



# Historic Neighborhood News

WINTER 2015

RENÉE KAHN, EDITOR

## Sacred Heart Property Cottages: What Will Happen to Them?



LAST SEPTEMBER, when the City of Stamford acquired the former Sacred Heart School at 200 Strawberry Hill Avenue, it also acquired three additional buildings on the site: primarily the High Victorian C.J. Starr Barn and Carriage house, currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, plus two, smaller farm cottages dating back to the late 1800s. According to a letter received from the State Historic Preservation Office, the two

cottages on the 10-acre property are included within the boundaries of the National Register nomination for the barn, putting the City of Stamford in the uncomfortable position of being unable to knock down these modest, run-down farmhouses without jeopardizing state and federal funding for the rest of the site. The main school building, an architecturally distinctive structure in a Jacobean Revival style, dates from 1925 and is probably eligible for individual listing on both the

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LEFT:  
**Farm cottage along  
Fifth Street, built c. 1870**

RIGHT and BELOW: Farm cottage at  
southwest corner of property, built c. 1885



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## Sacred Heart Property Cottages: What Will Happen to Them?

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State and National Registers, a designation which would make it eligible for additional funds for restoration.

What to do? City officials are now wrestling with the problem and a decision may be made by the time you receive this newsletter. The cottages are of no use to the city but present a headache to both the Building and Engineering Departments, already overburdened and short-staffed. While they have some late 19th-century "Vernacular" charm, they need considerable work to make them suitable for occupancy. Architecturally, they date back to the post-Civil War era and are representative of a period when Strawberry Hill was the site of many "Gentlemen's Farms," owned by wealthy New York City commuters. While we understand city officials' reluctance to take on the responsibility of two



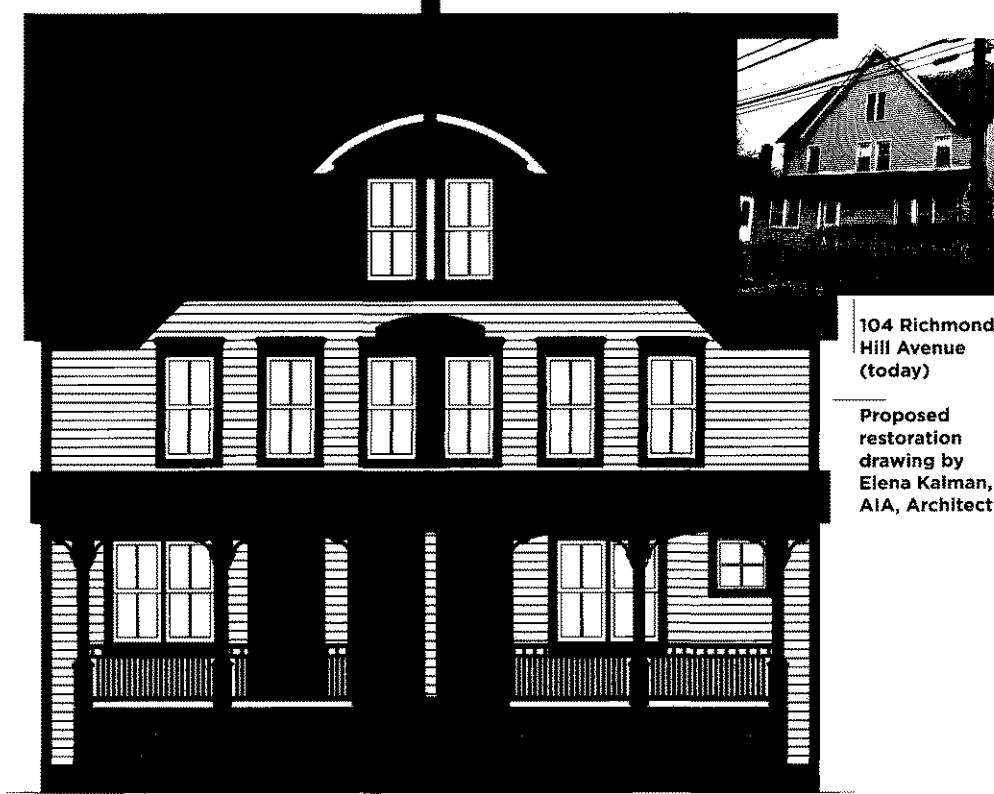
buildings it neither needs nor wants, every effort should be made to enable them to survive, because of their age (1870 and 1885) and their place in Stamford's agricultural history. We hope that the C.J. Starr Barn and Carriage House, a truly important local landmark facing Fifth Street, is not in danger. Most of us remember it fondly from its days as home of the Stamford Theater Works. HNN

