

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Antone DeSant HousesOther names/site number: N/AName of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 745 and 751-753 Bank StreetCity or town: New LondonState: ConnecticutCounty: New LondonNot For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:_____
Date_____
Title :_____
State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MID 19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood, brick, concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Antone DeSant Houses at 745 and 751–753 Bank Street are in a residential neighborhood west of Shaw Cove in New London, New London County, Connecticut (Figures 1–3). Built for whaler and Cape Verdean native Antone DeSant (ca. 1815–1886) between 1833 and 1850, possibly circa (ca.) 1840, the two closely spaced Greek Revival-style buildings abut the sidewalk on the north¹ side of Bank Street in a compact early twentieth-century neighborhood of single-family houses and commercial buildings. DeSant occupied the buildings as his home (751–753) and business (745), first a barbershop and then a grocery, from 1840 until his death. 745 Bank Street on the east is a two-and-one-half-story building with a gable-flank roof to the street and a distinctive curved northeast wall that curves to accommodate the course of a former stream. 751–753 Bank Street is a three-and-one-half-story building with a pedimented end-gable roof, a one-story shop extension on the west, and a triangular two-story extension on the north. Between 1884 and 1891, both buildings were raised one story above new ground-floor brick and glass storefronts with wood trim (Photos 1 and 2). Although they were altered in the twentieth century, the two houses retain overall integrity of location, setting, association, feeling, design, materials, and workmanship. The original first and second

¹ Bank Street runs northwest/southeast, but for simplicity the four main cardinal directions are used in this documentation.

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stories retain many original exterior and interior materials and most of their original fenestration pattern from ca. 1840. The ground-floor storefronts also retain materials and design from the late nineteenth century, but the interiors have been altered. DeSant's descendants continuously owned the property until 1991.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Antone DeSant Houses occupy a triangular 0.11-acre parcel on the north side of Bank Street, a four-lane road in a densely developed commercial and residential urban area of New London, Connecticut. The south-facing houses are west of the busy intersection of Montauk Avenue, Shaw Street, and Truman Street (Figure 4). They are on the east half of the parcel, with the curved north and east rear wall of 745 Bank Street and the angled north rear wall of 751–753 Bank Street following the east property line that traces the course of Truman's Brook, which edged the property until the early twentieth century.² Along Bank Street, the land slopes down slightly from west to east. The west portion of the parcel is vegetated with a mature magnolia bush at Bank Street and other trees, shrubs, and volunteer growth. Remnant sections of wood slat fencing separate the parcel from the Bank Street sidewalk at the west end of the property. Between the two buildings and their respective first-floor main entrances and porches, a stone paver walkway connects the Bank Street sidewalk to the rear of the parcel. The adjacent lot to the west is occupied by a two-story, end-gable roof, early twentieth-century commercial building. On the east, an asphalt-paved driveway on the neighboring lot leads to brick garage buildings at the rear of that lot and a two-story brick commercial building at the intersection corner. The surrounding area is an urban setting of mostly one- to three-story, brick commercial and light industrial buildings; several apartment buildings, all built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; a handful of late twentieth-century commercial buildings; and scattered vacant lots.

House, 745 Bank Street (one contributing building)

Exterior

The Antone DeSant House at 745 Bank Street, built ca. 1840, is a two-and-one-half-story, three-bay-by-two-bay, Greek Revival-style, wood-frame and brick building with a south-facing façade and an irregular footprint with a continuous curved wall on the east and north elevations. The commercial ground floor was inserted for the DeSant family between 1884 and 1891. The asphalt-shingled side-gable roof has a gable end on the west elevation and a rounded hip form on the east elevation. The foundation is brick with stepped low granite blocks following the slightly sloped site along the south elevation. The ground-floor walls are brick with wood trim and glass shop windows in the south storefront; the first floor and attic are wood-frame with wood clapboard sheathing and wood trim. The roof has slightly projecting eaves and cornice returns on the end walls. Trim consists of a wide and molded cornice board, molded rake boards, narrow and flat corner boards, and simple plank framing at the windows. A brick chimney with a corbel band rises from the north roof slope near the curved wall.

The facade (south elevation) contains a ground-floor storefront set off-center within the red brick wall laid in running bond. The storefront is composed of an entrance with double-leaf paneled and glazed wood doors flanked by one-light display windows with plain surrounds (Photo 3). Each door has two stacked glass

² The brook frequently overflowed its banks and was infilled at this location between 1912 and 1921.

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lights above two vertical panels. A shallow, asphalt-shingled shed-roof overhang with molded trim and carved brackets runs above the storefront and the length of the elevation (Photo 4). The brackets are attached to a plain board frieze, and larger brackets mark each end. A four-light fixed or casement wood window is set high in the wall east of the storefront. A plaque on the building and a freestanding bronze sign near the southeast corner of the building identify the buildings' association with Antone DeSant. The wood-frame and clapboard-clad section of the south elevation on the first story above the storefront contains one wood six-over-six double-hung sash window at the westernmost bay and a wood door that opens to a metal fire escape at the easternmost bay. The door has one glazed light and four horizontal panels. Two short, wood six-light sash windows intersect the cornice frieze in the attic level (see Photos 1 and 2).

The ground floor of the west (side) elevation is covered by a wood porch that has a wood lattice enclosure and railings, a straight stair run on the north side, and a platform at the first story that accesses the principal entrance to the upper stories (Photo 5). The porch was added between 1901 and 1907. The centered entrance is sheltered under a shed-roof hood and has narrow, plain board trim and a wood door. One wood six-over-six double-hung sash window is east of the door, and one is above the door in the attic level.

The curved northeast elevation is red brick laid in common bond on the ground floor and wood-frame with clapboard sheathing on the first floor (Photos 6 and 7). Windows are arranged in two tiers, one roughly centered on the east side and one near the north end. Each tier consists of a one-over-one double-hung sash replacement window on the ground floor, a short one-over-one double-hung sash replacement window on the first floor, and a short six-light sash wood window intersecting the cornice frieze at the attic level.

In the mid-1970s, 745 Bank Street was renovated with exterior repair and repainting, installation of new windows, and interior updates.

Interior

The Antone DeSant House at 745 Bank Street has an interior configuration and finishes that retain some original construction features but include alterations, primarily from the mid-1970s renovation (Figure 5). The commercial ground floor is an open space with a bathroom partitioned at the center rear. The space retains unfinished original exterior brick walls (Photo 8) and has a tile floor and sheetrock ceiling. All historic finishes have been removed. The apartment on the first and second stories retains the basic floor plan of two primary west and east rooms and the original curved wood staircase connecting the two floors along the curved northeast wall (Photo 9). A nonhistoric railing with turned spindles and a square newel post encloses the second-floor stair opening. Finishes consist of original wood board (first floor) and wood laminate (second floor) flooring, sheetrock and plaster walls and ceilings, and plain narrow board trim at the window and door openings and mop board.

House, 751–753 Bank Street (one contributing building)

Exterior

The Antone DeSant House at 751–753 Bank Street, built ca. 1840, is a three-and-one-half-story, three-bay-by-four-bay, Greek Revival-style, wood-frame and brick building with a south-facing façade and a pedimented end-gable roof. The commercial ground floor was inserted between 1884 and 1891. The building has an irregular footprint formed by a rectangular main block with multiple brick and wood-frame angled additions on the west and north. There are four primary extensions to the main block. Two wood-frame additions at the north bays of the west elevation and at the west bays of the north elevation were

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present by 1891. Two brick additions at the south bays of the west elevation and at the east bays of the north elevation were added in the early twentieth century.

The foundation is brick with stepped low stone blocks following the slightly sloped site along the south elevation. The ground floor of the main block is brick with a storefront of glass shop windows with wood trim on the south elevation. The first and second stories are wood-frame construction with wood clapboard sheathing and wood trim. Trim consists of a wide and molded cornice board and molded rake boards at the roof, narrow and flat corner boards, and simple plank framing at the windows. A brick chimney with a corbel band rises from the roof ridge near the center of the building. All of the east and much of the north elevations are covered in ivy.

The facade (south elevation) contains a ground-floor full-width storefront that consists of a central entrance flanked by paired display windows (Photo 10). The storefront entrance is a single-leaf paneled wood replacement door with wood side panels and a one-light transom. The four metal one-light display windows have two-light transoms above and brick laid in common bond below. A shallow, asphalt-shingled shed-roof overhang with molded trim and carved brackets runs above the storefront and the length of the elevation. The brackets are attached to a replacement plain board frieze (Photo 11). The wood-frame and clapboard-clad section of the main block's south elevation above the storefront contains three wood six-over-six double-hung sash windows on the first and second stories and one short wood six-light sash window at the attic level (see Photos 1 and 2). The south wall of the one-story brick shop addition at the west end has a wide wood signboard frieze with ghost painted lettering "Davidson's," a narrow molded cornice, and a concrete plinth at the southwest corner. Two nearly full-height segmental-arch openings for a door (east) and window (west) are infilled with plywood and a one-over-one vinyl window in the west bay.

The east (side) elevation's ground floor is partially covered by a wood porch at the south end that has a wood lattice enclosure and railings, a straight stair run on the north side, and a platform at the first floor that accesses the principal entrance to the first and second stories (Photo 12). The porch was added between 1901 and 1907. The first-floor entrance is in the southmost bay and sheltered under a shed-roof porch on square posts with a narrow tongue-and-groove board-clad ceiling. The wood, six-panel door with glass in the upper small panels is within a plain board surround. The rest of the west elevation of the main block and the addition at the north end are completely covered in ivy that obscures wood six-over-six double-hung sash windows at the first and second stories of the main block and both stories of the addition.

The west (side) elevation has two additions that create an angled wall (southwest-northeast) in relation to the main block's south and north elevations. The south bays of the ground floor are covered by a one-story, two-by-two-bay, brick shop addition built between 1907 and 1912. The addition's west wall contains a small, two-light, segmental-arch window and is painted with lettering "Diamond Ginger Ale" at the south end near Bank Street (Photo 13). A narrow wood cornice band outlines the flat roof. The north bays of the main block's west elevation are covered by a two-story, one-by-one-bay wood-frame extension with a shed roof that was in place before the building was raised and is now on a brick ground level. It has one window on the first-floor south wall. The first and second stories of the main block above the additions are wood frame with clapboard cladding, flat corner boards, and a plain frieze and molded cornice (see Photo 2). They each have two wood six-over-six double-hung sash windows.

