From Stone House to Glass House

Connecticut’s House Museums

By Karin Peterson, Museum Director, Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism

New England is well known for its many historic house museums and Connecticut alone has over 200. The Commission of Culture & Tourism invites the public to view an exhibit on Connecticut’s historic houses, “From Stone House to Glass House” in its gallery at One Constitution Plaza (second floor), Hartford during business hours. The exhibit opens April 1 with a special viewing between 3:00 and 7:00 p.m. and continues through May 28. This exhibit tells the collective story of the state’s historic house museums by focusing on the opening of select museum houses and linking them to personalities, organizations and legislation.

Women’s groups led the earliest efforts to save historic houses from uncertain futures. Town chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution began forming in Connecticut in 1892 and the National Society of Colonial Dames, led by Elizabeth Colt, established a Connecticut Society in 1893. These fledging organizations were especially active in the first part of the 20th century. Their preservation efforts focused on saving old buildings associated with illustrious citizens or events.

The Henry Whitfield Museum in Guilford was one of their successes and the museum house starts the exhibit time line. Long recognized as an important relic from the past, it seemed to many that the house should be publicly owned and preserved forever. In response to a petition from the Colonial Dames, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a resolution in 1899 naming it the State Historical Museum. Shortly thereafter, a group of concerned citizens purchased the Knapp Tavern or “Putnam Cottage,” in Greenwich, the 1779 headquarters of General Israel Putnam, to save it from demolition. Connecticut’s historic house museum movement was on its way.

Historical societies also were early involved with historic house making as they sought to preserve landmarks important to their story. In 1907 the New London County Historical Society undertook a fund drive to purchase the Shaw Mansion and all its contents from the last family member living there. The house had been the headquar- continued on page 6
From the Executive Director

Thirty-five years ago this past February, a group of concerned preservationists gathered in a living room in Middletown and formed the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. Through the leadership of Harlan Griswold, chairman of the state’s Historical Commission, the State Legislature passed Special Act 75-93 that officially chartered the organization. He believed that Connecticut should have a private agency concerned with the preservation of this state’s built environment that could act in ways impossible for an arm of the state government, the Historical Commission. Then as now, the relationship between the state’s historic preservation office, now at the Commission on Culture & Tourism, and the Trust is complementary and extraordinarily strong, as Mr. Griswold envisioned.

The Trust will celebrate this anniversary specifically on April 7 but more generally all year long. We have commissioned a special logo for the year which you can see above and on the cover of CPN. In our annual appeal for membership renewal that went out the 1st of March we emphasized the important role that longstanding members have played in strengthening the Trust. We celebrate you during this 35th anniversary year.

The Trust’s Historic Barns survey project received statewide attention when Connecticut Magazine asked experts in various fields to select their favorite things for the magazine’s January issue. As one of the experts, Trust barn researcher Charlotte Hitchcock picked her favorite barn. She chose the Darling House Barn, in Woodbridge. The barn and house, she says, “form a natural gateway out of New Haven.” As I city dweller, I love how I say, “From Stone House to Glass House,” which recounts the development of house museums in the state, in its own gallery (see page 1). The Westport Historical Society continues with “Westport Modern: When Cool Was Hot,” about that town’s legacy of Modernist architecture (see page 7). We were pleased to contribute to the exhibit a digital walk-through of the Michels house, designed by Paul Rudolph in 1972, now demolished. Stephanie Tryzk of Stephen Lazar Architects designed the program as part of their pro bono work for the Trust.

The Connecticut Trust has been busy, too. In partnership with Historic New England (HNE) and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and with funding from the Connecticut Humanities Council, we are displaying HNE’s exhibition, “The Preservation Movement Then and Now,” which tells the story of historic preservation in New England (see insert). The Connecticut Humanities Council also funded our creation of an additional panel specifically about preservation in Connecticut. Installed in the atrium at New Haven City Hall and supplemented by public events, “The Preservation Movement Then and Now” will reach an audience beyond the usual faithful preservationists and, we hope, bring new allies into the fold. What better birthday present could we hope for?

