

Marc Banks

Venture's family in a race- and class-conscious world and help win the respect of his white neighbors, many of whom eulogized the man in a later edition of his *Narrative* published in 1896.

Venture died on Sept. 19, 1805, at 77 years of age and was buried in the First Church cemetery in East Haddam, even though he was not a church member. His tombstone was made by a professional stone cutter; it is unique in that the "cherub" at its top displays Negroid features. This and other artistic attributes symbolize his high standing in local white society. Every year on September 19th, the East Haddam Historical Society and The First Church Society commemorate Venture with a eulogy, presentations by historians and archaeologists, and the placing of a wreath on the grave.

Venture Smith's story has been told in books, several international conferences, poems by the State Poet Laureate Marilyn Nelson, a school curriculum, and, most recently, the BBC's 2007 film "A Slave's Story". Venture Smith has become an international hero and role model for everyone. 🌿

For more information, see Lucianne Lavin and Marc Banks, "Venture's Nails," *archaeology*, May/June, 2007, page 72.

Lucianne Lavin is the Director of Research & Collections at the Institute for American Indian Studies, a museum and educational and research center in Washington, Connecticut. This article was adapted from one that appeared in the Institute's 2007 Newsletter, *The Birdstone*, with the permission of its Executive Director.

# Trust Unveils Grants for Historic Barns

In the past two years, the Connecticut Trust has surveyed almost 900 barns across the state. This survey has yielded a wealth of information about Connecticut's agricultural history and buildings, but it has also highlighted the threats that face many historic barns and related structures (see "The Most Important Threatened Historic Places," CPN, September/October 2006).

In December the Trust took a step toward helping these endangered buildings when the Board of Trustees approved a new grant program dedicated to historic barns. This program will allow the Trust to help owners evaluate buildings for structural integrity, for historic significance and for feasible uses other than agricultural. The goal is to distribute at least \$25,000 in grants by June 30. The grants will be funded through the Connecticut General Assembly, the Connecticut Humanities Council and the Commission on Culture and Tourism.

The grants will be offered to non-profit and municipal barn owners, as well as to private owners—a sector for which little, if any, help is currently available. Applicants should be able to demonstrate community-level significance, support from a local historical organization or municipality or from a local agricultural group, and a public benefit from the grant.

The Trust's barns grants can be used for assessments of historic integrity and structural conditions, nominations to the National Register, evaluation of adaptive use opportunities, following Donovan Rypkema's *Feasibility Assessment Manual for Re-using Historic Properties* (see page 3), or any combination of these options. The maximum grant is \$8,000, with a cash match required under some circumstances.

In addition to the new grants program, the Trust is continuing a number of other barn-related activities through the winter and spring of 2008. One goal is to add 800 more listings to the inventory of historic barns by the end of June. Two interns, Melissa Antonelli, of Roger Williams University, and Ryan Bova, from Central Connecticut State University, will perform much of this work, assisted by volunteer researcher Charlotte Hitchcock, of New Haven. At the same time, the team will double-check listings already posted on the



T. Levine

Trust's web site for historic barns, [www.connecticutbarns.org](http://www.connecticutbarns.org), for accuracy and completeness.

To add even more barns to the survey, Preservation Services officer Todd Levine plans to offer at least four barn survey training sessions for local preservationists during the winter and spring. Already scheduled are sessions in South Windsor, on January 10, and in Mansfield, on February 21. Finally, in order to share its new-found information about barns and barn preservation with the public, the Trust is working to expand [www.connecticutbarns.org](http://www.connecticutbarns.org) and exploring the possibility of publishing a book on Connecticut barns. 🌿

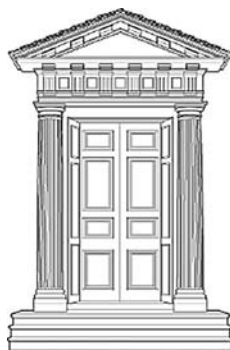
For more information on Barn Grants or other historic barns initiative programs, visit [www.cttrust.org](http://www.cttrust.org) or [www.connecticutbarns.org](http://www.connecticutbarns.org).

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# Technical Assistance Grants Fund Projects across Connecticut

The Connecticut Trust awarded \$198,216 in Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants to non-profit organizations and municipalities from across the state in October.