## New Section 7.3 Historic Density Bonus Applications

*I*N THE LATE 1980s, Ric Redniss and Renée Kahn wrote an innovative zoning regulation for the City of Stamford that was designed to encourage saving historic buildings by creating "incentives," bonuses designed to make restoration as profitable as new construction. They didn't know if it would work or not, given Stamford's overheated real estate market; however, here we are, almost thirty years later, and the legislation continues to do what they had hoped for when it was written. There are at least forty older buildings in Stamford

that would not have survived had it not been for this regulation. The demand is still there for additional projects, with at least three more coming up in the spring.

When you drive around town and see an attractive old-timer and wonder why it didn't get torn down, chances are, Section 7.3 made its survival possible. What is even more appealing is that most of these structures are not "gentrified", but still serve as affordable housing for the working people of Stamford. HNN



Other upcoming projects include 18 Hazel Street, left, and 17 Belltown Road, right.

## SECTION 7.3: HISTORIC DENSITY BONUS PROJECTS 1987 – 2014

Date	Applicant	Address	Bonus Granted
3/2/87	Pavia	192 Richmond Hill Avenue	four residential units
8/31/87	Jepsen	164 Fairfield Avenue	professional office use
1/23/89	Emmett	43 Franklin Street	professional office use
5/22/89	Audet	79 Orchard Street	two residential units
5/22/89	Konandreas	204 North Street	professional office use
12/11/89	Grabowski	2 Orchard Street	two residential units
4/16/90	Grabowski	15 Lafayette Street	four residential units
6/4/90	Saturno	47-51 Lindale Street	two residential units, prof. office
7/8/91	Clayburn	16 Taylor Street	two residential units
9/23/91	Atlantic Realty	115 Atlantic Street	two residential units
8/17/92	Williams	595 Hope Street	office and showroom
10/5/92	Neighborhood Hsg. Svc.	48 Orchard Street	two residential units
11/30/92	Giannattasio	181 West Avenue	five residential units
4/11/94	Sanseverino	97 Atlantic Street	two residential units
10/17/94	Grabowski	28 Fairfield Avenue	one residential unit
6/30/97	Grabowski	22-24 Orchard Street	three residential units
9/28/98	Conetta	62 Stillwater Avenue	three residential units
10/15/98	Gaglio	49 Glenbrook Road	five residential units
1/10/00	Denton	18 High Street	three residential units
5/15/00	Palace Theater	307 Atlantic Street	0.31 FAR bonus
7/31/00	Interlandi	35 Maple Tree Avenue	two residential units
6/17/02	Grabowski	54 Myrtle Avenue	three residential units
12/15/03	Sweeney	223 Henry Street	one residential unit
7/26/04	Giannattasio	177 West Avenue	two residential units
11/4/04	NHS/NNI	31 Mission Street	two residential units
9/13/04	Emmett	41 Franklin Street	professional office use
5/16/05	Mutual Housing	20-28 Fairfield Avenue	nine residential units
11/14/05	Bivona	119 Forest Street	two residential units, BC setbacks
6/26/06	Harper	432 Old Long Ridge Rd.	addition to single family
10/16/06	Triglia	185 Henry Street	one residential unit
3/19/07	Cedar Street Assoc.	45-47 Cedar Street	one residential unit, BC setbacks
4/16/07	Garden Homes	900 Hope Street	three residential units, parking
6/9/08	Poster Conservation	670 Pacific Street	art gallery, parking
6/23/08	New Neighborhoods	220 Ludlow Street	three residential units
7/14/08	Piantino	26 Orchard Street	two residential units, pkng., BC setbacks
12/1/08	Taylor Mission LLC	18 Taylor Street	two residential units, BC setbacks
10/5/09	109 Atlantic St. LLC	109 Atlantic Street	one residential unit
2/22/10	APC Development	48 Pleasant Street	three residential units
7/25/10	Highview Ave. Assoc.	172 Highview Avenue	one residential unit
5/2/11	Orchard K&G Assoc.	275 Greenwich Avenue	two residential units
2/24/14	Seaside Real Estate	108 Seaside Avenue	one residential unit

