



Quarterly News and Updates

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National Historic Preservation Advocacy Week

Earlier this month, State Historic Preservation Officer Jonathan Kinney and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Jenny Scofield traveled to Washington D.C. to attend National Historic Preservation Advocacy Week. This annual event is co-hosted by the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) and Preservation Action and brings together hundreds of representatives from SHPO's, national, regional, and municipal preservation organizations, allied professionals, and grassroots advocates from across the country. The first day of the event included a roundtable discussion with staff from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the NCSHPO Annual Meeting, where staff from 45 of the 59 SHPO's gathered to discuss the current challenges and opportunities facing the field and the preservation policy goals that are the emphasis of advocacy efforts this year.

Day two of the event included advocacy trainings and panel discussion with Congressional champions, lobbyists, and advocates to prepare participants for visits to their respective congressional delegations. This year, the federal legislative priorities for the preservation movement included funding for the Historic Preservation Fund and support for the Historic Tax Credit program. Detailed information on this year's legislative requests can be found here:

<https://preservationaction.org/aw2025/>

On Wednesday, Jonathan and Jenny visited all seven offices of the Connecticut Congressional delegation to thank them all for their continued support of historic preservation and to provide them with information on preservation's legislative priorities. Concerns over a potential funding freeze and force reduction efforts that could impact federal partner agencies such as the National Park Service were also discussed. Congressional staff stressed the importance of continuing our conversations with them and providing any updates we have on unintended consequences and impacts to programs at home in Connecticut.

The week concluded with a wonderful reception on Capitol Hill and a behind the scenes tour of the U.S. Capitol Building led by former Missouri Congressman and current Preservation Action President Russ Carnahan.

Please take a minute to read NCSHPO Executive Director Erik Hein's powerful opening remarks here:

<https://ncshpo.org/2025/03/04/ncshpo-executive-director-kicks-off-advocacy-week-with-powerful-message/>

Historic Preservation Success Story



Recently, SHPO entered into an agreement with representatives of Gales Ferry Intermodal, Inc (GFI) in Ledyard Connecticut to ensure the long-term preservation of Fort Decatur, a fort constructed during the War of 1812 and abandoned at the end of the war. Fort Decatur has the unusual distinction of being considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places applying all four criteria for evaluation at a national level of significance. SHPO staff and GFI have been meeting since April

2023 to balance preservation of this important piece of history with project activities. The agreement will result in the donation of 3.44 acres containing the remains of Fort Decatur's earthworks and sentry post to The Archaeological Conservancy for permanent preservation. The Archaeological Conservancy is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of our nation's archaeological resources. More information on Fort Decatur and the preservation agreement with GFI can be found at: <https://www.thearchcons.org/fort-decatur/>

Photo: Memorial Plaque at the site of Fort Decatur (courtesy of Kelley Berliner/The Archaeological Conservancy)

Recent Grant Awards

The following towns and organizations were awarded Survey and Planning grants during the last quarter:

South Congregational-First Baptist Church, New Britain was awarded \$15,000 for a Condition Assessment for the sanctuary and surrounding area of South Church (1865) located at 90 Main Street

New Preston Congregational Church, New Preston was awarded \$10,000 for consulting services of a structural engineering firm to assess the structural condition of the New Preston Congregational Church (1853) located at 15 Church Street

Town of Newington was granted \$20,000 for consulting services of a CFR-qualified Architectural Historian to prepare an Historic Resources Inventory for the town

Northeast Neighborhood Partners, Inc., Hartford received \$15,000 for consulting services of a CFR-qualified architectural historian to prepare State Register of Historic Places nominations for 34 Pliny, 243 Capen, and 33 Bethel Streets (c.1920)

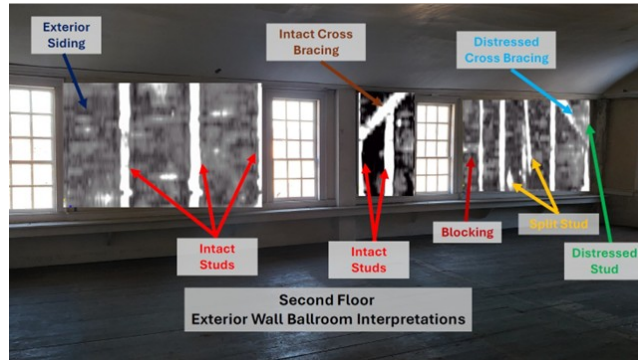
Hicks-Stearns Family Museum, Tolland was awarded \$20,000 for consulting services of a CFR-qualified architect to prepare construction level plans and specifications to support the restoration of the Hicks-Stearns House (c.1750) located at 42 Tolland Green

Emanuel Lutheran Church, Hartford was awarded \$20,000 for consulting services of a CFR-qualified historical architect/engineer team to prepare a

condition assessment of Emanuel Lutheran Church (1913) located at 311 Capitol Avenue

Town of Hamden was awarded \$16,000 for consulting services of a CFR-qualified historical architect/engineer team to prepare plans and specifications for the rehabilitation of the Brooksville Barn (c. 1900) located at 524 Brooksville Avenue

Using Technology to Learn About the Past



TerraSearch Geophysical, a cultural resources consulting firm based in Berlin, offered to demonstrate the application of ground penetrating radar (GPR) in the examination of historic structures. The SHPO team requested for the demonstration to be at Viets Tavern, situated across the street from Old New-Gate Prison in East Granby. The property was awarded a \$750,000

Semiquincentennial Grant from the National Park Service and the GPR survey could provide valuable information to aid that effort. Staff from TerraSearch employed the use of a hand-held high frequency GPR unit to examine the interior structure of the walls and ceiling of the second-floor ballroom. A sample of the results of the survey can be seen in the photo.

