



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES  
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
February 7, 2022  
9:30 am  
Via Video Conference

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA  
Dr. Marisa Angell Brown  
Dr. Patrick Malone  
Dr. Ronald Onorato, Chairman  
Mr. Keith Stokes  
Ms. Martha Werenfels, AIA

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Edward F. Sanderson  
Vacant  
Vacant (archaeologist)  
Vacant (architectural historian)  
Vacant (landscape architect/historian)

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Enerida Ademi, Data Control Clerk  
Ms. Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide  
Ms. Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian  
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director  
Dr. Timothy Ives, Principal Archaeologist  
Ms. Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:34 A.M. by Chairman Onorato.

2. Meeting procedures overview

Dr. Onorato explained the procedures that would be followed by Board members and attendees of the meeting.

### 3. Roll call

Dr. Onorato called the roll of Board members. See page one of these minutes for the attendance list.

### 4. Approval of minutes of October 4, 2021 meeting

On a motion by Mr. Stokes, seconded by Ms. Werenfels, the Review Board unanimously VOTED TO APPROVE the Minutes of October 4, 2021, without changes.

### 5. Interim Executive Director's Report

Mr. Emidy reported:

- a) RIHPHC National Register staffing update
  - i. Liz Rochefort left the RIHPHC in November, after the last Board meeting. For the record, again, we thank her for her years of service.
  - ii. Joanna Doherty has taken over most of Ms. Rochefort's projects.
  - iii. Ms. Doherty and Mr. Emidy have tried to develop a realistic timeline for nomination reviews and presentations at Board meetings. We think we have a good way forward. Right now, there are a number of preliminary presentations in the queue, so we will do a couple at today's meeting and more at the April meeting. We are trying to prioritize those that have tax credits tied to them, because they are on a schedule, and then those that have been in-house the longest.
- b) Nomination processing updates
  - i. Ms. Doherty continues working on writing the nomination for St. Columba's Chapel, in Middletown
  - ii. She is also working on two additions to the existing Wakefield Historic District nomination. One is for the former post office, the other is for Saugatucket Park
  - iii. Ms. Doherty and Mr. Emidy are both reviewing nominations for tax credit properties as they come in.
  - iv. Ms. Doherty has done some field work and is preparing, as mentioned earlier, presentations for this month's and future meetings.
  - v. Mr. Emidy has a final and a preliminary presentation for today's meeting, but is trying not to take on much more than reviews in the National Register program right now, because of other demands on his time.
  - vi. We have not submitted any nominations to the National Park Service lately, since we have not met since October.
- c) Properties listed
  - i. Donwell's Diner, in Pawtucket, was listed in October
  - ii. The Beaver River Road Historic District, in Richmond, was also listed in October

### 6. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places final review

Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District – Additional Information  
Front Street, Woonsocket

Ms. Werenfels recused herself from discussion of this nomination as her employer is working on the project.

Mr. Emidy made a presentation for final review of Additional Information for the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District, on Front Street, in Woonsocket. The district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR) in 1973. The property has been partially vacant and partially redeveloped since about 2008. The current proposal is to redevelop the remaining buildings using tax credits. This requires a reassessment of the 1973 nomination. Ryan Cameron, of MacRostie Historic Advisors, wrote the additional documentation.

The historic district is located in the center of Woonsocket, along the east bank of the Blackstone River, with the Court Street Bridge to the north, Front Street to the east, and Bernon Street and the Bernon Street bridge to the south.

The NR history of the complex begins with the construction of the Number 1 Mill in 1827-28 for the Russell Manufacturing Company. The Company went out of business in 1829. The Number 2 Mill was built in 1833 for the Woonsocket Company, which operated at the site until it closed in 1883. The complex was purchased by the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company in 1887.

When the complex was listed in 1973, six resources were noted in the inventory, the period of significance was “19<sup>th</sup> century”, and the areas of significance were architecture and industry. The history recounted in the nomination is thin and focuses on the textile use of the property during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Contributing and non-contributing status was not assigned for the buildings, so we presume that everything that was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since that was the period of significance, was intended to be contributing.

