STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
June 6, 2022
9:30 am

Location: Community College of Rhode Island – Knight Campus
Room 4090 (aka Board Room)
400 East Avenue, Warwick, R.I.

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Dr. Marisa Angell Brown
Dr. Ronald Onorato, Chairman
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Dr. Patrick Malone
Mr. Keith Stokes
Ms. Martha Werenfels, AIA
Vacant
Vacant (archaeologist)
Vacant (architectural historian)
Vacant (landscape architect/historian)

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

   The meeting was called to order at 9:35 A.M. by Chairman Onorato.

2. Approval of minutes of February 7, 2022 meeting

   On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Dr. Brown, the Review Board unanimously VOTED TO APPROVE the Minutes of February 7, 2022, without changes.

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

Dr. Onorato explained that there have been cases over the past two years where buildings that were clearly eligible for listing in the National Register were demolished or in danger of demolition. The state laws are unclear on some of the details of how reviews of these cases are conducted. Board member Pat Malone is very interested in this topic. He is travelling and thus unable to be at the meeting today, but has asked to have a statement on the topic read for the members' benefit and into the minutes.

Ned Connors read Dr. Malone's statement, which is attached to this document.

Dr. Onorato stated that there are multiple issues as he sees it:

- There are inconsistencies in the language of the law [RIGL 42-45] and the Procedures of the Commission [530-RICR-10-00-1]. These could be gone through and a process initiated to bring them in line.
- An area of concern is how buildings that are clearly eligible, but have not been formally determined so, be so determined in an emergency.
- Finally, towns often ignore the regulations that require review of their undertakings.

Mr. Abbott stated that maybe the reason that the towns ignore the regulations is that there is no penalty. Maybe there should be a financial penalty.

Mr. Sanderson stated that one question is where the Commission's power lies. When the law and the procedures were written, there was no appetite for historic preservation in the state. It was a "catch-as-catch-can" situation. The consensus at the time of writing was that it would do harm to the Commission's standing in the state to propose tougher regulations. This is completely different from the federal situation, where they gave teeth to the regulations. Regarding the penalty, the theory behind setting it up the way it is was that the agency [or municipality] does not want to end up in the governor's office over a preservation dispute. For the most part, the governor's office doesn't want to be involved in these disputes. One of the motives of the regulations was to capture instances where, if the state knew they had a historic building, we could tell them that they should follow our advice.

Mr. Sanderson continued, stating that the question of eligibility is less of a problem than what Dr. Malone and Mr. Connors said. The staff is quite good at doing this. The survey is complete enough that the information can be gathered relatively quickly.

Ms. Taylor stated that the idea of adding another level of bureaucracy may not move the needle. The Commission's role is minimal, but we do have the opportunity to have some influence. We are talking about two different things when we talk about privately-owned properties versus municipally-owned.

Mr. Sanderson stated that one of the tricks of the trade is to get other people interested who will object to demolitions because the Commission has the right to get information, it can slow the process down, and this gives them the opportunity to issue a letter that may get

public attention. Ms. Taylor added that one potential course of action is to give more ink and visibility to these instances.

Dr. Onorato posed the idea of forming a small working group to define some of these issues and what the options are. The State Review Board has no ability to do anything itself, it advises the Commission. He suggested that we have a working group to report back to the Review Board. He asked that any of the Board members who are interested in being in the working group contact Mr. Emidy.

Dr. Brown stated that sometimes it feels like we are silo-ed; we need to know who the allies are around the state. Some may not be obvious. We need to be able to reach out to them when these things come up.

4. Interim Executive Director's Report

Mr. Emidy reported:

a) Nomination processing updates
    i. Joanna Doherty continues working on writing nominations that have been in our queue for a while. The Board will see two of those today: St. Columba's and Wakefield. She is also finalizing the Newport Historic District nomination that you saw at the last meeting.
    ii. The inquiries have slowed a bit lately, so we're able to get into our backlog somewhat.
    iii. We did receive one more that we will see at the next meeting.
    iv. Properties listed
        1. *Woonsocket Company Mill – Additional Information* was accepted by the National Park Service in May
b) The agenda says that he has a National Register program staffing update. That's a cut and paste error. He has nothing to report on staffing.
c) The executive director position was posted in early May and closed May 23rd. Ruth Taylor is leading the search committee.

The sequence of National Register reviews was changed from that shown on the agenda in consideration of time and maintaining a quorum.

5. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places final review
   Cedar Point Historic District
   North Kingstown

Ms. Doherty made a presentation for final review of a 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. Abbott stated that there appear to have been many lots platted, but a few houses were developed on multiple lots. Kathy Cavanaugh replied that the developers were ambitions. There wasn't a lot of suburban development pressure, even on the larger portion of the plat.

Dr. Brown asked if we know more about the social history. Ms. Doherty replied that Ms. Cavanaugh added more to the nomination. Ms. Cavanaugh stated that these were not wealthy people, and thus, they are not elaborate cottages. Dr. Brown asked if they were designed with servants in mind. Ms. Cavanaugh replied that she did not find that in her research.

A motion to approve nomination of Cedar Point Historic District to the National Register was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Dr. Brown. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

6. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places preliminary review
   Atlantic Mills Complex
   120 Manton Avenue
   Providence

Mr. Emidy made a presentation for preliminary review for National Register eligibility for the Atlantic Mills Complex, at 120 Manton Avenue, in Providence. This is a preliminary review in anticipation of a potential tax credit project. It was brought to us by Ryan Cameron, of MacRostie Historic Advisors.

Atlantic Mills is one of the most recognizable mills in the state, with its two, domed, stairtower roofs in alternating red and white visible from Route 6 and from much of Olneyville, the neighborhood in which it is located. There are 15 distinct buildings or structures in the complex, dating from 1863 to the 1920s.

The Atlantic Delaine Company was founded in 1851 by five prominent Providence industrialists: Charles Tillinghast James, George W. Chapin, Josiah Chapin, Paris Hill, and Joseph Carpenter. After a bit of a kerfuffle among the five, George W. Chapin emerged as the dominant figure in the company. Initially, the company produced a type of woolen fabric known as delaine, a wool muslin that was one of the earliest mass-produced worsteds. The process of producing wool textiles included dying, finishing, and crabbing the wool. The crabbing process, new to the industry at the time the Atlantic Delaine company was organized, reduced the shrinkage of the fabric by running the wool under alternating hot and cold water. Employing this technique helped secure the company's reputation as one of the finest producers of worsted fabrics and the onset of the Civil War brought high demand for wool cloth for military uniforms.

In the mid-19th century, the land in the vicinity of Olneyville Square was sparsely developed,

primarily defined by large agricultural tracts outside of the village center. The Olneyville location was chosen because the Woonasquatucket River could provide process water for the factory and because a rail line paralleled the river into downtown Providence. Power for the factory came not from the river, but from Corliss steam engines. The first mill constructed for the Atlantic Delaine Company was erected in 1851 on Manton Avenue from the designs of architect Thomas Alexander Tefft. It was demolished sometime between 1970 and 1995. In addition to the mill, the company constructed worker housing, which is no longer extant, along Manton Avenue and Delaine Street to attract workers to the neighborhood.

Between 1863 and 1871, the mill complex was substantially expanded. The second building on the site was Worsted Mill No. 2, constructed to the north of and set back from the 1851 mill. Designed by Clifton A. Hall, the building is four stories tall, 205 feet long and 162 feet wide. It has 19 bays on the façade, with segmental arched window openings, many of which retain double-hung, wood sash, and some granite trim. The most striking feature of the building is the cylindrical stair tower centered on the façade. With its ornamental brickwork, multiple window configurations, and metal dome topped by a lantern, the stair tower rises a full two stories above the roof of the mill. Worsted Mill No. 2 alleviated crowding in the original mill and allowed for growth in production to meet the heightened demand for textiles during the Civil War. It also allowed for expansion of its product line; by1865 the firm continued to produce worsteds but was also known for its fine alpacas.

Also constructed in 1863 to designs by Clifton Hall is a brick gasholder located on the east side of Aleppo Street, just northeast of the mill. The cylindrical, brick building is 50 feet in diameter and 21 feet tall. The original, domed roof was replaced with a flat roof in the early 20th century. The gasholder had a metal gas tank that rested in a water-filled pit, and it could store 27,000 cubic feet of gas. Window openings have been cut into the walls over the years, and the building converted to office space. An addition was constructed south of the building in about 1937. It is a two-story, brick structure, essentially triangular in plan. The building was constructed for Arpin Van Lines, a moving company. It has also recently been rehabilitated.

