

PRESERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

C. Wigren



Foreground: The Andrews-Olney house, in Southington, is available for reuse.

Background: Outside the National Register district is sprawl.

Available for Preservation: The Andrews-Olney House in Southington

The Connecticut Trust is highlighting an opportunity to reuse a handsome Federal-era house in the heart of the Southington Center National Register district. The house was built about 1800 for Samuel Andrews, Sr., a veteran of the Revolutionary War. A later owner was Jesse Olney, an educator and author whose geography and atlas books rivaled Noah Webster's spelling book in sales during the 19th century. Olney also served in the state legislature and as state comptroller.

The house is constructed of orange-red brick finely laid in Flemish bond and sitting on a foundation of tooled brownstone. The house appears to have had an entry porch, now lost, but leaded quarter-round windows in the attic hint at the original Federal-style elegance. Currently owned by the Southington YMCA, it is available for redevelopment.

Each of Connecticut's 169 towns is defined by its historic character. Well-maintained buildings from the past are valuable assets that attract businesses and residents. Even more so, historic neighborhoods and districts provide broader settings for living

and working and relaxing that many people are drawn to. In any historic district, an underused building provides an opportunity to reinforce and expand the district's appeal.

Though they are little known, Southington has a remarkable collection of historic buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are four historic districts (Southington Center, Marion, Plantsville, and Meriden Avenue/Oakland Road), two thematic listings (Colonial houses and industrial complexes), and eight individually-listed buildings. Altogether, nearly 500 buildings and structures in Southington have achieved National Register designation. Some of them are well

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From the Executive Director

The Connecticut Trust lost a good friend and effective leader with the death of Chairman Emeritus C. Roderick O'Neil, in late July. Rory was a consummate preservationist with vision and clarity on meshing the past to the future, especially in Hartford, where he led the revitalization of the riverfront by creating Riverfront Recapture after the interstate and Constitution Plaza separated it from the city. When chairman of the Trust, Rory led the board through the major project to purchase and restore as our office the Eli Whitney Boarding House (1827) in Hamden. We continue to enjoy the legacy of his effort. We send our sympathy to his widow, Nancy, and their children.

Constitution Plaza was the subject of a lunchtime discussion at the Old State House in Hartford this summer. Deputy Director Christopher Wigren was a panelist for *Constitution Plaza: Did it Rip the Heart out of Hartford or Save the City?* Moderated by Diane Smith from Connecticut Network, historian Jason Scappaticci and Hartford Development Services Director Tom Deller joined Chris in a lively discussion that framed the unintended consequences of the Plaza's development against a vivid presentation of the historic but decayed riverfront neighborhood it replaced. Urban renewal is often seen as the destroyer of our historic urban neighborhoods but historian Scappaticci made a strong case for removal of many of the deteriorated and flood-prone build-

ings that dated from the 1800s. Whether Constitution Plaza itself was a good replacement was not resolved. Like many urban renewal projects, it was well intentioned but never fully built as intended.

In June, more than fifty people gathered in Thompson at the beautiful Greek Revival home of Donna Williams to hear Christopher Wigren describe the upcoming architectural guidebook, *Buildings of Connecticut*, which the Trust is creating for publication by the Society of Architectural Historians. After opening remarks by Helen Higgins and Senator Don Williams, the audience learned about the book project and the

role of the Connecticut Trust. The guests then strolled down the street through the historic town green to the Federal home of trustee Jane Vercelli for an array of refreshments and conversation. We're grateful to Jane and Donna for their hospitality.

—Helen Higgins



Senator Don Williams talks to guests in Thompson.

T. Grady

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 statewide organizations, it encourages, advocates and facilitates historic preservation throughout Connecticut.

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Upcoming Meetings of the Connecticut Historic Preservation Council

October 3, 2012, at 9:30 a.m.
November 7, 2012, at 9:30 a.m.

