



# Historic Neighborhood News

SUMMER 2014

RENÉE KAHN, EDITOR

## LOST

### *F.D. Rich Demolishes Historic Bedford Hall*

Reboots 1970s Urban Renewal  
North of Downtown



STAMFORD LOST one of its most venerable historic buildings to the wrecking ball on June 8. Long known as Bedford Hall, the stately Neoclassical mansion at 545 Bedford Street was a familiar and much loved landmark with a storied past and architectural presence that graced the north end of the downtown historic district since the early twentieth century. It was built as a residence around 1907 and updated by 1915 as Bedford Hall, a fashionable inn, when its comfortable portico was added. The building has been a distinctive downtown landmark ever since,

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## SAVED

### *HNP, Developer, and Historic Preservation Advisory Commission Find Consensus on Post Office*

Post Office Plans are Revised During  
Zoning Board Hearings:  
First Action for New Commission



HNP REACHED AGREEMENT with the Cappelli Group of White Plains, NY, on a conceptual plan to incorporate the complete National Register-listed post office building into an adjacent multiuse redevelopment to contain more than 600 residential units as well as retail space, the largest such project in Stamford in many years.

The developer worked closely with HNP during the public hearings period to revise the site plan in order to retain and restore both the post office's original 1916 core and its 1939 annex instead of demolishing the annex as initially proposed. The concept would

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## 38 Ann Street: Home for the Homeless

FOR MANY YEARS NOW, the Shelter for the Homeless, headquartered at 137 Henry Street, has been developing housing for clients who are trying to move out of the Shelter into homes of their own. Initially, these units were considered “transitional,” until the Shelter realized that there was literally no place for the residents to transition to and there was a need for more permanent quarters.

In order to accomplish this, the Shelter has been buying deteriorated older houses in the South End and the West Side of Stamford, fixing them up and renting rooms with kitchens to those residents of the Shelter who are ready to move on. The latest of these projects is located at 38 Ann Street, half a block south of West Main Street. The neighborhood is centrally located and has access to public transportation, reducing the need to own a car.

38 Ann Street is one of a row of Late Victorian structures. Built c.1880, it was a neighborhood eyesore, containing several illegal units as well as an illegal structure in the back yard. It is currently being restored into three apartments for seven men, including one that is totally handicapped accessible. The plans call for rebuilding the front porch as well as restoration of the wood siding. Interior finishes include hardwood floors and high-quality kitchen cabinets. Architect Elena Kalman, AIA, praised the materials and workmanship which she said were not normally found in publicly-funded housing. Funds for the purchase and rehabilitation were patched together from a number of sources including Low Income Tax Credits from the State of Connecticut, Neighborhood Stabilization Funds from the federally-funded Stamford Community Development Program as well as HOME dollars through the Federal Home Loan Bank.

We would like to compliment Ms. Kalman and contractor Charles Connors of Emerson Construction in Norwalk for their efforts to provide a quality product that will hold up over time and encourage rehabilitation of nearby property. HNN



38 Ann Street prior to rehabilitation



38 Ann Street after rehabilitation. Architect Elena Kalman, AIA  
Charles Connors, Emerson Construction, contractor

# Woodsman, Spare That Historic Tree!

by Renée Kahn

WHEN WE BOUGHT OUR c.1830 house, we were told that there had originally been three large maple trees in the front yard. Legend has it (though we've never seen it in print) that when a house was built in the 18th and early 19th centuries, a tree was planted out front for each member of the family. Our house obviously had Mama, Papa and the baby; unfortunately one of the three was cut down shortly before we moved in—the huge stump was still visible. Another came down during the great ice storm of 1973. One last maple remained, over 70 feet tall; it was our pride and joy. We fed, pruned, sprayed and cabled it. In return, it added shade and beauty to our property and the street.

