Modern Masterpiece
Demolished in Westport

On a rainy Saturday morning in January, police chased onlookers away as wreckers’ claws dug into the layered beams and window walls of a spectacular Modern house in Westport, ending a preservation struggle that touched on questions of Modernism, teardowns, and how legal action can be used to protect historic buildings. This issue also represented the first time that the Connecticut Trust initiated a lawsuit to prevent the destruction of an historic property.

The house

The Westport house, built for Dr. and Mrs. Louis Micheels in 1972, was the creation of architect Paul Rudolph (1918-1997). Rudolph had been chairman of the Yale Department of Architecture from 1958 to 1965 and designed a number of buildings in Connecticut. After leaving Yale, he continued to develop a reputation for complex and richly textured buildings with a rich variety of spatial effects and went on to build an international practice. In the words of Michael Sorkin, Director of the Graduate Program in Urban Design at City College of New York: “Rudolph’s architecture often used relatively simple means to achieve environments of astonishing complexity. He had no peer in his deft and dramatic articulation of the flow of space, and to visit any of his beautiful works is to embark on a rich and revealing architectural journey.”

In the Micheels house, this complexity of architectural scenery was achieved with white wallboard on the inside, and stucco studded with Arctic quartz gravel on the outside, combining the roughness of Rudolph’s Brutalist designs with the all-white, floating qualities of later works. Sited so that every room would share in panoramic views to Long Island Sound, the house sat atop Compo Hill, firmly anchored to the earth at one end but cantilevered...
The new year was a time of fresh beginnings, but it also brought some endings. We were saddened to learn of the deaths of two highly respected preservationists who earned their renown in architecture and archeology but were both passionate preservationists.

Richard Sharpe, FAIA, died on January 2, 2007. Dick had recently retired after 50 years of practice in Norwich. Dick served on that city’s historic district commission, where for 15 years he was chairman. He initiated a city wide award that honors property owners who restore and maintain historic buildings. He himself was the architect for significant restoration projects, most recently the 1887 Flatiron building that had been in danger of demolition. He also helped the Cape Verdean Santiago Society save their tiny 1926 Saint Anthony Chapel from destruction. His passing is a great loss to the city of Norwich and to the preservation community at large.

Harold Juli, an archaeologist and professor of Anthropology at Connecticut College, died on February 10. As a long time member of the state’s National Register review board and a former member of the Connecticut Historical Commission, Harold brought a passion for preservation and a commitment to public education to his work. In addition, he coordinated CPN’s Archaeological Perspectives column, writing or recruiting others to write three articles every year. We will miss Harold’s constant reminders to pay attention to Connecticut’s rich archaeological resources.

Two of the State of Connecticut’s top preservation officials left their jobs in January. Jennifer Aniskovitch, Director of the Commission on Culture and Tourism (CCT) and State Historic Preservation Officer, resigned effective January 18. Taking over from Douglas Evans shortly after the Commission was formed, she oversaw the merging of preservation, arts, tourism and film offices into a single state agency.

Also in January, J. Paul Loether, Director of the CCT’s Historic Preservation and Museum Division and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, left to become Chief of the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Division at the National Park Service in Washington. Taking over from longtime Connecticut Historical Commission director John W. Shannahan in 2003, Paul eased the transition of the CHC’s work into the new CCT. On the staff of the CHC since 1988, he administered the Historic Restoration Fund and the Certified Local Governments program. Before that, he worked for the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust and the New Haven Preservation Trust and ran his own preservation consulting firm. It was difficult for Paul to leave Connecticut, but his new job represents a big step up, and we wish him well.

Governor Rell has appointed the CCT’s director of operations, Karen Senich, to serve as acting Executive Director and Depute State Historic Preservation Officer. Paul Loether’s position remains open as of this writing.