The grants are part of a collaborative historic preservation technical assistance program of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, with funding from the Connecticut General Assembly, the Connecticut Humanities Council and the Commission on Culture and Tourism. They support efforts that help communities plan for the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings and places.

G. Farmer



Falling plaster sparked preservation discussions at Center Church in Hartford.

**Burlington Historical Society Burlington: designs for sympathetic addition to the Brown-Elton Tavern, \$7,900.** The addition will house offices and bathrooms, allowing restoration of additional spaces in the tavern itself to their original appearance. The tavern is listed on the National Register.

**Canton Historical Society, Canton: preservation and renovation plan for the Canton Historical Society Museum, \$13,850.** Renovation will make the museum, originally part of the Collins axe company, more visible and improve its accessibility. The building is part of the Collinsville National Register district.

**Stanley-Whitman house, Farmington: updated historic structure report, \$7,000.** Updates will include a maintenance plan for this National Historic Landmark, dendrochronology (see CPN, March/April 2006) to determine more accurately the construction date, and a symposium to publicize the results.

**Historical Society for the Town of Greenwich: local historic district study for the Sachem Road area of Cos Cob, \$2,800.** Formation of a local historic district is seen as a way to preserve the architectural and historic character of this neighborhood.

**Hamden Historical Society, Hamden: State Register and State Archeological Preserve nominations for Jepp's Brook Mill site, \$3,361.** This historic industrial site once included a grain mill, two saw mills, and a distillery.

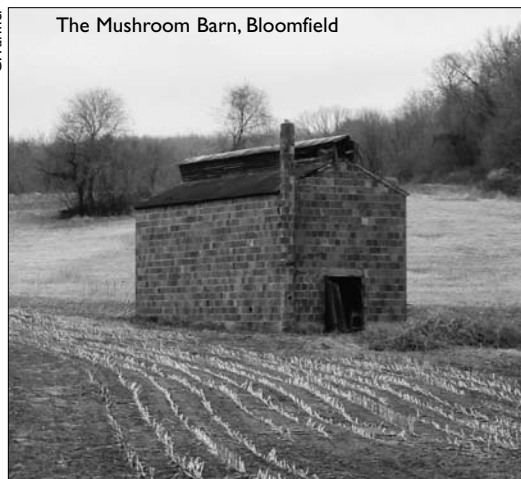
**First Church of Christ, Hartford: capital needs assessment, \$8,000.** This study will allow the congregation to create an appropriate maintenance plan for its meeting house, listed on the National Register, and parish house.

**Hartford Preservation Alliance, Hartford: training workshops, \$2,000.** Six workshops will help building owners and contractors comply with Hartford's new preservation ordinance, which protects more than 4,000 buildings.

**Milford Historical Society, Milford: historic structures report and restoration plan, \$7,500.** The society hopes to understand better its three museum houses—the Eels-Stowe house (listed on the National Register), the Clark-Stockade house, and the Bryan-Downs house—and plan for their maintenance.

**Westville Village Renaissance Alliance, New Haven: restoration plans for the Miles Elezar Hotchkiss house, \$25,000.** WRA bought this abandoned Greek Revival structure to save it from demolition and hopes to redevelop it for community and educational activities.

G. Farmer



The Mushroom Barn, Bloomfield

**Connecticut 4-H Development Fund Inc., Bloomfield: preservation plan for the "Mushroom Barn," \$4,000.** The Fund wants to study the history of this unusual agricultural building and explore adaptive use, including possible educational programs.

**Town of Bolton: preservation and restoration plan for the Heritage Farm House and Barn, \$10,000.** Recommendations for repairs, suggestions for adaptive use, and an archeological study are planned for this farm, listed on the National Register and designated a State Archeological Preserve.

**Area Cooperative Educational Services, New Haven: preservation plan for the Little Theatre on Lincoln Street, \$25,000.** Plans for this theater, listed on the National Register, include updated systems and production technology, improved accessibility, and a sympathetic addition.

**New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven: strategic plan, \$6,000.** The Preservation Trust will hire a consultant to facilitate strategic planning.

**Connecticut College, New London: historic structure report and National Register nomination for the Steel House, \$7,000.** The college plans to develop a stabilization plan for this rare prefabricated house erected in 1933 and explore possibilities for adaptive use.

