

THE 11TH ANNUAL RHODE ISLAND STATE

Historic Preservation Awards 2003

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission's annual State Historic Preservation Awards honor individuals, organizations, and projects for their contributions to the preservation of Rhode Island's historic resources.

The Commission has named three awards in tribute to individuals who exemplify Rhode Islanders' commitment to historic preservation. They are the highest honors which the Commission bestows.

Antoinette F. Downing served in the volunteer position of Commission Chairman for twenty-seven years, from 1968 to 1995. She contributed her time, her knowledge, and, most importantly, her vision to shape Rhode Island's state historic preservation program. At the same time, she generously lent her counsel and support to numerous organizations and projects throughout the state. In her honor, the Commission created the Antoinette F. Downing Award for Volunteer Service to Preservation.

Frederick C. Williamson was appointed State Historic Preservation Officer in 1969. Today, he is the dean of SHPOs, having served longer than any other in the nation. His professional expertise in government relations and his skill in promoting effective state and local government partnerships are invaluable in advancing historic preservation in Rhode Island. When Mrs. Downing retired as Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, in 1995, the Commission members elected Mr. Williamson as the new Chairman. In his honor, the Commission established the Frederick C. Williamson Award for Professional Leadership in Preservation.

John H. Chafee served Rhode Island as governor from 1963 to 1969 and as United States Senator from 1976 to 1999. He was a leader in advocating for historic preservation and the natural environment at both the state and federal levels. In his honor, the Commission established the John H. Chafee Award for Public Service in Preservation.

We salute the recipients of the 2003 State Historic Preservation Awards.

ANTOINETTE F. DOWNING
VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD



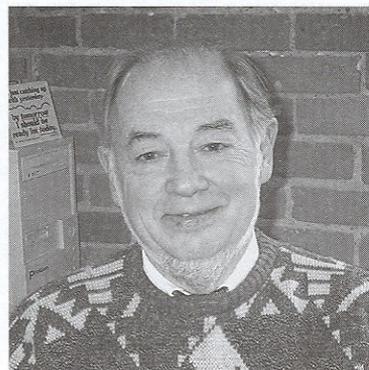
George Sisson

For forty years George Sisson has been a tireless champion for historic preservation on local, regional, and state levels. During that time, George has exploited many opportunities to advocate for and effect preservation activity.

Bristol might not have so many publicly accessible historic treasures without George's efforts. He was a key promoter for acquiring the land that became Colt State Park. He led the drive to purchase and develop the land and buildings at the Coggeshall Farm Museum, first as president of the Bristol Historical Society, then as the leader of an independent organization. The successful campaign to save Mount Hope Farm and open it to the public benefited from his drive. He effectively used his cable television show for preservation advocacy, notably in gathering support for historic district zoning. Most recently he turned his attention to the Bristol State House, both as executive director of the organization that oversees its renovation for use as an educational center and as the project's chief fundraiser.

On a larger stage, George was one of the first and most vocal proponents for the East Bay Bike Path. During his tenure as a member of the Coastal Resource Management Council, he helped to identify and protect historic public rights of way. George serves as a role model for all who desire to enhance the future through preserving our legacies.

FREDERICK C. WILLIAMSON
PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD



Wilbur Yoder

For more than thirty years, architect and engineer Wilbur Yoder of East Greenwich has played an important role in assuring that restoration and rehabilitation projects incorporate sound engineering. Some of the most important aspects of preservation projects are never visible. Securing the structure of an old building while maintaining its integrity can be challenging, and Wil brings uncommon creativity to the task.

Wil's expertise has ensured the successful preservation of properties varying considerably in age, complexity, and method of construction, including complex seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses like North Kingstown's Smith's Castle and Providence's Nightingale-Brown House, the nineteenth-century wood-frame Moffett Mill in Lincoln, and masonry and steel-frame commercial buildings such as the Arcade and Old Providence Journal Building. He has also helped to integrate structural systems of new additions to historic buildings, as in the conversion of the Kent County Court House into East Greenwich's Town Hall.

In addition to providing structural expertise for historic preservation projects, Wil's long tenure as a Professor of Architecture at Rhode Island School of Design has ensured that such expertise continues in rising generations of architects. And as a twenty-year member of the East Greenwich Historic District Commission (the last six as chair), Wil brings a teacher's calm and orderly perspective to the design-review process.

