The broken reflections in old glass set in delicate sash give historic buildings a rare sparkle. On many utilitarian structures, windows provide the only touch of variety—a key element in the building’s appearance. New windows never look the same: cheaper ones are flat and awkward, and even the better ones often lack the fine detail and the small irregularities that give historic windows their character. Furthermore, new double-glazing is heavier and requires wider muntins—altering historic appearance and in some cases noticeably reducing the amount of light that comes in.

Stewards of historic buildings today face a dilemma: rising energy costs and interest in sustainability are daily increasing the pressure to make historic buildings more energy efficient by replacing windows with modern windows. But is this truly a wise response? Is replacing historic windows the best way to preserve the environment?

In this issue of Connecticut Preservation News, you’ll find three articles that address some of the questions about historic windows. First, building contractor Judson Aley compares the benefits of replacement windows versus maintaining existing ones. Then we have an excerpt from Preservation Services Officer Todd Levine’s blog describing how Aley’s company is restoring the windows at the Trust’s headquarters. Finally, Programs Associate Hallock Svensk visits Johnson Millwork in Haddam Neck and reflects on some policy implications of window restoration. Along the way, there are illustrations and sidebars with additional information. We also invite readers to visit the Trust’s website, www.cttrust.org, for more on historic windows.
As we closed out 2008, the Connecticut Trust, like everyone else, faced challenging times, but we took comfort in the friends who continue to support our work.

We were saddened to learn in October that Henry Miller, FAIA, of Orange, former chairman of the Trust’s Board of Trustees, had died. As a partner in the architectural firm of Davis, Cochran & Miller, Henry designed many schools and public buildings across the state; he later worked for Yale University as Assistant Director of Facilities Planning. Henry also had the rare honor of seeing one of his works listed on the National Register: his own house, designed in 1949 as a Master’s Thesis project at Yale. The house was one of the first Modern-style residences in the New Haven area and attracted considerable attention when it was built. Henry was the Trust’s chairman from 1975 to 1976 and continued to serve on the board, heading up the Development Committee. His preservation activities also included service on the State’s Historic Preservation Board, which reviews National Register nominations.

November saw two celebrations for Connecticut preservationists. The Trust sponsored a farewell party for Linda Spencer, administrator of tax credit programs for the Commission on Culture and Tourism, who retired at the end of October. In addition to honoring Linda’s 20-plus years of service, the party provided an opportunity to promote tax credits as a preservation tool to those attending, including legislators and developers. The site itself, Firebox Restaurant in Hartford’s Frog Hollow neighborhood, is a fine example of adaptive use and helped to demonstrate the economic and social value of reusing historic buildings.

The very next night, the Board of Trustees honored Executive Director Helen Higgins with a surprise celebration of her tenth year on the job—a real surprise as it came eleven years after she started at the Trust! Nonetheless, it was a festive evening, and Yale University’s Betts House echoed with speeches and laughter. Among the honors, Helen received a citation from Governor Rell and the President’s Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
Preservation Grants Awarded

In December the Connecticut Trust awarded $30,444 in Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants to seven organizations or municipalities across the state. The grants are part of a comprehensive historic preservation technical assistance program of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, in collaboration with and with generous funding from the Connecticut General Assembly, the Connecticut Humanities Council, and the Commission on Culture and Tourism.

The grants are intended to encourage and support community efforts in planning for the preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historic buildings and places. As the economy continues to deteriorate, grants like these provide a valuable stimulus for economic activity.

Grants went to the following groups:

**Bacon Academy, Colchester**: capital needs assessment and preservation plan, $5,000.

**Derby Historical Society**: capital needs assessment for the Curtis-Smith house in Osbornedale State Park, $4,000 (see “Great Preservation Opportunities,” CPN September/October 2008).

**Town of Eastford**: plans and specifications for roof restoration of the Union Society House, $3,000 (a need identified in the Historic Structure Report funded by an earlier HPTAG grant).

**First Congregational Church, Guilford**: condition assessment of portico columns, $11,000.

**Litchfield Historical Society**: conditions assessment for the Noyes Memorial Building, $1,750.

**Rowayton Historical Society**: National Register nomination for Oysterman’s Way historic district, $3,915.

**Union Historical Society**: production of historic site booklet, map, and brochure, $2,499.

Applications for the next round of grants are due February 17, 2009. For more information, visit www.cttrust.org and enter ‘HPTAG’ in the search box.
It has been said that eyes are the window to the soul. I would argue that original wooden windows are the soul of an old house. So why would you replace them with vinyl windows and toss them in a landfill?