One morning, I happened to look out the window to see a tree service truck pull up in front of our house. Someone was up in the bucket, holding a chain saw, ready to go. Two men in hard hats were standing next to my maple, clipboards in hand, looking up and gesturing at the tree. I rushed out. "What's going on?" I asked. "It's a dead tree, lady, we're taking it down." I tried to control myself. "What do you mean it's a dead tree? I'd know if it were dead!" "No leaves" was their reply. (It was November and the leaves had already fallen.) I explained that two weeks earlier it had lots of leaves. At this point one of the men took a closer look at the paper in his hand. "Oh, sorry, that's not the tree," he said, and he pointed to a truly dead one a couple of hundred feet up the road. I stood there, shaking. Suppose I had been out of the house on an errand? Our

prize 180-year-old maple would have been history by the time I got home.

Older houses are enhanced by the mature plantings that surround them, some dating back hundreds of years. Judicious care is required, not wholesale clearing. Many residents of Connecticut are currently having problems with the overzealous tree cutting now going on throughout the state, ostensibly to protect power lines from damage by falling limbs.

**This letter explaining current tree trimming operations was written by Attorney Mark Diamond, on behalf of the North Stamford Association:**

You are probably seeing trucks from, or on behalf of, Connecticut Light & Power tagging, stripping and cutting down trees in your neighborhood. If you haven't, you soon will. The Board of the North Stamford Association wants you to be aware of the following: CL&P has expanded its use of what it calls "Enhanced Tree Trimming" (ETT) and engaged in aggressive tree cutting, which it calls "Enhanced Tree Removal" (ETR). This means that trees that CL&P used to trim they will now severely strip or remove altogether. The new standards, ETT and ETR, establish a rigid no-grow zone within eight feet on either side of power lines from the ground up. Any branches or trees within that zone will be removed. This may reduce the beauty and value of your property and could have a negative environmental impact. Since the late 18th century, citizens have planted trees to line streets and roads,

frame buildings, and ornament landscapes. Many of these trees are now in danger. A wide range of advocates, from environmentalists to home and business owners to landscape architects, object to CL&P's new guidelines as an overreaction: a drastic, one-size-fits-all approach that fails to take into account the health of individual trees, the differences among species, and the effect of trees on their surroundings. You should be aware that for trees in the public right-of-way, abutting property owners must be notified of proposed tree pruning or removal and have the right to object to the tree warden when the tree is on a town road, or to the Department of Transportation when the tree is on a state highway. A property owner or the electric utility company can appeal the tree warden's or DOT's decision to the Public Utility Regulatory Authority (PURA). For trees on private property, owners have an absolute right to refuse consent for pruning or removal if they disagree with the company's plans, except where trees or branches are clearly hazardous, such as when they are touching wires. We urge you to be aware of CL&P's program and object when you feel the stripping or removal of a tree is unwarranted. For more information, including a summary of the law and recommendations for citizen action, go to [www.gardenclubofnewhaven.org](http://www.gardenclubofnewhaven.org) or [www.cttrust.org](http://www.cttrust.org) INN

*Stamford's tree warden, Phil D'Amico, may be reached at: 203.977.4536.*

# Saved!

*Continued from page 1*

keep the exterior massing of the annex under its tiled roof intact while adapting its two westernmost bays to allow vehicular access. The remainder of the interior would be restored. The compromise required the developer to reconfigure the footprint of one of two proposed residential towers. The opening for the new drive-through portal would be created within the existing confines of the bays and trimmed with materials salvaged from the walls. The site plan revision received the unanimous endorsement of the newly-appointed Historic Preservation Advisory Commission (HPAC) in the commission's first referral for project review and is a marked change of course from three prior Zoning Board (ZB) approvals of earlier iterations of the project.

HNP had discussed this concept last fall with the Cappelli Group and was disappointed when the plans they submitted to the city's Land Use Bureau for planning and zoning review in January once again required the removal of the annex. Once again, HNP protested the loss of the annex, which is equal in architectural detailing to the core.

This time, however, several underlying factors were different. The structure of the deal was very complex, entailing several parcels under different ownership and an exchange of parking entitlements with the adjacent St. John's Towers site. The US Postal Service's sale of the post office parcel was (and still is) stalled by two injunctions brought in federal court in New Haven by the Post Office Collaborative (POC), a Berkeley, CA-based organization, and the Greenwich-based Center for Art and Mindfulness (CAM). POC, with the support of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has risen to national prominence aiming to reform the questionable ways USPS closes and disposes of historic post offices it



The 1939 rear annex of the post office (left) boasts terra cotta detail similar to that of the original 1916 building (right).