Photo: results of a GPR wall scan of the western wall of the Viets Tavern Ballroom (Photo courtesy of TerraSearch)

Spotlight on the Museum Collections A New Series by Jodi Polsgrove, Curator of Collections



This month's Spotlight focuses on an object from the collections of Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine, located in East Granby, CT, and one of the four State Museums operated by the State Historic Preservation Office.

The item pictured below may not look like much now, but the story it tells about New-Gate Prison is not your run of the mill history.

Many know that New-Gate Prison was the site of the first chartered

copper mine in the colonies dating to 1707. And most know that New-Gate was a prison from 1773-1827.

But something that few people know is that New-Gate was also a tourist attraction for much of its existence.

Prison guards would allow visitors to go below ground to see where the incarcerated lived while the men worked above ground in different prison.

Even after the prison closed and the mining operations attempted to resume, the site drew those who were curious about life in the prison and mine.

By the late 1800s, the 70-foot-deep copper mine was a full-blown tourist attraction with visitors paying a fee to climb down the ladder through the original ore shaft to the tunnels below. There was even an active souvenir trade!

Tourists flocked to the site throughout the twentieth century, visiting the tunnels, dancing in the Guardhouse, enjoying a chicken dinner in Viets Tavern across the road (then known as the Newgate Tap Room) and checking out the caged bear and World War I tank.

When the State reacquired the site in the late 1960s, several items remained as part of the transfer including a few "Visitor Registers" documenting the hand-written names of visitors and their point of origin.

Of all that remains of that time, there is one item which is my favorite. I call this "the carnival banner" due to its size and wording. It is a 6 foot by 9-foot piece of painted canvas .

Because of age and deterioration, it is difficult to get a good photograph of this amazing item. The top reads, "Famous Prisons & Torture Chambers of the World." Below are the years 1776, 1926 and a "Liberty Bell" image in between. There is also an indication of "over-painting"—as if the banner and it's wording was altered at some point.

We believe this was probably hung on the prison walls during the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence that was celebrated in 1926.

We acknowledge that the language on this banner is disturbing. In 1926 the owners of the prison complex were clearly advertising the "attraction" by making the most of shock value, titillating and teasing the visitor to view a historic site using the same language that would have been used to advertise carnival side shows – a whole other discussion. These days, staff are dedicated to sharing a complete history of the site including stories of the incarcerated men (and later women) and talk about the ways that punishment was meted out then and how the justice and prison system works today. We look at the changes, and we look at how things may have stayed too much the same. We strive to offer visitors historic facts that will help all of us make better decisions in the present day.

As we prepare for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, we will be looking closely at items like this banner that are housed in our collections, exploring how they help to tell a more complete story of our state, and of our country. We look forward to sharing them with you.

Old New-Gate Prison & Copper Mine



We are grateful to the Friends of Old New-Gate who recently received grant funding through the CT Museum Makeover program of Conservation ConneCTion. With this funding the museum plans to design and install a new exhibit in the Guardhouse. This interactive exhibit will focus on New-Gate's incarcerated population, emphasizing their humanity and promoting historic research.

The Friends of Old New-Gate are also planning an on-site Scavenger Hunt on May 4th (prior to the museum's opening). [Learn more and register here](#). And if you are interested in joining the Friends group, reach out to friendsofnewgate@gmail.com.

Old New-Gate is set to open May 9th, with regular hours Friday through Monday. Check out our [website](#) and [social media](#) to get all the latest news and event details. Hope to see you this season!

Museum Makeover Program Credit

America 250 | CT Museum Makeover a program of Conservation ConneCTion and the America 250 | CT state commission, administered by CT Humanities (CTH), with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) from the Connecticut State Legislature.

SHPO Staff Out and About

On Saturday, February 8, several members of SHPO staff, along with Circuit Rider Stacey Vairo and the Town of Vernon held a workshop on sustainability and historic preservation for owners of historic buildings. The presentation focused on how to introduce energy efficiency measures to buildings without adversely impacting architectural character and historic building materials. The workshop attracted a broad audience including homeowners, historic district commissioners and preservation advocates. The formal presentation by Marena Wisniewski was followed by discussion on financial incentives for historic rehabilitation and a lively Q&A.

On March 5th, Kevin Berger, the SHPO's GIS analyst, gave a presentation at the Office of Policy and Management's Open Data Day event. The presentation was on the Connecticut Cultural Resources Information System ([ConnCRIS](#)) along with the dashboards for the office's Environmental Review and Historic Grant/Tax Credit Programs Applications.

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