



The Preservationist

Is it worth buying historic?

Many stereotypes, misconceptions, and myths about historic home ownership may discourage people from buying or renovating old buildings. It's worth separating fact from misconception.

So, why buy a historic building?

1. **Building quality:** The phrase “they don’t build them like they used to” applies to buildings just as it does to appliances. For many historic structures, the materials with which they were made are of higher quality than material used today in new construction
2. **Historic character/sense of belonging:** Historic structures come with something no new building possibly could, their own story. These buildings all carry a unique character and story which cannot possibly be replicated or prefabricated, and can be effective in making a house feel more like a home. The tendency for historic homes to be custom built means not only are their stories unique, but many come with beautiful details that are rarely included in new building projects.
3. **Rewarding process:** Caring for a historic home not only improves your home but helps to preserve the character of your community.
4. **Grants/financial support:** Unlike most new buildings, homes which are recognized as historic may offer you access to sources of financial support for improving and maintaining them. The federal government, the state of Connecticut, and a few private foundations offer grants, tax credits, and professional guidance to properly perform these restoration projects. These grants make it easier to return a home to a quality state, as well as to maximize the return on investment if you select to purchase a “fixer upper”. To receive financial assistance, restoration is expected to preserve historic quality and follow certain guidelines.
5. **Availability:** If you are looking to buy a house in Connecticut, it’s likely that at least one of the buildings you look at will be over 50 years old. If you exclude historic buildings from your house search, you are excluding a large number of homes on the market, especially in Southeastern Connecticut.

6. **Resale value:** While one cannot completely predict future real estate market trends, a well-maintained historic home is likely to become a valuable investment although it is important to understand that this is largely dependent on the quality of the restoration. Additionally, the financial support you may gain access to (but are not guaranteed) when you purchase a historic building allows you to work with structures that may need a lot of work.

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23 Franklin Street

A house in disrepair can become a warm and welcoming home with proper historic restoration.



What to keep in mind when buying a historic building:

- Understand what exactly makes a property “historic”:
 - The age of a building isn’t the only aspect determining what is considered “historic”. It is worth checking if your building is listed on the state or National Register of Historic Places, or if it belongs to a Local Historic District. Each of these official designations come with their own opportunities or restrictions. You can find out exactly how each home is recognized historically and then explore what that means legally.
- Understand the problem areas:
 - Consider what makes this building unique, especially if you are looking for a "fixer upper". These could be areas in the house that have been renovated in the past, or a particularly vulnerable area. Has this building been divided up to rent? Has it been re-united?
- Have a clear sense of the building’s age and condition:
 - It can often be useful to have this information, though it is rarely required. Be clear and open about what you don’t know. It is likely that you will not have perfectly accurate information. However, having a sense of the age, architectural style, and history of the building you are interested in can help you look for grants, locate skilled tradespeople, and understand how to properly care for your building.
- Make sure that you hire a trained home inspector:
 - When buying any home, an inspection is highly recommended, but especially for historic structures. This is also part of why understanding the age and evolution of your home can be useful, so that you can be sure you’ve hired a contractor with the correct expertise.
 - Before anything else, make sure that the inspector you hire is trained in dealing with historic buildings. Many who work in this field in New London County are, but it’s always good to make sure. If you’re able to, tour the house first and keep an eye out for the three largest areas of concern: moisture intrusion, electrical systems, and the age of your plumbing.
- Be clear with your insurance agent:
 - If possible, find an insurance agent who is used to dealing with historic homes. Your agent may not need to specialize in historic structures, but you might have to inform them more about preservation issues.

The State Historic Preservation Office offers ConnCRIS, a system which can be used to identify the historic status of buildings in Connecticut.



Manually searching the National, State, and Local Historic District status of a building is also highly encouraged.



National



State



Local

A Note on Insurance

Whether or not you’re buying a historic home, repairing, or renting one, the question of insurance is bound to come up. Insuring a historic building is admittedly somewhat different than insuring a new build, but it is easier than it appears. Often, hesitation on the insurer’s part may be due to common myths about historic buildings being subject to requirements from the state. Insurance is not one-size-fits-all, and it’s important to acknowledge that insuring a historic home can be more expensive than a new build. New London Landmarks would be happy to discuss details with an insurance agent if additional questions arise.

A Correction:

The Cronin Building was not designed by James Sweeney but rather George Warren Cole, an architect from the firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. Sweeney also worked for Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge during this period.

What Are Brownfield Sites?

As defined by the federal government, brownfields are “abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.” In New England, these are primarily former mill or factory buildings, though they may be any building.

Brownfield sites don’t need to be objects of fear, but they certainly should be properly analyzed so that any actual toxicity can be measured and ideally abated. If you own or are interested in a property that may be considered a brownfields site, start by having that land accessed. Many brownfields sites may not be as toxic as they originally appear.

The Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection offers support related to brownfields on top of what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supplies including funding sources, liability relief programs, and a variety of success stories which prove that life can be returned to these seemingly “dead” sites.

In New London there are currently DEEP, DECD, and EPA brownfields assessment/remediation projects on seven sites within the city. The highest profile project is currently the Mercer building, as part of the Garde Arts Center’s project to create a Community Hall in the currently uninhabitable building. Lead and asbestos abatement is the first step towards proper historic restoration. Support for the EPA and DEEP on brownfields abatement projects is just another example of the important overlap between environmental protection and historic preservation. The presence of toxic housing materials does not need to be an impediment to historic preservation, so long as the renovations are done with care. Brownfield funds can often make these reuse projects both safe and financially viable. Depending on the grant they can also be used in combination with historic preservation grants to bring out the maximum return on projects.

The Meridian Street Project



Interested in writing your own guest article?

With the return of *The Preservationist*, we are excited to feature spotlight articles by New London Landmarks members, board members, and volunteers. Do you have a favorite building in New London? A New London historical figure whose story you want to tell? Please apply. Our office is always open to researchers, for *The Preservationist* or otherwise.



The left photo was donated to New London Landmarks as part of a larger collection by our board member Lonnie Braxton II.

Schneider's Hardware and Supply was the last occupant of 330 Bank Street. The building was just over 100 years old at time of its demolition in 2006 to be replaced by the Shaw's Landing apartment buildings. 330 Bank Street was purchased as part of a larger lot in the 1990s, which contained 330 through 400 Bank Street. The sale to Oaktree Development had been part of the Shaw's Cove Urban Renewal Project and many business owners were forced out of their historic buildings.

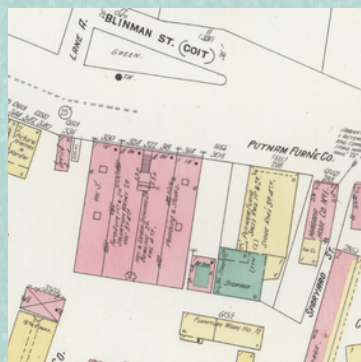
While some articles in *The Day* suggest that 330 had been Schneider's Hardware since 1890, Schneider's actually moved to its 330 location in 1971. The 330 Bank Street building was built in 1906 under the ownership of David Levinson. In 1905 Levinson had been selling "stoves and ranges" at 340 Bank Street and clearly expanded his business in the following years. By 1910 it had become a "stoves and variety store," and according to an ad in *The Day* the following year, was selling "Crockery, China, Bric-a-Brac, Lamps, Tinware, Paints, Hardware, French and American Window Glass, Mirrors, Colored and Ribbed Glass."

Levinson's variety shop would be moved out of 330 Bank by 1921, when the Schwarz P. Flour Company moved in. At this point the building had been expanded, as shown in the 1921 Sanborn map. This expanded building would become home to a variety of businesses, including a plumbing supplies business, a furniture store, the salvation army, a grain storage building, a biscuit company, and a bowling alley.

330 Bank Street in the early 20th Century



1901 Sanborn Map



1907 Sanborn Map



1912 Sanborn Map



1921 Sanborn Map

Our Upcoming Events!

May 6th 5:30pm

Join New London Landmarks for our 2026 Annual Meeting with guest Elizabeth Acly (PE, APT-RP), Principal Engineer of Cirrus Structural Engineering for her lecture on “**Sacred Spaces at a Crossroads: Stewardship, Community and the Future of Historic Churches.**” Refreshments will be provided and awards presented. RSVP for this free event on our website!

May 7th, 5:00PM

Join New London Landmarks and Bill Morse at the New London Public Library to explore details, stories, and photos from his book *Lost New London* which were not featured in our 2025 event. RSVP for this event on the New London Public Library Website.

An Eye on Membership

With uncertain federal funding, our members are more important than ever. Membership donations enable us to protect New London's historic places, conduct research, and create educational programs like our popular walking tours or our upcoming programming for the 250th anniversary of the United States. We will be re-working membership and improving its benefits, so this is the perfect time to sign up to take full advantage of the upcoming changes.

Become a member today.



Membership Rates

\$25 - Member **\$35** - Family Membership

\$75 - Contributor **\$100** - Patron

Curious about your membership status? Just ask, director@newlondonlandmarks.org.

Thank you to our funders.



WELCOMING CARING SEEKING

CThumanities



Studio 33 Art & Frame Gallery

CONNECTICUT



Connecticut

Department of Economic and
Community Development



New London Landmarks received support for this project from the State Historic Preservation Office of the Department of Economic and Community Development with funds from the Community Investment Act of the State of Connecticut.

Interested in a plaque for your own home?

If your New London home/building is at least 50 years old, it qualifies for a whale plaque listing its date and original owner. The research we conduct for each plaque helps increase our knowledge of New London's neighborhoods and is archived in our office for future generations.

Our title researcher will study land, tax and water records, historic maps and city directories to establish your building's first owner and date of its estimated construction. If this is for a new plaque (as opposed to a replacement plaque) we will also research biographical information on the property's early owners and write up a narrative with our findings. We welcome any oral history or copies of old documents relating to your building. Please allow at least twelve weeks for completion of the research and the durable, hand-lettered and sealed hardwood plaque.

PLAQUE ADDRESS _____

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

DAY PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

LEGAL OWNER (IF DIFFERENT) _____

APPROXIMATE DATE PURCHASED BY CURRENT OWNER _____

APPROXIMATE AGE OF PROPERTY _____

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION _____

MEMBERSHIP STATUS: YES: _____ NO: _____
IS THIS FOR A REPLACEMENT PLAQUE? YES: _____ NO: _____

Price of Plaque: \$235.00 for Members \$250.00 for Non-Members \$100 for a replacement plaque

A non-refundable deposit of \$100.00 is required with this application. You can make an online payment at www.newlondonlandmarks.org or mail us a check along with this application form.

Total amount due: \$ _____

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

DANIEL
COMSTOCK



c. 1840
New London Landmarks