



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
Old State House 150 Benefit Street Providence, RI 02903

Telephone 401-222-2678
TTY 401-222-3700

Fax 401-222-2968
www.preservation.ri.gov

MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION February 8, 2012

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Robert Goff
Mr. Michael Hebert, NR Review Board
Mr. Karst Hoozeboom, Chairman
Dr. Patrick Malone
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
Dr. Ronald Onorato
Mr. Jared L. Rhodes, Chief of Statewide Planning representing Kevin Flynn, Asso. Dir
Mr. Pieter N. Roos
Edward F. Sanderson, State Historic Preservation Officer & Executive Director

STAFF PRESENT

Dr. Richard Greenwood, Deputy Director
Ms. Mercedes Monteiro, National Register Assistant - Heritage Aide
Mr. Wm. McKenzie Woodward, Principal Architectural Historian

GUESTS

Mr. Stanley Weiss, 23 Washington Street, North Kingstown
Ms. Nicole Bourassa, North Kingstown Planning Department
Elizabeth Sherman, Wickford
Constance Tucker, 35 Washington Street, North Kingstown

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Janet Coit, Director DEM
Mr. Robert E. Cusack
Mr. John Grosvenor, AIA
John P. Leyden, State Building Commissioner
Dr. Patricia Rubertone
Mr. Keith Stokes, Executive Director, EDC
1 Vacant

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was convened at 9:30 A.M. by Mr. Hoogeboom, Chairman.

2. Minutes of January 11, 2012

On a motion by Mr. Goff, seconded by Dr. Onorato, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the Minutes of January 11, 2012.

3. Executive Director's Report

a) Mr. Sanderson distributed the Commission's 2012 Meeting Schedule.

b) Mr. Sanderson distributed the Commission's State FY 2011 financial report.

c) Mr. Sanderson distributed the Commission's State FY 2011 report of historic preservation and heritage program performance measures.

d) Mr. Sanderson reported that Governor Chafee's State FY 2013 Budget proposes essentially level funding for RIHPHC, except that the Governor's Budget does not recommend funding for the vacant position of Heritage Aide.

e) Mr. Sanderson distributed draft regulations for Registering and Regulating Historic Cemeteries. The Commission discussed the need to adopt historic cemeteries regulations at the July 13, 2011 meeting. Since that time, staff have prepared the current draft and are discussing the provisions with Gregory Schultz, Special Assistant Attorney General. Mr. Sanderson asked Commissioners to read the draft regulations at their leisure and share their comments and questions. Mr. Sanderson also asked for the Commission's authorization to give public notice of the draft regulations and invite public comment and schedule a public hearing. Following discussion, on a motion by Dr. Onorato, seconded by Dr. Morenon, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to authorize the Executive Director to give public notice of the draft regulations and invite public comment and schedule a public hearing in accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act.

f) Mr. Sanderson reported on the illness of staff member Robert Jones. Due to medical issues, Mr. Jones has been unable to work, and he has decided to retire. He has worked for RIHPHC as an architectural historian for thirty years.

4. National Register of Historic Places

Evaluation of 23 Washington Street, North Kingstown

Dr. Greenwood presented information about the property. The house at 23 Washington Street is located in the Wickford Historic District which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register.

Introduction

The Charles Short House at 23 Washington Street has been included in the Wickford National Register Historic District as a property that contributes to the district's historical significance. The National Park Service criteria for the National Register of Historic Places state that a resource must possess historic integrity to be a contributing property.¹ In light of the extensive modifications to the property that have taken place recently, the property needs to be reassessed to determine if it still meets the historic integrity requirement.

Methodology

National Register of Historic Places Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, provides a method for assessing historic integrity:

“Within the concept of integrity, the National Register criteria recognize seven aspects or qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining *which* of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant.”²

These seven aspects of integrity are:

- Location
- Design
- Setting
- Materials
- Workmanship
- Feeling
- Association

Each is described in detail in the Appendix.

As stated above, the analysis of these aspects should be predicated on an understanding of the property's significance. Therefore, this analysis of integrity has been preceded by an assessment of how the Short House shares in the significance of the Wickford National Register Historic District.

¹ National Register Bulletin 16A, *How To Complete The National Register Registration Form*, p. 16.

² National Register Bulletin 15, *How To Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, p. 44.

