



# The Preservationist

WINTER 2019

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*The Preservationist*  
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*Printing: Blu-Prints*



## 23 FRANKLIN STREET UPDATE

Since our last newsletter, we've received commitments for enough funding to complete the rehabilitation of 23 Franklin Street, a vacant and condemned Greek Revival house which we bought last year. So far we've repaired the roof, abated the asbestos, corrected a sagging floor, removed a modern wall which was obscuring the original front stairway, replaced rotted flooring with nineteenth-century salvaged fir flooring, demolished a modern addition which was sinking and pulling away from the main house, removed cedar shingles which were at the end of their useful lives and encapsulated lead paint on the original clapboards and exterior trim.

We wouldn't have gotten this far without support from the City of New London, the Francis Fund administered by Equity Trust, individuals who have made private loans and donations, the State of Connecticut which is funding us through the Historic Homes Rehabilitation Tax Credit and the Housing Tax Credit Contribution (HTCC) programs, and Eversource, which has committed to purchasing our tax credits.

We will receive the bulk of our funding in early December, and we anticipate finishing the project in mid-2020, at which point we will sell it to an income-qualified homebuyer. In a census tract with a 10% homeownership rate, this house will be owner-occupied and affordable for thirty years.

This house was built c.1845 by Edward Hempstead and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Hempstead Historic District. However, we first became interested in it because we knew it had been the home of former New London NAACP president Linwood Bland, Jr. Having bought it at a tax auction, we were surprised to learn that it had been scheduled to be sold at a tax auction back in 1997 after Bland withheld his property taxes to protest the lack of minority hiring in the City of New London's police and fire departments. An anonymous donor paid Bland's back taxes, and Bland continued to live at 23 Franklin Street until his death in 2005.



*Original clapboard revealed*



*Newly revealed original window trim*



*Jacking up a sagging floor*



## ICHABOD AND ROSE PEASE GRAVESTONE RESTORATIONS



*Ichabod Pease gravestone  
before restoration*

**With the help of our donors, we restored the Pease gravestones.**

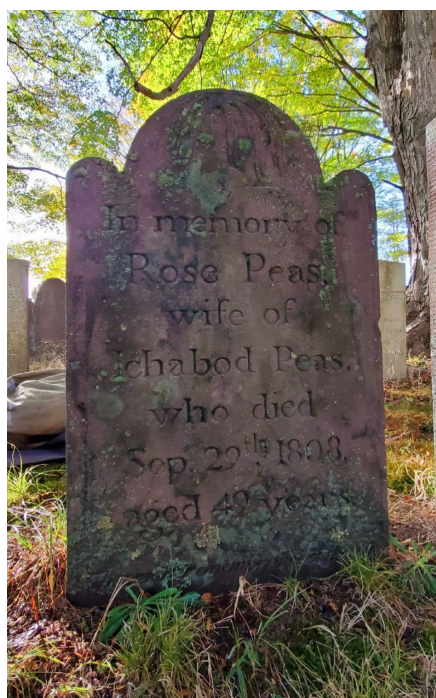
This past September, we hosted a talk by Mary Lycan and Tom Schuch on Ichabod Pease, who was born into slavery on Fishers Island in 1755 and opened a school for New London's African-American children when he was eighty-one years old.

This talk and an online fundraiser allowed us to raise over \$1700, enough money to restore his and his wife Rose's gravestones in Cedar Grove Cemetery.

Both stones needed extensive work. According to Lisa Cornell of Beyond the Gravestone, who completed the restorations, Rose's stone was in particularly bad shape, having suffered such extensive interior water damage that the face would likely have separated from the back of the stone within several years.

We are grateful to everyone who donated, to Mary Lycan and Tom Schuch, to Rev. Ranjit Mathews and Saint James Episcopal Church, and to Beyond the Gravestone, which gave us a substantial break in the cost of the stone restorations.

We anticipate having a program in 2020 at Cedar Grove cemetery during which we will honor Pease and explain the restoration process.



*Rose Pease's gravestone  
before restoration.*



*Ichabod and Rose Pease's gravestones after restoration  
Photos courtesy Beyond the Gravestone*



## THE ITALIAN ANARCHISTS OF NEW LONDON

### Talk by Richard Lenzi

Also in September, we hosted a talk by Richard Lenzi, author of *Facing Toward the Dawn: The Italian Anarchists of New London*, followed by a discussion moderated by NL Landmarks' board member Fred Paxton.

