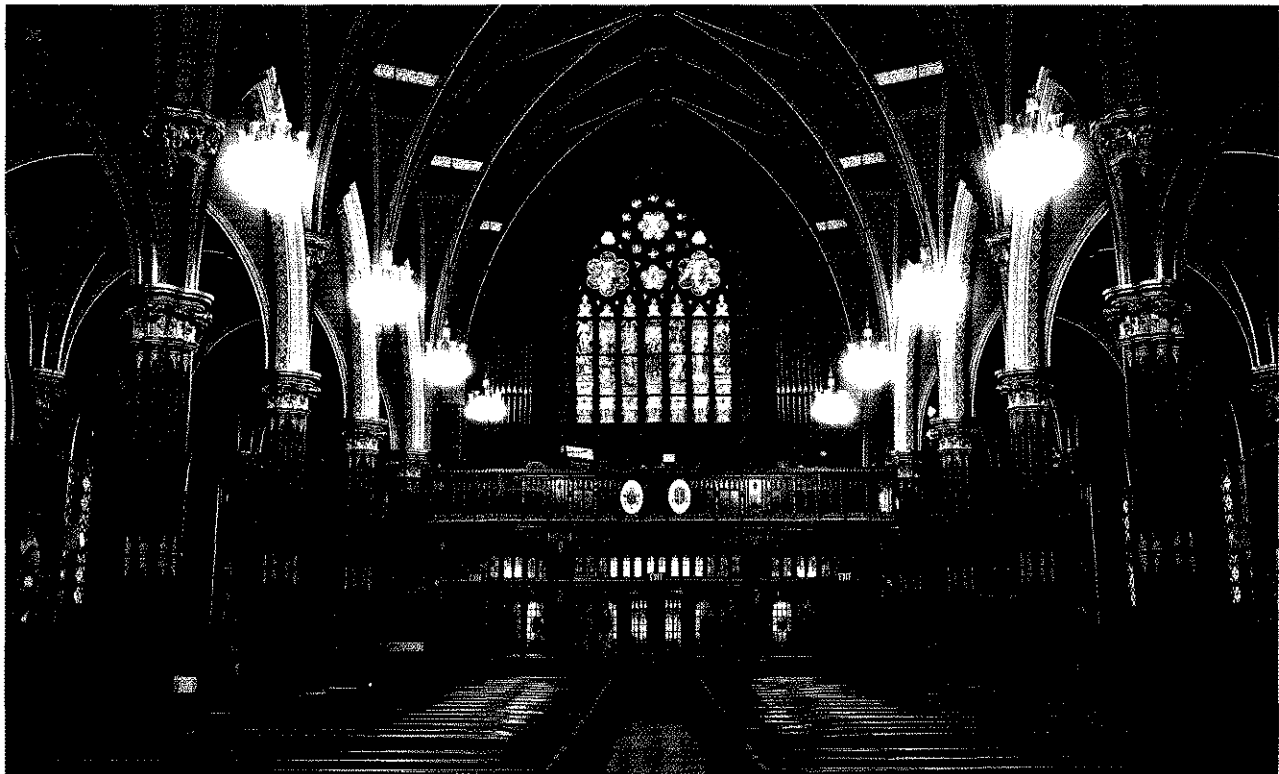


Historic Neighborhood News

Summer 2012

Renée Kahn, Editor

Restored Basilica on Atlantic Street



*T*HE HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROGRAM'S recent walking tour of the Columbus Park area (see centerfold) ended gloriously with a visit to the recently refurbished Basilica of St. John the Evangelist at 279 Atlantic Street. Monsignor Stephen Di Giovanni, Pastor of St. John's, told the group the history of what is one of the largest and most magnificent Catholic churches in

Connecticut (superseded only by the cathedral in Hartford).

When the Monsignor took his post fourteen years ago, the church and adjacent rectory were both in serious states of decline. Decades of neglect and insensitive 'renovations' signaled a diminishing congregation and a sense that the entire site was soon to become prime real estate. The Monsignor turned that all around,

aware that by restoring the buildings he was declaring to the world that the congregation was alive and well (expanding, in fact).

Originally built in the 1870s, the new church represented the growing importance of the Irish-American community in Stamford's economic and political life. It was designed by

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Sterling Farms: The Main House is Saved (For Now)



Recent photos show signs of ongoing neglect.

EVERYWHERE WE GO, we get asked about the main farmhouse at Sterling Farms Golf Course. What is happening? The answer: not a heck of a lot.

