

Downtown Renaissance *New Residents Flock to Connecticut Cities*

Christopher Wigren

The sidewalks no longer roll up at five o'clock. Restaurants serve dinner as well as lunch. Weekends see crowds come out to shop or stroll and chat. The good life no longer has to be lived in a freestanding house on two acres in the suburbs. Instead, its setting can be a loft in a converted office building. After years of struggling to attract businesses, Connecticut downtowns are seeing a new influx of residents.

As cities grew in the 19th and early 20th centuries, increasing noise, crowds, smells and high real estate costs drove anyone who could to live in the countryside — or at least the suburban approximation of countryside. Zoning regulations, with their emphasis on separating uses, further encouraged this trend. After World War II, planning theories and urban renewal made downtown living almost unthinkable. Once people began living in the suburbs, the logical consequence was to want to shop and work there, too. Business fled the cities, leaving behind empty spaces that are now attracting a new generation of city dwellers.

In fact, most Connecticut cities have always had some downtown residents. Urban renewal in New Haven and Hartford included some close-in apartment towers, such as the Bushnell Tower in Hartford, designed by I. M. Pei. In the 1980s, local entrepreneur Joel Schiavone redeveloped New Haven's Chapel and College streets with ground-level shops and restaurants and upper-level apartments, many of which attracted Yale students or faculty members. Other successful downtown revitalization projects in the 1980s and '90s included SoNo in South Norwalk and New Haven's Ninth Square, both of which reused historic buildings.

Since the late 1990s the rate of market-rate residential development in downtowns has increased markedly. New Haven has probably seen the largest number of projects. One of the most prominent is the conversion of the former Southern New England Telephone Company (SNET) headquarters on Church Street, now known as The Eli, to apartments with monthly rents ranging from \$910 to more than \$3,000. At the corner of Church and Chapel streets — the very heart of the city's commercial downtown — the Cutler's Block and the Woolworth building are being

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C. Wigren

Luxury lofts in downtown New Haven.

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From the Executive Director

Four members of the Trust's board of trustees, Martha Alexander, Joan Carty, Lisa Holmes and chairman Ted Ells, joined me and our two Circuit Riders, Nina Harkrader and Brad Schide, in Louisville, Kentucky, for the annual meeting of the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** in late September. Among the valuable work sessions we all attended were a training workshop for historic district commissions, real estate development for historic properties, use of historic tax credits, a comparison of revolving loan funds, and information on protecting cultural landscapes. The conference attracts over 2,000 attendees, many of whom are associated with a local or statewide preservation organization and with Main Street Centers; others are planners, developers, real estate agents, barn enthusiasts, restoration contractors, architects, community loan fund agents and so on. A mix of fun and vibrant people.

In September, for the 6th year, the Trust held **House Talk**, this time in Griswold. During a morning of torrential rain, Helmut and Pamela Reinholtz graciously let 25 strangers tromp through their 18th-century work-in-progress. Jane Montanaro, one of the Trust's network of underpaid consultants, once again organized the day which featured the expert musings of architectural historian James Sexton, Ph.D., and slate roofing guru Rich Susca of C.W. Bostwick.

The September/October issue of *Connecticut Preservation News* featured

This year's list has already led to actions that may ultimately save some of the threatened places.



Thanks to Dow Chemical's Union Carbide Corporation, the Trust's conference room has new tables, chairs and bookcases. The furniture comes from the award-winning Union Carbide Headquarters, in Danbury, designed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates of Hamden and completed in 1982.

our annual list of **The Most Important Threatened Historic Places** in Connecticut. Once the list was published here and in the *Hartford Courant's* Sunday PLACE section, our intern from Albertus Magnus

College, Stefania Viscusi, sent press releases to alert regional media of our choices. A media storm erupted, especially after AP caught the story. We are certainly pleased that this year's list elicited so much attention and, in some cases, has already led to actions that may ultimately

save some of the threatened places.

The Trust has been invited to add a historic preservation component to the **Heritage Advancement Program** in greater Hartford. The Connecticut Humanities Council, the Greater Hartford Arts Council, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Greater Hartford Tourism District announced in September a new granting program to enable qualifying heritage sites to hire the staff needed to serve more people as tourism in the area increases. For those organizations and their identified partners, the Trust will offer technical preservation assistance and a dedicated granting pool whose funds will support historic preservation or rehabilitation projects that will add to the "heritage readiness" of the heritage sites. For more information, please visit www.ctheritage.org.

— Helen Higgins

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

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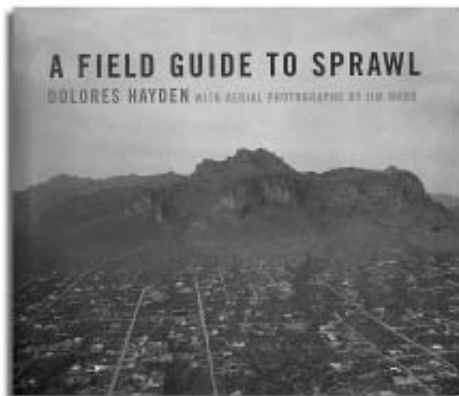
BOOK NOTES

Dolores Hayden, *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (W. W. Norton, 2004), 144 pages, \$24.95.

What do a “duck” and a “LULU” have in common? They are terms that make up a new vocabulary describing specific types of sprawl in this country, as presented by Dolores Hayden in her new book, *A Field Guide to Sprawl*. A “duck” is a building that serves as an advertisement for the product sold within it. “LULU” stands for a “locally unwanted land use,” such as a waste incinerator or a nuclear facility. Fifty other terms are described in the book, including more common sprawl terms, such as “big box” and “drive-through” developments, terms commonly associated with the ubiquitous chain superstores that devour much of the landscape along our roadways for their purposes.

The speculative building and unchecked development behind sprawl has forced us to create these new terms to properly view the American landscape, according to Hayden, a Professor of Architecture, Urbanism and American Studies at Yale University. She discusses the terms and documents them with aerial photos from around the country. One photo, called “clustered world” shows a cul-de-sac and a spiraling roadway with suburban houses crammed together around it. Hayden says that every square foot of land in the clustered world is accounted for, with no open or public space, and every house along the roadway is homogeneous and devoid of any architectural detail that distinguishes one from the next.

The small 120-page book probes the history of sprawl and some of its causes, but it is most vivid in showing the consequences of unrestrained building. Sprawling developments eat up farms, meadows and forests, turning them into strip malls



and subdivisions that serve cars better than people, and drain the life out of historic town and city centers. Hayden claims there is a war being waged on sprawl across the country, where communities are waking up and enacting restrictions on this unsustainable growth. “Americans do not have to tolerate sprawl”, she says. She calls on concerned citizens to challenge the economic forces behind sprawl and pursue a balanced, integrated built environment that supports historic neighborhoods and the natural features of the landscape.

