PRESERVING JAMESTOWN, RHODE ISLAND
THE HOW AND WHY OF SAFEGUARDING AN ISLAND’S HISTORIC RESOURCES

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In memory of Granny Di
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Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore what can be done to preserve the vital historic resources that enhance and define the character of Jamestown, Rhode Island. This island community has an outstanding array of architecture, some of which is recognized at the state and national levels. While some of these resources are protected, and will therefore be enjoyed by future generations, most are vulnerable to demolition and significant alteration.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines why Jamestown needs to expand its scope of preservation. The second chapter tells the history of the island through the surviving historic resources, highlighting the most valuable structures and neighborhoods as preservation priorities. Chapter three chronicles the process of a historic district ordinance in Jamestown that almost passed, but ultimately fell short. Chapter four outlines the preservation policy tools that could be effective in Jamestown, such as easements or neighborhood conservation districts, and where else they have been effective. This chapter also analyzes the nearby town of Narragansett, which recently passed historic district legislation, providing an excellent comparison due to the two towns’ related histories and similar resources. The final chapter makes the case that preservation is an endeavor that is inherently beneficial to the public, and should be welcomed and encouraged in Jamestown.
1. Why Preserve Jamestown?

Occupying rocky Conanicut Island in Narragansett Bay, Jamestown is a place long held dear by many people. Ocean vistas from high cliffs, pebbly beaches, and rolling scenery have made the island attractive since its first human habitation thousands of years ago. Over the years people have added structures that enhance the island’s beauty, building farmhouses, lighthouses, cottages and mansions. Many of these historic buildings survive, set in their original landscapes, and it is this relationship between the natural and the manmade that could be Jamestown’s most enduring quality.

In 1872, when steam ferries first provided Jamestown with a reliable connection to the outside world, the island was on the cusp of major changes. Its image shifted from a sleepy agricultural backwater of farms and windmills to a summer resort community, with scores of visitors arriving by the boatload to enjoy the newly accessible landscape. These summer people danced on porches of rambling hotels, played tennis on lawns with wooden racquets, and swam in the bay wearing full-body bathing suits. Architects experimented with new forms to accommodate their lives, using the island as a laboratory for the Colonial Revival and Shingle Styles.

The Great Depression and World War II marked the end of the era, and a new level of connectivity would once again change the face of the island. The Jamestown Bridge, spanning the West Passage and completed in 1940, provided Jamestown with a permanent link to the mainland for the first time. Farmland at the northern end of the island was turned over to suburban development as new residents now could freely come and go, made even easier by the Newport Bridge, completed in 1969, which provided connections to points east. A wider bridge replaced the old Jamestown Bridge
in 1992, and within two years a four-lane highway spanned the width of the island. Today one can drive clear across both bridges and the island without ever slowing down.

Despite all of these twentieth-century improvements, Jamestown retains much of its former character. Two of Jamestown’s three lighthouses continue to operate as navigational aids, and an 18th-century windmill is brought to life on special occasions. Large swaths of the island are still farmland, and other open spaces are protected through easements or public ownership. These are successful preservation efforts in Jamestown.

The same cannot be said for the structures from the resort era, which are unprotected from significant alteration or even outright demolition at the hands of private individuals. Some of these cherished structures exist in splendid isolation, for example Horsehead, a mansion on a dramatic promontory, or Clingstone, on its own rock out in the bay. Other resort-era structures exist in cohesive unity with one another, as in the architecturally consistent neighborhoods of Shoreby Hill or Green Lane. These attractive, shingle-clad historic buildings help define the town, firmly anchoring it to the New England seaside, while enhancing the lives of Jamestowners day in and day out. As demolition and unsympathetic alteration of this important historic fabric continues at a steady pace, it is clear that Jamestown needs to protect its buildings.

The quality and significance of Jamestown’s architecture has not gone unrecognized. From 1975-1995, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission conducted a survey documenting Jamestown’s surviving architectural resources, funded in part by the National Park Service. The objective of the survey was “To identify districts, structures, and sites eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and suggest priorities for preservation activities.”1 This survey is known colloquially as the “Purple Book,” which is how it will be referenced.

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1 *Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, i. Rhode Island conducted a similar survey for every community in the state.
henceforth. The Purple Book describes over 100 historic properties in Jamestown and outlines seven
districts (see appendix). While two of these districts are now listed on the National Register, listing
does not offer protection to the historic resource. Neither is it within the power of the state to regulate
privately owned historic resources. Only at the local level can regulatory preservation laws be enacted,
and that it why it is of utmost importance that Jamestowners recognize not just the value, but also the
vulnerability of their historic buildings, and take action to protect them.

From an academic standpoint, the preservation of Jamestown’s residential resort-era buildings
is vital, due to their significance in American architectural history. Vincent Scully, the Yale professor
who coined the term “Shingle Style” in 1949, dubbed it the first uniquely American style of
architecture.\(^2\) The Purple Book asserts that Jamestown is the best place in Rhode Island to appreciate
the Shingle Style’s “charm and sophistication.”\(^3\) Colonial Revival shingled houses in the Shoreby Hill
neighborhood exhibit both individual merit and harmony with one another, altogether set in a
naturalistic landscape, influenced by the same ideals that brought us Central Park. Shoreby Hill’s
original residents were ahead of their time, developing their properties according to their own strict
building codes that predated zoning. Homes built up through the Great Depression, and a few more
recent projects as well, have been designed with similar aesthetics and have perpetuated Jamestown’s
architectural legacy.

\(^2\) Vincent Scully, *The Shingle Style, Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright*, (New Haven: Yale

\(^3\) This assertion was probably made by William H. Jordy (1917-1997), architectural historian at Brown University,
contributor to the 1995 State Survey, and who has in other works dubbed Jamestown the best place in Rhode Island to
view the Shingle Style.
A 2010 survey asked Jamestowners their opinions on preservation, with over 500 replies, and 89 percent of respondents said they wanted to preserve the island’s historic resources.4 When surveyed at a preservation workshop in January 2014, Jamestowners echoed their earlier preservationist sentiment, and with the most popularly listed assets being “the windmill, followed by Shoreby Hill and its green, then the farms, old structures, the island location, the village and downtown, and then Clingstone, the house on the rocks.”5 By today’s standards, the quality of the historic resources, combined with the islanders’ appreciation of them, are certainly at odds with the lack of regulatory measures.

The threat at hand is not so much the physical force of destruction, but rather the complacency of Jamestowners regarding the security of their beloved landmarks. While so many historic buildings have been cared for, some by the same families for generations, there seems to be the assumption that future owners will share the same preservationist values. If unchecked, Jamestown will continue to suffer from the process of attrition that destroys a place and gradually removes its character. An August 2015 editorial in *The Jamestown Press* asked its readers “How many historic structures must we lose before people become alarmed?” Given the current resistance to preservation measures, the answer very well may be a high number, and Jamestown has a lot to lose. The policy tools identified in this thesis may provide the solutions to the preservation dilemma, helping to ensure the stewardship of Jamestown’s historic character for future generations. But first, it is necessary to look in depth at Jamestown’s surviving resources.

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6 “Protection needed for island’s historic buildings,” *Jamestown Press*, August 27, 2015. The editorial was written in response to the possibility of the Portuguese-American Citizens Club being torn down and replaced by condominiums.
2. Jamestown’s Historic Resources

*Early History*

When the glaciers receded from Narragansett Bay 12,000 years ago, they left in their wake a carved-out ridge that would become Conanicut Island. Successive waves of people have since lived among the island’s marshes, cliffs, and coves, with the earliest to leave their mark around 3,000 years ago. The Narragansett Indians were living on Conanicut Island in 1514 when Giovanni da Verrazzano discovered it for the Europeans, and a century later the Dutch established a temporary trading post on nearby Dutch Island to trade furs with the natives.

In 1637, Europeans from the Massachusetts Bay Colony settled on Aquidneck Island, across the East Passage, where the city of Newport was founded the following year. As part of an agreement with the Narragansett Indians, the settlers used Conanicut Island as a sheep pasture until an outright purchase of the island was organized in 1657. Resident farmers gradually moved to the island, and the population reached 150 by 1678 when the town of Jamestown was founded. It was likely named after James, Duke of York, who would later become King James II. While Jamestown would retain its sleepy agricultural character for the next 200 years, across the bay Newport would develop into a major port and commercial center.