Mr. Emidy provided a comparison of the district maps from 1973 and 2021/2022. The 1973 map is a sketch map; it is not to scale, the building footprints are not accurate, and it does not include all of the buildings that were on the site at that time. It does include: the Number 1 mill, built in 1827-28; the remnant of the Power Trench, likely built about 1827 in conjunction with the Number 1 Mill; the Number 2 Mill, built in 1833; the Number 4 Mill, built in 1859; and the Shoe Store, built before 1911, all of which are still present. It also includes the Power Plant, which was built between 1890 and 1911 and demolished circa 2008. The new map includes the remnant of the Power House, built between about 1903 and 1911, the Garage, built in 1904, and the Gate House, built in 2007.

Mr. Emidy showed photographs of the buildings from the 1973 nomination and current views of the same. Of note is that the Number 2 mill has been converted to condominium units. He noted that the remaining buildings and structure from the 1973 nomination

remain eligible today as contributing resources in the district, but that the Power Plant, also included in 1973, is gone.

Mr. Emidy then discussed the additional information provided for review today. The Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company, which purchased the property in 1887, played a vital role in the spread of electrical use within Woonsocket, but also to neighboring towns in Rhode Island and just over the state line into Massachusetts. That company would become the Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric (BVG&E) company in 1912. BVG&E followed suit, eventually providing services to Woonsocket, Cumberland, Lincoln, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and North Smithfield. BVG&E built a new headquarters in Lincoln in 1968 and soon after sold the Front Street complex. It became mixed use - primarily light industrial and storage - and continued that way but had rising vacancy into the 2000s.

Based on this history, the additional documentation more accurately defines and extends the period of significance for the district from “19<sup>th</sup> century” to “1827 to 1968” to include the use of the property for electrical generation and ending when BVG&E built its new headquarters in Lincoln and moved most, but not all, of its operations there. They would all eventually be moved to Lincoln.

As mentioned earlier, three structures on the site were not included in the 1973 nomination. The Garage was built 1904 for the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company as its garage and auto repair shop. The Garage is a two-story, flat-roofed, brick building. It has a steel frame, with an elaborate timber and rod-and-turnbuckle truss system for the roof framing. The windows are replacement double-hung and fixed sash. On the south end of the second floor of the façade is a double-leaf, wood door that used to open to a ramp that allowed trucks to be driven up for maintenance. The ramp has been removed. The second floor of the building is concrete, with pans or openings so you can access the bottom of a vehicle or for draining fluids.

The Power House exists as a modification of the original structure. It was constructed between circa 1903 and 1911. It is a one-story, concrete structure that has been truncated somewhat at the top and the south end.

The Gate House was constructed at the Front Street entrance to the lot in 2007. It is a one-story, small, square-plan, wood-frame building with a hip roof. It is considered non-contributing.

The additional documentation that is being added for the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills is not meant to be a rewrite of the nomination. It does not contribute much new historical information to the period that is already covered in the 1973 nomination. However, it does provide a better, more accurate map, with a more accurate boundary for the property, and more accurate building footprints both on and adjacent to the parcel. It updates the building and structure count to remove the Power Plant and add the Power

House, Garage, and Gate House. It extends the Period of Significance from “19<sup>th</sup> century” to 1827-1968 to include not only the textile manufacturing use of the property, but also the electrical generation use. It also explains the context of the electrical generation history of the property. As required, it also provides updated photographs of all of the buildings and structures on the site. The staff agree that this additional documentation makes the case for adding the later, electricity generation facilities to the nomination, with the Garage and Power House as contributing resources.

Mr. Emidy explained that, after the October meeting, Dr. Malone provided comments and additional information for the nomination, primarily related to the slow-burning construction used in the Number 1 Mill. Changes based on that information are not included in the draft nomination that is posted on our website for Board member review, but have been incorporated into the text that will be submitted to the National Park Service.

A motion to approve nomination of the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District Additional Information to the National Register was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Mr. Stokes. The Board voted unanimously - with Ms. Werenfels recused - to approve the motion.

7. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places final review  
Newport Historic District – Additional Information  
Newport

Joanna Doherty made a presentation for final review of Additional Information for the Newport Historic District, in Newport. The existing National Register nomination has been amended to include discussion of the Newport Town Spring Site, which is within the existing district boundary but mentioned only in passing in the original nomination. The Spring Box was recently the subject of an archaeological investigation, which prompted the desire to amend the nomination. The additional information was completed by the Public Archaeology Laboratory.

Ms. Doherty explained that a spring box is a structure that allows water to be obtained from a natural spring, protects the water from contamination, and provides a place for sedimentation and a point of collection. Newport’s earliest public water source, the site of the town spring is located at what is now an open area near Washington Square, at the intersection of Spring, Touro, and Court House streets. The site is in close proximity to many early Newport buildings, which would have been standing when it was in active use, from the 1639 settlement of Newport to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is located at the comparatively level midpoint of an east-to-west downslope to Newport Harbor, where the natural spring broke through to the ground surface.

Ms. Doherty stated that the Newport Town Spring Site is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the area of “exploration and settlement” as a significant

natural feature that influenced Newport's 1639 settlement and subsequent town organization. It is also eligible under Criterion D in the area of "archeology, historic-non-aboriginal" for the belowground survival of its stone spring box, built around 1802. Early infrastructure features such as spring boxes rarely survive, are poorly documented, and are largely ignored in discussions of municipal water management. For that reason, the Newport Town Spring Site has provided important information about the construction and modification of spring boxes and has the potential to provide additional information about Newport's water system before 1881, when a centralized waterworks was created and the spring was closed.

Access to fresh water is a prerequisite for human settlement at all times and in all places. Long before Europeans arrived in Newport, Native Americans had been living at and around the spring for thousands of years, as evidenced by archaeological sites at the Great Friends Meeting House and Touro Synagogue. European settlers first arrived in 1639, when a small band broke away from the settlement at the northern end of Aquidneck Island. The decision to settle in what would become Newport was no doubt influenced by the presence of both an excellent harbor and also a freshwater spring. Indeed, the town grew up around the spring and oriented toward the harbor. The spring, at least in the beginning, shaped Newport's road network and settlement pattern. The topographic contours formed by the many streams flowing from the spring influenced the irregular pattern of the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century roads that wound their way down to the harbor. The land surrounding the spring also was the first to be allotted to the settlement's most prominent members, including Henry Bull, a signatory to Newport's original compact.

Like many things important to day-to-day life but so common that they rarely warrant comment, the spring largely disappears from historical mention after Newport's founding. It is not shown on the 1758 map by Ezra Stiles, nor on Blaskowitz's map from 1777.

The spring likely remained an open-air landscape feature until the first decade of the nineteenth century, when the Newport Aqueduct Company was incorporated. On October 21, 1802, 20 men formed a company to build a water distribution system for Newport using the water from the town spring. After receiving a charter from the state, they hired Colonel Jeremiah Olney in March 1803 as the project surveyor and moved forward using hollowed wooden logs as piping. The spring box almost certainly was constructed at the same time to enclose the spring and control water pressure and flow throughout the system.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the area surrounding the intersections of Spring, Barney, and Touro streets was beginning to transition from a primarily residential to a primarily commercial area focused on carriage manufacturing and horse stabling. In the livery business, the spring would have been a valuable asset for watering horses. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the town spring was proving insufficient to serve Newport's expanding population. Following an act passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly allowing towns and cities to grant individuals or corporations exclusive rights to construct public water supply systems, in 1876 Newport granted George H. Norman, a Boston contractor, the right to build a system for the city drawing from Easton's Pond

and the marshlands around it. The Newport Water Works Company was incorporated in 1879, and in 1881 Norman transferred the completed waterworks to the corporation. With the construction of the new water supply system, the town spring and well pump would have been abandoned and removed.

With the widespread availability of automobiles beginning in the 1920s, the city's livery stables transformed into service stations; by 1925, a gas station was operating on the former Town Spring site. By 1940, the site was leased to the Colonial Beacon Oil Company, which replaced the original gas station with the building that stood on the property until 2019. Although the spring no longer surfaced at the site (and hadn't for quite some time), the oil company chose to commemorate its location with the installation of The Old Town Spring Plaque in 1941 in a small, landscaped island at the southeast corner of the gas station. It is a rectangular brass plaque affixed to a large conglomerate stone, engraved with an image of the town spring pump and water trough backed by the Old Colony House. It reads: "The Old Town Spring. Around which Newport was founded and some of the earliest houses of the town were built and for which the street was named." The plaque has since been removed and is on site awaiting reinstallation.