All meetings take place at the State Historic Preservation Office Department of Economic and Community Development Main Conference Room

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Book Notes

David Leff

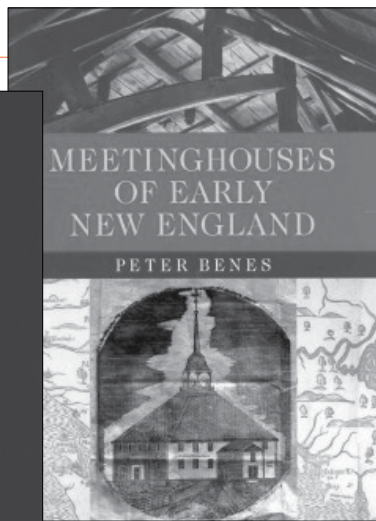
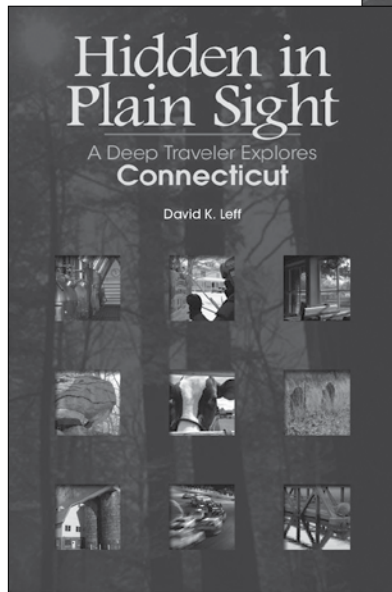
Hidden in Plain Sight: A Deep Traveler Explores Connecticut

Wesleyan University Press, 2012. 260 pages. \$24.95.

Deep traveling, according to David Leff, is "...purposeful 'power-looking' at our surroundings. It is about seeing in time as well as space, enabling us to weave fragments of the past into coherent stories that help explain the present or anticipate the future." A former deputy commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and a member of the Collinsville historic district commission, David Leff writes about the power of place and the intersection of the natural and the human-made.

In his deep travels, Leff teases new insights from places as well known as the Merritt Parkway, where the roadway's rises and dips heighten his awareness of Connecticut's geological underpinnings. He also discovers meaning in West Hartford street signs, where the names Glenn, Shepard, and Grissom recall the excitement of early space exploration. And he relishes such quirky sights as roadside rocks painted to look like eagles or frogs, or a mongrel Scottish/Norman/Moorish castle in Woodstock that "...owes more to Disney than history."

Leff's travels take him to drive-ins and cider mills, roadside springs and old-growth forests, ghost towns and highest points. An appendix provides a guide to many of the sites described in the book, but his real aim is to get readers out to look for themselves. 🌸



Peter Benes

Meetinghouses of Early New England

University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. 446 pages. \$49.95.

Among New England's most distinctive contributions to American architecture are its meeting houses, erected by the Puritans to serve both as houses of worship and also secular meeting places. These structures are popularly known as embodiments of the Puritans' belief that the Church was a gathering of people, not a building, and as symbols of American democratic traditions. Meeting houses flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries and then at the beginning of the 19th century were replaced by (or transformed into) single-function religious buildings characterized by long aisles and decorative steeples—churches.

Peter Benes, the director of the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, explores this popular image. While much stands up to inspection, he finds that the transformation of meeting house to church goes much farther back, to tensions between radical Puritan ideals on one hand and the allure of traditional Christian forms and practices on the other, beginning in the early 18th century.

Looking beyond architecture, Benes finds that the congregations that adopted more formal patterns of worship or new forms of governance were also the ones most likely borrow churchlike architectural elements from Anglicans.

A notable example is Wethersfield's meeting house, built in 1764. Its elaborate steeple, ornamented with arched windows, pinnacles, and urns, was patterned after that of Trinity Church, in Newport. Although other Congregationalist meeting houses had drawn ideas from Church of England buildings, none did so as openly as Wethersfield, according to Benes. Benes' insight adds to our appreciation of this magnificent building. 🌸



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Southington, cont'd from page 1

cared for and clearly treasured; others seem underappreciated, but they're *there*, and they're part of Southington's daily life. Together they give the town a distinct character as a place shaped by and living with its history.

The effects of National Register designation are apparent on North Main Street, a part of the Southington Center historic district. Heading out of the downtown, the street is lined with houses mostly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. The street is also a busy state route, and many of the houses have vinyl siding and big signs, but despite these shortcomings the row of historic buildings stretches for a half mile or more from the town green, and nearly every building is in active use. Beyond the boundary of the National Register district, the development pattern changes abruptly. A few historic buildings can still be found, but they're stranded in a sea of parking lots and commercial development—the landscape of sprawl.

Within the National Register historic district there's one small gap in the rhythm of the historic lineup. The Southington Community YMCA faces High Street, just outside the district, but a portion of its parking lot extends out to North Main Street, interrupting the steady line of historic buildings. The YMCA is a thriving community-based institution with a growing membership. Its leaders say it will need to expand soon, and that it needs more parking now.