The General Assembly is in session, and the Trust has been part of an alliance of eighteen natural lands, farmland, historic preservation and municipal redevelopment advocates that is working on what is called the Face of Connecticut campaign. This important legislation, announced at a press conference with state legislators on February 16, calls on the State of Connecticut to make a $1 billion investment—$100 million annually—over the next ten years to help our communities:

- Preserve our most critical watershed and open space lands, farm lands, and historic properties;
- Restore historic buildings and neighborhoods, and brownfields; and
- Plan responsibly for growth and conservation

Protect and maintain these resources once they have been preserved or restored.

Upcoming Meetings of the Connecticut Historic Preservation Council
April 4, 2007, at 9:30 a.m.
May 2, 2007, at 9:30 a.m.
All meetings take place at the South Congregational Church 277 Main Street, Hartford
For more information call (860) 566-3005

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.
The campaign grew out of the fact that we have very little time left to save the “Face of Connecticut”—the resources that constitute the visual character of our state, and more importantly, reflect the health and vitality of our communities.

From the point of view of historic preservation, never have we been in a more dramatic moment of crisis given the lack of priority in investing in our historic resources, whether they are municipal buildings, urban neighborhoods, commercial centers or historically important rural places. We must commit to brownfields remediation to reclaim our historic industrial buildings before these buildings are beyond repair. We must commit financial resources to jump-starting restoration projects in our village centers and urban areas where historic preservation and affordable housing intersect so seamlessly. Buildings will and do deteriorate when left to languish, and communities and neighborhoods deteriorate with them. Investment in historic preservation projects brings added jobs, increased property values and increased sales tax revenues. This is an extraordinary moment in time when so many groups have come together to present a concrete, doable plan to save the Face of Connecticut. I hope all of you will work with us and advocate with your local state senators and representatives to support this very significant campaign.

—Helen Higgins

Among other things, the Face of Connecticut legislation proposes funding for the preservation of historic agricultural buildings like the Stiles barn in Southbury.

Statewide Conference

The Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, in partnership with the Arts Council of Greater New Haven and the Greater New Haven Convention and Visitors Bureau, will “Turn It On” during the 2007 Governor’s Conference on Culture & Tourism to be held on May 1 and 2 in New Haven. The conference will include the Culture & Tourism Unity Dinner, a full day of informative workshops and the Governor’s Awards for Excellence in Culture & Tourism. Don’t miss this exciting opportunity to honor accomplishments in the Arts, Film, History and Tourism; enhance your professional development; and network and develop relationships with your peers.

For more information, visit www.cultureandtourism.org.

Member partners in the Face of Connecticut campaign:
• American Farmland Trust
• Audubon Connecticut
• Connecticut Association of Conservation & Inland Wetlands Commissions
• Connecticut CDFI (Community Development Financial Institutions) Alliance
• Connecticut Farmland Trust
• Connecticut Forest & Parks Association
• Connecticut Fund for the Environment
• Connecticut Land Conservation Council
• Connecticut League of Conservation Voters
• Connecticut Main Street Center
• Connecticut Preservation Action
• Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation
• Housatonic Valley Association
• South Central Regional Water Authority
• The Connecticut Farm Bureau
• The Nature Conservancy
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Samuel Taylor house, Middle Haddam (2005).
While flimsy construction and lack of interesting detail initially led Barbara Angelico to propose demolishing the Taylor house, she willingly went along with the calls to preserve the structure, located across the street from the Congregational church in the Middle Haddam National Register and local historic district (see CPN, January/February 2006).

Working with architect Jeff Kamm of Glastonbury and the historic district commission, Angelico renovated the house, keeping its exterior nearly as simple as it was originally, though they evened out the quirky, irregular spacing of the windows. A new wing provides additional living space and a garage. More complex windows give the wing a busier appearance, following Angelico’s and Kamm’s interpretation of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, which call for distinguishing old from new construction.

The case of the Taylor house has helped to spark a renewal within the Middle Haddam local historic district. The commissioners have held a training session with representatives of the state Historic Preservation and Museum Division and the Connecticut Trust, and they are working on revised design guidelines for the district.

