The Preservationist

Fall 2008

New London Designated a Preserve American City

Thanks to Bruce Hyde, Director of New London’s Office of Development and Planning, and a grant written by Cara Pianka, the city of New London has won the designation of a “Preserve America Community” which honors the city’s efforts to preserve historic and cultural resources.

This is a federal program designed to encourage and support community efforts to preserve and enjoy America’s priceless cultural and natural heritage. The goals of the program are to strengthen regional identities, increase a sense of place and local pride in the designated communities and increase local participation in preserving the communities’ cultural and natural heritage assets.

The public and private efforts to restore a building built by Captain Harris in 1844 was the focus of the grant application. Captain Harris was a member of one of New London’s prominent whaling families and the building, known as the Harris Building, was originally used as a ship’s provision store and crew’s quarters.

In 1996 it was slated for demolition—to become a parking lot for a bank. Sound familiar? Many members of the community went to work to save the building, known for being the venue of New London’s annual Hygienic Arts Festival. Hygienic Art, Inc. mobilized to save the building and create art galleries and artist’s studios, a focus for the growing arts community in the city. As the building was already listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings, community activists were able to enlist a wide variety of support. The State’s Attorney General’s Office, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, and local granting organizations along with thousands of private donors and volunteers joined the effort. It was this wide-ranging public and private support that enabled the project to meet the requirements of the Preserve America committee.

The Preserve America program recognizes communities that protect and celebrate their heritage, use their historic assets for economic development, and community revitalization, and encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources through education and heritage tourism programs.

“Sustainable historic preservation is a wise investment in the future, not a cost for maintaining the past. Communities and the nation receive significant economic, educational, and cultural benefits, including heritage tourism, in return for their preservation efforts,” said John L. Nau, III, chairman of the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, which administers Preserve America programs for the White House in cooperation with the Department of the Interior.

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Indeed, the future has been well-served by Hygienic Art, Inc. After successful restoration of the building they turned their attention to the vacant lot next door – and created the Art Park! A wonderful new performance venue, their variety of music and other activities brings a vital new audience to the Historic Waterfront District.

A major benefit of the designation is the significant Preserve America Grants, designed to assist preservation efforts. Selected cities become eligible for matching grants of $20,000 to $150,000 which are awarded on a competitive basis. The goal of the grants is to help communities develop sustainable management strategies and sound business practices for the continued preservation and use of their heritage assets. The grants support research, planning, marketing, interpretation and training efforts.

Two Solutions to an Architectural Challenge:

1. Designing an addition to an historic building is a major challenge for architects. The historic character of the original structure should be maintained and the new building should be compatible in scale, material and character with the main building. At the same time, the new building should be distinguishable from the original, complementing rather than challenging the older building according to recommendations from the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

The Citizens Bank Building (below), 63 Eugene O’Neill Drive, contrasts the elegant and beautiful 1905 New London Savings Bank, designed by Dudley St. Claire Donnelly, with a modern addition designed by Lindsay Liebig Roche Architects. Donnelly designed the original building in a currently popular Neo-classic style pioneered by English-born Benjamin Henry Latrobe, often called the “father of American architecture.” The Neo-classic style was a return to the purity and elegance of Classical Greece.

When expansion became necessary in 1969 the bank trustees recognized their responsibility to the original building and the Milford pink granite on the addition’s façade was milled from the same quarry as the classical façade of the original. The simple lines and set-back from the street give Donnelly’s original a prominent position along the streetscape.

In the late 60s the entire Main Street streetscape, was re-named Eugene O’Neill Drive, and was in the midst of major changes due to the massive demolition underway during New London’s period of Urban Renewal.
Directors’ Report

Sandra Kersten Chalk

**Pride of Place**, Landmarks tours of State Street Architecture, has been an interesting summer program and will continue in September and October with additional cruise ship arrivals. New London is a little-known destination for most of the passengers, and this offers us the opportunity to define and illuminate New London’s past and future for visitors. From all reports the passengers enjoy their day in New London and show great interest in exploring historic sites including the Custom House Maritime Museum and Shaw Mansion. The Nathan Hale Schoolhouse, right across from Union Station, may be the number one attraction.