Early this year, the YMCA bought the Andrews-Olney house (116-118 North Main St), plus a frame dwelling next to it (108-112 North Main), with plans to demolish them and expand its parking lot by 75 spaces. Both had previously been divided into apartments and had not been well maintained.

C.Wigren



Southington's North Main Street, part of a National Register district, has a long line of historic houses, all in active use.

Some local residents with an appreciation for history and architecture were concerned about the YMCA's plan to tear down the houses, particularly the Andrews-Olney house, and they called on the Connecticut Trust for guidance. Since May, Connecticut Circuit Rider Greg Farmer has been working with representatives of the YMCA, the Southington Historical Society, and local residents to explore ways of preserving at least the Andrews-Olney house, which is the more significant of the two buildings.

It soon became clear that what was at issue was not just the fate of one or two houses, but rather the character of the National Register district as a whole. Individual buildings in a National Register district are indeed important. Any resource listed as "contributing" to the significance of a National Register district has exactly the same official status as an individually

listed resource. The point of historic district listings is that a concentration of historic resources is itself an historic resource and has a value greater than the sum of its parts.

In the discussions about preserving the Andrews-Olney house, the YMCA had no particular use for the building, but an alternative was quickly presented. The Southington Historical Society stepped forward indicating an interest in partnering with the YMCA by leasing and rehabilitating the Andrews-Olney house. Preserving the historic building would reduce the impact of more parking on the historic district and allow the expansion of historical society programs.

To gauge the viability of the reuse plan, Mr. Farmer brought in architect William Crosskey, who drew up an alternative parking plan that used part of the Andrews-Olney property but left the house itself standing. The result would, depending on

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The Andrews-Olney house has fine Federal-style detailing.

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some of the details, expand parking by about 60 spaces, only 14-20 spaces fewer than the original plan.

Negotiations with the historical society continued into mid-August. At one point, the YMCA offered to sell the house, on a reduced lot, to the society for \$330,000. Then the talks broke down. When it was learned that the YMCA had obtained demolition permits for both houses, the Connecticut Trust filed for an injunction to prevent demolition.

Under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) any citizen can sue to prevent unreasonable destruction of historic resources. The State of Connecticut recently won a CEPA case in Wallingford, where the town wanted to demolish a National Register-listed house in order to expand the town hall parking lot (see CPN, May/June 2011). This case provided a strong precedent that gave the Trust hope of success in Southington.

However, the Environmental Protection Act can encourage preservation without anyone's setting foot in a courtroom. The very existence of the law can encourage property owners to consider possible solutions, saving everyone the expense and stress of a lawsuit. This is what happened in Southington. Encouraged by a judge to work out their differences, the YMCA and the Connecticut Trust agreed to leave the Andrews-Olney house standing for five months—until January 30, 2013. In that time, the Trust would attempt to find a new user who would either buy or lease the house from the YMCA and agree to renovate it.

In the meantime, the case has revealed opportunities for preservationists to help the Town of Southington take advantage of its historic resources more effectively. Southington's National Register properties (as well as other historic sites that could qualify for the Register) represent assets that the town could build on to enhance the quality of community life and to spur economic development. However, Southington has no framework in place to encourage and support the preservation and reuse of historic assets—no delay of demolition ordinance, no local historic district, no village district.

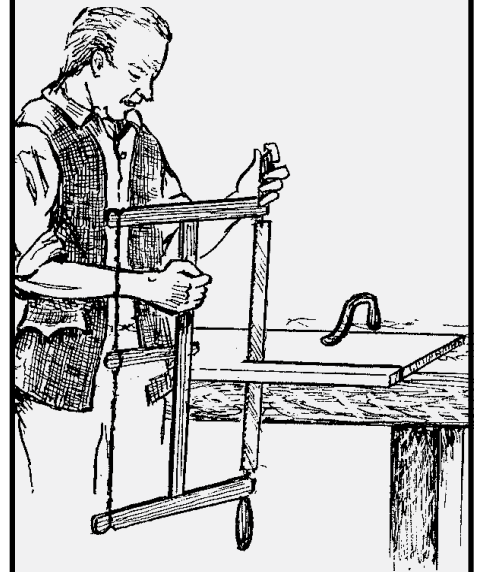
The Town is making a start on that right now, with the Gura Building, which is being studied for possible reuse by a local arts group, thanks to an Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant from the Connecticut Trust (notably, the YMCA is part of that arts group). Streetscape improvements in the downtown commercial area also have been credited with helping that area maintain its economic viability, but no matter how well they're designed, sidewalks and planters and handsome lights aren't much help if the buildings behind them are in poor condition.

