



# The Preservationist

January 2008

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Landmarks Archives



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## Leap Into the New Year!

New London Landmarks

**Annual Meeting ♦♦ February 28, 2008**

**Union Station 4:00 - 7:00 pm**

**View Plans for Redesign of Parade**

**Presented by:**

**Sam Gardner of Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects**

**4:30pm and 6:00pm**

**Also Awards Ceremony, Business Meeting, Refreshments**

See Back Page for details

## Bacon's Marble Block

In the mid to late 1800s New London was changing rapidly. Whaling reached its peak in the 1840s and was beginning to fade; railroads arrived in the 1850s; wealthy New Yorkers spent elegant summer holidays at The Pequot House and cottages. The fine location on Long Island Sound attracted people to Ocean Beach and luxurious coastal steamers plied the waters of the Sound. New London was a major port-of-call for passenger and freight business; downtown hotels attracted business travelers; the city was booming.

While commercial enterprises were mostly located along the waterfront and the Parade was the center of commerce, State Street rose gradually above the hustle and bustle of the waterfront and within a few blocks became a residential neighborhood of homes, churches, and a few grand mansions. Morris Bacon had a home on upper State Street with a barn housing his thoroughbred horses. (He was evidently well-known in the racing world and at one time owned twenty-one horses.) In 1895 he sold the house and barn to Frank Munsey who built the Mohican Hotel on the property in 1895. But in 1868 Bacon's interests were in a new building on State Street.



A few remaining State Street residences c. 1900



State Street & Bacon's Marble Block c. 1870

Public Library of New London collection

The **Bacon Building** was designed in a Second Renaissance Style with elegant, tall windows, a front façade of light-colored ashlar stonework and rusticated quoins on the external corners. It brought a new grandeur to the growing commercial development of the street and set the tone for later buildings such as Harris Place (1885) and the Crocker House (1872).

Elegant retail filled the street level spaces while a billiard room on the upper floor was described at the time as "one of the finest in this part of the country." The ceiling was 18 feet high; the spacious room, 62' x 45', was fully open, "not a post broke the harmony of the space."

Continued on Page 2

## Bacon's Marble Block

Continued from Page 1

The fourth floor and mansard roof with the seven alternating triangular and rounded-arch dormer windows was a later addition.

Many years of vacancy, a leaking roof, open windows and a disgraceful period of neglect created a disaster on State Street. Major questions about blight, the responsibility of building owners to maintain their property, and the responsibility of city government to enforce building codes before conditions become so serious that the building must be condemned, focused on this once-elegant building. Little was done to preserve or protect the building. By 1998 the problems could no longer be ignored, but once allowed to deteriorate so completely, restoration becomes a significant challenge. Hopes for a new life for the building began in December, 1998, when it was purchased by Cabrini, Inc., as part of NLDC's plan for downtown renewal.

Cabrini, Inc., also purchased the Cronin Building and the Crocker House with a plan to find developers who would restore these fine historic State Street buildings. As a major presence on the street, the three buildings were believed to be key to the economic development of the Historic Waterfront District. Unfortunately all efforts failed and the three buildings remained empty and deteriorating until 2002 when they were auctioned off to prospective buyers. NLDC president, Michael Joplin, led a group of investors to purchase the Crocker House and the Cronin Building. Bill Cornish purchased the Bacon Building.

Soon after Bill bought the building the whole back wall collapsed, creating a vast two story hole in the rear of the building, visible from Green Street. The years of inattention finally showed the true cost of willful negligence. Since then it has been a labor of love as Bill surveyed the vast interior spaces of this - still structurally sound - historic structure. Bill's first job was simply removing all of the totally irreparable interior debris. He replaced the roof, windows, mechanicals, wiring, and reinforced some floor support.



The grand second floor with its 18' ceilings was still a vast open space; there was little interior detail to save. A few fireplaces survived and a shuffleboard was painted on the floor of one upper room. A few solid sustaining walls provided a form for the interior renovations to develop around. Respecting the original architecture, Bill kept the splendid high ceilings and tall windows in creating the new apartments. New hardwood floors have been installed throughout the building. The original stairways with mahogany banisters are being restored and wide hallways provide a sense of space for future tenants.