Landmarks self guided walking tour guidebooks to Bank Street and State Street are in great demand and Board Members and I host a table at Union Station providing information and selling tickets for the Architectural Tour of State Street. Check the calendar on the back page and plan to join a tour, the presence of New Londoners joining the passengers will add an interesting dimension to the tours.

**Lyric Hall.** Once a gem for small concerts, lectures and dances, Lyric Hall has been empty for years and the once favorite Whaler’s Restaurant is also history. Recent owners have totally stripped interior spaces down to a skeleton—revealing the wonderful bones of the building. Now it is for sale and waiting for new owners to make critical decisions on the future of the building.

Could it be restored as a performance venue? With a restaurant on the ground floor it would be a whole new idea for a dinner theatre. A great idea but is it economically feasible? Condos are another choice, but New London would lose another theatre.

Of course we want the building saved and hope new owners will be found who will make good decisions for the building.

**Two Solutions to an Architectural Challenge**

2. Next door to Citizens Bank, at 47 Eugene O’Neill Drive, the New London DAY has had its offices since 1906. In 1929 they totally renovated and expanded their original building creating the main structure you see today. In 1960 the DAY added an extension at the rear of their building and asked the Redevelopment Agency for the land south, along Main Street (now Eugene O’Neill Drive) for further expansion. A major building project began and Lindsay Liebig Roche were hired for the project; improving the main building and meeting the challenge of connecting historic and modern architecture. We see their solution today: a small garden along the street links the offices and the new printing plant. The new building maintained complementary façade material and the garden was dedicated to long-time DAY editor Barnard Colby in 2000.
**Moving House on Robinson Street**

If you missed our Moving House event on Robinson Street in July, I would like to invite you to mark October 11 on your calendar and join us at 25 Robinson Street between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm for a tour of Richard Humphreville’s restoration work on this very old house that has moved from Fort Trumbull to Blackhall Street and now on Robinson Street. Many changes will have taken place since July—all the new windows are installed—and there is much to learn from his restoration work. We will also have more demonstrations on various techniques carpenters use when restoring and/or repairing historic structures.

When Susan Munger took over as Chair of the Robinson Street event she led Landmarks to discover a small, historically interesting neighborhood that had never really caught our attention. Development in the area began in the early 1890s when Shaw Street was the main road leading from downtown to Fort Trumbull and Shaw’s Cove was still a large body of water.

A neighborhood grew around Fort Trumbull in the 1850s when the railroad was being built and many Irish immigrants were employed by the railroad. Among this group, John Robinson was a grocer, a builder and a carpenter, building and selling many of the houses in this new neighborhood.

New London’s location between New York and Boston, and its excellent transportation facilities; railroads, steamships and quick access to Long Island Sound, encouraged new manufacturing businesses to establish factories in the city. Between 1891 and 1901 nearly four thousand people moved to New London, finding work in the industries spreading through the area and purchasing new homes built surrounding these industries (as people walked or used trolleys to get to work.)

New streets were laid out and developers, including John Robinson, Peleg and George Williams and Benjamin Blydenberg built homes in the Willetts/Montauk Avenue neighborhood for the bakers, laborers, grocers, carpenters and other workers arriving in New London and finding jobs in these new industries.

This 1695 home, a gambrel roof salt box, was moved to Willett’s avenue around 1895! Terrific restoration work has created a gem.

This Victorian house on Blydenberg Street was moved to this site from the recent Howard Street Development/Demolition—a perfect addition to this historic neighborhood.
**Historic Plaque Application**

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. 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 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, 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 upon completion.

**Historic Plaque Completed:**

**Martin Cullin**

1871

70 West Coit Street

**Membership Information**

New London Landmarks membership drive begins at our Annual Meeting in February with a membership year 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 at any time to join in our preservation efforts for New London.

If you haven’t renewed your membership yet, please join today!