The north (rear) elevation is brick on the ground floor and is covered on the east and center by a two-story, triangular, brick addition with a shed and flat roof that was added between 1912 and 1921. The wood-frame and clapboard-clad section of the main block's north elevation above the addition has one six-over-six,

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double-hung wood sash window in the east bay of the second story and one in the attic gable. A shallow, three-story, wood-frame and clapboard, projecting stair enclosure at the west end of the main block was in place before the building was raised and is now on a brick ground level (Photo 14). The west elevation of the triangular addition has a ground-level entrance with a wood door, metal storm door, and metal hood. An exterior wood, dogleg open staircase south of the ground-level entrance leads to a platform at the first story that accesses an entrance at the north edge of the addition, directly against the main block's projecting stair enclosure. The first-story entrance has a six-panel wood door within a narrow wood surround. A two-over-two double-hung wood sash window is in a segmental-arch opening north of the first-story entrance. The angled north elevation of the addition, almost completely covered in ivy, has one double-hung wood window at the ground level and two in segmental-arch openings at the second story.

Interior

The Antone DeSant House at 751–753 Bank Street retains much of the interior configuration and finishes from its original construction (Figure 6). The building contains three living units, one on each floor. The ground-floor unit has original exposed brick exterior walls, wood laminate flooring, and sheetrock ceiling and partition walls (Photo 15). The first and second stories retain the general layout and extensive original woodwork finishes and features including vertical-board wainscoting and chair rails, molded door and window surrounds and mopboards, and panel doors with original hardware (Photos 16 and 17). Original fireplaces with wide-board mantel surrounds are at the center of each story (Photo 18). Two original staircases—the main wood stair with round balusters, curved handrail, and turned newel post and the simple secondary wood stairs—connect the first and second stories (Photo 19). Floors are primarily wood, and wall and ceiling finishes are plaster and sheetrock. The attic is unfinished, showing the construction framing materials and methods of the main block (Photo 20). The second story of the north brick addition has wood floors, unfinished brick walls, and exposed wood roof framing (Photo 21).

Statement of Integrity

The Antone DeSant Houses at 745 and 751–753 Bank Street possess integrity of design, workmanship, location, association, feeling, setting, and materials. The houses retain much of their internal configuration and many original finishes associated with Cape Verdean whaler Antone DeSant's occupation from 1840 until his death in 1886 and his role as a successful Black businessman, owning first a barbershop and then a grocery, in New London. The closely set houses are good examples of one- and two-story, modest Greek Revival-style residences constructed in the mid-nineteenth century. The curved original footprint and massing of 745 Bank Street and the extended angular footprint of 751–753 Bank Street are uniquely derived from their site along the course of Truman's Brook, which was filled in between 1912 and 1921.³ The surrounding mixed neighborhood of two-story commercial and industrial buildings along the Bank Street (former Lyme Turnpike) corridor and the compact, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, single-family houses on small lots to the north extending to a small Black neighborhood on nearby Hempstead Street, which has some of the oldest continuously Black-owned properties in New England, contribute to the property's setting and feeling. Exterior alterations to the wood-frame houses since their construction primarily consist of the raising of both and the insertion of new brick commercial ground floors with storefronts between 1884 and 1891 to provide increased economic opportunities for DeSant's descendants, who continued to own the property through 1991. New entrance porches were added on side elevations to reach the upper floors. Between 1907 and 1921, side and rear commercial additions were made to 751–753

³ The proximity of the flood-prone brook and the relative isolation of the neighborhood in the first half of the nineteenth century likely corresponded to lower property values when DeSant purchased the land.

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Bank Street. The windows in 745 Bank Street were replaced in the mid-1970s, and the storefront openings of 751–753 Bank Street were modified with plywood infill sometime in the mid- to late twentieth century. The ca. 1840 original clapboards, trim, and chimneys on both buildings and windows on 751–753 Bank Street remain. Both buildings also retain the primary features of the early twentieth-century changes including brickwork, entrance porches, storefronts, and a faded painted sign on 751–753 Bank Street. Most of the interior finishes of 751–753 Bank Street, which was the primary residence for Antone DeSant and his family, are also intact, including the main and secondary staircases, wood floors, some plaster walls, wood trim, fireplace mantels, and doors on the first and second stories. The interior of 745 Bank Street, which Antone DeSant used as a shop, has simpler finishes of which a stair and some plaster and wood trim and flooring remains.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: OTHER, CAPE VERDEAN
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1840–1954

Significant Dates

1840: Antone DeSant purchases Bank Street property

1888: Death of Antone DeSant

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Antone DeSant Houses at 745 and 751–753 Bank Street⁴ are significant at the state level under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage and Social History for their associations with Cape Verdean native Antone DeSant⁵ (ca. 1815–1886) and his descendants. DeSant came to New London on a whaling ship in 1831 and worked as a crew member on additional whaling voyages out of the port before and after purchasing the Bank Street property. He lived at 751–753 Bank Street from 1840 until his death in 1888 and operated a barbershop and then a grocery at 745 Bank Street. His daughter, grandson, and great-granddaughter all lived at 751–753 Bank Street and rented out the ground-floor commercial spaces in both buildings and an upper apartment at 745 Bank Street. The DeSant family's development of the property demonstrate an important socioeconomic trend in maritime New London, in which non-white families became multi-generational landholders. The period of significance for the property begins when DeSant purchased it in 1840 and ends with his daughter Julia's death in 1954.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

CRITERION A – ETHNIC HERITAGE: CAPE VERDEAN and SOCIAL HISTORY

The DeSant Houses represent the history of many Black and mixed-race immigrant families in Connecticut who gradually earned sufficient income to elevate their social and economic positions in the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. Antone DeSant was among the first wave of Cape Verdean immigrants who found work on whaling vessels from New England in the early nineteenth century and settled permanently in the port cities of New Bedford, Massachusetts; Newport and Providence, Rhode Island; and portions of Connecticut, including Norwich and New London. Migration from Cape Verde to the United States, motivated by persistent poverty, droughts, and hunger on the islands, contributed to the development of a substantial Cape Verdean presence in New England. Exact immigration statistics are complicated by the fact that census records often designate those arriving from the islands as “Portuguese,” “Black Portuguese,” “Bravas” (for the Cape Verdean island of Brava), or “Atlantic Islander” or combine them with immigrants from other Portuguese colonies. Connecticut currently has the third-largest Cape Verdean population in the United States after Rhode Island and Massachusetts. DeSant's work on whaling ships in the 1830s and 1840s enabled him to acquire real estate in New London, start his own businesses, and provide his descendants with generational wealth and financial stability. His oldest surviving daughter, Julia (1865–1954), inherited his Bank Street property, which remained in the family through two more generations. Julia and her husband, William H. Bush Sr. (1861–1952), a renowned Black American

⁴ The street addresses assigned to the buildings have changed over time. The New London city directories list the entire DeSant property as 193 Bank Street in 1884 and 229 Bank Street in 1887. Sanborn insurance maps identify the buildings as 227 and 229 Bank Street in 1891; 687–689 and 693–695 Bank Street in 1896 and 1901; and 745–747 and 751–753 from 1912 on. The New London Assessors Office currently lists them as 745 and 751–73 Bank Street, which is how this nomination refers to them.

⁵ Various spellings of his first and last names appear in historical records, including Antoine, Andrew, DeSanto, Desand, Desaint, Descent, Desant, and De Saut. This nomination uses the most commonly documented spelling, Antone DeSant.

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organist, passed the property to their son, William H. Bush Jr. (1902–1987), who in turn left it to his daughter, Anna Bush (b. 1946).

Cape Verde to New London

Antone DeSant (Figure 7) was born ca. 1815 in Cape Verde (known today as the Republic of Cabo Verde), a cluster of ten islands about 500 miles west of Mauritania, Africa, colonized by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. Little is known about his parents or childhood in the geographically isolated Cape Verde islands. The islands were a central hub in the transatlantic slave trade for over 300 years, and interactions between Europeans and more than two dozen West African ethnic groups resulted in a majority mixed-race population. By 1815, free multi-racial Black people outnumbered enslaved people.⁶

DeSant left Cape Verde at about the age of 15, likely voluntarily, as a crew member on an American whaling ship that brought him to New London, Connecticut, in 1831, during the so-called “Golden Age” (1816–ca. 1860) of whaling in the United States. Whaling was a major economic activity for western European and North American countries during the late eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries. Following the declaration of peace that concluded the War of 1812 on February 13, 1815, the United States took the lead in this global enterprise and held that position until the Civil War (1861–1865). Demand for whale oil increased as the country’s growing numbers of textile mills, machine shops, factories, and railroad locomotives relied primarily on it as a lubricant to keep their machines moving. Whale oil also served as fuel for illumination and as an ingredient in other products, and whalebone was used in manufacturing. The mid-nineteenth-century American whaling fleet was the largest whaling industry in history. Its numbers peaked in 1846 at 735 ships of a total of 900 worldwide. Whaling provided a livelihood for about 70,000 people and accounted for roughly one-fifth of the nation’s registered merchant tonnage. Ca. 1850, whaling was the United States’ fifth-largest industry as measured by monetary output. The prominent US senator William H. Seward aptly summarized whaling as an important “source of national wealth.”⁷

The earliest American whaling vessels left from Nantucket, Massachusetts, which had the largest fleet in the country until New Bedford took over in 1823 with 120 ships and remained the premier whaling port through the demise of the industry in 1925. Whaling’s profits encouraged other eastern ports to enter the field; by 1839, 40 ports from Wilmington, Delaware, to Wiscasset, Maine, sent out whaling vessels. New London’s first forays in whaling began just after the Revolutionary War, and about 20 ships departed from the city for whaling grounds off the coast of South America between 1784 and 1808. After a pause during the industry’s sustained national downturn due to wars and trade embargoes, the whaling business in New London began again about 1819. By 1845–1846, New London, with over 80 whaling ships, was the second-largest whaling port in the world after New Bedford, which had 735 ships of a total of 900 worldwide. Between 1718 and 1908, a total of over 250 ships embarked from New London and completed 1,100

⁶ Rachel Carley, “Cape Verdeans in Norwich” (St. Anthony Chapel Foundation of Norwich, Connecticut, and the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, 2021); James M. Rose and Barbara W. Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut* (New London County Historical Society, 1979), 43.

⁷ Eric Jay Dolin, *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* (W. W. Norton, 2007), 86, 139–40, 168, 189, 206; Lance Davis, Robert Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling 1816–1906* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5, 35–38, 367–68, 514–15; Alexander Starbuck, *A History of the American Whale Fishery from Its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876* (Alexander Starbuck, 1878), 57–58, 91–93; Briton Cooper Busch, “Whaling Will Never Do for Me”: *The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 3.