JOHN H. CHAFEE
PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD



Christine H. Callahan
Paul W. Crowley

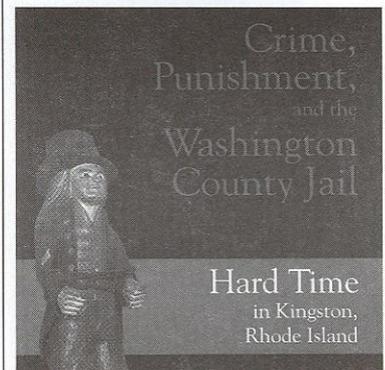
Thanks to the leadership of State Representatives Christine H. Callahan and Paul W. Crowley, Rhode Island will offer restoration grants for historic buildings used as museums or cultural art centers.

These two members of the House Finance Committee worked as a bipartisan team to include \$3 million for historic preservation grants in the 2002 *Preservation, Recreation & Heritage Bond Issue*. While the bond issue won 55% of the votes, polls showed that the preservation grants had the support of two-thirds of the voters. Historic museums and cultural art centers are important architectural landmarks, sites of heritage, and key destinations for our \$3 billion tourism industry. The new grant program will fund critically needed restoration projects in city centers and small towns around the state.

Reps. Callahan and Crowley are not newcomers to historic preservation. Rep. Callahan is the executive director of the Newport Art Museum, in the "Stick Style" Griswold House, located on Bellevue Avenue. Rep. Crowley operates La Forge Restaurant in the Newport Casino. For many years, he has actively supported preservation projects, including work to restore the Colony House and Fort Adams.

The joint effort to create this new grant program is a true "win-win." Soon after the election, Reps. Callahan and Crowley began to consider the next bond issue for historic preservation. Thanks to their extraordinary leadership and widespread voter support, historic preservation is the front-runner for 2004.

EDUCATION AND PRESERVATION



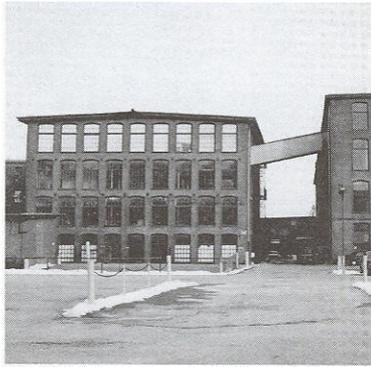
Pettaquamscutt Historical Society

Built in 1858 and 1861 as the jail for the state's southernmost county, this served its original use until the county-jail system was dismantled in 1956. The home of the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society since 1961, this building had been long misunderstood and misinterpreted.

In the late 1990s, with significant cyclical maintenance work impending, the society undertook research to document the building's history and development as a guide for making decisions about restoration. Delving into state and private records, researchers reinterpreted the interior layout, documented lost architectural elements, and developed a greater understanding of penal activity within the context of the local community. As a result, their work informed the way the building is understood and presented to the public. The extensive research project enabled architect Clifford M. Renshaw to complete a sensitive restoration, and it made possible an exhibition and a publication, *Crime, Punishment, and the Washington County Jail: Hard Time in Kingston, Rhode Island* by Christopher P. Bickford.

The integration of fine scholarship and thoughtful interpretation of research materials for both physical preservation and public education make this a model for others to emulate.

PLANNING

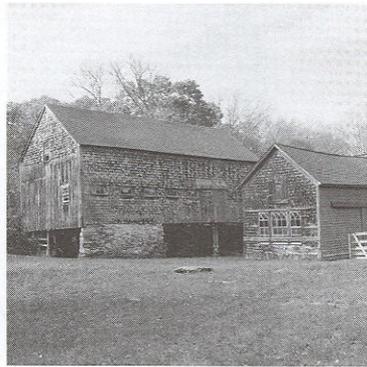


City of Providence for the Industrial and Commercial Buildings District

Industry made Providence vital and wealthy for almost two hundred years. The built legacy of industrial complexes dominates the cityscape, even long after manufacturing ceased. But recently, sites like the Gorham Manufacturing Company and Silver Spring Bleaching and Dyeing Company were demolished to make room for “big-box” retail stores. Plans for yet another such development at Eagle Square, on the Woonasquatucket River, precipitated unprecedented public outcry. The somewhat uneasy compromise reached for Eagle Square revealed the vulnerability of the city’s historic industrial and commercial resources as well as the need to provide for their protection.