Significance

The significance of the house at 23 Washington Street as a historic property derives from its associations with the themes or Areas of Significance that are expressed by the Wickford National Register Historic District. The Areas of Significance identified in the 1974 National Register nomination are: Architecture, Commerce, Transportation, and Urban Planning. The period of significance extends from c. 1709, when the first village plat was laid out, into the early decades of the 20th century. Although the National Register of Historic Places had not adopted its Criteria for Evaluation in 1974, the Wickford Historic District can be found significant under Criterion A for its ability to represent the growth and development of a small port dependent on maritime commerce and transportation and under Criterion C for the qualities of its architectural fabric and its village plan.

From the National Register nomination's Significance statement:

The Revolution marked the close of Wickford's existence as a small trading port, dependent upon the prosperity of the Narragansett plantations. Agriculture became considerably less profitable after the war, and the plantations went into decline. Wickford, rather than fading along with them, entered a new era of growth and wealth. Capitalizing on its harbor, Wickford became a maritime community, with an economy based on fishing, boat building, the coastal and West India trades, and occasional ventures to the Mediterranean and South America. In the early nineteenth century six Wickford vessels and some 100 men were employed in the Labrador fishery. The catch was sold, salted or dried, usually in the Caribbean, where this cargo would be exchanged for molasses to be distilled in Rhode Island. A regular packet service linked Wickford with other Narragansett Bay ports, New York and Boston.

In the boom years after the Revolution, vacant lots already sold were quickly built upon, and the Updike heirs soon made more property available for development. In 1800, lots were created along Brown Street, West Main Street and Church Street. Between 1780 and 1830 Wickford experienced its most rapid growth, and some fifty buildings dating from that period still stand in the village.

“Visually, one of the most outstanding villages in Rhode Island, Wickford presents today, in much of its original context of wide streets and flat waterside terrain, the aspect of a late eighteenth century and early 19th century town (some seventy-five buildings of this date are still standing). Its general character is derived from the level line formed by the many closely spaced two-story gable-roofed wooden houses set aside to the street. The gambrel-roofed or one-and-a-half-story houses dating from this early period and the few buildings dating from the Greek Revival and later period serve both to give a sense of variety and continuity of history without destroying the long established cohesive village scale and street relationship.”

The National Register nomination identifies the property thusly:

“23 Washington Street – 1 ½ story gable-roofed cottage set end to street, built 1807 for Charles Short.”

According to North Kingstown historian Tim Cranston, Charles Short was a sea captain who, unlike the majority of Wickford's sea captains, was independent rather than associated with one of the handful of maritime syndicates that operated out of the village between the Revolution and the Civil War. In 1830, after Short's death, his widow sold the house to James Hammond, a local fisherman and itinerant Baptist preacher. Between 1858 and 1913, it belonged to Benjamin Northrup, a mariner turned railroad trackman, and his family. Subsequent owners included local builder George Oatley who owned it from 1918 to 1930.³

In terms of the historical context of Wickford Village, the house is not individually distinctive, but it is associated with the significant themes of maritime commerce, the rapid development of the village in the early 19th century (Washington Street was laid out across the rear lots of the properties on the south side of Main Street by 1802), and as an example of the architectural character of the smaller houses built during the Federal era boom period.

Integrity

Location – The house retains most of its integrity in terms of location. It continues to occupy the same spot on its lot as it did historically, though it has been raised up on a new foundation. This change in foundation, which elevates the house approximately 30" to reduce the potential for flooding, was approved by the RIHP&HC as a minor alteration with the provision that the lot would be regraded to leave only 8" exposed foundation, which would be covered with stucco.

Design – The original design of the historic house can be characterized as a small center-chimney Cape, with one full story and a garret. Timber-framed and clad with clapboards, it had a modest amount of architectural elaboration in the Federal style concentrated primarily in the cornice, door and window molding and the transom over the front entry. An early, if not original, short one-story kitchen ell was built on the southwest corner; it was extended to the west some time after 1870.

The house has suffered a significant loss in the integrity of its design on the exterior. It has been altered most obviously by raising the house's wall height by c. 14" and removing the original cornice moldings which, in a distinctive regional manner, featured broken-out head moldings over the front door and windows. A new box cornice, new beaded corner boards, flared lintels over the front windows and an elaborate new mid-18th century Georgian-style doorway have been installed in their place. The house retains its basic form and dimensions (excepting the additional height) and the 3x2 bay door and fenestration pattern is largely intact. On the west (rear) roof slope, a 19.5'-long shed-roofed dormer has been added. This new dormer was approved by the RIHP&HC as a minor alteration with the understanding its length would not exceed 10'. A brick chimney of an appropriate size for a Federal-era house has been newly built above the roofline in the location of the original chimney (which was removed sometime previously). The stone-with-brick foundation has been replaced with a poured concrete foundation as noted above. The current project also includes the addition of a 1 ½ -story gambrel roofed clapboarded frame addition on the south end of the house. This addition had been approved by the RIHP&HC as an acceptable modification, contingent upon the careful

³ (See G. Timothy Cranston, *Walking in Olde Wickford, One House At A Time* (2011), p. 145).

rehabilitation of the historic house.