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7 *Geological History of Jamestown, Rhode Island*, http://www.jamestown-ri.info/glaciation.htm
To help guide merchant ships into Newport’s harbor, a lighthouse was built in 1749 at Beavertail Point, located at the southern tip of Conanicut Island. This lighthouse consisted of a wooden tower atop an octagonal stone base, and was the third lighthouse to be constructed in America. The wooden portion burned down in 1753, and was replaced by a fieldstone tower that was in use until 1856, when the present granite lighthouse was completed. Today, Beavertail Point is a 153-acre state park, featuring the currently active lighthouse, added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Visitors to the park can enjoy a free-of-charge aquarium and lighthouse museum, the latter occupying what was once the assistant lighthouse keeper’s house. There is also the foundation

Figure 2. Beavertail Lighthouse, completed in 1856. The foundation of the 1749 lighthouse is partially visible at top-right. Photo by the author.

10 National Register of Historic Places, Beavertail Lighthouse, Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island, National Register # 77000024.
of the old lighthouse from 1749, the remains of World War II-era gun batteries, and several lookouts from which to enjoy vistas of the open ocean. Outright public ownership ensures that these valuable cultural resources are protected from private development.

The American Revolution was not kind to Jamestown, as prolonged British occupation of Newport from 1775 to 1779 crippled both towns’ economies. Jamestown, with a population of 600 when the occupation began, had been at the peak of its prosperity as an agricultural community. But when the British finally left in 1779, Conanicut Island had been deforested and depopulated, with most buildings in town reduced to ashes. Consequently, very little in Jamestown survives from the colonial period.

While much of Rhode Island participated in the industrial revolution, Jamestown, lacking a flowing waterway powerful enough to harness, would continue to be largely agricultural well into the 19th century. In 1870 the population was 378, still less than it had been a century earlier. Jamestown’s resort era would begin in 1872, with the advent of steam ferry service, forever changing the face of the island. But Jamestown’s agricultural past survives in the structures that predate the resort era, and in the working farms that continue to lend the island a bucolic nature.

Windmill Hill

One of the first building projects in Jamestown in the wake of the Revolutionary War was the construction of a windmill to aid farmers in grinding corn. A windmill had existed previously on the island but was out of commission by the mid-18th century. The current windmill was completed in 1787, and was in use until its abandonment in 1896. After a period of neglect, the windmill was

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11 National Register of Historic Places, Windmill Hill Historic District, Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island, National Register #78000067.
12 Ibid.
bought and repaired in 1904 by a group of historically-minded citizens, and today is one of Jamestown’s most treasured landmarks.

The windmill is the centerpiece of the Windmill Hill Historic District, added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. It contains some of Jamestown’s oldest structures; the designation report lists six farms with their outbuildings, many of which date from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The district also contains the Friends Meeting House, and Miller’s Cottage, both built in 1787. Although a four-lane state highway, completed in 1994, now traverses the eastern and northern fringes of the district, the district retains its rural integrity.

Windmill Hill is an excellent example of Jamestowners taking action to preserve their island’s heritage. As listing on the National Register does not protect open land from development, or structures from inappropriate alteration or demolition, Windmill Hill owes its protection to several preservation-minded nonprofit organizations. The Jamestown Historical Society owns, maintains, and operates the Windmill. The Conanicut Island Land Trust, a private nonprofit group, holds a conservation easement on a 6.5-acre field along North Main Road. Historic New England, which dubs itself “the oldest, largest and most comprehensive regional heritage organization in the nation,” owns and maintains the 265-acre Watson Farm. The Watson family bequeathed their farm to the

![Figure 3. The Jamestown Windmill in 1906. The building farthest to the left is the miller’s cottage, well before the addition of dormers. Image courtesy of the Jamestown Historical Society.](image)

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organization in 1980 under the stipulation that it would be maintained as a working farm in perpetuity, and resident farmers continue to inhabit the 1796 farmhouse. Other historic farmsteads in Windmill Hill continue to be working farms as well, protected by conservation easements and the sale of development rights.

The historic resources of Windmill Hill are not completely protected, however. The Jamestown Historical Society’s ownership of the windmill does not extend to the Miller’s Cottage, which is privately owned, and has recently experienced the addition of large dormer windows to its roof. This unchecked alteration of its historic fabric is evidence of Jamestown’s vulnerability, highlighting the need for local preservation measures.

Conanicut Park

In 1872, the year that marked the beginning the resort era, the most built-up part of the island was along Narragansett Avenue, connecting the landings for the sailing ferries that crossed the East and West Passages. East Ferry was the more developed side, as it connected to Newport, and this route would be the first to be replaced by steam service in 1873.

The first development on the island for summer residents, however, was nowhere near the East Ferry landing, but rather at the isolated northern end of the island where previously there had been virtually no development. This real estate venture was known as Conanicut Park, established by the Conanicut Land Company in 1872. The company chose the site to capitalize on the existing steam ferries already crossing the bay, which would then land at Conanicut Park, linking it to Newport, Wickford, and Providence. The company purchased about 500 acres of farmland and divided it into more than 2,000 small rectangular lots. A hotel, four cottages, and a ferry landing were built by 1873,

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but the economic depression that same year slowed construction and most lots went undeveloped.\textsuperscript{16} Several more cottages gradually were built and the hotel eventually prospered, until an illness from contaminated water broke out in 1887. The hotel never regained popularity and was torn down in 1908.\textsuperscript{17}

A Gothic Revival-style lighthouse was constructed at the northern tip of the island in 1886 as a navigational aid to the ferries, and was in use until 1933. Now a residence, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.\textsuperscript{18} Around two dozen other structures from Conanicut Park’s heyday remain, some with fine Victorian woodwork, but these do not form a cohesive group, as they were built at odd intervals and distances from one another as the park never fully realized. Still, Conanicut Park is significant, as it contains some of Jamestown’s earliest resort buildings, and the original street plan of concentric ovals survives in current plat maps. As such, the 1995 \textit{Purple Book} lists Conanicut Park as deserving consideration for becoming National Register Historic District.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Green Lane}

The Jamestown-Newport steam ferry made its first trip across the bay in May 1873. Its route was practically the same as the sailing ferry it replaced, landing at East Ferry. This new reliable, convenient, and relatively frequent connection would usher in a wave of resort development that would last well into the twentieth century. Farms were subdivided and platted for development as land values rose, especially near the ferry landing, where some of the earliest summer cottages and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Rosemary Enright and Sue Maden, \textit{Jamestown: A History of Narragansett Bay’s Island Town}, Charleston: The History Press, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{18} National Register of Historic Places, Conanicut Island Lighthouse, Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island, National Register #87001698.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 44-48.
\end{itemize}
boardinghouses were built. Many of these early buildings survive, particularly along Union and Lincoln Streets, which run parallel to Narragansett Avenue and terminate at Green Lane.

Green Lane itself exhibits a high very degree of historic integrity. All houses on its west side date from before World War I, occupying land that was once part of a Civil War-era training ground.\textsuperscript{20} While the architecture along Green Lane is relatively inconspicuous compared to some of the more prominent architectural works on the island, the designs and construction dates are remarkably consistent. The Jamestown Historical Society has recently written columns about the neighborhood, published in \textit{The Jamestown Press}, and organized a historic house tour of the neighborhood in summer of 2014. Although the \textit{Purple Book} does not highlight the historic value of the neighborhood as a whole, its strong sense of cohesiveness and historic integrity make the Green Lane neighborhood, side streets included, a candidate for preservation.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{union_streets.jpg}
\caption{Historic structures along Union Street, which terminates at Green Lane. \textit{Photo by the author.}}
\end{figure}

Bay Voyage–Bay View Drive

Several large wooden hotels were constructed at East Ferry to accommodate the influx of seasonal visitors, eager to escape the heat of the city and enjoy the cool island atmosphere. The first hotel constructed was Gardner House, built in 1883 and expanded in 1888. The Bay Voyage Hotel, originally a house built in Middletown in the 1860s, was floated across the bay to a site north of East Ferry in 1889 and subsequently expanded. The 4½-story Bay View Hotel, featuring a prominent corner turret, was also built in 1889, the same year as the construction of the Thorndike Hotel.\textsuperscript{21} By the early 1890s, these large hotels, plus smaller hotels, boarding houses, and room rentals in private homes provided accommodations for over one thousand visitors.\textsuperscript{22} The hotels, which once dominated the waterfront, did not fare well over time and have all but disappeared due to fire or demolition. The one surviving hotel from this era is the Bay Voyage, currently a hotel and timeshare resort. A 2½-story

\textsuperscript{21} Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 20.

