

Minutes  
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission  
June 1, 2015  
Meeting Room  
Great Barrington Fire Station  
Great Barrington, MA 01230

ATTENDING:

- *Members:* Don Howe, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, Bill Nappo, David Rutstein
- *Town Officers:* Selectboard members Ed Abrahams and Bill George; Town Manager Jennifer Tabakin

MINUTES OF APRIL 6, 2015

- On a motion by Gary and second by David, the April 6, 2015 minutes were approved unanimously.

REVIEW AND VOTE ON HISTORICAL SITE APPLICATION ZONING BYLAW 7.1-12 ROOM LIMITS  
79 BRIDGE ST. (SEARLES HIGH SCHOOL SITE)

Attorney Kate McCormick, representing 179 Bridge St. Realty LLC stated that her client had submitted a letter of intent in February. Negotiations were completed on May 14 and a formal application had been submitted for review at the June 1 meeting. The reference bylaw authorizes deviation from room limits in structures judged to be historically, architecturally and/or culturally significant to Great Barrington. 179 Bridge St. Realty is currently preparing preliminary plans for a 95 room upscale hotel to be completed by the end of June. They will file for a special permit in mid-July.

1. Commission Comments On Application:

- A. *Item 6A Buildings-Structures, Style/Form:* The 1898 building is in the Georgian Revival style and not Queen Anne. The latter has been cited as the style over the years, probably as a result of the passage in the 1898 School Committee report in the *Great Barrington Annual Town Report*: "style of architecture adopted by the American colonies in the time of Queen Anne." Queen Anne reigned from 1702 to 1714 and the current style of architecture during that period was Georgian (1700-1780 are the generally accepted dates for this style).
- B. *Item 7 Narrative Description:* The Commission felt that describing the results of the alterations and additions in 1929 and 1937 as having "compromised the architectural integrity of the building" isn't supported by how the building appears today. Changes have been made but the overall character, shape and details of the building continue to convey its historical appearance.
- C. *Item 8 Historical Narrative:* The date of the addition of two inserts is 1929 and not 1928. The date the gym was added is 1937 and not 1935.
- D. *Item 9 Statement of Significance:* Under the paragraph about architectural distinction, the style should read Georgian Revival, not Queen Anne/Georgian Revival. The paragraph concerning the yield of prehistory or history relates to archaeology and isn't pertinent to this project.

2. Summary Of Significance of Searles High School (1898)

- A. **Summary Historical Background:** In response to the need to replace the structurally unsound high school, constructed in 1870 at the end of a lane opposite St. James Episcopal Church, at its 1896 annual meeting, the town voted to build a new high school "at a cost not to exceed thirty thousand dollars." A committee was appointed to execute the project. Meanwhile, Edward F. Searles, who was purchasing property surrounding his estate, had practically encircled the high school. He naturally coveted the high school site to round out his desired boundaries.

Searles offered to purchase the McTigue lot, near Bryant School, for the new school in exchange for the current school property. He also offered to "assume the entire responsibility for the construction of a new and extensive High School building. . . . with the plan drawn by Henry Vaughan of Boston." Searles would pay all the bills for the school. He would draw funds from the \$30,000 town appropriation, to be turned over to him, and the remainder from

his own pocket. Needless to say, the Committee unanimously resolved to accept Searles's "very generous and public spirited undertaking."

Ground was broken in July 1896 and construction crews worked to early December when it was boxed in until spring. Work resumed in April 1897 and completed in January 1898.

The building was a *tour de force* of the Georgian Revival style, a striking addition to Great Barrington's architectural catalogue. The interior featured school and recitation rooms with 18' high ceilings and tall windows and chandeliers to provide sufficient light and fresh air. There were separate entrances for boys and girls. The second story boasted 22' high vaulted ceilings and Kellogg Hall, a large assembly area with a stage that could seat 300 people. The hall was named after the Kellogg sisters who had operated Rose Cottage Seminary, a girls' boarding school in the mid-19th century. A niece, Mary Francis Sherwood (1819-1891), who had taught at the school, married Mark Hopkins who amassed a fortune as the organizer of the Central Pacific Railroad. Hopkins died in 1878 and Mary eventually married Edward Searles (1841-1920) in 1887. She had hired Searles as a designer for her home in Nob Hill, San Francisco and Kellogg Terrace, her mansion in Great Barrington.