# “Placemaking &

A talk delivered at the Connecticut Preservation Action Conference in January, 2014 by Kip Bergstrom,  
Former Deputy Commissioner, Connecticut  
Department of Economic and Community Development

**H**ISTORIC PRESERVATION has, at times, been portrayed and occasionally acted as if its interests and purposes are in conflict with the goals of business and economic development. We see them as aligned. Here's why:

## **Beauty**

First, because historic structures are things of beauty. As part of a new initiative to focus the State's arts funding on what I call "placemaking," I have been going around the state chanting this mantra:  
*"Great art makes great places.  
Great places attract great talent.  
Great talent creates great jobs."*

If we prove this connection in the work we do, we can increase State funding for the arts and culture. Great historic buildings are great art. Architecture is an art form that adds beauty to our lives and that adds texture, character and distinctiveness to our places. Not all old buildings are works of art, but many of them are and they are worthy of preservation for that reason and because they make the places we live and work, to borrow a phrase widely used by the National Trust, "places that matter," places people care about.

## **Story**

It is also true that great history makes great places. Historic buildings have another dimension that goes beyond the aesthetic: they are vessels of meaning. They have a story. They remind us of who we are, where we've been and by giving us that perspective, help us to see where we're going, who we might become. History provides contexts that give our lives meaning, continuity and help us understand the environments we live in. Some buildings become the vessels for the creation of new stories in their adaptive reuse. Some have such important stories that we do not allow them to be recycled as offices or housing but preserve them as public spaces. But these too continue to be the crucibles of our reinvention, as the power of the original story inspires the creation of new ones.