Possible next steps include offering preservation workshops for town staff and other interested parties, adopting a delay of demolition ordinance, and considering village district(s) or local historic district(s) for Southington Center and other areas in town. The Connecticut Trust's Vibrant Communities Initiative is specifically designed for communities that want to more effectively take advantage of historic assets. Southington would seem to be an excellent candidate for this program.

Whatever happens with the Andrews-Olney house, this case offers Southington an opportunity to use the rich resources that it possesses—and suggests that other towns look at their own staffing, ordinances, and planning to make sure that they, too, are prepared to address underused buildings like the Andrews-Olney house, before they face destruction. 🌸

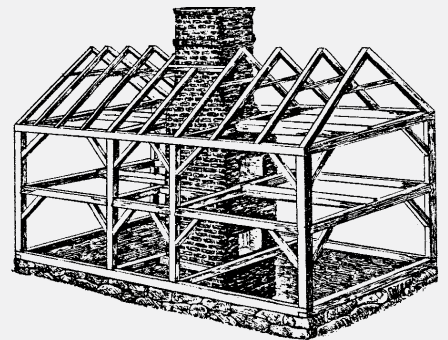
For more information on the Andrews-Olney house, call the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation at (203) 562-6312, or email contact@cttrust.org.

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Improving the New Haven Green

In July, Mayor John DeStefano called for improvements to make the New Haven green more “destination-friendly,” and the City brought in the firm Project for Public Spaces to run public workshops and create a conceptual plan in time for New Haven’s 375th anniversary, in April, 2013. Two workshops in July elicited a variety of suggestions such as better lighting, cafes, a playground, and a podium for soapbox speakers.

The green’s overall appearance has changed little since the early 19th century, when New Haven removed unsightly structures, planted elms, and built three stylish churches. One of the best-known public spaces in the country, the green is a National Historic Landmark. Residents give much credit for its preservation to the Committee of the Proprietors of Common and Undivided Lands (commonly known as the Proprietors), a private group that represents the heirs of the original shareholders in the New Haven Colony. Title to the green technically rests with these heirs, and as their representatives the Proprietors have final say on what happens to it. In the past, the group has blocked the building of an underground parking garage and created guidelines to prevent clutter and keep commercial activities off the green. They also work with community groups to oversee major projects, including the ongoing care of the green’s elm trees.

While there is always room for improvement—better lighting and seating, electri-



The Occupy protestors’ camp on the New Haven green, from September, 2011, to April, 2012, highlighted the green’s importance as a civic space, a key element of its historic character.

cal and water connections for public events, and more attractive paving, perhaps—the mayor’s call is most important as an opportunity to reinforce the green’s historic character by inspiring conversation about the meaning of the green and the difference between a green and a park.

New Haven might consult Hartford’s iQuilt plan, which proposes a broad system of improvements to improve linkages among that city’s downtown attractions

and public spaces, including Bushnell Park. It is notable that the first principle listed in the recommendations for the park is “Respect Park’s History.” This plan offers a larger vision and a recognition of historic character that were lacking in the New Haven workshops. 🌿

For more on the New Haven green, visit http://www.towngreens.com/DOCUMENTS/ig_newhaven_case.pdf. For Hartford’s iQuilt plan, visit www.iquiltplan.org.



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Changes for Wind Turbine and Cell Tower Approvals

Changes in the process for approving new cell towers and wind turbines in Connecticut have potential for better protecting historic resources. The proliferation of tall towers—for power lines, radio antennas, cell phones, WiFi, and wind turbines—has improved communications and emergency services and provided nonpolluting energy sources. But the towers have drawbacks as well, notably their impacts on historic and scenic areas.

Since these towers are public facilities, their approval is governed by the Connecticut Siting Council, a public board created to prevent narrow interests from blocking larger public needs and benefits. However, the council seems to approve the vast majority of applications and has been accused of bias in favor of the industry.

Last year, the Siting Council received applications for wind turbine farms in Colebrook and Prospect. When these proved controversial, the General Assembly imposed a moratorium on turbine approvals until the council issued clearer standards for wind farms, addressing such issues as setbacks, noise levels, and the scale and height of turbines. The council approved the Colebrook application (which had come in before the moratorium), even though the State Historic Preservation Office determined that it would have an adverse effect on a National Register property (see CPN, July/August 2011).