Sources:

"Report of the Committee On the New High School Building and Grounds," in *Annual Report of the Officers of the Town of Great Barrington, Mass, 1898*.

"Report[s] of the School Committee and Superintendent of Schools" in *Annual Report for the Town of Great Barrington, 1938*.

Bernard Drew, *Great Barrington. Great Town. Great History*. Great Barrington Historical Society, 1999.

Lila S. Parrish, "Searles High School, Great Barrington, Massachusetts," in *The Centennial Book of Searles High School Alumni*, 1998.

James N. Parrish, Form B inventory form, Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1980

David Carpenter, Searles High School Review Form for Historical Site Application Zoning Bylaw 7.10.2.

- B. **Summary of Building's Significance:** Searles High School is historically and architecturally significant to Great Barrington. The building embodies associative and design values and has maintained its architectural integrity
- 1) Associative Value: characteristics and aspects of the property's history link it with historic persons
    - a. **Edward Searles** (1841-1920): as a designer and the master of Kellogg Terrace (Searles Castle) and a benefactor to Great Barrington, he is clearly an important link to its history.
    - b. **Henry Vaughan** (1845-1917)
      - Vaughan is a distinguished architect and pioneer in the introduction of English, neo-Palladian and Georgian forms.
      - He produced dozens of churches and school buildings, as well as plans for one of the largest ecclesiastical structures of [the 20th ] century, the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C..
      - His biographer William Morgan called "Vaughan's buildings . . . the best argument for his placement in the pantheon of notable American scholar-architects, along with [Richard] Upjohn, [Charles Follen] McKim and [Ralph Adams] Cram."
      - Lack of Documentation of his Work There is a dearth of documentary material about Vaughan and his work: there was no family to save and pass on his work; his office had no telephone, typewriter or secretary; no office records

survive; specifications were written in longhand. With so few written records upon which to draw, the primary sources for a study of Henry Vaughan must be the buildings themselves.

#### Searles and Vaughan's Close Relationship

- It is virtually certain that Henry Vaughan designed everything that Searles built.
- From the mid-1880's until his death, Vaughan was involved in dozens of Searles-sponsored projects: schools, churches, and castles, organ cases, tombs, and remodeling work.
- Vaughan, Searles and Kellogg Terrace Vaughan was involved in the design of several improvements and additions to Kellogg Terrace from 1884 until its completion in 1888.
  - This includes design of the Roman Doric Garden Temple - the terminal feature of the reflecting pool behind Searles Castle
  - Vaughan surely must have decorated the English Baroque music room at Kellogg Terrace, for he designed the 25-foot oak case for the giant pipe organ that Searles installed there.

(Source: William Morgan, The Almighty Wall. The Architecture of Henry Vaughan (MIT Press 1983))

c. ***History of Education in the Great Barrington Community:*** For nearly a century and a quarter the lives of a majority of Great Barrington residents, and those of surrounding towns, were shaped by the Searles schools.

d. ***Distinguished Educators :*** Many individuals, such as School Committee Chair, Charles Giddings, George Argonal Taylor, the first African-American teacher in Great Barrington, Principal John Clark, Coach Mike Alphonso, Superintendent Russell H. Bellows and teacher Kathleen McDermott, made their mark on the lives of the students.

- 2) Design value: The building illustrates the Georgian Revival Style. Searles High School is a prominent local example of an architectural trend begun in the latter 19th century and which continues to this day. In the late 19th century, American architects, inspired by the 1876 Centennial focus on colonial America, began to look to their own national past for appropriate models. Our Town Hall (1876), built in this period, is a notable local example of the Colonial Revival style.

Architects also had to find ways to apply 18th century details to buildings that were decidedly 19th C. in size and function, such as railroad stations and public schools.