—Helen Higgins

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

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The Connecticut Trust is pleased to announce that the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) has awarded a grant of $261,670 to invest in the Trust’s Historic Building Finance Fund (HBFF). The grant comes from CHFA’s portion of the Community Investment Act, which provides money for historic preservation, affordable housing, farmland protection and open space acquisition through a real estate filing fee. The partnership with CHFA exemplifies a goal of the CIA to encourage cooperative programming among the four recipient agencies.

With this grant, the Trust will be able to make loans that help put three long-vacant historic buildings in Hartford back into use.

One loan will go to Christian Activities Council (CAC) for the rehabilitation of 54–56 Edgewood Street in Hartford’s Upper Albany neighborhood, a typical Hartford “Perfect Six” which CAC plans to renovate as six condominium units. Work had stalled for lack of financing, but with the HBFF money it is expected to get back on track.

Two of the loans will go to Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA) for these buildings in the Asylum Hill neighborhood:

• 235 Sargeant Street is a three-story, shingled double house constructed around 1900. Abandoned since 2007, the house has been vandalized.
• 87–89 Atwood Street, another Perfect Six which will be substantially renovated as two side-by-side single family homes. In the spring of 2009, the Trust gave a grant of $5,000 to help stabilize this severely deteriorated structure.

Both CAC and NINA have already rehabilitated several buildings in their target neighborhoods, so these latest projects will both benefit from and contribute to broader revitalization efforts.

HBFF was established by the Connecticut Trust in 2006 to provide gap financing for historic rehabilitation projects in Connecticut’s urban areas (see CPN, January/February 2007). Since then, the program has provided $191,000 in forgivable loans to seven projects, leveraging $3,208,000 in additional investment.

For more information on the Historic Buildings Finance Fund, visit www.cttrust.org/index.cgi/9223 or call Brad Schide, (860) 463-1093.

Update: What Is Preservation Worth?

Reacting to reports that the White House had eliminated funding for the Save America’s Treasures and Preserve America programs, reports preservation economist Donovan Rypkema (see “What Is Preservation Worth?” CPN, January/February 2010) published comments in “Place Economics Blog” On February 8. SAT was founded during the Millennium celebrations (see CPN, March/April 1999) and extended because of its success. Moreover, as Rypkema points out, both programs also contributed significantly to job creation:

Between 1999 and 2009, the Save America’s Treasures program allocated around $220 million dollars for the restoration of nearly 900 historic structures, many of them National Historic Landmarks. This investment by the SAT program generated in excess of $330 million from other sources. This work meant 16,012 jobs (a job being one full time equivalent job for one year...the same way they are counting jobs for the Stimulus Program). The cost per job created? $13,780.

This compares with the White House announcement that the Stimulus Package is creating one job for every $248,000. Whose program is helping the economy?

To read Rypkema’s comments in full, visit http://www.placeeconomics.com/blog.html
The Connecticut Trust awarded a total of $309,796 to 41 nonprofit organizations and municipalities from across the state in January. Every grant awarded creates a short-term job that will employ architects, structural, mechanical and civil engineers, historic and preservation consultants, energy use consultants, technology firms and planning companies.

The Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants program is a collaborative historic preservation granting program of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, with funding from the Connecticut General Assembly, the Connecticut Humanities Council and the Commission on Culture & Tourism. (In the following list, “NR” means that a building is listed on the National Register, either individually or as part of a district; “SR” means it is on the State Register, and “NHL” means that it is a National Historic Landmark.)

**Technical Assistance Grants Awarded**

*Ashford Historical Society:* $8,000 for design development and construction documents for rehabilitation and reuse of the Tremko house (c.1773) to serve as a society headquarters and museum.

*Town of Barkhamsted:* $5,000 to develop a strategic plan for preserving the historic Lambert Hitchcock House in the village of Riverton (NR).

*Connecticut Landmarks, Bethlehem:* $5,000 to document damage at the Bellamy-Ferriday house (NR) that may have been caused by use of an encasement paint product.

*Canton Historical Society, Collinsville:* $3,000 for a detailed cost estimate of proposed renovations to the Canton Historical Museum (1865, NR).

*Chaplin Historic District Commission:* $4,500 for plans for the reuse of the former William Ross Public Library (1911, NR) as a community art center.