\textsuperscript{22} Rosemary Enright and Sue Maden, Jamestown: A History of Narragansett Bay's Island Town, 78.
mansarded and shingled mass, with its 1890 in-kind extension stretching behind, it stands a half-mile north of East Ferry and serves as an important reminder of Jamestown’s bygone days as a resort.

The Bay Voyage is adjacent to the Bay View Drive area, a district outlined by the Purple Book as meriting consideration for nomination to the National Register. Of the six potential districts listed, Bay View Drive is the smallest, containing only seven buildings, but which merit a high level of distinction. Five of the seven buildings were built in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and all feature wooden shingles, typical of Jamestown architecture of the period. The large house at 50 Bay View Drive, built in 1896-97, was designed by architect Stanford White of New York. Another of the houses has been expanded for conversion to a yacht club, but this hardly detracts from the old-fashioned seaside charm that the district embodies.

Figure 6. The Bay Voyage Inn. Originally a house built in Middletown, R.I. in the 1860s, it was floated to Jamestown in 1889, and expanded the following year. It is the only surviving hotel from Jamestown’s resort era. Image courtesy of tripadvisor.com.

23 Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 32-33
Ocean Highlands–Walcott Avenue

Like the Bay View Drive area, the southern end of the main part of the island experienced development resulting from the new reliable ferry service. The Ocean Highlands Company was incorporated in 1875 to acquire and subdivide 265 acres of farmland. Although somewhat isolated from the new ferry, as roads were unpaved at the time, Ocean Highlands occupied some of the choicest pieces of land in the state, with rugged granite cliffs and views east to Newport and south to the open ocean. The first house in the Ocean Highlands area was built in 1881 for the renowned land- and seascape artist William Trost Richards, and at least a dozen were erected by 1887, mostly owned by wealthy Philadelphians. By 1888, a small new steamer, Dumpling, connected the East Ferry to Ocean Highlands, significantly reducing its isolation.24

The United States government also had its eye on this prime real estate, which held strategic value for defending the bay. Through eminent domain, the military acquired land to build Fort Wetherill, demolishing several prominent residences to make way for it, including Richards.’ Construction of the fort lasted from 1902 to 1907, and the fort was active through the end of World War II. In 1976, the state of Rhode Island acquired the land, converted it to a state park, and today Fort Wetherill is one of the island’s most spectacular publicly held resources, with its accessible coves and commanding ocean views.

Summer residents continued to purchase lots from the Ocean Highlands Company near the newly-commissioned Fort Wetherill, and many of the residences survive today, forming the Ocean Highlands–Walcott Avenue district. This district, identified by the Purple Book as a potentially eligible for the National Register, contains some of Jamestown’s largest and most prominent residences. The

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Purple Book documents around fifty historic buildings within the district, many built by wealthy Philadelphians in the 1880s and 90s, and others built at odd intervals through 1936.

Lot sizes in the Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue district tend to be large, with abundant trees, so the houses are notable more for their individual significance rather than as a cohesive group. The northern part of Walcott Avenue is an exception to this, with a near-continuous string of historic houses on its west side; many feature shingled turrets and generous front porches.

Several houses in this district have particular individual significance. Altamira, designed by the New York firm of Selfridge & Obermaier and built in 1905, sits high on an outcropping with commanding views to the south and east. A 100-foot-long porch wraps around its 2½-story hipped-roofed mass, and within are no less than twenty bedrooms. The 1995 state survey describes Altamira

Figure 7. Altamira, in the Ocean Highlands–Walcott Avenue district. *Photo by the author.*
as “epitomiz[ing] an important aspect of American taste in early twentieth-century architectural design--big, bold, unpretentious, comfortable, and friendly.”

Horsehead, a domed, dormered, and shingled mansion built for Bethlehem Steel co-founder Joseph Wharton, it occupies an extraordinary setting on a promontory within the district. Completed in 1884, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for being “significant in the history of architecture, landscape architecture, industry, and American society. Architecturally it represents an important stage in the evolution of seaside Shingle Style summer houses.” The 1995 state survey

25 Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 93
26 Horsehead-Marbella National Register listing, 13

Figure 8. Horsehead, built for steel magnate and philanthropist Joseph Wharton. Charles Bevins, architect. Photo by the author.
dubs Horsehead “one of the outstanding summer houses of the New England coast.” A fixture of Narragansett Bay, and appearing on navigational charts, Horsehead is landmark in every sense but the official sense.

Horsehead was designed by Charles Bevins, an architect virtually unknown outside of Jamestown, but who nonetheless made great strides in developing the Shingle Style. More than half of his forty or so designs survive, many of which contribute to the architectural significance of the Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue district. A drive through the district allows one to appreciate the design tendencies of his Shingle-Style houses, notably their compactness, asymmetry, and emphasis on verticality. The district features notable houses by other architects as well, including the Round House by Charles McKim. A two-story shingled house, it has a circular plan in imitation of Fort Dumpling which once stood nearby. Clingstone, located on its own islet just offshore from the district, is as remarkable for its setting as it is for its design. Completed in 1905 to a design credited to local builder J.D. Johnson, with input from artist William Trost Richards, Clingstone appears a sort of hybrid between a Swiss chalet and a shingled New England mansion. Both local and nationally renowned architectural talent led the Rhode Island Heritage Commission to assert the Ocean

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27 Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 71.
29 James C. Buttrick with the Jamestown Historical Society, Images of America: Jamestown, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, 2003. Clingstone was built for J.S.L. Wharton, whose earlier house, Braeeleugh, designed by Bevins, was demolished to make way for Fort Wetherill.
Highlands-Walcott Avenue district’s significance, dubbing it “best place in Rhode Island to appreciate the charm and sophistication of Shingle Style architecture.”

![Image of steamer Dumpling en route to East Ferry. In the background is the Barnacle (still standing), built in 1886 for Admiral Thomas Selfridge, and designed by Charles Bevins. Conveyed in this photograph is the isolation this section of the island experienced in the nineteenth century. Image courtesy of the Jamestown Historical Society.]

**Shoreby Hill**

The last major development that occurred in Jamestown during the resort era was Shoreby Hill. A coalition of wealthy residents of St. Louis, Missouri formed the Jamestown Land Company with the intention of developing a summer enclave in Jamestown for their enjoyment. Led by industrialist Ephron Catlin and lawyer James Taussig, the company in 1895 purchased the 58½-acre Quaker Farm, located just to the north of East Ferry and Narragansett Avenue, and southwest of Bay

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30 Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island, Rhode Island Historical & Heritage Preservation Commission, 1995, 90.
View Drive and the Bay Voyage Hotel. The land was undeveloped except for the farmhouse, and featured a hill sloping down to the water’s edge.

The Jamestown Land Company hired Ernest Bowditch to design their community. Bowditch had a history of designing landscapes for wealthy Americans, as he designed several landscapes in Newport, in addition to the large, gated community of Tuxedo Park in New York State. For Shoreby Hill, Bowditch laid out a series of curvilinear roads to follow the natural topography of the island, meeting one another at irregular angles with small triangular green spaces within the intersections. In a prescient move that predated zoning regulations, houses were required to be set back from the street, with a ban on front fences and front plantings over a certain height. The community featured a main, central meadow on the hill, just above a smaller “green,” with the grandest homes facing the meadow. Access to Shoreby Hill would be through pairs of stone gates, which give the community an air of exclusivity, reminiscent of the gated communities in St. Louis in which many of the members lived.31

Major alteration of the old farmland began in 1896, and in the following year Taussig and Catlin began construction of their own homes. Over the next six years, eight new houses were built in Shoreby Hill and two were transported from elsewhere on the island. Architecturally, the new houses built on Shoreby Hill were a departure from the earlier Shingle-Style buildings popular in the Ocean Highlands–Walcott Avenue area. Queen Anne-inspired asymmetry, steeply gabled roofs, and prominent turrets gave way to more formal American Colonial forms. Shoreby Hill houses exhibited symmetry and horizontality, and featured Colonial Revival elements such fanlights, Palladian windows, and gambrel roofs. Shingles as a cladding material both lent an air of seaside informality and provided yet another architectural link to New England’s past.32 One might be surprised to learn that the

32 Elizabeth Mary Delude, Jamestown, Rhode Island: A Nineteenth Century Resort and Shoreby Hill: A Resort Suburb, (unpublished master’s thesis), Columbia University, New York, 1986, 79-81. The choice to build in such a historicizing style was an assertion of the resident families’ status as being American since the country’s founding.
Shoreby Hill covenant did not include an architectural review process, given the harmony the houses exhibit in relation to with one another.

