



The Preservationist

1976—2006 We're celebrating 30 years

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The Preservationist

Editor

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Printing

Joseph Merritt & Co.

March 2006

Bank Street 30 Years Ago

Kristin Clarke, archivist

DISCOVER HISTORIC BANK STREET BEFORE IT'S GONE

Remember this slogan?

This is the way preservation began in New London — with the effort to save historic buildings on Bank Street, despite their run-down or derelict condition.

Looking at Bank Street in 2006, one sees an increasingly vibrant street, with galleries, restaurants, retailers occupying historic buildings. However, turning the clock back 30 years, a very different scene was taking place.

In 1976, while the nation was preparing to celebrate its Bicentennial, New London was battling to save Bank Street. The street's foe this time was not the fires set by Benedict Arnold's troops as they marched through the city, or the '38 hurricane, but looming wrecking balls and bulldozers.

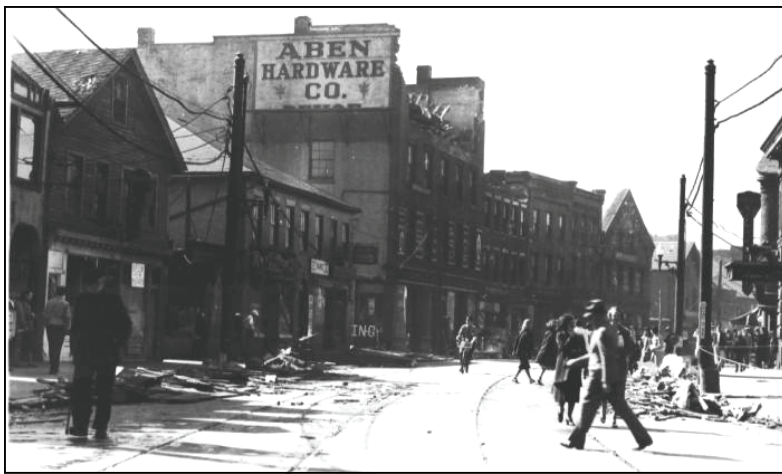
By the mid 70's, disrepair and rowdiness were common associations for Bank Street. It was the gritty, wilder part of downtown, compared with the stately, commercial and financial focus of State Street. However, the street's buildings were a fascinating mix, telling the rich story of New London's history. Whaling banks, homes of prominent businessmen, the customhouse, vaudeville theaters were all part of the complex fabric of the street.

Throughout Bank Street's history, waterfront industries and all that went with them vied for attention along the street: docks, rooming houses, rowdy bars and constant activity made for a lively street scene. This followed throughout 20th century and as the presence of the submarine base in Groton grew, Bank Street continued to be a sailor's hangout. Even in Greene's Books & Beans serene space (140 Bank), there are reminders of its previous incarnation as the Flamingo Café: cigarette and cigar marks are burned into the floors and there is a visible divot in the storefront window presumably from a ricocheting gunshot.



Continue on page 6

Stay tuned...more on Bank Street



1938 Hurricane damage on Bank Street

“Bank Street 30 Years Ago” is a preview of ongoing research for our newest PowerPoint presentation to debut in May during Historic Preservation Month. This article looks at one block of Bank Street in the context of 1970s re-development. The PowerPoint will consider how Bank Street has evolved from when it began, through economic and social changes in New London and throughout our society, following a path to its resurgence today.

How did the rise and fall of whaling affect the street? Just how much damage did Benedict Arnold inflict? What other sections of the street were slated for demolition? Who were the players that brought Bank Street back?

Directors Report

Sandra Kersten Chalk

AND . . . WHAT OF THE FUTURE, NEW LONDON?