**Individual:** $25   **Family:** $35   **Contributor:** $50 - $75   **Patron:** $100 & above   **Corporate:** $200
In this vision for a 21st century open city plaza, the new Parade Plaza creates an area for citizens of the city and the region to meet, relax, and enjoy a variety of community events in every season of the year. The upper plaza provides space for musical events, the Saturday Market, the Lights & Song by the Sea holiday festival and many other public activities. As a busy pedestrian area in the lower plaza, movement to and from the parking garage, the waterfront park and the business district creates an active “front door” enhanced by the imaginative “Whale Tail” fountain.

It will be an area for tourists and visitors to safely transit through all New London’s transportation options; the ferries, trains and busses, leading visitors to explore the Historic Waterfront District. The Parade Plaza opens up views of Bank and State Streets, encouraging exploration of the city, helping visitors discover the many shops, art galleries, restaurants and historic sites in this very walkable district.

Historically the Parade was the center of all commerce. In the early settlement of the city local farmers drove herds of cattle through the streets to be loaded onto ships bound for the West Indies. Barrels of sugar, molasses and rum made the return trip enriching early city fathers. Thus, the new Parade Plaza will also be a site for people to learn about the history of New London. A series of bronze plaques will provide interesting visuals and tell brief tales of important moments in the history of the city. The plaques will suggest locations such as the Custom House, Shaw Mansion, the Hempstead Houses, the Nathan Hale Schoolhouse, where more information can be found.

The Nathan Hale Schoolhouse will have it’s own plaza next to the parking garage to welcome all visitors. The new location gives the schoolhouse a prominent position in the Parade Plaza and provides a safe place for students to be dropped off on their school trips.

While there will be some inconvenience during the 18-month construction period, this redesign of the Parade is a long-term investment in New London’s economic development and its future as a major tourist destination.

Antientest Buriall Ground

The Antientest Buriall Ground is the oldest place of internment in eastern Connecticut. The 1652 grave of Richard Lord is the earliest stone in the cemetery, and the earliest stone in all of New London county. Other noteworthy burials include Thomas Short, first printer in the colony of Connecticut and Gurdon Saltonstall, fifth governor of Connecticut. Several men who died at the Battle of Fort Griswold, Sept. 6, 1781 are buried here as well as Nathaniel Shaw Jr., Connecticut Naval Agent during the Revolutionary War, and his wife Lucretia Shaw.

An interesting aspect of the burial ground is the section set aside for people of color. New London in the 18th century had one of the largest black populations in New England. In 1998, New London Landmarks joined with The New Londoners, a group of local African-American families, to raise money for the conservation and commemoration of these graves in the Antientest Burial Ground. Quickly raising over $10,000, five African-American gravestones were stabilized and bronze plaques were placed on 10 other African-American graves where the stones had been lost. Landmarks used the remaining funds to have a professional assessment of all the gravestones completed, and in 2002, with the help of a grant, 16 gravestones in direst need were conserved.

In early October the U.S. Park Service is hosting a workshop here in New London that is focused on the challenges of restoring and maintaining historic gravestones.

On October 11, 2008, at 10:30 am, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Lucretia Shaw Chapter, are planning to place bronze plaques at the graves of Nathaniel Shaw Jr. and his wife Lucretia Shaw, to mark their Revolutionary War service and significance to New London’s Patriot cause.

On November 1, 2008, New London Landmarks offers a tour of the burial ground led by Lance Mayer and Sally Ryan. The tour begins at 2:00 and will be followed with cider and donuts. Tickets: $10, advance purchase recommended.
Franklin is an historic street, part of the Hempstead Street National Register Historic District, and within walking distance of downtown. And, it is in the midst of change. . .

These two houses have fascinating stories to tell about the history of New London; they provide a lesson in how and why a neighborhood can and should be revitalized.

They are also different examples of the argument concerning issues of individual property rights v/s responsibility to the neighborhood and the larger community.

They are also examples of why New London must do everything possible to insist on proper maintenance of historic properties and stop demolition of our cultural and historic resources.

Suzette Kelo’s little pink house on the Fort Trumbull peninsula became a nationally-known symbol of Eminent Domain activities and has launched a nationwide property rights movement to stop eminent domain abuse.

Since losing the case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005, the house was disassembled and moved piece-by-piece to this new location at 36 Franklin Street. (above left) Local preservationist Avner Gregory located the Kelo House on his property and has lovingly restored the home with additional improvements to help it fit on the site. Today it is Avner’s home and also a monument to all the friends and Fort Trumbull neighbors who battled to save their neighborhood from demolition, supported by the Institute of Justice.