In an effort to save on heating costs and reduce their carbon footprint, well-intentioned homeowners are often convinced by replacement window manufacturers that if they want to save money, new windows are their only option. This simply isn’t true. What these manufacturers neglect to mention is that studies show most homes lose more heat through inadequately insulated walls and roofs than through wooden windows, and that it could take a century or more for an investment in replacement windows to result in energy savings. What can a homeowner do?

If you still want to tackle your creaky, leaky old window problem, here are your primary options:

- **Window Replacement** entails removing the entire window including the frame, trim, and molding inside and out and replacing it with a brand new window that is often custom-built. This is the most expensive option and, as I stated, you would never live to see the return on your investment in energy savings.

- **Sash Replacement** (replacing only the movable part of the window) can run the gamut from inexpensive vinyl replacements to high-end name brand kits. Unfortunately, homeowners often do not realize the hidden costs of those seemingly inexpensive kits until it is too late. For example, if you remove the storm windows and sash and replace them with a double-paned vinyl window, the sill that accommodated the absent storm window is exposed to the elements and is prone to rot, which can lead to expensive repairs down the road. You also may not realize that since this sash is set into the existing window opening with a new track, you reduce the viewing area and the amount of sunlight that shines into your home.

- **Window Restoration** can include repairs, glazing, weatherstripping, and the addition of an exterior storm window. Once completed, the window functions as it was originally designed to function, and its R-value is comparable to that of most replacement sash. If you want to do a faithful restoration of your home, this is your best option. The cost is generally on par with a high-end sash replacement, and you are preserving the integrity of the building, which is priceless. Historic wood windows can easily last more than 100 years if properly maintained, and studies have shown you can save 30–40% on heating costs by just repairing failed glazing or adding weatherstripping. Window or sash replacement is not necessary in most cases.

### The Greenest Windows Are in Your House

In these difficult times, economic and environmental concerns dovetail nicely with historic preservation. Many of us in the building industry have embraced the saying, “The greenest building is already built.” The same can be said of your old wooden windows. A properly maintained wooden window that has a storm window and weatherstripping can be just as energy efficient as a replacement window or sash, and it has less of an impact on the environment when you think of the energy used to manufacture and ship the new windows. A more serious consideration is that vinyl replacement windows contain polyvinyl chloride, which is becoming a growing environmental concern. Not only can PVC windows emit harmful gases into your

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**Payback Time**

An ordinary wood-framed single-glazed window with an aluminum storm window has an R-value of about 2, while a fancy wood-framed triple-glazed window with quarter-inch spaces between the panes (but no storm window) has an R-value only somewhat higher—about 2.5. A triple-glazed window that has a low-emissive coating on the glass and is filled with argon, an inert gas, instead of ordinary air, has an R-value of little more than 4…. For almost any house, spending an additional twenty thousand dollars on energy-related window features would have much less impact on actual energy use than spending two thousand dollars on more insulation in the attic.

Restoring the Boarding House Windows

Although most of the windows at the Whitney Boarding House, the Connecticut Trust’s headquarters, aren’t quite 20 years old, they needed a tune-up. Jud Aley, president of R.J. Aley General Contractors, a Westport firm that specializes in historic restoration, graciously offered to donate the labor. His carpenters completed work on half the Boarding House’s 31 windows in October, and they plan to finish the job later this year.

Twenty years may not seem like a long time, but it represents the length of the warranty of most modern replacement windows. The Boarding House’s windows are accurate reproductions, complete with old glass, of early 19th century sash (copied from the building’s surviving attic windows) manufactured by Maurer and Shepherd Joiners of Glastonbury and built of time-tested materials: wood, glass and putty. The attic windows have lasted 180 years; with occasional maintenance, they and the reproductions should continue to serve the Trust long after most modern windows will have failed (see “Shattering the Myths of Replacement Windows,” page 4).

Caesar Lopez, Aley’s lead carpenter, started by inspecting each window to determine its condition. Even the location of a window on the building can make a difference: those on the south and west sides face the sun and tend to suffer primarily from dried-out putty and faded and peeling paint. Those on the north and east, which get less sun, suffer more often from moisture trapped in their joints, causing rot.