*Community Economic Development Fund, East Hartford:* $2,500 for a visioning study of downtown East Hartford (NR) to promote grass-roots community development efforts.

*Town of Essex:* $10,000 for an energy audit of Town Hall, a former school built in 1892.

*Merwinsville Hotel Restoration, Gaylordsville:* $4,000 for structural engineering analysis and recommendations for repairs to this historic trackside hotel (1843; NR).

*The Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich:* $10,000 for plans to reconstruct a dormer on the rear of the Bush-Holley house (NHL), depicted in paintings by Childe Hassam.

*Hamden Historic Properties Commission:* $2,500 for design signage and other publicity for the Jep Brook Millsite (SR; state archaeological preserve) and for an archaeological survey of Lock 14 on the Farmington Canal (NR), in collaboration with the Hamden Historical Society and the Farmington Canal Commission.

*Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery, Hartford:* $8,000 for a capital needs assessment of the Charles B. Haskel house (1896, NR), to preserve the building’s historic character while improving energy efficiency.

*Hispanic Health Council, Hartford:* $16,600 to develop bid-level plans and specifications for design of a new energy efficient HVAC system of its historic Main Street building (NR).

*Immaculate Conception Shelter and Housing Corporation, Hartford:* $19,695 to study and determine appropriate reuse of the former Immaculate Conception Church (1894, NR).

*The Woman’s Institute for Housing & Economic Development, Jewett City:* $20,000 to provide architectural documents for the renovation of a 19th-century downtown building as supportive housing for homeless veterans.

*Kent Historical Society:* $13,392 for a Historic Structures Report of Seven Heaths, one of the most significant Colonial houses in town (NR).

*Academy of Our Lady of Mercy at Lauralton Hall, Milford:* $13,700 for technical planning to adapt the school’s carriage barn (1864) for reuse as a performing arts center. Last year, a Connecticut Trust Barn Grant provided emergency stabilization of the barn.

*First Lutheran Church of the Reformation, New Britain:* $2,245 to provide hazardous materials inspection of church (1906, SR) as a first step toward restoration.

*New Canaan Preservation Alliance:* $4,750 for website design and development, including simplifying local zoning issues.

"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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historic district commission regulations, information on National and State registers, easements, technical advice and vernacular architectural styles.

New Haven Department of Cultural Affairs: $5,750 to layer monuments, memorials, and public art onto the City’s digital mapping system, to support planning and development activities and provide public access to images and data.

New Haven Museum and Historical Society: $10,000 for a feasibility study for the restoration of the museum’s headquarters, a Colonial Revival structure designed by J. Frederick Kelly (1929, NR).

New Haven Preservation Trust: $2,500 to build an online searchable database of records and images which will be made accessible to the public through NHPT’s website, including more than 2,000 Historic Resource Inventory forms.

St. Paul’s on-the-Green Episcopal Church, Norwalk: $6,375 for a topographical survey of the historic churchyard, which contains cultural features dating to the colonial beginnings of Norwalk, 400+ grave markers, outbuildings, stone wall, labyrinth, and paths.

Norwalk Mutual Housing: $2,000 for a National Register nomination of the Village Creek historic district, which contains 64 Modernist houses (1950-1964) and 4 sites.

Norwich Historical Society: $8,500 to clarify title and assess conditions of the Buckingham Memorial (1847, NR), home of William Buckingham, Connecticut’s Civil War governor, and now housing historic and preservation organizations.

Town of Putnam: $20,000 to hire a multi-disciplinary team including an architect, landscape architect, engineers, and construction consultant, to develop plans for adaptive reuse of Cargill Falls Mill (see CPN November/December 2009).

Town of Rocky Hill and Rocky Hill Historical Society: $6,000 for a structural conditions analysis and remediation recommendations for Academy Hall (1803, NR).

Stonington Historical Society: $5,000 for a Historic Structures Report of the Old Stonington Lighthouse (NR), to document the building’s evolution, study environmental conditions, explore climate control options, and evaluate fire protection and handicap accessibility.

City of Torrington: $5,000 to study costs associated in renovating the historic Warner Studio Theater (NR) to modern code standards. This study will be used to promote the re-use of this property and nearby vacant buildings.