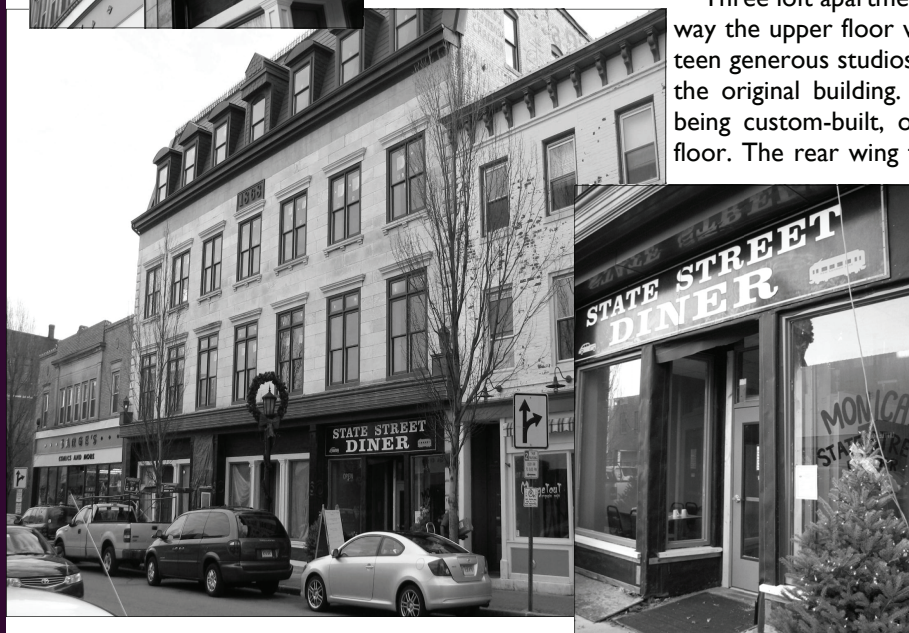
Three loft apartments have been created, taking advantage of the way the upper floor with the Mansard roof was constructed. Thirteen generous studios and one, one bedroom apartment, complete the original building. A new door for the apartment entrance is being custom-built, opening to the wide stairway to the second floor. The rear wing facing Green Street has three apartments, all ready rented.

The whole State Street façade of the building has been re-built, cleaned and restored to its original elegance. Bill carefully studied historic photos and is recreating original details. The three large commercial spaces bring new possibilities to State Street. Monica's Restaurant is looking splendid in its newly remodeled space and the other two storefronts, closely resembling the original design, are nearly ready for tenants, bringing renewed elegance to the street.

Landmarks congratulates Bill Cornish for returning this historic building to useful, 21st century life.



*The Bacon Building c. 1900*





## Directors' Report

Sandra Kersten Chalk

### Leap Into The New Year!

#### Annual Meeting, Thursday, February 28, 2008

Rebuilding the historic Parade is New London's leap into the future. Design plans are complete, the project about to go out to bid and work should begin this spring! Can you believe it? Congratulations to Bruce Hyde for steering the planning through numerous committees and selecting Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects of New Haven to create the final plans.

Sam Gardner will be the speaker at the Annual Meeting and lead us through the details of what-is-to-come. The new Parade Plaza will transform the transportation center, creating an open public plaza with room for public activities, easy access to the parking garage, and a new Nathan Hale Plaza for the schoolhouse with safe access for children and tour groups. Interesting display material will contain snatches of New London history, and a fountain depicting the tail of a life-sized whale, in the act of diving beneath the waves, will be a focus of attention.

Please plan to join us on February 28th as we honor preservationists with the Restoration Award, the Clifford Stone Award, the Rescue Award, and our Volunteer of the Year. And - most importantly - add to our "Most Endangered" list.

#### Historic Homes for Sale

Of the many things we in New London can be proud of, our historic homes must be near the top of the list. Beautiful homes in a variety of styles, from the mansions of sea captains to solidly constructed homes of workers, the City of New London offers great choices to prospective buyers.

Purchasing an historic home comes with challenges: Restore? Renovate? Re-build? Replace windows? Select Siding? Repair the damage of the years? How? Who will do the work? Even a historic home in prime condition requires a special owner who will love and care for its unique qualities.

And so, . . . finding the right buyer is a challenge that reverberates through neighborhoods and along quiet residential streets, as well as in the Historic Waterfront District. This is why NLL responded positively to requests from real estate agents to offer special open houses for Landmarks friends and members. Offering the opportunity to see a historic home, without pretending to be interested in purchasing, expands members' knowledge of and familiarity with these buildings. If that in turn creates a "buzz" and increased interest in a home, helping to find the right buyer, that is part of NLL's mission to promote the preservation of New London's rich resource of historic buildings.