The next step was to remove the existing paint and putty. Although there are a number of ways to do this—steaming, scraping, sanding or applying chemicals—Aley has found that steaming is gentlest and the least likely to break the glass. It also allows for easy and safe disposal of the old paint and putty, which commonly contain lead. A portable generator produces the steam, which is then pumped into a box containing the window sash. After one or two hours, the putty and paint are soft enough to slough off.

After the windows dry out, any necessary repairs can be done. Fortunately, the Boarding House windows were in good shape, although one rotted window sill will have to be patched with epoxy. Where replacement parts are needed, Aley prefers to use cedar or redwood, since these woods last longer than pine.

Next, oil-based primer is applied using a brush rather than a spray, because brushes apply a thicker coat of paint and force paint into interstices in the wood. Aley recommends priming not only the exposed surfaces but also the back and ends, where moisture can invade the wood.

After the windows are repaired and primed, the glass is replaced. Small metal brackets, called glazing points, hold each pane in place; then putty is added for additional holding and an airtight seal. As the windows are re-installed, Aley’s team usually replaces cords or weights as needed, but the Boarding House windows are modern replicas and do not have weights or cords. The carpenters also add weather stripping to block drafts. Finally, they apply wax to make the windows easier to open and close.

This article is adapted from the blog in which Preservation Services Officer Todd Levine describes the Trust’s ongoing efforts to maintain, restore, and improve the sustainable features of the Boarding House. To follow the blog, visit www.cttrust.org.
Window Repair as Economic Stimulus
By Hallock Svensk

As federal, state and local governments consider investing in America’s infrastructure on a massive scale, a recent visit to Johnson Millwork in Haddam Neck provided a vision of the impact such investment might have if directed towards preserving, restoring, and retrofitting existing buildings, instead of towards new construction.

With President-elect Obama discussing the need to address the inefficiency of our nation’s building stock, there is reason to believe that some federal funding will be directed to the renovation and retrofitting of existing buildings. As such, preservationists have the opportunity to make a powerful case for the benefits of preservation work.

Johnson Millwork, which has been in existence for more than 50 years and specializes in period woodwork, has worked on the restoration of Gillette Castle, the Mark Twain house, and the Old State House, as well as on buildings at Wesleyan, Yale, and Brown universities. Throughout their careers, the firm’s partners, Bob Johnson and Peter Smith, have not only proved themselves to be talented wood-workers, but have rendered faithful service to Connecticut architecture. With such diverse experience and with the expertise to make their own tools if the job requires it, there is, as they say, almost no historic window, door, or wood detail they can’t fix.

This is true, in part, because historic material is inherently fixable. Whereas the failure of modern windows and doors more often than not necessitates the replacement of the entire unit, older casements can have damaged or rotted parts repaired or replaced. In addition, modern materials, particularly lumber, have degraded significantly, thereby contributing to leaks, failure, and again, replacement. Johnson and Smith pride themselves on not having to purchase a lot of new material. Instead, they recycle what they can and get other parts they need from salvage.

Thus, when preservationists speak of preservation work as being “labor intensive” as opposed to “materials intensive,” they mean that not only are more of the costs being directed to the employment of skilled labor, but they are also being directed away from the need to use new materials of questionable quality. If the goal of infrastructure investment is economic stimulus, increased employment, and environmental sustainability, paying for labor as opposed to raw material would seem to be an intelligent use of funds.

The federal government, in considering how best to improve the efficiency of its buildings and put people back to work, would do well to look at its historic building stock—for example, historic town halls and school buildings—as a sector which would benefit greatly from strategic investment. In revitalizing its older buildings, the government would not only bring down long term energy costs, put talented artisans to work, and limit use of scarce raw materials, but it would prove itself to be the responsible steward of our nation’s history we expect it to be.

Resources for Historic Windows


National Park Service, Preservation Briefs (www.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm)

No. 9: The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows
No. 13: The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows
No. 33: The Preservation and Repair of Historic Stained and Leaded Glass


This Old House’s website has guides to maintaining and repairing windows. http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/windows

The workshop at Johnson Millwork
Maintenance IS Preservation

It's an old truism that a bad economy is good for preservation. When there’s no money for erecting new buildings, neither is there money for demolishing old ones.

This is true, but only in part. While a bad economy may indeed mean less new construction, it generally also means that there’s less money for maintenance. It’s easy to cut upkeep in order to pay for groceries or to keep from laying off the staff, and perfectly understandable.

But without maintenance buildings don’t survive.

When the economy finally does recover, there will once again be opportunities for construction, and un-maintained buildings will be prime candidates for demolition. “It’s just too far gone to keep,” will be the excuse.