Friends of Valley Falls, Vernon: $5,912 for strategic and historic preservation planning at the 8-acre Valley Falls Farm.

Willington Historical Society: $10,000 to provide a conditions assessment of the Daniel Glazier Tavern (c.1815; NR).

Town of Windham: $7,500 to provide needs analyses for two historic buildings that currently house the Windham Textile & History Museum.

Grace Episcopal Church, Windsor: $9,912 to assess water infiltration, which is causing damage to this historic brownstone building (1864; NR), and to develop a remediation plan.

Winchester Soldiers’ Monument Commission, Winsted: $13,845 for engineering restoration and site enhancements to this Gothic Revival Civil War monument (1889-1890; NR).

Woodstock Historical Society: $11,500 to provide assessment of the Chamberlin sawmill (SR) which includes documentation of current condition, measured drawings, and recommendations for stabilization.

Connecticut Main Street Center: $5,000 to develop and implement a communications plan to increase awareness of, and resources for, the revitalization of Connecticut’s historic Main Streets as catalysts for community development.

The Friends of Connecticut State Parks: $19,620 for conditions assessments of the Ostrom Enders house (Waterford) and the Smith-Curtiss house (Derby), both being considered for the Department of Environmental Protection’s new resident curatorship program.

Municipalities statewide: $2,500 for energy audits of the Indian Charity School (Columbia), Harwinton Community Hall (Harwinton), former Witt School (Stafford), Old Tolland Jail & Museum (Tolland) and Bridge Street School (Suffield).

For more information on Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants, call the Trust at (203) 562-6312 or visit www.cttrust.org and click on “Seek Grants and Loans.”
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For more information about the exhibit, visit www.cultureandtourism.org or call 860-278-2800.
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Three years ago, preservationists rallied to save the Micheels house in Westport, one of Paul Rudolph’s most important works. Ultimately, this battle, which culminated in a lawsuit filed by the Connecticut Trust, was lost. Triumphantly the developer bulldozed the house and replaced it with a “Shingle Style” McMansion—one more tragic loss of an important building.

It was clear to Michael Glynn, a New York architect, and Morley Boyd, a Westport preservationist, both leaders in the Micheels battle, that the first step in preserving important modern buildings was to find them before the developers did—in other words, conduct a survey. Working with Kim Elstein, an authority on Modern furniture, they searched out houses built from the early 1930s through the 1970s in Westport and Weston. The team made some remarkable finds. For instance, a rare International Style house by Chicago architect Barry Byrne and a large villa, built in 1940, by Ely Jacques Kahn, as well as first-rate work by lesser-known architects.

A big Moderne house that could have popped out of a Nick and Nora Charles movie turned out to have been designed by Erard Matthiessen, an obscure architect who went on to a notable career in environmental conservation and to have a famous son, the author Peter Matthiessen. Victor Lundy, Mies van der Rohe, Richard Neutra, and Keck and Keck are some of the other architects represented. The survey team also located a house designed by Antonin Raymond in 1941. The owner, unaware of the house’s provenance, had been planning to demolish most of it to build a spec house.

Boyd, Glynn and Elstein have hung an exhibit at the Westport Historical Society, with photos and information from the survey, as well as photos of the destruction of the Micheels house, taken by photographer Chris Mottalini. The team hopes to do a more extensive search and eventually to place all the buildings on a web site, similar to what was recently accomplished in New Canaan. New Canaan has been billed as the epicenter of modern houses, but based on this survey, it would appear that New Canaan is not unique.

“Westport Modern: When Cool Was Hot” runs at the Westport Historical Society through May 1. For more information, visit www.westporthistory.org or call (203) 222-1424.

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“An old house craftsman dedicated to perpetuating early Connecticut architecture, one job at a time, large or small, for individuals and organizations.”

The First Unitarian Church of Fairfield County, in Westport (1961), designed by Victor Lundy
**Bridgeport.** The Arcade, a forerunner to modern shopping malls and a longtime downtown landmark, received its first tenant when the Main Street Pharmacy opened in January. Inspired by a visit to the building and a dream of providing personal service to downtown customers, Jean Jacob, a former pharmacist at Walgreen’s, and his wife, a holistic nurse, put up their life savings to start the store.

