



preserve

RHODE ISLAND

THE STATEWIDE ADVOCATE FOR HISTORIC PLACES

Around the Block E-News

By Shifting Gears, a Project Gets Underway in East Greenwich



Photo by Terry Romano, Courtesy of EGHPS

It's a common problem for many non-profit custodians of historic buildings: instead of engaging with their communities, they are forced to pour more and more of their financial and time-related resources into maintaining historic properties, many of which sit underutilized.

That was the case in 2021 for the East Greenwich Historic Preservation Society, custodians of the Old Kent County Jail. Without a tenant or a current/projected use for the building, they faced potentially crippling maintenance expenses. Working with specialists from Preserve RI they established a Historic Easement to protect the property in perpetuity. Knowing the historic building was now safe, they could sell it to a local business looking to expand.

Relieved from the costs of maintaining the Old Jail, the EGHPs could refocus and take on other projects. One immediate result is now on view all around town: brand new interpretive signs tracing the history of East Greenwich and its impact on architecture, the land, and the state.

The idea for a series of interpretive signs had been circulating for years, especially after nearby Wickford put up its “Wickford Walk” signs. Three EGHPs volunteers stepped up to champion the project: Jennifer Suellentrop, Rachel Pierce and Matt Carcieri. They said the sale of the Old Jail “freed up our time, energy, and financial resources to focus on more of our programming priorities.”

Pierce has an extensive background in RI history, and her knowledge and experience was crucial to the project’s success. With the signs up around town, the EGHPs has redirected its resources from caring for one building to “elevate the historic profile of the town, enhance appreciation for some of its historical features, and strengthen community pride and sense of place.” Phase two is underway now. Preserve RI looks forward to seeing this project expand and hopes other towns will follow Wickford and East Greenwich in engaging the public on their local history.

Preserve RI Receives Grant Towards Revolving Fund

Preserve RI is grateful to announce that the 1772 Foundation has awarded us a grant as part of their Historic Properties Redevelopment Program. \$50,000 will go towards Preserve RI’s Revolving Fund, which repairs at-risk historic properties, enabling us to take on select real estate and construction projects.



In recent years, Preserve RI has used our Revolving Fund to support a curatorship project at Mowry House in Smithfield, and major rehabilitation projects at Chase Farmhouse (pictured above) and Valentine Whitman House, both in Lincoln.

In partnership with The 1772 Foundation, Preserve RI also manages a Matching Grant program that will provide \$125,000 thousand for nonprofits this year.

[See Our Past Projects](#)

Grandmillennial Style: Bold Patterns and Dark Wood Furniture



Photo by Nickolas Sargent

Every generation comes with its own style. Today's "Millennials" are no different; they've come up with a new/old concept they call: "grandmillennial." According to *Martha Stewart Magazine's* [article on the topic](#), the style features "bold patterns, printed curtains, embellishments and heirloom furniture." These hallmarks signal a trend to embrace historic character in Millennials' home decor.

On social media, a number of "Influencers" promote the grandmillennial style. Anna Page, Mallory Fletchell, Shelby Vanhoy, and Hattie Kolp each have hundreds of thousands of followers. On her social media page, @reserve_home, Fletchell has been restoring elements of her pre-war Brooklyn apartment. While not strictly in-line with preservation traditions, her style demonstrates a growing interest in past styles within the millennial culture.

"I'm realizing more and more that what I love most about working on this apartment of ours is bringing back more of the historic charm I love so much."
— Mallory Fletchell

This trend represents a significant opportunity for preservationists whose audience has long leaned toward older demographic groups. This new interest in historic charm can build bridges to younger audiences. Organizations like Boston Preservation Alliance have begun partnering with Influencers to reach out to their Millennial followers. BPA partnered with Stephen and David St. Russel (@renovationhusbands) to share their experience renovating a Boston Victorian. Grandmillennial design may just be the key for raising the awareness of preservation's importance to younger generations and build support for the future.

Lippitt House Museum's 9th Annual Community Conversation Series

Lippitt House Museum, Providence League of Women Voters, and the African Alliance of Rhode Island have joined together to present in-person discussions about immigration and civic

participation in Rhode Island. The community conversations take place at Lippitt House Museum, 199 Hope Street in Providence. Doors open at 6:30 pm with a short reception, followed by a facilitated discussion at 7:00 pm.



Rhode Island Stories, Tuesday March 12

Three immigrants share their stories of how they came to Rhode Island, the barriers they found to civic participation, how they have navigated being active in community life, and their suggestions for community action.