So for the next couple of years, one task for preservationists will be to fight for basic maintenance. It’s a difficult task, since maintenance work simply isn’t as dramatic as new construction or extensive restoration, and the consequences of neglect usually aren’t immediately visible. Something that’s just a little run-down can always wait, but one day it will be past just a little run-down. A stitch in time saves nine.

Preservation organizations need to spend more time encouraging and assisting owners and stewards to develop good maintenance habits. The Connecticut Trust’s Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants (HPTAG) can, for instance, be used to fund a condition assessment for an historic building, complete with priorities for addressing issues. The grants could also be used to set up a maintenance schedule tailored to a particular building’s needs.

Although the Trust doesn’t give grants for actual construction, other funders might promote restoration grants that can be used for maintenance, or modify their guidelines to allow maintenance chores that do not rise to the level of ‘restoration.’

Owners and stewards of historic buildings will find that, while maybe not dramatic, maintenance does have its satisfactions. As Stewart Brand writes in How Buildings Learn: “The romance of maintenance is that it has none. Its joys are quiet ones. There is a certain high calling in the steady tending to a ship, to a garden, to a building. One is participating physically in a deep, long life.”

RESOURCES


The State of Illinois Historic Preservation Agency has a sample building inspection form and maintenance schedule to download from http://www. illinoishistory.gov/ps/maintenance.htm


Connecticut Trust Technical Assistance Grants: http://www.cttrust.org/index.cgi/1190


Regular maintenance, such as touching up paint and replacing broken window panes, now can prevent more expensive restoration needs later.

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CONNECTICUT PRESERVATION NEWS, January/February 2009 7
Welcome to Negrotown

African Diaspora Archaeology in Western Connecticut

Ryan W. Hewey and Warren R. Perry
Central Connecticut State University

Archaeologists have recently found evidence that African settlement patterns and spiritual beliefs continued to shape the ways that people of African descent went about their daily lives, even in the quiet backwoods of western Connecticut. This summer, CCSU's Archaeological Laboratory for African and African Diaspora Studies (ALAADS), working in conjunction with the Metropolitan District Commission, began investigations into a recently rediscovered Colonial-era community known as Negrotown, located within what was once Simsbury but is now New Hartford.

Occupied roughly between 1770 and 1822, Negrotown was a small community of people of primarily African, Native American, or mixed descent, who lived on land held by Captain Dudley Case, a wealthy farmer, mill owner and abolitionist who employed a number of the community’s members. Negrotown served as a temporary home for many families of color during a time when many captive Africans were being granted their freedom in New England.

While there are no known records of the size of the community, one source mentions that there were, “many blacks; some in comfort, [i.e. in permanent housing], and plenty of other hangers-on.” The only other known contemporary description conflates the community with Satan’s Kingdom, a nearby settlement, saying that the area was “so recruited by negroes, Indians, and renegade whites that it was the most populous part of town by 1780, and an asylum for criminals.” The ALAADS team has been able to identify more than 30 persons of African or mixed heritage who occupied Negrotown before its forced evacuation following Capt. Case’s death.

Despite the disparaging remarks, multi-ethnic outsider communities played a significant role in the economic, social, and political development of New England, as archaeology conducted by CCSU faculty and students has shown. Thanks to its location, and to its African-influenced social and occupational structure, we believe that Negrotown served as a mediator between at least six white communities (Avon, Barkhamsted, Canton, Collinsville, New Hartford, Simsbury) and two other outsider communities (the Lighthouse in Barkhamsted and Danbury Quarter in Winsted). It is highly likely that Negrotown’s non-traditional social and commercial networks had effects on both the developing local capitalist industry and on the marginal industries of the outsider communities.

From a modern perspective, Negrotown occupies minimally useful land, but its layout has a decidedly African influence. Structures and utilitarian spaces are clustered communally rather than separated over large distances and bound by walls, as was typical of capitalist settlements. In this way, the landscape itself speaks of a preference for collaboration over individualism.

In 2008, our team located several archaeological features, including...
African Diaspora Archaeology, cont’d from page 8

dations, property and retaining walls, a breakwater along the river, a well, and what is possibly a small cemetery. We conducted preliminary excavations in three areas, focusing on a foundation and cellar hole which was likely a residence. The students recovered a variety of domestic ceramics, a number of metal knives and tools, and even a counterfeit George III halfpenny.

