



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

June 8, 2022

Location:

R.I. Department of Business Regulation
560 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, R.I.
DBR Board Room, First Floor

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Mr. Warren Ducharme, representing James Cambio, State Building Code Commissioner
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Interim State Historic Preservation Officer
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Ms. Roberta Groch, representing Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of
Statewide Planning
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Hilary Fagan, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department
of Environmental Management
Ms. Kaity Ryan
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide
Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Timothy Ives, Principal Archaeologist
Michaela Jergensen, Principal Reviewer RIDOT Projects
Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 A.M., Ms. Taylor, Chair, presiding.

2. For approval: Minutes of May 11, 2022, Commission meeting

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Mr. Schoettle, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2022, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft.

3. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. An update on Cemetery Weeks is on the agenda, but we are going to put that off until next month.
- b. Sarah Zurier provides the following information on the Conference Evaluation project, which is wrapping up. Our consultant, Susan West Montgomery, has shared a draft final report with findings, analysis, recommendations for future programs, and data from her research. She incorporated comments from reviews by Sarah Zurier, Joanna Doherty, and Mr. Emidy. We have shared the latest report with staff and several colleagues. The project will wrap up with an implementation plan by the end of June. Ms. Zurier will present the findings to the Commission at the July meeting.

- Mr. Schoettle asked about what the options identified are. Mr. Emidy replied that they include a series of community meetings to identify issues that towns are concerned with, HDC and other professional training, continuing Cemetery Weeks or something similar, and still some sort of gathering like the conference, but probably smaller. Ms. Zurier added that one suggestion is making staff available to make presentations about preservation topics at other conferences and gatherings.
- c. After last month's meeting, Mr. Emidy emailed the result of the Commission discussion about the 2022 Rhody Awards to PRI Executive Director Val Talmage and subsequently spoke with her by Zoom meeting. She determined that our best role is that of a sponsor, so that is what he agreed we would do. She asked if our staff would provide feedback on the nominations, which we did, and if he would present one of the awards, which he said he will. Over the following week, Val and RIHPHC staff and Mr. Emidy crafted a talking point statement to explain the situation. He will email it to Commissioners this week. It reads, "Since 2009, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission and Preserve Rhode Island have co-hosted the Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation to honor individuals, organizations and projects for preserving Rhode Island's historic resources. This collaboration between the state office for historic preservation and the statewide preservation advocacy organization has been valuable in building our preservation

- community. In order for the Commission to focus on statutory responsibilities, the partners have agreed that, in 2022 PRI will assume full management of the Rhody Awards. We are confident that the program will be in good hands at PRI and we continue to applaud and support the Rhodys.”
- d. The RI250 Commission continues to have monthly meetings. With Gaspee Days under way – this weekend is particularly full of events, including the parade on Saturday and commemorative burning on Sunday – there was a flurry of activity at the last meeting as we try to get the 250th Commission’s website and branding established.
 - e. In National Register news, the Woonsocket Company Mill/Bernon Mills Additional Information was approved by the National Park Service on May 25th. The State Review Board had a meeting on Monday, at which one preliminary determination, for Providence’s Atlantic Mills, was heard and approved, and three final nominations, which Ms. Doherty will share with you today, were approved
4. For consideration: State Historic Preservation Review Board action
 Final Approval: St. Columba’s, the Berkeley Memorial Chapel
 55 Vacluse Ave, Middletown