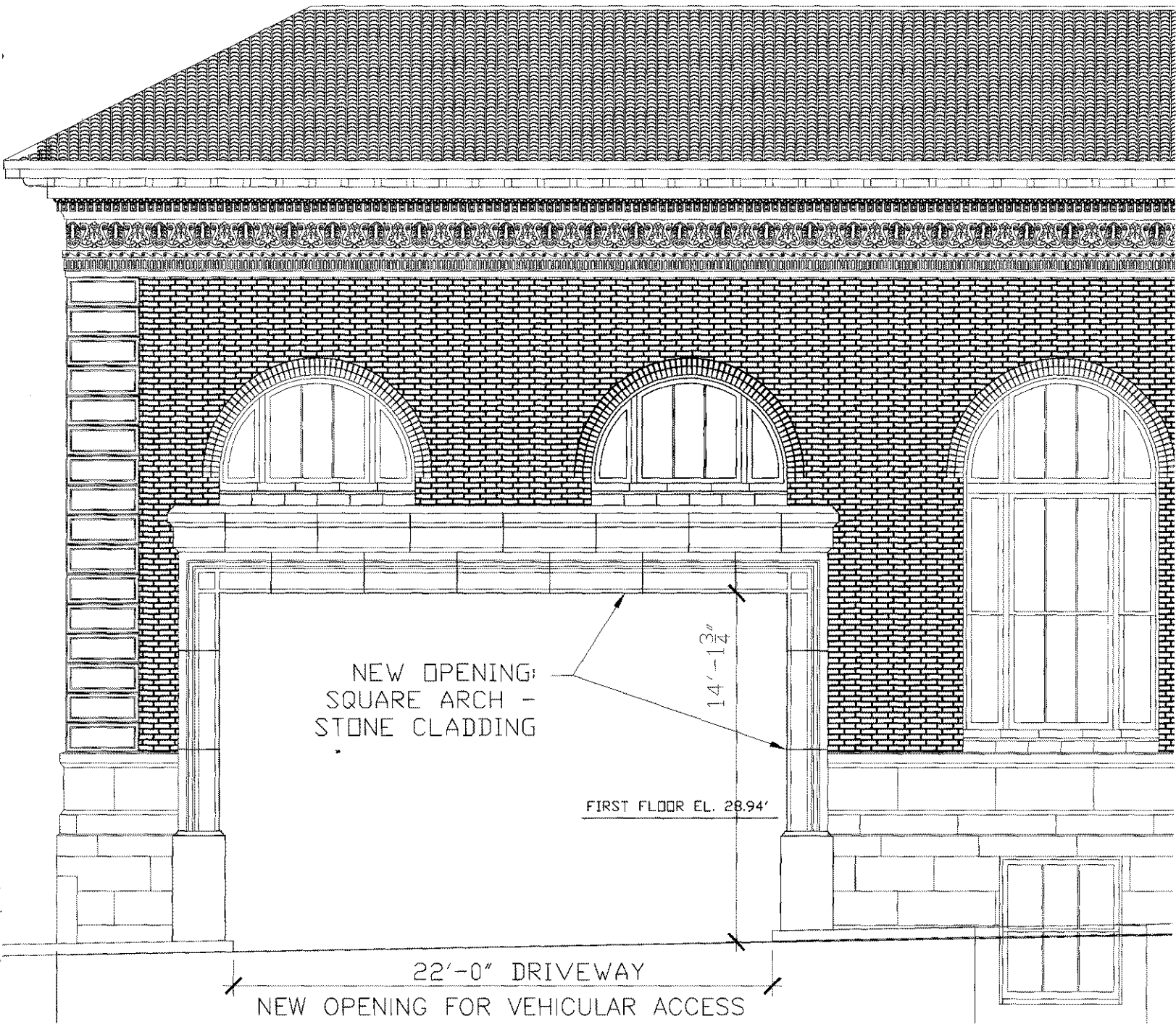
no longer needs, and the Stamford post office is their battleground. CAM's action is based on USPS' rejection of their bid for purchase which was higher than that of the developer. They hope to develop an art center. After HNP and POC failed to convince the Planning Board not to refer the application to the ZB because the developer had not yet established site control, HNP began to prepare for the even heavier lift of persuading the ZB to reverse course on its precedent.