On December 15, 2006, the National Park System Advisory Board voted to refer the matter of National Historic Landmark status for the Coltsville Historic District back to the Landmarks Committee.

The committee voted in October to recommend against listing Coltsville as a National Historic Landmark because of concerns that renovations being done by Homes for America Holdings, Inc., would impair the historic integrity of the factory buildings (see CPN, November/December 2006). The committee is expected to reconsider the nomination at its next meeting, scheduled for April 11 and 12.
A pre-Revolutionary one-room house in Redding measuring 17 by 18 feet—once the home of a family of 12—and its 1779 additions will be preserved intact forever, inside and out, thanks to a marine engineer who spent enchanted childhood idylls there 80 years ago.

Lauren McCready, 91, has seen to it that the antique parts of his treasured home will never be altered and will always be maintained “in good condition and repair.” Last October, he deeded a historic preservation easement to the Redding Historical Society, self-imposing covenants and conditions that will be part of the land title forever. He is one of a growing number of Reddingites to do so.

The easement preserves historic features such as wide oak and pine flooring, six-over-six and nine-over-six windows, clapboards, horsehair plastered walls, a 20th century barn, and a 19th century “two-seater” outhouse, and it imposes a maintenance schedule. It forbids alteration or demolition.

McCready’s dainty white cape house with pink shutters, pleasing in its simplicity, could have come out of the pages of a storybook. Indeed, it often has. McCready’s brother, Thomas, married children's book writer and illustrator Tasha Tudor, who was influenced by the rustic charms of the dwelling and the beauty of its setting, upon sloping meadows with red-painted barns and views that look out to forever. Scenes in Tudor’s books of gentle storytelling evoke the old-fashioned landscape.

Built in 1770 on ten acres of wilderness, the sturdy structure was expanded to two rooms in 1779 to accommodate the 10 children of Timothy Parsons and his wife Elizabeth, the original owners. The family grew every two years with the birth of a new child except for the brief period when Parsons served in the militia and was captured by the British during the raid on Danbury on April 26, 1777. He was released in New York on June 1 and one last child was born shortly after.

A meticulous research project undertaken by Redding historian Kathleen von Jena establishes that the antique part of the McCready home, quaint and miniature in scale, retains its interior historical integrity. She discovered a valuable historical clue to the house’s layout in the Danbury probate records, Parsons’ bequest to his second wife, Hannah, upon his death in 1811:

To “Hannah the widow: one third of the dwelling house, the east front room, the chamber and garret over the same, the north part of the cellar under the same to the north side of the outside of the cellar door & to the south east corner of the chimney—a third part of the milk room, east part of the same; with privileges to pass through the kitchen to said milkroom, to the cellar stairs, to the north kitchen door; and to bake in the oven; and also to pass through the entry to the south door and chamber stairs.”

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The most recent Connecticut sites to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places include a 20th-century family-owned amusement park and an 18th-century house with substantial Colonial Revival additions. Another early house was determined to be eligible for the Register but was not listed due to owner objections.

**Babb’s Beach**, in **Suffield**, represents the small, family-owned amusement parks that flourished in the first third of the 20th century, thanks to shorter working hours, greater leisure time and the increased mobility of automobiles.

In 1898 Curtis Babb bought a former picnic ground on the shore of Middle Pond, one of three Congamond Lakes that straddle the border between Connecticut and Massachusetts, and started a camp for sport fishermen. Babb built cottages and put others up in a former boarding house on the site, which he renamed the “Cottage Grove Inn.” By 1911, the Babb family was offering refreshments, a playground and a bathing beach for the fishermen’s families.

Under Curtis’ son, Nelson, the beach became a full-fledged amusement park. Nelson expanded the swimming facilities with a bathhouse, docks, slides and boat rentals. He also built the first of three dance halls. The third hall, constructed in the 1930s and notable for its steel-truss roof, survives today. In its heyday it drew nationally known bands, including those of Tommy Dorsey, Harry James and Kay Kaiser.

