

## **Agenda Item B. Review of National Register Status for Properties Proposed for Demolition**

In addition to reviewing new nominations, the State Historic Preservation Review Board is tasked with completing evaluations of National Register eligibility for other specific properties when necessary to assist the SHPO.

In Connecticut, a State Historic Preservation Review Board opinion is necessary in some cases when demolition is proposed and action under Connecticut Environmental Protection Act is being considered. The Protection Act applies to properties that are listed on the National Register. However, there are many cases where lack of clarity in the original nomination or a change in the physical integrity of a property warrants re-evaluation of the property's designation status.

At the June 14, 2024 meeting, the SRB will be asked to assess whether or not one property, located within a National Register-listed historic district, retains enough integrity to continue to contribute to said district.

This package includes current information about the property and a copy of the nomination for the district it is a part of, as well as a copy of a recent Historic Property Evaluation Report, dated April 8, 2024, by Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, Inc.

### **Agenda Item B.**

#### **B.1. Review of National Register Status for Property Proposed for Demolition, 25 South Main Street, Norwalk, South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase (NR# 85003505)**

Staff requests that the SRB evaluate whether the property known as 25 South Main Street, Norwalk, continues to contribute to the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase.

The South Main and Washington Streets Historic District was listed in the National Register on September 16, 1977 (NR# 77001393). It was subsequently enlarged through two additional increases: the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase, listed November 8, 1985 (NR# 85003505), and the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District (Boundary Increase #2), listed April 15, 1999 (NR# 99000449). The property in question was designated a contributing resource in the first boundary increase in 1985.

The building is identified in the nomination, in Section 7, page 1, where it is listed in the inventory of contributing buildings as, "23-29 South Main Street (McMahon Block): three stories, wood-frame construction with stuccoed exterior, 1900. Six-bay facade. Elaborate pressed metal cornice with dentils, egg-and-dart molding, modillions with acanthus carving, and a paneled frieze. Photographs 1 and 2." It is again referenced in Section 8, page 1, where a list of previous occupants is provided, as well as Section 8, page 2, where its cornice is referenced as characteristic of commercial architecture from its period of construction.

The South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase was listed on the National Register under Criterion A and C as they contribute to the overall historic development and architectural character of the original district, noting, "both these themes are amplified by the addition of the eleven buildings in the extension." The boundary increase summarizes the original district's buildings' significance: "because they illustrate the historical development of the area as South Norwalk's commercial center [Criterion A]," and, "because its buildings embodied the distinctive characteristics of late 19th and early 20th-century commercial architecture [Criterion C]."