On the night public hearings began, HNP and developer Louis Cappelli resumed their earlier conversation over the compromise concept and agreed to meet at the site with architect Elena Kalman. After looking at the existing conditions, Kalman and HNP worked with the Cappelli Group's in-house architect Kathleen Hennessey to present the concept in drawings for presentation to HPAC and the ZB. HNP subsequently concurred with HPAC's endorsement of the solution on the final night of ZB public hearings.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the Zoning Board will probably have approved this win/win solution. All work on the

rehabilitation of the post office building which is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Structures. Kalman has been retained by the Cappelli Group as the project's preservation architect to see that it is executed accordingly.

HNP is very pleased at this important breakthrough. Keeping the entire south elevation intact and exposed to view along Federal Street provides great new opportunities for revitalizing street life in the pedestrian wasteland between downtown and the train station. But there are still open-ended questions that need to be resolved before anything can actually happen on the site. Will the court permit the sale to the Cappelli Group to proceed? What will the building be used for? The developer expects it to be one or more restaurants, we see the sky as the limit. If one thing is true in Stamford, people patronize historic buildings when they have a chance to be saved. HNN



Changes to post office annex to allow vehicular access proposed by architect Elena Kalman, AIA.

# Lost! F.D. Rich Demolishes Historic Bedford Hall

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well known to Stamford residents as Brockton Manor, Stamford's most colorful restaurant in the 1940s, then Bouton and Reynolds Funeral Home, and more recently real estate offices.

Inventoried by the City of Stamford in 1979 as one of the most distinguished historic resources deserving preservation and unanimously determined eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places by the State Historic Preservation Office staff earlier this year, Bedford Hall had proven itself adaptable to changing uses. It was one of a handful of major historic buildings to be spared demolition during urban renewal in the 1970s. But the Zoning Board chose to ignore these facts, as well as the opinions of the Stamford Historical Society (our official Municipal Historian) and HNP, and voted to approve an application by TR Eastview, a subsidiary of developer F.D. Rich, to replace Bedford Hall with a five-story multi-unit apartment building. As of this writing, the once-welcoming portico with its four giant columns set back across a refreshing grassy knoll has been reduced to a pile of rubble, soon to be replaced by a sidewalk-hugging, corrugated stick-built box. Its charm-free side walls are to be planted with shrubs at the request of a neighboring property owner. For "architectural interest," its cramped lobby will become a fishbowl for residents checking their mail, overwhelmed by its adjacent – and larger – parking garage entrance.

HNP did not stand idly by while this avoidable tragedy unfolded. After our offer to explore alternative site planning was rebuffed by the developer, we vigorously argued the case for preservation before a Zoning Board whose minds were more focused on counting the number of proposed parking spaces. When the board voted to approve rezoning the site to permit "infill" development under zoning regulations which explicitly

encourage historic preservation, HNP filed a complaint in State Superior Court in March against the developer and the City of Stamford to appeal the Zoning Board's misguided decision. We followed this in mid-May to obtain a temporary restraining order against demolition until the Court considered our appeal.

The injunction and appeal of the Zoning Board's decision were the first legal actions brought by HNP in our 35-year history. We pursued legal action reluctantly but had no other recourse. The land use review process had started in January before the city's new Historic Preservation Advisory Commission was appointed. Besides the loss of a prominent landmark, the approval under the relatively new "infill" zoning regulations set a troubling precedent. Across the country nearly all communities define infill development as new residential construction on the empty space around historic buildings, but this decision opens a new front for 1970s-style urban renewal in the so-called "collar" district north of downtown. HNP supports residential densification bordering of the areas the downtown's amenities, but not at the cost of irreplaceable landmarks like Bedford Hall. The building was suitable for historic rehabilitation and its site would have supported additional development. This could have been sorted out to everyone's benefit if the Zoning Board had followed its own rules and insisted the developer revise the plan in accordance with the regulations.