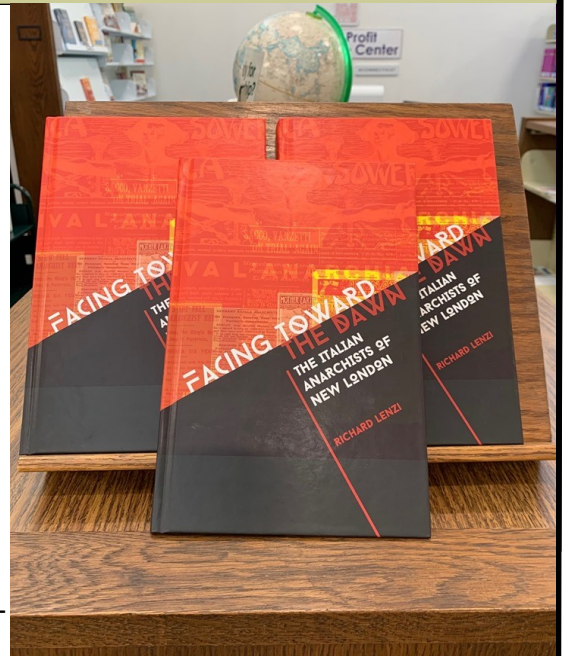
Lenzi's research has uncovered a history of the Fort Trumbull peninsula that had been all but forgotten, despite the national attention brought to The Fort because of the eminent-domain takings and the *Kelo v. City of New London* case decided by the Supreme Court.

Beginning in the late 1880's, radical anarchists primarily from Fano, Italy, began settling in The Fort. Geographically and linguistically isolated from the rest of New London, they were part of a larger Italian anarchist movement that despised both government and organized religion, and which was sometimes violent in its pursuit of a revolution which, they hoped, would sweep away capitalism and lead to a classless society.

New London's anarchists contributed financially to anarchist publications, brought in guest speakers, produced anarchist propaganda theater in the innocuously-named Italian Dramatic Club, and debated amongst themselves whether organized labor and cooperatives were beneficial, or whether they would weaken workers' resolve to fight for the anarchist cause.

In the 1920's, they despised Mussolini and were fiercely anti-fascist. Just before the 1928 Columbus Day parade, which culminated in the unveiling of the Columbus statue, a group of anarchists attacked New London's Italian Fascist community which was centered on Shaw Street.

This program was standing room only and attended by dozens of descendants of the Fort Trumbull anarchists. It was made possible by a grant from Connecticut Humanities.



*We donated three copies of Lenzi's book "Facing Toward the Dawn: the Italian Anarchists of New London" to the Public Library of New London with funding from Connecticut Humanities.*



*Rochetti family, c. 1903  
Courtesy Michael Rochetti*



*Connecticut College students researching at our office.*



*Executive director Laura Natusch speaking to New London youth at Shaw Mansion*

### A new generation of preservationists

This past year, we've enjoyed collaborating with other organizations in order to share New London's history and talk about why historic preservation matters with local students.

## PRESERVATION ISSUES

**How do we protect our historic buildings from modern threats?**

When New London Landmarks formed over forty years ago, it was in response to the near loss of Union Station to the wrecking ball.

We were part of a nationwide preservation movement that formed in the wake of urban renewal programs in cities throughout America. Largely because of organizations like ours, people now value our architectural heritage. I think it will be a long time before New London decides to demolish a swath of New London again.

But that doesn't mean our historic buildings are safe. Although we successfully prevented the demolition of 130 and 116 Bank Street over the last few years, they and other historic buildings remain vacant and at risk. What are some steps can we take to protect them?

**Public financing**

Sometimes it's technically possible to save a building, but hard, if not impossible, to make the numbers work without public financing. That was the case with 23 Franklin Street, which was vacant and condemned when we purchased it. When we toured the house prior to its going up for sale at a tax auction, we realized that the cost of rehabilitating it would exceed the house's value. Unless we or another nonprofit like HOPE or ECHO with access to substantial public financing bought the property, it was likely to sit vacant until it was demolished.