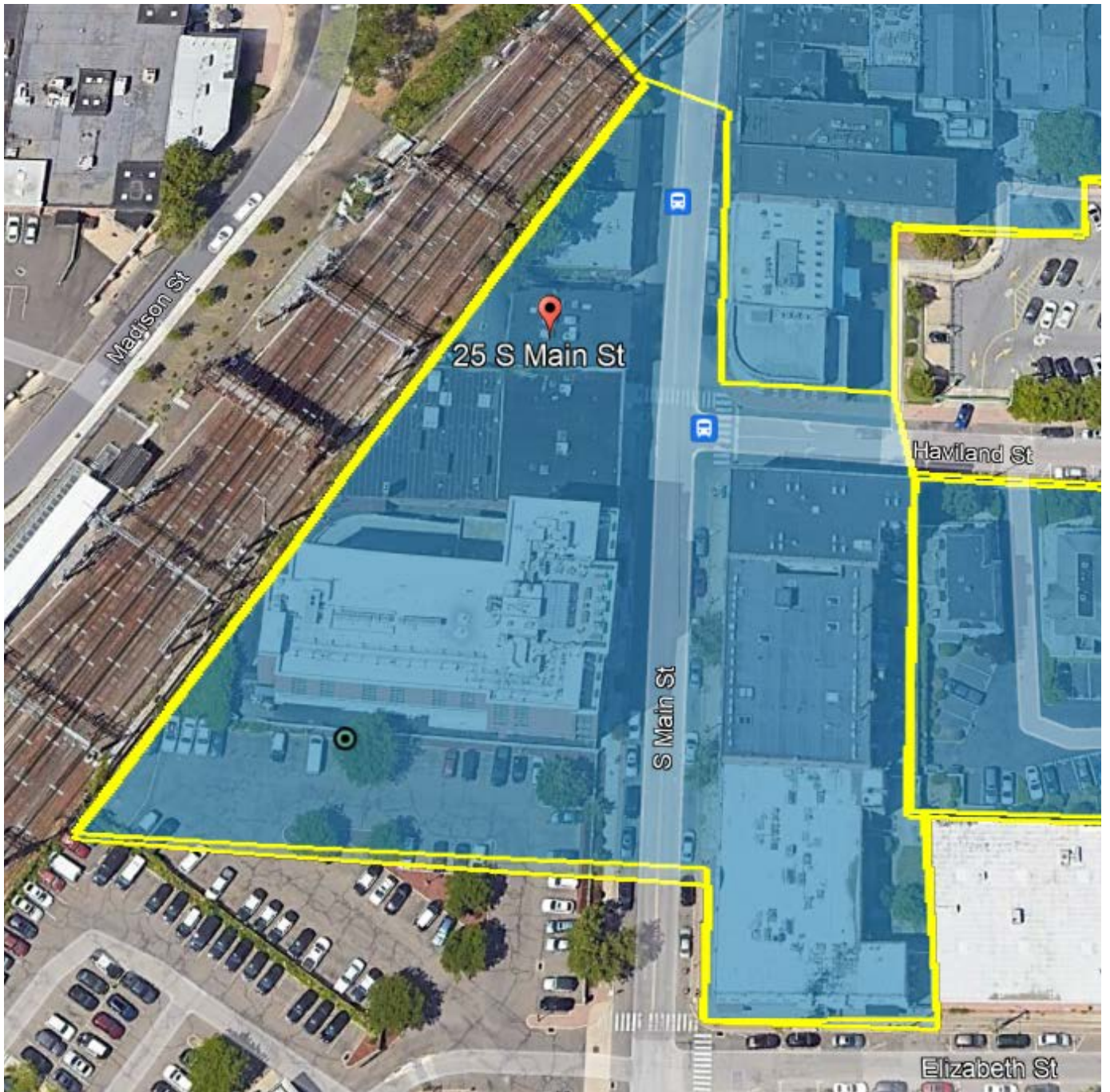
### Description

According to the nomination, the building is a 3-story, wood-framed structure, with a stuccoed exterior, and elaborate pressed metal cornice. Fenestration is 6 bays on the upper stories, and commercial storefronts on ground level.