In addition to the Arcade itself, the building also includes the Arcade Hotel, a Greek Revival commercial building built in 1840. The Arcade was added to the rear of the hotel in 1889, providing more profitable use of the interior of the lot as well as a cut-through to Broad Street. From Main Street it is reached by a long passage with a slight bend that delays the visitor’s view of the atrium, where two levels of shops surround an open central area. Iron scrollwork supports the balcony and the glass roof, through which brilliant sunlight pours.

Renovation of the Arcade is by Urban Green Builders, a New York-based development company devoted to sustainable and transit-oriented development. They are renovating sixteen buildings in downtown Bridgeport, hoping to create a critical mass of renewal and activity that can become self-sustaining.

The residential part of the project was relatively easy: Urban Green Builders’ Eric Anderson reports that all 23 apartments were quickly rented, but finding tenants for the 27 retail and commercial spaces has gone more slowly. This pattern parallels revitalization experiences other downtown districts, such as New Haven’s Ninth Square, where commercial activity had atrophied, and businesses were leery of the risks of opening in untried locations.

However, during the trial Salvatore said he would abandon the deal if forced to save the house. The Rev. Richard Alton, the church’s priest-in-charge, testified that Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Church was demolished on December 15 under CEPA, which allows any citizen to sue to prevent “the unreasonable destruction of historic structures and landmarks of the state”—defined as those listed on or under consideration for the National Register of Historic Places (see CPN, September/October 2009, January/February 2010).

The congregation has declined in numbers and has tried for years to develop part of its large downtown property. Several schemes have been proposed, some incorporating the house and some not. The latest scheme, with developer Randy Salvatore, called for razing the stone house and building a 94-unit apartment tower.

Under his agreement with Saint Andrew’s, Salvatore pays the church $20,000 per month for ground rent and will continue to do so until the new building is 85 percent occupied, at which time he will complete the purchase. This agreement made the church, rather than Salvatore, responsible for getting planning approvals for the project and for demolishing the historic rectory.

Moreover, during the trial Salvatore said he would abandon the deal if forced to save the house. The Rev. Richard Alton, the church’s priest-in-charge, testified that Saint Andrew’s depends on Salvatore’s payments to keep operating. One half of the money was going regularly for payroll, the other half was being set aside for the new youth programs which the church plans to initiate and which are expected to become its principal ministry. If Salvatore were to walk away, the church would have to close its doors.

The judge’s decision placed great weight on the church’s parlous finances, and the hardship it would suffer if this deal were to fall through. “While the court understands the plaintiff’s desire to maintain this building as a historic building, the costs associated with either the restoration or a combination of relocation and restoration is overwhelming for a small parish that can barely break even on income and expenses,” she wrote.

For more information, visit www.urbangreenbuilders.com.

**Stamford.** The Rectory of Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Church was demolished on February 11, after Judge Barbara Brazzel-Massaro ruled against preservationists in a lawsuit brought under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) to preserve the house.

Save Old Stamford (SOS) filed the lawsuit in December under CEPA, which allows any citizen to sue to prevent “the unreasonable destruction of historic structures and landmarks of the state”—defined as those listed on or under consideration for the National Register of Historic Places (see CPN, September/October 2009, January/February 2010).

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**The Most Important Threatened Historic Places – Update**

**Town Hall, Watertown (2006).**
After years of neglect and indecision, in February the Town Council directed the Public Buildings Committee to develop plans for repairing or replacing the roof of Town Hall. The building was built in 1894 and is a contributing structure in the Watertown Center National Register district. For years it has suffered from a decaying roof, crumbling brick and poor ventilation. Scaffolding erected years ago as protection against falling masonry has become so much a part of the local scene that many townspeople don’t even see it any more.

Since he took office in November, Council Chairman Raymond Primini has made clear his intention to repair Town Hall as part of a larger project to convert Heminway Park School into a government center. Once the school is converted, town offices can move there, allowing a thorough renovation of the Town Hall.