This summer, the Siting Council released its draft regulations. At a hearing and in written comments, citizens, municipalities and environmental organizations objected to specific provisions, particularly the setback requirement, which affects not only views but also sound and vibrations. The draft requires that turbines be set 1.1 times their height from any property lines. Comments have cited much more stringent setback standards in other states, such as Massachusetts and Wisconsin—up to ten times the turbines' height.

The public comment period ended on August 7. The council has until November 1 to make revisions and submit the regulations to a legislative review


committee, after which the committee will have 65 days to reject or approve the regulations or send them back for changes. If the committee does not act by that deadline, the regulations are deemed approved.

Towers for cell phones and WiFi present also can affect historic or scenic settings. This year, the General Assembly passed new legislation requiring developers to consult with towns 90 days before going to the Siting Council. This ensures that towns have information about proposed towers and gives them an opportunity to suggest other locations.


Rep. Patricia Widlitz (D-Branford, Guilford, a former Trustee of the Connecticut Trust), who co-sponsored the bill, said, "This new law will not only greatly improve our ability to influence the siting of cell towers, but will also encourage the use of the least obtrusive technology. It's an important step forward for the protection of our shoreline vistas."

Linda Roberts, the Siting Council's executive director, told newspapers that the new law largely reinforces what the council already does. In fact, the FCC has ultimate authority over the siting of telecommunications towers, and can override decisions by the council. But by formalizing the role of towns in reviewing applications, the law does broaden the opportunity for taking historic resources into account. 🌿

For more on the Connecticut Siting Council, visit <http://www.ct.gov/cs/site/default.asp>.



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Connecticut Sites Listed on the National Register

Four sites newly listed on the National Register of Historic Places point up the variety of Connecticut's historic built environment, from Colonial saltboxes to suburban neighborhoods, factories to schools. The following descriptions are excerpted from the nominations presented to the National Park Service.



Lucas Karmazinas

Art Deco sculpture ornaments the 1931 wing of the Kensington Grammar School/Jean E. Hooker High School, in Berlin.



Tod Bryant

The evenly-spaced girders framing the Enos Kellogg house are a feature rare in Connecticut but more commonly found in the Hudson River Valley.

The **Kensington Grammar School/Jean E. Hooker High School** played a key role in the development of Berlin's educational system. Constructed as the town's first centralized grammar, and then high, school, the facilities typify the way Connecticut towns reacted to expanding populations and shifting educational theories in the early 20th century. The construction of the Grammar School, in 1910, was a response to the condition of the town's strained district school system and to calls for a graded

system of schools. Similarly, the decision to build the town's first public high school, in 1931, came as public high school education became increasingly popular. Both buildings represent fine examples of public educational facilities typical of those found throughout Connecticut. 🌿

—Lucas Karmazinas

Plans to rehab the school for apartments were derailed by local opposition to a needed zoning change. The school is in poor shape and needs another use before it's too late.

The **Enos Kellogg house**, in Norwalk, is an outstanding example of a New England farmhouse that was designed and constructed in the saltbox form and contains many of the original architectural details. Constructed circa 1784 by Enos Kellogg, the house was owned by his direct descendants until 1917. Originally, the saltbox form with the sloping gable roof (said to resemble a wooden box that stored salt) reflected the expansion of a house over time; as a structure was expanded by add-

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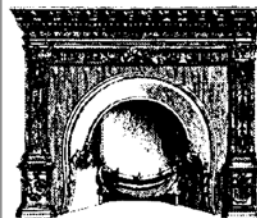
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In 1921 the *Norwalk Hour* wrote that the Le Roy Shirt Company factory, "...presents an appearance that is both dignified and substantial and that comports with the solidity of the company and the reputation of the product."



With its modest houses evenly spaced, the streetscape of the Titicus Hill historic district is typical of American residential development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

ing a leanto addition attached to the rear. In the instance of the Enos Kellogg House, the evidence indicates that the dwelling was constructed all at once using framing techniques that were current from the period 1775-1800. Aesthetically, the structure captures a moment in time when homeowners in rural Connecticut were in stylistic transition, still holding on to certain elements that they had long lived with, such as cased timbers, while easing into more modern elements such as plastered framing members. ❀

—*John Harrington*

The **Le Roy Shirt Company** is one of the few surviving buildings that tell the story of a once thriving industry in Norwalk. When Le Roy Shirt opened in the 1920s, Norwalk boasted 43 companies making shoes, garments, and hats, along with support companies producing, among other things, lace, tape and trimmings, paper boxes, labels, and rough hats. Taken together, this industry employed over half of Norwalk's entire industrial workforce in 1923. The factory is entirely unchanged from its time of construction and embodies the distinctive characteristics of a light manufacturing loft building of the period. Its load-bearing masonry construction was inexpensive but durable, and its large windows provided plenty of light for the employees inside to assemble shirts. The interior was laid out for efficient handling of raw materials, cutting sewing, finishing and shipping. It is an unchanged artifact of Norwalk's industrial past. ❀