Ms. Doherty reported that, at its June 6th meeting, the State Review Board had considered and approved a final nomination for St. Columba’s, the Berkeley Memorial Chapel, at 55 Vacluse Avenue, in Middletown. St. Columba's Chapel is an English Gothic Revival-style church constructed in 1884-86 to designs by Wilson Eyre, Jr. of Philadelphia. A compact building consisting of a narrow, deep nave with a chancel telescoping off the east end, the chapel has exterior walls of rough-cut schist and granite and a steeply-pitched, slate-shingled, gable roof. A bellcote rises from the west end of the roof and buttresses delineate the window bays in the nave; at the corners, the buttresses are set on a diagonal. The principal entry is located in a gable-roof porch that extends off the west end of the south elevation. It features a pointed-arch doorway with a pair of wood doors. A shed-roof sacristy and shed-roof organ chamber extend off the east end of the north elevation. The interior walls are also of stone, floors are wood plank, and the vaulted ceiling is supported by decorative trusses and finished in diagonally-laid tongue-and-groove sheathing. The chapel includes a number of memorial stained-glass windows designed by the noted artist D. Maitland Armstrong, manufactured by the Tiffany Company, and installed in 1886-87. The large stained-glass window in the west elevation, installed in 1885, is attributed to the Belcher Mosaic Glass Company of New York City and Newark. The chapel is remarkably intact; alterations include the construction of a handicapped-access ramp at the main entry and the installation of eight wrought-iron chandeliers in 1932. In 1937, the roofline of the organ chamber was raised to accommodate the pipes of a new organ.

The St. Columba's property also includes a cypress-and-stone, Gothic Revival-style lych gate (1897), designed by the Boston-based architect Henry Vaughn. A burying ground

encircles the chapel and contains many stones carved by John Howard Benson and John Everett Benson of the John Stevens Shop in Newport, as well as an Art Moderne-style marker for the grave of Varick Frissell (1903-1931) by the sculptor Gerome Brush. A parish hall designed by William Burgin Architects of Newport was constructed at the north end of the property, some distance from the chapel, in 2001 and is non-contributing. Stone walls line the perimeter of the property and mature specimen trees dot the grounds.

Middletown's bucolic landscape began to attract summer residents as early as the 18th century; by the mid-19th century, several country estates had been established in the eastern part of town, known as "Paradise." In the summer of 1871, Eugene Sturtevant of Boston rented a home in Paradise and began buying up farmland in the area, laid out Indian Avenue, and platted 100 house lots. Indian Avenue developed slowly and never became as expansive as Newport's summer community, but by the 1880s it had enough of a population to support the construction of St. Columba's Chapel. The chapel was built in 1884-86 on land donated by Eugene Sturtevant and his wife, Mary Clark Sturtevant and with funds raised from the Indian Avenue summer community as well as donors from Newport. Wilson Eyre, Jr. of Philadelphia donated his architectural services, and the building was constructed by William Gosling, the stone mason who built Channing Memorial Church in Newport. Initially a mission church, St. Columba's became an independent parish in 1929.

Wilson Eyre, Jr. was born in Florence, Italy to a Philadelphia family. His family summered in Newport in the 1870s and 1880s. He trained for one year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's architecture program before joining the Philadelphia firm of James Peacock Sims in 1877. Eyre inherited the firm upon Sims' death in May of 1882, and five months later was staking the location of St. Columba's. Eyre worked independently until 1911, when he partnered with John Gilbert McIlvaine to form Wilson Eyre and McIlvaine. Commissions were primarily residential, particularly country houses, and mostly in the Philadelphia area, but Eyre also completed projects in Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and elsewhere. St. Columba's appears to be one of just two surviving buildings in Rhode Island designed by Eyre and a rare example of ecclesiastical work by the architect.

Henry Vaughn, who designed the lych gate at St. Columba's, was born in England and emigrated to Boston, where he developed a practice that specialized in Gothic Revival-style churches. The lych gate at St. Columba's was built in memory of Reverend Henry A. Coit, the first rector at St. Paul's School and an Indian Avenue summer resident, and his wife, Mary.

D. Maitland Armstrong was a lawyer-turned-painter who became a prolific stained-glass designer, beginning in the mid-1880s. He had summered in Newport and Paradise Valley in the 1860s, where his wife's family owned property. The windows at St. Columba's were an early commission and include one of his first figural designs, a window behind the altar depicting St. Michael. Armstrong's early work, including the windows at St.

Columba's, were manufactured by the Tiffany Company. In 1887, he established his own studio in New York City.