Annual meetings are moments to shed a tear for departing board members and a tear of joy as we welcome new board members to the table. As we thank Barun Basu and Rob Richter for their years of service to Landmarks, we are glad to welcome them as members of the Advisory Board, keeping them as partners in our activities. We are also delighted to welcome Abigail Van Slyck and Allyn de Vars to the Board. As students of New London History with special interest and concern for our architectural heritage, they bring unique talents to NLL. In addition, we have a change in the Executive Committee with Heather Grigsby stepping down, (although remaining on the board,) and Susan Munger replacing her as our new Vice President.

We held a full day retreat in February, led by Sally Whipple, who is the director of the Lebanon, CT Historical Society. Landmarks' future was the topic, and while we reviewed some of our past accomplishments we also looked forward to the challenges facing New London's preservation community. The Capitol Theatre looms large in our concerns. As a core block in the Historic Water-front District we need to help find a new life for this old building with its graceful façade anchoring the first block of Bank Street. Appreciation for New London's historic resources, in a vital and energetic downtown, with a re-designed, pedestrian-friendly Parade and a thriving transportation center, is another of our visions for the future.

A positive outcome for each of the remaining property owners in Fort Trumbull is another concern. City Council has given them until May 31 to accept an offer to be negotiated with the City. Current proposed offers include: moving houses to a specific location (where owners could live for the remainder of their lives, while paying rent to the city); accepting the City's offer to receive compensation and, thus, moving; or, to quote Rob Pero, “get their walking papers.”

Landmarks would like to see the few remaining historic homes become the anchor and design motif for future construction. As a new river-front development, including commercial buildings, a Coast Guard Museum, a hotel and condominiums surrounding this traditional housing, “The Fort” can become a vital mixed-use community and key to bringing economic development to New London. Each current property owner has individual concerns for their property and their future - these concerns should be honored by NLDC and the City of New London.

Reminder. All NLL memberships run from April first through March of the following year. As members you become active partners in our preservation work in New London. Please renew today, we appreciate your support.

May is National Historic Preservation Month. Check out the preliminary calendar on the cover and stay tuned for many interesting May activities.

30-Year Highlights

Compiled by Susan Munger

1976 New London Landmarks (NLL) forms and merges with Union Railroad Station Trust to establish a united voice for preservation.

NLL holds 1st walking tour on Bank St with 75 people.

1st issue of NLL newsletter appears, edited by Clifford Stone.



1979 NLL purchases Elias Jennison House, 89 Hempstead St, overseas structural repairs, and sells the house in 1982.

1980 At the request of the City Council, NLL completes historical & architectural surveys of East New London & Fort Trumbull.



1985 Plaque program begins.

1986 City designates NLL to coordinate conservation of Nathan Hale and John Winthrop, Jr., statues using Palmer Grant funds. Today these statues are once again in serious need of repair and restoration.

1987 Local history curriculum developed by NLL given to New London Board of Education. This 6-part history program, available at all New London school libraries, includes historical information, illustrated architectural details and ideas for field trips and tours of the City.



NLL proposes joint task force together with the Design Review Board and the Planning & Zoning Commission to establish standards for rehabilitation and new construction being proposed for historic areas.



1988 NLL and New London Development Corporation (NLCD) begin working to establish awareness among downtown property owners about rehabilitation of historic buildings in the Downtown New London Historic District.

Preservation and restoration have long-term goals. Just look at what is happening today on State, Bank, Golden Streets, and Green Alley — our Historic Waterfront District is experiencing significant renovation.



1988 NLL purchases the dilapidated David Bishop House, 49 Washington Street, for \$22,000.

1995 David Bishop House is fully restored and dedicated as headquarters for NLL.

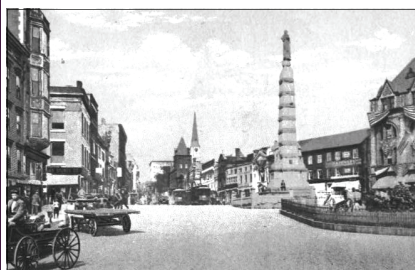


30-Year Highlights



1996 NLL urges P&Z to deny a permit that would lead to the demolition of the Hygienic Restaurant.

1999 Antientist Burial Place. Restoration begins on selected stones.



2000 Coalition to Save the Fort Trumbull Neighborhood begins holding monthly meetings at NLL office

2001 NLL board members attend Hyatt-Palma action committee meeting and accept the reports challenge: *"... The Parade should be enhanced to more closely resemble its original design and purpose"*