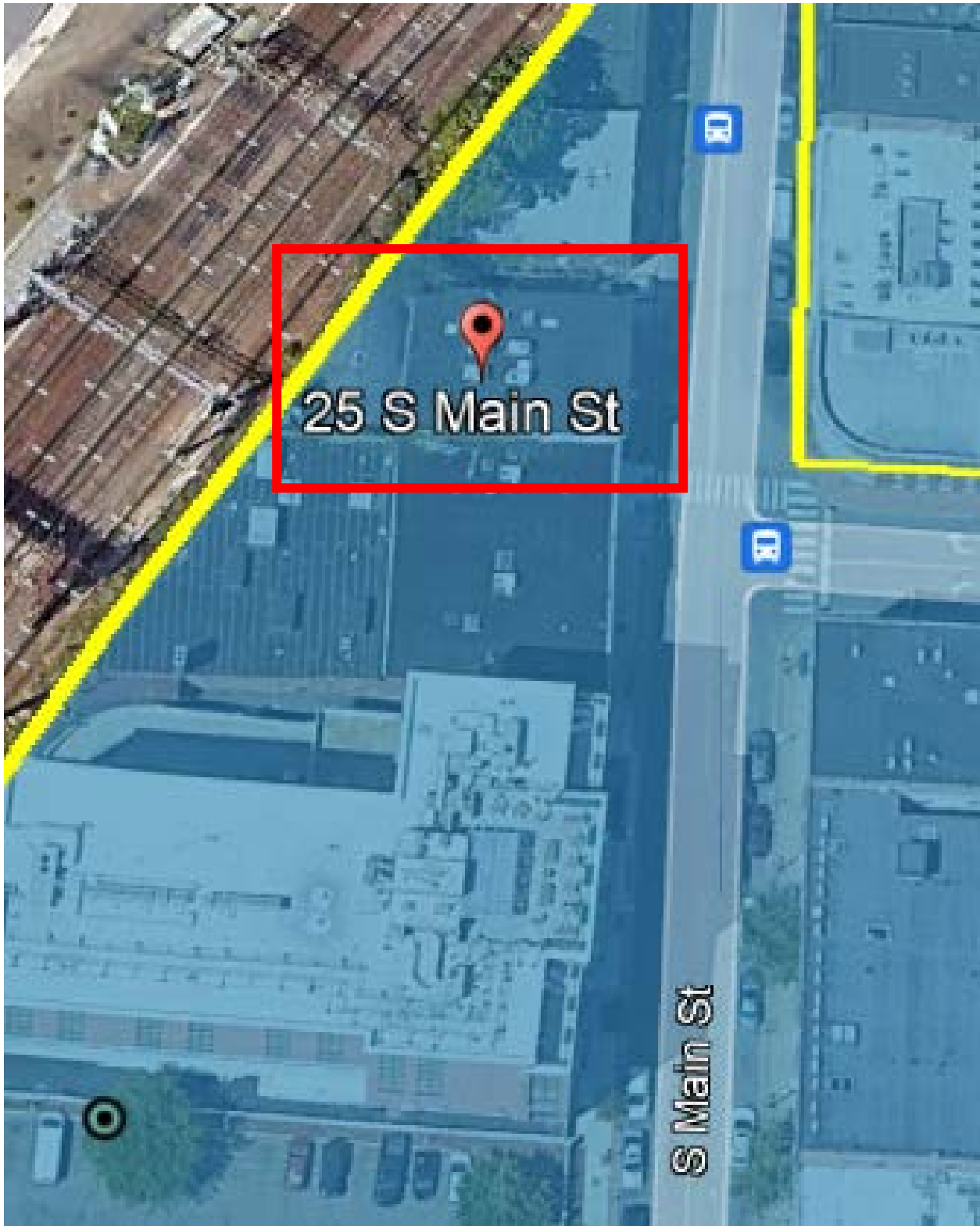
### Demolition Delay

The City of Norwalk has a 120-day demolition delay ordinance. To SHPO's knowledge, a demolition permit has not yet been filed.

Photographs and figures are below:

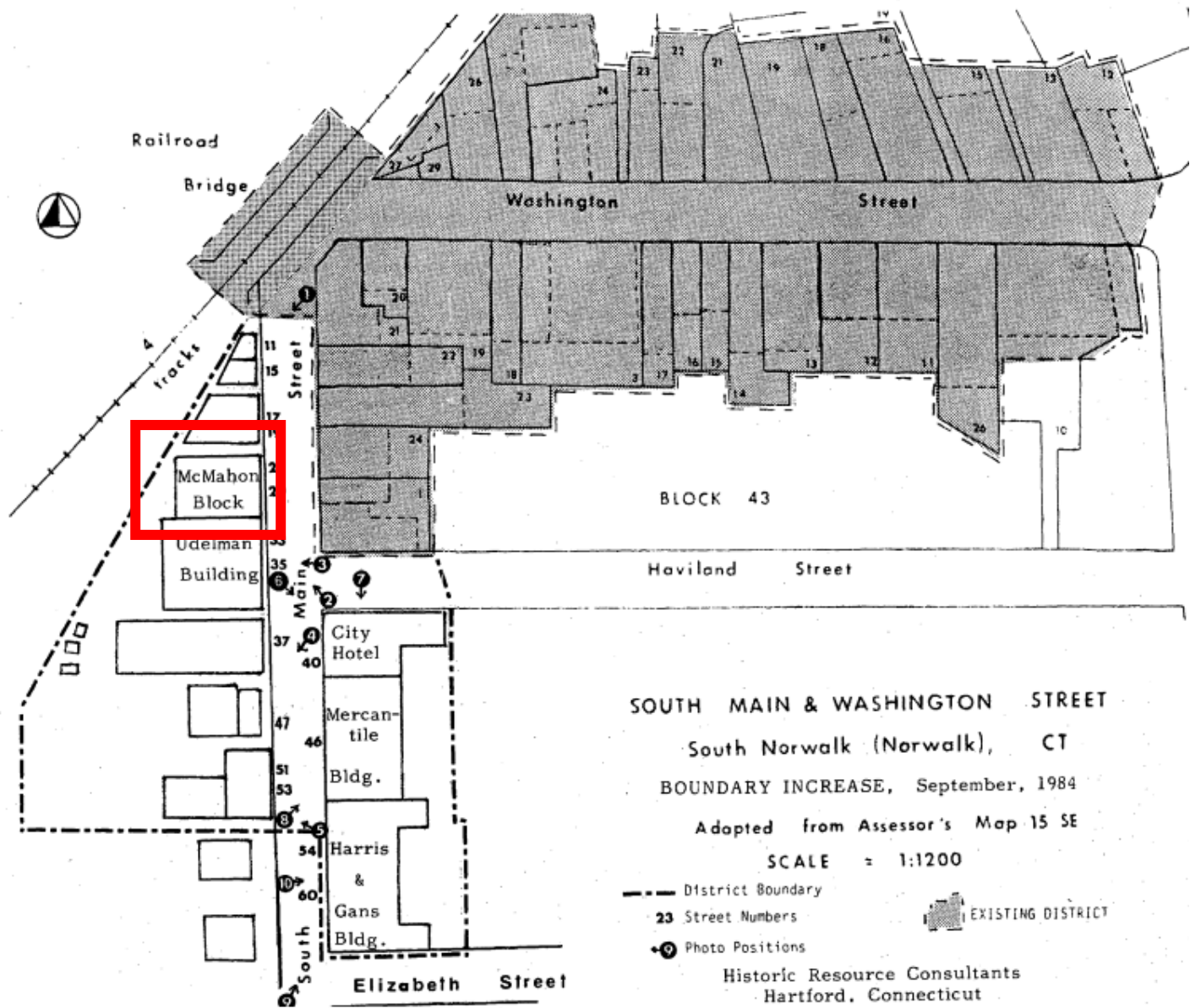


**Location of 25 South Main Street, Norwalk, within the South Main and Washington Streets National Register Historic District Boundary Increase, map oriented north (google earth, 7/9/2022). National Register boundary shown in yellow. District to the northeast is the South Main & Washington Street Historic District. District to the east is the Haviland and Elizabeth Streets / Hanford Place Historic District.**



Location of 25 South Main Street, outlined in red (google earth, 7/9/2022).





Map of the South Main and Washington Streets National Register district boundary, including proposed increase. 25 South Main Street is identified as the McMahon Block Building (outlined in red).



South Main Street, Norwalk, view looking north. 25 South Main Street to the left. *Google Earth*, July 2023.



South Main Street, Norwalk, view looking south. 25 South Main Street to the right. *Google Earth*, July 2023.





25 South Main Street, Norwalk, camera facing southwest, *google Earth*, July 2023.



**National Register of Historic Places South Main & Washington Streets Boundary Increase South Norwalk (Norwalk), CT Photograph #1, 25 South Main Street to the left, September, 1984.**





**National Register of Historic Places South Main & Washington Streets Boundary Increase South Norwalk (Norwalk), CT Photograph #2, 25 South Main Street to the left, September, 1984.**

***\*Additional photos of current conditions (December 2022) are within the attached Historic Property Evaluation Report\****

# Historic Property Evaluation Report 25-29 South Main Street, Norwalk, CT



*Prepared for:*  
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Stamford, CT 06901

*Prepared By:*  
Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, Inc.  
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Michael Devonshire, Principal  
08 April, 2024

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## **Introduction**

The services of Jan Hird Pokorny Associates (JHPA), based in New York, NY, were obtained by F.D. Rich Company of Stamford, CT. to evaluate the context and salient conditions of the commercial building façade at 25-29 South Main St., South Norwalk, CT. On 17 January, 2023, and 08 April, 2024, Michael Devonshire, of JHPA, Inc. performed a visual site assessment of the exterior of the building. The visual inspections were the basis for the findings of this Evaluation Report.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the on-site evaluation was to determine what original materials/finishes remain extant on the building main facade and what later accretions have occurred that have impacted the original façade, the condition of extant architectural features, and the suitability of reusing the extant façade.