**New London County Historical Society, New London: preservation plan for the Shaw Mansion, \$7,500.** The society plans to create an accessible bathroom and classroom and find ways to improve environmental conditions in its artifact storage spaces.

**Town of New Milford: structural evaluation and restoration plan for the Larson barn and outbuildings, \$9,000.** The town is studying ways to use this historic barn and other farm buildings preserved when a high school was built on the property.

**Norwalk Preservation Trust, Norwalk: preservation web portal, \$3,105.** A dynamic, interactive website will connect the general public with the local preservation community.

**Norwich Historical Society, Norwich: historic neighborhoods presentation, \$6,000.** The presentation, on the character, architecture and history of Norwich neighborhoods, is seen as a way to build community pride and promote preservation.

**Roxbury Historic District Commission, Roxbury: National Register nomination for the Roxbury railroad station, \$3,000.** The nomination will document the history of the station and surrounding buildings and encourage appropriate new use.

**Christ Church Episcopal, Sharon: evaluation of exterior brick, \$7,200.** A specialist will be hired to investigate the causes of deteriorating locally-made bricks at the church and other buildings in Sharon, and to recommend solutions.

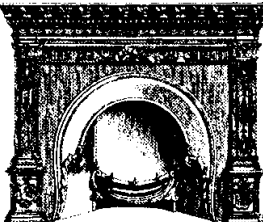
**Sherman Library Association, Sherman: expansion plans, \$10,000.** The design will link the library with an unused barn, which will be adapted as a meeting space. The

Library is a contributing resource in the Sherman National Register district.

**Wethersfield Historical Society, Wethersfield: historic structure report and preservation plan for the Captain James Francis house, \$20,000.** Careful study will help the society restore and interpret this house, a contributing resource to the Wethersfield National Register district.

**Woodbridge Conservation Commission, Woodbridge: preservation and restoration plan for the Massaro farm, \$3,000.** The commission plans to restore the farmhouse and barn on this town-owned property as a working community-supported farm.

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## LEGAL NOTICE

### Historic and Archaeological Resource Services Request for Letters of Interest

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (Department) is seeking to engage a cultural resource consulting firm for historic and archaeological resource services on a "task order" basis.

The services to be performed by the selected firm shall include archaeological investigations and historic documentation studies for transportation projects in accordance with State and Federal regulations. The firm selected for this assignment will be required to have archaeological laboratory capabilities in house.

The scope and fee for each task under the agreement will be negotiated separately. The agreement period will be for three years, with up to twelve tasks anticipated. The agreement may be extended for a period not to exceed one year to complete work assigned during the previous three years only.

If your firm desires to be considered for this assignment, your submittal should consist of a one-page letter of interest and Department Form CSO 255 with a maximum of five resumes. One of the resumes must be that of the proposed Project Manager in charge of the work, as well as the assurance that he/she will be available for work when required. **Four copies of the submittal are required, and they must be postmarked by Friday February 1, 2008, or, if hand delivered by 4:00 p.m. on that date.** (The CSO 255 form can be found online at [www.ct.gov/dot/consultant](http://www.ct.gov/dot/consultant).)

Included in the submittal must be a brief narrative summarizing your current workload, description of proposed staff, qualifications, and discipline experience and expertise in the following: (1) Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; (2) The Environmental Review Primer on Connecticut's Archaeological Resources; (3) The National and Connecticut Environmental Policy Acts; (4) Research and Data Gathering; (5) Phase I and 2. Archaeological Surveys; (6) Phase 3 Data Recovery Procedures; (7) Industrial Archaeology; (8) Historic American Buildings and Engineering Records as well as State Level Historic Documentation; (9) Laboratory Processing; (10) Report Writing; (11) Electronic Media Presentations; (12) Project Management; and (13) Familiarity with Department Policies Procedures and Standards.

You are advised that a disadvantaged business sub-consultant goal applies to this project. The goal will be

no less than 5 percent of the agreement value. Within the letter of interest submittal, you must include the designated certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) subconsultant(s) which you plan to use. The DBE subconsultant(s) must be currently certified by the Department. All firms are advised that the prime consultant must perform the major part of the work with employees of the firm. Subconsultants may be used to comply with DBE requirements or perform specialized work. Joint venturing assignments will not be allowed.

Do not send additional documentation other than what is requested. The Consultant Selection Panel may reject your submittal, and your firm may not be considered for this project if you provide additional documentation such as corporate brochures, background information, and histories.

