

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, during the period where Sweeney also worked.



# The Preservationist

## NEW LONDON LANDMARKS

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Williams Park postcard, C. 1915



Connecticut College Arboretum postcard, C. 1930

## Preservation, Conservation, and Development

Nine years have passed since the city of New London confirmed its Plan of Conservation and Development in 2017. While the plan is to be updated in 2027, the process of developing that plan will occur this year. With the city lacking a designated City Planner, this project has fallen to the Planning and Zoning Committee.

In the time since the 2017 plan was finalized, it has become increasingly apparent that New London's residents are passionate about maintaining quality green space. It's a topic that has already generated some controversy, including the conflict over the solar park in Bates Woods. Conservation and green thinking are ideas inherently intertwined with Historic Preservation, even if that might not seem initially clear.

The updated Plan of Conservation and Development is one step towards improving quality of life in New London and to properly steward our natural resources. It has become impossible to deny that the climate crisis is causing hotter summers and more temperamental winters. Green spaces help to mitigate those effects.

Conservation and development need to occur in tandem to create the most positive results. These concepts do not stand in opposition to each other. Instead, conservation provides a useful counterbalance to emphasize sustainability and quality of life. Focusing on caring for the natural world allows development to proceed in a controlled manner. If development brings people and capital to New London, then conservation encourages them to stay, and vice versa.

It is not that New London should discourage change or development, but we must be careful not to sacrifice the character and environmental health of this city. Our natural environment needs to work in concert with our built environment. This is something New London's residents have known for hundreds of years. Historic buildings are also largely designed to maximize energy efficiency and make use of the area's natural environment.

Many of the elements endemic to New England architectural styles were favored because of how they interacted with the natural environment. Gambrel roofs, for example, are designed to be sturdy and to allow snow to easily slough off the sides. Internally they maximize space and, with the addition of dormers, maximize the amount of interior light and space without sacrificing warmth.

The coast on which New London is built was present before the construction of any building in the city and will be present past the decay of any structure currently standing. That, of course, does not necessarily translate to our harbor's health, or to the survival of our green space. Much of the undeveloped land which exists in New London survived the various boom and bust cycles of the city from the 1700s onwards. It is also worth noting that, once

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paved over, it is difficult to return parks and plots of soil to a healthy balance. It takes care and consideration to make previously developed land safe and viable for a healthy environment.

Historic Preservation is a key aspect of green development. As Carl Elefante, the groundbreaking historic preservationist, famously put it, “the greenest building is the one that’s already built.” The carbon sink for new construction is drastically larger than even major restoration projects.

Of course, sense of place must also be considered. Connecticut residents have a right to historic buildings under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) the same way they do to clean air and water. Todd Levine is the Environmental Review/CT Freedom Trail and W3R Coordinator who manages these cases at the state level and can be contacted through the State Historic Preservation Office website.

While New London Landmarks’ goals as an organization align with conservation, we are far from the only organization doing so. New London has multiple organizations dedicated to promoting healthy relationships with nature.

Green spaces provide non-visible benefits as well. They help with mood, air quality, temperature control, storm-water management, and overall health. We don’t realize how beneficial these spaces are until we lose them.

In such a small city it is important to remember that undeveloped land is not a “waste”. These spaces are important to keep the city pleasant and to promote a healthy future.

## What can you do to help fight for green space?

1. Get involved! There is most likely a local organization in New London which can address your specific concerns. These include but are not limited to: Riverside Park Conservancy, Save Ocean Beach, Alewife Cove Conservancy, New London Beautification Committee, FRESH, Bates Friends Forever, and New London Trees.
2. Read the 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development. Clearly define what you think needs to be updated and what you think was most successful.
3. Attend Planning and Zoning meetings where the Plan of Conservation and Development is on the agenda. One can sign up ahead of time and speak on the value of preserving green space.
4. Utilize green space when and where you can, making sure to do so publicly. Improving the visibility of green space brings positive attention to these spaces.

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### Guest Article

## “The Douglass and Colfax Families: A Legacy of Service”

By Evan Andriopoulos

The history of the Douglass and Colfax families is a narrative of American resilience, spanning the Revolutionary War through the War of 1812. From the streets of New London, Connecticut, to the legal halls of Chillicothe, Ohio, these figures shaped the religious, political, and maritime foundations of the burgeoning United States.

*Captain Richard Douglass Sr. (1746-1828)*

Richard Douglass Sr. was a cornerstone of New London’s early history. A successful cooper and baker, his 1801 gambrel-roofed house on Green Street remains a local landmark. Beyond commerce, he was a pivotal religious leader, credited with organizing New London’s first Methodist meeting in his home in 1793.

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*Revolutionary Service and "Depredations"*

Douglass's military career began as a private at the Lexington Alarm in 1775. He marched to Boston alongside Nathan Hale in William Coit's Independent Company. Over the course of the war, he rose through the ranks to Captain (1780), fighting in major campaigns including the Battles of New York, Monmouth, and Brandywine. His life was marked by the "depredations of the British";—a term he used when applying for compensation after Benedict Arnold's 1781 raid on New London. During this brutal attack, the city was burned, and Douglass was captured and imprisoned, witnessing the systematic destruction of his community and livelihood.