In 2012, the organization Washington Square Roots organized a charrette to brainstorm ideas to improve the area. One idea was to create a park at the end of Spring Street, create a more expansive public space, and acknowledge the central role of the Town Spring in the city's founding. The owner of the gas station soon announced his intent to sell the property, and the Church Community Housing Corporation, in collaboration with the Newport Spring Leadership Committee, purchased the site in 2015. The new owners commissioned a series of studies to explore redevelopment options, which led to the demolition of the gas station and an archaeological investigation of the site.

Ms. Doherty turned the presentation over to Timothy Ives, who presented information about the archaeological investigation. The archaeological survey was conducted in 2018 by Salve Regina University archaeologists and a team of speleologists, who are people who scientifically study caves. Newport Environmental, which conducted an environmental study of the site, summarized the archaeological findings in a project report.

Dr. Ives provided more detail on the working of the spring box. As Ms. Doherty stated, it is a structure engineered to capture and store water from a natural spring and protect that water from contamination. It also allows any naturally occurring sediments to settle to the bottom as a form of passive filtration. The central element is a relatively watertight collection chamber that is fed by a lead-in pipe. Periodic cleaning of sediment was facilitated by an accessway at the top and a drainpipe at the bottom. A screen-covered distribution pipe located slightly above the bottom allows water to be channeled to other locations.

The box is a stacked fieldstone chamber with a slightly tapered "beehive" construction that supports massive, stone-slab, ceiling beams. The speleologists used laser-based 3-D imaging technology known as LiDAR to help document the Spring Box. The LiDAR

shows a lead-in conduit high on the upslope side to channel spring water into the box, an iron distribution pipe on the downslope side of the box to deliver water to some offsite location, and a plugged wooden pipe which possibly served as the drainpipe. A lead pipe extending down the west wall probably fed the pitcher pump at street level.

The Salve Regina professor and his archaeology students removed sediment samples from the bottom of the box and from surrounding fill. They recovered several eighteenth and nineteenth century ceramic sherds, pieces of a can, a riveted metal strap, burnt animal bones from meals, and coal slag chunks. All of these are representative, run of the mill, historic trash.

Ms. Werenfels asked if there was a control mechanism for the drain pipe at the bottom, to allow the box to be drained for cleaning. Dr. Ives stated his presumption that opening the distribution pipe would drain the box enough to allow someone to get in and clean it out.

Dr. Onorato stated that locating the spring box and assembling this information is exciting. He has some minor text edits that he will provide after the meeting by email.

A motion to approve nomination of the Newport Historic District Additional Information to the National Register was made by Ms. Werenfels and seconded by Mr. Abbott. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

8. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places preliminary review  
Wells House  
634a Barbers Pond Road, South Kingstown

Mr. Emidy made a presentation for preliminary review of the Wells House, at 634a Barbers Pond Road, in South Kingstown. The request for review was made by the property owners. The property is located east of Yawgoog Pond and north of Barber Pond, northwest of Kingston Village and the University of Rhode Island. It is just under 32 acres. Buildings are clustered at the southwest corner of the property and include a house, barn, studio, and a few smaller outbuildings. The balance of the property is cleared fields and woodland.

Mr. Emidy explained that, at this point, it seems that the property would most likely be nominated under Criterion C, as a good example of an 18<sup>th</sup> century, Colonial cape. There is also a possibility that there is an agricultural context that could qualify it under Criterion A, but that is based purely on what is there now, and not knowing much about the history of the property.

The house is a five-bay, one-and-one-half-story cape, with a side gable roof pierced by a brick center chimney. It faces south, with a modern addition at the west end and a historic ell on the east end. The house has wood shingle siding, 12-over-12, double-hung, wood sash, and an asphalt shingle roof. It is set on a granite block foundation. The primary



entrance consists of a six-panel wood door under a four-light transom, with flat pilasters that have a simple molding at the top.