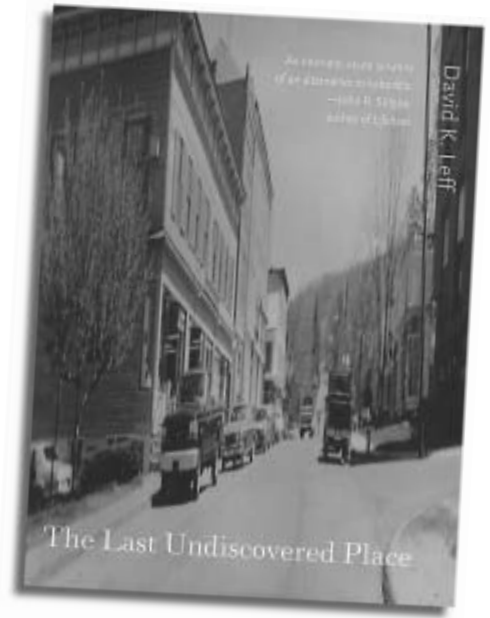
—Brad Schide

David K. Leff, *The Last Undiscovered Place* (University of Virginia Press, 2004), 247 pages, \$27.95.

Preservation is about knowing and maintaining places that we find important. To do that, we have to understand the places about us, to know what makes them important. In *The Last Undiscovered Place*, David Leff does that for Collinsville, a village in the town of Canton, which grew up around the Collins Axe Company factory, beginning in 1826. After the Collins company closed in 1966, the village has struggled to remain viable in rapidly changing suburban surroundings.

As Leff describes it, Collinsville is still very much a traditional small town, a place of corner stores and old houses, where residents meet each other frequently in the course of their daily lives. Leff, Deputy Commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, moved to Collinsville 20 years ago, and gradually became more and more in-

involved in the community's life. He is a volunteer fireman and has chaired the Historic District Commission and moderated town meetings. For Leff, it is the web of informal relationships and volunteer activities that together make Collinsville function as a community. A sense of community, he writes, is “not an old-fashioned



concept that has gone out of style, archaic as horsehair plaster, to be replaced with something more modern and efficient. It is timeless, and stems from the interactions of neighbors and citizens. In essence, communities belong to those who participate.” Later, he adds, “We get the communities we work for.”

While human relationships are the primary building blocks of this community, the physical shape of Collinsville plays an important role, too. The small lots and public spaces, the corner stores and local bank help to ensure that citizens see each other frequently and have plentiful opportunities to learn each other's concerns and ideas and to discuss community issues. For Leff, building patterns don't make a community, but they can reinforce it.

Even more than a snapshot of one Connecticut community, David Leff wants *The Last Undiscovered Place* to encourage readers to explore and seek to understand their own communities. He writes, “I offer my explorations not to demonstrate that this village is any better than anyplace else but to foster discovery of other places....I merely suggest that there is an unknown world of endless fascination at our doorsteps, and that we underestimate the depths of our belonging, the extent to which we are shaped by our surroundings. If we grow to know our communities, they will enrich our lives and we will learn to care for them and work to make them better.”

— Christopher Wigren

New Listings on the National Register of Historic Places

Four urban places have recently been added to the National Register of Historic Places. They include a commercial building, a residential district that grew up at the edge of Hartford's downtown, and two churches. Sites whose importance is primarily religious are not listed on the National Register, but both churches are also significant architecturally and for their place in social history.

The **Southern New England Telephone Company Building in Hartford**, constructed in 1930, is significant as one of Hartford's most important examples of the Art Deco style, as well as for its place in the evolution of the communications industry in the 20th century.

The Southern New England Telephone Company (SNET) launched Connecticut's telephone network in the 1880s. The 1920s were a decade of tremendous growth in telephone technology for SNET, the first company to introduce direct dialing. Because of the new equipment required, and thanks to the company's increased profits, SNET was able to erect this building during the Depression, a time when little commercial construction took place. In the early 1950s, when long-distance calling was improved, growth in employment and



Robert Powers

Southern New England Telephone Company building, Hartford. Above: Geometrical carving and stylized flowers.

equipment made it necessary to expand the building. Six additional stories were added, bringing the total height to 12 floors.

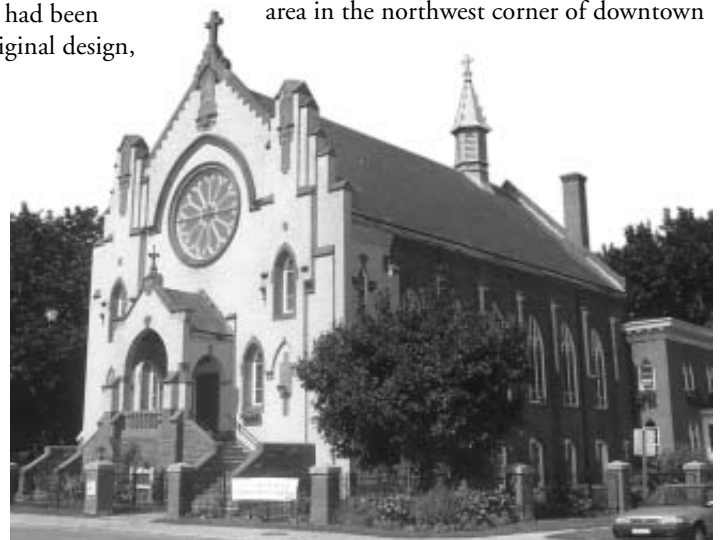
SNET wanted to create a building that was "impressive yet not imposingly formal." The building's Art Deco style emphasizes linear as well as embellished geometrical ornamentation. The main elevation has decorative grilles and geometric floral carvings. Geometrical window patterns are also a significant motif. The addition, above the sixth floor, had been planned for in the original design,

which provided structural capability to support the new construction. In keeping with current architectural trends, however, the new stories are much simpler, reflecting postwar rejection of carved ornament.

In the 1970s SNET relocated into other facilities, and in the following decades the building was subleased and renovated by tenants. However, the space was increasingly vacated and wholly abandoned by the late 1990s. The building has recently been converted to apartments.

The **Downtown North Historic District in Hartford** is a primarily residential area in the northwest corner of downtown

David F. Ransom



Downtown North Historic District, Hartford. Right: Sacred Heart Church was built in 1892 to designs by Hartford architect Michael O'Donohue. The façade was altered in 1917 by George A. Zunner, Sr.