—*Tod Bryant*

The **Titicus Hill historic district** in Ridgefield has long been known as a small industrial and agricultural area. The growth of Ridgefield as a seasonal retreat from New York City and the growth of local industries in town made the Titicus area ideal for residential development. The northern part of the district was subdivided in the early 20th century, when it had long been anticipated that a commuter rail spur would terminate there. The railroad terminus was never

constructed, but by 1916 the majority of the lots had been sold to Ridgefield residents who built modest houses. Most of them are executed in the Queen Anne style that is typically identified by irregular floor plans, varied exterior finishes, and asymmetrical rooflines. The district remains one of the largest contiguous groupings of late 19th and early 20th century residences in Ridgefield.



—*Philip Esser and Melanie Marks*

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Southeast Light, Block Island with Walter Sedovic Architects

The 67 foot tall SE light and keeper's quarters were constructed in 1875 for a cost of \$50,000 equipped with a first order Fresnel lens and illuminated with lard oil. The cast iron tower suffers from rust damage. Restoration will include liftoff of the 16 sided iron/glass lantern structure, recasting of corroded radial iron plates at both the watch and lantern levels using the original iron material, new cast fascia at the watch level, new railings and replacement of paint coatings.

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Hartford: Coltsville's Armory's East Armory building is getting a new roof, the first in more than 100 years. New windows are slated to follow, and then the building with the trademark blue dome will be ready for tenants to move in, a major milestone in the reuse of the National Historic Landmark armory.

Litchfield: The Town of Litchfield is looking at options for the former Bantam School, designed in 1956 by the pioneering Modernist architect Marcel Breuer. The building currently houses a post office, a court, and town offices, all of which are slated to move to new quarters soon. Selling the school is a possibility, and developers are interested. Any new plans should include reuse.

New Canaan: Developers knocked down the Jeliff Mill, just months after the structure was listed on the State Register. The building will provide an appropriate setting for the company, which presents itself on its website as "a curator of the finest historical design the world has to offer." The town's Historic Review Committee voted not to invoke the delay of demolition ordinance, incongruously saying that the mill had no historic significance.

National Register of Historic Places, 1985



Greenwich: Restoration Hardware will lease the former Greenwich Post Office (1917; NR). The New York Times recently interviewed CEO Gary Friedman who said that the gracious proportions of older buildings are more in line with the company's identity: "We think of ourselves not as retailers, but as curators."

Suffield: The Kent Memorial library reopened in May, after a renovation. Work included a new roof, repositioned circulation desk and children's area, and reconfiguration to make the building seem more open. In 2004 the library board proposed demolishing the 1974 building, by Warren Platner, but two referendums to approve a new building failed.

C. Wigren



• Suffield

• Litchfield

• Hartford

• Rocky Hill

• New Canaan

• Bridgeport

• Greenwich

C. Wigren



Bridgeport: General Electric completed demolition of its former Bridgeport plant, a process that took more than a year. Remington Arms built the mammoth factory during World War I to supply rifles for the Russian army. Despite urging by architects and preservationists, reuse never had a chance (see CPN, September/October 2010).

Rockville: Amerbelle Textiles, the last of the textile mills that made Rockville an industrial powerhouse, announced it would close at the end of August. New uses will be needed for the company's mill complex (1867 and 1868; NR).

C. Wigren



Willimantic: WB Properties has asked the Town to expand the range of uses permitted at the former Willimantic Thread Company property (1854ff.; NR). Several of the historic textile mills have been renovated for professional or light industrial activity, but mixed-use development would make the property more sustainable, the company says.

N. Harkrader



East Hampton: The Bevin Brothers Manufacturing Company is working to rebuild after fire destroyed its National Register-listed factory building in May. The company, founded in 1832, is the last survivor of East Hampton's defining bell-making industry.

John Lantz



Norwich: The United Congregational Church (1855; NR) rededicated its sanctuary in July, after a six-month renovation to strengthen failing roof truss that threatened the historic building's ceiling and walls. Grants from the Connecticut Trust, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Fellowship of Northeast Congregational Christian Churches helped fund the project.