In 1911, the Jamestown Land Company platted Upper Shoreby Hill, uphill and to the west of the existing development. This new section abandoned the curvilinear road plan in favor of a rectilinear grid. Between 1911 and 1917, 33 new homes in Shoreby Hill were completed, in both the upper and lower sections. No construction occurred during US involvement in World War I, but construction resumed afterwards and thirteen new houses were built between 1919 and 1931.33

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Although some houses have been built in Shoreby Hill since World War II, the neighborhood largely retains its historic character.

Shoreby Hill was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2011 due in part to its high level of integrity. The period of significance extends from 1895, when the land was first purchased, to 1936, the after which there was a hiatus in construction. Since then, only a handful of new houses have been built, some in previously vacant lots, and elsewhere new construction has replaced older structures. Many views of Shoreby Hill look much the same today as they did in historic photographs, with the exception that many of the original plantings, notably copper beech and maple trees, are now mature.

Two homeowners’ associations govern Shoreby Hill, which is divided into lower and upper subdivisions. These are also sometimes referred to as “First” and “Second” subdivisions, respectively, which is a reference to their order of purchase and development. Lower Shoreby Hill is a key, character-defining area of Jamestown, as it contains the meadow and the large original houses facing it. About half of the forty or so houses in Lower Shoreby Hill are owned by seasonal residents. The homeowners’ association that governs it grew out of the deed restrictions from the original subdivision, which are still in effect, although the only requirement regulating a house itself is outdated. That requirement is the minimum price of a house erected in Lower Shoreby Hill, stipulated to not cost less than fifteen hundred dollars.34

In keeping with the 120-year-old requirements, houses must be set back from the road by between fifteen and twenty-five feet, depending on the road. Front fences are banned, as are front plantings higher than five feet. The roads and the meadow are the property of the association, although the original deed does specify that the “sole management and control of said Green, roads, sewers and

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34 First Subdivision of Shoreby Hill Deed Covenants and Restrictions, 1
lights, and the right, if they so determine, of dedicating any of said roads or sewers to public use, shall be vested in said Trustees selected by such lot owners under their said rules and regulations.” The roads and the green technically remain private property of the association, but serve the public nonetheless.

Shoreby Hill’s roads remain private not to keep away outsiders; the private ownership is necessary to preserve them in their current form, as they are not up to public standards. They are too narrow and curved to be public roads, although two cars can easily pass one another. No markings exist in the pavement, and the triangular intersections are unusual. Road names are written in cursive on decorative white boards that hang from low, wooden support structures. These are character-defining features of Shoreby Hill, and wouldn’t be possible if the roads were public. One signboard at the foot of the hill does read “PRIVATE ROADS/15 MPH” but this is not intended as a “keep out”

Figure 11. Typical road sign in Shoreby Hill. In the background is the house originally built in 1897-98 for Ephron Catlin, founding member of the association. Photo by the author.
sign. Rather, it is an “enter at your own risk” sign, as a visitor, not knowing the roads were private, could expect them to be held to public standards and then sue the homeowners association if an accident were to occur.35

Shoreby Hill’s benefits to the community extend beyond the sense of openness one experiences when driving along Conanicus Avenue at the foot of the green. Jamestown’s Christmas pageant is held on the Shoreby Hill green every December. The green is used as a parking lot for events that bring visitors in from across the state, such as the Fourth of July fireworks and the Fools’ Rules Regatta in August. When a strong storm causes flooding on Conanicus Avenue, the police redirect traffic through Lower Shoreby Hill. The neighborhood is both very much a part of the community and an asset to it.

However, the weakness of the covenant of Lower Shoreby Hill was revealed in 2008 when a large house (dubbed a “McMansion” by its neighbors) was completed in Shoreby Hill. The house occupies two lots, extending to the street behind it, with a cottage from 1916 demolished to make way for the new house.36 While not immediately facing the green, it is still visible from the bottom of the hill, changing the view that had existed for over a century. The McMansion’s scale and architectural incongruity led one neighbor, in a letter to the editor of The Jamestown Press, “What has happened to Lower Shoreby Hill? Home construction in keeping with its 19th century appearance? Or with pleasant blending? Or neighborly consideration by builders? Nothing. Gone with the winds!”37

The white poly-vinyl-chloride fence surrounding the property on three sides particularly attracted the ire of many neighbors, as it violated the Lower Shoreby Hill covenant. The deeds describe the enforcement process of when a neighbor violates the covenant: “It shall be lawful for any person,

35 Interview with Barbara Hermann, Secretary to First Subdivision of Shoreby Hill, inc., Jamestown, R.I., April 17, 2016.
36 Shoreby Hill National Register Nomination Form, 15
including this grantor, owning a lot in Shoreby Hill…to institute and prosecute appropriate proceedings at law or in equity for the wrong done or attempted.”38 However, when the trustees explored the option of taking the owner of the new building to court for violating the fence restriction, they determined that their own financial resources were insufficient compared with the new owner’s, and they backed down.39 Residents then realized the weakness of their own by-laws, and the vulnerability of the historic fabric of their community.

Figure 12. The Shoreby Hill McMansion. Photo by the author.

38 First Subdivision of Shoreby Hill Deed Covenants and Restrictions, 3
39 Email from Barbara Hermann, Secretary to First Subdivision of Shoreby Hill, inc., February 3, 2016.
3. The Proposed Shoreby Hill Historic District

In recent years, Jamestown came close to enacting a historic district ordinance, with the intention to designate Lower Shoreby Hill as its first district. Preservation-minded community groups worked tirelessly with the town government to achieve it, but the proposal ultimately died at the hands of both parties.

While the idea of designating Shoreby Hill has been considered for decades, the movement first gained momentum in 2007. The Shoreby Hill Historic District Study Committee, formed from members of the Shoreby Hill association, sponsored a meeting in the town on June 21st of that year to begin the discussion. The meeting featured a presentation from the deputy director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission to address the pros and cons of establishing historic districts. The town council entertained the idea by asking the Jamestown Historical Society for comments and recommendations regarding the creation of a historic district. In a letter to the council, the society expressed support for the establishment of a local historic district ordinance, with Lower Shoreby Hill to be designated as the first district.

The movement continued with the ordinance being proposed at a Planning Commission meeting in May 20, 2009, as per the convention for ordinances concerning land use. Some Shoreby

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Hill residents at the meeting opposed the ordinance on the grounds that the commission was moving too quickly without considering the consequences of the regulations. Commissioners responded favorably to the ordinance, but did not come to a decision until a subsequent meeting on July 23rd, when they voted unanimously in favor of the ordinance and recommended that the Town Council adopt it. The Town Council considered the ordinance at a meeting two weeks later, where it opted not to move forward. Concerns included whether a historic district truly was the best route to proceed, and if educational programs or a voluntary district might be preferable. According to town planner Lisa Breyer, “The council was leery about going into the formal process of creating an historic district and an historic district commission…it just didn’t go anywhere.”

Some Jamestown residents voiced their opposition to historic district legislation, citing the public time and expense of passing such legislation, and the loss of rights that it would ultimately entail. One letter to the editor of The Jamestown Press described the proposed historic district legislation as a “big brother effort,” the result of which would be “more regulations, another commission, more town employees, more legal expense, and a loss of freedom.” A 24-member group, identifying themselves as the Jamestown Taxpayers Association: Advocates for Common Sense, flagged the proposed Shoreby Hill historic district as “a selfish thing the town shouldn’t be involved with.”

Proponents of the historic district legislation then turned to educational measures. The Shoreby Hill Historic District Study Committee wrote letters in the Jamestown Press emphasizing the importance of historic districts, stressing that they are very much worth the time of town employees.

49 Jim Buttrick and Betty Hubbard, “Historic Districts: This is the Time,” The Jamestown Press, August 20, 2009.
The committee also held a public informational session, in which several Shoreby Hill residents voiced their concerns about the burden of design review for even the most modest renovations. They cited the painstaking review process that Newport residents must endure when seeking minor modifications to the rear of a house, and to this the committee assured the homeowners that Jamestown’s ordinance could be tailored to only pertain to what is visible from a public right of way.⁵⁰

Spurring interest in Shoreby Hill’s history was the Jamestown Historical Society, which organized a house tour featuring four houses in the neighborhood. The tour highlighted the development’s “curving streets, strict building codes, sewer and water systems, waterside green and other amenities, [which] was a novel approach to town planning in its day.”⁵¹ Still, the historic district proposal remained dormant at the town government level for several more years, until listing on the National Register of Historic Places brought Shoreby Hill to the forefront once more.