So, on the Searles building we find such Georgian elements as:

- Hip roofs
- sash window with wooden bars
- modillion cornices
- quoins
- a high architectural basement
- belt course
- Palladian five-part composition of a central block connected by hyphens to identical dependencies

- 3) *The Original Building Has Maintained its Integrity*: The standard simple field test to determine the integrity of a building is if a resident of Great Barrington in the late 19th or early 20th centuries could return to town in 2015 and still be able to recognize the property as it exists today. It's clear that the overall physical appearance of the building continues to convey its architectural significance.

There have been changes over the years. The most egregiously negative alteration are the modern aluminum windows installed in the primary facade in the 1970s. These replaced the graceful original 9/9 and 6/6 wooden sash windows and totally neutered that key element of its character on the south facade. Fortunately, the 6/6 and 9/9 original windows on the north facade are extant.

### 3. Recommendations Re: Preservation of the Historic Architecture

Part of the Historical Commission's responsibilities in these proceedings is to present recommendations about the architecture of the building. We realize you face challenges in adaptively re-using this building but hope they can be overcome and that the entire building can be preserved and recognized nationwide as a distinctive 5-star hotel, housed in a century and a quarter-old classic Georgian Revival landmark, and become a prime destination for Great Barrington.

- A. **Specific Recommendations to Preserve the Architectural Features of the Building that Define its Visual Character**: The following visual aspects and physical features that comprise the appearance of the Searles High School building are what gives this building its own identity and its special visual character. The Historical Commission recommends preservation of these key features. We also emphasize that this list is not exhaustive. Following the guidelines in the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards* will ensure full deference to preserving the building's architectural character.

- 1) The overall shape of the building, the Palladian five-part composition of a central block connected by hyphens to identical dependencies (wings) is an important element in its visual character.
- 2) Roof: The following elements should be retained.
  - The hip roofs on the east and west dependencies and the front-facing pedimented gabled roof with its raking cornice on the central block. (Raking Cornice: a cornice following the slope of a gable, pediment or roof)
  - The cornice with modillions beneath the east and west eaves of the central block
  - The massive, arched brick chimneys with decorative belt courses.
- 3) Openings
  - The tall (12' high) wooden 9/9 and 6/6 wooden sash windows with decorative brick lintel courses should be preserved and replicas installed to replace the intrusive aluminum models on the primary facade.
  - The rhythmic fenestration pattern of the windows is an important feature and should be maintained
  - Decorative windows such as the round (oculus or roundel) windows in the pediments of the central block are key features.
- 4) Exterior Materials that Should be Preserved
  - Basement story: the raised foundation of native blue dolomite, mined from the Hopkins Quarry on Quarry St.

- Envelope: the water struck (or "soft mud") brick, laid in Flemish bond, for the walls, the pressed brick (molded under pressure) for decorative embellishments and the Indiana limestone used for the window sills
  - The decorative terra cotta brick arched surround and flanking pilasters to the paired, five-panel main entrance doors, as well as its decorative metal grillwork covering the half-round transom window are important features.
  - Quoins at the corners
  - Patterned brick aprons beneath the windows
  - The belt course of Pennsylvania brick between the first and second floors, including the section of a "broken" belt course on the south facade.
- 4) The Gym: was constructed in 1937 and '38 and designed by Morris Maloney of Springfield to answer the school's urgent need for a gym and assembly space. The primary facade of this building, with its engaged and fluted rectangular columns and recessed wall and with relief bronze lettering on the generous frieze, is an impressive piece of civic architecture, strongly evocative of the art deco designs during this period. Indeed, it's probably the only building with this sort of design in Great Barrington and should be preserved.
- 5) The Annex: Constructed in 1959-60 and designed by architect John H. Fisher, Pittsfield, this building does not possess any distinctive architectural features.
- 6) New Additions: New work should be differentiated from the old and be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of the original building. An addition should not appear to be part of the original building. When the project is done it should be clear what is old and what is new.

**B. Follow The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings**

*(Secretary's\_Standards\_and\_Guidelines\_for\_Rehabilitation.pdf)*: As the responsible stewards of this historic property, we urge you to adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards in project planning and execution. These standards provide excellent professional guidelines for renovating an historic property while preserving the features that convey its architectural values.