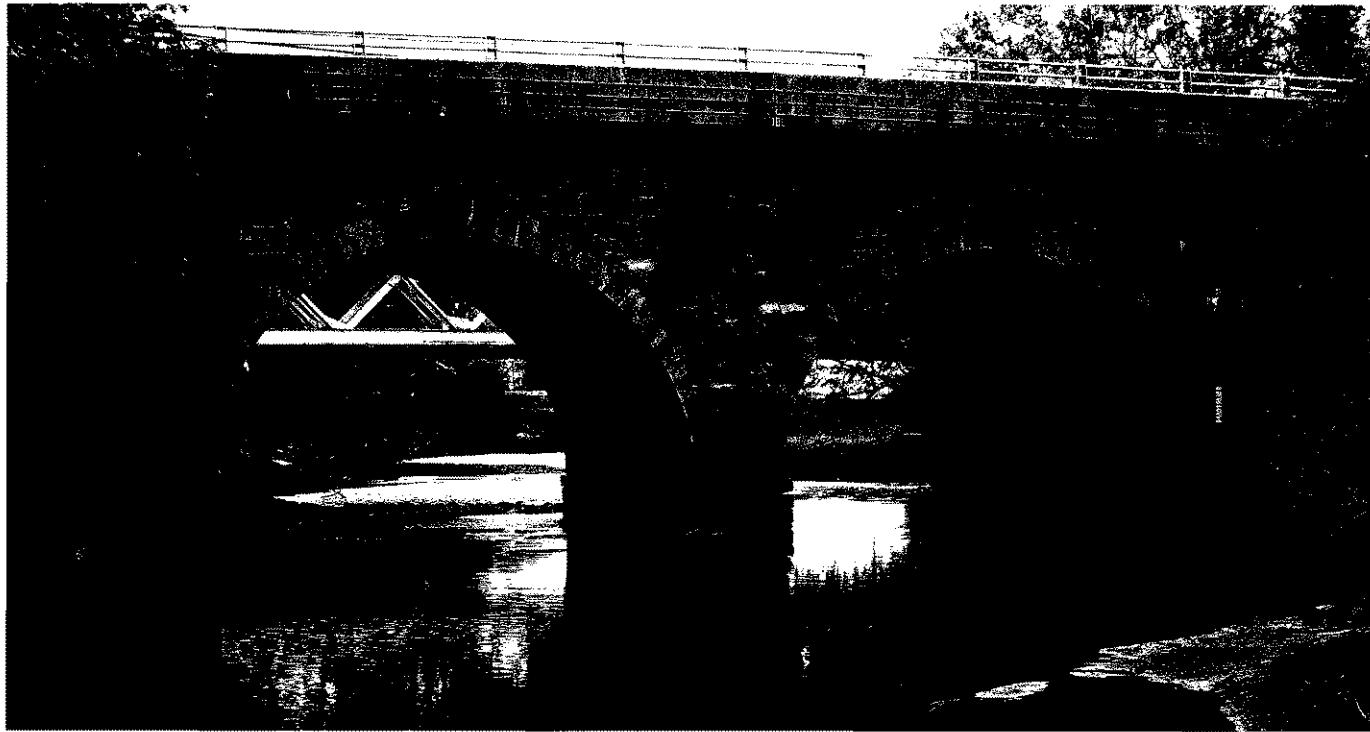
Our best buildings both carry stories and make stories, in ways that are deeply personal. The Greeks called this Civitas – a collective pride of place that comes of a sharing of stories, past and present. This idea of Civitas, or lived-in and living history, is something that we in New England have more of than other places in the country. I grew

up in the West where history is like a rare butterfly pinned to a mounting board under glass. You can look at it, but not touch it. It blew my mind when I first moved here that you can sleep in history, work in history, eat in history, hold your most significant public and private events in history. Our ancestors and their stories are always with us here and those stories help to guide us forward. We are, in a larger sense, the stewards of the nation's story, our legacy to preserve. In the West, the critical legacy is wilderness, landscapes untouched by people and buildings. These landscapes inspire us too, giving our nation its sense of possibility. That is the West's legacy to preserve. Ours is history.

## **Economic Diversity**

It's easy to get carried away with heritage architecture and historic preservation precisely because buildings are vessels of meaning. But they are also just buildings. In fact, sometimes old buildings are more important for the fact that they are old, than that they are meaningful. When Jane Jacobs said the four key physical ingredients to great neighborhoods are density, mixed use, short blocks and old

# Preservation”



The historic State Street Bridge (c. 1848) erected over the Rippowam (aka Mill) River to carry the newly-constructed railroad from New York City has untapped potential to create the kind of vibrant urban experiences millennials and boomers look for in downtowns.

buildings, and when she said that new ideas come from old buildings, she was not talking about heritage architecture. In both instances, what she was talking about was cheap space. When you redevelop an old building, you often make it into a new building from a rent perspective. This narrows the range of uses that can afford to be in the building, in particular the income/ethnic mix of people, the mix of retail and the mix of commercial. This is why gentrification leads so often to its own demise, making distinctively funky places into homogeneous, upscale, generic-chic places. While mixed use and even mixed income may fly in the face of years of (mostly bad) zoning policy and cultural tendencies, it is exactly the formula that produces sustainable, dynamic and GROWING economies. It's important to keep a

significant portion of the old buildings in a place undeveloped and accessible for low-budget uses, and to build affordable housing and affordable retail and commercial space into redevelopment projects (including through the use of our tax credits), if you want to preserve diversity and distinctiveness.

So, the ultimate challenge of historic preservation is to energize a network of public and private capabilities to create places that are not cookie-cutter subdivisions, strip malls and office parks – the generic, default development pattern of most of the suburban American landscape – but rather places that are “whole” and “authentic”... that is, places that are: full of life; diverse and distinctive in their built form, natural environment and social networks; empowering of their people; transit and digitally

connected; water and energy efficient; and disaster resilient.