The Waterbury Republican-American commented, “Bringing Town Hall back to its prime has been a consideration in town since the 1950s, but it has never materialized either due to a lack of political will or financial constraints.” With this vote Watertown has taken the first step toward restoring this historic asset to its rightful place as a landmark in the community.

**Simsbury.** The National Trust for Historic Preservation has designated Simsbury’s Main Street one of its Dozen Distinctive Destinations for 2010. The designation recognizes the town’s efforts to protect its recreational and historic assets, calling it “the quintessential New England village.”

Town officials, along with the Simsbury Main Street Partnership and members of Connecticut’s congressional delegation, promoted the town’s selection. They cited its well-preserved downtown with an active farmers’ market and top-rated restaurants, as well as hiking and biking trails and opportunities for boating and fishing on the Farmington River.

Writing in the Hartford Courant, columnist Tom Condon observed that the recognition is the culmination of twenty years of activity by a variety of players.

**continued on page 14**
Connecticut Modern

Two landmarks of 20th-century Modernist architecture in Connecticut were recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Moreover, both buildings represent important preservation success stories. Both faced urgent threats but now are well on their way to long-term preservation. National Register listing provides public recognition of these remarkable turnarounds.

130 Mohegan Avenue, New London

In 1934, Winslow Ames, the director of the Lyman Allyn museum in New London, erected two pioneering prefabricated houses. Promoted as “houses of tomorrow,” they represented attempts to address the housing shortages of the Great Depression by applying modern materials and industrial production techniques to homebuilding. Ames sold the houses to Connecticut College, but eventually they fell into disrepair. In the 1990s, the college restored one of them, known as the Winslow Ames house (see CPN, March/April 1991).

The other house, located at 130 Mohegan Avenue, manufactured by General Houses, Inc., of Chicago, was built of steel panels bolted together without a frame. In addition to the use of steel, a flat roof, rooftop deck, open floor plan, attached garage, and the lack of applied ornament all were elements of the small house’s innovative design. But eventually the roof leaked, the steel rusted, and the house was vacated. Now the college has begun to study and restore 130 Mohegan Avenue (see CPN, May/June 2007), with National Register designation an important part of the process. In addition, Connecticut College has received $100,000 in grants to continue with the next phase of renovations to the steel house.

New Listings on the National Register

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“I know antique houses, and others, too!”
Connecticut General Life Insurance Company Headquarters (the Wilde Building), Bloomfield

Known today as the Wilde Building, the Connecticut General headquarters, built between 1954 and 1957, is one of Connecticut’s foremost examples of International Style architecture. Its design was overseen by Gordon Bunshaft (1909-1990) of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), the firm that in the years after World War II set the pattern for corporate offices, in America and throughout the world. In addition to Bunshaft, the building’s design includes work by two other major figures, interior designer Florence Knoll (b. 1917) and sculptor Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988).

The nomination, by Jen Hembree, of MacRostie Historic Advisors LLC, also says, “The building further stands as a testament to former Connecticut General Life Insurance Company president Frazer B. Wilde’s expectations for the company’s new headquarters, a building that would ‘epitomize America’s early visions for the suburbs’ by improving employee morale, self-esteem, physical health and productivity. A pioneer in the suburban office campus, the Wilde Building represents the emergence of suburbanization after World War II, a transformation of the American lifestyle that included dispersal of residential neighborhoods, as well as industry, offices, and commercial outlets from cities to ourlying areas.”

The Wilde Building also represents one of Connecticut’s most important preservation success stories of the past decade. In the late 1990s, Cigna Corporation (Connecticut General’s successor company) continued on page 14

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Please remember the Connecticut Trust in your will.

Connecticut Preservation News, March/April 2010
within the town who promoted historic preservation, land conservation, recreation, sports, entertainment, shopping, and cultural events, a process that took time. According to Condon, “Real progress in communities is almost always incremental, and that may be the lesson from Simsbury.”

The National Trust has published its Dozen Distinctive Destinations for ten years, as a way of promoting visitation to communities that offer cultural and recreational experiences different from those found at the typical vacation destination. Simsbury is the first Connecticut town to win the designation. Other sites listed in 2010 include Saint Louis, Missouri; Sitka, Alaska; Rockland, Maine; and “The Crooked Road,” Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail.