A ruling on May 22 by State Superior Court dismissed the temporary restraining order, removing the last impediment to demolition and rendering HNP's appeal moot. It was not dismissed on any lack of merit to the validity of HNP's appeal, but on the technical grounds that HNP, which does not own property nearby, lacked standing to obtain the

injunction. Thus the case leaves questions unanswered. During the Zoning Board's public hearing the parties representing the developer argued that they did not know the building was historic when it was purchased, and hired a Portland, OR-based consultant to make their case. That was beside the point, for the 110-year-old building met the criteria for "historic" as defined in the zoning regulations. How could the Zoning Board ignore this fact and the consensus of the State Historic Preservation Office, the Stamford Historical Society, and HNP to side with the opinion of the developer and their paid consultant and approve its destruction? Is historic preservation nothing more than happy talk in Stamford's land use process?

Although Stamford's master plan and the city's zoning regulations both acknowledge historic preservation as an important goal, Stamford has not been as successful as surrounding communities in protecting the kind of historic buildings to which people gravitate. In the last five years the Zoning Board has approved redevelopment plans leading to the loss of the 18th century house of Revolutionary War veteran Andrew Dogherty at 880 High Ridge Road, significant 19th century buildings at the former Luder's boatyard, St. Andrew's rectory, and now Bedford Hall. Look at successful places near and far and these kinds of historic resources are anchors for vibrant development. Having an effective mechanism in place to protect them removes uncertainty, stabilizes neighborhoods and invites appropriate development. If we have learned anything from the sad loss of this important building it is that HNP needs to work harder with civic-minded organizations and the new Historic Preservation Advisory Commission to strengthen the tools for historic preservation in our zoning code and see that they are enforced. HNN

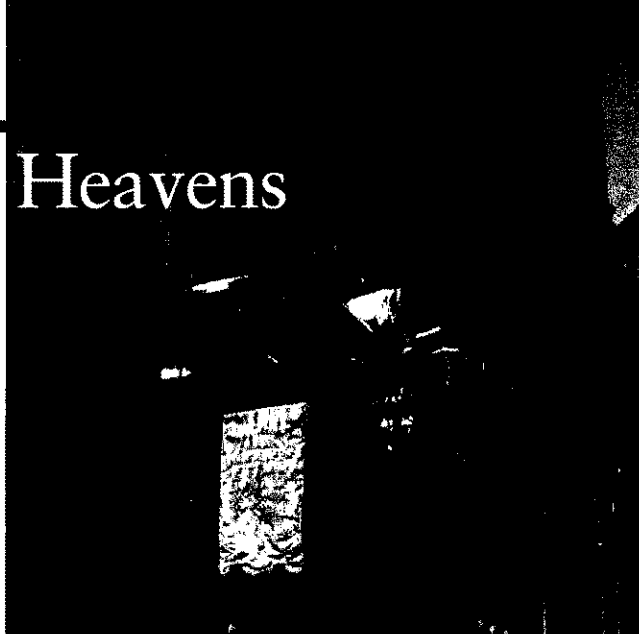
# Music From the Heavens

ONE OF STAMFORD'S best-kept secrets is the number of exceptional church organs there are in town; many are more than one hundred years old. Maintaining these treasures is costly, often prohibitively so, let alone finding musicians capable of playing them.

On Sunday, March 30, the Unitarian Universalist Society on Forest Street hosted a concert of organ music played by noted organist Stephen Rapp. Mr. Rapp can be heard locally as the organist for St. John's Lutheran Church on Newfield Avenue. He is also the Assistant Organist for St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. He welcomed the opportunity to play on the church's famous Johnson Opus 339 (of 860) organ, installed when the church was built in the early 1870s. The complex instrument is made of wood, metal, leather, ivory and stone and is noted for its remarkable tone, pitch and timbre.