However, there is also public financing available for private developers. To its credit, the City of New London recently started a revolving loan fund for roof repairs of commercial buildings—a great way to stabilize a building and prevent more costly future repairs. It also offers grants for façade improvements for downtown commercial buildings, as well as housing conservation grants and lead risk reduction grants for homeowners. The State of Connecticut can provide financial assistance to owners of homes listed on the National Register of Historic Places through the Historic Homes Rehabilitation tax credit program.

**Municipal preservation ordinances**

A few cities in Connecticut, including Hartford and New Britain, have recently taken advantage of State enabling legislation that allows cities to protect their historic buildings from demolition or character-altering façade changes by passing municipal preservation ordinances. Here in New London, we've worked with Mayor Passero, municipal staff and Brad Schide from Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation to develop a draft ordinance that would grant the Historic District Commission the authority to prevent demolitions to historic buildings downtown without a lengthy and expensive court battle. It would also grant the commission the authority to approve or deny façade alterations downtown, while limiting the cost of any requirements. We're currently working with members of City Center District so that the City can consider their input.

**Preparing for Climate Change**

In the coming decades, climate change will threaten New London with rising sea levels, stronger hurricanes and more frequent torrential downpours like the one that led to a near-drowning in a basement apartment in October.

New London recently approved funding for upgrades to its storm water drainage system. In 2018, it also worked with UConn's Community Research and Design Collaborative and Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation to develop a plan to mitigate flooding on South Water Street. But this is just a beginning. We need to identify the areas at greatest risk of flooding and then develop a broad plan to mitigate that risk, considering building codes, infrastructure, manmade and natural barriers and more.



## 2019 ANNUAL MEETING AWARD WINNERS



*Restoration Award for 147 Bank Street, accepted by Kate Shargis on behalf of Yehuda Amar.*



*Volunteer of the Year  
Constance Kristofik*



*Marilyn Graham receives  
Clifford Stone award for her  
work with HOPE, Inc.*

## 2019 Programs

- A talk by Peter Miniutti and James O'Donnell on rising sea levels and a plan to protect South Water Street.
- A walking tour through East New London led by Board member Don Presley, Board President Tom Couser and NL Landmarks member Tom Schuch.
- A water taxi tour by Don Presley on the history of sites along both sides of the Thames River.
- A lecture by Richard Lenzi, author of *Facing Toward the Dawn: The Italian Anarchists of New London*, on the Italian-American anarchist community that lived in The Fort from the late 1800's through the mid-20th century.
- A program by Mary Lycan and Tom Schuch on Ichabod Pease and the larger struggle for African-American educational parity.
- A candidates' debate on preservation issues.
- A history of the New London NAACP by NL NAACP President Jean Jordan.

## From the Executive Director

*New London Landmarks preserves and promotes New London's historic character through education, advocacy and the rehabilitation of historic structures.*

It's been a little more than a year since we changed our mission statement to better align with our work on 23 Franklin Street.

Of course, we're still a historic preservation organization. We're not a housing organization. However, from time to time—if we're confident we have the resources to be effective—we may take on the direct rehabilitation of endangered structures. It's another tool in our preservation toolkit, and one which can help fund our other, non-income-producing work.

Our mission statement now also better reflects our commitment to building an appreciation for New London's history and building a culture of preservation. We've always offered tours and educational programs, but until recently, our mission statement didn't reflect this aspect of our work.

Finally, when we talk about preserving and promoting New London's historic character, we're referring to the buildings, neighborhoods and parks that embody the histories of New London's diverse population.

*Laura Natusch*

## A PLAQUE: A PLACE IN NEW LONDON'S HISTORY

For the last several years, I have been doing the bulk of the title research in New London Landmarks' plaque program—a total nearing 100 different buildings, including commercial as well as residential properties. To do so is to learn New London history from the ground up, so to speak, because each search requires that we trace a title back to a transaction involving land only. Then we know the building was erected between that date and the first transaction for which the deed mentions buildings. To nail down the precise date, we look to street directories (which go back to the 1850s), tax abstracts, old maps, and sewer and water records. At that point, we have a chart displaying all property transactions from the initial land-only to the last buyer and current owner—a complete chain of title.