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission had granted Shoreby Hill preliminary approval for nomination to the National Register in March of 2008; in July of 2009 the Town Council petitioned the state for a grant to fund the research to determine whether the neighborhood would fully meet the requirements. While National Register status does not directly affect property rights, the move was, according to town planner Lisa Breyer, to “add validity” and “add credibility to the process for those seeking to create a local historic district.”⁵² Residents’ efforts paid off, and Shoreby Hill was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 15, 2011.

Shoreby Hill was then back on track for historic district status. In September 2012 the Jamestown Historical Society ran an article in The Jamestown Press titled “Shoreby Hill: An Exceptional

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Garden Suburb” extolling the sophistication and historic value of the neighborhood. The Town Council heard the historic district proposal again on February 4, 2013, this time moving forward by unanimously authorizing the Planning Commission to draft an ordinance including design guidelines and regulations. Councilor Mary Meagher, an architect by trade, at the meeting referred to lower Shoreby Hill as “such a unique architectural gem.” The Planning Commission mulled over the ordinance at the next five monthly meetings, concerned primarily with who would compose the new historic district board and whether historic districts on the island could proliferate beyond control. At the planning commission level it was a simply a matter of details; Chairman Mike Swistak said at the April 3 meeting “The historic district is going to happen.” Finally at the June 6, 2013 meeting, after amending the 16-page ordinance to address the concerns, the Planning Commission unanimously voted to send it to the Town Council. It seemed at this point that Jamestown would join the ranks of the sixteen other Rhode Island towns that have historic districts, with lower Shoreby Hill as Jamestown’s first one. It then hit an unexpected snag.

The Jamestown Town Council met on September 16, 2013 to address and vote on the finalized historic district ordinance. At the public meeting, councilor Mary Meagher stated support for the creation of a Shoreby Hill Historic District, praising its architecture for “contain[ing] uniquely American building types that epitomize an emerging American identity,” and calling its Ernest Bowditch-designed landscape design “remarkable…its features create a coherent and cohesive district.” She then expressed her support of historic districts in general, quoting the state enabling

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legislation that “there is public purpose for the preservation of structures of historic and architectural
value.”

She then shifted her attention to a matter that had never been raised until that point. Her
concern was the Shoreby Hill’s private roads, as recorded in the minutes of the council meeting:

We are pledging the commitment of resources for the benefit of the entire community,
not one neighborhood. However, there is one issue in Shoreby that contradicts this
effort – private roads. The recent letter to the editor (of the Jamestown Press) about
the grandmother asked to leave a Shoreby Hill property has raised the issue, and it
remains that these roads are private and can be closed off at any time. Though she
hopes it is clear she is supportive of the creation of a historic district, she noted she
cannot reconcile the expenditure of the community’s resources when the public’s
access to the roads, to view the buildings, to walk the landscape, is not ensured. Vice
President Meagher suggested the Shoreby Hill community come back to the Council
with a legal, enforceable assurance of the public’s right to access the district, and this
hearing be continued until that time.

The remaining four councilors agreed with Meagher about the private roads issue, with one
stating, “A historic district with private roads is almost a contradiction.” The time span the council
granted the Shoreby Hill residents to come with the “legal, enforceable assurance” was two months,
with the meeting to be continued on November of that year.

At the November meeting, the Council issued a six-month moratorium on building permits
in lower Shoreby Hill, and postponed the decision on the ordinance to February 2014, at which

57 Jamestown Town Council Meeting Minutes, September 16, 2013.
58 Ibid. The grandmother who was asked to leave Shoreby Hill was an untimely and unusual incident of rudeness, in
which the dog she was walking pooped on the lawn across from the resident’s house, which was indeed part of his
property. This isolated incident occurred just days before the Town Council meeting, affecting its legislative outcome.
59 Ibid.
meeting the historic district ordinance was then formally withdrawn. Justifying the withdrawal, councilors cited the long span of time the issue had been open, and the lack of action on the part of historic district proponents.\textsuperscript{60} To give the Historic District proponents additional time to solve the private roads issue, the moratorium continued until June 2014, and was extended until September of that year.\textsuperscript{61} By that time, traction for creating a historic district had died, as a majority of Lower Shoreby Hill residents became opposed to historic districting, as stated in their petition to the Planning Commission that August.\textsuperscript{62} Reasons for the diminishing interest included changes of ownership for

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Concerns over the privacy of Shoreby Hill's roads prevented the passage of historic district legislation. \textit{Photo by the author.}}
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\textsuperscript{60} Jamestown Town Council Meeting Minutes, February 3, 2014.
Shoreby Hill properties, and amidst rising property values there was the notion that historic districting could hurt a real estate investment.\(^6\)

Although residents are still concerned about the loss of historic buildings from their town, historic preservation in Jamestown now is very much on the back burner. For a time, town planners discussed assigning the status “building of value” to any building listed in the 1995 state survey or listed in a National Register district. Modifications to “buildings of value” would have go before the planning commission, but this idea proved ineffective.\(^6\) Zoning requirements are of course still in effect island-wide, but these only apply to basic features such as height, setbacks, lot coverage, use, etc., without regard to design features or historic fabric. Shoreby Hill remains unprotected, as is most of the island. While the most effective policy tool for preserving neighborhood character is the historic district, there are other preservation tools available, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

\(^6\) Interview with Elizabeth Delude-Dix, April 28, 2016. It should be pointed out that historic districting tends to protect property values, not damage them. Ted Sanderson, the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Officer, has stated in a January 6, 2016 interview that it is unlikely a Shoreby Hill historic district would devalue its properties.

\(^6\) In 2013 a building located in the Shoreby Hill National Register Historic District was demolished without even a conversation. The building was listed as non-contributing, a status the rule did not specify as an exemption. The replacement building did go before the planning commission, but only because a neighbor insisted.
4. Policy Tools

In the wake of Jamestown’s failure to enact a Historic District Ordinance, there are a variety of preservation tools available to protect the island’s historic resources. The methods range from regulation to education. Despite Jamestown’s resources having national significance, preservation is an inherently local issue, and regulatory preservation methods would have to originate from within Jamestown itself. Jamestowners may choose to adopt any one or combination of these measures to help ensure long-term stewardship of the island’s historic and cultural resources.

Although state and federal tax credits are in many cases useful for encouraging the preservation of historic buildings nationwide, such incentives are not applicable to Jamestown. The federal government provides income tax credits for rehabilitations of certified historic buildings, but these only apply to income-producing properties and not single-family homes. The state of Rhode Island once had a fund for historic residential properties located within in a local historic district, but these state funds have been exhausted, along with such an incentive for historic districting.65

Tax breaks at the town level are a possibility, however, as there is state enabling legislation that allows it. The town of Narragansett, R.I. has a bill drafted for property tax breaks for the rehabilitation of historic houses within local historic districts. The ordinance is drafted to credit up to twenty percent

65 Interview with Edward Sanderson, Rhode Island SHPO, Providence, R.I., 1/6/2016.
of the rehabilitation cost, up to two thousand dollars per year for five years.66 Jamestown would need to adopt its own historic district ordinance before granting similar tax credits, so such a preservation incentive could be considered in the more distant future. Currently, the only method for a historic house in Jamestown to achieve a break in taxes would be to establish an easement on the façade.

_Easements_

A preservation easement is a method of ensuring that a building’s exterior will remain unchanged. The property owner enters a legal agreement with a state or nonprofit organization (the easement holder), in which the owner surrenders the right to alter the building. In exchange, the owner receives federal income tax deductions, and pays less in property taxes due to a lower property tax assessment. The owner does have to make a one-time tax-deductible contribution to the nonprofit, typically around one percent of the property value, to fund future maintenance for the building in perpetuity. Preservation easements can be combined with conservation easements, which ensure that land remains undeveloped, to protect all the historic and natural features of a property. To qualify for a preservation easement the building must be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Jamestown already employs conservation easements to maintain its unique sense of place. The Conanicut Island Land Trust along with several other nonprofits serves as easement holders for hundreds of acres of open land all over the island, including the Shoreby Hill Green. Houses fronting the green will always have views down to the water and across to Newport, and likewise will always be highly visible from the water and busy Conanicus Avenue. It is thus of importance that the houses fronting the Shoreby Hill green outwardly maintain their historic character.