We need to use historic preservation to deliberately sustain and expand diversity – of people, buildings, businesses, habitats and species – in the face of prevailing economic forces that diminish diversity...in other words, we need to prove, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that a community can be economically successful without losing its soul.

In our revised state historic preservation tax credits, we have created some powerful new tools to help us meet this challenge. I look forward to working with the preservation community over the years ahead to bring beauty to our places, to preserve and constantly renew their stories and to sustain and enhance the diversity that makes us whole. HNN

# Main Street Bridge



**O**N FEBRUARY 3RD, HNP submitted the following statement to the Planning Board in support of funding a project titled "Replacement of the West Main Street Bridge." The City stood to lose federal funding if it did not include the item in the budget for next year. The hesitation stemmed from two unresolved issues. The project initially called for scrapping the historic bridge, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and replacing it with a plain flat span. HNP was not consulted on this wasteful idea, and expressed deep reservations about a subsequent plan to hang the trusses decoratively along the edges of the bottom-heavy new bridge. The other issue was that the funding is for a pedestrian bridge favored by the Mill River Collaborative but opposed in the past by some West Siders. Over the past year the Mayor's office worked diligently to bring the parties together to work out a compromise. At HNP's urging, Mayor Martin to his great credit sought an objective assessment of the condition of the historic lenticular trusses by an engineering firm experienced in bridge rehabilitation, and their report

concluded that repairs were relatively minor. While HNP had questioned in the past the wisdom of decommissioning the bridge, its 13 years out of such service have not created the hardship imagined on the West Side. HNP now strongly supports the new pedestrian bridge carried by historic trusses carefully restored to grace, and was pleased to join our voice in unanimous endorsement with a broad base of community groups.

## Statement

The Main Street bridge (aka "the purple bridge"), built in 1887, is Stamford's oldest "modern" structure and remains in service as a pedestrian span today. Most bridges that old and still useful would be considered valuable historic assets, but the Main Street bridge has even greater distinction for its truss type. The lenticular truss—shaped like a lens—is the most economical way to build an iron bridge using the structural principle of the arch. Its economy was derived from the fact that it used approximately 10% less iron than other iron truss types. And the trusses were made locally in Connecticut. The

Berlin Iron Bridge Company owned the patent, and built it along with more than 100 within the state and some 10,090 other lenticulars in New England, New York and Ohio between 1878 and around 1900, the heyday of the truss type. Our Main Street bridge is a rare survivor, for fewer than 5% of these first generation lenticulars are thought to remain standing.

Structural engineers and historians of engineering generally concur that beyond economy and ingenuity, the lenticular truss is one of the most graceful and visually pleasing ways to carry a bridge span. Within the last eight years urban planners have also caught on, introducing new lenticular truss spans in major cities such as Paris, London and New York after an absence of a century. Elsewhere, communities in the northeast and abroad have successfully rehabilitated historic lenticular trusses like ours for vehicular or pedestrian use. An example close to home is the Lover's Leap bridge in New Milford, adapted from vehicular use to a pedestrian span in a state park.

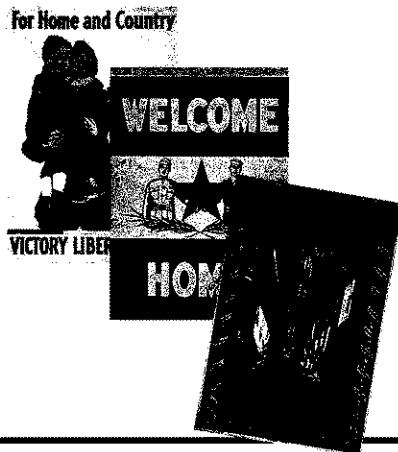
Our Main Street bridge has been individually listed on the National