### *Methodology*

The inspection and report methodology included review of pertinent documentation, a visual review of the historic district, and close on-site visual assessment of the building exterior and adjacent context.

### *Format*

The written report and photographs are intended to complement and, where applicable, reference each other to produce a comprehensive evaluation of the building.

### *Reproduction*

This report is considered work for hire and may be reproduced only at the discretion of F.D. Rich Company. Copies of the files related to this assessment are available to the client on CD or flash drive upon request. The services represented by this report are for the exclusive use and benefit of F.D. Rich Company, and such services, data, recommendations, proposals, reports, documentation, and similar information produced and provided by the consultant are not to be used or relied upon by other parties without written permission from the consultant or F.D. Rich Co.

## **Background**

The building at 25-29 So. Main St. was included in the 1985 boundary increase of the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District of South Norwalk, and was included as a contributing building under Criteria A and C for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Building Description**

According to the NPS designation report, the building was constructed in 1900, and was known as the “McMahon Block”. It was described as: “three stories, wood-frame construction with stuccoed exterior. Six-bay facade. Elaborate pressed metal cornice with dentils, egg-and-dart molding, modillions with acanthus carving, and a paneled frieze.” The windows are 1/1 sash in wood frames, and window openings are surmounted by splayed lintels with central keystones. The ground level storefronts are framed with wood.

## **Observations**

### **General**

The building main façade appears to have undergone a renovation within the last two decades. The renovation included: alteration of the main façade cladding, removal of the original storefronts and replacement with new wood and glass elements that are much less articulated than the originals, replacement of entry doors, replacement of all windows. (Photo #1)

### **Stucco Finish**

The original stucco cladding of the main façade was removed during the renovation, and replaced with new metal lath and stucco application. The new stucco was applied to metal lath, which appears to be rusting at a few locations. More visually obtrusive, unlike the original stucco application, the new stucco is tooled to a rough textured finish. Additionally, the stucco was applied in a manner that includes expansion joints which remain prominent on the façade, creating an awkward, visually obtrusive “grid”, unlike the original application which would have projected a uniform appearance. (Photo #2)

### **Cornice**

The decorative cornice that surmounts the façade is of stamped and brake-formed sheet metal. Although some deformation was noted, the cornice cladding appears to be in good condition – the wooden support system was not able to be examined for this report. (Photo #3)

### **Windows**

The extant windows are one-over-one wood sash in wood frames. The original projecting masonry sills and “flat” lintels have been removed; false decorative splayed lintels of stucco were applied above the window openings when the façade was re-stuccoed; the sills were not replaced. The lintels and keystones appear awkward on the relatively restrained façade, and the windows appear to “float” on the façade, lacking sills. Unfortunately, the extant windows that replaced the originals are of inferior fabrication, and exhibit a considerable amount of rot. The casing moldings received scarfed replacement repairs, and areas were noted where the finger joints in the wood elements are failing. (Photo #4)

### **Storefront**

The commercial storefronts at the ground floor appear to have been considerably reconfigured from the original, which featured a prominent supplemental cornice, and sign band. The extant entry doors are non-original, but appear to be serviceable. The decorative wood elements of the storefront do not reflect the variations of the original, and exhibit varying levels of deterioration. (Photo #5)

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned, like the adjacent the building at 31-35 So. Main St., 25-29 So. Main St. was included in the 1985 boundary increase of the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District, and was designated a contributing building under Criteria A and C for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

At the time of designation, the building retained much of its original treatment. Unfortunately, with the exception of the sheet metal cornice, all of the original features of the historic main façade have been removed, and the present treatment is a pastiche of awkward design, poorly executed. The loss of the

historical integrity of the building façade is lamentable, and thus restoration is not possible, only reconstruction, of historic features. With the exception of the original extant cornice, nothing of historical value remains on the façade.