• **Rockville**

• **Willimantic**

• **East Hampton**

• **Norwich**

• **East Lyme**

Bill Champagne



East Lyme: the Town is considering a proposal to buy the 17-acre Samuel Smith house (c.1685, 1735, 1812; NR) property for open space preservation. Community volunteers are working on a conditions assessment and maintenance plan for the house.

Jan Cunningham



Rocky Hill: A grant from the Federal Highway Administration will fund a new office and restroom building for the Glastonbury-Rocky Hill ferry. The state nearly closed down the historic ferry last summer as a cost-saving measure, but now is committed to extending its 357-year run.

C. Wigren

Bridgeport. Stabilization of the Freeman houses began in the summer as workers started to remove later additions to the houses. Built in 1848 for sisters Mary and Eliza Freeman, they are the only surviving structures from Little Liberia, Bridgeport's antebellum free-black community. The houses have long been severely deteriorated, leading the Trust to include list them among the Most Important Threatened Historic Places, in 1992 and 2007.

The Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community, Inc., which owns the houses, plans to restore them for historical and community uses. Plans include one unit of low-cost housing, offices for a community non-profit, and museum space to interpret life in Little Liberia during the sisters' lifetimes. The center will offer literacy programs, sponsor research into the history of blacks in Connecticut, and promote rebuilding housing on the site of a demolished project across the street.

"We're building an institution, not just a museum," says Maisa Tisdale, the Freeman Center's President and CEO. "People relate to what the Freeman houses symbolize—that striving for self-determination and liberty. People are willing to work hard to achieve that."

Removing the additions is the first step toward stabilizing the houses. "We call it



Dismantling additions on the Freeman houses, in Bridgeport, has revealed clues to the houses' history.

Jamila Moore Pewu, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California Davis, found a description of Little Liberia that appeared in 1854 in Frederick Douglass' Paper, a newspaper published by the abolitionist and social reformer. This discovery underscores Little Liberia's significance as a nationally-known community of free blacks before the Civil War.

As the letter, signed "Ethiop," reports, "The colored people of Bridgeport are in an improving condition many of them are doing well, owning and living in their

'pre-stabilizing," says Ms. Tisdale. "We're going one step at a time, peeling back the layers. That has given us a lot of information about the layout of the houses, and that will determine what we do next. These houses are such a rare resource—we want to take our time to do it right."

So far, explorations have turned up evidence suggesting that Mary Freeman enlarged her house shortly after its construction, perhaps to accommodate tenants or boarders. And demolition of a 20th-century storefront added to Eliza Freeman's house uncovered what appears to be a section of wall from the Duncan House, a hotel that catered to African-Americans.

In addition to work on the houses,

own snug and comfortable houses, and engaged in proper employments."

Writing from the Duncan House, "Ethiop" promotes Bridgeport as a resort for African-Americans. "At the fashionable watering places, I have mentioned the whites now rule and reign. In Bridgeport the blacks may reign. This, then, is the spot for respectable colored people. Let them never play the tail part anywhere, when they can play the head. This is not fashionable for whites; 'tis too near by; let it be so for blacks." 🌿

Mystic. Since 2008, Mystic Seaport has been restoring its flagship vessel, the *Charles W. Morgan*. Built in New Bedford in

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1841, the *Morgan* is the last wooden whaling sailing ship afloat, and a National Historic Landmark.

Wooden ships require constant maintenance and need major overhauls every twenty years or so, according to Mystic Seaport curator Matthew Stackpole. The *Morgan's* last restoration, between 1977 and 1984, involved reconstructing virtually everything visible above the waterline. The current restoration is the first to address the hull and keel, parts that have needed less attention since salt water actually acts as a preservative: while the *Morgan* is on her fourth deck, much of her planking is original, and her framing timbers have not seen the light of day since they were installed in 1841.

While much has survived, it will be



C. Wigren

Shipwrights attach planking to the *Morgan's* hull with wooden treenails.

still alive. They trained new workers, who have trained others, so that the shipyard represents a living tradition, rather than one that has been revived. The builders working on the *Morgan* include third-generation Seaport shipwrights.

Finding materials has been a challenge. The original planking, 3-1/2 inches thick and as much as 48 feet long, was old-growth timber from virgin forests. How to find such wood today? The Seaport began collecting supplies in the 1990s, with funding from a federal Save America's Treasures grant. The South Carolina Department of Transportation has offered timber from live oaks cut for road projects. Trees downed by Hurricane Katrina have been another resource. An amazing discovery was a cache of 19th-century live oak from the Navy shipyard in Charlestown, Massachusetts.

