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THE 15TH ANNUAL RHODE ISLAND STATE

# Historic Preservation Awards 2007

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

**T**he 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 to Preservation.

We salute the recipients of the 2007 State Historic Preservation Awards.

ANTOINETTE F. DOWNING  
VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD



Karen L. Jessup

Beginning as a volunteer, Karen L. Jessup has served on behalf of historic preservation efforts for more than thirty years, placing her in the forefront of the movement today.

In the 1970s, Karen volunteered for the Providence Preservation Society, and was appointed to the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee. Karen helped PPS emerge as a strong citywide advocate, and she helped to form its successful revolving loan fund. Appointed to the Providence Historic District Commission in 1990, she immediately succeeded Antoinette Downing as Chair.

Karen earned a M.A. in Historic Preservation Studies from Boston University in 1983 and taught future preservationists at B.U. and Roger Williams University. As a landscape preservation advocate, Karen has advised Blithewold Mansion, Gardens, and Arboretum in Bristol. She received her Ph.D. in Vernacular Landscape History from DeMontfort University in England in 2005.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation appointed Karen as one of its Rhode Island Advisors in 1997. Six years later, she became the Northeast Regional chair of the Advisors, and for the past two years Karen has served as the Trust's national chair of Advisors and a member of the Board of Trustees.

Karen L. Jessup's dedication to synthesizing preservation concepts and to convening groups and individuals has enriched historic preservation locally, regionally, and nationally.

FREDERICK C. WILLIAMSON  
PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD



Charlotte Eschenheimer Johnson

For more than 20 years, Charlotte Eschenheimer Johnson has lit the light and kept it burning on Newport Harbor's Rose Island. Her dedicated professionalism sets a high standard for other preservationists.

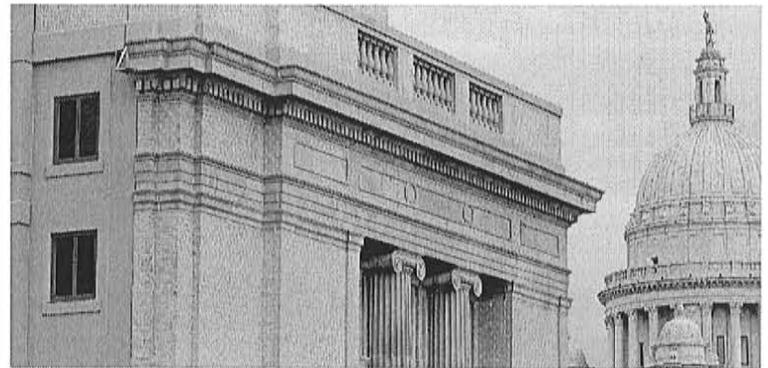
In 1984, the City of Newport acquired the island, and the Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation stepped in to restore and maintain the lighthouse and grounds as a historic site. Charlotte emerged as the property's visionary and chief champion, spearheading archival research, clean-up, and fundraising.

After the lighthouse was restored in 1993, Charlotte expanded efforts to preserve both the history and environment of Rose Island. Because the site lacks public utilities, she oversaw eco-friendly installations of wind turbines, a septic field, rainwater collection devices, and signs reminding visitors about island stewardship.

Charlotte implemented wildlife management policies to protect nesting birds and native plants, and she developed educational programs to interpret the island's historic and environmental significance. She oversaw capital campaigns and sought new income by inviting guests to pay for the privilege of staying overnight at the lighthouse and completing the keeper's chores. Her latest project is the restoration of the Fort Hamilton Barracks.

Charlotte Eschenheimer Johnson's extraordinary efforts transformed an isolated and abandoned historic property into a well-interpreted and environmentally sustainable landmark.

JOHN H. CHAFEE PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD  
ADVOCACY AWARD | PROJECT AWARD



Masonic Temple

Saving and rehabilitating Providence's historic Masonic Temple needed the vision, perseverance, and skill of local advocates, two governors, and a brave developer.

Abandoned in 1928, the unfinished shell of the Masonic Temple was long a vacant eyesore, seemingly too expensive to complete and too expensive to demolish. The Classical Revival-style limestone structure, designed by the nationally prominent architectural firm of Osgood & Osgood, was intended to be an imposing headquarters for the Scottish Rite Freemasons. Instead, the colossal ruin competed for prominence on the skyline with the State House and was locally renowned for its graffiti displays.