HRC

Left: Stone construction, pointed arches, and medieval detailing are elements of the Gothic Revival style at St. James' Episcopal Church, New London. **Right:** St. James' Episcopal Church boasts seven windows by Tiffany and Company, one of America's most innovative producers of stained glass.

Hartford that includes 28 brick and brownstone structures constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With building types that include a school, a church, a warehouse, shops, single-family houses, apartment buildings, a memorial tower and a hotel, built in a variety of architectural styles and nearly all designed by local architects, the district's architecture traces the changing nature of a portion of downtown Hartford.

A number of luxurious homes were built in the district in the 19th century, among them the Isham Terry house, an

Italianate villa, and the Queen Anne-style Arthur G. Pomeroy house, both listed individually on the National Register. Other houses of equal extravagance include another Queen Anne example, located at 1313-1317 Main Street. Its façade is partially obscured by a commercial front added in 1927, as the neighborhood became more densely settled and new businesses moved in to serve the residents.

Several public buildings punctuate the neighborhood. The Keeney Tower of 1898 is a 130-foot brownstone tower designed by New York architect Charles C. Haight on the site of the Keeney family's house and store. The Henry Barnard School, a

Neoclassical Revival building of brick and brownstone, has three entrance towers and a battlemented roof that resembles contemporary armories. Now known as Barnard-Brown, it continues to function

continued next page

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New Listings, cont'd

as a public elementary school. Sacred Heart Church, a brick structure in the Gothic Revival style, was built for a German-American parish.

Today, there is less residential or commercial activity in the district. Many structures are vacant and boarded up, and there are ten vacant parcels. Much of this inactivity may result from the construction of Interstate 84, which cut the neighborhood off from the rest of downtown Hartford. Nonetheless, the district's buildings still convey a sense of character and development of a residential neighborhood.

New London's St. James' Episcopal Church is a perfect display of Gothic Revival architecture designed by one of America's leading 19th-century architects. Located in the commercial downtown area, the large stone church was built be-



Mary Dunne

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, New Haven. Right: Polychrome brick forms decorative bands.

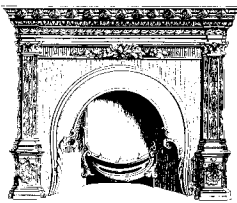
tween 1847 and 1850 to designs by Richard Upjohn, a pioneer of the Gothic Revival and a founder and the first president of the American Institute of Architects. Beautiful detailing, form and materials, all featured in the design of this church, exemplify Upjohn's work. The church's foundation and walls are built of a random ashlar of red New Jersey sandstone. Most of the original windows, purchased from the Sharpe studio of New York City, are simple grisaille glass painted with *fleurs-de-lis*. But there are more elaborate windows — the circular west window bearing the symbols of the four evangelists and the large window above altar, depicting Christian symbols tied together with grapevines — in prominent locations.

An elaborate cast-iron fence featuring trefoil arches lines the church's property on the north and west sides. Within the fence is a marble monument that formerly stood in over the grave of Samuel Seabury, the first Episcopal bishop in the United States. The monument was brought here when the church was built and Seabury's body was interred in the crypt.

Saint James' is New London's oldest Episcopal parish. Its members have included some of New London's wealthiest and most influential families, people who prospered from the city's whaling and commercial enterprises. The church was nominated to the National Register in 1990, but was not listed, due to the

continued page 13

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John F. Kennedy - October 26, 1963

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Avon Nomination Draws Town's Objections

The State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service alike are stumped that the town of Avon has raised objections to a proposed National Register district in the town center.

In a presentation to the State Historic Preservation Board (also known as the Review Board) on October 14, Avon's town attorney, Marvin P. Bellis of the Hartford firm Murtha Cullina LLP, objected to the inclusion of town-owned properties in the district — a school built in 1949, a park, the town green, and a group of historic industrial buildings converted to town offices.

The Review Board is made up of historians, architectural historians, architects, and archaeologists. Their task is to review nominations to the National Register and determine if they adequately make the case for the places' listing before the nominations are sent on to the National Park Service for final approval.

The most unusual portion of Bellis' presentation dealt with the question of contributing and noncontributing resources. For districts, the National Register distinguishes between resources (that is, buildings, structures, sites and objects) that contribute to the historic character of the district and those that do not. A new building erected in an historic neighborhood, for instance,



Avon's town offices, housed in former buildings of the Ensign-Bickford Fuse Company, are part of a contested National Register district nomination.

would be considered noncontributing but would not disqualify the entire district for listing.

On behalf of the town, Bellis argued that the town-owned properties could not be considered contributing because federal regulations provide for distinguishing between contributing and noncontributing *buildings* solely for the purpose of qualifying them for the federal rehabilitation tax credit. Since the park and the green are not buildings, he maintained that they cannot be considered contributing. Neither can the town-owned buildings, since the town pays no taxes and they therefore cannot qualify for a tax credit. Bellis recognized that the National Park Service's guidelines for preparing National Register nominations call for listing all resources in any district as either contributing or noncontributing, but he argued that the guidelines do not possess the legal authority of regulations adopted after official review and public hearings.

Beth Savage, Historian for the National Register, said "This question has

never been posed before in this context." She is consulting with the Department of the Interior's legal counsel.

Although Bellis did not mention it, the town's objections are surely based on the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act, which allows lawsuits to prevent the unreasonable demolition of resources listed on the National Register, a provision interpreted to include contributing resources in National Register districts.

The town also objected to the manner in which the nomination was submitted to the Review Board and disputed the historic nature of several of the town-owned properties. After discussion, the Review Board found that the disputed properties did have historic merit and contributed to the proposed district, which outlines the development of Avon Center from the early 19th century to about 1950. Much of the history centers on the operation of the Farmington Canal and the later Canal Line Railroad through Avon Center, and the growth of the Ensign-Bickford Fuse Company. ❖

Upcoming Meetings of the Connecticut Historic Preservation Council

December 1, 2004, at 9:30 a.m.
January 5, 2005, at 9:30 a.m.

◆
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PRESERVING LIGHTHOUSES



standing on the rocky coast or on offshore islands, or rising directly from the water, lighthouses are beloved landmarks of many a coastline community and vivid illustrations of the dangers and achievements of maritime history. In recent years, the changing needs of the Coast Guard, which operates navigational aids, have led to efforts by preservationists to ensure the lighthouses' continued existence.