Connecting Policy and People, Tuesday March 19

Representatives from organizations that serve and advocate for immigrants in Rhode Island will share their current work and how community members can support civic engagement for immigrants. Presenters: Chris Abhulime, African Policy & Research Institute; Omar Bah, Refugee Dream Center; Marcela Betancur, Latino Policy Institute.

Admission is free; reservations required.

[Register](#)

Meet New Board Member: Michelle Fonseca

The Preserve RI Board of Directors plays a vital role in shaping policy and providing expertise and advice to the staff. Two new members have joined the Board in 2024. This month we're profiling:

Michelle Ruberto Fonseca

Michelle is a Partner at Riemer & Braunstein, in their Tax Credit and Community Development Finance Group. For more than 30 years, Michelle has advised clients in commercial real estate,



financing, business, and tax credit investment transactions nationwide. She represents investors, syndicators, lenders, developers, non-profit organizations, public agencies, business corporations, and private individuals in historic rehabilitation, affordable housing, community redevelopment, and community revitalization projects. Michelle concentrates on transactions involving federal and state historic tax credits (HTC), low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) and other tax incentive programs. She has represented investor clients making significant capital investments in federal HTC and LIHTC transactions, and closed hundreds of investment transactions on behalf of HTC and LIHTC investors in projects throughout the United States. Additionally, she works extensively with developers of affordable housing.

Michelle is also passionate about community service. For over 20 years, she served on the board of the Women's Development Corporation. She is also a moderator for a high school Mock Trial program in which students compete annually in the Mock Trial Competition sponsored by Rhode Island Legal Education Foundation, and volunteers for a variety of local charities and non-profits. Michelle is a graduate of both URI and Suffolk University Law School.

"When asked 'Why is preservation important?', a preservationist group commented that historic places tell stories of the past, provide context for our present, and direction for our future. I am delighted to join the Board of Trustees of Preserve Rhode Island, whose mission promotes stewardship of our state's most treasured places. I hope my professional expertise in both historic preservation and affordable housing and community development will be useful to PRI in its work to find solutions for preservation challenges."

-Michelle Ruberto Fonseca

People in Preservation: Barbara Zdravesky

Board President, Heritage Alliance of Pawtucket

Barbara Zdravesky is an historian and a preservationist, mostly by accident. She grew up in New Mexico, then came to Rhode Island to finish her degrees in music and anthropology. She was a longtime volunteer with the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Providence Preservation Society, but when she bought an old house in Pawtucket, she dove head first into learning the stories of the Blackstone Valley.



In 2021 the Preservation Society of Pawtucket changed its name and mission to the Heritage Alliance of Pawtucket to emphasize the cultural heritage of city residents in addition to preserving the city's historical

architecture. Tell us more about that decision and the new programs and initiatives you have implemented.

The changes we made reflect our desire to take a broader, more contextual approach to preservation work. The Society's mission statement was written in 1978, and it hadn't ever changed. By 2021, the membership and financial resources had essentially disappeared, and we were struggling just to exist, without a well-defined strategy for how to protect the city's historical resources. We examined which of our activities got the most response from the community, and we chose a new mission and a name that we think focuses on Pawtucket's most valuable resources--it's people and their stories. We didn't want to just become the Pawtucket Historical Society, because well, we didn't want a name with the word Society in it. Perhaps the new name Heritage Alliance doesn't immediately identify what we do, but we like that it gives us a lot of leeway, in terms of how we achieve our mission.

Our historic building plaque program is still popular, and the plaques still have the Preservation Society name on them, but we did away with the old scoring sheet that rated a building's importance, mostly based on architectural details. The new criteria include buildings that might look unimportant, but represent some aspect of the city's history. For example, we recently approved a plaque for a house that is fairly plain in design but it was built by a middle-class immigrant family who was able to move away from the city center and commute to their jobs by streetcar. It tells a story about hardworking people who were able to improve their lives, and it is part of the story about how industry and technology changed the city. The historic buildings are the structural ancestors of the city, and we value them very much, but they mean far less without the stories of the people who occupied them. It isn't enough to identify who designed a building, and what era or style it is, but for most people to agree that a building is worth preserving, there has to be a human connection.

What initiatives have been most successful in bringing more diverse voices into your organization? What advice would you give to other historic non-profits that want to be more inclusive?