Prior to the negotiation process, the selected firm will be required to have a Department-approved audit and affirmative action plan, as well as current corporate registration with the Secretary of State (partnerships excluded). The selected firm will also be required to maintain insurance coverage from a firm licensed to do business in the State of Connecticut. Proof of coverage must be submitted on Department Forms CON-32 and DOC-001 prior to the start of the negotiations process.

Please be advised, that as of August 1, 2007, the Office of Policy and Management has updated its contracting affidavits and certifications, as well as the timeline of when these documents are required to be completed, signed and returned. For the purposes of Form I (Gift and Campaign Contribution Certification), the planning date is defined as the date when the Commissioner granted approval to hire a consultant. For this project, the planning date is August 23, 2007. This is the date the selected firm must use when completing Form I at the time the agreement/contract is executed in accordance with the Connecticut General Statute (CGS) Section 4-252 and Executive Order No. 7C, paragraph 10. Please be advised that Form 5 (Consulting Agreement Affidavit), in its revised format (Rev. 08-01-07), must be completed and **one copy** should be submitted with your letter-of-interest package. Please do not staple or bind the affidavit in your submittal package. Forms I and 5 apply to all consulting agreements/contracts which have a total value to the State of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) or more in a calendar or fiscal year. Any consultant that does not make the certifications required under subsection (c) of CGS 4-252 or refuses to submit the affidavit required under subsection (b) of CGS 4a-81 shall be disqualified and ConnDOT shall award the agreement/contract to the

next highest ranked consultant or seek new submittals in accordance with subsection (d) of CGS 4-252 and subsection (d) of CGS 4a-81. Further information on these requirements can be obtained online at <http://www.ct.gov/opm> via the Ethics Affidavits link on the right-hand side of the web page.

For all State contracts, as defined in P.A. 07-1, having a value in a calendar year of \$50,000 or more or a combination or series of such agreements or contracts having a value of \$100,000 or more, the authorized signatory to this submission in response to the State's solicitation expressly acknowledges reviewing of the State Elections Enforcement Commission's (SEEC) notice advising state contractors of state campaign contribution and solicitation prohibitions, and will inform its principals of the contents of the notice. The SEEC Form 11 can be found online at [www.ct.gov/SEEC](http://www.ct.gov/SEEC) by clicking on the State Contractor Contribution Ban in the left hand column. SEEC Form 11 is hereby made a part of this solicitation.

Circumstances may require the rescheduling or cancellation of projects. Should this be necessary, the Department would be under no obligation to provide supplementary work for the firm selected for this assignment. The Department reserves the right to award assignments to other qualified firms.

The Department reserves the right to add additional projects of a similar nature for a separate selection should additional projects become available prior to the interview phase of the selection process.

All submittals shall be addressed as follows:

Ms. Cynthia Holden  
Transportation Assistant Planning Director  
Connecticut Department of Transportation  
2800 Berlin Turnpike  
P.O. Box 317546  
Newington, CT 06131-7546

**Hand delivered submittals must be brought to the Bureau of Policy and Planning, Room 2146 no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday February 1, 2008.**

All inquiries regarding this Request for Letters-of-Interest shall be directed to Ms. Simone Cristofori, of the Consultant Selection Office, at (860) 594-3017.

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C. Wigen



Hartford's Amos Bull house, home to the state historic preservation office from 1971 to 2007.

## Commission on Culture and Tourism Moves to New Quarters

As of December, the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism (CCT) has a new home. The Commission, created in 2003 to combine formerly separate offices of historic preservation, tourism, arts, and film, has long intended to bring all those offices together into a single spot, where they can better work together. That goal was realized when the offices all moved into new shared quarters in Constitution Plaza.

For the Commission's Historic Preservation and Museums Division, this move was bittersweet: since 1971 the Division and its predecessor, the Connecticut Historical Commission (CHC), had occupied the historic Amos Bull house on South Prospect Street, which the CHC bought and moved from Main Street to save it from demolition. The CHC's restoration and use of the house provided a living example of historic preservation at work. In 1992 the CHC expanded its offices into the adjacent Butler-McCook carriage house.

It's a shame that the state's historic preservation office will no longer be able visibly to practice what it preaches. However, we hope that the promise of increased agency visibility and interdisciplinary cooperation will be realized and make up for that loss.