Just up Franklin Street at the corner of Hempstead Street is an 1866 Italianate home in desperate need of loving care, maintenance and restoration. (above right) However, it is the property of the Shiloh Baptist Church and they need the property for the expansion of their church. This is the crux of the property rights problem.

- This beautiful historic home has been left uncared for since around 2004.
- The City of New London has no maintenance codes requiring property owners to maintain their buildings.
- The property owner has other uses for the property and is not willing to invest in maintenance or restoration.
- While many neighboring properties are in the midst of restoration and/or renovation this house stands out as an eyesore to the entire neighborhood.
- The neighborhood is a National Register District filled with historic homes and within easy walking distance of downtown. It is a neighborhood whose economic development is important to the over-all economic health of the City of New London.

The church has offered the house for $1. to anyone who is willing to move it off the site and one offer has been received by the church. NLL is not part of that negotiation process although we did promote the offer with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and advertised it in a story in This Old House magazine. NLL could simply not face the demolition of the house, nor could we purchase and restore it. We received nearly 100 calls from people who read the This Old House story and were interested in saving the house. They appreciated the value of an historic home, constructed with oak, chestnut and pine; wide board floors, a curving staircase and beautiful moldings around the ceilings and windows.

However, neighbors and preservationists want the house saved and kept in its present location. Shiloh Baptist Church has now offered the house for sale at the price they paid for it: $170,000. The dilemma is economics. The house is in such bad condition a new owner couldn’t move into it without a considerable additional investment.

As of early September no decisions have been made about the future of the house, perhaps there is still time to find a way to save and restore the home on its site on Franklin Street.
## NEW LONDON LANDMARKS
### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**OCTOBER:**
**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11—10:00 AM—2:00 PM**
**“MOVING HOUSE” ON ROBINSON STREET**
See the changes that have taken place since July, and visit one of the cottages on Ann Street.

**NOVEMBER:**
**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1—2:00 PM**
Guided Tour the Antientest Buriall Ground with Lance Mayer and Sally Ryan. Tickets $10. (Advance purchase recommended)

Saturday, November 8
A full-day Symposium at the Custom House Maritime Museum, celebrating the 175th anniversary of the Custom House & the 25th anniversary of the Maritime Museum.
- **Featured Speakers:**
  - John Bryan author of *Americas First Architect, Robert Mills*
  - Chris Wigren, Deputy Director, CT Trust for Historic Preservation and Greg Stone, Custom House Maritime Museum Board Member lead a Forum on Federal Architecture and Preservation in New London
- **New Exhibit** on the architecture of the Custom House, with original Robert Mills drawings for the construction of the Custom House.

Pre-Registration and Fee contact: [www.NLmaritime.society.org](http://www.NLmaritime.society.org)

## CRUISE SHIP ARRIVALS & WALKING TOURS

**PLEASE NOTE:** Times for the walking tours have been changed to accommodate revised ship arrival times.

**Thursday, September 25**
Princess Cruise Line: *Royal Princess*
**HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE ON STATE STREET** – Walking Tour led by New London Landmarks. 12:30 PM
Start from Union Station, - $10.

**Saturday, September 27**
Princess Cruise Line: *Royal Princess*
**HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE ON STATE STREET** – Walking Tour led by New London Landmarks. 10:30 am & 1:00 PM
Start from Union Station, - $10.

**Monday, September 29**
National Geographic/Linblad Expedition, *Explorer*
**HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE ON STATE STREET** – Walking Tour led by New London Landmarks. 2:30 pm.
Start from Union Station, - $10.

**Friday, October 17 & Sunday, October 19**
Princess Cruise Line: *Royal Princess*
**HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE ON STATE STREET** – Walking Tour led by New London Landmarks. 12:30 PM
Start from Union Station, - $10.

**Thursday, November 6**
Princess Cruise Line: *Royal Princess*
**HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE ON STATE STREET** – Walking Tour led by New London Landmarks. 12:30 PM
Start from Union Station, - $10.