In 2000, Congress passed the National Lighthouse Preservation Act (NLPA), a program administered by the Department of the Interior (see *CPN* November/December 2002 and March/April 2003). Under this act, the government is giving historic lighthouses away to local governments or nonprofit organizations. In exchange for the lighthouses, recipients are expected to maintain them according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, and to provide educational programs and public access. They must also allow the Coast Guard to continue to use the structures as aids to navigation. Current plans call for about 200 lighthouses across the country, including ten or more in Connecticut, eventually to be transferred out of federal ownership.

Periodically, the General Services Administration (GSA), the agency that oversees the transfers, announces availability of a group of lighthouses. Interested organizations have three months to submit letters of interest, after which groups that qualify for the program are asked to submit detailed applications from which a recipient is chosen. The National Park Service reviews the applications to determine whether applicants have the technical and financial ability to take responsibility for a lighthouse. The NPS makes a recommendation to the GSA, which makes the final decision. The deed includes a covenant outlining the requirements for proper care and maintenance, environmental remediation if needed, and public access.

If there is no qualified taker for a lighthouse (a case that has not yet occurred), the GSA can sell it to any interested buyer, in which case the covenants concerning historic preservation and Coast Guard access still apply,



J. E. Heilander

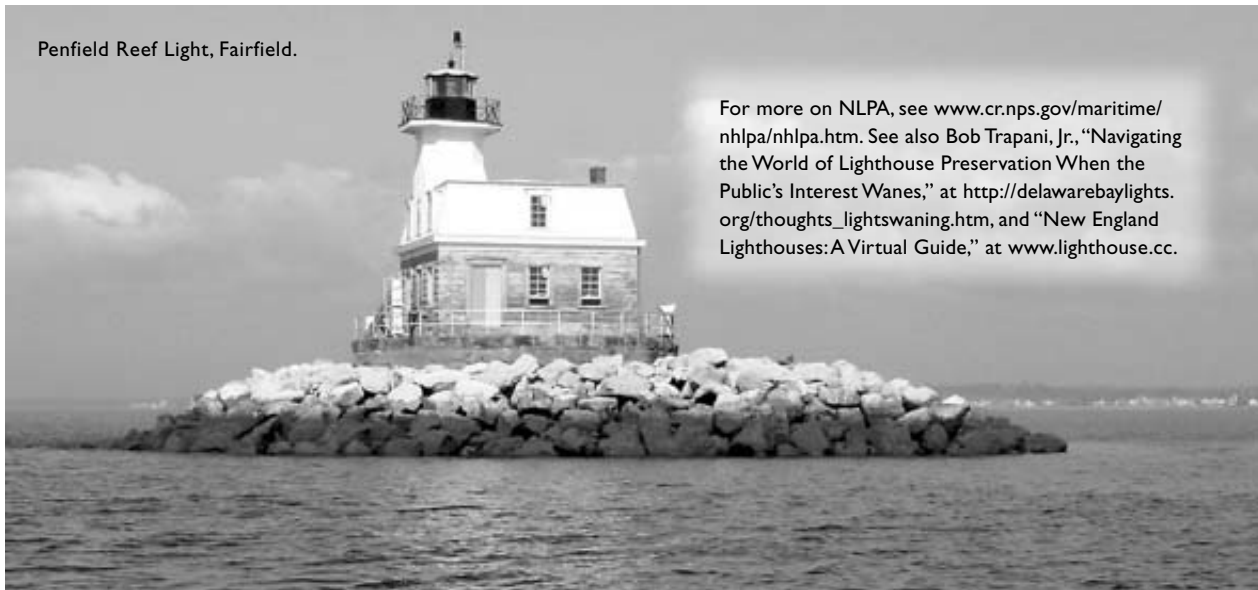
Faulkner's Island Light, Guilford.

but public access would not be required. If no one at all wanted a lighthouse, the government would retain ownership.

In Connecticut, two lighthouses have been made available so far under the NLPA. New London Harbor Light was offered in 2003. Three organizations indicated interest, but only the New London Maritime Society actually submitted an application. The GSA announced the availability of the Tongue Point Light in Bridgeport in June. Letters of interest were due on September 1, but the Coast Guard has asked that the process be put on hold pending reconsideration of security concerns. The lighthouse is surrounded by power company property, and requirements for public access may pose a security risk for the power plant.

Why is the government giving away lighthouses? Shouldn't the Coast Guard accept responsibility for the facilities that it uses? In response to this question, David Stinson of the GSA's Property Disposal Division points out that many of these lighthouses are old-fashioned and expensive to maintain. Given the demands made upon it, the Coast Guard could decide to demolish them and replace them with more modern structures. Transferring the lighthouses to municipalities or nonprofit groups

Penfield Reef Light, Fairfield.



For more on NLPA, see www.cr.nps.gov/maritime/nhlpa/nhlpa.htm. See also Bob Trapani, Jr., "Navigating the World of Lighthouse Preservation When the Public's Interest Wanes," at http://delawarebaylights.org/thoughts_lightswaning.htm, and "New England Lighthouses: A Virtual Guide," at www.lighthouse.cc.

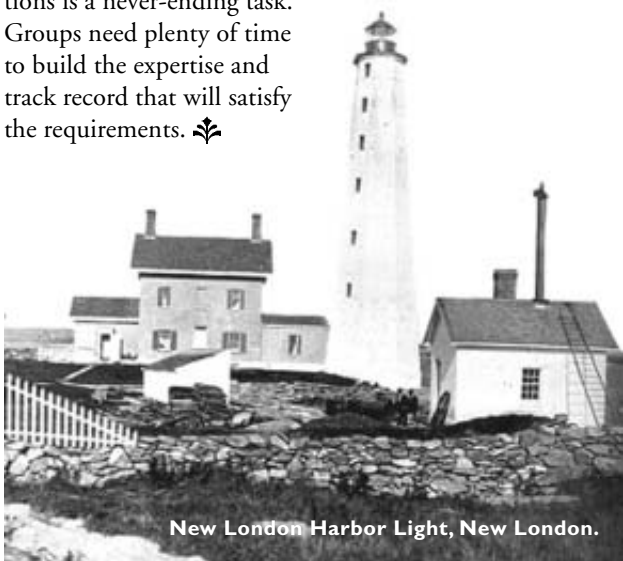
USCG

whose principal goal is preservation ensures that these coastal landmarks will survive.