The house has a center-chimney, five-room plan. Fireboxes are located in the two front rooms and the back center room. The chimney in the west front room has a beehive oven, indicating that this room was likely the original kitchen. It is currently used as a parlor, with the kitchen in the east ell. Other noteworthy interior elements include wide-plank floors, chamfered posts, and horizontal plank wainscot in the west front room.

There are four outbuildings located on the property: a barn that appears to be modern, a garden shed of unknown age, a pole barn-like structure of unknown age, and an artist's studio that dates to the 1980s. The landscape includes cleared fields delineated by a well-maintained system of stone walls. There is also a cellar hole off the driveway, the history of which is unknown at this time.

A circa 1900 photograph of the house shows the façade and the east end addition. Our survey sheet for the house from 1982 assigns it is an early 18<sup>th</sup> century construction date. The tax assessor's date, which would need to be verified, is given as 1783. That date is very specific for an assessor's date, which may indicate that there is some evidence of that date available. The house isn't shown on maps from 1857 and 1862, but does appear on an 1870 map as "B. Wells". Adjacent land was also in the Wells family at this time, and the site of Wells' Mill is nearby. According to our survey report, the mill was built in 1862 as a carding mill, later became a carding and grist mill, then just a grist mill. It collapsed around 1927. We don't know at this point the specifics of how the Wells family that owned this house is related to the multiple Wells houses in this immediate area. This property was still in the Wells family in 1895. On a map it appears as the property of J.S. Wells, who appears to be Joshua Stanton Wells, from Newport. We know that the house was purchased in 1908 by William Sheffield and possibly William Buffam - the survey sheet is hard to read - and it was only used on weekends from 1909 to 1967.

Staff, including Mr. Emidy, visited the property in 2014 for project review. At that time, the staff thought that the property is likely eligible for listing in the National Register. Having looked at it again, a mostly different group of staff still believe that to be true. Even without a great deal of the ownership history and with outbuilding dates and details still unknown, it seems like the house is a good period house that would meet Criterion C for architecture of the eighteenth century. Further research may uncover that there is a historic farmstead here, so we are keeping that open as a possibility, as well.

Mr. Abbott stated that the property looks promising for listing. He wondered if the ell on the left in the circa 1900 photograph could be the connector to the 1980s addition at that end of the house. Dr. Onorato suggested a closer examination of the wainscot molding and stair banister to get date information and also opined that it seems eligible for listing.

Ms. Werenfels asked if the east end ell is historic. Mr. Emidy stated that it appears to be the same height and location as the present ell, but that the current fenestration and door location on the south side don't appear to match. Ms. Werenfels stated that the outbuildings are bothersome in terms of an individual listing. She asked if the staff will inform the property owners that this is not a sure-thing for listing. Mr. Emidy replied that we will pass the Board's questions and comments on to the property owners by letter.

Mr. Abbott made a motion that the Wells House is worthy of further exploration toward a final nomination. The motion was seconded by Dr. Onorato and unanimously approved by the Review Board.

9. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places preliminary review  
Holy Ghost Church  
472 Atwells Avenue, Providence

Ms. Doherty made a presentation for preliminary review of the Holy Ghost Church at 472 Atwells Avenue, in Providence. Holy Ghost Church is an Italian Renaissance Revival-style church constructed between 1901 and 1910 at the corner of Atwells Avenue and Knight Street, in the Federal Hill neighborhood of Providence. The church, which was designed by Ambrose Murphy of Murphy, Hindle & Wright, is constructed of brick with polychrome terra cotta trim, turrets, and an arcaded campanile. The front elevation faces northeast and includes three entries accessed by a set of full-width granite stairs. The central entrance has an elaborate surround with Corinthian columns and pilasters; a panel above the door includes a relief depicting the Last Supper. A large rose window is located above the central entry. Side elevations include large (18 ft tall by 6 ft wide), pointed-arch window openings that are filled with stained glass. The roof is gabled, with gable-end parapets, and covered in slate. The interior of the church has seating for about 900, a high, vaulted ceiling springing from Corinthian pilasters, and a semi-circular apse in the west end. An extensive interior decoration scheme was carried out in the mid-20th century and included the installation of an Italian marble altar, pulpit, and altar railing; marble veneer on wall surfaces; decorative marble flooring in the center aisle; figurative, stained-glass windows; and decorative painting and murals.