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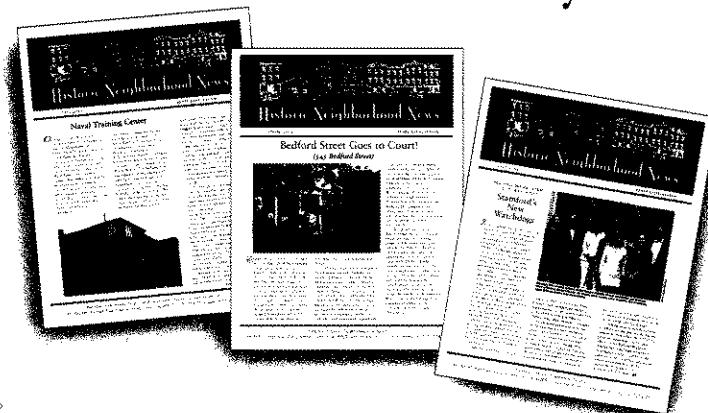
## WWI Stamford: A Virtual Walking Tour

**May 13, 2015, 6:30 – 7:30 pm**  
Ferguson Library, 4th Floor Auditorium

*What remains of the home that Stamford's doughboys went to war to defend? Join HNP's Wes Haynes in marking the centennial of the Great War with a slideshow and stories about the places where they lived, worked and played. HNN*



## Historic Neighborhood News Index On Its Way



*T*WO YEARS AGO, Colin Skidmore, HNP Secretary and Assistant Editor of *Historic Neighborhood News*, compiled a brief index of the 66 issues of the newsletter published by the HNPP since 1987. Even in an abbreviated version, we found the index useful, encouraging Mr. Skidmore to produce a complete index filled with 28 years of detail about Stamford architecture

and history. We hope to have it available on our website in the next few months. Eventually, all of the newsletters will be available online, but in the interim, you can find them at the office of our editor, Renée Kahn, 78 Webb's Hill Road, 203.322.6671, or at the library of the Stamford Historical Society, 1508 High Ridge Road, 203.329.1183. HNN

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

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## Main Street Bridge

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Register of Historic Places since 1990 as a well-preserved example of a very rare variant—a double-lenticular span—of this important and elegant vanishing bridge type. By well-preserved I do not mean to give you the impression that the bridge has been preserved or should be preserved in its current condition. Its future has been in doubt for years. What I mean by well-preserved is that the original trusses are still intact and in fair structural condition even though they have received no maintenance for decades. To envision this bridge as the asset it is one needs to declutter it of the non-structural jersey barriers and chain link fencing, as well as the outrigger sidewalks and the forest of piers below added to carry a trolley around 1900. A recent report on the bridge by Ryan Biggs-Clark Davis, a New York engineering firm with extensive experience in rehabilitating historic iron bridges, concluded that while the existing deteriorated bridge deck was deficient and needs to be replaced, the 1887 lenticular trusses are in fair condition, in need of some manageable repairs, and capable of continuing to carry the loads required for proposed pedestrian use. Wrought iron is a very forgiving material that rusts at a very slow rate. That can be stabilized with paint. As described in the report these repairs consist of replacing 16 cover plates at the top chord panel points, replacing limited portions of

other cover plates where rusted or displaced, replacing one damaged end post, replacing one damaged vertical web member, strengthening or realigning several round web members with heat, and resetting the finials.

HNP supports adapting the bridge to pedestrian use by repairing the lenticular trusses as the primary structure. Because the bridge is listed on the National Register, up to \$400,000 of the cost of these repairs, along with painting the ironwork and replacing the deck, would be eligible for restoration matching funding from the State Department of Economic and Community Development. Moreover, additional pre-development planning needed to refine the restoration scope would also be eligible for state funding. HNP sees this as beneficial to the project and we have pledged to assist the City and/or Mill River Collaborative in obtaining these funds.

Reusing these rare trusses is sustainable, hip, and tells us something distinctive about Stamford as a place. Adapting them to pedestrian use will establish a vital connection between the new park, our historic downtown and eventually historic South End, our greatest walkable urban environments. It is the kind of good urban people-friendly design we have sorely lacked in downtown since abdicating our streets to the automobile, and something worth inheriting in the future. IINN