More interestingly, we recovered a possible indicator of African spiritual practices. Located 44 cm. below the southeast corner of the cellar was a collection of objects that included a large piece of burnt lumber, half of a pearlware bowl, pieces of a larger redware bowl, a pipe stem, blue and green glass fragments, a single large bivalve shell, and a number of bent handmade nails.

Bundles of what appear to European-Americans to be everyday items have been found at a number of antebellum New England sites associated with peoples of African descent. They tend to be situated in specific locations, such as attics, basements, liminal areas separating indoor and outdoor spaces (such as doorways or window sills), spaces underneath flooring, or spaces near sources of smoke or water, on which it was believed spirits travelled.

These spiritual bundles, referred to as nkisi, were—and in many areas still are—deployed as a means of invoking spiritual protection, aid, or attack.

Each item has several symbolic meanings and usages within African spiritual contexts. For example, the burnt wood and pipe emit smoke, on which a spirit might travel between this world and the next. Reflective objects, such as the glass sherds, were intended to capture a spirit’s attention. Glass could also symbolize water, believed to be the boundary between the natural and spirit worlds. Bivalve shells, associated with both water and the spirit world, hold myriad meanings and have been utilized world-wide in African influenced spiritual contexts. Nails have been used to awaken spirits and to direct their energies and efforts. Finally, inverted bowls conceal the nkisi from prying eyes while concentrating and directing its power.

Through continued analysis of these artifacts and further development of testable hypotheses, we hope to uncover additional information regarding Negrotown’s political, social and economic history. Excavations will progress here for the next several years, and we’ll provide updates as they occur.
Norwich. Downtown revitalization here continued with the reopening of the Thayer Building in October. An office building erected in 1915, the Thayer is located just a block from the Wauregan Hotel, the local landmark whose long and difficult redevelopment has been a catalyst for much other work in Norwich. Like the Wauregan, it is included in the Downtown Norwich National Register district.

New York-based developer Gary Tse has converted the Thayer Building’s upper levels to 32 apartments, ranging from studios to three-bedroom units. Many have views of Franklin Square through the large, Chicago-style windows that are the building’s hallmark. Retaining and repairing the windows’ copper-clad frames and spandrels was a key element of the rehabilitation work.

Before Tse came along, the building had sat empty for a number of years. As a result, he had to deal with mold and basement contamination. The building’s layout also made it necessary to obtain zoning approvals for some nonstandard apartments.

Several of the other buildings in Franklin Square are still empty or partially empty, but Tse told the Norwich Bulletin that that didn’t worry him. In fact, a number of the Thayer Building’s apartments were spoken for well before the building opened, and a law firm—operated by Tse’s sister—occupies one of the storefronts.

Sharon. Plans are underway for an historically sympathetic expansion of the Hotchkiss Library. The library, which opened in 1893, was designed by Bruce Price, a New York architect known for his social connections and his designs for houses in Tuxedo Park, an exclusive community in New York State. The library was a gift from Maria Hotchkiss, in memory of her husband, the local industrialist Benjamin Berkeley Hotchkiss.

Despite its small size, the building’s stone walls, deep eaves, and big, arched entry make it a dominant presence on the town green, in what is both a National Register district and a local historic district. The interior boasts oak woodwork, stained glass windows, and many original furnishings.

Like many of its counterparts, the Hotchkiss Library has long needed expansion—even after a recent weeding-out the building, designed for 6,000 books, contained 14,000 items. But not only did the library need more space, it also needed to comply with codes and provide accessibility for the disabled. The board of trustees wanted to stay where they were, but the historic district commission turned down an expansion plan, prompting some residents to suggest giving the building to the historical society and constructing a new facility elsewhere.

In order to decide what to do, the library’s board secured a Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant (HPTAG) from the Connecticut Trust to hire architectural historian Rachel Carley, of Litchfield, to evaluate the building. She praised the building’s design, writing that Price’s “skillful spatial composition makes the interior simultaneously intimate and accessible. The effect could not have been better suited to the small but tasteful monument to culture that the Library’s civic-minded donor surely wanted to establish for Sharon residents.”

Also remarkable is the building’s state of preservation: “Virtually all of the original materials and detailing...are not only intact, but also appear to be in very good condition. That state of preservation is

“I 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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a rarity in Connecticut's historic public buildings—let alone a library that has experienced the usual wear and tear for 125 years.” This quality of design and level of preservation, Carley concluded, warranted careful restoration.