A two-story rectory constructed in 1927 sits immediately to the north of the church, on a separate lot. It features a Classical entry portico, bracketed cornice, and a clay tile roof. Exterior walls are of brick, laid in alternating courses of headers and stringers. The interior has a center-hall plan, with a living room, dining room, kitchen, and offices on the first floor, and bedrooms and bathrooms above. Also on a separate lot but owned by the Holy Ghost Church Corporation is a former parochial school that was built circa 1970. It is constructed of brick with concrete trim and extensive glazing on its northwest elevation.

Holy Ghost Church traces its origins to 1889, when Reverend Harkins, the Irish American Bishop of Providence, invited Reverend Luigi Paroli, a priest from northern Italy, to come to Providence and preach in Italian to the growing Italian immigrant

community. Soon, Reverend Paroli was invited to stay, and a small chapel was erected on Brayton Avenue in Federal Hill, the heart of Providence's Italian American community. Named Holy Ghost Church, this was the first parish in Rhode Island to serve the growing Italian American population. In April 1890, a lot at the corner of Atwells Avenue and Knight Street was purchased and a wood-frame church was built. In 1897, the parish purchased additional land and constructed a wood-frame rectory immediately to the north of the church. Not long after, Holy Ghost engaged the architect Ambrose Murphy, of Murphy, Hindle & Wright, the foremost ecclesiastical architect in Providence at the time, to design a new church "in the Roman style." A "basement church" was completed in 1901 and the building's upper stories were constructed between 1908 and 1910. The principal façade of the church was renovated in 1927, with the addition of a monumental entry staircase and two side entries. A new brick rectory, which housed several priests, was built the same year. In the mid-20th century, a team of prominent Italian-American designers transformed the interior of the church: Guido Nincheri designed and manufactured 11 monumental stained-glass windows, while Victor Zucchi and Giorgio DeFelice completed an elaborate decorative painting program. The interior work was overseen by the architect Oresto DiSaia.

Holy Ghost Church was perhaps at its peak in the mid-20th century, with a strong presence in this part of Federal Hill. In addition to the church and rectory, the parish owned a convent, chapel, and parochial school on nearby Knight Street; these last three were razed when Route 6 was improved in the 1960s. The new parochial school, built circa 1970, operated until around 2010, when it closed due to falling enrollment.

Founded in 1889, Holy Ghost Church is closely associated with the development of Providence's Italian-American community. In addition to being the first parish in Rhode Island to serve Italian immigrants, it was the "mother church" for other Italian churches in Providence, Warren, Bristol, and elsewhere. The church is architecturally significant, as well. It was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style by a prominent ecclesiastical architect, with the interior embellished by notable Italian-American designers. The period of significance for the property would start in 1901, when construction began on the church, with an end date to be determined based on additional research and analysis.

Mr. Abbott asked if we have any photographs of the lower level of the church. Ms. Doherty stated that we do not, however, Liz Rochefort visited the church and stated that the basement is a large, open room with modern finishes.

Dr. Onorato observed that the pews and the decoration in the apse appear to have changed from the 1939 photograph that was shown. He stated that he is in favor of nomination for the church's associations with both the Italian-American community and Murphy, Hindle & Wright.

Ms. Doherty asked the Board members if they have any comments on including the 1970s school. The initial inquiry was just for the church, but the rectory seems worthy. Dr. Onorato replied that he would need more information on the school to make that decision.

Mr. Abbott made a motion that the that the nomination of the Holy Ghost Church should move forward with further exploration, including what to nominate. The motion was seconded by Ms. Werenfels and unanimously approved by the Review Board. Mr. Stokes did not vote, having left the meeting during the presentation.