After World War II, larger parks drained off much of Babb’s Beach’s business. A hurricane damaged the beach in 1955. Even though a new arcade and shooting gallery were added, only roller skating, introduced in the ‘30s as a way to use the dance hall between dances, showed steady profits. In 1977 the family sold the property to the Town of Suffield, but Nelson Babb, Jr., continued to operate a roller skating rink in the old dance hall until 1997. Currently, the Citizens Restoring Congamond, a local group, has leased the property and is restoring the remaining buildings. (For more information, see [www.congamond.org/babbproject.htm](http://www.congamond.org/babbproject.htm).)

In **Sharon**, the **King-Hart house** presents architecture of both the 18th and 20th centuries. It is also important as the home of Admiral Thomas C. Hart (1877-1971), a pioneer in the development of the Navy’s submarine service and U. S. Senator from Connecticut.

The original house was built by George King, a local merchant, in 1794, a time when Sharon was a center of trade for northwest Connecticut. Constructed of brick, the single-story house has an unusual plan, with a small wing extending from the rear portion of each side. Fine detailing includes a handsome porch and a Palladian window in the dormer above.

From 1924 to 1982, the house was owned by Admiral and Mrs Hart (coincidentally, a great-granddaughter of George King), who like many other prominent New Yorkers found country homes in Litchfield County. The house served as home base for the Harts as the Admiral moved from assignment to assignment. Among his many accomplishments, Hart is best known for his promotion of the use and development of submarines. He served as commander of New London’s submarine flotilla during World War I, as commander of the entire Naval submarine fleet in the 1930s, and later as chairman of the General Board of the Navy, where he oversaw expansion and diversification of the submarine fleet. Retiring to Sharon in 1944, Hart was appointed by Governor Raymond Baldwin to fill a vacant Senate seat, but he chose not to seek election in his own right in 1946.
The Harts expanded the house in 1925, following designs by the New York firm of Ford, Butler & Oliver. They added a service wing and a large living room, employing materials and forms resembling those of the original house and using details but with slight variations, as with the Palladian window dormer, transformed on the addition as a small balcony. In the living room, Colonial-style fluted pilasters share the space with exposed rough-hewn ceiling beams, a combination that would not have been found in the 18th century.

The Abel Bradley house in Westport also has a gambrel roof, but it is in every other way very different. Owner objection blocked listing the house in the National Register, but a nomination provides information about its history and architecture. Built in about 1800 by a bootmaker who later served in the War of 1812, the Bradley house resembles modest houses found across the state, much more typical of how ordinary people—farmers, artisans, and tradesmen—lived than the brick and fine woodwork of George King’s house. The house is conservative, employing the center-chimney plan and raised paneling that were passing out of fashion in 1800. Its most notable feature is the flare of the gambrel roof, highly unusual in lower Fairfield County.

For more than 100 years the house belonged to members of the Brotherton family—small farmers, carpenters and gardeners. While Westport gradually changed from a farming community to estates and weekend homes to suburbia, the Bradley house managed to hold on to a enough land to preserve some of its rural setting. Threatened by demolition in 2004, it was finally saved when the developer who bought it agreed to build a new house as an addition to, rather than a replacement for, the Bradley house (see CPN, January/February 2006). However, expansion for the builder’s perceived market makes it uncertain that the house’s humble character will remain unchanged.

—Christopher Wigren
at the other, where the master bedroom, supported only by slender piers, seemed to float above the ground. The result, again according to Sorkin, “...shows Rudolph's characteristic structural ingenuity and verve, his careful sense of orientation and climate, and his unshakeable dedication to joyful living.”

Demolition

Dr. and Mrs. Micheels, both now in their late 80s and wanting to live nearer their children, put the house on the market in September, 2005. They hoped to find a buyer who would appreciate and preserve the house as they had, but after more than a year with no serious offers, they contracted to sell the property to David Waldman, a local developer who wanted to demolish the house and build a new dwelling on the spectacular site. WestportNow.com quoted Waldman as saying, “We have a family of three young children, and a modern structure wasn’t appealing to us.” The sales agreement allowed him to have the house razed before taking title to the property.