In some communities, municipalities or private groups undertook restoration of lighthouses even before NHPA. The New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation leased that lighthouse in 1987 and has nearly completed a restoration. The group plans to convert the lighthouse into a museum and bed-and-breakfast. The town of Greenwich bought and restored the Great Captain Island Lighthouse in 1973, and the City of Bridgeport, along with two community groups, restored the Fayerweather Island Lighthouse in 1997. Faulkner's Island Light, off the coast of Guilford, has been restored by the Faulkner's Light Brigade, a complex project that involved work on the lighthouse itself as well as shoring up the island's eroding shoreline and protecting the roseate terns that nest on the island. The Avery Point light, unused since 1967, is being restored by the Avery Point Lighthouse Society, who as of September reported that they had raised \$250,000 of a total restoration cost of \$350,000.

Restoration and long-term maintenance of a lighthouse is a serious responsibility. Will there be enough qualified groups to take care of every lighthouse the Coast Guard wants to offload? The Delaware River and Bay Lighthouse Foundation, notes that public enthusiasm for lighthouses peaked in the 1990s, but since then has faded, as all fads do. The foundation encourages lighthouse organizations to focus on their core mission — preserving lighthouses — and eliminate nonessential activities.

More Connecticut lighthouses will become available in the future, but the timeline is uncertain. The Fairfield Historical Society and the Town of Fairfield have begun looking at the Penfield Reef Light in Fairfield, so as to be prepared when that light becomes available. Preservationists in other shoreline communities should also start planning. A successful bid for a lighthouse requires demonstrating the ability, both financial and technical, to care for the structure in the long-term. Restoration costs can be steep and maintenance in exposed shoreline locations is a never-ending task. Groups need plenty of time to build the expertise and track record that will satisfy the requirements. 🌿



New London Harbor Light, New London.

CONNECTICUT'S HISTORIC LIGHTHOUSES

(* National Register of Historic Places)

Avery Point Lighthouse (1943)

Location: Avery Point, Groton
Current use: inactive

Black Rock Harbor (Fayerweather Island) Light (1817)

Location: Fayerweather Island, Bridgeport
Current use: nature preserve

Faulkner's Island Light (1802) *

Location: Faulkner's Island, Guilford
Current use: active aid to navigation in National Wildlife Refuge

Five Mile Point (Old New Haven) Light (1845) *

Location: harbor entrance/Long Island Sound, New Haven
Current use: city park

Great Captain Island Light (1868) *

Location: western Long Island Sound, Greenwich
Current use: town park

Greens Ledge Light (1902) *

Location: Long Island Sound/Norwalk Islands, Norwalk
Current use: active aid to navigation

Lynde Point (Saybrook) Light (1839) *

Location: Connecticut River/Long Island Sound, Old Saybrook
Current use: active aid to navigation/Coast Guard housing

Morgan Point Light (1868)

Location: west side, mouth of Mystic River, Groton
Current use: summer cottage

New London Harbor Light (1801) *

Location: west side of harbor entrance, New London
Current use: active aid to navigation; keeper's house is private residence

New London Ledge Light (1909) *

Location: Thames River, New London harbor entrance, New London
Current use: active aid to navigation

Peck Ledge Light (1906) *

Location: Long Island Sound, Norwalk Islands, Norwalk
Current use: active aid to navigation

Penfield Reef Light (1874) *

Location: Black Rock harbor entrance, Fairfield
Current use: active aid to navigation

Saybrook Breakwater Light (1886) *

Location: Connecticut River/Long Island Sound, Old Saybrook
Current use: active aid to navigation

Sheffield Island (Norwalk) Light (1868) *

Location: Sheffield Island, entrance to Norwalk River, Norwalk
Current use: museum surrounded by wildlife sanctuary

Southwest Ledge (New Haven Breakwater) Light (1877) *

Location: reef at main entrance to New Haven Harbor, New Haven
Current use: aid to navigation

Stamford Harbor (Chatham Rocks) Light (1882) *

Location: Stamford Harbor entrance/Chatham Rock, Stamford
Current use: private aid to navigation (for sale in 1998)

Stonington Harbor Light (1840) *

Location: east side of harbor, Stonington
Current use: museum

Stratford Point Light (1881) *

Location: Long Island Sound/Housatonic River, Stratford
Current use: active aid to navigation/Coast Guard housing

Stratford Shoal (Middle Ground) Light (1877) *

Location: Long Island Sound, Stratford
Current use: active aid to navigation

Tongue Point Lighthouse (1895) *

Location: Bridgeport Harbor, Bridgeport
Current use: active aid to navigation

Sources: NPS Maritime Heritage Program (www.cr.nps.gov/maritime/light/ct.htm) and National Register of Historic Places.

NORWICH. The long-awaited restoration of the Wauregan Hotel was finally assured of adequate funding on October 1, when the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) and Becker and Becker, the developers of the project, finally signed a funding agreement. As soon as the 300-page agreement was filed with the city, Wachovia Bank, a major investor, released more than \$11 million for the project.

The hotel, located in downtown Norwich, was built in 1855, and hosted many of the city's most famous visitors, including presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln in 1860. In the 1960s the building became a welfare hotel. It closed in 1989 and suffered a fire the next year. For 10 years preservationists fought to prevent the demolition of what had become Norwich's most infamous eyesore. The dispute was at the center of Norwich's mayoral election in 2001. The winning candidate, Connecticut Trust Trustee Arthur Lathrop championed restoration despite widespread sentiment that the decayed structure should be razed.

In 2000 the city named Becker and Becker Associates, an architecture and development firm based in Fairfield, as preferred developer, with plans to convert the structure to 70 units of low-cost housing, plus retail space on the ground floor. Putting financing together has been a four-year saga of near-misses and last-minute miracles (see *CPN*, July/August 2002).

The closing took two days and was nearly sunk by a last-minute legal snag over flood plain regulations. The funding package for the \$18 million project includes:

- \$10 million in federal low-income housing tax credits
- \$2.5 million in federal historic rehabilitation tax credits (all the tax credits have been purchased by Wachovia Bank)
- \$3.65 million from the state Department of Economic and Community Development for construction of a parking garage
- a loan of \$1.34 million guaranteed by CHFA
- \$800,000 from the City of Norwich
- \$350,000 lent by the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- \$700,000 invested by Becker and Becker.



The Wauregan Hotel, Norwich.

Construction began in June of this year with the help of a loan from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (which will be repaid with the new money). Bruce Becker hopes to complete work by December 2005.

NEW CANAAN. The second house that Bauhaus-trained architect Marcel Breuer designed for himself in New Canaan was purchased by a developer this summer and has been put back on the market temporarily. If no buyer is found the house will be demolished to make way for a new, larger residence.



Marcel Breuer house, New Canaan.