2003 City Council passes new Delay of Demolition ordinance developed by NLL..



2002 Through efforts of NLL, the 19th century Hopson & Chapin Building, 69 Hamilton St, is placed on the State Register of Historic Places.

2004 NLL hires architect Frederick Biebsheimer to prepare a detailed structural analysis of Hopson & Chapin



2003–2006 Work begins on Hempstead Trail Signage program, a self-guided walking tour of the Hempstead neighborhood. Opening of the tour and a special guidebook to the neighborhood is planned for May 6, 2006.

2005 NLL takes an active role in promoting redesign of Parade; NL Main Street, the City of New London and City Center District join in effort.

Preserving our Heritage:

New London's 12 National Register Historic Districts and 24 individually listed National Register sites were researched and compiled by New London Landmarks. Professional preservationists prepare the applications for State approval before they can be sent on to the Park Service for the national listing. We have an application for the Hopson & Chapin Factory building pending approval from the State.

This on-going research project seeks to honor and preserve our architectural heritage while also developing regional and national recognition for our historic resources.

Coit Street Historic District—1988

Downtown New London Historic District—1979

Downtown New London Historic District—1988
(Boundary Increase)

Hempstead Street Historic District—1986

Pequot Colony Historic District

Prospect Street Historic District—1986

U. S. Housing Corp. Historic District—1990

Whale Oil Row—1970

Williams Memorial Park Historic District—1987

Civic Institutions Historic District—1990

Montauk Avenue Historic District—1990

Post Hill Historic District—1993

Annual Appeal donations—2005

A very important part of our annual budget is made up of contributions during our Annual Appeal in November. This additional support, along with answers to the survey questions, provided us with a valuable assessment of our activities. As we plan activities and programs for the next few years, your responses to our questions will be part of the planning process. As we thank you for your support today— we hope to continue to earn your support tomorrow.

<u>\$1,000. and above</u>	Bill Morse	Susan & Donald Cash
Anonymous	Susan Munger & Nield Oldham	Sandra & Rodney Chalk
	Robert Richter	Kristin Clarke
<u>\$500. and above</u>	Abigail Van Slyck	Carol Corbeil
Dr. & Mrs. David Hayes	& Mitchell Favreau	Deborah Donovan
Wick & Rodi York		Rick & Myra Gipstein
John & Sarah E. Steffian	<u>\$50. and above</u>	Barbara Kil
	Mary Chrisman Anderson	Beth Komorowski
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Lloyd & Sandy Beachy	Russell & Pauline DeMarco	Rita Lentine
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Elizabeth & Joshua Friedman	James & Ellen McGuire	Charlotte Rea & Robert Fricker
Heather & Rick Grigsby		Wilfred Thompson
Myron & Rita Hendel	<u>\$25.</u>	Martha Williams
Stephen L. Joncus AIA	Mr. & Mrs. Deane C. Avery	Melvin J. Woody

Our Annual Membership drive begins at our Annual Meeting. Remember our Membership year is April 1 through March 31. A letter and membership envelope will be sent out shortly and this is a reminder to renew promptly. Of course, we are always happy to welcome new members to join in our preservation efforts for New London.

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

Our Mission Statement:

"... To promote the preservation and development of the entire urban environment of New London, Connecticut, including significant individual structures, streetscapes, neighborhoods and open spaces.

A Whole New View of New London

Thanks to a grant from the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund we are continuing our research and archival work with a special emphasis on State Street and Bank Street.