The new mailing address for all CCT divisions is **1 Constitution Plaza, 2nd floor, Hartford, Connecticut 06103**. The Historic Preservation and Museum Division will have new telephone numbers; until they are announced, call the main number, (860) 256-2800. 🌸



## Don't let Connecticut's heritage become history.

Historic preservation contributes to quality of life, supports smart growth and community-based revitalization and allows for unrivaled adventures back in time.

The Commission on Culture & Tourism's Historic Preservation and Museum Division offers a range of grants to help Connecticut's municipalities and organizations save their heritage.

For grant applications and guidelines, visit [cultureandtourism.org](http://cultureandtourism.org) and begin forging a future with the past.



### Capital Improvement Grant Programs: Historic Restoration Fund

- Funds the rehabilitation of historic buildings by municipalities or non-profit organizations

### Cultural Capital Grants

- Fund new construction for arts, heritage and history organizations

### Historic Preservation Activities Grants

- Enable planning for the future of historic buildings

### Endangered Building Fund Grants

- Assists local communities in saving seriously threatened buildings

### Basic Operating Support for Historic Preservation Non-Profit Organizations

- Enhance and strengthen local historic preservation leadership

### Certified Local Government Grants

- Promote collaboration with towns and cities as full preservation partners

### Culture and Tourism Partnership Grants

- Encourage new partnerships among heritage, film, art and tourism organizations

### Special Initiative Grants

- Nurtures creative and unique projects that include many aspects of culture and tourism

### Marketing Assistance Program

- Creates new marketing partnerships between CCT and its constituents by supporting product development and promotional efforts



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# John Leeke's Historic HomeWorks™

## Decayed Wood Siding

*I just bought a farm house about 100 years old. The exterior hasn't been painted in a very long time. Several of the exterior boards have wood rot and will be replaced. Is there any special treatment for the house before I paint to eliminate any more wood rot from appearing in the future?*

Yes, look for patterns of paint peeling to bare wood and exterior wood decay that point to sources of moisture, and then eliminate or reduce the moisture. For example, if you find peeling paint or decayed wood siding in a vertical strip beneath a leaking roof gutter, fix the gutter so it catches the water before it spills down across the wall causing further decay.

## Paint Layer Colors

*I will be painting the exterior of my 1858 farmhouse. I am not sure of what colors to use. There are ads in the back of magazines to help people choose the best color for their house. Should I try them, or just pick a standard "historic color" from one of the paint manufacturers?*

Consider "cratering" for paint evidence. You could begin by checking out what colors your house has actually been at various times in the past. In a small area (perhaps 2" x 2") sand down through the several layers of paint. Use 100-grit sandpaper sand in a circular swirling motion, creating a very shallow crater, or concave depression. A series of concentric rings of color will be revealed representing the various past layers of paint. The crater's rim at the outer edge shows the existing top layer. Keep sanding away until the wood beneath is revealed at the lower center of the crater. Then smooth the crater's surface by sanding with successively finer grits: 200, 300, 400, perhaps even 600. Wet the surface with water and examine the layers with a magnifying glass. Even if the house has always been white, you may be able to count the layers. Crater for paint color evidence in several locations including siding, trim boards,

windows, cornices, etc. Some houses were painted different colors in different locations.

**CAUTION: SANDING OLD PAINT CREATES HAZARDOUS LEAD DUST.** As you do this sanding, keep the surface damp with a spray bottle containing water and a little detergent and use wet/dry sandpaper. Wipe up residue frequently with a paper towel. For each wipe fold the paper towel over to enclose the soiled paper and to expose fresh paper. Drop paper towels in a plastic bag. Double the bag and seal before disposal. Wash up and change your clothes before eating or smoking. Launder clothes separately from other clothes with TSP. Run the rinse cycle with TSP to clean out the washer.

*John Leeke is a preservation consultant who helps homeowners, contractors and architects understand and maintain their historic buildings. You can contact him at 26 Higgins Street, Portland, Maine 04103, (207)773-2306; or by email: [johnleeke@HistoricHomeWorks.com](mailto:johnleeke@HistoricHomeWorks.com); or log onto his website at: [www.HistoricHomeWorks.com](http://www.HistoricHomeWorks.com). Copyright © 2004 John Leeke*