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66 Interview with Michael DeLuca, Narragansett Town Planner, Narragansett, R.I., April 18, 2016.
Preservation easements on historic building facades have been used effectively across Rhode Island. The 1733 “Old Yellow” house in Wickford, for example, has a preservation easement on its exterior, protecting it in perpetuity. The New York Yacht Club in Newport is also protected by a preservation easement, preserving the façade that can be seen from Newport Harbor. For both examples, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission acts as the easement holder.67

Although attaining an easement is not as easy as it once was, as the IRS has in recent years established stricter guidelines regarding appraising properties, easements are still a viable preservation tool. While Jamestown currently has no easements that protect its architecture, one Jamestown resident is in the process of establishing one on his historic home in Lower Shoreby Hill. The house does not front the green, but is one of the development’s original structures. The nonprofit organization Preserve Rhode Island will act as the easement holder, and the resident is going through the motions “to prove it can be done,” with the faint hope that other preservation-minded individuals might follow.68

Easements do have their shortcomings, however. Incentives for preservation easements are generally quite low, so they are more about preservation than tax benefits, limiting the scope of their appeal outside those who are already preservation-minded. The process of establishing an easement can take quite some time, and it is usually difficult to substantiate the property’s value to the Internal Revenue Service, which must provide an independent verification of the easement’s value.69 While the ability to preserve a single building in perpetuity is an attractive prospect, easements cannot be relied

68 Interview with Shoreby Hill Resident, New York, 1/21/2016.
69 Telephone interview with Valerie Talmage, Executive Director of Preserve Rhode Island, 4/8/2016.
on to preserve entire neighborhoods, as organization of such a group is very difficult. As such, easements are not a substitute for historic district zoning.

Nevertheless, preservation easements may have their place in Jamestown. There are historic property owners who highly value the architectural qualities of their homes, possibly highly enough to go through the process of establishing one. Unlike historic districts, easements do not require the passage of a local ordinance, and so are not hindered by an anti-preservationist sentiment in a community. It is possible Jamestown will see more easements on its historic homes in the coming years, but that would depend on both the successful establishment of the easement on the one Shoreby Hill house, and better public knowledge about the benefits of preservation easements.

*Pattern Book*

In 2007, the Town of Jamestown commissioned a team of planning professionals to develop a strategy for improving the commercial area centered around Narragansett Avenue, the island’s main thoroughfare. While the focus was on the pedestrian experience of this small area, one product of this study was the Jamestown Pattern Book, containing suggestions for the whole town. Historically, a pattern book is a compendium of buildings and architectural elements, from which an architect can draw inspiration and piece together a new building. In the modern sense, it is an illustrated style guide, highlighting the “dos and don’ts” of architecture. Jamestown’s pattern book contains guidelines “set out to illustrate those traditional patterns as they are objectively observed on Jamestown and all over New England so that in those instances where the goal is to build in a traditional manner the designer, builder, neighbors and officials charged with permitting it may be better able to achieve that goal.”70

Architectural features from cladding materials to cornice dimensions to placement of garages are

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outlined, using text, sketches, and photographs from houses both on and off the island. Although architects are not required to follow the guidelines when designing or altering residential architecture in Jamestown, it is possible future zoning codes could require it. While such form-based codes can result in buildings that appear historic, they are not empowered to preserve genuine historic buildings.

Another flaw in the pattern book is that it is hardly specific to Jamestown. The types of architecture it concerns itself with are generic American, possibly inland New England, and not that of the New England Seaside. The most character-defining architectural feature found in Jamestown, and along the coast in general, is the cladding of a building in wooden shingles which are not given any special mention in the pattern book. Gambrel roofs, common in Jamestown, are never mentioned, although a small sketch of a building with one appears among an assortment of other building types.

A pattern book can be much more than a set of mathematical guidelines and banal didactic photographs, and in special cases can actually be a preservation tool. Watch Hill, Rhode Island has had a pattern book published that is more in the style of a coffee table book, with full-page photographs of an exceedingly high aesthetic quality. Detailed descriptions and sketches of architectural features accompany the photographs. The book is *Watch Hill Style* by Richard Youngken, a Watch Hill resident and advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. *Watch Hill Style*’s self-proclaimed mission is “to provide a guide for those considering new construction or preservation to assist in understanding, appreciating, and respecting the colony’s architectural heritage and character.” The book is frequently cited as fostering a profound sense of pride in the town’s architectural resources, resulting in their preservation.

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72 Telephone interview with Valerie Talmage, Preserve Rhode Island, 4/8/2016. Multiple sources have also said that no teardowns have occurred in Watch Hill since the book’s publishing in 2009, but this has not been verified.
Watch Hill is a particularly appropriate location to examine when considering preservation tools that would be effective in Jamestown. Like Jamestown, Watch Hill has an established summer community alongside a year-round population. Both towns contain premier examples of Shingle Style and Neo-Colonial architecture. Neither Rhode Island town has a regulatory local historic district, despite the high architectural merit. Both towns are experiencing an influx of wealthier newcomers and rising property values.

The example that Watch Hill sets with its pattern book could be followed in Jamestown. Although Jamestown would probably need more than a book published to ensure the preservation of its resources, it would at least help foster a greater desire for historic preservation and architectural appreciation.

**Voluntary Historic District**

A voluntary historic district is a curious method of preservation. It is just like a traditional, restrictive local historic district, except for the key difference that residents of the district are not bound to do as the historic district commission says. A resident of the district would be required to come before the commission when seeking approval for demolition, construction, or alteration. The resident would experience a critique of the plans, and upon leaving the session, could abide by the commission’s opinions or choose to ignore them. A voluntary historic district would therefore fall into the “education” category of preservation methods, albeit a sort of mandatory education.

The idea behind the voluntary historic district is that an owner of a historic building would “do the right thing” if only he or she knew better, and there is probably a component of peer pressure as well, as the board meetings would be public. Like a neighborhood conservation district, which will be explained shortly, a voluntary historic district is a sort of compromise between those who more value preservation and those who more value liberty with property rights. Of course this type of
ordinance still leaves historic resources greatly at risk from developers willing to forego the opinions of others. Voluntary historic districts have been appearing recently in the Rhode Island towns of Warren, where a local historic district ordinance was blocked, and in Narragansett, which will be discussed further on.

Voluntary compliance to a set of standards is not a concept new to Jamestown. Jamestown’s pattern book is full of design guidelines that can be easily (and often are) ignored. At a Planning Commission meeting in August 2014, discussing commercial buildings in Jamestown’s town center, the concept of mandatory review but voluntary compliance was discussed, but not established. Residents of Shoreby Hill have also considered the concept of voluntary historic districts, but rejected them on the grounds that such education is unnecessary.

**Neighborhood Conservation Districts**

One possible solution to Jamestown’s preservation dilemma is the neighborhood conservation district, or NCD. Similar to voluntary historic districts, NCDs typically are thought of as “historic district light” in that they are a compromise between those who want preservation and those who oppose regulation. They can also be applied to areas that do not merit historic district designation, yet exhibit a character-defining streetscape deemed worth protecting nonetheless. Towns and cities are free to design their own NCD exactly to fit their needs; usually they take the form of protecting historic neighborhoods by preventing teardowns, without a nit-picking design review process for alterations.

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74 Jamestown Planning Commission Meeting Minutes, August 20, 2014.
to existing structures. Towns can tailor the governance of an NCD to suit the residents’ desires, and can range in stringency from very relaxed to as restrictive as a full-on historic district.

Similar to historic districts, NCDs are regulated by a design review board. In cities and towns that have both NCDs and historic districts, the same board can serve both types of districts. There can also be a separate board for each individual district. NCDs also need not apply only to historic neighborhoods, as their objective is primarily about form and scale of existing and new structures, and architectural details and historic fabric are secondary considerations. Neighborhoods with a mix of newer and older architecture, as are found in Jamestown, may thus find NCDs useful.

A New England town that can serve as a model for Jamestown is Cambridge, Massachusetts, in that one was created to fit the needs of residents of the Avon Hill neighborhood. The catalyst for the formation of an NCD in Cambridge was demolition and substantial alteration of buildings with a cohesive architectural character.77 The proponents of the Shoreby Hill historic district had the same concerns: opposition to tear-downs in a community of exceptionally cohesive architecture, aversion to oversized “McMansions” in their places, and a more relaxed approach to alterations of existing buildings. While Cambridge’s traditional historic districts are regulated by a very strict design review board, its NCDs are overseen by a separate board,

The Avon Hill NCD in Cambridge is generally regarded as a success. A member of the Avon Hill NCD commission described the NCD as “an orderly process for reviewing significant change in a district with a defined character, and it has done a good job of balancing homeowners’ interests in improving their properties with the neighborhood’s interest in maintaining visual character.”78 Another member of the Cambridge Historical Commission described the NCD as “successful at

restraining the forces that were detrimental to the conservation of the neighborhood.”79 Residents of the neighborhood also gave the NCD praiseworthy remarks, describing it as providing a kind of “comfort” and “stability,” and the sense of certainty that an out-of-scale development would not occur.80

Residents of the Dallas, Texas neighborhood of Greenland Hills have enjoyed the protection of an NCD since its enactment in 2002. The architecture in Greenland Hills is almost entirely 1920s-era High Tudor Style, with tree-lined parkways and a consistent look and feel throughout. The NCD was established to protect against teardowns and “mansionization” that was beginning to creep into the neighborhood. The NCD requires that all demolitions be subject to review, and all new construction be in the Tudor style. To protect against McMansions, new construction is required to at least have the appearance of a 1½-story structure.81 Like with the Avon Hill example, strong parallels exist between the goals of the Greenland Hills NCD and Shoreby Hill residents’ desires, and so this NCD could also serve as model for Jamestown.

