

NEWBURYPORT  
PRESERVATION TRUST

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Linking the past with the present and future



Quarterly Newsletter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust

Fall 2014

# Public visibility on the rise at the Powder House with public events, school visits, and HABS survey

## Landscaping work also in progress this fall

Newburyport's restored 1822 Powder House continues to gather increased public notice this season, thanks to school visits, well-publicized public events, and finally, the end-of-the-season finishing touches of landscaping work at the Low Street site.

Six groups of middle-school students enjoyed educational programs at the Powder House in the spring, and since the grounds of the Powder House Park & Learning Center is open to the public from spring through the fall, history enthusiasts of all ages availed themselves of self-guided tours enhanced by interpretive panels that describe the useful functional life of the Powder House through the years. In May, guided tours of the Powder House were featured during the NPT's annual Preservation Week.

Also in the spring, the team of graduate students from Boston Architectural College wrapped up its comprehensive project for the National Parks Service's Historic American Building Survey (HABS) report. The report, under the direction of the school's Director of Historic Preservation Robert W. Ogle and faculty member Johanna Rowley, includes measured

At right, Tom Kolterjahn, in period garb, introduces a group of students to the Powder House Park & Learning Center at the Godfrey's Hill site off Low Street, Newburyport. Below right, landscaping begins in earnest at the Powder House, after clearance from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the state's Executive Office of Public Safety & Security.



drawings, photo studies, and historic research reports. The report has been presented to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., taking its place alongside HABS reports on over 38,000 historic structures throughout the U.S. The archives are housed at the Prints and Photographs Division.

More recently, the Powder House has been featured among the destinations of the

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## NPT annual meeting date & location imminent

The annual meeting of the Newburyport Preservation Trust will be in October ... on some Sunday date ... at some Newburyport location yet to be determined. That determination is imminent, so watch for NPT e-mail news notification, then join us for the usual business, elections, and the latest news on NPT activities. ■

## NPT loses appeal contesting city's ruling at 59-61 Bromfield St., but sends message that preservation advocates are watching

Preservation advocacy advanced to first priority during the summer of 2014, as the Newburyport Preservation Trust pursued a formal appeal of the city building commissioner's decision to not enforce permitting regulations on a project at 59-61 Bromfield Street in Newburyport.

NPT's request for enforcement by Building Inspector Gary Calderwood and the Zoning Board of Appeals was based on the belief that a partial demolition of the 1810 structure was undertaken that went beyond what was authorized in the original building permit (i.e. demolition of two rear additions).

For relief, NPT asked the ZBA to provide guidance to the building commissioner so that future demolitions would comply with the relevant city board public hearings, approvals, and permitting required by law.

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At right is 59-61 Bromfield St. Demolition beyond what was authorized in the original building permit was the subject of NPT's ZBA appeal. (Photo by Tom Kolterjahn)



## No ruling on demolition of 1846 firehouse until Zoning Board engages its own experts

The Newburyport Zoning Board of Appeals, after a two-hour hearing on a request for full demolition of the 1846 brick structure at 114 Merrimac Street, decided to call upon the expertise of independent consultants before voting on the matter.

The option to engage independent professionals to assess the feasibility of preservation in the face of a demolition request is a provision of the new demolition control ordinances passed by the City Council in April 2014. This was the ZBA's first exercise of that option.

At the September 16 hearing in City Hall Auditorium, six individuals spoke in opposition to the demolition request, including three members of the NPT board. No one except the applicant's lawyer and architect spoke in favor of the demolition – or the proposed residential project.

The building, a contributing structure within Newburyport's National Register Historic District, and one of the city's first fire stations, was most recently the site of Mr. India Restaurant, and has been unoccupied for over 900 days. The owner's sale to a



couple who plan to build a two-family home on the busy corner is contingent on the city's permission to demolish the structure.

After weighing information from its consultants, the ZBA will render a decision at a future meeting in October or November. ■

## Historic house program seeks coordinator(s)

The Newburyport Preservation Trust (NPT) is seeking two coordinators for a new initiative to provide plaques for historic homes. The purpose of the program is to research, promote and ensure that more historic homes in Newburyport display an accurate informational plaque regarding the structure. Specific goals are:

- to engage more homeowners in public appreciation of their historic homes,
- to educate locals and visitors about the treasure trove of historic homes in Newburyport, and
- to promote the NPT as an educational resource about historic homes.

The role of the coordinator is to receive requests from homeowners, ascertain what information is required, coordinate contact with a house information researcher, and ensure that payment is made and the plaque is delivered. This is an opportunity to visit historic homes in Newburyport and get to know their proud owners.

As this is a new initiative, the workload is unpredictable. If requests mount up, NPT would solicit additional coordinators. If you are interested in the historic house sign project and would like to volunteer as a coordinator, please contact NPT co-president Linda Miller at (978) 462-9079. ■

## NPT loses appeal, but makes firm statement

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The lengthy hearing on August 12 at Newburyport City Hall featured a well-prepared presentation by NPT, supporting testimony from the Historical Commission, extensive public comment in support of the

appeal, a blustery performance by the building owner's lawyer, and deliberations by a zoning board still working to master the new pro-preservation ordinances.

Ultimately the board voted 4-1 to deny the appeal, stating in the written decision that the building commissioner was within his authority in ordering the additional demolition under the existing permit. ■

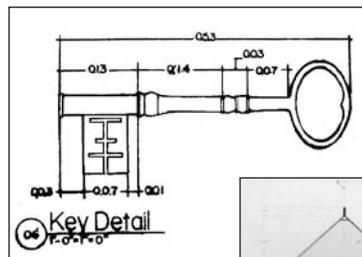
## Powder House park makes its mark

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annual Trails & Sails events coordinated by the Essex National Heritage Area. In addition to guided tours, Sunday, Sept. 21 featured demonstrations by master cooper Ron Raiselis. Sunday, Sept. 28 (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.) features a Civil War encampment, with musket-firings at 1:30 and 2:30 p.m.

In the next few weeks, passersby will notice even more activity at the Powder House, as clearance for final landscaping work was received from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety & Security – Military Division.

Powder House Park & Learning Center has been a long-term restoration supported by NPT, under the direction of co-chairmen Tom Kolterjahn and Karen Holt. ■



At top right is the team from Boston Architectural College that conducted the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) of the Powder House, with (at far right) Powder House co-chairman Tom Kolterjahn.

At immediate right and above are some of the detailed drawings from the survey, which are now at the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division.