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whaling voyages that employed several thousand men.⁸ The *Nile*, which left New London in 1858, holds the record for the longest whaling voyage (11 years).⁹

The Atlantic trade winds carried New England whalers almost directly to Cape Verde and the Azores, another Portuguese colony of islands about 1,000 miles west of Portugal that were a rich whaling ground for sperm whales. Many Azoreans and Cape Verdeans used whaling to emigrate permanently to the United States or to earn sufficient money to acquire property in the islands. Portuguese sailors from the Azores were documented on American whaling ships as early as 1808. Smaller numbers of Cape Verdeans joined whaling crews in the early nineteenth century. By the 1830s, about 60 merchant and whaling ships a year stopped in Cape Verde to sell merchandise, buy supplies, and hire crew. Islanders were often desperate to escape the lack of economic opportunity and the droughts and ensuing famine that occurred about once every eight years. When DeSant left, Cape Verde was in the middle of a severe drought and famine that lasted from 1830 to 1833 and killed more than 30,000 people, a third of the colony's population.¹⁰

After his initial trip across the Atlantic Ocean in 1831, DeSant went on at least seven whaling voyages from New London. His name appears on crew lists for *Tuscarora* in 1834, *Clematis* in 1839, *Georgia* in 1846, and *Superior* in 1848.¹¹ *Tuscarora*'s voyage was one of five the ship made between 1831 and 1837 under Captain Franklin Smith for N. and W. W. Billings.¹² DeSant's last documented voyage was in 1850, when he served as an officer aboard *Portland*, a cargo vessel that sailed from Boston to San Francisco during the gold rush.¹³

Whaling crews required large numbers of skilled mariners (captains and mates) and unskilled laborers. The average crew in 1829 numbered 29 and consisted of a captain, at least two mates, boatsteerers (men who harpooned the whales and steered the whaleboats when the whales ran), a cooper, a cook, a steward, and seamen of various abilities. Ship crew members received a share (termed a "lay") of the profits from each voyage that was in general related to their rank on ship and their individual seafaring abilities. This payment scheme, used in whaling as early as the seventeenth century, shifted part of the financial risk from vessel owners and sponsors to crews and encouraged productivity.¹⁴

Whaling was hard and dangerous work interspersed with long periods of inactivity onboard in cramped living conditions with poor food. Use of the lay system encouraged crew effort, but the danger of the work and voyages with few whales caught also encouraged crew desertion. Discipline onboard was strict and accompanied by physical penalties such as beatings, floggings, and handcuffs ("irons"). The risky labor conditions, combined with the relatively low wages for sailors aboard whaling voyages, encouraged

⁸ Frances Manwaring Caulkins, *History of New London, Connecticut from the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860* (H. D. Utley, 1895), 638–42; Judith N. Lund et al., "American Offshore Whaling Voyages: A Database," World Wide Web electronic publication, n.d., <http://www.nmdl.org>.

⁹ New London Historical Society, "The Second Largest Whaling Port IN THE WORLD in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century," n.d., <https://www.nlchs.org/online-exhibits/whaling-out-of-new-london/>.

¹⁰ Busch, "Whaling Will Never Do for Me": *The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*, 42, 44–45; Joao A. Gomes Vieira, *Man and the Sea: The Portuguese Participation in American Whaling* (Medialand, 2007), 11–12, 47, 52–55, 61–63, 146–147, 331–337, 343–347.

¹¹ "New London Crew Lists, 1803–1878," Digital Database (Mystic, Connecticut: Mystic Seaport Museum, n. d.), <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-new-london/>.

¹² Caulkins, *History of New London, Connecticut from the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*, 638.

¹³ Mary Beth Baker, "745–753 Bank Street, Antoine Desant, c. 1840–1886, Home and Store" (New London Landmarks, 2018).

¹⁴ Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling 1816–1906*, 15.

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diversity in the labor pool, as whaling merchants and captains were forced to employ often marginalized social or ethnic groups on whaling ships.¹⁵

Maritime employment was virtually the only industry open to free Black men in the US; whaling was seen as an industry of opportunity and advancement. A crew member completing a first voyage to the satisfaction of his captain might earn a chance to ship out again as harpooner. From harpooner it was relatively easy to move on to officer and mate, even without the ability to speak English or the necessary writing skills to make entries in a ship's log. While estimates of the number of non-white men working on whaling vessels vary, one survey of seamen's protection papers for the period 1809 to 1865 lists about 3,000 names of Black sailors. In some instances, between two-thirds to almost half of whaling crews were categorized as "Black," although ambiguities and cultural fluidity in racial categorization also meant that mixed-race, Native American, and individuals of other ethnicities were placed in this category. Almost 60 percent of those recorded in New London's 1850 federal census as employed Black men listed themselves as mariners (not including those at sea when the census was taken).¹⁶

Until the 1830s, non-whites seem to have been more integrated into ships' crews. In the 1840s and 1850s, however, the numbers of non-white sailors and the status of their position on ship declined due to competition from white immigrant groups and increasing racism. Compounding the difficulty of assessing race relations over time in the maritime industry is the highly fluid definition of "Black" sailor in historical accounts, which at various times may refer to African Americans, Cape Verdeans, or Kanakas. Portuguese sailors from the Azores and Cape Verde had a positive reputation among ship owners and captains for their "quiet industrious nature" and resistance to the "dissipation" common in American sailors. However, opinions of these men among common sailors ranged from reluctant acceptance to outright hatred, particularly for those from Cape Verde, who did not benefit from the lighter skin of the Azoreans.¹⁷

DeSant in New London

As DeSant's great-granddaughter Anna Bush noted in a 1996 interview, "Whaling was the key to my family's success. It gave DeSant his chance to make it as a merchant. That was a hard time for blacks, and it was a lousy job nobody else wanted, but it let him carve out his place in New London."¹⁸ By 1840, DeSant had earned enough from his whaling voyages to buy property in the city, which had a population of about 5,500 at that time (Figure 8). He purchased a parcel of land with at least one building on it at the edge of Truman's Brook on the north side of the Lyme Turnpike (now Bank Street).¹⁹ The New London and Lyme Turnpike Company, incorporated 1807, had laid out the road from the southwest edge of the city to the Waterford town line.²⁰ The turnpike was not graded until 1844, and the area along it was still largely undeveloped in 1840. A small cluster of "unpretentious buildings" near the intersection with Truman and Shaw streets was known as Lewisville after local businessman Thomas Lewis, who owned a house and store just east of the intersection. Tobacco fields and very few houses lined the turnpike west of Cape Ann

¹⁵ Busch, "Whaling Will Never Do for Me": *The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*, 20–21; Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling 1816–1906*, 150–51; Starbuck, *A History of the American Whale Fishery from Its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876*, 5–6.

¹⁶ Ellen Liberman, "Black Mariners Claim Little-Known Place in History," *The Day*, February 15, 1994.

¹⁷ Busch, "Whaling Will Never Do for Me": *The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*, 32–35, 42–48; Vieira, *Man and the Sea: The Portuguese Participation in American Whaling*, 133–34.

¹⁸ Penelope Overton, "Black Whalers Captured Respect," *The Day*, April 14, 1996.

¹⁹ Thomas Couser, "Historic Plaque Information" (New London Landmarks, 2017).

²⁰ Caulkins, *History of New London, Connecticut from the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*.

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Lane (now Jefferson Street). People watered their horses at Truman's Brook, which was a "considerable stream" that overflowed its banks at times and covered much of the land around it.²¹

The exact construction date of the two extant buildings on the DeSant property is unknown, but land records and maps indicate the original wood-frame portions (now the upper stories) of each were constructed between 1833 and 1850 (Figure 9).²² Both may have been built after 1840 for DeSant; a 1909 newspaper article says he fixed up an old shack on the property that was "always the abode of black people" to sell rum and saved enough money to "put up a couple of good buildings."²³ The smaller one on the east side of the parcel was built with a curved northeast wall that followed the alignment of the brook. DeSant's grandson later said that his grandfather had "found a wedge-shaped ledge solid enough to support a house and then constructed the building to conform to the foundation."²⁴

Between whaling voyages in the 1840s, DeSant started a family and established himself on Bank Street. On September 18, 1842, he married Diana Maria Gager (or Cager), a mixed-race woman born in Connecticut ca. 1816.²⁵ The 1850 federal census records the couple living with their 10-year-old son George and several boarders.²⁶ Antone is listed as a barber with real estate valued at \$1,000 (equivalent to \$41,000 in 2025).²⁷ His barber shop was likely in the smaller curved building next to the brook, with the larger house used as his residence to the west. In the mid-nineteenth century, barbering was considered unskilled service work primarily done in the North by minorities and new immigrants. DeSant operated his barber shop until at least 1859 and probably served mostly white men, although he may have had some Black customers.²⁸ New London was a rapidly growing city with a total population of over 10,000 by 1860 that included about 250 (2.5%) people of color. While DeSant's immediate neighbors were white, a small Black neighborhood existed on nearby Hempstead Street, which has some of the oldest continuously Black-owned properties in New England.²⁹

²¹ Richard B. Wall, *Bank Street Fifty Years Ago* (Press of the Day Publishing Company, 1902).

²² Couser, "Historic Plaque Information"; J.C. Sidney, *Plan of the City of New London, New London County, Connecticut* (Collins & Clark, 1850).

²³ R. B. Wall, "The Ancient School Located by Truman's Brook," *The Day*, July 16, 1909.

²⁴ Tim Murphy, "Ships weren't on builder's mind, but flood-prone brook was," *The Day*, June 11, 1977.

²⁵ Rose and Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*; Nancy Finlay, "Africans in Search of the American Dream: Cape Verdean Whalers and Sealers," 2022, <https://connecticuthistory.org/africans-in-search-of-the-american-dream-cape-verdean-whalers-and-sealers/>; Barbara W. Brown and James M. Rose, *Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650–1900* (Gale Research Company, 1980), 88, 109–10.

²⁶ The couple had two other children who died in the 1840s. The 1850 census does not indicate DeSant's race.

²⁷ "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1850, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration.

²⁸ *New London Directory for 1859–60* (The New London Publishing Company, 1859); Dale Plummer, "Black Entrepreneurs Once Thrived in Region," *The Day*, October 31, 1999; Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²⁹ Rose and Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*, 43; Caulkins, *History of New London, Connecticut from the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*, 666; Baker, "745–753 Bank Street, Antoine Desant, c. 1840–1886, Home and Store," 2; "Segregation and Community on New London's Hempstead Street - Segregation and Community on New London's Hempstead Street," accessed January 28, 2025, <https://segregationnewlondon.digital.conncoll.edu/>; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1860, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration.