Our Power Point shows are available for meetings, classrooms or special events. Five New London neighborhoods are the first of a planned series of shows to highlight the history of New London.

- 1) East New London and Winthrop Cove— from city founding in 1646 until today
- 2) Coit Street & Bream Cove— the growth & death & rebirth of a neighborhood from Revolutionary fires to today
- 3) Hempstead Street 1678 - 2005 — traces changes occurring over 300 years to this one, central by-way
- 4) The Pequot — historic photos of Pequot Houses & Cottages provide a record of mid to late 1800 development.
- 5) Fort Trumbull — includes a history of urban renewal in New London with before and after photos of East New London and Fort Trumbull.

Program supported with a grant from the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund

DAVID BISHOP HOUSE



c1796

Historic Plaques

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 and is archived in our office for future generations.

Our title researchers study land, tax and water records, historic maps and city directories to establish your building's first owner and the date of its estimated construction. The researcher also welcomes any oral history or copies of old documents relating to your building that you may have.

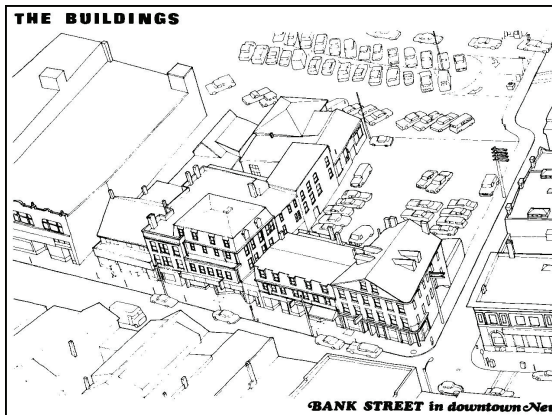
As this is such a popular program and research is very time-consuming for our volunteer researchers, we are not accepting new applications at the moment. I am happy to take your name and phone number and as soon as we have caught up on our back-orders, you will be first on the list for a plaque.

Thank you for your patience,

Heather Grigsby, Plaque Chair

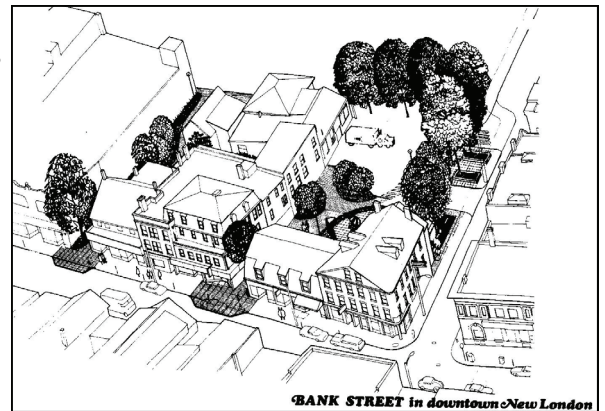
Bank Street 30 Years Ago

continued from page 1



Wishing to revitalize Bank Street, and confronting the rundown conditions of the historic buildings, the city's Redevelopment Agency developed plans for the future of the street. Bank Street was part of the larger downtown redevelopment area with the goal of injecting business back into downtown. As in other areas of the city, the agency's plan included demolition of many buildings with plans for new construction to follow, a common trend in urban planning at the time.

In the downtown redevelopment area, 87 buildings fell within this zone and 1/3 were slated for demolition.



Redevelopment plan for the corner of Bank & Golden Streets

While often painted in a dark light, the Redevelopment Agency produced at least one valuable report related to the historic buildings slated for demolition. "Bank Street Rehabilitation: Study of 8 Buildings" (undated) documented the historical significance, structural integrity and the role they played in the streetscape. The report included five buildings located from 79 to 111 Bank Street, some of the oldest on a continuous stretch along the street: the Harris Block (the Hygienic), the Fosdick House, the Gurley House, Marty's and the Bulkeley House.