This local icon, highly visible from upper Newfield Avenue, is a prime example of high-style early-20th century Colonial Revival architecture. It was recently threatened when representatives of the Stamford Golf Authority (SGA) went before the Planning Board to request that the building be demolished to make way for a larger "event facility."

A heated battle ensued between neighbors and preservationists versus representatives of the SGA. Neighbors expressed concern about the impact of expansion on their quality of life in the form of additional traffic, noise, and lights, while preservationists questioned the cost of new construction, asserting that the option of restoring the building had not been fully explored. In its questioning, The Planning Board made clear that this is city-owned property and its fate lies with the City, not the SGA. They also reflected concerns that the building had become an example of "demolition by neglect," whereby a property owner deliberately fails to maintain his property and then seeks permission to demolish, on the basis that the structure is "too far gone to repair." Given that

the house was recently listed on the Connecticut Register of Historic Places, preservationists felt strongly that a new plan reusing the existing building needed to be prepared. In addition, they felt that the entire city-owned site, including its numerous outbuildings, should be studied in depth as well. Unfortunately, when the SGA initially requested proposals from architects, they covertly discouraged plans that advocated reusing what was there and failed to consider practical alternatives to

demolition as should always be the case when dealing with an historic building.

While the wrecking ball has been put away for now, the farmhouse still needs extensive repairs and updated facilities. Following a fire in 1983, alterations and additions were made that disfigure the building and now need to be removed. The artificial siding, as is often the case, is a structural and aesthetic disaster. Not only does it cheapen the appearance of the building and hide architectural details, it allows problems to develop unnoticed under a cover of vinyl or aluminum siding. Repairs need to be done as soon as possible; gutters need care and water damage caused by poor drainage is affecting the foundation.

Mayor Michael Pavia has been an ardent supporter of preservation in the past, with several "saves" of endangered buildings under his belt, most notably the former Richmond Park Republican Club, a mid-19th century Victorian structure near the corner of Richmond Hill and Fairfield Avenues. He's going to have lots of public support on this one. He recently reminded us that early in the creation of New York City's Central Park, older buildings were moved into and around the park and they are still in use today. Isn't there a lesson here? HNN



Unightly utility shed further disfigures front of historic building.

Re-restoring An Historic South End Site

Upgrading 658 and 660 Atlantic Street again (and again and again)

REPAIRS TO OLDER BUILDINGS are much like repainting bridges, a never-ending job. You think you're finished, but things wear out and there's always more to do. This is the Stamford Community Development Program's third go-around for this pair of c.1890 tenements.*

In 1987, private owners used SCDP rehabilitation funds to restore the buildings and in 1997, the new owners, St. Luke's Community Services, Inc., (now known as Aspirica) turned them into twenty-seven SRO (Single Room Occupancy) units for people in need of supportive services along with housing. As now, the need was great.

These architecturally distinctive buildings, with their double-decker porches and slate-covered mansard roofs "contribute" to the National Register of Historic Places South End Historic District. When St. Luke's took them over, the restoration was funded by Federal Investment Tax Credits and, once more, SCDP money; they have been heavily used ever since.

Now, due to the signs of age, over \$300,000 of Federal HOME (Home

Investment Partnership Program) funds administered by the SCDP was allocated for new siding and porches. In addition, Jason Shaplen, CEO of Aspirica, and a "fan" of historic buildings, miraculously managed to come up with additional money for replica wood windows.

Elena Kalman, a Stamford architect with an exceptional color sense (see Unitarian Church and Rectory on Forest Street), helped choose colors for the facades. We would also like to compliment Charles

Connors of Emerson Construction Co., General Contractor, and Ralph Mastromonaco of the Stamford Community Development Office for their sensitivity to historic detail. Given the buildings' prominent location a short distance south of the exit from the Transportation Center Garage, we expect that that you will be noticing them when you visit the revitalized South End.