Sunday's concert, designed to raise money to maintain the sensitive instrument, attracted over eighty people – a full house. When the first crashing notes of the Bach "Tocatta and Fugue" filled the hall, there was an audible gasp from the audience; it was as if the heavens had

The Unitarian Universalist Society on Forest Street recently rehabilitated its famous Johnson Organ.



opened up. Mr. Rapp then proceeded to play a diverse program featuring organ music from several different musical eras and ending with a contemporary tango that made the historic instrument sound like a modern accordion. Funding for the concert was provided by a City of Stamford Community Arts Partnership Program grant as well as donations from the audience.

Over the years, HNP has worked with many historic churches and rectories, encouraging preservation. A number of years ago we sponsored

a tour of their stained glass windows. Next year, we're thinking about organizing a Sunday afternoon tour of notable organs in the city of Stamford. An "organ crawl," as a fellow listener from Old Greenwich suggested we call it; it would allow people to visit churches around the city and listen to the different instruments being played. Let us know if your church would like to participate.

Just imagine, organ music from one end of town to the other. A celestial event! HNN

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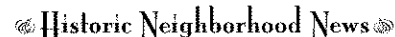
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Historic Neighborhood Preservation

The HNP is a non-profit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization dedicated since 1977 to the preservation of historic buildings. We would appreciate your help in achieving these goals.



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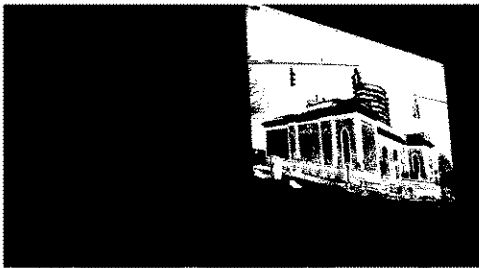


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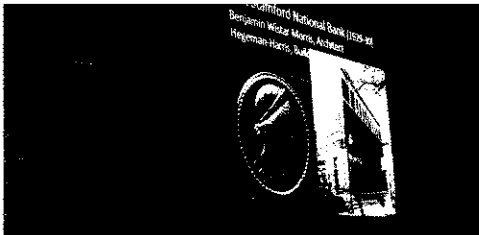
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## Wes Haynes Gives Two Lively Virtual Tours of Historic Stamford

*A* VIRTUAL TOUR of Stamford downtown was recently given by HNP's new executive director, Wesley Haynes, at the Ferguson Library. Despite inclement weather over 80 people turned out to join him. HNN



Haynes and a view of the 1916 Atlantic Street Post Office and its 1939 rear annex



Haynes tells the history of One Atlantic Street



HNP Board President Marshall Millsap and Wes Haynes celebrate at the Hudson Grille following the talk

ON SUNDAY, MAY 18, Historic Neighborhood Preservation hosted a talk about the Turn of River Bridge, an unused lenticular truss bridge in a hidden cul-de-sac off High Ridge Road just north of the Merritt Parkway. The scheduled speaker, architect Morgen Fleisig, had recently won first prize from the Historic American Engineering Record for his meticulous drawing of the remarkable iron structure. Mr. Fleisig discovered it while traveling along the Merritt Parkway to his vacation home in upstate Connecticut and "fell in love." Unfortunately, Mr. Fleisig's employers needed him in Seattle and he was forced to cancel. Wesley Haynes, HNP's new executive director, filled in at the event held at the North Stamford Congregational Church on Cascade Road, one of oldest churches in Stamford. Mr. Haynes presented a history of Stamford's bridges, showing photos of different construction methods used over a period of more than 150 years. He began with a discussion of arched, stone bridges dating to the early 1800s, moving on to the iron bridges of the late 1800s and finishing with modern steel bridges, many encased in stone to harmonize with their surroundings. He emphasized the importance of Stamford's two



Detail of abandoned 1892 Turn of River Bridge

Photo: Lynn Villency Cohen

remaining lenticular truss bridges and how the form is undergoing a revival today, with new examples recently constructed in New York City on the High Line, in London across the Thames and in Paris across the Seine. Haynes was followed by former HNP director Renée Kahn, who gave an anecdotal history of Stamford's iron bridges and how local politics had affected them. She also explained how the West Main Street Bridge happened to be painted purple.

At the end of the talk, the group moved across the road to the beautiful stone parish hall owned by the church for refreshments. HNN