Based on this recommendation, the library then hired J. P. Franzen Associates, of Southport, to make preliminary designs for the restoration and a 5,294 square-foot addition—again, with HPTAG funding. Franzen’s design hews to the intimate scale of the original building and picks up some of its details, such as the doorway arch. However, a different wall material, pebble-dash (stucco with small pebbles embedded in the surface, a material that was popular in the 1890s), will allow passers-by easily to identify the addition as built later.

With the designs completed and approved by the town’s historic district commission, the library learned in late November that the State Library Board had approved a construction grant of $1,000,000 toward the estimated total cost of $4,207,960.

Libraries now are in position similar to that of schools some thirty years ago. As public expectations of library services evolve, there is pressure in many communities to build a larger, more accessible new building on a larger library campus. The remarkable thing in Sharon is that the Hotchkiss Library has found a way to keep the library in an historic building, in the town center, with an appropriately-scaled addition.

**Bridgeport.** The Department of the Interior has selected Beacon Preservation, Inc., as recipient of the Penfield Reef Light, which is being deaccessioned under the National Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 (see CPN, November/December 2004).

The lighthouse was built in 1874, at a time when Bridgeport was becoming a major industrial power and improving its harbor. It has been automated since 1971. One of the last offshore masonry light-houses built before the switch to cast-iron towers, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Beacon Preservation is a private non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of lighthouses and their environments for educational, cultural, recreational, and historical preservation purposes.

Under the Lighthouse Preservation Act, Beacon must restore and maintain the light, and allow the Coast Guard to continue its use as a navigational guide.

The organization is also considering an application to take over the Old Saybrook Breakwater Light, the lighthouse depicted on Connecticut’s “Save the Sound” license plates.
The redevelopment of Samuel Colt’s industrial village is seeing two big changes in the new year.

On December 17, a feasibility study for the proposal to create a National Park at Coltsville was sent to the National Park Service. The study’s conclusion: “Coltsville could be as significant a New England destination as the Lowell National Historical Park and the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, both of which have hundreds of thousands of visitors each year and have contributed significantly to the revitalization of their communities.”

Crucially, it also finds that partner groups, ranging from the Church of the Good Shepherd and the Colt Trust, to the Connecticut Historical Society, Riverfront Recapture, the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Commission on Culture and Tourism, the Connecticut Trust, and the Connecticut Humanities Council, can contribute much to Coltsville—in fact, are crucial to its success—but none has both the history-based mission and the capacity to develop and manage the site. For that, the National Park Service’s expertise and resources are necessary.

Commissioned by the Connecticut Trust on behalf of Coltsville Ad Hoc Committee, with funding from the Commission on Culture and Tourism, the study looks at three different scenarios: a small visitor center estimated to attract approximately 25,000 visitors per year; a larger setup with more extensive exhibits in the East Armory, drawing approximately 60,000 visitors per year; a full-site scenario reaching out into the landscape from the riverbank to worker housing to the Church of the Good Shepherd complex, Colt Park, and the Colt houses on Wethersfield Avenue.

The Park Service has four months to finalize the study and will then present it to Congress for action. Representative John Larson, whose district includes Hartford, has strongly supported the national park effort. He told the Hartford Courant that the study has an excellent chance of passage.

At the same time that the completed study was unveiled, a new developer was negotiating to take over Coltsville from its current owner, Homes for America Holdings, which struggled to find financing, even before the current economic downturn.

Lance Robbins, of Urban Smart Growth, a California firm, has particular interest in revitalizing historic buildings and urban neighborhoods, transforming neglected buildings into living, retail and commercial spaces “that appeal to the creative class.” The company has projects across the country, in California, Oregon, North Carolina, Ohio, and New Jersey, as well as four sites recently completed or currently under construction in Rhode Island.

Robbins purportedly has financial backing from Chevron Oil and is committed to maintaining and enhancing the Colt site’s historic character, calling it historical “hallowed ground.”

For more information…
Coltsville National Park Study: www.coltsvillestudy.org
Urban Smart Growth: www.urbansmartgrowth.net

Homes for America Holdings has accomplished much in the rehabilitation of the Colt Armory, but much work still awaits the site’s new owner, Urban Smart Growth.
Grumman-St. John house,
The Norwalk Preservation Trust and Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal have gone back to court in an attempt to preserve the Grumman-St. John house.

