



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND STATE REVIEW BOARD
April 2, 2018 9:30 am

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Dr. Marisa Angell Brown
Ms. Tanya Kelley
Dr. Patrick Malone
Dr. Ronald Onorato
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson
Ms. Martha Werenfels, AIA
Vacant (Hébert)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Dr. Tripp Evans
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Acting Executive Director
Ms. Elizabeth Warburton, Senior Architectural Historian

GUESTS

John Grosvenor and Cheryl Hackett, owners of Restmere, Middletown
Nancy Moore, East Providence Historical Society

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:38 A.M. by Chairman Onorato.

2. Minutes of December 4, 2017

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Ms. Werenfels, the review Board unanimously VOTED TO APPROVE the Minutes of December 4, 2017.

3. Acting Executive Director's Report

a) Mr. Emidy reported that the following properties have recently been listed in the National Register of historic places:

- Kay Street-Catherine Street-Old Beach Road Historic District: Additional Information and Boundary Decrease
Newport
listed March 12th
- L'Union Saint Jean-Baptiste D'Amerique (USJB)
One Social Street, Woonsocket
listed March 12th

b) Mr. Emidy reported that Michael Hébert has resigned from the State Review Board. Mr. Hébert recently retired from the RIDOT and is moving to Florida, so he will be unable to continue to serve.

Mr. Sanderson made a motion that the State Review Board pass a resolution to thank Mr. Hébert for his years of service. The motion was seconded by Dr. Onorato and passed by unanimous vote of the Board.

The Board briefly discussed whom to consider as a replacement for Mr. Hébert. The appointee will have to fill the role of archaeologist. Mr. Sanderson recommended John Marcoux, an archaeologist who teaches at Salve Regina University. Chris McCabe, an archaeologist who works at the University of Rhode Island, was also suggested.

4a. National Register of Historic Places Final Review Alexander Van Rensselaer House (aka Restmere) 1 Ichabod Lane, Middletown

Ms. Doherty made a presentation of the Alexander Van Rensselaer House, also known as "Restmere," in Middletown, for final review. It was presented to the Commission in October 2016 for a preliminary review, and was approved. "Restmere" is a south-facing, three-story, wood-frame, Italianate-style dwelling built in 1857-1858 on the north side of Miantanomi Avenue in Middletown, just over the Newport city line. The building has a three-bay-wide, symmetrically-composed façade; a one-story, colonnaded, flat-roof entry porch; and a hip roof with deep eaves and brackets. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboard, with decorative stickwork at the third floor (attic) level, in the form of half-timbering and cross-bracing. The principal entrance is centered on the façade and consists of a pair of wood, paneled doors set

within a pilastered surround and beneath a round-arched transom window with wood tracery. Window openings are filled primarily with 2/1, double-hung, wood sash and feature simple wood trim with drip caps. The main block of the building is roughly square in plan; a two-story ell was built off the rear (north) elevation in the late 19th century, and two-story bay windows were added to the east and west elevations in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Other exterior changes, likely dating to the early 20th century, include the addition of a porch railing with a balustrade that mimics the colonnaded porch, and a sweeping set of stairs to the porch. The flat-roofed porch originally had a roof balustrade, which has been removed. On the interior, the center-hall plan remains intact, as do many historic finishes such as wood floors, plaster walls, doors, and window and door trim. Some Classical Revival/Beaux Arts-style details were added, probably in the early 20th century, notably elaborate door surrounds in the first-floor hall, with fluted pilasters, Corinthian capitals, and friezes ornamented with swags and dentils.