*The Next Generation: Alexander and Richard Jr.*

Richard Sr.'s sons continued the family's legacy of maritime and legal influence:

- Whaling Master Alexander Douglas (1778–1856): A prominent captain for the firms of Benjamin Brown and Williams. Alexander is most famous for captaining the Dauphin, the ship that famously rescued the survivors of the whaleship Essex—the real-life tragedy that inspired Herman Melville's Moby Dick.
- Richard Douglas Jr. (1785–1852): A lawyer and politician who moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, on land grants earned through his father's service. He became a "quintessential example" of British cruelty during the War of 1812. Captured at sea, he was held at the infamous Dartmoor Prison in England. He survived the 1815 "Dartmoor Massacre" where guards fired upon American prisoners, and spent his later years in Ohio as a respected Whig politician and survivor of systemic British neglect.



Richard Douglass House on Green Street.



Richard Douglas Jr. (image from Chillicothe, Ohio Town Hall.)

*Comparison: The Two Richard Douglasses*

History often confuses Richard Sr. with his cousin of the same name.

Feature	Richard Douglass (senior)	Richard Douglas (Cousin)
Lifespan	1746-1828	1750-1816
Trade	Cooper and Baker	Lawyer and Politician
Legacy	Built the Green Street House	Moved to Chillicothe, OH
Military	Captain; Methodist Deacon	Captain; Society of Cincinnati

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### *General William Colfax (1756-1838)*

While the Douglasses remained tied to New London and Ohio, their contemporary, William Colfax, became a central figure in George Washington's inner circle. Commander of the Life Guard in 1778, Washington selected the New London-born Colfax for the "Commander-in-Chief's Guard," an elite unit of 180 men protecting the General and his sensitive documents. By 1781, Colfax was promoted to Captain of the Guard. He was a veteran of Bunker Hill and Monmouth, and famously stood near Washington during Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown. Colfax was notoriously hardy; during one battle, a bullet passed entirely through his body, yet he continued fighting until his men noticed his boot filling with blood.

### *Post-War and Political Dynasty*

After the war, Colfax married Hester Schuyler, linking himself to the powerful Schuyler and Hamilton families. He settled in New Jersey, serving as a Brigadier General during the War of 1812 and later as a state legislator. His legacy continued through his grandson, Schuyler Colfax, who served as Vice President of the United States under Ulysses S. Grant. His home, the Schuyler-Colfax House in Wayne, New Jersey, stands today as a museum.



Alexander and Lydia Douglas  
(Pre-1856)



William Colfax (1756-1838)



Green Street House (Date Unknown)

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## 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.

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## Building Spotlight: The Cronin Building

New London Landmarks has recognized the Cronin Building as one of its most endangered going back to the early 2000s. Currently, the New London Public Market company has expressed an interest in restoring the building in partnership with a developer, hopefully utilizing available tax credits.

The Cronin Building, at 80-88 State Street, was built in 1892 by Jeremiah D. Cronin according to the designs of George Warren Cole of the firm Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge. Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge are widely considered a successor firm to H. H. Richardson.

The Cronin Building's original façade was solely brick. From the start the bottom floor of the building was intended for commercial use and was split between multiple shops. The current façade was added in 1955 for the expansion of Kaye's Juvenile Shoppe, a local clothing retailer. The changes were described in the June 27th, 1955, edition of *The Day*. They stated that "a new granite veneer front will be installed, with modern entrances and show windows. The rear entrance from Golden St. also will be improved."



Cronin Building (pre-1955)

The Kirshenbaum family began their clothing business in 1929 with Kaye's, surviving the Great Depression and then creating offshoot clothing stores. The Cronin Building specifically housed the Juvenile Shoppe, which specialized in children's clothing. Prior to the addition of the current façade, they had already conducted some interior alterations. The first floor was transformed into space for a single retailer to occupy. The name "Kaye's" can still be made out on the front if examined with a careful eye.

While the clothier dominated the first floor, various other businesses rented top floors of the Cronin building. These were mostly other retailers, including a tailor's shop and even a dance studio. One of these rented spaces was the studio of Barkley L. Hendricks.

Barkley Hendricks was a pioneering American painter whose legacy was celebrated with an exhibition at the Frick Museum in New York in 2023. Hendricks, a former professor at Connecticut College, who lived and worked in New London from the mid-1970s until his retirement in 2010. His star rose throughout his career, though he continued to work in New London until his death in 2017.

His work in New London was recently displayed at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum. According to Tanya Pohrt's guide to the exhibit "Hendricks celebrated everyday people in his art, inspired by Grand Manner portraiture and a desire for diversity in the fine art canon. His portraits offer powerful and complex visions of contemporary identity. "My paintings were about people that were part of my life," Hendricks noted in a 2016 interview. "If they were political, it's because they were a reflection of the culture we were drowning in."

The building which once housed Hendrick's studio is thus worth appreciating and promoting as an important site of Black History in New London and a viable contender for an expansion of the Black Heritage trail. His work is on display in museums and galleries around New England, having earned national recognition while he was alive. We hope to see the Cronin Building properly preserved and restored. While it may currently stand empty, its past proves its relevance and potential.

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# An Eye on Membership

With turbulent 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](mailto:director@newlondonlandmarks.org).

Thank you to our funders.



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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.

**Connecticut** 

**Department of Economic and  
Community Development**

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# Interested in a plaque for your own home?

If your New London home/building is at least 50 years old, it qualifies for a 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](http://www.newlondonlandmarks.org) or mail us a check along with this application form.

Total amount due: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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