* *By the way, "tenement" historically meant "multi-family housing." It's not a pejorative, just a description. HNN*



Lead Paint Removal

Do It Yourself-ers: Safely Remove Layers Of Lead Paint

We recently received an inquiry from Peter Buck, an owner of the former Frank Martin Clothing Store on the corner of Main and Bank Streets. You can't miss the brick building with its painted tin cornice; it currently houses the Black Bear Café. He shared his plans to repaint the building and asked for color suggestions. We inquired about how he planned to remove the peeling paint, as brick is quite fragile and abrasive methods damage the hard coat that protects it from moisture. He said he planned to use PeelAway, a product we have had luck with in the past. PeelAway is a paper saturated with paint remover that is applied to a surface, and, when dry, pulled away, taking multiple layers of paint with it. We saw it



Paint removal test patch on 261 Main Street.

used effectively on wood shingles (notoriously difficult to sand) at Cove Island Mansion many years ago. Peter had a test piece he had done and it looked pretty good. However, PeelAway comes in several formulas and he is still experimenting.

Lately, however, we have been hearing good things about another product, although

we have not tried it ourselves. It's called "The Silent Paint Remover" and was recommended by a friend restoring a 1910 Bungalow in California. It's basically a heat gun, but one that uses infra-red heat and is far less of a fire hazard than the standard gun. It is supposedly good for simultaneously removing paint and old putty from windows. According to the manufacturer, it uses no chemicals, requires no sanding and can be painted over immediately with long-lasting linseed oil-based paint. The manufacturer claims it is "lead safe," does not create dust or toxic lead gasses. The main drawback we see is the price, around \$500, but then, time is money and what will even one "replacement" window cost you? Our friend got a used gun from Craigslist for half price. Check the site: www.silentpaintremover.com/spr/index/html for further information. HNN

PHOTO: JOHN MARTIN



A Stroll

Originally the site of the city's e Park became Columbus Park in Christopher Columbus celebrati nity was erected by Geno Lupin



▲ Curley's Diner, 67 West Park Place, a "Mountain View"-style diner, was brought to the site in 1949 by original owner Herlauf Svenningsen (aka Curley). It has belonged to two sisters, Maria Aposporos and Eleni Begetis, since 1976. Adjacent buildings were demolished by the city in the 1990s.

◀ 215 Main Street dates back to the 1880s. Although its ornamental cornice has been lost and storefronts "modernized," the decorative, incised Victorian window heads remain.

▼ According to assessor records, 211 Main Street was built in the 1830s which would explain the remnants of a Greek Revival-era doorway on the second story. At one point the building was raised and enlarged and stores placed underneath.



20 Summer Street (corner West Park Place), ▶ the Lockwood-Palmer Building, was originally a three-story furniture store. Ornate decorative panels outline the window bays. A portion of the adjacent Hotel Davenport can be seen to its left, a Neoclassical structure designed by Horatio Abbott in 1914.

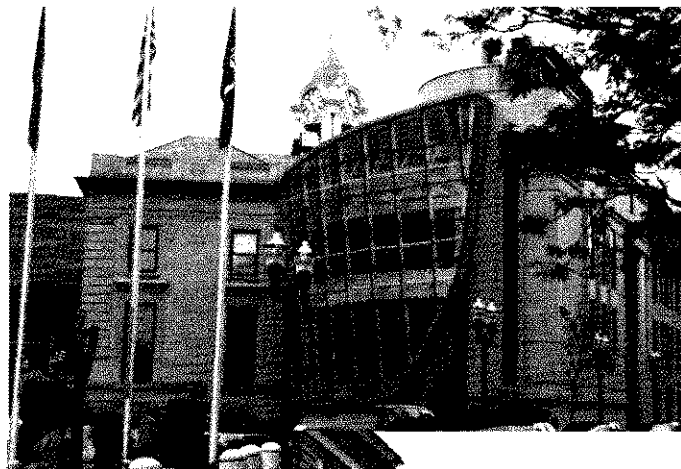


Around Columbus Park

earliest burial ground, West
1958 when a life-sized statue of
Stamford's Italian commu-
caci Studios.



Rear of Old Town Hall. ▶
175 Atlantic Street, 1905,
designed in the Beaux Arts
style by architects Mellien
& Josseyn, was recently
restored after being
unoccupied for over two
decades. The rear elevation,
originally hidden from view
by two now-demolished
buildings, sports a new
glass addition of somewhat
discordant charm.



▲
272 Main Street, the Algonquin Building,
c1895, was designed in the Neo-Romanesque
style by prominent local architect John
Bogardus. Quaint and picturesque, it anchors
a prominent corner and is distinguished by
its conical corner tower and round-arched
windows.



▲
300 Main Street, 1912, the former Stamford
Trust Co., originally came only to the height of
the balustrade, but when the adjacent Gurley
Building, Stamford's first "skyscraper," was built
in 1924, the bank added sufficient height to make
their building the tallest in town. Its architect,
H.J.Hardenbergh, designed the Plaza Hotel and
the Dakota Apartments in New York City.