“Restmere” was erected as a country home for Alexander Van Rensselaer and his wife, Mary Howland. It was built on land subdivided from the property to its west, the three-story, hip-roofed, Italianate-style Hamilton Hoppin House (NR, 1996), which had been built for Hoppin and his wife, Louisa Howland, one year earlier. Louisa and Mary Howland were sisters. The architect Richard Upjohn designed both the Hamilton Hoppin House and Oak-Lawn, built in Newport in the 1850s (not extant) for Charles H. Russell and Caroline Howland (sister to Louisa and Mary). The family connections to Upjohn strongly suggest he was the architect for Restmere, as do the strong stylistic similarities between it and the Hoppin House. In addition, there is evidence that Richard Morris Hunt was involved either in the initial design of Restmere or in renovations completed in the 1860s. In any case, it is an excellent example of a mid-19th-century, Newport-area estate and, with its unusual stickwork at the third-floor level, presages the picturesque styles that would become popular in subsequent decades. Restmere has experienced some alterations over time, most of which are significant in their own right, and it retains a high degree of integrity.

The building is proposed for listing under Criterion A for Community Planning and Development and Criterion C for Architecture at the local level.

Ms. Werenfels asked whether there were shutters on the second floor of the building in historic photographs. Ms. Doherty confirmed that there had been. Ms. Kelley commended the owners for their restoration work on the building and Dr. Onorato recognized the authors of the nomination [Virginia Adams, Melissa J. Andrade, and Michelle Johnstone of PAL] for a job well done.

On a motion by Ms. Werenfels, seconded by Ms. Kelley, the Review Board unanimously VOTED FINAL APPROVAL for the nomination.

4b. National Register of Historic Places Final Review

Rumford Historic District: Additional Information and Boundary Decrease

Rumford Historic District: Boundary Increase

East Providence

Mr. Emidy made a presentation related to changes to the Rumford Historic District, in East Providence, which was listed in the National Register in 1980. In 2015, the City of East Providence received a CLG grant from the RIHPHC to resurvey the District and update the NR nomination with a goal of later establishing a local historic district based on the NR boundaries. Ned Connors was hired as the consultant for the project. The revised work includes additional information for the nomination, removing 15 properties, and adding 8 properties to the NR district. The National Park Service (NPS) prefers this to be accomplished in two actions: an *Additional Information and Boundary Decrease* and a *Boundary Increase*.

Mr. Emidy made a single presentation for the two actions recommended by the NPS. The Rumford Historic District was listed in the NR as part of the Multiple Property Submission entitled *Historic Resources of East Providence, Rhode Island: Partial Inventory, Historic and Architectural Resources*. Because of this format and the time period in which the nomination was prepared, there is not as much information included in the nomination as there would be if it were prepared today.

As listed, the district contained 91 properties along Pawtucket Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Greenwood Avenue, and in the Hunts Mills area. The original nomination stated that the district “contains most of the extant structures that comprised the civic center of east Providence and its parent communities, Seekonk and Rehoboth, through the 18th and 19th centuries.” While no specific period of significance was given for the district in the original nomination, contributing buildings were defined as “those which represent when Rumford was East Providence’s civic center – from 1643 to circa 1890 – and those which contribute to the visual continuity of the district including early 20th century buildings whose form, scale, and materials are compatible with the Colonial, Federal, and Victorian structures in the district. In general, buildings constructed after 1930 were not considered to contribute to the district.”

Mr. Emidy showed photographs of typical buildings from the original district nomination. He discussed the removal of 15 properties from the district. Five of these are in the northwest part of the district, off Greenwood Avenue. These include two vacant lots, two buildings that appear to have been included as a map error – they are set on side streets off the main road, which was not intended – and one building that was recently constructed in what had been the yard of an included property. The other 10 properties to be removed are in the southeast part of the district, on what was, at the time of listing, a single parcel that was included in the district. Most, if not all, of the houses on these properties were constructed after 2000.

Eight contributing resources are proposed to be added to the district: two houses on Greenwood Avenue at the northwest end, three houses and the Cole’s Bridge on Pawtucket Avenue at the southwest end, a house on Pleasant Street at the northeast boundary, and the Hunt’s Mills Bridge on Pleasant Street at the southeast end of the district. All are within the period of significance, which has been expanded to 1953 to include expanded history of the Hunt’s Mills area.