The goal of the restoration is not only to keep the *Morgan* afloat at her berth, but to make her fully seaworthy. The Seaport plans to take her on another voyage, beginning in May, 2014, to a number of her old haunts, starting with New London and then on to New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard, Provincetown, and Boston. 🌿

The Charles W. Morgan is open throughout restoration. Launching is scheduled for July 21, 2013. For more information, visit www.mysticseaport.org.

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necessary to replace much; shipyard director Quentin Snediker says that when work is complete, between 15 and 18 percent of the *Morgan* will be original material—a number that seems alarmingly low compared to guidelines for restoring buildings but which reflects the challenges of keeping a ship afloat. Nonetheless, the Seaport's goal is that the restoration be as authentic as possible. Extensive documentation accompanies every step of the process and the best materials are being used, along with traditional building techniques.

The skills preserved at the Seaport's restoration shipyard make this restoration possible. When the shipyard opened in the 1970s, the last old-time shipwrights were



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Redding. The First Church of Christ, Congregational, is leading an effort to rebuild the fence that lines part of the town green, in front of the Samuel Jarvis house, which serves as the church's parsonage, and on to the Old Town House. Although the present fence was only built in the 1970s, it reproduces an older design that has been part of the landscape since the 19th century, defining the edge of the public space and adding a touch of delight with its Victorian-style scrolled pickets.

The fence was falling apart, and the church considered replacing it with a longer-lasting plastic version, possibly in a style to match the Greek Revival Jarvis house. However, preservationists made the point that the existing fence was an important feature of the green, which lies in the Redding Center National Register district.

"History is not static, it changes over time, and the Victorian fence is a well-documented part of the history of the property," said Kathleen von Jena, the town historian

(and the Connecticut Trust's Membership and Office Manager). "It tells a visual story of the evolving history of the green."

In the end, as Mark Barber, church treasurer and head of the fence replacement committee, told the Redding Pilot, the church decided to replicate what was there, "to recreate the picture that people are used to seeing." To ensure that the new fence will last as long as possible, the plans call for using Western red cedar, instead of pine, and making sure that no wooden parts actually touch the ground. In addition, the church hopes to establish a dedicated fund for ongoing maintenance. Completion is expected by late September.



In Redding, the First Church of Christ, Congregational, is rebuilding an historic fence that frames the town green.

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design. One runs from the main gate past a gatehouse and carriage house to the entry court and on to the enclosed garden where it finished in a great semicircular pergola (recently demolished but its end pavilions survive).

The other axis begins atop the hill, where Platt proposed a swimming pool that never was built, and runs down through the entry court, the front door and hall, and out through a loggia to a wide terrace with views across the city. Loggias, terraces and porches ease the transition from indoors to out; the most interesting is the recessed porch above the front door, Platt's adaptation of an Italian feature to the English Georgian style of the house.

Everything is done in the restrained, almost austere, classicism typical of Platt's work. The critic Royal Cortissoz, describing Platt's domestic interiors, captured this quality: "He has the way of making a well-appointed room beautiful without causing you to notice any specific thing in it—is not that the quintessence of art in domestic architecture?" It's a perfect statement of aristocratic reticence. 🌿

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Industrial Aristocracy Maxwell Court, Rockville

Beginning in 1821, a string of textile mills grew up along the Hockanum River, eventually forming the city of Rockville and making it one of Connecticut's principal textile-producing powerhouses. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Maxwell family—first George Maxwell and then his sons William and Francis—came to dominate Rockville's textile mills. By 1906 they had merged four firms into a larger holding company, the Hockanum Mills Company.

The Maxwell brothers left an architectural mark on the city, building a library in

memory of their father as well as houses for themselves. Their architect was Charles Adams Platt, a relative of their fellow mill owners, the Cheney's of Manchester. Platt's designs brought a new level of architectural sophistication to Rockville. Unlike the self-made owner-operators of an earlier age, who lived close to their mills and their workers, the Maxwells presented themselves through their buildings as members of a new industrial aristocracy—urbane, elegant, and understated.

This image is best seen at Francis Maxwell's house, Maxwell Court, begun in

CONNECTICUT *Snapshots*



1901, which stands on a hillside overlooking the city. The property now belongs to the Rockville Elks Club, which has preserved the house as well as the basic structure of its gardens.

Platt was a landscape designer before he turned to architecture, and Maxwell Court clearly shows his interest in uniting house and garden in a coherent whole.

Two intersecting axes form the basis of the

continued on page 15

C. Wigren