#### 10. For information: Update on Cemetery Weeks collaboration

Sarah Zurier reported that there will not be a historic preservation conference this year, but the Commission is working on organizing a statewide preservation program - Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Awareness and Preservation Weeks. This is a collaboration between the RIHPHC and the R.I. Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries. The Advisory Commission is an all-volunteer body appointed to study the location, condition, and inventory of historical cemeteries in Rhode Island and to make recommendations to the General Assembly, but they are also a clearinghouse for anyone looking for advice or information relating to historic cemeteries. They have no regulatory powers, but they do have a lot of knowledge. Charlotte Taylor, one of our archaeologists, sits on the Commission.

For several years, the Advisory Commission has hosted cemetery cleanups in April and May, trying to get at least one in each town. This year, by collaborating with them, we want to promote what they do, increase participation, and expand programming to include more tours, conservation demonstrations, walks, and documentation projects. All of the programs are free and open to the public and all of them are outdoors. This seems like an excellent fit for expanding access to preservation activities and doing so in a safe and outdoor way during COVID times.

We are working closely with the Advisory Commission, and we have put out a call for programs, which is on our website. They already have their networks and are getting their cleanup dates together. We will probably have about 50 programs across the state that we will be able to promote together. So, if you like being out in cemeteries and you have a program, as long as it's free and open to the public, we want to support what you do.

#### 11. For information: Update on Conference Evaluation project

Ms. Zurier reported that, given all of the uncertainties about COVID and public health, we opted not to hold a conference in 2022, in person or online. As reported earlier, we will be collaborating with the R.I. Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries to put on R.I. Historical Cemeteries Awareness and Preservation Weeks.

We opted to take a step back and evaluate the preservation conference, taking stock of what we have accomplished and anticipating how this program will best serve the interests of the commission and historic preservation in Rhode Island. We posted a request for proposals for a consultant and received three proposals. We chose to work

with Susan West Montgomery, a preservation consultant based in Maryland. She is one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation team who remade the National Trust Conference “saving places,” and she recently worked with the Providence Preservation Society on their strategic plan.

Ms. Montgomery is at work, gathering information, interviewing stakeholders, and meeting with us. There will also be polls and meetings with stakeholders. This project will wrap up this summer, and we will receive a report containing data, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations.

## 12. For discussion: Role of the State Review Board in RIHPHC Project Review

Mr. Emidy reported that Dr. Malone reached out to him a couple of weeks ago to ask about a review that we are conducting and to ask about how we’ve arrived at the decision that we reached. Mr. Emidy stated that he does not want to discuss that particular project here, in the public meeting, because we have not advertised it. However, it was focused on the proposed demolition of a building that the staff think is potentially eligible for listing in the NR, but which is not currently on the National, or the State, Register.

That conversation led us down the road to questions of whether the Review Board should have a role in situations like this, where a property has not been formally evaluated. Dr. Malone has opined that he believes there are situations in which the Review Board might want to be involved. Mr. Emidy has looked into the Commission’s enabling legislation, RIGL 42-45, and at the “Procedures for Registration and Protection of Historic Properties”, which are also codified in the R.I. Code of Regulations. He has not yet looked into the Procedures of the Review Board to see what they say.

Mr. Emidy’s reading of the laws and regulations is that there is some ambiguity and some contradiction between the documents, in regard to the ability for the Review Board to become involved in reviews, and in what body - the Review Board, State Historic Preservation Officer, or Commission - has what responsibilities around designation of properties as historic in the case of the State Register and the review process.

Mr. Emidy stated that before he started preparing memos and/or presentations about this, he wanted to give the Board members the opportunity to discuss what role, if any, they think the Review Board might want to have in reviewing projects. Eventually, of course, since they are a board of the Commission, the Commission will have to consent to any added role that the Board might want to take on. This is not something we are going to solve today. Mr. Emidy stated that he would like to get instructions, if there are any, as to what direction the Board would like to take, so that he can try to figure out how to make that work. Then he will report back to the Board for further discussion and can take something to the Commission if, and when, necessary.