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Diana DeSant died on June 13, 1856, and Antone married Susan M. Congdon (ca. 1835–1876), a Black or mixed-race woman from Connecticut, on October 30, 1856.³⁰ In 1860, Antone and Susan lived with two sons from Antone's first marriage, George (age 20) and William (age 10, born after the 1850 census), and two young daughters, Cecilia A. (age 3) and Evelina (age 2).³¹ The census does not record any boarders residing with the DeSants in 1860, and Antone is listed as a grocer with real estate valued at \$1,500 (\$58,000 in 2025). His neighbor across the brook to the east was Timothy Sizer, also a grocer. DeSant reportedly sold "rum and cookies" in the former barber shop.³²

The 1860s and 1870s brought DeSant a mixture of good and bad fortune. A steady income from his grocery store enabled him to invest in more property in New London. By 1868, he owned a building farther north on Truman's Brook along the east side of Cape Ann Lane that he presumably rented out (Figure 10).³³ His real estate was valued in 1870 at \$5,000 (\$122,000 in 2025). Antone became a naturalized United States citizen in 1872. He and Susan had nine more children, but Susan died on Sept 6, 1876, and only four of their children (John, born ca. 1863; Julia, born in 1865; Ella, born in 1867; and Alice, born ca. 1873) survived by 1880.³⁴ The average life expectancy in the United States at the time was only about 40 years, and mortality rates for non-white and urban populations were higher than for other groups.

The 1880 census records Antone living with his children and a housekeeper and working as a grocer and liquor dealer. A newspaper article from the following November reports that the city selectmen rejected DeSant's application for a liquor license.³⁵ City directories show that he continued to operate his grocery store through at least 1884. In 1883, he purchased an empty lot directly west of his house and, in 1884, built a house on it (not extant, identified on early twentieth-century maps as 763 Bank Street), likely as another rental property.³⁶ In January 1886, he paid taxes on property worth \$5,400 (\$184,000 in 2025).³⁷ Antone DeSant died on September 17, 1886, at age 71.³⁸

³⁰ Finlay, "Africans in Search of the American Dream: Cape Verdean Whalers and Sealers"; Rose and Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*.

³¹ Records show that a George Desant with a "copper" complexion, born ca. 1840 in Connecticut, enlisted in the Navy in 1861 in New Bedford, MA. See US Naval Enlistment Rendezvous, 1855–1891, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, National Archives and Records Administration. No further information on George or William has been found.

³² Caulkins, *History of New London, Connecticut from the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*, 681, 686; Wall, *Bank Street Fifty Years Ago*.

³³ F. W. Beers, A. D. Ellis, and G. G. Soule, *Plan of the City of New London, New London County, Connecticut* (Beers, Ellis and Soule, 1868). The house owned by DeSant is possibly the extant but altered duplex at 123–125 Jefferson Avenue, which appears on the 1921 Sanborn insurance map (the earliest Sanborn map with coverage of the parcel).

³⁴ Theresa, born ca. 1861, died in 1864; Cecilia and Evalina both died in 1865; three sons (Robert, born in 1868; Anton, born in 1869; and Frederick, born in 1870) died in 1870; and Almira, born in 1871, lived less than two months. Susan and at least four of her children were originally buried in New London's Third Burial Ground and later reinterred in the city's Cedar Grove Cemetery. "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1870, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1880, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "Susan M. Congdon DeSant (1834–1876) - Find a....," accessed January 28, 2025, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/104823069/susan_m-desant.

³⁵ "Six Licenses Refused," *The Day*, November 1, 1881.

³⁶ Couser, "Historic Plaque Information"; "New London 50 Years Ago," *The Day*, September 19, 1934.

³⁷ "Our Heavy Taxpayers," *The Day*, January 25, 1886.

³⁸ "Died," *The Day*, September 18, 1886.

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DeSant's Descendants in New London

DeSant's will, prepared in 1881 and probated in 1886, left his estate to his four living descendants: John, Julia, Ella, and Alice. John DeSant inherited the Cape Ann Lane property and lived there in 1887, when the city directory lists him as a mariner.³⁹ Julia DeSant, the oldest daughter, was appointed executrix of the estate with the authority to collect rents from the Bank Street buildings and share the proceeds among the three sisters or their offspring but not to sell property.⁴⁰ Only Julia and Ella DeSant appear among a list of Bank Street property owners in the January 21, 1888, issue of the New London newspaper *The Day* who were potentially owed damages related to road construction, indicating that Alice DeSant (who disappears from the historical record) had likely died by that time. John and Ella DeSant apparently suffered from mental illness as adults. In September 1895, Julia requested authority from the city's Probate Court to mortgage real estate in New London belonging to the estate of John DeSant, an "incapable person."⁴¹ John died in 1905 at the "Connecticut Hospital for the Insane" (Connecticut Valley Hospital, National Register-listed) in Middletown, where Ella lived from at least 1900 until her death on February 28, 1932. Ella's grave is in New London's Cedar Grove Cemetery (National Register-listed 2024).⁴²

Julia DeSant (Figure 11) outlived all her siblings. On February 8, 1888, she married William Herbert Bush, a Black musician from New London (Figure 12), at the city's Second Congregational Church. The son of Anson (known as Aaron) and Henrietta Parkis Bush, William grew up in the historically Black Hempstead Street neighborhood close to the DeSants.⁴³ Aaron Bush was a nailmaker and machinist by trade but, like Antone DeSant, had worked on whaling ships as a young man. William Bush learned to play the melodeon (reed organ) as a child from his mother and started earning money by playing hymns at a mission on Bradley Street. He later received an old cabinet organ and a set of pedals and took organ and piano lessons from organists at two New London churches. He spent about five years studying music in New Haven and New York before returning to New London, where he held the position of organist at the Second Congregational Church for 35 years and then at the First Baptist Church for 10 years. Bush gave organ concerts in New London and other cities, including St. Louis for the 1904 World's Fair and New York City for a pontifical mass in 1908.⁴⁴

The Bushes resided in Julia's childhood home at 751–753 Bank Street through the end of their lives. The couple had one son, also named William Herbert, in 1902.⁴⁵ In addition to playing the organ professionally,

³⁹ *Whittlesey's New London Directory* (The Little Guide Publishing Co, 1887).

⁴⁰ "Connecticut, US, Wills and Probate Records, 1609–1999, Vol. 21–22, 1885–1890," 256–57, Connecticut County, District and Probate Courts.

⁴¹ *The Day*, September 19, 1895.

⁴² "John Desante is Dead," *The Day*, January 14, 1905; "Obituary: Ella DeSant," *The Day*, March 1, 1932; "Ella DeSant (1867–1932) - Find a Grave Memorial," accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/239985962/ella-desant>.

⁴³ His family home at 73 Hempstead Street is extant.

⁴⁴ "Observe Golden Wedding Date," *The Day*, February 11, 1938; "Celebrating 61st Wedding Anniversary," *The Day*, February 9, 1949; Rose and Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*, 59–61, 122.

⁴⁵ "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1900, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1910, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1920, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1930, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1940, Records of the

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William Bush taught music lessons out of a second-floor room in the house and tuned pianos. Between 1884 and 1891, the buildings at 751–753 and 745 Bank Street were raised above new brick ground-floor commercial spaces that the Bushes rented out for additional income. They added a one-story shop extension at the west corner of 751–753 Bank between 1907 and 1912 and a two-story angled rear section to the same building between 1912 and 1921, when the brook along their property line was filled in from Bank Street north to an automobile service complex built on the adjacent lot. The Bushes also had tenants in the upper apartment at 745 Bank and in the house at 763 Bank Street until it was removed between 1907 and 1912.⁴⁶

Taxpayer lists published in *The Day* in the first decade of the 1900s show that William Bush owned property valued at \$2,000–\$3,000 (\$73,000–\$109,000 in 2025) and the Antone DeSant estate administered by Julia was valued at \$3,000–\$4,000 (\$109,000–\$145,000 in 2025). In 1900, the Bushes were one of eight Black families recorded in their federal census district, four of whom owned their homes. The 1940 federal census recorded a total of 17 Black families living in their district, but only the Bushes and one other Black family owned their homes. By 1949, Bush's property value had increased to \$21,000 (\$282,000 in 2025) and the DeSant estate was worth more than \$10,000 (\$134,000 in 2025).⁴⁷

The ground floor added to 745 Bank Street ca. 1890 was occupied by a barber shop for more than 75 years. Nicholas P. Robinson, a Black barber from Virginia, rented it from at least 1890 to 1925. He lived above the shop from at least 1900 to 1915 and at other nearby apartments in 1920 and 1925.⁴⁸ Angelo LaGrúa, an Italian immigrant, took over the barber shop by 1930 and rented it through at least 1965. He and his family rented an apartment farther west on Bank Street in 1930 and lived on Jefferson Street in 1950.⁴⁹ The

Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1950, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration. The 1900 census lists the couple on Montauk Avenue, which intersects Bank Street, but at house number 693, which is on Bank Street.

⁴⁶ "Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut" (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1891); "Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut" (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1896); "Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut" (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1901); "Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut" (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1907); "Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut" (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1912); "Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut" (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1921).

⁴⁷ "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1900; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1940.

⁴⁸ *Whittlesey's New London Directory* (Price, Lee & Co., 1890); *New London Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1900); *New London Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1910); *New London Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1920); *New London and Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1925); "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1900; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1910; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1920.

⁴⁹ "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1930; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1940; "US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London," 1950; *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1930); *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1935); *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1940); *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1945); *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1950); *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1955); *New London Niantic and Waterford Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1960); *Price & Lee's New London City Directory* (The Price & Lee Co., 1965).

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apartment above the shop had a variety of white tenants in 1920, 1930, and 1940; two young Black women rented it in 1950.⁵⁰

The ground floor added to 751–753 Bank Street ca. 1890 housed various retail establishments, including a “variety market” in 1891 and a “cigars and stationery” shop in 1901.⁵¹ By 1910, Louis Conti, an Italian immigrant like LaGrua, had opened an ice cream and candy shop in the space. Conti owned a house farther west on Bank Street and retired by 1930; his son, Lawrence, ran the shop through at least 1935.⁵² By 1940, Conti’s had become a confectionary operated by William Davidson, a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania who lived in the neighborhood south of Bank Street.⁵³ William’s daughter and son-in-law, Beatrice and Herman Rodensky, took over the business in 1951, when they signed a three-year lease with William Bush Sr. for \$50/month (\$615/month in 2025).⁵⁴ A store named Davidson’s remained in business at this location through the early 1990s but by 1971 advertised as selling patent medicine and photographs. In 1983, Davidson’s was a camera store owned by Donald R. Hetzel.

William Bush Sr. died in 1952, and Julia DeSant Bush in 1954; both are buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery (National Register listed 2024).⁵⁵ Their son, William H. Bush Jr., inherited the buildings at 745 and 751–753 Bank Street and continued to live at 751–753 and earn rental income from both buildings.⁵⁶ He kept his father’s grand piano in one corner of his house next to shelves of dusty music sheets. William Jr. had worked as a piano tuner and motorcycle mechanic before serving in World War II. After the war, he married Helen Lane (1906–1988) of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, and worked at the Naval Underwater Sound Laboratory at Fort Trumbull in New London. The couple had one daughter, Anna, in 1946.⁵⁷ Anna Bush recalled playing as a child in the attic of the Bank Street house among Antone DeSant’s harpoons and sea chests, although she says her grandmother Julia was a quiet person who did not talk much about her father.⁵⁸ By the mid-1970s, the smaller building at 745 Bank Street was vacant and had fallen into disrepair. The Bush family renovated it with the assistance of an \$11,000 low-interest loan from the New London Housing Conservation Program. They installed new windows, repainted the exterior, and updated the interior,

⁵⁰ “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1900; “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1920; “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1930; “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1940; “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1950.