Chris Handrinos bought the house in 2001 planning to raze it for expansion of the Norwalk Inn, of which he also is part owner. Because the house is listed on the National Register, the Norwalk Preservation Trust sued to prevent demolition under Connecticut’s Environmental Protection Act, claiming that the house could be rehabbed as an addition to the Inn. In February, 2008, Judge Thomas Nadeau issued a decision in favor of the preservationists (see CPN, March/April 2008) and a temporary injunction against demolishing the house.

Since then, the house has continued visibly to deteriorate. Broken windows let the elements in, and several porch posts have collapsed. The Norwalk Trust and the state claim that Handrinos is deliberately allowing the structure to crumble and they asked the court to order immediate measures to prevent further decay, and to find the owners in contempt of court.

During the trial in November, Tod Bryant, of the Norwalk Preservation Trust, testified that the house appeared to have been vandalized, that broken windows sat open for a long time, and that the property is only partly fenced in. Structural engineer James Grant, who inspected the house in 2006 and found no structural problems, said that several porch columns appeared to have been knocked out. “In my opinion, the only thing that could have caused movements like that is some sort of deliberate action,” he said.

Bryant emphasizes that this is not a case of demolition by neglect, but rather deliberate tactic on Handrinos’ part. The brief submitted by Norwalk Trust and the State spells this out: “The testimony shows that his inaction was an action and a knowing encouragement for vandals to destroy the historic building, so as to render it no longer viable for restoration, and that he had reason to know that this was in violation of the Court’s orders.”

The plaintiffs asked the court to order Handrinos to take immediate measures to protect the building: shore up the collapsing porch roof, board up broken windows and doors, place a tarp over the holes in the roof, and completely fence in the property.

Sunrise on the Merritt Parkway inspired a new film, “The Road Taken…”

Fairfield County.
Celebration of the Merritt Parkway’s 70th birthday (see CPN, September/October 2008) continued in December with the unveiling of a new film about the historic road.

“The Road Taken…The Merritt Parkway,” a documentary by Westport filmmaker Lisa Seidenberg, takes an alternately poetic and informative look at the Parkway, combining historical information, rarely-seen footage of construction and early traffic, and personal anecdotes.

Included in the cast of characters is Westport photographer Nate Gibbons, former DOT Commissioner Emil Frankel, Laurie Heiss and Peter Malkin of the Merritt Parkway Conservancy, preservationist artist Renée Kahn, Christopher Wigren of the Connecticut Trust, and Henry Merritt, a relative of Schuyler Merritt, the Stamford Congressman for whom the Parkway is named. There are also interviews with travelers at rest areas, in nearby towns and at the Lakeside Diner in Stamford. “I call it ‘a people’s history,’” said Seidenberg.

Lisa Seidenberg’s previous work as director includes a feature, “Pledge of Allegiance Blues”; also “Mongolia on the Edge of Time”, “Being Human” and “Women Make Art.” She says that an early-morning drive along the Parkway inspired her to make the film.

“I was driving and looking at the lights and the sights with my radio going and thought it was really pretty,” says Seidenberg. “I wondered if anyone had ever captured this on film. It’s not just another road.” Grants from the Merritt Parkway Conservancy and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism supported production.

The movie has been shown at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, the Westport Historical Society, and the Avon Theater in Stamford. Copies are available from Metro Video Inc.: call (203) 341-9655 or email jumpcut03@yahoo.com.

The Grumman-St. John house continues to deteriorate.
home, but their manufacture creates toxic by-products. They are hardly a “green” option.

Why Restoration Matters
I am fascinated by what an old building says about the person who built it and the people who have owned and cared for it over the years. By saving an old house—or its windows—you are preserving a piece of history, conserving natural resources, and being environmentally responsible by not contributing debris to a landfill. I believe it is important to be respectful of the history of the house, whatever period it may be from. Once the original windows have been replaced, the integrity of the home has been compromised in the name of alleged energy efficiency. This is too high a price to pay.

Judson Aley is President of R.J. Aley General Contractors of Westport and a proud member of several preservation organizations including the Connecticut Trust. This “Old House Specialist” is a second generation contractor who specializes in sensitive restorations of vintage homes. He is licensed to work in Connecticut (#570003) and Westchester County, New York (#WC13151H02). For more information, visit: http://www.rjaley.com or call (203) 226-9933. Go to http://cttrust.org/index.cgi/10754 to read an interview with Jud.

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Shattering Myths, cont’d from page 4

This case is important as a potential precedent for future cases. The preservationists' brief concludes, “The defendants up to now have won by simply ignoring the intent of the court’s decision. If this is allowed to happen, this case will clearly illustrate that the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act has no teeth…The next building owner who wants to demolish a National Register property won’t even bother to go to court if he knows that the court’s decision on a temporary injunction against demolition can’t or won’t be enforced.”