◀ 1-5 Bank Street dates back to the 1870s and
was remodeled at least two times since then.
It stands on the site of Webb Tavern, a
Colonial-era inn where George Washington
once breakfasted. Stones from the original
foundation can still be seen in the basement.

Four For Sale

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS you learn in the field of preservation is that preservation acts according to the rules of real estate. While one might appreciate the beauty of an older building or its historical significance, or place in the streetscape, whether it survives or not depends on the real estate market. How much does it cost to buy? How much will it cost to renovate? And last but not least, what else can be built on the site? When the stars converge, you might be able to save and re-use an historic building. Unfortunately, given the realities of permissive zoning and anti-preservation planning in Stamford, the stars rarely converge.

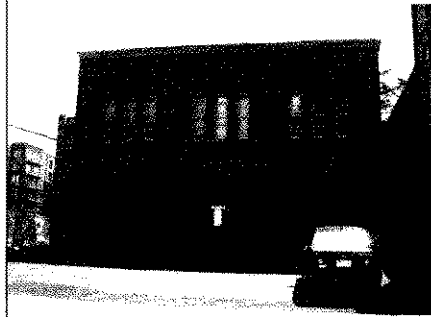
We know of at least four significant historic buildings that are currently for sale.



THE BENNY GOODMAN HOUSE

The former Benny Goodman house at 1287 Rockrimmon Road will most likely survive, not because of nostalgia, but because teardowns seem to be out of style and the house, as it stands, has a great deal of personality and history. Portions date back to the 1830s although it appears to have been "Colonialized" in the 20th century. The wood frame and shingle farmhouse contains 11 rooms, a paneled library and lots of desirable antique features such as wide board floors, multi-paned windows and period mantels. It's situated on 1.2 acres abutting the Rockrimmon Country Club in Old Long Ridge Village, one of the most charming and historically intact neighborhoods in Stamford. The rear

cottage overlooking the pool was Benny Goodman's studio; lots of history there. If interested, contact owner Allison Rowe at 203.981.5221.



THE SOUTH END FIREHOUSE

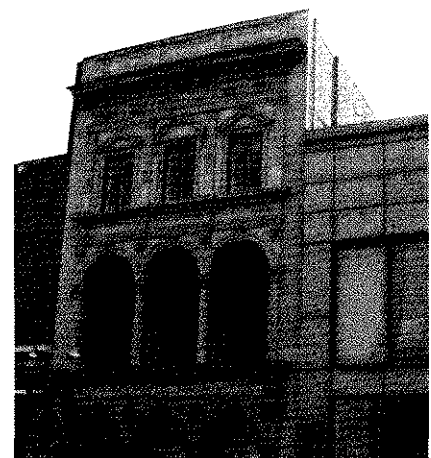
The former South End Firehouse on the corner of Atlantic and Henry Streets is currently owned by the City of Stamford, which has "sold" it several times in the past, only to have the deals fall through. Unfortunately, lack of roof maintenance has resulted in significant water damage and each time the building goes out to bid, there is less and less interest, despite its c.1900 architectural and historical significance and prominent location. The latest round of bids will be reviewed shortly and the building sold, not only on the basis of how much money is offered, but on how well the buyer intends to fulfill community needs, including a police substation. We have our fingers crossed that this time things will work out.



THE U.S. POST OFFICE ON ATLANTIC STREET

Two other local landmarks are currently for sale, both listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Neo-Renaissance United States Post Office and the former Advocate Building, most recently The Print Research Center. Despite their historic status, both buildings could easily be torn down.

The one that worries us the most is the Post Office because it sits on a large, highly developable, one-acre site and could be connected to an even larger parcel of land. The most recent deal, which would have saved only the front portion and the plaza, fell through about ten years ago. It called for a hotel (the Ritz Carlton) as well as offices and luxury housing. Given its prime location across the street from the railroad station and I-95, it is a developers' dream (once the market revives). Skip Lane, one of the Realtors in charge of the sale, told us that the Post Office was presently considering two bids and that both included saving the original building. We'll know more shortly.



