

NEWBURYPORT PRESERVATION TRUST

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Linking the past with the present and future



Quarterly Newsletter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust

Fall 2020

Violation of city zoning laws at Harrison Street project shines the spotlight on monitoring and enforcement



In early August more than 25% of exterior walls of a mid-18th-century Georgian house at 12-14 Harrison Street were demolished and replaced without a proper permit. The zoning code violation led to the stop-work order (above) issued on August 11.

Demolition exceeds permit, and stop-work order issued, but more of our 'authenticity' leaves town in a Dumpster

Once again the city of Newburyport is struggling with enforcement of its preservation zoning and building laws.

The most recent struggle is prompted by the unpermitted exterior wall demolition of a mid-18th-century Georgian-style house at 12-14 Harrison Street, which is listed in the Demolition Control Overlay District (DCOD) as contributory to the Newburyport Historic District. Demolition of greater than 25% of the exterior walls of such a building requires a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).

The owner did not apply for an exterior wall demolition permit because, according to him through a letter from his attorney, "no exterior walls are being demolished." The owner did, however, apply to the Historical Commission to demolish and raise the building's roof by 18 inches, and to the ZBA for a related special permit, which was granted on May 26. The owner then proceeded with necessary building permits.

While executing the approved building plans, exterior walls were demolished without permission. The Building Department issued a stop-work order on August 11, because the owner had "removed and replaced more exterior walls than what was stated on the approved construction documents." The same day, a zoning violation notice was issued because demolition exceeded what was allowed by ZBA permitting, associated building permits, and the DCOD zoning ordinance. The zoning violation results in a three-year moratorium on further construction.

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'Victorianized' Greek Revival is a milestone for NPT's Historic House Plaque Program

The Newburyport Preservation Trust Historic House Plaque Program mounted its 50th plaque in July, a milestone for the growing program that celebrates the entire range of historic architectural styles found in Newburyport.

The 50th plaque was mounted on an 1855 Greek Revival style home at 18 Allen Street in the South End. The rigorous research and thorough documentation at the heart of the Historic House Plaque Program determined that the house was built by Charles H. Coffin, a one-time co-owner of the Globe Steam Mill, but ownership passed in the 1860s to the Bliss family that would own the house for the next 100-plus years.

It was in the ensuing decades that the house acquired Victorian embellishments fashionable later in the 19th century, including the front bay window and the ornamental brackets by the front door.

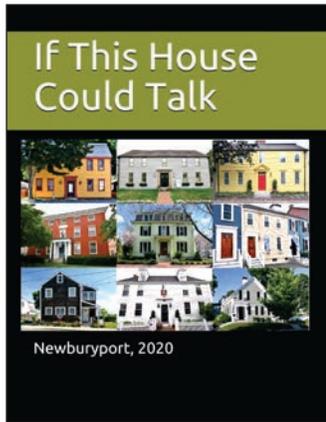
NPT is already working on the next wave of Historic House Plaque applications. For complete information about the

program, and how you can identify your historic home with a plaque validated by the research of the Newburyport Preservation Trust, visit the dedicated Historic House Plaque Program page at the NPT website, www.NbptPreservationTrust.org. ■



If This House Could Talk 2020 book captures the event's grassroots spirit

"If This House Could Talk," the fun do-it-yourself public history project that draws strollers through our neighborhoods to read snippets of ultra-local history, has been a favorite summer Yankee Homecoming week event since its inception in 2016.



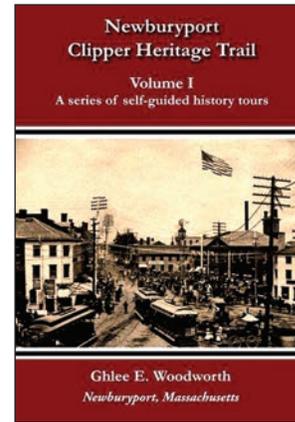
The event, directed by NPT member Jack Santos, is co-sponsored by the Newburyport Preservation Trust and the Newburyport Public Library.

This year's documentary book is the best yet. The photography is crisp and the images of the signs are readable. NPT members Jack Santos, Chris Edmonds, Bob Watts, and Barb Bailey produced a book that reflects the loose-and-fun grassroots nature of the event.

Get your copy at Jabberwocky Bookshop in Newburyport. ■

Clipper City Heritage Trail – online or on foot – is now a book you can hold!

Since 2013, visitors and residents alike have enjoyed exploring the nooks-and-crannies of Newburyport history guided by the granite markers, printed brochures, online maps, and robust phone-accessible content of Ghlee Woodworth's Clipper Heritage Trail.



Now, as a complement to those invigorating on-foot explorations, Ghlee has published a book packed with the same engaging text and photos as the self-guided tours.

Sometimes history can have a bitter taste, but we must take it like medicine to help us survive. But in *Newburyport Clipper Heritage Trail Vol. I*, this local history in book form is served more like a warm, soothing, bottomless mug of hot chocolate.

To get comfortable with your own copy, contact the author directly at tiptoethroughthetombstones@yahoo.com. ■

Zoning enforcement...

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On September 9, the owner filed an appeal of the zoning violation to the ZBA, followed by a request that the ZBA waive the construction moratorium, then by an application for the ZBA's after-the-fact permitting of the demolition done, through a DCOD Special Permit.

The owner asked that these latter requests be heard and decided before the appeal, because if a waiver and DCOD Special Permit are approved, the owner "will likely not need to pursue his Appeal," according to a letter from his attorney. The ZBA agreed to this request, and the appeal is not scheduled until December 8.

The construction moratorium is the city's deterrent to wrongful demolition. Waiving it, and approving wrongful demolition in retrospect, stands zoning enforcement and public policy on its head.

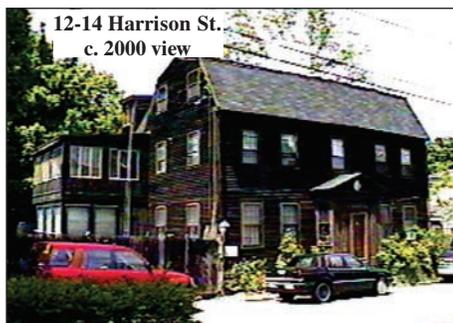
During its October 22 discussion of a DCOD Special Permit advisory opinion to the ZBA, Historical Commission members noted as much. They will issue



a written report prior to the ZBA's next scheduled hearing of the matter on November 10.

NPT representatives will continue to follow this case and advocate for zoning enforcement and due public process.

For enforcement of our pro-preservation zoning laws to rise in priority, the mayor and city councillors need to hear the voices of the voting public. Those concerned with the preservation of our city's nationally significant concentration of varied period architecture are encouraged to make their opinions known. ■



William Lloyd Garrison lecture sponsored by NPT's Next Generation Preservationists

The bond of preservation and history will be in evidence at the inaugural William Lloyd Garrison Lecture sponsored by NPT's Next Generation Preservationists.

Join us online on December 12 at 7 p.m. for "Lloyd and Moses: The Remarkable Friendship of William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Tubman," presented by Dr. Kate Clifford Larson, author of *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero*. Dr. Clifford is a Women's Studies Research Scholar at Brandeis University.

This event is funded by a gift from the Next Generation Preservationists of the Newburyport Preservation Trust, and is co-sponsored by *The Daily News*.

The lecture will be hosted on the Zoom platform via the Newburyport Public Library. To register visit: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Ns9Abrf8R02VFbh8ou4ZVw.

Related to historic preservation, NPT has consulted on renovations to the William Lloyd Garrison's birthplace at 3-5 School Street, Newburyport, and is contributing to the funding of interpretive panels planned for Atwood Park. ■