Dr. Malone pointed out that the resource count in the forms is incorrect, and that the RIHPHC bridge study book should be included in the bibliography. Mr. Emidy stated that he will correct

both. Dr. Onorato asked why the house at 11 Huntington Avenue is being removed if it is within the period of significance of the district. Mr. Emidy explained that the original intent of the nomination was to stay along the main roads, and not extend into the side streets, so the removal is fixing an error. Regarding the effort to keep the boundary along the main roads, Dr. Onorato, Ms. Werenfels, and Mr. Abbott agreed that they would not add the building if it were not already in the district, but that, since the building is already in the district, within the period of significance, and retains integrity, it should not be removed. Mr. Emidy agreed to make the correction to the new documents.

Mr. Abbott made a motion to approve the nomination provided that the resource count be corrected, the property at 11 Huntington Avenue not be removed, and the boundaries otherwise remain as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Werenfels, and passed unanimously.

4c. National Register of Historic Places Preliminary Consideration College Hill Historic District, Amendment Providence

Ms. Doherty made a presentation of an amendment to the existing College Hill Historic District nomination, which dates from 1976. The RIHPHC received funding from the National Park Service's Under-represented Communities grant program to amend the NR nomination for College Hill so that it better reflects the neighborhood's African American heritage. She stated that this presentation would be fairly robust because this was a complicated project, and that a draft amended nomination will be up on web site within a couple of days to give the Board members the opportunity to provide comments for staff to address before the June meeting, when we will be seeking final approval. This presentation is not a formal request for preliminary consideration, but rather a presentation for the Board's information prior to their reading the final document for the June meeting.

The NPS grant for \$25,000 was awarded in November 2014, with a project deadline of June 2018. The purpose of the project is to amend the National Register nomination so that it more accurately and thoroughly reflects the district's diversity by re-interpreting already recognized resources for a deeper understanding of their significance and identifying resources not yet recognized as historically significant. The RIHPHC is working with the RI Black Heritage Society on the project, and consultants Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson, who have done similar projects in New Bedford, were hired to prepare the NR amendment.

The scope of work included amending the description section of the nomination (Section 7) to identify and analyze properties associated with events, people, institutions or historical trends that are significant to African American heritage. These include: domestic spaces, institutions (religious, educational, and civic), and places of work. The inventory was updated to include entries for places with significant African American associations to reflect that association, including many of the oldest properties in the district.

A district-wide survey was not done for this project and inventory descriptions were not updated

for all of the properties in the district. One property, the Olney Street Baptist Church, constructed in 1962-63, changed from non-contributing to contributing, but the boundary of the district was not changed.

The scope of work also included amending the *Statement of Significance* section of the nomination (Section 8). The additional information included a chronological history of African Americans on College Hill, from the 18th century to the mid-20th century, tied to place. An additional Area of Significance: Ethnic Heritage – Black, was added to the existing list.

Research for the project involved consulting secondary sources, looking at previous research conducted by the RIBHS, and an enormous amount of work with primary sources, including census records, city directories, maps, newspaper articles, and slave narratives. The research shows us that College Hill was the site of a notable African American settlement in the city's early history and continued to serve as a residential, religious, institutional, social, and cultural focus for Providence's African American community into the latter half of the 20th century. Between 1770 and 1970, the neighborhood had a proportionately greater concentration of African Americans than the city as a whole.

The team also found that the history of the district reflects national themes in African American history, including: enslavement as well as freedom through manumission and escape, the migration of African Americans from the south, entrepreneurship in the face of limited job opportunities and employment discrimination, the creation of community institutions, displacement due to urban renewal and gentrification, and the struggle for equal rights.

While the history of African Americans in College Hill includes stories of enslaved people, many African Americans who lived and worked in white households were not enslaved. In 1790, 475 people of color lived Providence, about 70 percent in two census districts on the East Side that correlate closely with the College Hill district. Many blacks also lived in their own households; in 1790, 278 people of color lived in black-headed households in Providence.

Some institutions on College Hill, though not founded by or for African Americans, have associations with the black community, including the First Baptist Meetinghouse, which had African American members as early as 1764 - though black congregants sat in a separate area until 1818, and the Old State House, where legislators passed the 1784 act "authorizing the manumission of negroes, mulattoes, and others, and for the gradual abolition of slavery." African Americans in late-18th-century Providence also created institutions to serve their community. For example, the Providence Free African Union Society, a mutual aid organization, was organized in 1794, and at least five men who lived on College Hill were members, though no buildings associated with the organization are known to survive.