The single-story house was built in 1951 and reflected a shift in Breuer's architecture. Unlike his previous house, a lightly-framed, smooth-skinned box that hovered above the landscape on a recessed base, this is a more massive form that sits squarely on the ground and bears the rugged texture of natural fieldstone. This heaviness is carefully balanced, however, by extensive glazing that takes advantage of the wooded site. Breuer's partner Herbert Beckhard remodeled and enlarged the house in 1979.

A student and teacher at the Bauhaus, Breuer (1902-1981) came to the United

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States in 1937 with Walter Gropius to teach at Harvard University. After World War II he set up his own firm in New York and moved to New Canaan, where he and four former Harvard students designed a cluster of modern houses that captured international attention.

In recent years, as property values have risen and taste has become more luxurious, the relatively small and simple modern houses have increasingly faced demolition or insensitive alterations. The Connecticut Trust listed the New Canaan moderns as a Most Important Threatened Historic Place in 1999. The town is currently considering new zoning guidelines aimed at encouraging the preservation of the modern houses (see *CPN*, September/October 2004), but even these incentives depend on buyers who value architecture over maximum profit. Because of Breuer's prominent role in the development of the Modern movement and because of the quality of its design, the Breuer house ranks as one of the most important of the New Canaan cluster. To lose it would be a serious blow to Connecticut's, and the nation's, architectural heritage.

The Breuer house is listed at \$2,895,000. For more information, call Carol Pelzner, Country Living Associates, (203) 966-7800.

EAST GRANBY. After a search that would rival the best detective fiction, archaeologists and neighbors have found the prisoners' cemetery at Old New-Gate Prison, the former copper mine that served as Connecticut's state prison from 1773 to 1827. It is now a museum operated by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism.

In 1814 the state acquired a small lot near the prison to serve as a cemetery. According to records, about 20 prisoners were buried there. The site continued to be known after the prison closed and was documented in a photograph taken in 1895 and a 1934 inventory of historic cemeteries. But then its location was forgotten.

The search involved longtime residents who had hazy and contradictory memories of the site. State records were skimpy and unclear, so searchers ended up tramping through the underbrush to investigate

continued next page

The Most Important Threatened Historic Places: Updates

Sherwood Place houses, Greenwich (2004). William Gardiner and Judith Larson, the developers who wanted to demolish three houses in the Fourth Ward National Register district, agreed in October to withdraw demolition permits for 77 and 85 Sherwood Place. The agreement came in a meeting with the state Historic Preservation Council, which was considering a resolution to ask the Attorney General to bring suit to prevent the demolition. After Gardiner and Larson announced their change in plans, the Council voted down the resolution.

Although the houses had lost much of their historic detail, preservationists objected to losing their place on the streetscape. Susan Richardson, vice chair of the Greenwich historic district commission, argued that allowing these houses to be razed would encourage other property owners to tear down their buildings, too. "Why bother to designate areas on the National Register in the first place?" she asked.

Gardiner and Larson will go ahead with plans to build a new, traditional-style structure in place of the third house, 81 Sherwood Place, but they agreed not to demolish it until they have received all necessary town approvals for the replacement.

Fort Trumbull neighborhood, New London (2000). Although the New London Development Corporation has leveled most of the neighborhood, the legal battle continues, and could have national consequences. The United States Supreme Court agreed in September to hear the case in which the Fort Trumbull residents have challenged the right of the NLDC to use eminent domain to take their property for private development.

The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution says that governments may take

private property for public purposes, provided they adequately reimburse property owners. At issue in New London is the definition of "public purposes." The residents say the term refers to overtly government purposes, such as schools or roads or revitalizing blighted areas that pose a threat to public safety. The city argues that "public purposes" also include acquiring land for private development intended to produce tax income for the city, reducing the burden on other taxpayers and making possible government programs and services that benefit the public.

The Institute for Justice (IJ), a libertarian legal association based in Washington, D.C. sued the city on behalf of the landowners. They won the case, but in March the Connecticut Supreme

Court overturned the victory, ruling that the city was justified in taking the homeowners' property.

According to IJ's website (www.ij.org) governments took more than 10,000 properties for private development between 1998 and 2002. Currently, seven states, including Connecticut, allow condemnation for private business development, while eight forbid the use of eminent domain when the economic purpose is not to eliminate blight. Three other states lean toward the stricter interpretation, and the remaining 32 have no clear policy on the matter.

This is the first case on the subject to reach the Supreme Court. If the court limits the use of eminent domain, the effect on historic preservation will not be clear. As the January/February, 2004, issue of *CPN* reported, condemning private property can be used either to preserve historic structures or to demolish them. The Supreme Court will determine whether this tool is easier or more difficult to use. ❖

— Christopher Wigren

If the court limits the use of eminent domain, the effect on historic preservation will not be clear.

possible sites. Mapping and soil tests were inconclusive. Three exploratory trenches were dug, but they too seemed unlikely to yield any evidence, and State Archaeologist Nicholas Bellantoni was about to call off the hunt when a volunteer found a 19th-century coffin nail. Further investigation turned up several more nails, arranged in the shape of a coffin. Because of the highly acid soil, no other evidence, such as hair, bones, or scraps of clothing, seem to have survived.

The cemetery is on private property, so its location is not being disclosed, but the story of the cemetery has been added to tour guides' talks at the museum, giving visitors one more glimpse into prisoners' lives — and deaths.

THOMASTON. The state will help preserve the home of 19th-century clock manufacturer Seth Thomas. Governor Jodi Rell announced in September that the State Bonding Commission intended to approve a \$450,000 grant to the town of Thomaston to purchase the house from the estate of Thomas' great-great-granddaughter, who died this past summer.

Seth Thomas (1786-1859) learned clockmaking from industry pioneer Eli Terry in Plymouth and eventually became part owner of Terry's factory. In 1813 Thomas sold his interest in the business, moved to Plymouth Hollow, and started his own company to make metal-movement clocks. After his death, his sons enlarged the company, producing a variety of clocks, watches and other timekeeping



Unearthing evidence of the prisoners' cemetery at Old New-Gate Prison, East Granby.

devices, including metronomes and parking meters. When Plymouth Hollow was incorporated as a separate town in 1875, it was renamed in Thomas' honor. The company still operates, but it closed its Thomaston factory closed in 1955 after a disastrous flood.

Thomas bought the Main Street house in 1838 and gave it to his daughter, Amanda Thomas, in 1850. Her descendants continued to live there, preserving the house and numerous family belongings as a memorial to their famous ancestor. "It's like walking into 1890," said J. Paul Loether, director of the state's Historic Preservation and Museum Division, which helped arrange for the grant. The town hopes to open the house as a museum and visitor center.