⁵¹ “Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut,” 1891; “Fire Insurance Map from New London, New London County, Connecticut,” 1901.

⁵² *New London Directory*, 1910; *New London Directory*, 1920; “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1920; *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory*, 1930; “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1930; *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory*, 1935.

⁵³ “US Census, New London County, CT, Population Schedule, New London,” 1940; *New London Waterford Borough of Groton Directory*, 1940.

⁵⁴ “Store Is Leased for Three Years,” *The Day*, December 21, 1951.

⁵⁵ “Death Takes William H. Bush, 91; Was Organist and Piano Teacher,” *The Day*, October 21, 1952; “Obituary: Mrs. Julia D. Bush,” *The Day*, April 12, 1954; “William Herbert Bush (1861–1952) - Find a Grave...,” accessed January 28, 2025, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/143949643/william_herbert-bush; “Julia DeSant Bush (1865–1954) - Find a Grave...,” accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/143949665/julia-bush>.

⁵⁶ “Estate Settled,” *The Day*, August 5, 1958.

⁵⁷ Rose and Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*, 59–61.

⁵⁸ Liberman, “Black Mariners Claim Little-Known Place in History”; Anna Bush, Oral history interview, October 30, 1992, Connecticut History Illuminated Mystic Seaport Museum. Anna donated her great-grandfather’s whaling logbook, sea chest with a whale’s tooth, and family photographs to the Mystic Seaport Museum in 1992.

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including the upstairs apartment with “rooms shaped like bites out of a piece of pie and a winding staircase tucked into the pointed end.”⁵⁹

William Bush Jr. died in 1987; his obituary says he had lived in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, since 1983.⁶⁰ Anna Bush, who worked as a bank manager in Boston, inherited the Bank Street properties when her mother died in 1988. She sold the buildings in 1991 to Marion and Richard Ferry, who owned them until the current owner purchased them in 2003.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Murphy, “Ships weren’t on builder’s mind, but flood-prone brook was.”

⁶⁰ “William Bush,” *The Day*, August 25, 1987.

⁶¹ Couser, “Historic Plaque Information.”

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other

Name of repository: New London Landmarks, Mystic Seaport Museum

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.11

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

A. Latitude: 41.349369

Longitude: -72.105689

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property conforms to the parcel identified as 4419 (Map E14, Block 134, Lot 12) in the City of New London's GIS and assessment databases (2025). This 0.11-acre parcel is listed as 745 Bank Street but contains both DeSant Houses, known as 745 and 751-753 by street address (see Figure 1).

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary follows the lot historically associated with the DeSant family since 1840, when Antone DeSant purchased it.

Antone DeSant Houses
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Laura Kline, Sr. Architectural Historian; Virginia H. Adams, Sr. Architectural Historian; Sophie Zionts, Assoc. Architectural Historian
organization: The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL)
(Edited by Jenny Scofield, CT SHPO)
street & number: 26 Main Street
city or town: Pawtucket state: Rhode Island zip code: 02860
e-mail: lkline@palinc.com
telephone: (401) 728-8780
date: May 2025

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Antone DeSant Houses

City or Vicinity: New London

County: New London

State: Connecticut

Antone DeSant Houses

Name of Property

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Photographer: Laura Kline, PAL

Date Photographed: October 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 21. Antone DeSant Houses 745 and 751–753 (right and left) Bank Street, view northwest.
- 2 of 21. Antone DeSant Houses 745 and 751–753 (right and left) Bank Street, view northeast.
- 3 of 21. 745 Bank Street south façade elevation, storefront entrance detail, view north.
- 4 of 21. 745 Bank Street south façade elevation, storefront cornice and brackets detail, view north.
- 5 of 21. 745 Bank Street west elevation with main entrance and porch, view northeast.
- 6 of 21. 745 Bank Street east and north elevations curved wall, 751–753 Bank Street at right rear, view southwest.
- 7 of 21. 745 Bank Street south façade and east elevations, view west.
- 8 of 21. 745 Bank Street, ground floor, interior north brick curved wall detail, view north.
- 9 of 21. 745 Bank Street, stair between first floor and attic from first floor, view north.
- 10 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, south façade elevation with shop addition and storefront, view northeast.
- 11 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, south façade elevation with storefront detail, view northwest.
- 12 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, east and north elevations with main entrance.
- 13 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, west elevation with painted sign “DIAMOND GINGER ALE,” view east.
- 14 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, north and west elevations with stairs and rear entrances, view southeast.
- 15 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, ground floor, brick wall of main block, view west.
- 16 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, first-floor door, window frame, and wainscoting detail, view northeast.
- 17 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, second-floor windows, chair rail, and trim detail, view north.
- 18 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, first-floor fireplace and mantel detail, view north.
- 19 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, first floor, main stair to second floor, view north.
- 20 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, attic detail with roof framing, chimney, and window, view north.
- 21 of 21. 751–753 Bank Street, first-floor north addition with segmental-arch windows, view north.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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Figures

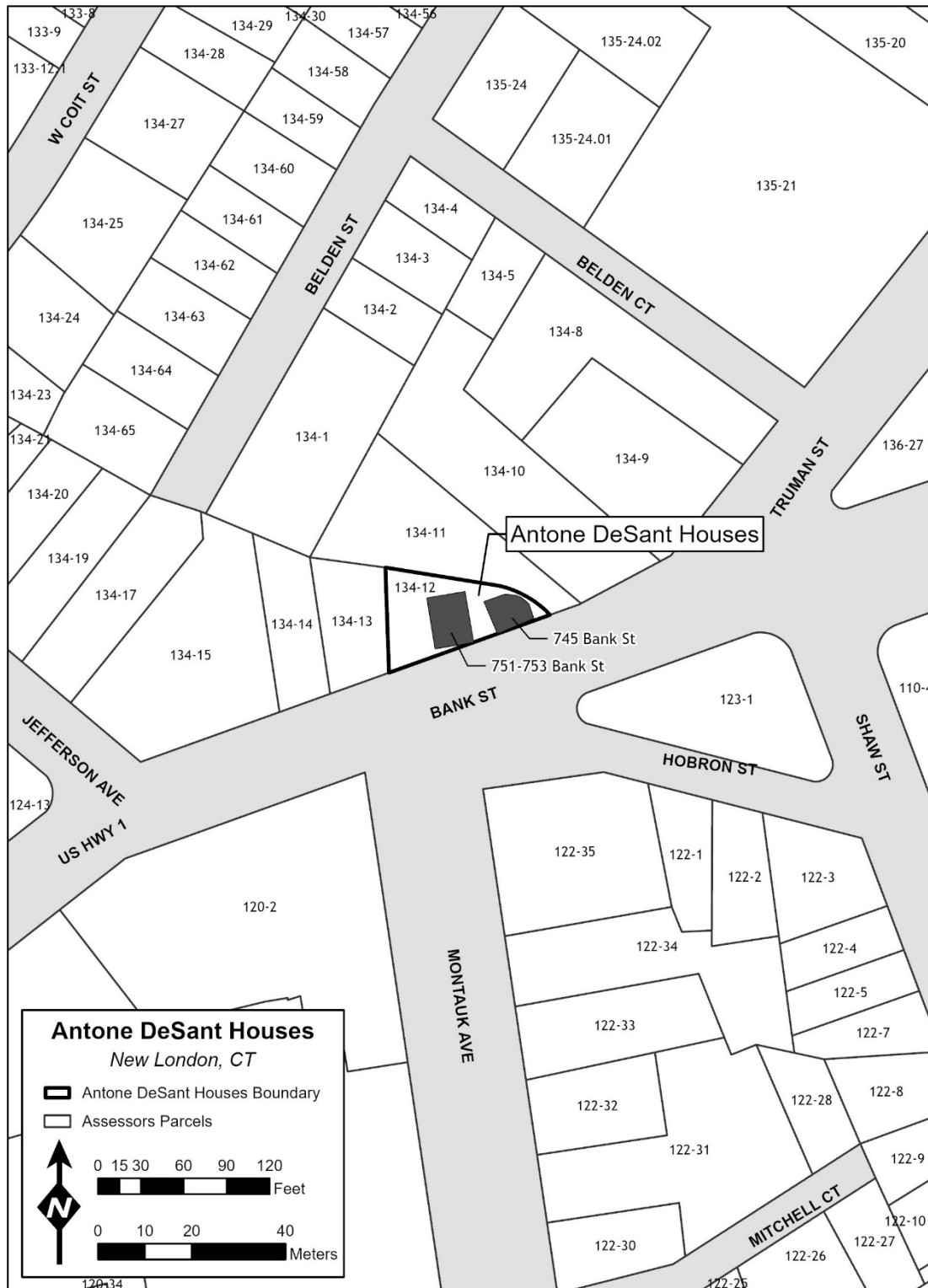


Figure 1. Antone DeSant Houses Assessors Map.