A motion to endorse the State Review Board approval was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Dr. Grefe. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

5. For consideration: State Historic Preservation Review Board action
Final Approval: Cedar Point Historic District
North Kingstown

Ms. Doherty reported that, at its June 6th meeting, the State Review Board considered and approved a final nomination for the Cedar Point Historic District, in North Kingstown. The Cedar Point Historic District occupies a small spit of land on the south side of Wickford Cove and contains five wood-frame, single-family dwellings built between 1872 and 1910, representing vernacular examples of Late Victorian and Colonial Revival architectural styles. Cedar Point is accessed via an unpaved road, Loop Drive, that extends across Wickford Cove and terminates in a small circle around which the five houses in the district are arrayed. Surrounded by water on three sides and bounded by a former railroad right-of-way on the south, Cedar Point has the feel of a secluded enclave.

The houses in the Cedar Point Historic District include the Clara and John Cranston House at 26 Loop Drive, a one-and-one-half story, wood-frame, Late Victorian-style cottage built in 1873. It is sheathed in wood clapboard siding with simple wood trim and has a one-story, hip-roofed, wrap-around porch with Queen Anne-style turned posts. The Charles H. and Julia L. Hunt House at 13 Loop Drive -- a modest version of the Second Empire or Mansard style -- was built by 1878. It is compact, two-stories tall, with wood clapboard siding and simple wood trim and has a one-story porch with decorative, bracketed posts. In 1880-81, Emma S. and John M. Hull built their home at 21 Loop Drive, a Late Victorian-style, two-stories-tall, single-family residence with a cross-gable and hip roof, wood clapboard and shingle siding, and a one-story, hip-roofed, open porch with Doric columns. The house at 31 Loop Drive was built for Mary A. and Noah Holloway in 1890. The L-shaped dwelling is two stories tall with a cross-gable roof and wood clapboard siding with wood trim. Door and window surrounds have molded drip caps, and the brick chimney has decorative corbeling. In 1909-10, Charles and Ada Post constructed the last house to be built in the district: the two-and-one-half stories tall, Colonial Revival-style residence at 49 Loop Drive. It has a front-gable roof, a rusticated concrete block foundation, wood clapboard and shingle siding, and a one-story, hip-roofed porch with Doric columns.

In 1871-72 a group of developers created Wickford's first residential subdivision plat on the 125-acre former John R. Sherman Farm, which was situated on the south side of Wickford Cove within easy walking distance of a new train station on Hamilton Avenue - now Boston Neck Road. Within that subdivision lay a small, self-contained, waterfront enclave called Cedar Point accessed via a private road, originally called Circle Avenue and later renamed Loop Drive and made a public street. By 1881, three summer cottages

had been constructed on Cedar Point. John Cranston, of 26 Loop Drive, was in manufacturing, Charles Hunt, of 13 Loop Drive, was a Providence police officer, and John Hull, of 21 Loop Drive, was a builder. From 1885-1902, the Hunt House was owned by Georgianna Pettey of Fall River, who dubbed it "Cedar Point Villa" and rented it out for short-term summer stays. By 1902, the extended family of Simeon and Mary Gardiner, who had long-established roots in Wickford, had acquired all three of these cottages and built a fourth house, at 31 Loop Drive, as a year-round residence for their daughter, creating a family compound that persisted for several decades. The fifth and final house in the district, 49 Loop Drive, was built as a permanent home for Charles Post, an oyster boat captain, and his wife.

The Cedar Point Historic District evolved in response to several historical trends that played out in Wickford in the late 19th century, including transportation improvements, the rise of the leisure tourism industry, and economic prosperity that was sufficiently widespread to allow not just wealthy but middle-class people to afford a modest home in a summer resort area. The houses on Cedar Point reflect popular architectural styles of the period, often combined to suit the homeowners' tastes and budgets. Cedar Point's scenic locale was conveniently situated near Wickford's bustling "downtown" and public transportation, but was cut off from surrounding areas by train tracks and a saltwater cove. It was a very small area – less than three acres – that became a self-contained residential enclave for three inter-related families, some of whose descendants continued to maintain ties to Cedar Point for more than a century. These factors all helped the tiny community that developed here between 1872 and 1910 to remain largely intact and, while each of the five houses have experienced some degree of alteration, the historic architectural character of the district, as a whole, endures.