PAWCATUCK. Developers and the Town of Stonington are working to revitalize decaying textile mills in downtown Pawcatuck. In August Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission approved an amendment to create a new zoning category: Industrial Heritage Reuse District (IHRD), which allows mixed-use development for mills 50 years old or older. Developers must submit a detailed master plan for approval.

Local preservationists hailed the decision. Edward Dear, a member of the Paw-

catuck Revitalization Organization, told The Day of New London that he only wished the amendment could apply to younger industrial buildings as well. "It's a big plus for the town; I just wish it was a little broader."

The new amendment was supported by POKO Partners of Port Chester, New

New Collection of Town Histories at U.Conn.

The University of Connecticut has announced that Emeritus Professor of Civil Engineering Jack Stephens and his wife Virginia, of Storrs, recently donated approximately 270 Connecticut town histories to the Archives and Special Collections at the university's Thomas J. Dodd Research Center. Originally assembled by Virginia Stephens' mother, Lida Stilton Ives, the collection provides a unique, historic and frequently picturesque view of Connecticut through its towns, localities and churches. The materials date from 1846 through 1976 and are particularly useful in identifying prominent families, individuals, structures, and significant events throughout the state and over the course of time. Although the collection stands by itself as a monument to the growth and change of Connecticut's towns, it significantly strengthens the Dodd Research Center's efforts to document Connecticut history and has already proven useful in researching events, individuals and localities represented in many Connecticut-focused manuscript collections in Archives and Special Collections. For more information, contact Betsy Pittman at betsy.pitman@uconn.edu or (860) 486-4507. 🌿

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York, a development firm that wants to convert the Clark Thread mill on River Road into condominiums and retail space. The mill, built in 1901, lost its top floor to the hurricane of 1938 and is currently used as a warehouse. Its decaying condition has been a cause of concern in Pawcatuck. After the amendment passed, POKO submitted a master plan for the Thread Mill, and a public hearing is to be held in November. "It's a great looking mill in a good location," said POKO's president, Ken Olson.

Encouraging reuse of historic industrial buildings is among the preliminary recommendations made by the Yale Urban Design Workshop (YUDW), which provides planning and design assistance on projects ranging from comprehensive plans, economic development strategies, and community visions to the design of public spaces, streetscapes, and individual community facilities. YUDW studied Pawcatuck this summer at the invitation of the Pawcatuck Revitalization Organization; a final report is expected this fall. It

is also hoped that the mill reuse in Pawcatuck will reinforce and benefit from revitalization in Westerly, Rhode Island, on the other side of the Pawcatuck River.

EAST HAVEN. Preservationists and the developer who wanted to demolish two houses in the East Haven Green National Register district reached an agreement in August to save one of the houses (see *CPN*, July/August 2004).

Eight East Haven residents (not the Historical Society and the Old Cemetery Board, as *CPN* reported) sued Russo Family LLC under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act to prevent demolition of the houses for the Russo Family's new residential development, Catherine Commons. Before allowing the case to go to trial, the judge asked the parties to attempt to reach a compromise.

With a grant from the Connecticut Trust, the East Haven Preservation Trust/plaintiffs hired architect Robert Orr to make some plans showing how the houses could be incorporated into the development. Orr's drawings convinced the Russos to change their plans.

Under the agreement, the developer will be allowed to demolish one of the houses and construct a new building in its place, provided that the other house is restored and the plaintiffs have input concerning the design of the new building. The town Zoning Board of Appeals and its Planning and Zoning Commission have approved a new site plan reflecting these changes, and based on these conditions.

The two vernacular-style houses were built in about 1890 and about 1900. They stand opposite the northeast corner of the green at the entrance to the National Register district. ❧

New Listings, cont'd

congregation's objection. The objection was lifted and the church finally listed on the Register this year.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, located just west of downtown **New Haven**, is a significant site in the history of African Americans. The second Episcopal church established the city, it was formed in 1844 by black members of Trinity Episcopal Church who felt that they were discriminated against by white congregants. Alexander DuBois, grandfather of author W.E.B. DuBois, was one of the founders. In 1894 the congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary and began plans for a new and larger building, which was finally completed in 1905. Dedicated to the active pastors who helped the church to grow and become a valuable social asset to New Haven, the church is both a physical representation of the parish's success in overcoming early social and financial struggles to become an active and thriving community presence and an important part of ongoing history of the parish.

St. Luke's church, designed by the New Haven firm of Brown and Von Beren, is an exceptionally well-preserved example of the early 20th-century Gothic Revival style. Unlike earlier examples of the style, the forms are more streamlined and silhouettes subtler. Also unlike many Gothic Revival churches — among them St. James — it is built of brick rather than stone, an economy move that creates a more colorful effect. Stone is used only for trim, such as horizontal bands and carved door and window frames. The interior retains its original materials, plan and furnishings. ❧

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Living Downtown, cont'd

developed as market-rate apartments. And the former United Illuminating Company building on Temple Street is set to reopen in November with a movie theater, a restaurant, and 44 apartments.

Similar developments are underway in other cities. Former SNET Buildings in Hartford (see page 4) and New London have also converted to apartments — the telephone company's buildings, with their sturdy construction, ample provision for wiring and other utilities, and handsome architecture, seem particularly well suited to residential conversion — as has the Crocker House hotel on State Street in New London.

The federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit helps make redevelopment possible. According to Linda Spencer, the Tax Act Coordinator for the State Historic Preservation Office, a large number of these projects, from some of Joel Schiavone's in the 1980s to the mixed-use redevelopment of the City Trust tower in Bridgeport, just announced in October, have taken advantage of the 20 percent tax credit available for qualifying rehabilitation of buildings listed on the National Register. But the tax credit does not alone account for the popularity of downtown living. ELK Investors, the owners of The Eli, first planned to reuse the building as offices, but then decided that there was a better market for apartments in New Haven. Furthermore, not all projects have used the historic credit. Some developers have decided that the quality of restoration required for the credit would outweigh the value of the credit. Others have done



The pioneering SoNo redevelopment in Norwalk brought a mix of residents and shops into an urban neighborhood in the 1980s.

projects in buildings not listed on the National Register. Still others are doing condominiums, which do not qualify for the historic tax credit, rather than rental apartments.

What these projects all have in common is a conviction that downtown locations represent an increasingly attractive housing market. A growing number of people, largely young professionals or empty-nesters, are looking for the lively, engaging environment that downtowns provide. One of them is John Salamone, a professor at the University of Connecticut, who recently wrote in the *Hartford Courant's* Place section, "I came to reside

in downtown Manchester because of the lifestyle choices it offers. Although I am a professor at U.Conn., I did not want to live in the bucolic splendor of rural Mansfield. I had lived in viable towns and cities in Europe for several years, and I wanted a 'walking downtown' where I could stroll to shops, a park and a library. I wanted to be able to hear church bells from my front porch and walk to a restaurant or pub."