Antone DeSant Houses
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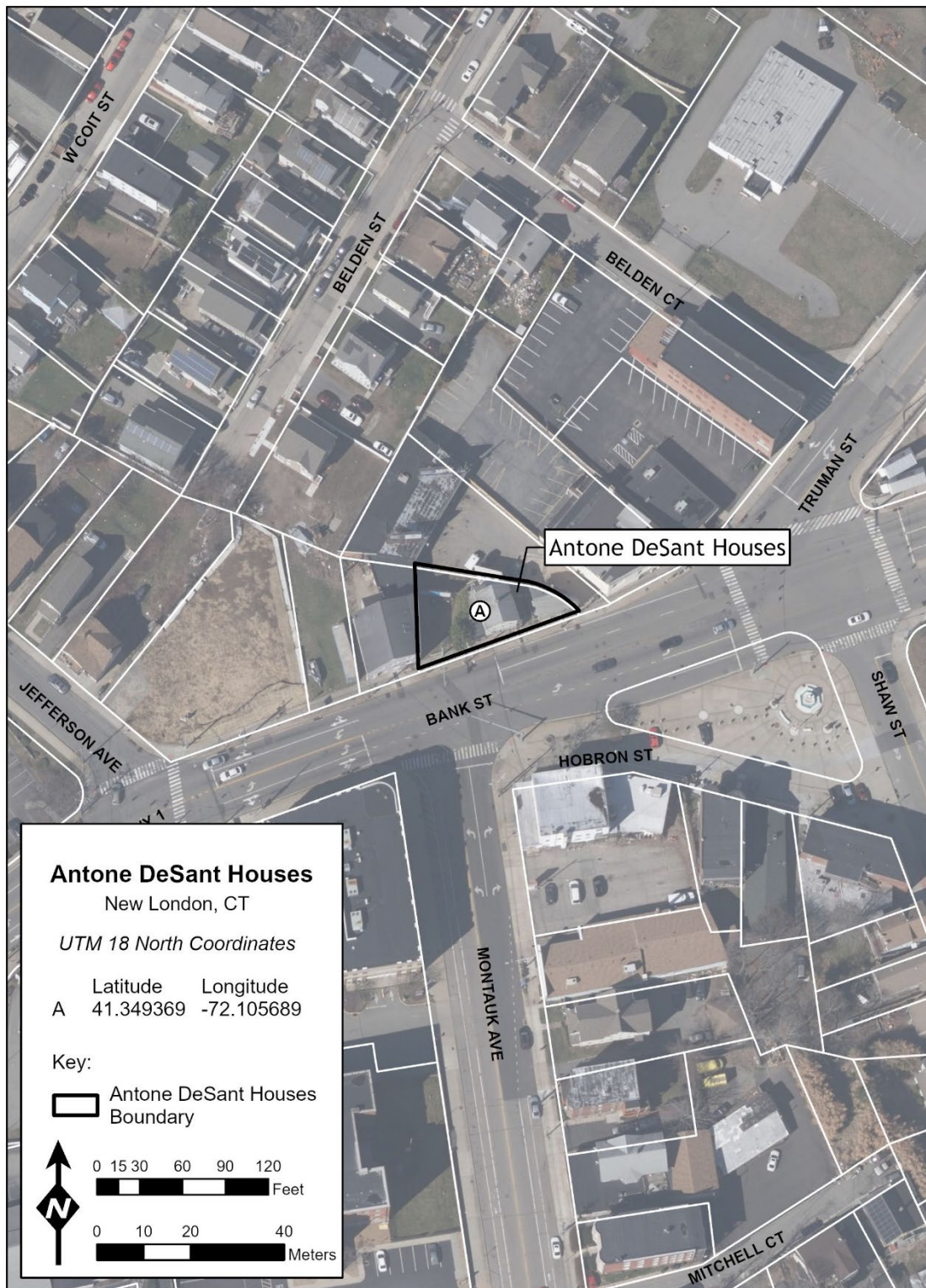


Figure 2. Antone DeSant Houses Coordinate Map.

Antone DeSant Houses

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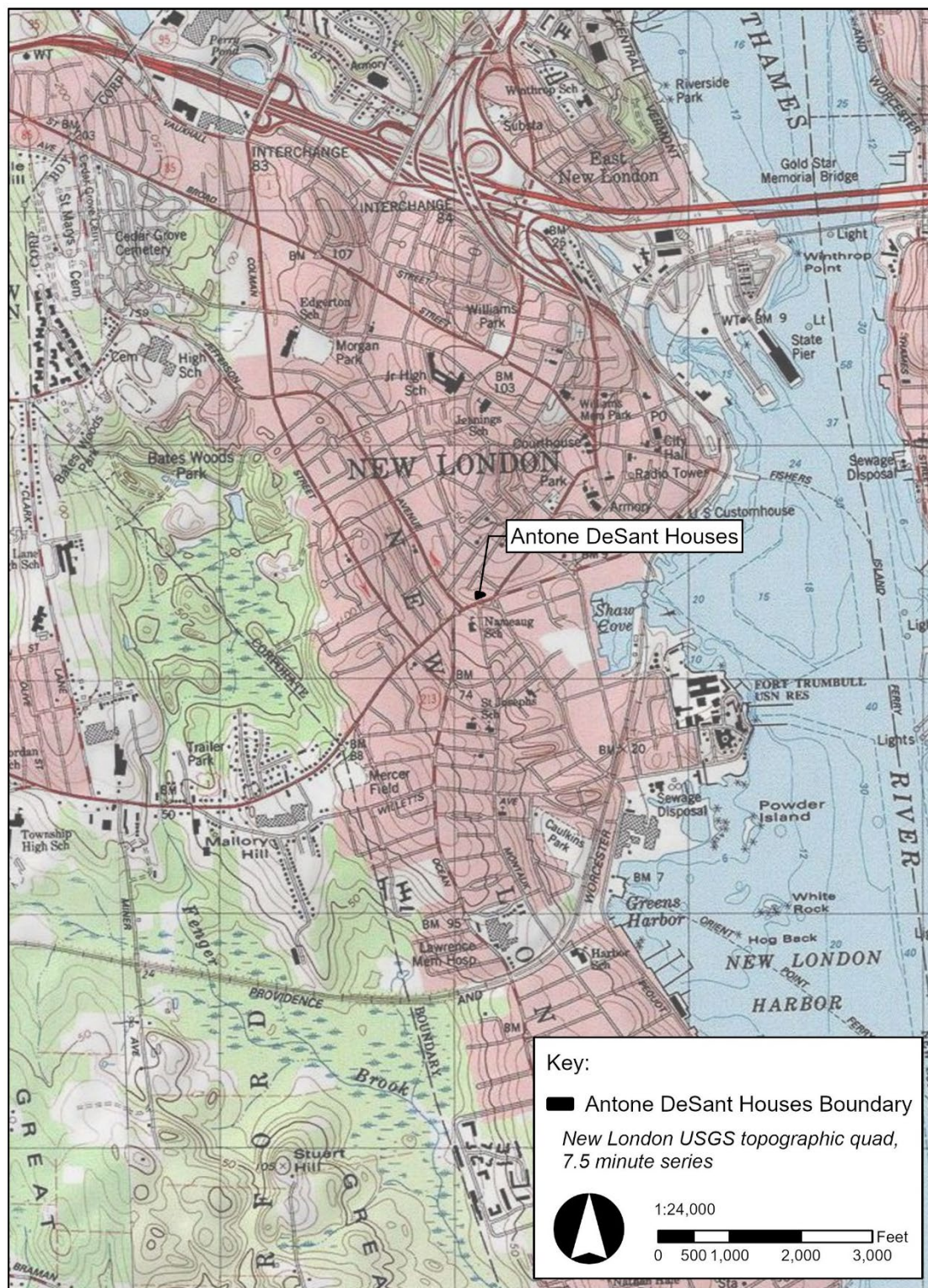


Figure 3. Antone DeSant Houses USGS Map.

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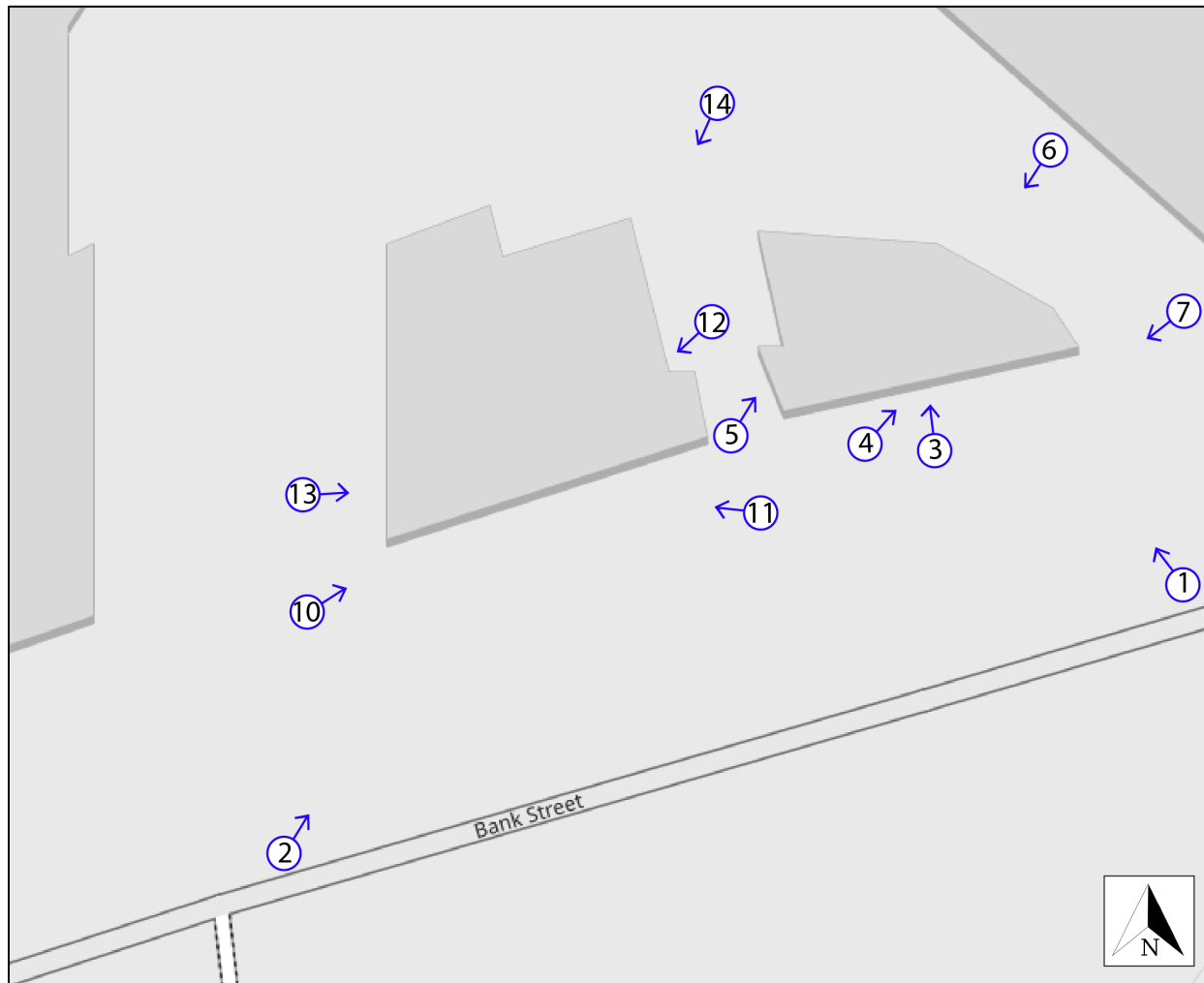
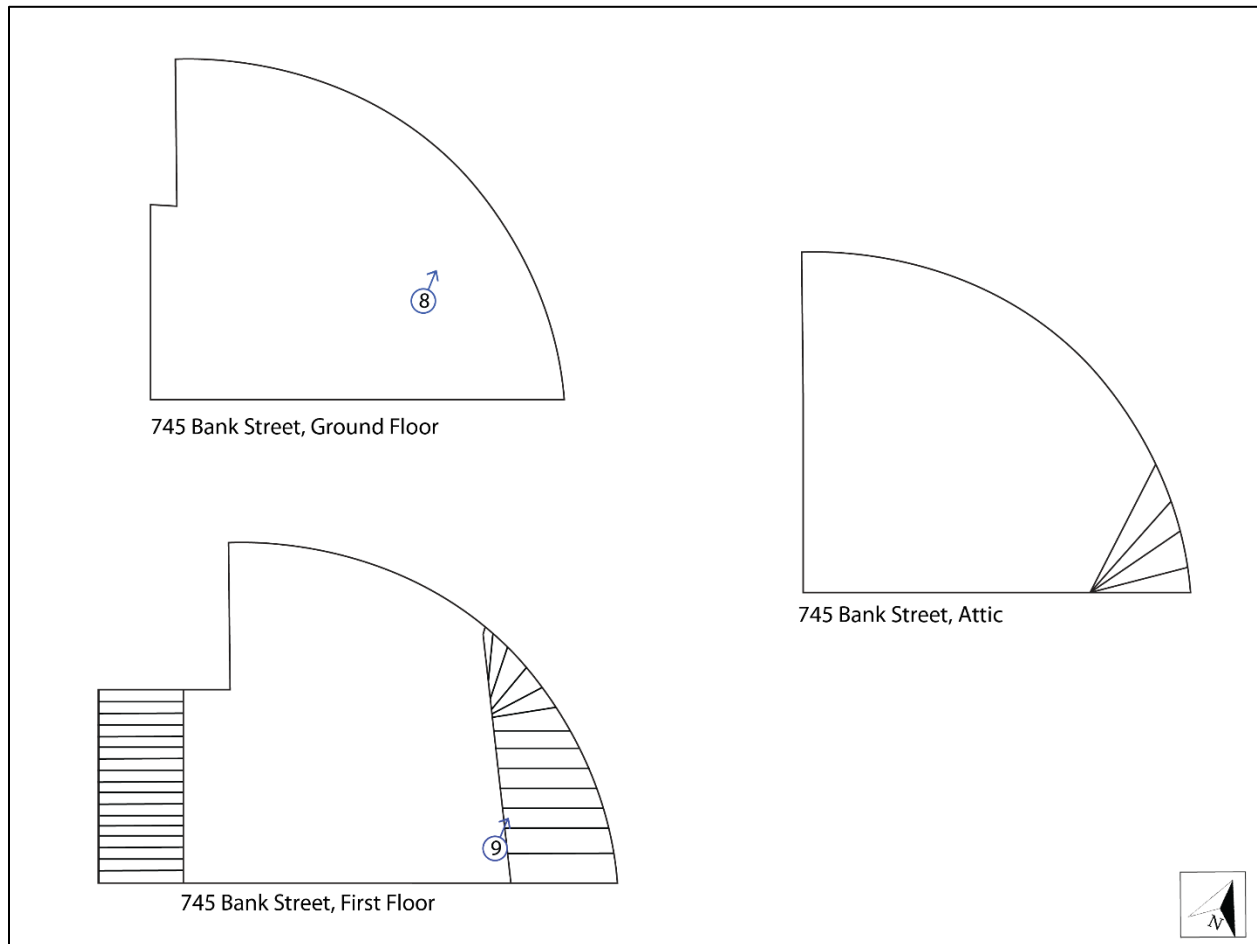