My partner in this process, Mary Beth Baker, then uses another set of resources (available on line through Ancestry.com) to research the original owners (or other significant owners). She can often produce a richly detailed account of the individuals who first owned the property. So while the *plaque* may announce only the date and the name of the owner when a building was erected, the research that supports it will document the whole history of the building.

The plaque locates a building on the axis of time. For the owner, this may serve as a kind of badge of honor, but it also serves an educational purpose for the general public. By displaying your plaque, you make available to passerby a key element of the history of New London--and a way of learning about American architecture. By browsing plaques, passersby can learn to identify kinds of buildings and styles common to certain eras.

A plaque also locates a building on another axis--the axis of space--because it makes accessible its relationship to its neighbors. Tracing titles has taught me a lot about how New London developed, both as a whole and neighborhood by neighborhood. I compare title searching to taking a core sample of New London—drilling down through layers of history to the vacant land. Often, this process will reveal the ethnic evolution of a neighborhood, for example, as well as the process by which it was developed.

Every successive plaque assists in making the history of this historic town visible to all.

— Tom Couser, President of New London Landmarks

## BUSINESS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### Fiddleheads Natural Foods Co-op

Thank you, Fiddleheads Natural Foods Co-op, for becoming a business member and sponsoring all of our programs for the past two years.

“When I first came to New London in 2016, I was struck by New London Landmarks' plaques throughout the city,” says Fiddleheads' General Manager Lexa Juhre. “The plaques immediately identified New London as a remarkable New England coastal town. They made history palpable and stimulated thoughts about the connection between the coastline and people's lives.

“New London Landmarks' plaques and programs provide the city with a cohesive identity. They reflect back that New London is proud of its history and the character that it has retained.

“Fiddleheads is committed to supporting local nonprofits, and to building a healthy, robust, just and inclusive community. We're proud to become a business sponsor of New London Landmarks.”

*Fiddleheads Natural Foods Co-op is located at 13 Broad Street, New London*



## HISTORIC PLAQUE APPLICATION

### DAVID BISHOP HOUSE



c1796

If your New London home/building is at least 50 years old, it may qualify to receive an historic marker listing its date and original owner. Our plaque research aids in neighborhood preservation efforts, and the plaques help identify New London as a historic city. Plaques make great gifts!

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 construction.

Our researchers welcome any oral history or copies of old documents relating to your building you may have. Please allow approximately two months for completion of the research and delivery of the durable, hand-lettered, 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: \$250.00 Non-member

\$235.00 Members

Replacement Plaque  
\$100.00

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

### HISTORIC PLAQUES COMPLETED IN 2019

- Helen F. Lena house (1940) 160 Broad Street
- Raymond & Louisa A Panciera house (1946) 756 Montauk Avenue
- Frank E. Wilson house (1927) at 127 Glenwood Avenue
- Louisa F Smith, Alice H Smith, & Mary S Smith house (1897) 81 Vauxhall Street
- Alexander Fournier house (1900) 147 Bank Street (restoration award)
- Billings P. Learned house, Moved in 1911, Grace D. Brown (c.1877) 54 Park Street
- Joshua Bolles house (c. 1840) 730 Williams Street
- Helen Boice DeGraw house (1916) 575 Ocean Avenue
- Woodward Cottage 3, The Pequot Colony, Bishop & Co. house (1876, moved 1899) 810 Montauk Avenue
- John Yargots house (1904) 50 Maple Avenue
- Thomas T. Wetmore, Jr. house (1930) 286 Lower Boulevard
- Silas Maxson, Jr. house (1924) 536 Montauk Avenue
- Henry D Barrows commercial building (1924) 38 Green Street

If you have a Landmarks Whale Plaque on your home and it is fading, chipping or wearing away, we can restore it for a fee of \$100.00. The program began in 1985 so some of these plaques have been out in the weather for many years. Let us know if they need restoration!



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### Individual Membership:

Individual \$25  
Family \$35  
Contributor \$75  
Patron \$100  
President's Circle \$500

### Business Membership:

Heritage Supporter \$100  
Heritage Partner \$200  
President's Circle \$500

**[www.newlondonlandmarks.org](http://www.newlondonlandmarks.org) (Join/Give)**

*Thank You For Your Support!*