A “scattered site” NCD also exists in Providence, Rhode Island to protect its historic mill buildings. The goals of preserving the mills is not so much regulating their details, as such regulation could prevent easy conversion to residential or office space. The city was primarily concerned with preventing their demolition, so an NCD was the solution. As the mill buildings are not all located near one another, the NCD was created as a scattered site.82 Residential communities, such as Jamestown’s neighborhoods, are less well suited to scattered-site NCDs, but they are still possibility. If, for example, Jamestowners wanted to prevent the demolition of houses designed by Charles Bevins, but not regulate their modifications, a scattered-site NCD could be used.

79 Ibid
80 Yeston, 21.
82 Interview with Edward Sanderson, Rhode Island SHPO, Providence, R.I., January 6, 2016.
While they are indeed less restrictive than traditional historic districts, NCDs may have added appeal in their name. In the later days of the Shoreby Hill historic district proposal, internal politics caused “historic district” to become a very polarizing term. Certain Shoreby Hill residents became tightly associated with the “historic district,” and eventually people avoided the term altogether.83 “Use that word ‘historic district’ and people freak out,” said planning commission chairman Michael Swistak in an April 2014 meeting.84 Although those who opposed historic districts still may still very well meet the term “neighborhood conservation district” with suspicion, there is still value in its name, as an alternative to such a poisoned term.

NCDs are not without drawbacks, however, and have received similar criticisms as traditional historic districts. Residents of Avon Hill have criticized the financial burden that accompanies the NCD’s regulations, as have delays surrounding the application and approval process. Despite the minor drawbacks, the residents generally considered the NCD a positive tool for maintaining the neighborhood and preventing inappropriate development, citing the “comfort” and “stability” that it provides, and the prevention of construction that is out of scale.85 Shoreby Hill residents and other Jamestowners who oppose McMansions, but oppose historic districts as well, may wish to look to NCDs as a viable preservation method.

“Starter” Historic District

One of the obstacles to the passage of the Lower Shoreby Hill Historic District Ordinance was the fact that roads are private, combined with that it would have been the first the town’s first

83 Interview with Barbara Hermann, Lower Shoreby Hill Homeowners Association Secretary, Jamestown, R.I., April 17, 2016.
85 Yeston, 21.
historic district. Mary Meagher, the councilor who raised the private roads issue that eventually led to the ordinance’s withdrawal, has commented:

So the assertion of the privacy of their roads by Lower Shoreby was a sensitive issue. Would the public not be welcome in Lower Shoreby? Would future millionaires want gates? How do you support public funding for the creation of an historic district commission for Jamestown’s first historic district if these possibilities are real? That was my concern. If we already had had a district, it might not have been such an issue.86

It would seem that designating a different neighborhood, with uncontested public access, as a historic district or NCD could be a route toward preservation in Jamestown. Not only would this other group of deserving houses achieve preservation, but also with the ordinance already on the books and the historic district commission already formed, the door would be open for designation of Shoreby Hill and other neighborhoods in the future. Shoreby Hill is Jamestown’s only historic neighborhood on private roads, leaving many possibilities for the first historic district in town.

Jamestown Residents have raised concerns in town meetings about a domino effect, or “district creep” with historic districts expanding out of control. But this notion, like many misconceptions about preservation measures, results from a lack of education. Only neighborhoods with willing residents will achieve status, as a preponderance of residents in a district will have to be in favor for the district to be created. Additionally, there are only so many neighborhoods in Jamestown that exhibit both the integrity and cohesiveness that make designation possible. Jamestowners cite Newport as a victim of district creep, but Newport has one of the nation’s largest concentrations of historic architecture, so the proliferation of historic districts there is seemingly all but inevitable.

86 Mary Meagher, email to the author, January 7, 2016.
Green Lane in Jamestown has had some interest in historic preservation. A recent house tour conducted by the Jamestown Historical Society featured five houses on the road. While the architecture on Green Lane is not as conspicuous as on Shoreby Hill, the neighborhood as a whole nevertheless exhibits a high level of cohesiveness, historical integrity, and craftsmanship. Green Lane residents may currently be the most willing neighborhood for a historic district or a Neighborhood Conservation District. One Green Lane resident familiar with historic districts suggested including Green Lane, along with intersecting Union Street in a historic district.  

The Purple Book suggests Bay View Drive and Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue as meriting consideration for addition to the National Register, so would be a logical place to consider for the first local historic district. At only seven properties, Bay View Drive is probably too small to garner enough merit to be the first historic district. Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue is quite large, with some very deserving architecture, so would be a good place to start.

While the Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue area is not a planned garden community like Shoreby Hill, and its houses are spaced significantly farther apart, it still is prime candidate for historic district status. Impetus for historic districting would have to come from the residents, and to garner support, they may choose to begin by adding properties to the National Register of Historic Places. Although the legislation did not pass, such a tactic helped the preservation movement in Shoreby Hill gain traction after the neighborhood was designated in 2011. Listing on the National Register also is necessary for a property to qualify for a preservation easement.

As a local regulatory district, Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue could be considered as one district, as the Purple Book suggests, or as two or three separate districts, as would make more sense geographically. Several individual properties in the area could also qualify individually, if the ordinance

87 Jamestown Town Council Meeting Minutes, September 16, 2013
were tailored to include individual landmarks; of particular worthiness are the Charles McKim-designed Round House, the 20-bedroom Altamira, or Clingstone, the iconic mansion on its own islet.

If a group of residents in the Walcott Avenue-Ocean Highlands area or along Green Lane wanted to form a historic district, voluntary historic district, or NCD, the process could kick-start preservation in Jamestown. Deserving neighborhoods such as Shoreby Hill would then have a much easier time attaining preservation status. The nearby town of Narragansett has also found success with implementing regulation incrementally.

**Narragansett, R.I. Case Study**

The town of Narragansett, located across the West Passage from Conanicut Island, can provide vital insight into how to proceed with developing preservation strategies for Jamestown. Narragansett is one of the sixteen Rhode Island towns that has a historic district ordinance, but unlike the other towns, most of which passed their ordinances in the 1980s, Narragansett’s was passed in 2010.

Narragansett’s population is about three times that of Jamestown, and shares a nearly identical pattern of development. Its agricultural period gave way to a resort era in the mid-to-late nineteenth century as the town became increasingly connected to the major northeastern cities. Large hotels sprang up along the shoreline, along with summer shingle-style “cottages.” The hotels are now almost completely gone, but much of the resort-era residential architecture remains, and the town today is inhabited by a mix of year-round and seasonal residents.

Narragansett’s valuable historic resources were unprotected by regulatory measures until recently, possibly due to the same factors, such as complacency, that have kept Jamestown unprotected. Narragansett then had a major preservation scare, a sort of Penn Station moment for the town. The iconic Hazard Castle—with a highly prominent six-story tower, and probably the most
important historic building in Narragansett—went up for sale. The Gothic Revival building, which had originally been built in the nineteenth century as a private residence, was owned by the Catholic Diocese and operated as Our Lady of Peace retreat center. After a long run of stewardship of the historic building, Our Lady of Peace was put up for sale in 2007. “Once that ‘For Sale’ sign went up, my phone started ringing all day long, every day,” said Narragansett town planner Michael DeLuca. People were calling to make sure that their beloved landmark would not be destroyed. But without a preservation ordinance, no such assurance could be offered.88

A historic district ordinance was then drafted up with the help of a consultant, modified from the sample ordinance provided by the state of Rhode Island. The ordinance proposed four historic districts, encompassing large, rambling oceanfront houses, some of which are located on shared private driveways; Victorian houses and commercial buildings in town; The Towers, an iconic stone building spanning the road by McKim, Mead, and White; and of course Hazard’s Castle. The boundaries of some districts were drawn along National Register historic districts, and where the historic resources were observed to extend beyond the National Register districts, voluntary historic districts were proposed. The fully-regulated portion of Narragansett’s Central Street Historic District is roughly cruciform in shape, aligning with the National Register boundaries, with the voluntary sections of the district complementing it to form an overall more rectangular shape. Five non-historic properties at the south end of the Ocean Road Historic District were included as a voluntary buffer zone, to help maintain neighborhood character. The Earls-court neighborhood, comprised of twenty-four properties with half being mid-century ranch houses, was designated as a completely voluntary historic district, with the intent being to not overwhelm the historic water tower in the center of the district.