The Board approved this activity at our October meeting. It did not involve any expenses or release of NLL's mailing list, however, as with any new project, details need to be examined. The Board and I are open to comments and will seriously consider objections in the event we are approached to do it again.

### New Staff at Landmarks

**Heather Tichenor** joins Landmarks as our Archivist, replacing Tricia Royston who found her schedule between the Shaw Mansion, NLL, and her teaching position just too demanding. However we are maintaining our association with the Shaw Mansion; Heather is their Educational Director and works closely with Tricia. She brings her interest in history and education to NLL's archival activities which have a strong educational component. We're working on material for the new Web site which I hope to have operational before the Annual Meeting in February.

**Scott Kadey** joins the staff from his Navy career as Sonar Technician Submarines, 2nd Class. He brings terrific IT knowledge and skills to this part-time position and is designing and implementing new File Maker Pro software for our Membership, Annual Appeal and Plaque Holders data base. Scott plans to begin a Masters Degree program at UConn in the fall while his interest in New London history keeps him involved in our activities.

### New London Landmarks Web Site

Where New London is today and what was happening in 1976 when NLL was founded to save Union Station? These questions have led Heather and me back through the files. We are tracing the changes in ideas and urban philosophies that have influenced development in New London since the great demolition that wiped out so much of the city in the 1960s and early 70s.

*Union Station 1970*



The automobile ruled the world in that era; several blocks of buildings on Golden and Pearl Streets were demolished in the late 1950s to create parking lots. Most of East New London met the wrecking ball in the late 1960s. Captain's Walk opened in 1974. The second span of the Gold Star bridge was completed in 1975.

The Union Railroad Station Trust was formed to save Union Station in 1973. New London Landmarks was formed to save Bank Street from demolition in 1975. The two organizations joined in 1976 to begin the work that continues today; promoting the preservation of New London's Historic Resources.

### Annual Appeal Donations— as of 1/4/08

In 2008, with our Basic Operational Support Grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, all contributions to our Annual Appeal are matched by the State so we are doubly grateful for your generous support.

#### **\$500 and above**

Lloyd & Sandy Beachy  
Charles Curtin  
Dime Bank  
John & Sarah Steffian  
Mr. & Mrs. John Timken  
Wick & Rodie York

#### **\$200— \$499**

Kathleen & Rick Barrett  
Barun Basu Associates  
Laurie Deredita  
Elizabeth & Anthony Enders  
Fran H. Moore

#### **\$100—\$199**

Harold Arkava  
J.D. Diaz-Saavedra  
Libby & Josh Friedman  
Heather & Rick Grigsby  
Frank McLaughlin  
Bill Morse  
Susan Munger  
Jerry Olsen & Vivian Stanley  
Katherine Rosen

Carl Stoner  
Abby Van Slyck  
Philip & Sherry Turner  
Michael Wright & Scott Ross

#### **\$50—\$99**

Nathan & Patricia Belcher  
Carolyn Booth  
Garrett Brennan  
Sharon Churchill  
Dino Dart  
Deborah Donovan  
Edgar C. Forest  
Rick & Myra Gipstein  
Tek-wah King  
Lindsay Liebig Roche  
Benjamin Martin  
Morgan McGinley  
Helen C. McGuire  
James & Ellen McGuire  
Peter Moore  
Dr. & Mrs. Daniel E. Moalli  
Colin Revill  
Robert Richter

Pat & Tod Schaefer  
Marian Shilstone  
Frances & Russell Vocalina

#### **\$49 and under**

Vincentia Belbruno  
Marion Bodde  
Carolyn Condon  
William Cornish  
John DiOrio  
Fern Drutman  
Doris Edmund & Edward Murphy  
Linda & Tom English  
Ned Hammond  
Jennifer Hillhouse  
Ken & Rosemary Johnson  
J. Kushigian  
Peter Kreckovic  
Armand Lambert  
Sylvia Malizia & Fred Paxton  
Dorothy Miller  
Gerald E. & Martha Myers  
Hubert Ryan

### Design Review: What Can it Do?

**Sandra Kersten Chalk**

Design Review can create recommended, basic standards for new buildings in New London's historic districts. Design Review can provide potential developers with guidelines and the knowledge that New London cares about the quality and design integrity of development within the city. Design Review can help the Planning and Zoning Commission work with developers as building plans are brought forward.

With no design guidelines to allow some control over building design, developers are free to do their worst. The parking lot and Walgreen Pharmacy now dominating Gariabaldi Square was approved without any design control. Once again, preservationists and those who care about New London's architectural heritage were blind-sided by developers and New London's lack of design review. It is not appropriate urban design, it belongs in a suburban shopping mall.