The Industrial and Commercial Buildings District (ICBD), a non-contiguous thematic grouping, is one of the first of its kind in the country. It balances historic preservation and economic development by combining protection through review by the Providence Historic District Commission with financial incentives through the Providence Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Planning & Development as well as state and federal income-tax credits. Setting a new standard for historic preservation, the ICBD proved itself almost immediately: a 30-unit artists’ live-work space, 250 luxury apartments, an environmentally innovative business incubator, 200 low-to-moderate-income apartments, and a mixed-use complex. As additional rehab projects get underway, the ICBD is an effective protector of Providence’s industrial heritage.

STEWARDSHIP AND PLANNING



East Greenwich Municipal Land Trust

Established by the town of East Greenwich in 1987, the East Greenwich Municipal Land Trust (EGMLT) advocates preservation of the natural and historic environment in a rapidly developing community. To date, the Land Trust has acquired land, conservation easements, and development rights for almost 300 acres, and identified another 342 acres of significant property.

In 2001, the EGMLT purchased the Boesch Farm, an 88.5-acre farm in East Greenwich and North Kingstown with a mid-eighteenth-century farmhouse and barn, nineteenth-century outbuildings and stone walls, historic family burial ground, and intact agrarian landscape. Funding came from state and town sources, as well as private donations—including a generous price reduction from the Boesch family. The Land Trust and the East Greenwich Planning Department worked with the Department of Environmental Management to produce a management plan for the property.

Today the Boesch Farm is the southern anchor of the town’s greenway system, a network of protected open spaces that preserve the town’s rural and scenic character, as well as the environmental quality of East Greenwich. Also, Boesch Farm notably continues agricultural activity as a site for the Rhode Island Community Farm. Protector and provider, the East Greenwich Municipal Land Trust promises to be a worthy steward of historic Boesch Farm.

PRESERVATION PROJECT



Conanicut Battery, Jamestown

The Rhode Island General Assembly ordered the construction of fortifications at Dumpling Rock in the spring of 1776. The earthworks were intended to protect the west passage of Narragansett Bay with as many as six heavy cannon. Used briefly both before and after the British occupation of Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands between December 1776 and 1779, the battery was finally abandoned following the close of the American Revolution. The federal government acquired the property for defense purposes in 1916, but the earthworks, overgrown and hidden under a dense growth of plant material, remained out of view and largely unknown for many years.

In 1998 Edwin Connelly and the Jamestown Historical Society formed the Friends of Conanicut Battery to clear, stabilize, and preserve the earthworks. Supported by an initial federal grant from the American Battlefield Protection Program, the project included assessment of the site by professional landscape architects, development of an overall plan to link the Revolutionary War and World War I installations, hundreds of hours of carefully monitored volunteer site clearance, and installation of interpretive signage, flag poles, and benches. Following the project’s completion in the summer of 2002, one of Rhode Island’s very few remaining Revolutionary War earthworks now can be seen and understood as a vital link in the bay-wide defense system.

PRESERVATION PROJECT



Fort Wetherill, Jamestown

In the early twentieth century, the U.S. Government established Fort Wetherill, not far from the site of Revolutionary War-era Fort Dumpling. The new facility included three structures built between 1908 and 1911 and used to store and soak submarine cables, submarine mines, and other military equipment. These wood-frame and reinforced-concrete buildings are rare surviving military fortifications employed in both world wars. The state acquired the fort for use as a state park in 1972, but these buildings were minimally used and little maintained for many years.

The complex’s waterside location and direct connection with the bay, however, made it an ideal location for development of the Department of Environmental Management’s Aquatic Research Center, which monitors and manages marine resources of Narragansett Bay. While advanced deterioration necessitated the reconstruction of the wood-frame 1911 building (though its historic foundation and equipment were preserved), the 1908 reinforced-concrete buildings were carefully rehabilitated. The project, completed and dedicated in the spring of 2002, commendably preserved the overhead crane system, steel roof supports, cable tanks, and rail system that reveal complex’s historic function while accommodating an appropriate new use.

PRESERVATION PROJECT



Swiss Village Farm, Newport

Rarely, if ever, do projects of this magnitude and vision occur. In 1912, Arthur Curtiss James engaged New York architect Grosvenor Atterbury to create this picturesque gentleman's farm complex, modeled after European exemplars he and his wife had visited on their honeymoon. Abandoned in the early 1940s and hidden behind an obtrusive 1970s structure, Swiss Village was on the verge of sale for development as condominiums. But as soon as Dorrance Hill Hamilton discovered the plan for this property, she stepped in to secure its future.