In 1996, the Providence Preservation Society convened a charrette to investigate the building's potential. Governor Lincoln Almond, whose office overlooked the Temple, helped to fund the charrette, personally joined in, and tasked policy staffer Sam Reid and Chief of Staff Joe Larisa Jr. with finding a development solution. Their efforts brought critical attention to the project and achieved a "near miss" development proposal.

In 2002, during the last year of the Almond administration, the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit was implemented and offered the promise of new financing. Subsequently, a new developer with extensive experience with historic hotels signed on: SAGE Hospitality Resources of Denver, Colorado.

For the last four years, Governor Donald Carcieri and the Capital Center Commission have worked with SAGE to solve problems involving real estate, financing, utilities, and transportation, not to mention supporting this massive building while restoring its limestone masonry, rebuilding the roof structure, and creating a first-class Marriott Renaissance Hotel inside.

The Masonic Temple surely would have been lost without the insistent vision of the Providence Preservation Society, the leadership of Governor Almond and Governor Carcieri and their staffs, and the development skill and fortitude of SAGE Hospitality Resources. Thanks to their overwhelming commitment, all Rhode Islanders can look with pride to a well-preserved historic building that stands as a paragon of public service to preservation, finally.

## ADVOCACY



### Stop Wasting Abandoned Property (SWAP)

In the 1970s, as Providence's population skidded to its lowest point in the 20th century, city residents became concerned about the growing number of vacant and deteriorating houses. Following a citywide Conference on Neighborhoods in 1975, local activists formed an organization called People Acting through Community Effort (PACE) charged with demolishing blighted buildings.

As the urban landscape began to disappear, PACE members and others formed Stop Wasting Abandoned Property. SWAP acquired and renovated abandoned houses, including its headquarters at 439 Pine Street, and aimed to reclaim neighborhoods by building infill housing on vacant lots for low- to moderate-income working families. Thirty-one years later, SWAP continues its work in Upper South Providence and beyond.

In addition to developing affordable housing, SWAP pursues several activities to make homeownership feasible for more families. It provides homebuyer counseling, contractor mentoring, job training and placement, neighborhood planning, and youth development and employment programs, and it maintains a lending "tool library" for homeowners to use. Over its history, SWAP has developed more than 1,400 units of affordable housing with a total value over \$75 million.

SWAP serves as a model for hand-on inner-city urban revitalization and plays a major role in making neighborhoods safe, active, vital parts of the community. SWAP is a sustainable renewal strategy for every historic neighborhood.

## ARTISANSHIP



### Robert Mende

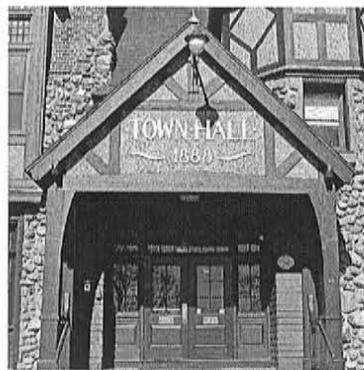
For more than fifty years, Bob Mende has set the standard in Providence for the highest quality woodworking artisanship.

As restoration of 18th- and early 19th-century houses became the city's principal construction activity in the 1950s, Mende and his firm, August W. Mende, Inc., became specialists in the emerging field of historic-preservation contracting. While various preservation projects certainly had occurred previously, the new, larger scale of such activity offered an opportunity previously unimaginable.

Mende's work has included major projects at landmark buildings, including the John Brown, Stephen Hopkins, and Truman Beckwith houses; restoration and continuing maintenance of private homes, including the Joseph Jencks and Henry Rhodes houses and Spring Green (with its 18th-century ice house); and constant small-scale repairs, all of them executed with the same painstaking attention to detail.

Bob Mende is a master carpenter, cabinetmaker, and general contractor who is uniquely knowledgeable and skilled in all aspects of his trade. In his work he achieves the highest quality results in as cost-effective a way as possible: he capably demonstrates that often the gentlest, least invasive or destructive solution is the best. His craftsmanship was critical in making historic preservation a successful alternative to demolition, and his commitment to professional practice serves as a model to preservation craftsmen and women who follow.