Clifton Hall also designed a Gasworks Building along Aleppo Street to the north of the Gasholder. Also built in 1863, the brick, one-story building is 138 feet long. The center five of the 13 bays project slightly from the façade wall plane. The Gasholder and Gasworks provided gas for lighting the new mill. Artificial light made it possible for the new mill to be wider than the original mill, which relied exclusively on natural light. A coal furnace located in the Gasworks released flammable gas which was stored in the Gasholder and piped into the factory buildings.

Despite thriving in its early years, the Atlantic Delaine Company suffered from the economic downturn that resulted from the Panic of 1873. Like many other businesses in Providence, the company filed for bankruptcy in March of 1874. The complex languished for five years, and 1879, a group of investors incorporated the Atlantic Mills Company and purchased the land, mill buildings, machinery, and worker housing of the Atlantic Delaine Company for just over $300,000. The incorporation of the Atlantic Mills Company resulted in renewed investment in the complex. Worsted Mill No. 3 was constructed in 1882 to match Worsted Mill No. 2. The tower of Worsted Mill No. 3 differs slightly from the tower of Mill No. 2 in

the window shape of those on the third floor. Its lantern was also lost around 1997. Mills No. 2 and No. 3 are connected by the Intermediate Building, also known as Building 2½, a four-story, brick building constructed about 1882.

The complex also includes:

- Pipe Shop/Paint Shop, constructed ca. 1871
- Dyeing and Finishing building, constructed in 1871-72
- Buildings 8 and 19, constructed by 1875, both of which were later attached to Mill No. 2
- Engine Room/Boiler House, constructed in 1882
- Mill No. 4, constructed in 1899, which contained space for dry finishing, packing and storage
- Store House/Filter House/Building No. 17
- Engine Room, built about 1900
- Mill No. 5, constructed in 1893 to designs by Frank P. Sheldon,

The company was cited in the 1889 publication, *The Industrial Advantages of Providence, RI,* as "one of the largest and most important industrial enterprises in the State." Further description reveals the scale of the production facility at that time:

> The products of the mills consist of worsted and cotton warp fabrics for ladies' dress goods chiefly, and they have achieved a national reputation for their excellence and uniform good quality. The mills are comprised in a number of large buildings, which are fully equipped with the latest improved and most expensive special machinery… It embraces 41,620 worsted spindles, 34,368 cotton spindles, 58 double cards, 47 combs and 2,160 looms, besides all other necessary auxiliary appliances, the whole of which is operated by powerful steam engines, and about 2,100 operatives find employment in the mills.

The 1890s was a decade of continued growth, despite another change in ownership. Investors from Maine purchased the company in late 1892. All of the manufacturing facilities in the Atlantic Mills complex were transferred to the Atlantic Mills Company of Maine. Several new buildings were constructed under the stewardship of the Maine investors.

The Atlantic Mills Company's primary distributor, A.D. Juillard & Company of New York, purchased all of the assets of the Atlantic Mills Company of Maine and the Union Manufacturing Company of Maine in 1904. The new company, the Atlantic Mills Company of Rhode Island, operated the mill complex from 1905 through 1953. Several additions to the complex were made during this period, and additional worker housing was built on Curtis Street in 1907; this is no longer extant.

After World War II, the northern textile industry, including in Providence, declined precipitously. For several decades textile production had been shifting to southern states, and this trend became more pronounced in the years following the war. In July 1953, a merger with Union Merchants and Manufacturers, the third largest textile weaving company in America, was announced. The 2400 workers continued working at the plant until October

1953, when textile production ceased.

The Atlantic Mills Complex is significant under Criterion A for its role in the textile industry in Rhode Island. Also under Criterion C as a relatively intact group of industrial buildings that exemplify 19th century methods of construction and as a prominent example of mid-late 19th century mill design by notable local architects Clifton A. Hall and Frank P. Sheldon. The period of significance for the complex appears to be 1863 - the date of construction of the earliest remaining building - to 1953, when textile production ceased.

Dr. Brown asked if we know what the specific ties were to the Civil War, stating that they are worth exploring. Mr. Emidy replied that we do not at this time, but that is something that we can pass on to the author. Dr. Brown also mentioned that information about the workers and any strikes would be worth exploring.

A motion that the Atlantic Mills Complex appears eligible for listing in the National Register and for approval of for further study toward a nomination was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Mr. Sanderson. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

7. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places final review
Wakefield Historic District (Boundary Increase)
South Kingstown

Ms. Doherty made a presentation for final review 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.