Mr. Schoettle asked what the impetus for the nomination was. Ms. Doherty replied that the property owners in the district banded together, led by Dave Wrenn.

A motion to endorse the State Review Board approval was made by Dr. Grefe and seconded by Mr. Abbott. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

6. For consideration: State Historic Preservation Review Board action
Final Approval: Wakefield Historic District-Boundary Increase
South Kingstown

Ms. Doherty reported that, at its June 6th meeting, the State Review Board considered and approved a final nomination for a boundary increase at the Wakefield Historic District, in South Kingstown. As listed in 1996 and expanded in 2019, the Wakefield Historic District is a linear district that runs along Main Street, from Columbia Street on the north to Belmont Avenue on the south. Contributing resources are defined as those that relate to the early development of the village along the old Post Road - present-day Main Street - and/or the area's subsequent growth into South Kingstown's central commercial district. The district consists primarily of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings and includes examples of the Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Queen Anne, and Colonial

Revival styles.

The boundary expansion area includes three resources. Saugatucket Park, built between 1934 and 1936 on High Street is an approximately 3-acre public park designed by Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects. The park is roughly triangular in shape, bounded by High Street to the west, the ca. 1965 Wakefield Elementary School parcel to the north, and the Saugatucket River to the southeast. The terrain is gently sloping, except on the park's southeast edge, where the riverbank drops steeply. The park includes an asphalt-paved, loop path that encircles a grassy bowl. Park vegetation includes specimen trees planted along the path, leaving the center of the park open. Some, like the sweet gum, linden, ash, and maple trees at the park's southern end, date to the park's construction and are shown on the Olmsted Brothers plans. The Saugatucket River Footbridge, built in 1941, is a narrow, flat-arched trestle bridge that provides pedestrian access between Saugatucket Park on the northwest and the village center on the southeast. The bridge is approximately 150 feet long and about 8 feet wide and is supported by a series of six timber pile bents. Although the bridge's superstructure – including the metal railing system and wood deck – are not historic, much of the original substructure remains. The former Wakefield Post Office (1934-36) on Robinson Street was designed by Albert Harkness, a prominent Rhode Island architect. The two-stories tall, brick building was executed in a stripped-down Federal Revival style with a symmetrical facade, brick quoins, limestone trim, and decorative, metal filigree panels.

The creation of what would become Saugatucket Park was spearheaded by local businessman Bernon Helme, who sought to beautify and improve Main Street through the development a public park. To that end, Helme raised funds among village residents and business owners to acquire the parcel, which was then donated to the town. In 1932, as chair of the town's park commission, Helme engaged Olmsted Brothers -- the preeminent landscape architecture firm of the period -- to design the park. Percival Gallagher, a partner in the firm, soon produced plans for a "promenade park" and construction began in 1934, with help from the Civil Works Administration (CWA), a federal jobs-creation program. The park was completed in 1936. At the same time, under the auspices of the Public Works Administration, a new post office was being built on Robinson Street. Its simple form and clean lines are typical of the New Deal era, while other design elements reference the Colonial Revival. Albert Harkness, who designed the post office, had trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and worked at some of the most prominent firms in Providence and New York City before establishing his own practice in Rhode Island's capital city in 1919. In 1999, the post office was decommissioned and is now an office building.

The Saugatucket River Footbridge was constructed in 1941, to connect Main Street with Saugatucket Park and the nearby elementary school. Designed by Leon L. Holland, a civil engineer, it replaced an earlier footbridge that had been constructed in the same location in 1908. The bridge has been repaired several times over the years, most recently around 2010, but retains much of its original substructure and continues to provide an important link between downtown Wakefield and Saugatucket Park, across the river.

Ms. Taylor stated that it is nice to see WPA projects being recognized. Dr. Grefe asked if the park is being repaired. Ms. Doherty stated that it is, and that the town and the department of recreation are supportive and interested in the history of the park.