Dr. Malone stated that cases like this one raise questions about properties that we have missed for National and State Register listings, survey, and Historic American

Engineering Records documentation. Things may have been missed initially, or time has gone by and our opinions have changed on what is historic, but we are highly dependent on lists that were generated decades ago. We have cases where a property that is clearly significant is scheduled for demolition, but he asked what role does the Review Board play when someone comes to the Commission to ask for advice. He stated that he is particularly concerned with whether the staff take the word of the applicant or if we do our own investigation about the information that is submitted. We all are reliant on the staff to make these calls and Mr. Emidy has pointed out that there are a lot of cases so the Review Board can't go over all of them in detail. The problem that Dr. Malone sees is that something can come up with a demolition suggestion where there is expertise on the Review Board and the experts on the Board don't hear about it. He is concerned that we [the preservation community at large] trust the staff to pick out what the most important properties are and we [the Board] hope that the staff would be able to determine that there is expertise on the State Review Board that might help to make a determination on some of those projects.

Dr. Onorato stated that he agrees with what Dr. Malone has said. It seems that what we are looking for is a clarification of the path that the evaluation can take and the Review Board's role in it. It may require some changes in the general procedures and the like. What he finds confusing is that when he looked at the material that Mr. Emidy provided to him, different entities make these decisions about eligibility under different circumstances. In part, what we are talking about as well are decisions that come up more often than the Review Board meets. That said, it seems that we need to clarify what the path is in terms of the legislation and the general procedures and maybe in doing so, asserting the idea of looking to the expertise of the Review Board, at least for some kind of input on some of these decisions.

Mr. Emidy stated that the material that Dr. Onorato referred to is documents that Dr. Onorato asked for when they were talking about making the agenda. This included the Commission's enabling legislation. Mr. Emidy stated that he did not send it to all of the Board members because we are not that far into the topic yet.

Dr. Brown stated that, over the course of a year or so, it is disappointing that we don't see many listings come up that relate to the histories of communities of color. We are interested in seeing the kind of numbers for those resources and modern properties. It would be wonderful to figure out a way to be more proactive in trying to encourage or seed some of those kinds of listings. She recognizes that part of it is connected to what is coming into the office.

[There was a brief conversation about Ned Connors trying to join the conversation but being unable to. Staff said they would continue working on it.]

Ms. Doherty stated that, to Dr. Brown's point, we did recently apply for an Underrepresented Communities Grant from the National Park Service. If we get it, that will allow us to create a multiple properties submission for African-American Civil Rights sites. This will follow up on the survey that we did a few years ago and we would create a multiple properties document that would provide context and identify property

types and then we would nominate individual properties under that umbrella. We are hopeful that we are going to get that grant. A lot of the time, we are just responding to what is coming in, especially given our staffing situation right now, but it is definitely at the front of staff's mind as well. We should find out about the grant in June.

Dr. Onorato stated that the issue of us being proactive in terms of getting more nominations for communities of color is important.

Dr. Malone stated that one thing we really need to be aware of is the limitations that the Commission staff deals with in terms of having 30 days to turn around a decision. It is obviously not enough time for the Board to discuss something at one of the regular meetings. Another issue is that the law states that to be considered historic, a property must be listed in the State Register, so there is a question of whether or not they are listed when the request for demolition is made. So is it possible to list them before the 30 days runs out? A third issue is that our opinion under the State Act is only advisory. All of those things weaken our review in a significant way.

Ms. Werenfels asked if it is possible to create an advisory subcommittee of the Board that would be able to respond quickly in these situations? Dr. Onorato stated that, in discussing this topic with Mr. Connors, a similar question came up. Maybe there could be a smaller group that can answer these things more quickly.

Mr. Emidy stated that he will try to summarize what the questions are for him to look into. First, the Board is curious about an expanded role. He will try to define what that role could be. Dr. Malone has also raised a couple of questions about timing. He stated that he wants to note that when you are talking about a property under review for Section 106, eligible properties count as though they are listed, but when you are looking at the State Act, it is different and whether "eligible" counts seems to be addressed multiple ways in the different pieces of legislation and regulation. What may be needed, as Dr. Onorato has said, is some sort of rewrite of one or the other document to get rid of the ambiguity. One of the things that will be important in that conversation is having Ted Sanderson around, since he wrote the legislation. Mr. Emidy stated that he will look into these issues and get something in writing for the Board members to review prior to the next meeting.

### 13. Announcements

The next meeting will be held on Monday, April 4, 2022.

### 14. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:49 A.M.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy  
Interim Director  
Interim State Historic Preservation Officer

DRAFT