Figure 4. 745 and 751–753 Bank Street, Antone DeSant Houses, Exterior Photo Key.

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Antone DeSant Houses
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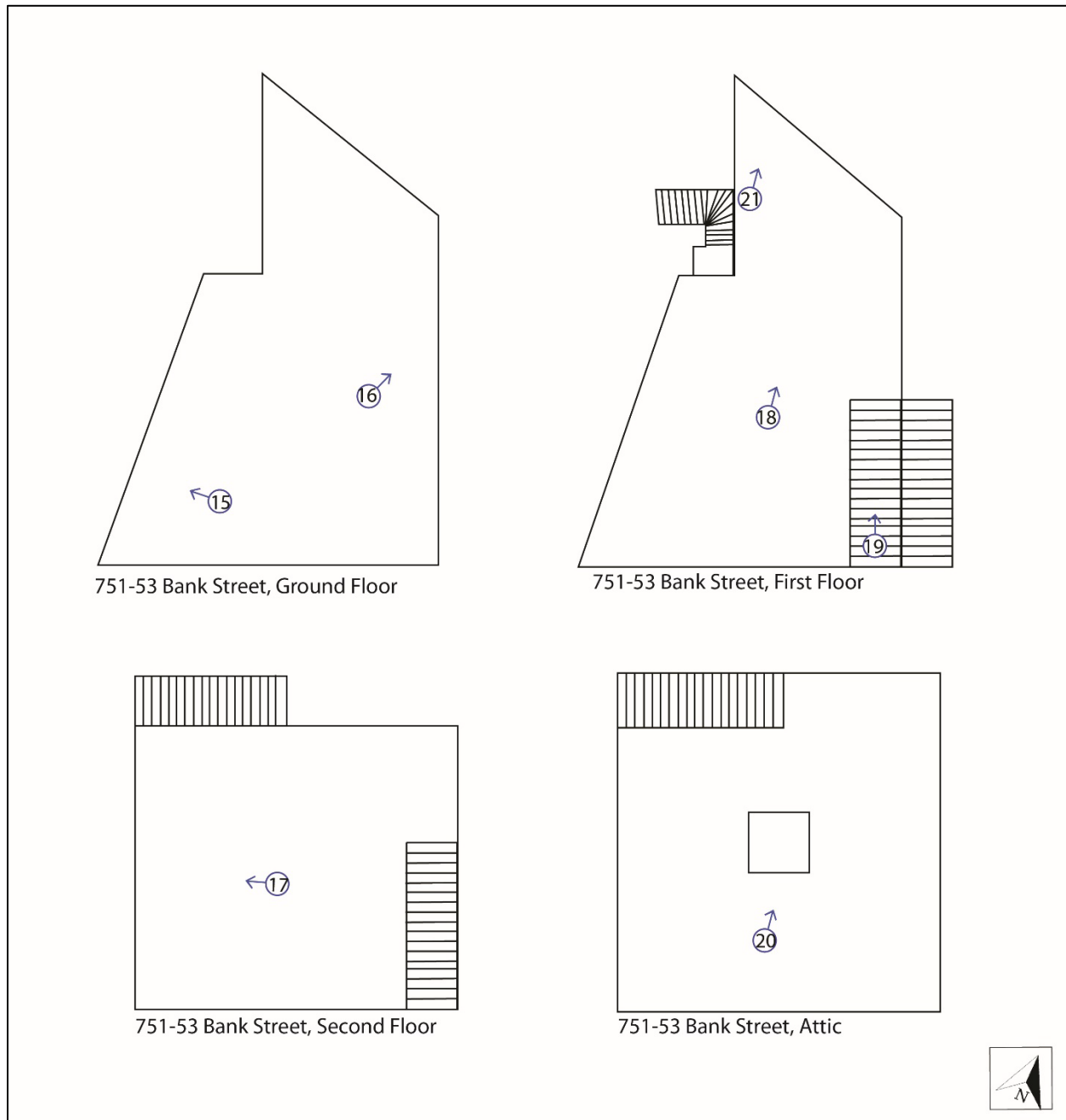


Figure 6. 751-753 Bank Street, Interior Photo Keys.

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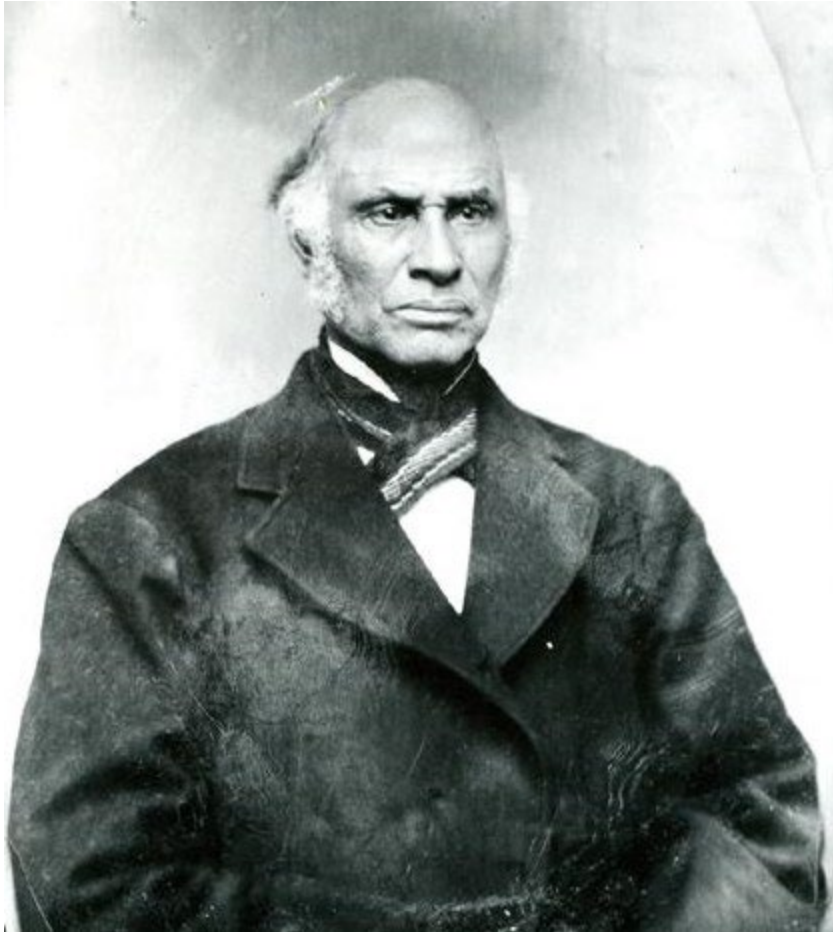


Figure 7. Antone DeSant, ca. 1880 tintype by Bolles & Frisbie (Mystic Seaport, 1992.119.1).

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Figure 8. Detail from *Map of New London and Windham Counties in Conn.* with location of DeSant property noted (Lester 1833).