**APPENDIX A: Photographs**



*Photo 1 With the exception of the cornice, the entire façade of the McMahon Block building has been replaced.*



*Photo 2 Expansion joints in the newer stucco application are not concealed, presenting an awkward grid appearance; the stucco is textured, unlike the original treatment.*





*Photo 3 The sheet metal cornice is intact and is the only remaining original feature of the façade.*





*Photo 4 New windows were fabricated of inferior materials, and are deteriorating. Original flat sills and lintels have been altered in an unfortunate manner. The exterior aprons are of dimensional lumber.*



*Photo 5 The ground floor commercial storefronts have been replaced, and do not match the originals.*

## **APPENDIX B: Curriculum Vitae, Michael Devonshire**

Michael Devonshire

Principal, Director of Conservation, JHPA, Inc.

### **EXPERIENCE**

Michael Devonshire is an architectural conservator and preservationist with forty-three years of experience in the field of historic preservation. He is skilled in materials analysis, historic building evaluations, conditions assessments, materials specification, and project management. His knowledge of building documentation and technology is comprehensive, with a particular emphasis on pre-Colonial Dutch and English wood frame buildings.

Mr. Devonshire began his preservation career as a restoration coordinator for the New York State Bureau of Historic Sites' office at the Schermerhorn Row Block in New York City. From 1981 to 1985 Mr. Devonshire served as senior architectural conservator for the Center for Building Conservation (CBC), performing construction history documentation and materials investigation. For CBC he directed several restoration projects, including the Hunterfly Road Houses (Weeksville) in Brooklyn, New York, and the Lord & Burnham Palmhouse at Old Westbury Gardens on Long Island. He also directed window restoration and energy conservation retrofit upgrades at the Tweed Courthouse in New York City, and performed the restoration of interior decorative plaster at Carnegie Hall. From 1985 to 1987 Mr. Devonshire was a restoration foreman at the National Trust for Historic Preservation Restoration Workshop in Tarrytown, New York. In that position, he supervised historical analysis and restoration work at Wards Castle in Rye, New York, a structure that pioneered the use of reinforced concrete in the United States.

As Senior Architectural Conservator with JHPA, Mr. Devonshire supervised investigation of the copper cladding at the Erie-Lackawanna Rail and Ferry Terminal in Hoboken, New Jersey, and conducted a condition assessment at Mills Mansion State Historic Site in Staatsburg, New York. In addition, he was responsible for restoration work at both the Church of the Incarnation (1864), which received a Victorian Society Award, and the Morris-Jumel Mansion (1765), which received a New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Award, and Walnford House, in Walnford, New Jersey which received a NJHT award. He also directed the compilation of a historic structure report and evaluation for the Merchant's House Museum (1832) in New York City, and the kitchen wing of the Mark Twain House, in Hartford, CT. Mr. Devonshire more recently directed field restoration of the Guilin Building (1920) in Shanghai, PRC, and Manitoga, the Russel Wright Studio, in Garrison, New York.

As principal at JHPA, he has recently supervised the restoration of several churches in New York and New Jersey, and the Bowne House (1661) in Queens, NY. He provided technical assistance for the restoration of the US Capitol dome in Washington, DC, and recently supervised the compilation of a Master Plan for Sylvester Manor historic site on Shelter Island, NY. He has provided historic building evaluations for the Maria Mitchell Association, Nantucket, Old Westbury Gardens, Westbury New York, and the Keeler Tavern and Museum, Ridgefield, CT., among others.

## **EDUCATION**

Attingham School for the Study of the English Country House, 1997

BA Historic Preservation, Roger Williams University, 1979

Aegean School of Art, Paros, Greece, 1974-75

BFA Department of Architecture, Rhode Island School of Design, 1973

## **TEACHING**

Adjunct Professor, Columbia University GSAPP 1990-2014; Lecturer, 2015 – present

Preservation Institute: Nantucket 2005-2017

University of Massachusetts Amherst and Hancock Shaker Village 2010-2017

## **PROFESSIONAL ADVISORIES**

Member, New York State Historic Preservation Board, 2010-2017

Member, ICOMOS International Wood Committee, 2014-present

Commissioner, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2010-2023

Board Member, Historic House Trust of New York City 2022-present