Mr. Abbott stated that he believes that the additions to the district make sense. Dr. Onorato agreed.

A motion to approve the boundary increase to the Wakefield Historic District National Register nomination was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Mr. Sanderson. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

8. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places final review
   St. Columba’s, the Berkeley Memorial Chapel
   55 Vaucluse Avenue, Middletown

Ms. Doherty made a presentation for final review of a nomination for St. Columba’s, the Berkeley Memorial Chapel, at 55 Vaucluse 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, built in 1897 to a design by 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 approve nomination of St. Columba’s, the Berkeley Memorial Chapel, to the National Register was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Dr. Brown. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

9. Announcements

The next meeting will be held on Monday, August 8, 2022.

10. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:41 A.M.

Minutes recorded by,

Jeffrey D. Emidy
Interim Director
Interim State Historic Preservation Officer

STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR PATRICK MALONE, JUNE 6, 2022

A quasi-public agency recently requested approval for demolition of two historic buildings that it owns but no longer uses. Its engineering consultant claimed that the buildings were "outdated, unused and in disrepair." At a minimum, the proposed demolition of these handsome, historically significant, and visually prominent buildings deserves a thorough historical study, a structural investigation, and an evaluation for adaptive reuse.

In this case, the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission determined that the buildings were "potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places." The Commission's letter to the engineering consultant went on to say that "While there appear to be no other prudent or feasible alternatives for the buildings, the demolition of the complex would be considered an adverse effect on the historical resource. We suggest that mitigation of the adverse effect be accomplished through the preparation of a Rhode Island Historic Resources Archive (RIHRA) documentation of the complex."

Thanks to opposition by local preservationists and enlightened review by the managers of the property, the demolition of these particular buildings no longer seems assured. There may indeed be "prudent and feasible alternatives." However, the RIHRA documentation has been underway, and the buildings are still under serious threat. At the same time, our Commission is looking closely at the whole issue of demolition or heavy alteration, particularly as it relates to state, municipal, or quasi-public properties that should have some level of protection if they are deemed potentially eligible.

One of the problems facing the Commission is that many properties whose historical significance now seems obvious were not identified as such in town

surveys, the Historic American Engineering Record's Rhode Island inventory, or National Register nominations. As a result, they do not have state listing. Some buildings were simply not old enough when a survey was completed. Others may have seemed like just another example of a numerous type, but have now become rare survivals of an endangered species. Interest in particular subjects, such as commercial architecture or public works, has increased over time, and new historical studies continue to identify overlooked gems worthy of our attention. We now recognize that what happened inside a building can give it a high level of historical significance, even if its exterior design is not particularly impressive.

Too often we see the value of a property only when a developer considers a project and wants tax credits badly enough to pay for an investigation. A proposal by a state entity, a municipality, or a quasi-public agency to tear down or radically alter an historic property should trigger a rigorous review by the Commission. We have to be very cautious about accepting the proposer's own determination that there is no other option. Identifying alternatives is something the Commission does very well and one reason it employs an historical architect.

There is, unfortunately, ambiguity in current state law defining the role of the commission. Public or quasi-public agencies or instrumentalities are required to obtain **"the advice"** of the Commission before taking actions that might damage properties that are **"included in the state register."** There is some question about whether a property that is **potentially eligible** for the National Register of Historic Places qualifies for this very limited oversight by the Commission. The executive director should review current laws and regulations and identify contradictions or ambiguities. Then legislators with an understanding of preservation could introduce new legislation that would clarify the role of the Commission and precisely define its powers.

The Commission has very little time (only 30 days are allowed) to act on a request for determination of adverse or no adverse effect. The staff now responds to almost twenty of these requests dealing with eligible properties each month. The challenge is even more difficult when the eligibility of a property has not been established. No one on the State Review Board is questioning the expertise of the Commission staff or wants to undermine its authority. The question is whether a subcommittee or individual members of the SRB could assist in making rapid determinations of eligibility in **special cases involving unlisted properties with obvious historical significance.**

Some SRB members have particular qualifications which could be valuable in making determinations of eligibility, objecting to proposed actions, or suggesting appropriate mitigation of adverse effects. RIHRA documentation may not be enough for a few properties that are scheduled for demolition or heavy alteration. There are special cases that deserve detailed description, intensive historical research, and high quality photography or measured drawings. The Commission staff can suggest capable consultants with the experience to handle such documentation.