- C. Include a Preservation Architect on Your Project Team:** A preservation architect has the sensibilities, skill and experience in meeting the challenges that old buildings present. They know how to change a structure to accommodate the owner's program without violating its essential identity.

Finding Vote: On a motion by Gary and second by David, the Commission unanimously passed 179 Bridge Street Realty LLC's application under Zoning Bylaw 7.10.2. The vote affirms that the Searles property is culturally, architecturally and historically significant to Great Barrington. The Commission congratulated and thanked Vijay Mahida and his team on submitting an application with solid documentation and looks forward to working with him as the project unfolds.

Discussion

- Jennifer Tabakin suggested including famous people, such as W.E.B. Dubois, who have graduated from Searles High School in the report. David responded that idea was good but that Dubois had graduated from the previous high school. He was, however, a speaker at the 1929 commencement.

- David noted that the plaque honoring Coach Alphonso is no longer in its original place. He and David Carpenter will try to locate it.

#### HOUSATONIC SCHOOL FORM B PROJECT

- Background: The town is preparing to issue a third RFP for the sale of the school. To make this edition as attractive as possible to potential developers the town needs to verify that the building is eligible for historic tax credits. A privately owned building is eligible for historic tax credits if it is listed on the National Register or is judged by the Massachusetts Historical Commission to be *eligible for listing*. The school is neither on the National Register nor, inexplicably, the town architectural survey, (1985). The Massachusetts Historical Commission requires a completed Form B inventory form to determine eligibility for NR listing.
- Architectural Historian: Because of the lengthy, arduous and exacting nature of the Commission's project to research the site to complete Form B, Paul recommended to the Town Manager that the town hire a consultant architectural historian to complete the work. The Commission prepared a RFP and sent it to a list of four potential architectural historians to complete the work. One was out of the area and declined; one didn't respond; one expressed interest but didn't submit a proposal. Norene Roberts, Goshen, MA, who had completed the successful National Register nomination form for the Ramsdell Library, submitted an excellent proposal. She is an experienced and highly qualified candidate. The Town completed a contract for her to do the work.
- Project Completion: Working with Gary and Paul, Norene conducted a complete tour and took photographs of representative parts of the interior and exterior of the school, completed archival research with the town Historical Collection, Berkshire Couriers, the Massachusetts State Archive and the research data that the Commission had already assembled. She completed the Form B and attendant materials and submitted the package to the town on May 13,
- The Next Step: is submitting the Form B package to MHC for their review and judgment if it is eligible for listing on the National Register.
- Questions on Ramifications of Declared Eligibility: Town Manager Jennifer Tabakin wants to hold the forms in abeyance until she and Select Board are clear about the ramifications of a positive National Register ruling by the MHC. There is a perception that this designation imposes restrictions on the building that would impair a developer's freedom of action to pursue the project to his/her plan. Paul explained that buildings that receive tax credits are obliged to follow the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. These are very reasonable guidelines that assure the sensitive treatment of an historic building. The only way for this obligation to apply is if the developer chooses to apply (and then is approved) for the tax credit program. Otherwise, there are no restrictions. The inclusion of the eligibility ruling can only strengthen the RFP as it gives the developer an opportunity to lower costs.
- Jennifer will notify Paul when this item will appear on the Select Board's agenda and he will prepare a talking points summary explaining the ramifications of the program.

#### STATUS OF FY15 BUDGET

- The FY15 budget included: \$5,000 for the archivist consultant, \$1,200 for archival supplies, \$995 for the walking tour license and \$275 for the walking tour brochure, for a total of \$7,470. The addition of \$2,013.31 in F14 remainder funds made the actual income \$9,483.31.
- As of June 1, the "available budget" expressed in the spreadsheet printout from the Town Treasurer is \$3,392.39. The expenditures include \$3,960.92 + \$2,130 encumbered = \$6,090.92. This leaves the \$3,392.39 remaining as "available budget."
- The HC has the options of expending all or some of the remaining budget and/or carrying it over to FY16.
- Paul and Gary will meet to discuss any budget expenditures needed for the collections at Ramsdell.