On the inside, the house, which seems to have had a traditional five room plan, was previously altered by the removal of the original center chimney, fireplaces and stairway, the construction of a new stairway in a new center hallway, and some other relatively minor changes to the interior partitions. In the course of the current project, the interior fabric, excepting some of the sheathing and framing, has been removed: some doors and windows and their casings have been retained for reinstallation. The plans call for the recreation of a floor plan similar to the modified plan present at the beginning of the project, with new partitions and finishes.

Setting – The setting of the house retains important aspects of its integrity, such as the close proximity of the shoreline, the house's placement on the edge of Washington Street and its relationship with the neighboring houses in this relatively dense and generally small-scale corner of the village. The lot is primarily kept as open lawn with some tree and shrub plantings, bounded by a white picket fence along Washington Street. A one-story wood-frame shed, at least one end of which dates to the 19th century, stands in the southwest corner of the lot. The setting's integrity may suffer from an uncharacteristic regrading plan that would create a 2'-wide planting box along the perimeter of the north half of the house.

Materials – The integrity of the house's materials has been significantly diminished by the recent work. Essentially all exterior materials have been removed, excepting some window sash. The roof has been completely rebuilt. Existing sheathing, which includes original plank walls on one half of the west wall, the north wall and east wall, has been retained, though interior studs have been added for the new interior walls. Half of the west wall and most of the south wall had been rebuilt previously. Original hewn timber framing elements that remain include the majority of the plates and girts, including the chimney girt, some posts, and the hewn joists in the southwest portion of the second floor framing. The rest of the joists were cut off and new joists installed. Some of the connections between the surviving old timbers appear to have been supplemented by steel plates, covered with a veneer of old wood. All of the first floor framing is new material. Some doors and windows and their casings have been retained for reinstallation in the new interior walls. No original partitions remain.

Workmanship – Due to the lack of original finish materials and trim, the integrity of the historic workmanship is almost nil, surviving only in the remaining sections of plank wall and hewn frame which were traditionally unexposed.

Feeling – The house has conveyed its feeling as a solid but modestly trimmed Federal dwelling occupying a shorefront lot in a predominately Federal-era neighborhood in a maritime village. The integrity of this feeling has been seriously diminished by the changes to the exterior, including the loss of the original exterior trim, and the addition of an elaborate new doorway designed in an earlier architectural style.

Association – The house's associations with the significant themes of maritime commerce, architecture and village development retain some integrity by virtue of its relationship to the shoreline, its house form and its continued presence in the village streetscape. However, its associations with its original owners, especially Captain Charles Short, and the characteristic

architecture of the village's Federal-era expansion have been seriously diminished due to the loss of the character-defining exterior and interior architectural fabric from Short's period of residence and the cumulative effect of additions and changes to the original house structure.

Summary

The house at 23 Washington Street has suffered a loss of integrity that is serious in Design, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and a loss of integrity that is moderate to severe in Association. Loss of integrity in these aspects seriously diminishes the house's ability to represent the village's architectural and planning significance and the history of maritime commerce as represented by Captain Short and other 19th century residents. Consequently it is the determination of the RIHP&HC staff that the house can no longer meet the National Register Criteria of Evaluation and, therefore, does not contribute to the Wickford National Register Historic District.

During discussion, Dr. Onorato noted that the alteration to the roof height, removal of the cornice moulding, and creation of a fourteen-inch space above the transom was particularly significant in diminishing the building's historic architectural design. He also noted that a large amount of the building's historic materials have been replaced. He stated that the building no longer reflects its early 19th-century character, and due to recent alterations it is today a fancier and more imposing building than it was historically. Mr. Hoogeboom noted that the Commission's evaluation of the building's significance and integrity must be based on its current condition, and the owner's reasons for altering the structure cannot outweigh an objective evaluation of National Register eligibility criteria. Mr. Roos said he recognized that sometimes historic building components deteriorate and must be replaced, but in the case of 23 Washington Street it appeared to him that too much historic material had been removed, and the design of new alterations did not match the original historic design and compromised the building's historical integrity.

Mr. Sanderson distributed copies of a letter dated January 11, 2012 that the owner, Mr. Weiss, had sent to the Commission. In part the letter stated: "Insofar as this house has been restored with 80% new materials and alterations undertaken because of the deteriorated condition of structural elements, we don't believe it qualifies for the national register." Mr. Hoogeboom asked Mr. Weiss if he wished to address the Commission; he declined.

Dr. Onorato asked if the RIHPHC staff had a recommendation. Dr. Greenwood replied that the staff opinion is that the property has lost National Register integrity and that the property can no longer contribute to the significance of the Wickford Historic District due to the alterations that have been made. On a motion by Dr. Onorato, seconded by Mr. Hebert, the Commission unanimously

VOTED That based on Dr. Greenwood's report of the history and current condition of the house at 23 Washington Street, and having applied the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places and guidelines issued by the U. S. National Park Service to evaluate the historical significance and integrity of 23 Washington Street as the structure exists today, RIHPHC finds

that the property no longer meets National Register criteria and is no longer eligible to be considered a certified historic structure.

Following the Commission's vote, Ms. Sherman, a Wickford resident, asked what effect the Commission's vote may have? Mr. Sanderson replied that in 2010, the owner, Mr. Stanley Weiss, received a RI Coastal Resources Management Council Assent (CRMC File #2010-05-072) to rehabilitate the historic house, construct a new addition, and do site work. This CRMC assent was based on review and approval by RIHPHC of proposed construction plans. The same construction plans were reviewed by the North Kingstown Historic District Commission and approved at the HDC's November 8, 2010 meeting.

In 2011, construction began. With no notice to CRMC, RIHPHC, or the North Kingstown Historic District Commission, the project did not follow the approved plans, and the alterations were made that has led the Commission to de-certify the building as a historic structure.

Mr. Sanderson will inform the CRMC, North Kingstown Historic District Commission, and North Kingstown Building Official that the alterations to the property that do not conform to the approved plans have caused the house at 23 Washington Street to lose its historic status as a certified historic structure. Further, in his capacity administering FEMA flood management rules in the Town of North Kingstown, the Building Official will have to consider whether to revoke the building's historic exemption from flood elevation requirements.

Finally, although 23 Washington Street no longer contributes to the significance of the Wickford National Register Historic District, development of the site will affect the character of surrounding historic properties. RIHPHC will continue to review work at 23 Washington Street in accordance with CRMC chapter 220, and we will continue to coordinate our review with the North Kingstown Historic District Commission.

Dr. Malone said he was very troubled that the changes made to the historic building were made by the Owner in clear violation of approvals from RIHPHC, CRMC, and the North Kingstown Historic District Commission.

5. 2012 Certified Local Government Grants

Dr. Greenwood presented information about the applications submitted and RIHPHC staff evaluation and recommendations to provide funding for all of the applications. In response to a question, Mr. Woodward provided additional information about the proposed Newport survey of street-edge features. This will focus on historic landscape features such as masonry walls, iron fences, ornamental gates, hedges, distinctive paving, and other features located along the public edges of properties in the Point and Bellevue Avenue historic neighborhoods.

Dr. Onorato noted that the project responds to the recent rewriting of Newport's Historic District Zoning Ordinance and local concerns about protecting these types of historic features. Mr. Hoozeboom stated that this will be a very significant project for Newport to address historic landscape elements and hopefully the project will serve as a model for similar studies in other

historic neighborhoods. In response to a question from Dr. Malone, Mr. Woodward explained that Newport already has a tree inventory and therefore specimen trees are not a primary focus of the proposed project. Following further discussion, on a motion by Dr. Malone, seconded by

Mr.

Roos, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the 2012 Certified Local Government grants as presented:

2012 Statewide Historic Preservation Conference	\$10,000
Survey of Street-Edge Landscape Features, Newport	\$ 9,800
Revising HDC Standards & Guidelines, Providence	\$10,000
Structural Assessment for Trinity United Methodist Church Steeple, Providence	\$10,000
Survey of City Landmarks, East Providence	\$ 5,000
Peace Dale & Wakefield Informational Brochures, South Kingstown	\$10,500
uncommitted balance	\$ 2,592
TOTAL	\$57,892

6. Other business

There was no other business.

7. Next meeting date: Wednesday March 14, 2012.

8. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 11:20 A.M.

Minutes recorded by,



Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director