## STEWARDSHIP



### Town of Barrington for Barrington Town Hall

The sweeping Queen Anne-style Town Hall atop Prince's Hill magnificently captures Barrington's individualistic suburban image. Designed by Stone, Carpenter & Willson and erected in 1887-88, the picturesque half-timbered building is the town's best known landmark. With walls composed of cobblestones donated by local farmers and landowners, Barrington Town Hall literally embodies its community.

Barrington Town Hall is an old building, that need periodic maintenance and adaptation for community use. In recent years, the Town of Barrington has chosen to preserve and restore its Town Hall rather than remodel. Improvements completed in 1996 included installing a fire safety system; upgrading mechanical systems; and removing a dropped ceiling to restore the council chamber.

In 2005, the Town received a State Preservation Grant towards exterior restoration. Led by Olga Bachilova of Newport Collaborative Architects, the project included careful repair of historic materials (including windows) by carpenter C.L. Howard and the installation of a new slate roof by Apollo Roofing and Sheet Metal. Their work was complemented by top-notch painting by E.F. O'Donnell & Sons and masonry restoration by Lombardi Construction.

The Town of Barrington sets the standard for municipal stewardship by projecting community pride and demonstrating the value of preserving the town's historic resources.

## PRESERVATION PROJECT



### Gordon Avenue Business Incubator, Providence

Built around 1927 for light manufacturing, the small brick-pier-and-spandrel building at 17 Gordon Avenue on Providence's South Side was similar to many built in the last years of Rhode Island's industrial boom. Unlike its peers, however, it has found a new life as the state's first green, smart, and historic office building.

The South Providence Development Corporation (SPDC) purchased the vacant and decaying building in 1999. Assembling partners from the financial, energy, economic development, historic preservation, design, and communications fields, SPDC oversaw the \$2.1 million transformation of 17 Gordon Avenue into an incubator for fledgling service-oriented and environmentally sensitive businesses.

As a historic building rehabbed with the Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit, the Gordon Avenue Business Incubator is an outstanding demonstration of restoring an abandoned building to vital community use. As an energy-efficient building, it employs solar panels, a green roof, energy-efficient windows, a rainwater-recovery system, porous paving, and high-recycled-content materials. As a smart and small-business-friendly facility, the building provides shared conference facilities, office-support services, a fiber-optic network, and affordable rent.

With its LEED-silver certification almost in hand, the Gordon Avenue Business Incubator now shines forth as a state-of-the-art marriage of energy efficiency and historic preservation and a model for green rehabilitation throughout the region.

#### PRESERVATION PROJECT



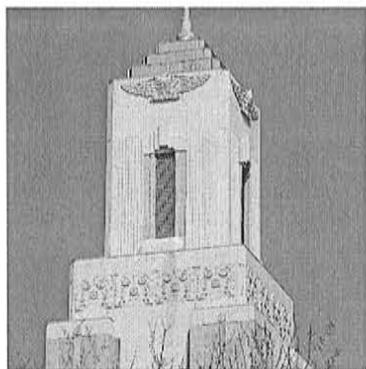
#### Lonsdale Village Revitalization, Lincoln

Decried as a blight on the community and a safety hazard, this group of seven historic mill houses on Grant and Lonsdale avenues and Main and School streets in Lincoln's Lonsdale Village stood empty with boarded windows until recently. While in poor condition, they nevertheless retained most of their character-defining features. First proposed for rehabilitation in 1998, zoning, financing, and construction delays kept this group in limbo for six years.

Valley Affordable Housing Corporation, a non-profit created by the Cumberland Housing Authority, assumed the project in the spring of 2004 and hired PAL and Salisbury Group as consultants. The project carefully restored the exteriors and preserved as much of the historic interiors as possible while updating livable spaces with new heating, wiring, plumbing, windows, and roofs. The brick buildings were carefully repointed, and wood trim was repaired and replaced in kind.

An innovative combination of federal, state and private resources financed the Lonsdale Village Rehabilitation, including state and federal historic preservation tax credits, Rhode Island Housing first and second mortgages, HOME funds, FHLB Affordable Housing Program funds, Neighborhood Opportunities Program financing and a lead-hazard reduction loan. This former mill-worker housing now provides 27 apartments for low- and very low-income individuals and families.