Several excellent studies on design and development recommendations for New London have been done in recent years. The R/UDAT study in 1989, sponsored by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the 2001 New London Downtown Action Agenda recommended by HyettPalma offer thoughtful and professional recommendations. A new Design Review committee, working under the Planning and Zoning Commission, offers the hope that a set of guidelines will be developed and accepted by City Coun-

cil. These design concepts will be provided to all potential developers to work with and design for.

Design Review is an effort NLL has been working on for over thirty years! Closely related to the preservation of historic buildings, design review seeks to develop an appreciation for the architectural details that make a building an interesting and cohesive part of the streetscape. The façade material; the pattern of windows; the shape and architectural detailing of the roof line; the street-level appeal to pedestrians; all these characteristics contribute to a sense of place, to the unique details that identify where you are.

Check out these details yourself. Stand in front of the Post Office on Meridian Street—look across to City Hall and Harris Place. Look down to Citizens Bank and over to the Congregational Church. Cross the street and look back to the Post Office, the windows, the entry-way, the roof-line. Each building is different, built in different eras, yet a harmony remains. A block away, at the corner of Governor Winthrop and Eugene O'Neill Drive, a very different streetscape greets the visitor. Now where are you? Let me know, I would love to hear from anyone who is willing to take a critical look at New London architecture—historic and contemporary—and think about future development in the city.

## Historic Plaque Application

**DAVID BISHOP  
HOUSE**



**c1796**

If your New London home/building is a least 50 years old it may qualify to receive an historic marker listing its date and original owner. The information gathered in this process aids in neighborhood preservation efforts.

Our volunteer title researchers study land, tax and water records, historic maps and city directories to establish your building's first owner and date of its estimated construction.

The researchers also welcome any oral history or copies of old documents relating to your building that you may have. Please allow at least 16 - 20 weeks for completion of the research and delivery of the durable, hand-lettered and sealed hardwood plaque.

PLAQUE ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

DAY PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

LEGAL OWNER (IF DIFFERENT) \_\_\_\_\_

APPROXIMATE DATE PURCHASED BY CURRENT OWNER \_\_\_\_\_ APPROXIMATE AGE OF PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

MEMBERSHIP STATUS: YES ☐ NO ☐

PRICE OF PLAQUE: \$200.00 Non-member \$175.00 Members

A non-refundable deposit of \$100.00 is required with this application. Balance is due on completion.

### Historic Plaques Completed:

**Isaac Thompson**  
**Circa 1840**  
**32 Tilley Street**

**Agostino Minucci**  
**1916**  
**37 Pacific**

**Jeremiah E. Fitzgerald**  
**1919**  
**23 Belden Court**

## Membership in New London Landmarks

Our Annual Membership drive begins at our Annual Meeting in February. Remember our membership year is April 1st through March 31st. Benefits of membership include receiving copies of The Preservationist, postcards and mailings about special events and, most importantly, support for our on-going work to preserve and protect New London's historic urban landscape.

We are always happy to welcome new members to join in our preservation efforts for New London.

**Individual: \$25    Family: \$35    Contributor: \$50 - \$75    Patron: \$100 & above    Corporate: \$200**

### New Members since September 2007

Michael Bellesiles

Carol Booth

Carolyn Leuze

Penny Parsekian

## Green Street Development

In case you haven't noticed, the changes along Green Street are really significant! Paul McMasters has nearly completed his work on the little house at # 77 and new downtown residents are helping return this small neighborhood to a mix of business and residential activities. I Net is making great progress with their house at the corner of Green and Golden Streets and a new store, Muse, has opened in the ground floor. Bill Morse is still working on the brick extension of his old Central Hotel building. The venerable Dutch Tavern continues to be popular for "regulars" and enterprising tourists "discover" it regularly. There are new storefronts across from the Dutch and apartments-to-be in the Bacon Building. Greens Alley and the renovation of Chateaux Apartments are nearing completion, and further down Golden Street the old Contemporary Furniture building will soon house Upton Bass String Instrument Corporation. What a great new business for New London!



Corner State & Green Streets

## Discovery

by Evan Andriopoulos



I discovered a small derelict house, almost ready to be demolished a few years back and quickly fell in love with the house and the "potential" of the area. It was within walking distance of, or as I like to say "feet" of, State and Bank Streets and the Waterfront Park. All transportation was nearby in this potentially cozy side street. This was an area that I had driven by hundreds of times without ever noticing until one day, in my hunt for a historic home in downtown New London, I took "that left" off State Street and discovered this old beauty.