Antone DeSant Houses
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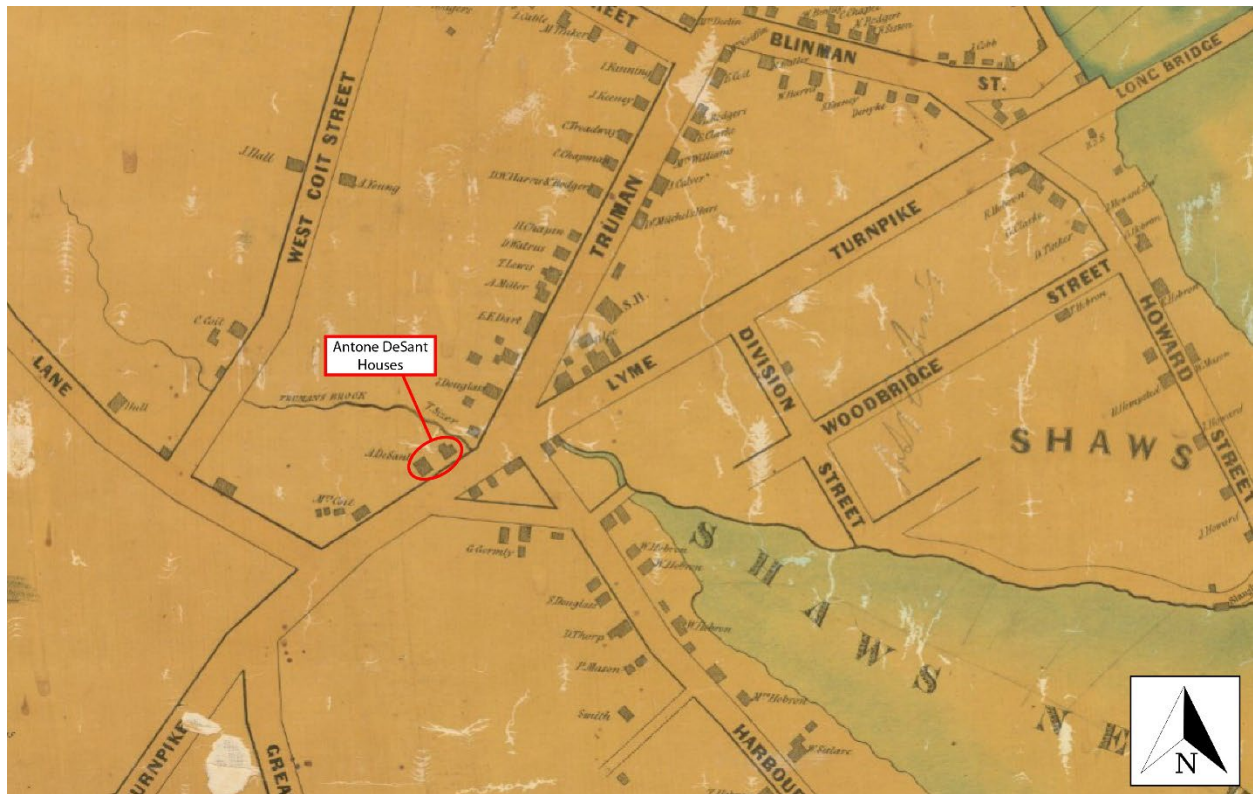


Figure 9. Detail from *Plan of the City of New London, New London County, Connecticut* showing DeSant Houses (Sidney 1850).

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Figure 10. Detail from *Plan of the City of New London, New London County, Connecticut* showing DeSant Houses on Bank Street and DeSant property on Cape Anne Lane (Beers et al. 1868).

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Figure 11. Julia DeSant, ca. 1880 albumen print (Mystic Seaport, 1992.131.1).

Antone DeSant Houses
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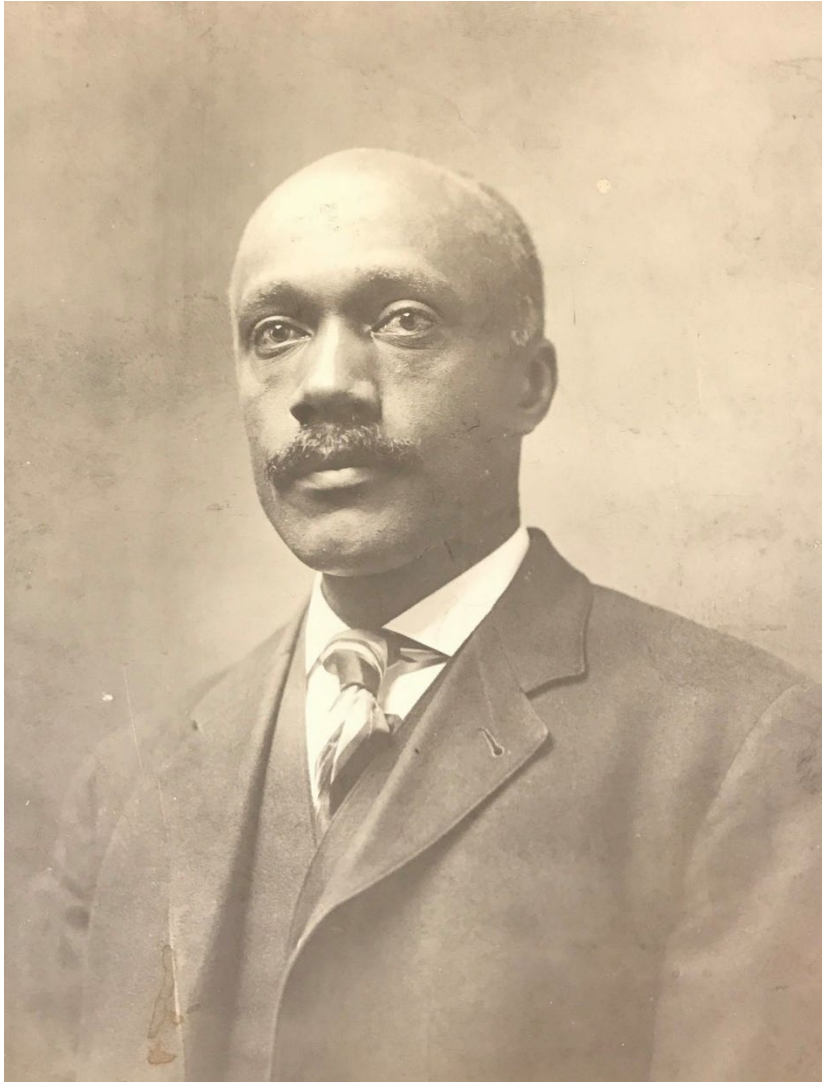


Figure 12. William Herbert Bush Sr., date unknown (New London County Historical Society).

Photo Sheets – Antone DeSant Houses



Photo 1. Antone DeSant Houses 745 and 751–753 (right and left) Bank Street, view northwest.



Photo 2. Antone DeSant Houses 745 and 751–753 (right and left) Bank Street, view northeast.



Photo 3. 745 Bank Street, south façade elevation, storefront entrance detail, view north.



Photo 4. 745 Bank Street, south façade elevation, storefront cornice and brackets detail, view north.



Photo 5. 745 Bank Street, west elevation with main entrance and porch, view northeast.



Photo 6. 745 Bank Street, east and north elevations curved wall, 751–753 Bank Street at right rear, view southwest.



Photo 7. 745 Bank Street, south façade and east elevations, view west.

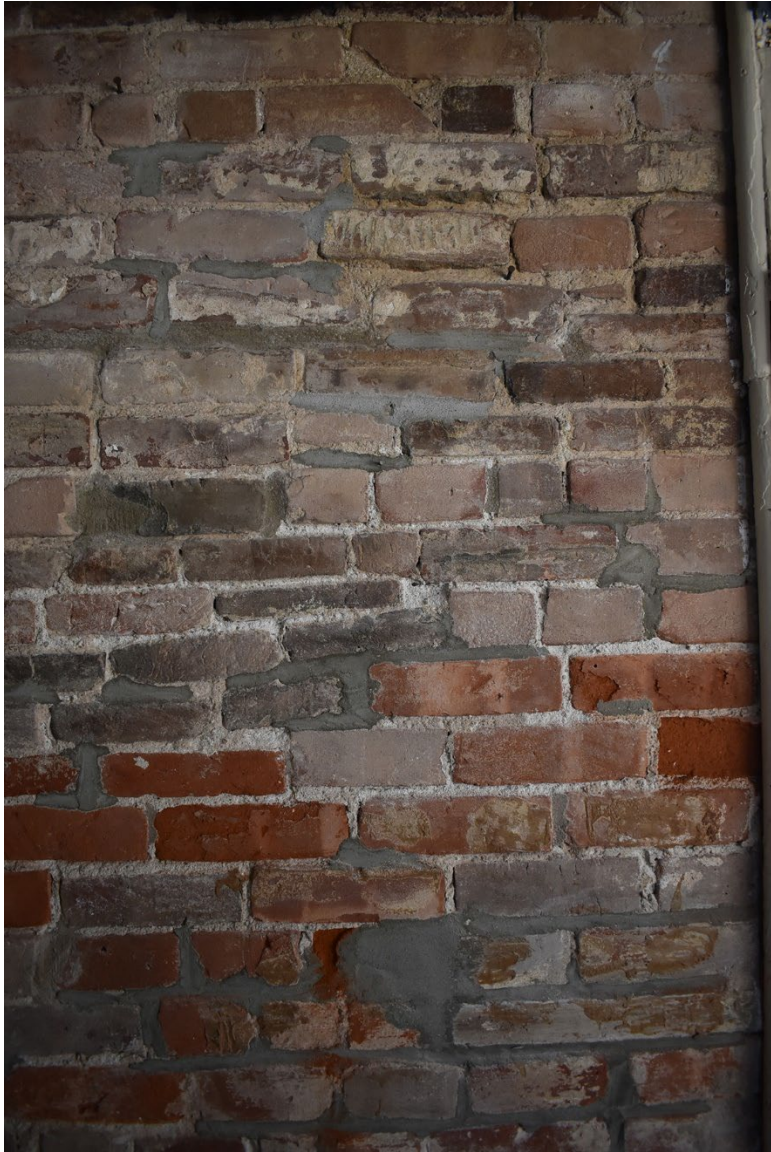


Photo 8. 745 Bank Street, ground floor, interior north brick curved wall detail, view northeast.



Photo 9. 745 Bank Street, stair between first floor and attic from first floor, view north.



Photo 10. 751–753 Bank Street, south façade elevation with shop addition and storefront, view northeast.



Photo 11. 751–753 Bank Street, south façade elevation with storefront detail, view northwest.



Photo 12. 751–753 Bank Street, east and north elevations with main entrance.



Photo 13. 751–753 Bank Street, west elevation with painted sign “DIAMOND GINGER ALE,” view east.



Photo 14. 751–753 Bank Street, north and west elevations with stairs and rear entrances, view southeast.



Photo 15. 751–753 Bank Street, ground floor, brick wall of main block, view west.



Photo 16. 751–753 Bank Street, first-floor door, window frame, and wainscoting detail, view northeast.



Photo 17. 751–753 Bank Street, second-floor windows, chair rail, and trim detail, view north.



Photo 18. 751–753 Bank Street, first-floor fireplace and mantel detail, view north.



Photo 19. 751–753 Bank Street, first floor, main staircase to second floor, view north.



Photo 20. 751–753 Bank Street, attic detail with roof framing, chimney, and window, view north.



Photo 21. 751–753 Bank Street, first-floor north addition with segmental-arch windows, view north.