#### PRESERVATION PROJECT



#### Pawtucket City Hall

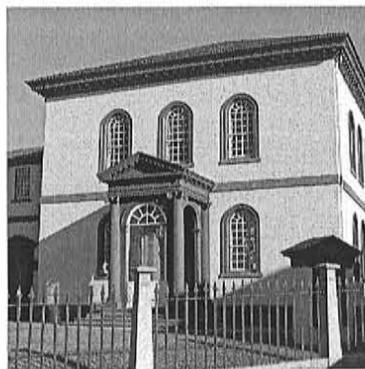
Pawtucket City Hall is an Art Deco masterpiece that recaptured its pride of place on the skyline through a dramatic restoration project.

Architects O'Malley and Richards designed the building to consolidate city offices, police and fire headquarters, and courthouse under one roof. It was Rhode Island's first project to be funded by the Public Works Administration. Between 1933 and 1936 the new City Hall rose: a 3½-story main block with a 143-foot tower. Its extensive Art Deco ornament included cast-stone eagles and reliefs depicting Pawtucket history. Unfortunately, the deteriorating tower was stripped and bricked over in the 1970s, and a distressed eagle fell from its perch.

Under the leadership of Mayor James E. Doyle, citizens, government, and professionals worked together to restore City Hall. In 2004, voters approved a \$3 million bond. Local researchers and residents provided documentation and memories of City Hall. Pawtucket Historic District Commissioners and staff reviewed plans, specs, and materials from week to week. Public Works Director Jack Carney and L.S. Walsh Architects guided the project as NER Construction Management removed the 1970s brick cladding; repaired, replaced, and repointed the masonry; and restored the Art Deco details. Sculptor Rob McPherson added the finishing touch by recreating the cast-stone eagles.

At last, in the spring of 2006, the scaffolding and netting came down to reveal the restored symbol of a renewed city.

#### PRESERVATION PROJECT



#### Touro Synagogue, Newport

Completed in 1763 to designs by Peter Harrison, Touro Synagogue is the oldest synagogue in North America and one of the country's greatest historic resources. After 240 years, the building was in dire need of extensive restoration, including critical repairs and necessary improvements.

Careful planning was the critical first step. Congregation Jeshuat Israel and Touro Synagogue Foundation engaged Shawmut Design and Construction to work closely with National Park Service architect David Bitterman on a scope of work that balanced long-term needs and available resources. Financial assistance from a Save America's Treasures Grant and a State Preservation Grant also required the highest restoration standards for the project.

Both outside and in, Touro's restoration exemplifies the best practices of preserving as much historic building material as possible and unobtrusively installing modern systems. On the outside, 22 layers of paint were removed by hand from the brick, and the windows were carefully removed, refurbished, and reinstalled. Inside, the approach to saving as much historic plaster as possible led to removing only small damaged sections and replacing them in kind. The new gutter network is concealed beneath the roof, and the fire-safety system is hidden within the ceiling.

Touro Synagogue's exemplary restoration retains exceptionally high levels of both visual and physical integrity, a condition commensurate with its landmark status.

#### PRESERVATION PROJECT



#### John Waterman Arnold House, Warwick

Built around the time of the American Revolution, the John Waterman Arnold House was threatened with demolition by fire in the mid 1960s. Thankfully, the Arnold House was saved by the Warwick Historical Society, which has served as its steward for more than 40 years. The organization and the house faced a major threat in 2003, when a car collided with the building, not only causing substantial damage but also revealing extensive deterioration of the historic structure.

With funds from the Champlin Foundation and a State Preservation Grant, the all-volunteer Warwick Historical Society worked with the Preservation Cooperative to carry out a project that repaired structural damage and accurately restored painted finishes. Sagging floors, bulging walls, and deteriorated sills were repaired, while visible surface materials remained intact. Throughout the process, the building remained available for visitors and scholars.

When the building is rededicated in the spring of 2007, coinciding with the Warwick Historical Society's 75th anniversary, it will be ready again to serve as meeting headquarters, home to a research library, and destination for tours by schoolchildren and visitors.