Not all the new apartments go for market rates, however. Some buildings, such as the Wauregan Hotel in Norwich and 410 Asylum Street in Hartford, are being redeveloped as low-cost housing. In these cases low-income housing credits/grants have provided another source of redevelopment financing. And downtown locations make sense for people who cannot afford cars, allowing them to live close to potential jobs, to social services, and to hubs of public transportation. In fact, it is the very nature of cities to contain a more varied mix of people than the suburbs. Common Ground Community, the nonprofit housing developer for 410 Asylum, argues that in their experience a well-maintained and well-operated facility for the poor can fit well into a thriving downtown.

The arts are playing an especially important role in the downtown renaissance. State funding for the arts has increased in recent years, fueling a boom in the theaters, galleries, and museums that constitute some of the biggest attractions which cities can offer new residents. Artists themselves are part of the attraction, too. Traditionally, they have often pioneered the revitalization of run-down urban neighborhoods in their search for large, inexpensive studio space. It was artists

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who first moved into the urban factories and open lofts of New York's Chelsea district, and in Connecticut they moved into vacant factories like the Norwalk Lock Company on the edge of SoNo and the Colt armory in Hartford. As the pattern typically works, they are eventually followed by restaurants, galleries, and other residents, all of whom want to be part of the lively atmosphere. Eventually the artists find themselves priced out of the neighborhood — this happened in both Norwalk and Hartford — and they move on to another.

The new twist in this process is the appearance of nonprofit developers that provide subsidized studios for artists. Minneapolis-based nonprofit Artspace has helped renovate the Hygienic Building in New London and, more recently, Sterling Market Lofts, which opened on November 1 in the former Read's department store in downtown Bridgeport. Bill Finch, president of the Bridgeport Economic Development Corporation and a State Senator, credits this project with inspiring plans for more than 500 new apartments downtown and with saving ten historic buildings from demolition.

New residents not only bring increased life and activity to downtowns, they also create a demand for shops and services that has been more difficult to meet. The apartments in New Haven's Ninth Square rented instantly, but filling the district's ground-level commercial space has taken much longer. Those businesses that have opened have tended to be restaurants or what one might call recreational shops. It is still difficult to find day-to-day needs like dry-cleaning, food or household supplies downtown. Rents are high, residen-

tial densities are still relatively low, and grocery stores and drugstores remain tied to their suburban sprawl formulas. Perhaps chambers of commerce, downtown merchants' associations or Main Street organizations can help address this need. For the time being, however, downtown living can reduce but rarely eliminate the need for a car. As a result, parking remains an expensive and difficult need. Open lots are bad for urban fabric, but garages are expensive and still often create unfriendly streetscapes. Cities need to provide coordinated planning for parking.

Despite these ongoing needs, the trend for downtown living continues to show strength and seems to be spreading to other cities. In October, the city of Shelton approved the conversion of an historic factory building on Canal Street to condominiums. Just across the river, the city of Derby has wiped out a row of historic buildings (see "The Most Important Threatened Historic Places," *CPN*, September/October 1999), but the city's developer, Ceruzzi Redevelopment LLC, has proposed a mix of residential and retail development in its place. The proposed commuter train service between Springfield and New Haven offers further incentive for development near train stations. In Meriden, for instance, the station lies immediately behind National-Register listed buildings on Colony Street that are begging for redevelopment ("The Most Important Threatened Historic Places,"



The nonprofit group Artspace has converted Read's department store in Bridgeport into artists' lofts.

Artspace

CPN, September/October 2004).

The downtown renaissance has emerged largely on its own, at a time when economic development efforts still concentrate on commercial growth, but there is much that cities and preservationists can do to nurture the movement. Local organizations can sponsor National or State Register nominations to help buildings qualify for tax credits. Cities can revise zoning regulations to encourage downtown living, and provide coordinated planning for parking and attracting services which residents, as opposed to workers, need. And those of us who live in other places can support the downtown businesses and attractions that make our city centers lively and engaging places to live. John Salamone concluded his article by saying, "The town-oriented Main Street lifestyle is not a relic of the past. It is a high-quality way of life that has a long history and a viable future as well. The future of America, and that of Manchester, is not necessarily restricted to urban sprawl, mass-produced malls, ugly box retail giants, parking lots and traffic jams on the one hand vs. rural isolation on the other. There are alternatives." ❁

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Miniature Marvel: Dr. Hunt's Office, Windham

Elizabeth Mills Brown

This comical and beguiling building, erected about 1790, is only ten feet and ten inches wide, but its builder nevertheless managed to squeeze in a full-dress classical ensemble of center door and two windows and then to add a third window with arched head and tracery high in the gable of the towering gambrel roof. This window is mounted over the door, and door and window together are framed by a pair of giant pilasters that terminate vaguely in the middle of the gable, suggesting that the builder never considered what they were supposed to be doing. In addition, in the proper genteel tradition, there is a side door (side and front doors open into the same room a few feet away from each other), and front windows and door are dressed with false lintels of wood carved to look like flat stone arches. All this on a tiny structure that looks as if it could be picked up and carried off!

And indeed it has been picked up and carried off more than once. Originally it stood on what is now called Weir Court Extension, just south of the green. In the 1960s it was moved to North Road, and later, having been listed on the National Register and being made much of in town, it was promoted to the Green. It surely deserves the honor, but some of the old charm and whimsy are

lost in this exposed position where it is expected to behave in a monumental manner. On its first site, its surroundings were cozier.

The false lintels deserve particular mention because they are a Windham specialty that can be seen on numerous other houses in town but seem not to be found elsewhere in Connecticut. This suggests the presence of a client or a local builder who had either seen the mansions of the Boston area, where the feature seems to have originated in the 1730s, or their spinoffs in the great doorways of the Connecticut River valley. Unfortunately it is not possible now to say which of the Windham examples became the local prototype. Not only is dating too insecure, but the carved wood board is easy to imitate and add at any time to an older house, and one suspects that in the palmy days of the 1920s when the "restoration" of old houses by the city folk was high fashion in Windham, the Colonial Revival architects were quick to borrow a picturesque detail when they saw it. ❁



Elizabeth Mills Brown is an architectural historian who lives in Guilford. Dr. Hunt's office is located on the Windham Center Green, at the intersection of Connecticut Routes 14 and 203.