In the late Federal and antebellum periods, African Americans were largely excluded from factory work, despite the diversification of RI's economy. Common forms of employment remained domestic service, barbering, teaming, shipping, and working on wharves. Workplaces associated with African Americans include the Market House, where several people of color had stalls.

The 19th century saw the emergence of three black enclaves on College Hill: along Benevolent Street; near the intersection of Meeting and Congdon Streets; and the neighborhood including parts of Meeting and Cushing Streets west of Thayer Street. Several African Americans are documented to have lived along Benevolent Street as early as 1798. African Americans remained in this area into the 1940s, though the mid-20th-century expansion of Brown University through the construction of Wriston Quadrangle in 1952 destroyed much of the neighborhood. The neighborhood west of Thayer Street remained African American in some measure into the 1940s, though the development of the Pembroke College campus caused the demolition of houses on Cushing Street beginning about 1910. None of the houses built before the Civil War in either this or the area near the Meeting/Congdon streets intersection remain.

The African American population in Providence increased significantly in the years following the Civil War; it more than doubled between 1865 and 1875, and by 1895, over 4,000 people of African descent lived in Providence. The rate of growth slowed in the early 20th century. The late 19th and early 20th centuries also saw the arrival of a new immigrant group: people from the island nation of Cape Verde, many of whom had West African ancestry, and College Hill continued to be a locus of settlement for Providence's existing African American community, as well as for those newly arrived from the South or Cape Verde.

People of color coming to Providence from elsewhere, as well as native-born blacks, found limited job opportunities. As in other northern cities, they were systematically excluded from almost all factory jobs, except as janitors. Well into the 20th century, employment among African American men remained profoundly restricted to janitorial work; barbering; teaming, delivering, and later driving both for companies and residents; working as porters; working on commercial vessels; and working as stevedores and longshoremen. Most black women during this period worked as dressmakers, laundresses, housekeepers, and cooks.

Twentieth-century censuses document the presence of African Americans in the homes of whites through 1940, the last census schedules that are publicly accessible. There were, of course, African Americans who worked outside the jobs to which they had historically been confined. Some African Americans on College Hill ran their own businesses that catered to the black community.

The most significant civil rights group of the period, the Providence branch of the NAACP, was organized in 1913, largely by African American migrants from the South, many of whom lived on College Hill. African Americans and Cape Verdeans also formed religious congregations and established social service and civil rights organizations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some of which endure on College Hill.

The demographics of Providence began to change in the mid-20th century. As the city's overall population declined, its African American population increased, both in terms of absolute number and share of total population – a reversal from the previous period. African American neighborhoods on College Hill persisted, but also faced threats from institutional expansion, gentrification, urban renewal and other forces. Nevertheless, many black families remained on

College Hill, and the district continued to be a focus of African American life.

Not all African American families moved from College Hill during the renewal years, though many Cape Verdeans left the neighborhood in the 1960s, displaced by rising rents and home costs. An African American presence remained on College Hill, however, especially in the northern end of the district, where it continues today.

Dr. Malone expressed concern that University Heights and Lippitt Hill, the real centers of the African-American population in Providence, are outside the district. Ms. Doherty replied that there are some integrity issues at University Heights, but that we are considering it as a potential nomination of its own, though nothing formal has been done.

Dr. Angell Brown thanked the RIHPHC and our partners and Ms. Doherty for this important work and said that a study of slavery in the Nightingale-Brown House is forthcoming. Dr. Malone added that Myron Stachiw's study of the Meeting Street School also could add pertinent information on this topic.

Being an informational presentation, a vote was not taken on the matter.

5. Announcements

Mr. Emidy announced that the next regular meeting of the State Review Board will be Monday, June 4, 2018 at 9:30 AM.

6. Adjourn

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Dr. Onorato, the Board VOTED to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 11:32 AM.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Acting Executive Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer