



GUILFORD PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

Newsletter

Spring 2006

Update of Historic Survey enters the home stretch

The 2004+ update of the Survey of the Historic Architecture of Guilford, Connecticut will soon come to an end. Nearly 100 additional buildings will be added to the original survey; some have been recognized for their architects, others for various reasons.

In the 1980s, 450 buildings were surveyed, chiefly Guilford's oldest and most notable. It later became evident, however, that many

worthy buildings had been missed, usually owing to a lack of surveyor's time, but also because some important structures were then deemed architecturally insignificant. In the more than twenty years that have passed since the original survey, houses that seemed merely run-of-the-mill in 1981 have had their significance recognized. Among them are buildings that were designed by notable architects, had histories important to the community, or were

remarkable because of their style, the material used, or the way they fit into their surroundings. In this most recent survey it was felt these not necessarily old structures should be reviewed.

The 2004 committee was spearheaded by Marje Noyes who worked tirelessly until her death in May of 2005. Due to other member's illnesses or overwork elsewhere, of the original committee only one remains. Five novice surveyors have

been working hard, improvising and hoping that the information they have amassed will prove to be of importance in the future. After all of the canvassers submit their fact sheets, the information will be entered into a computer program, submitted to the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and be available to the public at the Guilford Free Library, as is the earlier survey.

continued on page 2

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

~ AND WHY IT MATTERS ~

Vernacular: "that which is native to a country or place."

Vernacular: "of a common language or pattern of speech."

These two definitions can be found in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Put them together and you arrive at a definition of "vernacular architecture":

architecture that is of a common pattern or expression, found in a particular region or place. This is the architecture of

the everyday culture and it can be all over Guilford.

Why is this architecture important?

Because vernacular buildings make up a great percentage of historic structures in our town and are located in the village center, along the shoreline and in our outlying rural roads. From the earliest settlement, for every grand dwelling built by a Puritan leader, wealthy sea captain or local merchant, there were

dozens of smaller houses borrowing some of the details or building traditions of the larger house but reducing them to a simpler, folk style.

The vernacular structures that survive are often unappreciated and can be threatened. The biggest

continued on page 4



Ellen Ebert



Ellen Ebert

THE JONES TRUST

~ A Brief History

Begun in 1985 with an anonymous donation, the Jones Trust—officially the Hugh McK. Jones Memorial Trust Fund—was developed and designed as a revolving fund for preservation under the leadership of Jack Betts. Hugh Jones, a noted architect and community benefactor, frequently commented that the GPA needed a pool of money that could be used to prevent the loss of historic properties. Mr. Jones personally interceded when the Kingsnorth-Starr house was in danger of being destroyed for commercial development. He acquired title to the property, which was then assumed by the GPA. This allowed the GPA to impose permanent enforceable conservation restrictions to preserve its documented historic significance. The house was then sold with the restrictions in place. The proceeds from the sale helped enhance the trust and Mr. Betts recommended that the trust be named in honor of Mr. Jones when he died in 1995. The Trust Fund is administered by six trustees; the president and treasurer of the GPA and four other members of the GPA appointed by the president.

The purposes of the Jones Trust are to preserve and protect land or buildings in Guilford. Funds can be used, when necessary, to assure the preservation of buildings of

architectural or historic significance or the conservation of land the loss of which would seriously impair significant views of town character. Buildings included in the GPA's Survey of Historic Buildings would have a higher priority for the Trust than those not included in the survey. As a general policy, the Trust Fund does not purchase land if such purchase, in the opinion of the trustees, and after consultation with the Guilford Land Conservation Trust, put it in competition with the objectives of that organization. The fund also acquires and enforces preservation easements. The Trust's funds are invested in relatively liquid, short-term securities so that they may be available without penalty if needed on short notice to take advantage of opportunities that are brought to the attention of the trustees.

In addition to saving the Kingsnorth-Starr house, Jones Trust funds have been used to support projects of the Faulkner's Light Brigade, the Guilford Keeping Society and the Save our Shack effort. They have also been used to assist in the restoration of an historic house and antique bowling alley. More recently, loans have been made to assist the Dudley Farm Foundation, the First Church of Christ, Scientist and the Women and Family Life Center in building, restoring or repairing their structures.

The Trust is always happy to receive donations to assist it in its work.

—Ed Seibert

Update of Historic Survey enters the home stretch *continued from page 1*

Every building in Guilford has a field card filed in the Assessor's Office at Town Hall that provides pertinent data about that structure. The surveyor's task begins there. Having noted the information on the field card, she or he must then examine the construction of the house. Are the roof shingles asphalt or wood? Is that really vinyl siding? The field card says one chimney, but there are two. What is the foundation made of? Is the surrounding land open, rural, woodland or perhaps all of those? It is not always possible to tell by looking at a house exactly how many stories there are: is that a half-story as the field card states, or is it truly a second story? The architecture of the

house is not always identifiable and many field cards describe a building as "colonial," a designation that might include any style not immediately identified as a ranch. Chronicles of houses are not easily found at Town Hall, unless one by chance encounters Joel Helander, the town historian, who is also Judge of Probate.

Doug Williamson, a survey team member, has discovered that many houses were moved from one place to another. Moving a house was easier in the 18th and 19th centuries than in more recent times and often one house was moved to be attached to another. Sandy Flatow, another surveyor, has found the histories of the stone cottages on Boston Street,

but no one has discovered the reasons for the stone pillars on Route 1, Durham Road, or other places.

Researching the origins of these structures can turn out to be a labor of love. One house, whose history I found in the Guilford Room at the Guilford Free Library, was not built in 1920, as the field card shows, but in 1855 and was once a very attractive farmhouse. It is now deteriorating badly and bittersweet vines and overgrown bushes obscure its once noble proportions. There seems to have been a porch or a front door overhang that has been clumsily removed. In the back yard car carcasses languish. Shingles have fallen off to display underpinnings of tarpaper and clapboard. A

neighbor inquired about my note-taking and told me that in the past developers had been snooping. He was apparently relieved that I was merely a representative of the Guilford Preservation Alliance on an innocent mission. He said that even though the house appears to be not only uninhabited but abandoned, the owner in fact comes each day to collect his mail and to ensure the house is safe.

Guilford's architectural heritage extends from the Green in all directions. Even though buildings may be only 150 years old, or perhaps a mere fifty and not necessarily beautiful, they can be memorable. Keep looking.

—Penny Colby

Train station venture gathers some steam

The GPA's campaign to preserve the remaining buildings associated with the 19th-century Guilford train station, announced a little more than a year ago, is gradually gathering steam. The GPA has received almost \$30,000 in donations earmarked for the urgently needed stabilization of the historic engine house and water tower. In addition, the Board of Directors has allocated \$10,000 for the project out of general funds and, as reported in our last newsletter, Sarah McCulloch has generously pledged the royalties from the seventh printing of her ever-popular Guilford: A Walking Guide.

Although the past winter was comparatively mild, the shoreline elements continue to take a severe toll on the

matching brick structures just east of Guilford's new commuter rail station. The 130-year-old octagonal water tower—which may be the only building of its kind to survive from New England's golden age of railroading—is particularly vulnerable, having lost its entire wooden roof over the years. Plans for the initial phase of the restoration call for covering the tower with a temporary protective roof and making emergency repairs to the crumbling masonry fabric. Both buildings, thankfully, have been pronounced structurally sound.

The GPA's Real Estate Committee is working to secure supplemental funding for the project from the State of Connecticut later this spring, an effort that enjoys the wholehearted support of Guilford's Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Commission, Historic District Commission and other town agencies. Noyes Vogt Architects, a distinguished local firm known for its commitment to historic



preservation, has produced an inspiring conceptual plan for the restoration (published in our fall 2004 newsletter and also viewable on the GPA's website) and an experienced contractor is waiting for the signal to begin work.

The major hurdle now is AMTRAK, which owns the station buildings and the land on which they stand. Negotiations with passenger railroad officials in Philadelphia have been underway, fitfully, for several months, but the wheels of bureaucracy move considerably more slowly than the high-speed Acela. The GPA is weighing various

strategies for leasing or buying the property, taking due account of the environmental liabilities that are inevitably attached to old industrial sites such as Guilford's steam-locomotive maintenance shed.

Meanwhile, GPA President Preston Maynard and other members of the Real Estate Committee met recently with representatives of the Windsor Locks Preservation Association, which is moving full-speed ahead with plans to restore that town's Victorian depot despite being similarly sidetracked by AMTRAK. Stay tuned for further developments.

—Harry Haskell

GPA capital campaign gets off to a solid start

In 2004 the GPA funded the production of the Town Center South Charrette to assimilate the creative inspiration of many individuals into a singular vision. It would be difficult to find anyone who could disagree with the conclusions of that process. We now find ourselves at the crossroad where we must begin to take these thoughts from paper to bricks and mortar, literally. The first step is to acquire or take control of the remaining original brick railroad complex buildings. These

two buildings are in urgent need of stabilization.

Like many non-profit organizations seeking to improve the quality of life in Guilford, the GPA finds itself long on ideas and short on financial resources. As a result, the GPA has initiated a capital campaign designed to fund the stabilization and adaptive reuse of the remaining original train depot buildings. Bear in mind that the actual train station building was lost to demolition several years ago. Along with the Faulkner's

Lighthouse project, which the GPA brought under its wing as a commission and aided in the initial funding, the redevelopment of the railroad buildings and adjacent properties is long-term in nature and will require patience and perseverance. Fortunately, the first step in this process is clearly before us. Unfortunately, it requires financial resources.

The campaign has gotten off to a solid start with total funds raised or pledged to date of almost \$30,000. Our

goal for the capital campaign is \$150,000. The GPA will be soliciting businesses and individual donors to reach this goal. We strongly encourage our members and friends who have not contributed, to review the charrette once again and consider how vital this project is to the long term development of Guilford. To those who have already made their gift, the Board of the GPA thanks you.

—Patrick Smith



*Keep an eye on
the GPA Website
and your local
newspapers for an
announcement
about our
Annual Meeting!*

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE *continued from page 1*

assaults on these modest structures are the changing lifestyles and affluent taste of our time, especially in our shoreline neighborhoods. The small cedar-shack and stick-built cottages built along the water's edge are being demolished for the much larger, winterized homes of year-round residents.

The architecture of 19th-century summer life is giving way to the more ostentatious trophy homes of the 21st century. For all the successful efforts the GPA and others have made to save important structures, we are losing these small vernacular buildings to demolition and overzealous expansions.

Vernacular buildings survive from every period of our history. Witness the modest 18th-century capes on State Street or the small fishermen's houses on Old Whitfield Street near the

Town marina. These structures are the simplest expressions of their style and period. Or notice the modest Greek Revival temple residence on Water Street (photo 3) and compare it to its fancier cousin on Lincoln Street (photo 4) in New Haven. Another wonderful juxtaposition is the French Second-Empire cottage on High Street (photo 1) with its fancier and much larger cousin facing the green (photo 2)!

My favorite local vernacular houses are two simple 19th-century dwellings located at 296 and 304 Boston Street (photo 5). Both have been carefully restored by their owners and make beautiful contributions to this neighborhood. Another of note is the simple white cottage on the Boston Post road near Branford (photo 6). This former dwelling now seems abandoned. It has two wonderful tear drop windows in the front

half story, a country carpenter's touch of self-expression. Wouldn't it be great if someone were able to save and restore this building, perhaps as an artist's studio or small shop?

—Preston Maynard