Teardowns—the demolition of houses in usable condition in order to build larger and more pretentious dwellings—have become a leading preservation issue in the past decade, one that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has called a nationwide epidemic. Changes in taste and stratospheric property values have made Modernist houses in Fairfield County especially vulnerable. Recognizing this, the Connecticut Trust included New Canaan’s Modernist houses on its 1999 list of the Most Important Threatened Historic Places.

Westport also suffers from teardowns; in 2006 the town issued more than 92 demolition permits. While not all of these were for houses with historic importance, together they represent not only the loss of historic fabric, but also a significant and largely uncontrolled change to the overall character of the town. WestportNow.com, a local website, has covered the issue extensively and even has a regular section called “Teardown of the Day,” which featured the Micheels house on November 16, 2006.

This coverage brought the house to the attention of Westport citizens and the town’s Historic District Commission. Unfortunately, the house was not old enough to trigger Westport’s delay of demolition ordinance, and the Historic District Commission agreed not to interfere in exchange for access to take photographs. In early December, Waldman began removing hazardous materials from the house, including parts of the roof.

The lawsuit

At the urging of several Westport citizens and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Connecticut Circuit Rider Gregory Farmer visited the Micheels house and determined that it was of great significance but had no legal protections to prevent demolition. However, that lack changed when, convinced of the house’s importance and the urgency of the threat, the State Historic Preservation Office approved the house for National Register study.

Official recognition put the house under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (Connecticut General Statutes, Section 22a-19a), which allows any citizen to file suit to prevent the unreasonable destruction of historic properties listed on or under consideration for the National Register. On December 21 the Connecticut Trust filed suit to stop demolition in Stamford Superior Court.

One of the strongest arguments in the Trust’s case was the presence of an interested potential buyer who had already restored Rudolph’s own apartment in New York City.
Having someone willing to restore the house, and who had the proven ability to carry out such a project, strengthened the Trust’s claim that razing the Micheels house was unreasonable, since property owners often argue that demolition is necessary because restoration would be too expensive.

After a preliminary hearing, Judge Taggart D. Adams persuaded the parties to stop all action until he could hold a hearing on issuing an injunction. The hearing began on January 2, and on January 5 the Trust and Waldman (on his own behalf and that of the Micheels) came to a settlement calling for Waldman to negotiate with the would-be buyer for one week. If at the end of that time (by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, January 12) he and the buyer came to an agreement, the house would be saved. If not, Waldman would be able to demolish the house. Judge Adams specifically charged Waldman with making a good-faith effort to come to an agreement.

At the same time, Waldman and Micheels also gave the Trust access to take photographs and measurements to document the house to the standards used by the Historic American Buildings Survey.

Unfortunately, the deadline came without an agreement. The buyer offered $3.8 million, several hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the contract price of $3.24 million, but Waldman held out for $5 million. At that point, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal stepped in on behalf of the State of Connecticut (having earlier declined to do so) and filed for a new injunction forbidding demolition. However, Judge Adams turned down Blumenthal’s request.

Demolition started at 9:00 the next morning while police drove onlookers away, threatening them with arrest and charges of trespass, since the site is in a private association. A photographer from WestportNow.com managed to take photographs from a neighboring property, with permission of that property owner.

Lessons learned

Despite a decade or more of attention, Modern architecture commands only limited appreciation from many preservationists and from the public at large. In hotbeds like New Canaan and individual structures like the Micheels house, however, Connecticut can boast a collection of Modernist buildings that has national, if not international, importance.

Because this collection has received only limited study, much of it is still not adequately understood. It is of vital importance that the preservation community broaden understanding and appreciation of Modernist buildings, lest the most important examples perish before they attain the 50 year age necessary for most preservation protections and incentives. Surveys and studies are the first step, followed by National Register nominations where appropriate and perhaps zoning incentives like those adopted to protect Modernist houses in New Canaan (CPN September/October 2004).