For more information, visit these web sites:
Town of Simsbury, www.town.simsbury.ct.us
Simsbury Main Street Partnership, www.shopsimsbury.com

presenting the certificate: First Selectman Mary Glassman; Alicia Leuba, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Anita Mielert, Connecticut Advisor to the National Trust; State Representative Linda Schofield

simsbury, cont’d from page 9

The Wilde Building, cont’d from page 11 decided to demolish the building in order to redevelop its 600-acre property. The proposal elicited widespread opposition: Hartford architects Tyler Smith and Jared Edwards organized Save Connecticut General to advocate for preservation, and the building made the Connecticut Trust’s Most Important Threatened Historic Places list in 2000 and the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places list in 2001. In the meantime, National Trust staff members kept working with Cigna, and eventually the company decided to continue to use the building for its operations (unfortunately, Cigna did demolish the Emhart building, another corporate headquarters by SOM on the property). Today, although the meadows that once surrounded it have been transformed into a golf course, the Wilde Building remains as a gleaming epitome of the best of the suburban idea of the 1950s.

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Boothe Memorial Park, cont’d from page 16

...economy, meant to be bitter or tongue-in-cheek? Visitors must decide for themselves.

**Blacksmith shop** (late 1930s): a frame building with 44 sides and three steep, gabled spires—or perhaps, false flues.

**Basilica**: a sunken garden converted to a religious site in 1931 with the addition of a rock-built pulpit whose vertical stone ridges defy gravity (and why is there a hitching ring embedded in it?).

To the architectural historian Elizabeth Mills Brown, the Boothe Park buildings weren’t merely funny. Combining a lack of architectural training with varied stylistic elements and a sense of humor, they constitute folk art. And, like any work of art, they say something. But what?

“Some people find this place delightfully quaint and amusing,” she wrote. “But some people find it vaguely disturbing, seeming by its very strangeness to be urgently saying something that we haven’t yet been able to read. There is such an intensity to these odd buildings that perhaps some day architectural historians will apply to this compound the same sort of mathematical, philosophical, astronomical, and religious analysis that they have applied to dolmens, Druid circles, Gothic churches, round temples, and numberless other mysterious structures. And then perhaps we will understand why two men of not very great means spent untold dollars and years building, largely with their own hands, this elaborate complex of buildings for which they themselves had no practical use.”

Boothe Memorial Park is located at 5800 Main Street, in the Putney section of Stratford. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

For more information, visit [http://boothememorialpark.org](http://boothememorialpark.org)
lined up along the brink of a steep hill overlooking the Housatonic River, the buildings of Boothe Park make up one of Connecticut’s oddest public sites, enough to make any passer-by stop and gawk. They were the work of David and Stephen Boothe, who were born here, on land that their family had owned since the 17th century, in 1867 and 1869. In addition to farming, the brothers operated an insurance business, dealt in farm equipment, and managed real estate holdings. The formation of the park began in 1914, when they opened a small museum of agriculture and local history in one of their barns. After their mother died in 1919, the brothers expanded their museum and embarked on other building projects. The early buildings are conventional, if markedly old-fashioned, but the later ones became increasingly eccentric. Some of the principal structures are:

Boothe homestead: the family farmhouse, built around 1840 and altered in 1914. A stained-glass transom unrealistically proclaims it “the oldest homestead in America.”

Caretaking’s house (1921-22): an example of the brothers’ fairly normal—although by then old-fashioned—version of the Queen Anne style.

Museum: a 19th-century barn converted to a museum in 1914. The tower came from a church in Massachusetts; the brothers are supposed to have gotten it in trade for a carpet sweeper.

Technocratic Cathedral (1933-1934): a two-story structure of stacked redwood boards with pagoda-like tiered roofs. The Boothes described it in an undated flyer (ellipses original):

EVERY stick of timber, piece of board in this ENTIRE structure will lay FLAT and be fastened with half inch galv. dowels...absolutely flat...therefore metal windows will be used.

F-L-A-T YES...Depression Style, and being built of California Redwood...RED...Depression Color as per your ledgers of the past few years.

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Are these wry references to red ink, so reminiscent of today’s

continued on page 15