As CPN goes to press, final arguments are scheduled for January 7. We don’t know how long it will take the court to reach a decision.
this additional moisture. Most likely it is
due to poor drainage around the founda-
tion exterior. Downspouts may pour water
out right at the foundation. Fix the down-
spouts with ground leaders to channel the
water five to ten feet away from the foun-
dation. The ground may slope toward the
foundation and let water flow down into
the foundation walls. Regrade the ground
for five to ten feet away from the founda-
tion with a one-to-two-inch drop per foot
of run.

After you have done this wait for a cou-
ple of years to see if this reduces the mois-
ture in the cellar and house; if not, ground
water may be coming up from beneath the
dirt floor by capillary action or as water
vapor. This is more difficult to deal with.
Possible solutions include ventilation of the
cellar to the outdoors, and extensive interi-
or drainage systems.

Bathroom History

I have a lot of questions about my upstairs
bathroom. What puzzles me is that all the
plumbing for the bathroom seems not to be
‘original’ to the house—it all was installed
cutting the joists and studs. What was this
9’ x 5’ room used for if it wasn’t a bathroom
with indoor plumbing when the house was
built in the 1880s? Was it a ‘trunk room’ as
I have seen small rooms referred to on floor
plans contemporary with this age of house?
Or was it used as a wash room then, even
though the water had to be brought up?
Any clues would be appreciated.

Subtle details and evidence remain-
in the house itself are your best clue
although they may be difficult to “read.”

Water Damaged Flooring

I just found your website after discovering
some recent water damage to an area of a
wooden floor. The wooden floor has discol-
sored and three of the boards have risen and
buckled up, perhaps a 1/8” up. The area of
buckling is approx. two feet square. I have
applied some Johnson’s floor wax, and have
placed a heavy metal plate, one inch thick,
on top of the area in question in the effort
to weight it down. Is there something more
effective to flatten out the boards without
replacing them?

—Lance Jackson

You want to dry out the floor boards
slowly over a long period of time, perhaps
a few to several months. If the boards are
going to flatten out they will do so on
their own without the heavy plate. I’m con-
cerned the plate may not allow the boards
to dry evenly.

If your finish flooring is less than 5/8”
thick the weight of the plate might help
a little, but you should place “stickers”
(1” x 1” strips of wood) across the buckled
boards every 6”, then put the heavy metal
plate on top of the stickers. This will allow
some air to circulate over the flooring.

Do not try to rush drying with a fan;
a long drying time is the key. If the source
of the moisture was in the cellar or crawl
space beneath the floor be sure to dry out
that space as well.
Window Moisture

My wife and I recently bought our first house. It is a circa 1900s farmhouse in the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. We got it for a pretty good price so we overlooked some of the apparent flaws that it had. Some of the flaws have come back to haunt us by letting in more cold air than we had anticipated.

I thought that the windows were a plus. They are modern replacement windows that were manufactured in 1983. Unfortunately they have been letting in a lot of cold air. The windows are all double-glazed, but five of them have condensation that is between the glass. There is evidence of water damage both on the wood casings (surrounding the glass) and in between the plates of glass themselves. The wood that is at the bottom of the top window pane is black with mildew. The wood is sound; it is just damp and discolored. The caulking around all of the panes of glass has mildew on it. We don't understand why; all of the windows are double-paned and we figured this type of setup would have been the most weather resistant.

The house has vinyl siding and a dirt floor basement with rock walls. It gets quite damp down there in certain spots when it rains. It isn’t insulated. I haven’t properly vented our dryer yet. The vent goes into the basement. There is no bathroom vent.

—Jay & Heather Stirling

The moisture is rising up from your cellar and condensing on the interior side of the windows where it soaks into the putty and dribbles down to deteriorate the wood at the lower rails of the sash. You are correct to be concerned about this moisture at the windows because it is an indication that moisture is also condensing within the walls where it becomes trapped by insulation and the exterior vinyl siding. This could be causing a much greater hidden problem than the relatively minor window deterioration you see.

Begin by controlling and reducing the moisture in the cellar. You already know you must vent the clothes-dryer outdoors and install vents in all kitchens and bathrooms. These are the obvious sources of moisture, but the cellar’s dirt floor and stone walls may be generating much more moisture. Look for the sources of

continued on page 15