National Register listing should be undertaken before a property faces a threat. Last-minute nominations initiated specifically to block demolition can occasionally succeed, as with Abel Bradley house, also in Westport, where a nomination and lawsuit persuaded the developer to preserve and add to the historic house (see CPN January/February 2006 and page 7). More often such efforts fail, and in the process they provide confirmation for the image of preservationists as obstructionists.

Implementing preservation tools must be accompanied by activities aimed at the general public, such as tours, exhibits, publications and public statements of the value of Modern architecture. Another need is for assistance in marketing important examples of modern architecture as they come up for sale. There is a market for these buildings, but it is specialized.

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Gregory Farmer

Vistas tied together distant parts of the house, and a variety of windows provided ever-changing natural light, some of it from hidden sources.

White quartz gravel embedded in the stucco cladding provided a sense of texture and a visual character that changed with the angle and quality of the light.

Todd Levine
and often not tied to local pools in quite the same way as that for ordinary housing stock.

Innovative structural techniques and materials used by Modernist builders sometimes fail, as, for instance, the stucco cladding of the Micheels house cracked as some of its wooden beams warped with age. Such failures are sometimes cited to justify razing Modernist buildings, but all buildings suffer from age and weather, and addressing such issues has always been an important task for preservationists. So, another need is for technical information to assist owners maintain or restore Modernist buildings.

The only law of its kind in the nation, the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) is a valuable tool for preservationists. Even where no legal action is undertaken, this law can serve as an incentive to property owners to reconsider demolition plans. As with many laws, the wording of CEPA leaves several questions unanswered. For instance, the law protects buildings listed on or under consideration for the National Register, but just what does “under consideration” mean? The Attorney General issued an opinion saying that “consideration” began when the State Historic Preservation Office approved a site for National Register study, but in the Micheels case Judge Adams suggested that he might not accept that definition. A more basic question is how judges who don’t have any background in historic preservation can make informed decisions? In some cases, judges have based their rulings on an inaccurate understanding of preservation regulations and procedures. Is there a way to provide them with accurate information about preservation law?

**What the Connecticut Trust is doing**

This was the first time the Trust ever initiated a lawsuit under CEPA, even though the Trust’s charter specifically mentions taking legal action as one of the organization’s intended activities. In the case of the Micheels house, the Trust found itself filling a vacuum created by the locals’ inability to take action and the unwillingness of the Attorney General’s office. Since then, the Trust’s Board has begun considering what criteria to use in the future in determining whether or not to take action to prevent demolition. On the whole, the Board has expressed a strong preference for leaving lawsuits to be led by the State, with its greater resources and years of experience in litigating CEPA cases.

For more information…


In its effort to save the Micheels house, the Trust ran up legal bills of more than $20,000—an unexpected expense. However, the house was of such importance and the threat so urgent that we felt that we had to speak up for its preservation and do all in our power to save it. To help us meet that expense, please consider sending a tax deductible donation payable to the Connecticut Trust at 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, Connecticut 06517.
It is these unaltered historical elements and others that Lauren McCready aims to preserve forever.

McCready has also teamed up with Charles Couch, former president of the Redding Historical Society, to undertake a fastidious architectural examination of the structure. They believe that the property may have been used for a military encampment under General Israel Putnam in 1778. McCready previously gave 26 acres of the picturesque fields and forest to the Redding Land Trust for permanent conservation and placed another 12.5 acres in a conservation easement. The property cannot be further subdivided.

While later owners expanded the home, with an addition that became a poor house, and a living room with the same lovely unscarred views to the south as the Parsons must have enjoyed as they cleared their land for a farm, the original humble dwelling has survived 237 years without substantial change to the exterior or the interior.

The property’s use as a working farm ended in 1886, when then-owner Irad Carter died in a wagon accident. Later the home became a hunting lodge for weekend New Yorkers. In 1928, Lauren’s mother bought the house on 60 acres for $15,000 as a “country house.” It was then as a thirteen-year-old that Lauren began his love affair with the property. Spending weekdays in prim comfort in Pelham Manor, New York, the McCreadys found a quiet retreat where they lived much as the Parsons did in 1770 without electricity, running water or central heating. An ancient privy continued to serve its purpose. In stages, McCready brought creature comforts to the property which came to him in 1936.

In a pilot program the Town of Redding launched in January to stem the rising tide of historic property demolitions, owners of historic homes are being encouraged to follow McCready’s lead and that of several others to place permanent restrictions on their homes with the Redding Historical Society, the Redding Preservation Society or the town itself. The Town has engaged an architectural historian, James C. Sexton, to facilitate the process for a fixed fee of $500 to homeowners. Donating a historic preservation easement can provide useful tax benefits as well as a sense of satisfaction in taking a direct role in preserving history. A standing-room-only crowd of hundreds of owners of historic houses filled the meeting room when the project was announced—a sign that Lauren McCready’s pioneering in historic preservation will help lead the way for many others.

Nancy Burton lives in Redding.
Exploring Children’s Life in Early Connecticut


What was life like for the people who first built and lived in our old houses? Children and adults alike ask this question. Jennifer Thermes of Newtown is one author who has tried to answer it. Thermes is an illustrator who specialized in whimsical illustrated maps before she branched out into children’s books. It all started with her own house, built about 1720 for the Fairchild family and later the home of the poet Louis Untermeyer. Thermes found herself talking with her children about how earlier people lived in the house, which led her to write When I Was Built. The book contrasts life when the house was new with life as it is lived now, comparing elements of everyday life such as transportation, cooking and lighting.

The second book, Sam Bennett’s New Shoes, came about after Thermes’ husband was replacing the dining room chandelier and found an old boot hidden in the ceiling. Later, the family found a shoe under the floorboards. These were “concealment shoes”, secreted as good-luck charms in an old English practice that came to Connecticut with early settlers (see also CPN, September/October 2006). Thermes writes, “Finding these treasures makes me think about the children who have lived in our home.” So she spun a story of them, telling how their footwear was made and repaired and passed from one child to another until they were worn out. Who should read these books? Sam Bennett’s New Shoes says it’s targeted for ages 4-8, and Caroline Montanaro, a first-grader and daughter of the Trust’s Membership Manager, Jane Montanaro, enjoyed both. For children and parents who want to go farther, the author’s website, www.jenniferthermes.com, offers a teacher’s guide with questions and suggested activities for When I Was Built.

“We look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future.”

John F. Kennedy - October 26, 1963

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“I know antique houses, and others, too!”

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New Tax Credit Takes Effect

As of March 1, the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism is accepting applications for the new Historic Structures Rehabilitation Tax Credit enacted by the General Assembly last year (see CPN DATE). The credit applies to the conversion of historic commercial and industrial buildings to residential use, including either rental or condominium units. Partial tax credits are available for buildings converted to mixed residential and commercial uses. Other details:

• 25% tax credit of the total qualified rehabilitation expenditures
• buildings must be listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of an historic district
• projects under construction but not placed in service as of July 1, 2006, may qualify
• state tax credits may be combined

with the 20% federal historic preservation tax credits provided the project qualifies under federal law as a substantial rehabilitation of depreciable property as defined by the Internal Revenue Service

• annual aggregate cap of $15 million in tax credit reservations
• per building cap is up to $2.7 million in tax credits
• tax credit vouchers are issued after completion of rehabilitation work or, in phased projects, completion of rehabilitation work to an identifiable portion of the building placed in residential use
• tax credits are available for the tax year in which the building or, in phased projects, an identifiable portion of the building is placed in service
• tax credits can only be used by C corporations with tax liability under Chapters 207 through 212 of the Connecticut General Statutes
• tax credits can be assigned, transferred or conveyed in whole or in part by the owner to others

Owners seeking tax credits under the Historic Structures Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program are required to file applications with the Commission. Proposed, ongoing and completed rehabilitation work to the historic building must meet the Standards for Rehabilitation established by the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism. Prior approval of proposed rehabilitation work is required for a reservation of tax credits. Projects underway after July 1, 2006, without prior approval may qualify if work already undertaken as well as proposed work meet the Standards for Rehabilitation. Partial tax credits may be available.

Application instructions and forms are available in PDF format (see below). Each application form is to be filed separately.

For further information…
Contact: Linda Spencer, linda.spencer@ct.gov or call (860) 566-3005 extension 317.
Program Regulations: www.ct.gov/cct/lib/cct/history/hstcregs_001.pdf
Instructions: www.ct.gov/cct/lib/cct/history/instructions_001.pdf
Application form: www.ct.gov/cct/lib/cct/history/application_forms_001.pdf

Silvermine Tavern For Sale

Rare Southwest Connecticut Opportunity

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accurately acknowledged.
If an error has been made, please notify our office.

Please consider the Connecticut Trust
in your will.
Paint on Bricks
Can paint be completely removed from brick? We just bought an old brick house that has who knows how many layers of paint on it. I prefer brick but don’t know what my options are. Someone mentioned steam cleaning to me, another said sand-blasting.

First determine if your bricks need to be painted. Some brick is rather soft and will not hold up to the weather, so it should be painted. This may even have been the intent of the original builders, or a condition that developed later. To do this you will have to remove patches of paint from various points around the building and examine the brick. It takes experience and knowledge to determine the type and condition of the brick; you should bring in a specialist if you don’t know all about bricks. If you have harder brick that doesn’t need paint then consider paint removal. Don’t remove the paint with any kind of abrasive blasting. Blasting will remove the hard outer skin of the brick exposing the softer inner brick which is not as resistant to weathering. Chemical paint removal won’t cause this type of damage. Whether you do it yourself or hire someone else, do test panels (say 3’ x 3’) to select the specific methods and materials for removal and then do a test section from foundation to roof to determine time and cost data that you can project to the rest of the building. This also gives you a chance to test whether or not you want to do the whole job yourself or whether you can work with the contractor doing the testing.

Hinges
I am looking for a resource for old hinges. I have looked in Renovator’s Supply and in Garrett Wade catalogs without success. I am sure there are other catalogs but I don’t know where to look. Could I send a picture of the hinge to someone and stand a better chance of matching it? It is a black 3x3 door hinge, with an engraved Victorian design with a Steeple on the hinge. —John Turney

Talk to Lance Dobson at Eugenia’s Place (5370 Peachtree Road, Chamblee, Georgia 30314; telephone 800-337-1677 or 770-458-1677, www.eugeniantiquehardware.com).

He carries a wide variety of antique hardware. The Old-House Journal has a Restoration Directory that lists dozens of other specialty hardware companies. (202-339-0744, ext. 101; $14.95)

Fireplace Tiles
I have an older house (approximately 85 years old). In one of the fireplace hearths some tiles are missing. They are approximately (2” by 6”) in size with a depth of about 7/16”. They are dark gray in color. The color match isn’t too important to me since you can’t really see the tiles being inside the fireplace. However, the size is since I’d like to be able to salvage what is left. I have brought a sample to a large distributor who told me that my only chance of finding replacements would be through some type of renovation supplier. I don’t know what the tiles are made of; however the distributor thought they may be English quarry tile. I’m located in Massachusetts and am wondering if you know of renovation suppliers in this area.

We used to search far and wide for replacements, spending a lot of time and money in the process. Now we often find local talent to reproduce tiles. Try going to a nearby potter or ceramicist who does arts-level or crafts-level work. While they may not be used to doing architectural reproductions, they do often have the knowledge, skills and equipment to make replacements. Usually they do this work for quite reasonable fees.

John Leeke is a preservation consultant who helps homeowners, contractors and architects understand and maintain their historic buildings. You can contact him at 26 Higgins Street, Portland, Maine 04103, (207)773-2306; or by email: johnleeke@HistoricHomeWorks.com; or log onto his website at: www.HistoricHomeWorks.com.

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