A motion to endorse the State Review Board approval was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Mr. Schoettle. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

7. For Information: Update on the 2022 Rhode Island Heritage Festival

Donna Alqassar reported that, after two years of Covid 19 restrictions, she is excited to announce that we plan to hold Rhode Island's 44th Annual Heritage Festival in person on Saturday, September 17th, at the WaterFire Arts Center. For the past 43 years, we have celebrated our state's diverse heritage community by hosting an annual heritage festival. This festival bridges Rhode Islanders' cultures and expressions of creative talent while fostering community engagement. During the festival, over 40 Rhode Island heritage groups will be presenting various cultural art forms that have been passed down from generation to generation.

This year, Coyote Brass, from the Rhode Island National Guard's 88th Army Band, will open the festival and lead our Flag Parade. We are honored to have Governor Dan McKee provide a welcome message during the festival's opening remarks. Then we will have the Bavarian Brothers sing the National Anthem a capella. This year's program will have storytelling from Arte Latino of New England and the R.I. Black Storytellers. We will have several vocal performances and dance groups, including African, Asian, South American, and European performers. We will have hula, belly dancing, and even Bollywood dance routines. We will have moving musical performances, like the Puerto Rican and Caribbean drum rhythms from Yoruba 2, the renowned Korean harpist Seyon Kim, and the gifted drumbeats of Sidy Maïga from Mali. SheaFashion has partnered with us again to choreograph a multicultural fashion show featuring traditional and ceremonial clothing.

Heritage groups will have informational table displays and cultural items for sale. There will be a children's area where we will have free crafts and face painting. The non-profit organization Books Are Wings will give away free books. The Providence Children's Museum and the Greater Providence YMCA will engage children with hands-on activities. There will also be food trucks offering an array of traditional foods and drinks.

After hosting two virtual celebrations, we learned the importance of documenting the Heritage Festival. With your support in growing the heritage program and Mr. Emidy's help in adding the funds needed to secure a videographer, Ms. Alqassar was happy to report that we will be working again with Luminous Creative Agency. We plan to create four one-hour videos that capture this year's festivities from the footage we will take at the festival, with the intent to premiere them on our YouTube channel in February 2023.

Ms. Alqassar encouraged the Commissioners to please save the date of Saturday,

September 17th, to come join us as we celebrate our fellow Rhode Islanders' wonderfully diverse and rich cultural heritages.

Ms. Taylor recommended that, in her experience at the Newport Historical Society, one-hour videos on YouTube are hard for people, but 20 minutes is better. Dr. Grefe added that, if we are thinking about how the videos will be used, think about teachers using them as modules. They could very easily be turned into a web resource. Ms. Alqassar thanked the commissioners for these helpful ideas.

8. For Information: Update on the RIHPHC executive director hiring process

Ms. Taylor reported that she has assembled a search committee of three people: Lucie Searle, Wendy Nicholas, Ron Onorato, plus herself. The application window has closed. Applications were received from 22 potentially viable candidates. Ms. Taylor has begun surveying members of the preservation community about what they are looking for in leadership. Outside input is necessary for a good process. She will set up two meetings at the end of June: a public, open meeting to establish the hiring process, and an open meeting that will go into executive session to discuss potential applicants. Potential dates for these were discussed, but not decided on.

Ms. Groch asked if it usual for a search committee hiring a state employee to not have a state employee on it. Ms. Taylor responded that it is okay. She is in contact with the state human resources office and they have said that it is fine.

Mr. Abbott stated that scheduling interviews was difficult the last time. Ms. Taylor stated that there will be some virtual meetings this time, which should make it easier.

Ms. Zurier stated that, if there is a way that she can be a conduit for anonymous feedback, she is happy to do that. Ms. Taylor replied that she has initiated a system where any comments or input will be anonymous to the search committee.

9. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on July 13, 2022.

Dr. Grefe announced that the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Rhode Island Historical Society will be celebrated at the John Brown House, in Providence, on Saturday [June 11th]. There will be anniversary ice cream, cake, and performances on the lawn. The new exhibit on *HMS Gaspee* is also opening. Ms. Taylor stated that she had a preview of the exhibit and that it is a vey good presentation.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:13am.

Minutes recorded by,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey D. Emdy". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jeffrey D. Emdy
Interim Executive Director