THE FORMER ADVOCATE BUILDING

We're also watching what happens to the former Advocate (Print Research Center) Building at 258 Atlantic Street. Originally built in 1894, it was converted into a Neo-Renaissance "palazzo" in 1920. It is less vulnerable than the Post Office, for no reason other than it already makes maximum use of its site. Of course, that doesn't guarantee that someone won't come along and combine it with adjacent properties. We would hate to see that happen since the building, designed by architects Butler & Provost, is one of the most delightful examples of the Beaux Arts style in Stamford. In case you're interested, it is three stories tall, contains 15,000 s.f. of usable space and the asking price is 4.5 million. It's in wonderful condition. HNN

Preservation: More Than Just Eye Candy

Before demolishing an old building to make way for a new one, consider the amount of energy required to manufacture and assemble the pieces of the building. With the destruction of the building, all that energy is utterly wasted. Then think about the additional energy required for the demolition itself, not to mention for new construction. Preserving a building is the ultimate act of recycling.

Richard Moe, Retired Director, National Trust for Historical Preservation

In June of 2011, the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism released a new study showing the economic benefits of preserving historic buildings. Prepared by PlaceEconomics, Inc., the leading expert in the field, the study shows that in the last decade over \$450 million in private investment has been spent in rehabilitating historic buildings in Connecticut, \$242 million in direct salary and wages and over 400 units of housing created.

Governor Malloy was quoted as saying: "By rehabilitating our existing building stock, we create jobs, increase local tax revenue and use our irreplaceable architectural heritage to benefit our state in the twenty-first century." Executive Director of the Commission, Christopher "Kip" Bergstrom, added that "...harnessing our state historic preservation tax credits and construction grants to leverage private investment helps Connecticut communities to advance sustainable growth and enhance tourism opportunities. Reinvesting in Connecticut's historic buildings not only serves as an economic driver, but contributes to a community's ability to tell its unique story."

The full report, *Investment in Connecticut: The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation, Creating Jobs, Leveraging Resources, Advancing Sustainable Growth, Enhancing Community Quality*, by PlaceEconomics, Washington, DC, 2011, is available at www.cultureandtourism.org For information regarding technical and financial assistance in preservation projects, contact the office of the Commission at 860.256.2754. HNN

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~~~~~ Meet Marshall Millsap ~~~~~



ON JULY 1ST, RENÉE KAHN will step down as Director of the Historic Neighborhood Preservation Program, Inc. Her replacement, Marshall Millsap, is an enthusiastic preservationist who brings many new talents to the job. Renée will continue to edit our newsletter, *Historic Neighborhood News*, and remain an active member of the Board.

Marshall Millsap, current chairman of the Old Long Ridge Village Historic District Commission, has been actively involved in preservation for many years. He and fellow members of the Commission were largely responsible for achieving CLG (Certified Local Government) status for Stamford. During his 28 years as a resident of Stamford, he has lived in three different historic houses and restored two of them (including the 1860 house he currently lives in with its remarkable 1836 barn). He and

his wife were involved in rescuing stone walls and an ox bridge dam on nearby property by organizing the purchase and donation of three acres to the Stamford Land Trust. Millsap is a history buff, keen on local village history, particularly the early days of the Republic.

As for his own story, he was born in Boston, raised in Texas and is a graduate of Princeton University and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. A career banker with JPMorgan, he has most recently specialized in offshore regulation and market structures. His wife, Jackie Kaiko, Connecticut born and bred, is also a banker.

He brings many new and much needed skills to our table and we welcome him wholeheartedly. INN

Restored Basilica on Atlantic Street

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a leading ecclesiastical architect, James Murphy, in a version of the English Gothic style and destined to be the largest stone church in New England. Unfortunately, the congregation ran out of money and the church languished, unfinished, for a decade until completed in the 1880s by John Ennis, a stage set designer by trade. He completed the upper stories in wood, plaster lath and tin, creating on the interior what were reputed to be the "greatest acoustics in the

State." Funding to build the tower was not available until 1928.

After spending a total of six million dollars on the restoration, including over one million dollars on repairs to the stained glass windows - most of which came from prestigious workshops in Munich, Germany - Monsignor DiGiovanni turned to one of the leading restorers of historic interiors in the country, John Canning

Studios. Mr. Canning, a Scottish immigrant, originally specialized in ornamental stenciling but has since branched out to decorative work of all kinds. Canning made use of motifs and colors he found in the side chapels and a mural painted in the Sanctuary in 1920 by Thomas Magee.

The result is glorious; please see for yourself (and try to wangle an invitation to the rectory while you're at it). INN