To restore the property, she assembled a skilled project team, including project manager Peter F. Borden, architect Reid Madison Spencer, and Kirby Perkins Construction Company. The distinctive red tile roofs and rugged stone walls were carefully preserved, and extensive structural work was undertaken. Considering a future for the property, Mrs. Hamilton learned about the need to protect rare breeds of domestic farm animals, including horses, cows, goats, sheep, and poultry. Now, the land and buildings at Swiss Village Farm elegantly accommodate these unusual creatures while their genetic material is collected, frozen, and stored for the future. Affiliated with several leading universities, the Swiss Village Farm has received national attention for its state-of-the-art approach to rare livestock preservation—and now, statewide attention for its state-of-the-art approach to building and landscape preservation.

PRESERVATION PROJECT



Avery Pettis House, Providence

Prominently sited at the confluence of Carpenter and West Fountain Streets in Luongo Memorial Square, the Pettis House (ca. 1865) represents the extensive mid-to-late nineteenth-century development of the West Side of Providence. Built and long used as an income-producing property, the building was converted to commercial use on the first story early in its history. But by the late twentieth century, the cumulative effects of numerous remodelings and the devastation by fire of the upper stories made this a serious eyesore on an important site.

The building's owner, Crescent Partners, worked with the Providence Preservation Society Revolving Fund, to rehabilitate the Pettis House and transform it into a neighborhood showpiece. The inappropriate old storefront was replaced with one sympathetic to the historic character of the mansard-roof building. The upper stories were converted into a commodious single-family dwelling, and the bar on the ground level was rehabilitated and reopened as the Decatur Lounge.

Today the once-abandoned building sets the standard for continuing preservation activity in this newly redeveloping part of the city, and the Decatur Lounge is a favorite destination for neighbors and for many who live well beyond the area. The rehabilitation of the Avery Pettis House proves to be a catalyst in the ongoing revitalization of Luongo Memorial Square and the West Side of Providence.

PRESERVATION PROJECT



Corliss House, Providence

Designed by and built for steam-engine manufacturer George Corliss, Corliss House (1882) is both a visual and historic eminence on the College Hill skyline. In the twentieth century, it was the East Coast home of Hollywood producer Charles Brackett, Corliss's great-nephew. Brown University located its admissions office here in 1973, but the department's growth required a reassessment by the late 1990s.

The university engaged Durkee, Brown, Viveiros & Werenfels Architects to prepare a comprehensive planning and implementation program. Working with architect Michael Viveiros were consultants Carol Sanderson, historic interiors; Mary MacDonald, office design; and project managers Joanna Saltonstall and Mike Guglielmo of Brown's Facilities Department. The new plan improved circulation, including handicapped access, upgraded lavatory facilities, enhanced office layout, and increased storage. Because of the significant interiors in the main house, major changes occurred in the rear annex. The parlors, dining room, and stair hall were treated as period restorations. The deteriorating brownstone exteriors were carefully restored.

Educational institutions that care for buildings like this elegantly instruct the community that preservation is an integral part of daily life.

PRESERVATION PROJECT



One Athenæum Row, Providence

Built in 1844-45 by Tallman & Bucklin, Athenæum Row was a powerful symbol of architectural and urban ambition. For its first fifty years, the five-unit row housed members of Providence's Yankee elite. In the twentieth century, the single-family units were converted into small apartments. By the time owner Edmond R. Nickerson acquired One Athenæum Row in 2000, the dilapidated property had been divided into five units, most occupied by students who applied highly imaginative decorative treatments.

Despite the division into multiple units, One Athenæum Row was remarkably intact. Period mantels, decorative plasterwork, doors, shutters, hinges, escutcheons, floorboards, balusters and railings, and window sash were mostly buried beneath layers of paint but still there. In converting it to one unit on each floor, Nickerson made the building "exactly as it was" in appearance yet also installed state-of-the-art plumbing, ventilation, electrical, security, and sprinkler systems as well as cable-television, dedicated DSL, and fiber-optic lines in almost every room. Architect Cornelius J. deBoer and contractor Stephen Sevigny ensured that this proud legacy from the mid-nineteenth century is user-friendly for the twenty-first.