After having walked through the yard, around the house and through the Green Street and Golden Street area for nearly an hour, I called my wife, Reidun, to tell her I found exactly what we were looking for... in the center of it all. A hidden little gem of character, feet from everything!

Later Reidun and I walked Green and Golden Streets dozens of times—

enjoying the smell of the sea in a neighborhood of historic buildings - with a summer farmers market and more!

With the oldness of Green Street, the closeness of the buildings and what is happening in New London, we simply fell in love with the area... we pictured a completed historic side street, cozy, eclectic, old... but cutting edge new. In the past few years others began to share our vision.

The house was in dire need of restoration. Paul McMasters, who recently completed 7 Greens Alley purchased the house and together we began planning restoration. We wanted to retain as much of the historic character and materials as possible. The house, abandoned for nearly three decades, was very 1970s. A green bathtub and green tiled bathroom, pink walls and tiles throughout, years of garbage in the cellar and a totally overgrown back yard was what we had. But we knew that underneath all of this was a historic house, once built with pride and made to last. It has!

Restoration began with gutting and rebuilding. We retained the original hardwood, wide planked floors, staircase, some wainscoting and fireplaces. Behind concrete blocks, and in some cases stone, we found fireplaces in virtually every room. Original cabinets in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor were restored as well as later (19<sup>th</sup> century) additions. We added all 21<sup>st</sup> century amenities including down lights, modern electricity and plumbing, heating, etc. as well as new supports.

The interior project took much longer than expected and then we restored much of the original clapboard siding to retain the original look and installed a cedar roof. While this has been a labor of love, it is a living one... so that we ensure the house does not fall into such disrepair again and will continue to evolve as one of New London's great historical houses.

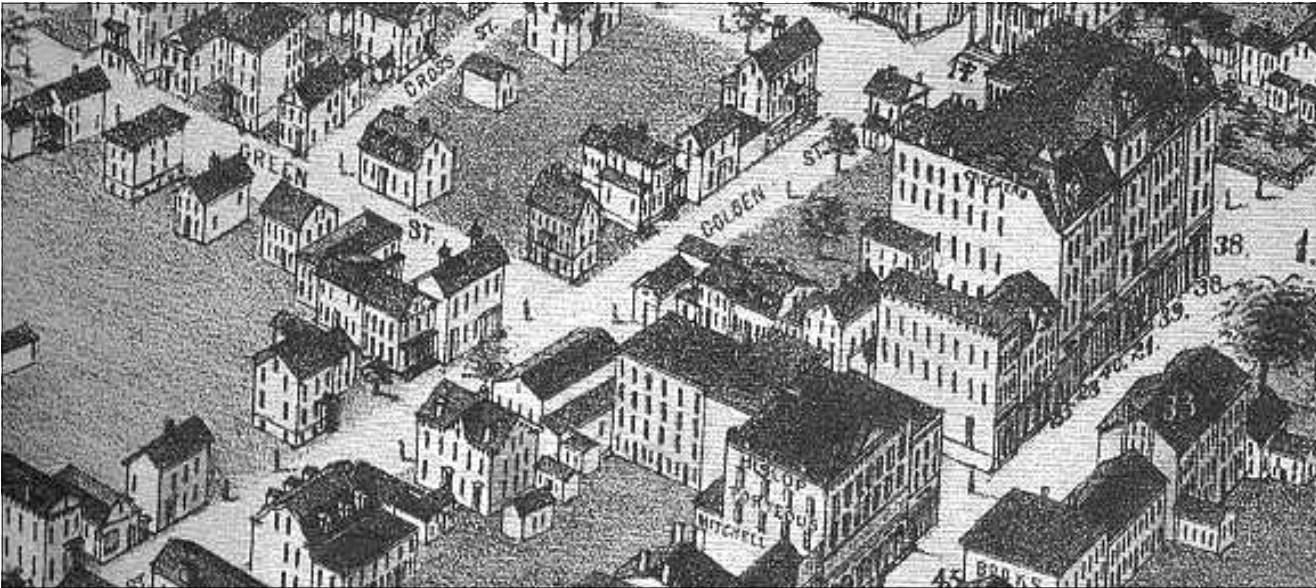
Fast Forward to today... our vision of this side street is becoming "the place to be"... a little bit of SoHo in New London. While not losing touch with its historic roots, Green and Golden may well become the flagship "side streets" destination of the entire historic downtown area.