### NEWSBOY MONUMENT PROJECT

- Paul distributed "Newsboy Conservation Project Summary" which outlines the key outcomes, action steps and responsibilities connected with this conservation project. The Town approved a CPA grant of \$31,640 towards a \$37,220 total project budget.
- Project components include: the conservation of the statue by Daedalus; repair of the pump by Gilmore Heating/Plumbing; writing a Maintenance Manual and holding a training session for DPW workers, Commission members and volunteers; publication of a brochure and an unveiling program with educational events.
- The first step is the signing of a contract with Daedalus and settling on dates of work. In an initial contact, Paul learned that the principal conservator has been unable to work because of a back operation. On receipt of the contract form from the Town CPA, Paul will contact them again to determine dates.

### CDC AND BRPC REQUESTS

- To ensure compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Historical Commission has been responding to requests from the Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to comment on the historical importance of seven residential dwellings that are being rehabilitated as part of the Great Barrington-Sheffield Housing Rehabilitation Program, funded by a FY14 Community Development Block Grant (basis of BRPC request) and a joint CDC-Construct Inc. project to develop 314 State Rd for a mixed income housing development on-site. They also sought comment on any potential adverse affect of the rehab projects on the architectural integrity of those buildings that contain historical values.
- The approach taken by Paul, who responded to the requests, includes a site survey, photographing the street-facing sides of the house and important architectural details (if any), searching the MHC MACRIS website for the property, completing the "Historical Review Certification" form and writing a An accompanying "Comments and Recommendations" letter described the methodology of the review, discusses any historical importance, summarizes any architectural significance or details that need to be preserved and makes specific recommendations about preserving character-defining features. The Commission membership approved of this format.
- Paul noted that his investigations resulted in recommendations that some of the neighborhoods in which the target houses are located should be considered for National Register Historic District Status. He also strongly recommended against the installation of any synthetic cladding, such as vinyl siding, as it is incompatible with an old and historic building. Don noted that some historic districts permit synthetic materials that have a wood-like appearance.

### HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

- Don reported that the Historic Marker program has been completed and has a link on the town website. The Historic District Commission is planning a public launch of the program with the public unveiling of plaques for the Town Hall and Mason Library. This will be accompanied by the (re-)burying of the Bryant School time capsule beneath the Town Hall lawn.

### MAIN STREET RECONSTRUCTION SALVAGE ARCHAEOLOGY

- The Commission has rescued trolley rails, a cross tie and spike and a curb stone as part of the salvage archaeology initiative of the Main Street project. He thanked the Historical Society for allowing storage of the heavy rails and tie and curbstone in a barn at the Wheeler House.

### JOINT MEETING WITH HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

- Don reported that this meeting has been put on hold.

### CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAM

- Don reported that he is pursuing this project.

#### FIRST RESISTANCE OBELISK

- Don reported that the Historic District Commission has asked Dadaelus to examine the obelisk when they are in town for the Newsboy project.
- He also noted that he has requested the firm to look at the Town Hall steps (with Joe Sokol) and to wax the Winged Victory in front of the Town Hall.

#### OTHER BUSINESS

- Bridge Street Bridge: the Town has received a grant from the State Department of Transportation for renovation of the bridge. The bridge is 54 years old and, since it's a state-funded project, the Historical Commission will probably be asked to comment on the impact of the renovation plans on the bridge's architectural character. This means we will have to assemble a research file in order to make an informed response.
- Berkshire Magazine Article: an article about Medal of Honor winners from the Berkshires in the recent Berkshire Magazine, failed to include Great Barrington's Frederick Deland. Gary will write a letter to the editor.
- Shay's Rebellion Veteran: Gary reported that he was informed by Bernie Drew that the grave of Ephraim Porter, who served in Thomas Ingersoll's company during the Revolutionary War and is the only militiaman to die the day of the last battle of Shay's Rebellion, is buried in Mahaiwe Cemetery. Bernie noted that there is no veteran's flag for Porter to mark his grave. Bernie asked the GBHC about placing a flag there. Paul will contact the Veterans' Agent about the matter.
- Community Preservation Committee: Bill reported that all the applicants for CPA grants were approved, including the Newsboy project.

#### NEXT MEETING

- To be determined

#### ADJOURN

- Motion made, seconded and passed unanimously.