It is to our great advantage that Pawtucket's cultural heritage is so diverse, and there are innumerable stories to tell. All we had to do was choose a name (for our organization) that reflected our desire to include cultural preservation in our mission. I want to clarify that the city already has several cultural clubs that each celebrate the traditions of the groups they represent, and we aren't trying to replace them. We are careful to not declare that we are more capable of telling their stories, but we're hoping to enhance what they do. One initiative we're experimenting with is our Neighborhood Heritage Series, where we highlight a different neighborhood each year. We spent last year focusing on the Woodlawn neighborhood, and created a Woodlawn Bingo game where players had to find sites or architectural details that corresponded to squares on a Bingo card. This year

we're looking at Darlington. We led a trolley tour of several houses of worship in Darlington, including a brand new mosque, which sits right next to a 19th century Congregational meetinghouse. The pair is a literal representation of Pawtucket's past and present, and we were able to celebrate both by telling the stories of the two congregations and their uniquely beautiful buildings. The day was a great success in many ways and we were very gratified to see so many people learning about each other and making connections for future collaborations.

[Continue Reading](#)

Are You Ready for a Natural Disaster?



Flooding in West Warwick

Being prepared can mitigate the damage a historic home or property suffers should disaster strike. Preparedness also means extra peace of mind for individuals and organizations. Preserve RI has gathered resources and case-studies of the things you can do today to protect your property against extreme unexpected events, from fire to hurricanes and floods.

Need advice? We offer free consultations through our [Community Preservation Response \(C.P.R.\)](#) program. We also host a wide range of carefully vetted professional resources in our online Preservation Toolkit.

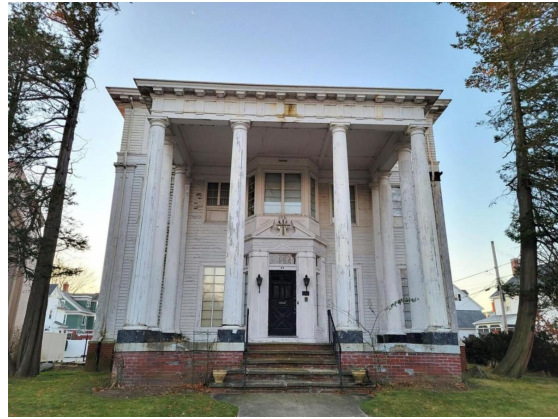
[Open Our Toolkit](#)

Featured News

[Pawtucket neighbors to Greek church: Save the Read-Ott House, or](#)

[let us do it](#)

"We're very saddened about the impending demise of the Read-Ott House, but we're also encouraged by all the community support for such a great historic building. We might be about to lose another Pawtucket treasure, but we know that people here really care about history and preservation." -Barbara Zdraveskey, President of the Pawtucket Heritage Alliance



[On Nantucket, a Legal Maneuver to Protect Historic Homes From Gutting](#)

LOCAL NEWS

East Providence

January 8: [East Providence Group Blasts Development Plan for Historic Metacomet Golf Course](#)

New Shoreham

November 29: [Block Island mulls proposal to build new Harborside Inn](#)

Warwick

November 27: [Historic home renovated for homeless female veterans dedicated in memory of local Marine](#)

Newport

November 27: [New discoveries suggest Rhode Island shipwreck is Captain Cook's long-lost vessel after battle over ship's identity](#)

December 2: [Preservation Society of Newport details its appeal of massive, industrialized wind farms off coast](#)

January 10: [Flooding damages 8,000 photos at Newport Historical Society](#)

February 4: [A decade after receiving a \\$4.2 million state grant, Opera House project still needs millions to complete restoration](#)

February 4: [Black History Month Newport: A look at 19th century black-owned businesses, business owners](#)

February 7: [Demolition of 'The Bells' in Newport finally begins](#)

February 8: [NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY LAUNCHES GROUNDBREAKING PROJECT TO AMPLIFY BLACK AND INDIGENOUS VOICES IN LOCAL HISTORY](#)

Pawtucket

February 12: [Statement from the Greek Assumption Church on the future of Pawtucket's Read Ott Mansion](#)

Providence

November 29: [Don't demo this sad trio](#)

November 30: [Renovations underway inside Providence's Superman building](#)

STATEWIDE NEWS

December 9: [New England Stone Walls Lie At The Intersection Of History, Archaeology, Ecology And Geoscience, And Deserve A Science Of Their Own](#)

December 30: [Architecture and Design - Best and Worst of 2023](#)

January 8: [Save The Bay appoints Topher Hamblett to executive director seat](#)

January 11: [Latino oral history project inspires new play at Trinity Rep](#)

January 24: [Burrowing into a Rhode Island icon: What is the Big Blue Bug?](#)

February 5: [Tomaquag Museum has big plans for move to URI](#)

NATIONAL NEWS

November 12: [The 'Georgists' Are Out There, and They Want to Tax Your Land](#)

January 24: [Historic church collapses in downtown New London](#)

January 26: [Amid a Housing Crunch, Religious Groups Unlock Land to Build Homes](#)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

February 9: [Restoration of ancient pyramid in Egypt draws fierce backlash](#)

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