In this early plan, the buildings were to be retained between 79 to 111 Bank Street and an attractive new park plan is shown in these axonometric drawings. Nevertheless, many other Bank Street buildings were on the demolition list.

Saving Bank Street was one of New London Landmarks' first achievements. The newly formed group began an active campaign with the goals of increasing public awareness of the historic significance of the buildings, saving the buildings from demolition and using historic preservation as a broad tool for downtown revitalization. Walking tours of Bank Street were a key element in raising public awareness. The National Register Downtown New London District was designated in 1979.

79-111 Bank Street



Four of these five buildings were deemed worthy of saving for primarily two reasons - to maintain the streetscape pattern and preserve their significant historic value.

Beginning at the corner of Golden & Bank is Harris Block, known then, and still today, as the Hygienic (79 Bank Street). At the time of the report, it was thought to be in the best structural condition of the buildings included. While it was not demolished during Redevelopment, it was not renovated until the 1990's when the threat of demolition for a parking lot set the arts community and New London Landmarks into action. The resulting stay of demolition order allowed for the eventual purchase of the building by the hard-working Hygienic artist group. Perseverance and extensive fund-raising created the artist studios and exhibit space we see today.

Sharing a structural wall with the Hygienic was the Fosdick House. The Fosdick House had severe fire damage rendering the second floor and attic unusable. The consultants called saving Fosdick House "a dubious venture at best," but felt that the building's first floor could be renovated, with the top two floors torn down and re-built. The next door Gurley House had undergone major structural changes in the early twentieth century. It had been jacked up to make room for a new street level space and an extension was added, wrapping around the house. The consultants were at a loss as to the best possible reuse for this building as the whole structure was in poor condition.

While both Gurley and Fosdick had structural changes from their original construction, the consultants felt that their presence on Bank Street was important for the continuity of the block and movement along the street. They did not have a real solution, but provided cost estimates for the plans they presented, shown on the previous page.

The Bulkeley House, the 1790 home of Charles Bulkeley, (111 Bank Street) had seen many changes as well, including the addition of a storefront to the building. The Federal style building was structurally intact, but underutilized and in need of much repair. After standing vacant for several years, it was carefully restored, maintaining much original character, and converted to a restaurant in 1984. NLL hosted an open house to celebrate its grand opening.



Bulkeley House in the 1970s

A small building, only referred to as Marty's, was the fifth building on the block. It was nestled in between Gurley House and Fosdick House, but Marty's was not deemed of historic merit and was demolished without regret.



Ultimately, Fosdick and Gurley Houses were demolished and remained as vacant unfinished lots until recently. Now, they are growing, literally, into the fabric of the street as urban green spaces, including the Hygienic Art Park.

This stretch of Bank Street has seen dramatic changes in the last thirty years and today is part of a 21st century urban fabric. Vitality is returning with urban green space and the Art Park book ended by the two restored buildings — all playing a major role downtown revitalization.

New London Landmarks was a key player in creating public interest in saving Bank Street and in showing that historic preservation can also be an economic development tool.



View of New London from Fort Trumbull by Frederick Allen
Courtesy of Lyman Allyn Museum

Calendar for the summer will include a multitude of events under the banner of Thames River Heritage — details to come but here is a quick look at activities:

May 6—Founders Day: Opening of the Hempstead Colony Walking Tour and neighborhood project 11:00 am at the Trolley Station

May 20—Springtime in Secret New London — 11:00 am—4:00 pm. New sights, new shops, new restaurants and downtown New London is ready to greet the Summer of 2006! Come for a preview.

June 23— *Mystic Whaler* arrives at City Pier

- Walking Tour of Bank Street led by Sally Ryan
- History of Bank Street, Power Point show from archives of New London Landmarks
- Privateer Tours at the Shaw Mansion

September—Labor Day Weekend

Burning of New London and the Battle of Groton Heights—re-enacted by a cast of 100's and sponsored by the New London County Historical Society

The Preservationist

March 2006



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