## Green Street Renovations

...continued by Bill Morse

*New London 1876—Green, Golden & State Streets*

**Editors Note:** This is the ongoing story of Bill's experiences as he took on the challenges presented by the 1888 Central Hotel building. Earlier parts of the story were in February, July & November 2005 issues, and briefly in September 2007.

## A Few Surprises

A few years ago, I came across an 1860s map of New London showing the area around Green Street, and through small drawings, showed the houses along it. Some are still with us... the Dutch Tavern, the corner house at Green and Golden and the circa 1800 Dutch gambrel, recently renovated.

Most buildings from the map have disappeared ... an equally early gambrel next to the Dutch housed a Chinese laundry until the 1960s, and on the opposing corner, a house at Green and Golden. This two-story frame house was occupied by the George Williams Bakery and came down in the 1880s to make way for a new brick edifice in the Italianate style. Further down the street, a small frame house sat next to what would later be the Elks Club, opposite the recently renovated Dutch gambrel.

My building at the corner of Green and Golden streets was the new home for the Williams Bakery and then became the Central Hotel, abandoned in 1997. A two-story extension to the building, once part of the Central Hotel, is a space I am trying to market. I hired a contractor to remove the rotten mansard third floor and replaced that section with a low pitch truss roof that continues over the extension separating the mansard from the corner building. With the bearing walls no longer bearing much of anything, I proceeded to gut the interior, removing walls and rain-damaged flooring.

My first surprise ... the second floor beneath the former mansard was post and beam - timber construction with mortise tenon joints held by oak pegs, braced diagonally in the manner of house construction around 1800. The timber fram-

ing completed a rough square set back three feet from the sidewalk. The second floor rear wall had two windows now facing the brick of the neighboring El-n-Gee club on Golden built in the 1920s. Under the boards were surprises - a pair of corn cobs used as early weather stripping were lodged in the double sash and a bottle from the New London Dairy Company had been left on one of the sills.

Interior demolition continued. A wall with simple molding covered a chimney with a vent going from a neighboring room into the flue. As the brick was badly deteriorated, I dismantled the chimney.

The removal of walls and flooring revealed more. The 18' whitewashed planks siding the back wall showed ghost lines from the framing of an even earlier building. On the side, a door-sized hole had been broken through the brick exterior wall of the Elks Club. Evidently the red light activities of the former hotel extended into the second floor of its neighbor.

Another revealing issue was the lack of old post and beam framing on the first floor. Either the house was lifted eight feet to accommodate a new first floor (a practice common in earlier times to increase floor space) or the earlier first floor was substantially rebuilt when a brick facade came up along the sidewalk sometime during the 1870s or 80s.

Oh, and did I mention the false walls down below on the first floor?

... To be continued



## ***Sunday at 4***

### ***Historic Neighborhoods in New London***

Join us at The Landmarks Office, 49 Washington Street, New London, for PowerPoint presentations, conversation and refreshments.

#### **January 27 at 4:00pm**

##### **Neptune Park and Ocean Beach 1893 - 2007**

A new presentation on the history of this little-known neighborhood and the wonderful New London treasure of Ocean Beach Park.

#### **February 24 at 4:00pm**

##### **Hempstead Street 1646 - 2008**

A fascinating historic neighborhood that includes nearly every era of New London history. The Ancientest Burial Ground, Hempstead Houses, Williams Memorial Park, and the Shaw Mansion.

#### **March 30 at 4:00pm**

##### **The Pequot Colony 1853 - 2008**

This popular presentation on the Pequot Colony neighborhood is revised to reveal more of the changes that have taken place over the past 150 years

## **Annual Meeting**

**Thursday, February 28, 2008**

**Union Station, New London**

**4:00 - 7:00 pm**

4:00 Display of the new Parade Design

Open to the Public

4:30 Discussion of Plans: (20 minutes)

Sam Gardner, Gregg Wies & Gardner, Architects  
(to be given again at 6 pm)

5:00 Annual Meeting Begins:

Conversation & informal discussion of Parade plans

5:30 Recognition Of:

Special Contributions to the Parade Project

6:00 Discussion of plans: (20 minutes)

Sam Gardner, Gregg Wies & Gardner, Architects

6:30 Official Business Meeting

Election of officers

Election of, new Board Members

Annual Awards:

Restoration Award

Clifford Stone Award

Rescue Award

Volunteer Award

Most Endangered List

# **The Preservationist**

## **January 2008**



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