88 Interview with Michael DeLuca, Narragansett Town Planner, Narragansett, R.I., April 18, 2016.
This historic district proposal found favor with the Narragansett residents for a number of reasons. It protected their historic resources without being overly restrictive, as around half of the listed properties were to be voluntary. The ordinance only required owners to pass review if an alteration affected the front of the building, with a “front” being considered any side facing a road or the ocean. Included was a clear list of minor modifications, such as shingle or awning changes, that could be signed off by the town planner and did not require an appearance before the board. Further encouragement was the provision that the application process would be free of charge.89

The ordinance passed in 2010, in a 3 to 2 vote at the town council. Town Planner DeLuca describes one councilor, who was ultimately in favor the ordinance, being initially a fence-sitter on the issue. But, he said, it was the voluntary districts that won her over. He considers this to be part of a larger strategy of incremental preservation. Start small, and make it attractive, and it can grow from there.90

Indeed, the historic preservation measures in Narragansett are expected to grow. The ordinance is considered an overall success, and the town is currently planning extensions to its historic districts. Some sections that are currently voluntary are proposed to become fully regulated, and the planning board recommended that the list of items that can be approved without a review be expanded. As mentioned earlier, there is an ordinance drafted that would grant property tax credits to owners who perform historic façade rehabilitations. Not only does Narragansett currently enjoy protection of its vital historic resources, but also the town wants to expand the protections offered.

89 Although popular, the ordinance was not met with 100% acceptance. The owner of a property in the center of the Central Street historic district wanted to be excluded from the district. The owner's building, a house that had been converted to five apartments, had non-historic cladding materials added to it over the years, and other qualities that made it an eyesore to the community. The planners held their ground by including the property in the regulated district, as it was such houses like that one which necessitated the ordinance in the first place.

90 Ibid.
Of the takeaways that can be gleaned from the successful passage and probable expansion of Narragansett’s historic district ordinance, three especially stand out. First, establishing regulations incrementally, both in geographic scope and in degree of regulation, can yield successful results. Expansion can always occur in the future, but the key is starting small and easy.

Second, private roads do not matter when establishing a historic district. Eight properties in Narragansett’s Ocean Road Historic District are accessed via private roads, and were included without an issue. The properties are visible from public rights of way, including views from the ocean. The private roads in Narragansett are in fact more private than Shoreby Hill’s roads, as the town of Jamestown is responsible for sweeping Shoreby Hill’s roads and plowing them in the winter, while Narragansett provides no services for the private roads off Ocean Road.91 Even if Shoreby Hill’s roads

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91 Email correspondence with Cyndee Reppe, Jamestown Planning Assistant, May 2, 2016; Email correspondence with Michael DeLuca, Narragansett Town Planner, April 29, 2016.

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Figure 14. Central Street Historic District in Narragansett. The mandatory zone is in purple, with the voluntary "buffer zone" in yellow. *Image courtesy of the Narragansett Planning Dept.*
were inaccessible to the public (which they have not been for the 120 years of their existence), the key viewshed of the meadow and the many iconic houses surrounding it would still be visible from the water and Conanicus Avenue. It should also be noted that a house does not have to abut the meadow to be visible from the water; the McMansion, set several lots back from the front row, is an important example. In the quest for a water view, lots were merged and trees were cut, and it made itself visible.

The third lesson is the least uplifting and already well known—that a crisis is sometimes necessary to garner support for preservation. New York had to lose Penn Station and Chicago had to lose its Stock Exchange for landmarks laws to be enacted in those cities. In Narragansett, the preservation movement was occasioned by one of its beloved structures being threatened, and fortunately, the town acted in time to protect it. Hazard’s Castle, tower and all, is currently a boarding school.

The McMansion on Shoreby Hill was apparently not enough of a crisis to warrant regulatory preservation measures in Jamestown. Neither was the demolition of the Bay View Hotel in 1986, as its tower had already been lopped off and the remainder of the building was in an unsound and unsightly condition. Nor was the loss Harbor of Entrance in 1967, a grand, domed mansion akin to Horsehead on an equally extraordinary site, but at the time, preservation in America was still in its infancy. To jump-start Jamestowners into caring deeply about their built environment once more, a big, beloved, and probably privately owned structure in Jamestown would have to be threatened or demolished – Horsehead, or Clingstone, or perhaps one of the large houses that directly faces the Shoreby Hill Green. Until then, Jamestown may continue to lose its smaller, less conspicuous landmarks one by one.
Conclusion

A strategic application of the policy tools outlined in this chapter could lead to the successful preservation of Jamestown’s historic resources. Shoreby Hill should be ignored for the moment, and instead, other architecturally significant parts of the island should be focused on. Shoreby Hill’s bid to achieve historic district status has left the town exhausted, including its own residents and the town government. Instead, the Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue area should be brought to the forefront, or the Green Lane neighborhood, or both. Property owners in these areas would need to develop an interest in preservation.

To accrue support, preservation advocates in Jamestown have a number of options, but should press for properties to be added to the National Register of Historic Places, a key educational and advocacy tool. The 1995 state survey has already named the Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue district as having potential eligibility, so it is already a good candidate for listing. If state funds become available to this end, they could petition to have it be directed toward the studies necessary for listing, as happened for Shoreby Hill in 2008-2009. Listing Ocean Highlands-Walcott Avenue on the National Register would give the district the recognition it deserves, fostering pride in the architecture, possibly enough to encourage owners to want to protect it. Green Lane, while not listed as a district in the 1995 state survey, already has some degree of interest in its architecture and history.

If enough support is garnered, residents may want to draft an ordinance to protect their neighborhood. They could propose a traditional or voluntary historic district, an NCD, or some combination of the above. As evidenced by Narragansett’s success, taking incremental steps is key, both in the potential to upgrade the historic districts from voluntary to mandatory compliance, and in the ability to proliferate into other deserving neighborhoods, even Shoreby Hill. But the first step toward achieving any of these measures is owner interest, which would stem from either successful advocacy or the threatening of a major historic structure.
5. A Profound Cultural Shift

*Without some relics the total past becomes less than a myth: neither useful nor believable, but only a sense of unknown loss of knowledge which might exist—a vanished world left for conjecture of imagined cities in the sun.*

-George Zabriskie

The buildings that speak to Jamestown’s history are threatened by more than direct destruction by man, but they may find protection in the same policy tools already outlined. The fact is that the oceans are rising and Jamestown is on an island, and by the year 2100 the sea levels will have risen by between 2.5 and 6.5 feet. 92 Although glacier-carved Conanicut Island enjoys plentiful high ground, a rise of four feet would put Conanicus Avenue, which already sees flooding during strong storms, under water twice daily with the high tide. Many structures will be inundated, especially the communities just north of the Newport Bridge. 93 With the increased risk of damage by stronger storms and higher surges, historic districting could have additional benefits. The Rhode Island Emergency

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92 “Sea Level Rise: Oceans are getting higher-can we do anything about it?” *National Geographic*, http://ocean.nationalgeographic.com/ocean/critical-issues-sea-level-rise/.

Management Agency (REIMA), a FEMA construct that provides disaster relief funds, is advised in part by the Rhode Island State Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RISHPHC). Currently, the RISHPHC is developing a triage program for distributing its share of REIMA funds. Property owners may be interested to learn that inclusion in local historic districts will likely be a factor when evaluating properties as recipients of the funds.94

National Register status can improve a structure’s prospects in this regard as well. After Superstorm Sandy, the National Park Service (which oversees the National Register of Historic Places) supplied relief funds to Rhode Island and other states affected by the storm. To qualify for these federal funds, a property had to be listed on, or deemed eligible for, the National Register.95 When the next major storm hits, owners who have gone through the effort of listing their historic properties may be glad they did.

At this point in the thesis, it has been established that Jamestowners have at their disposal a multitude of tools for protecting their built environment against destructive forces. The historical importance, and aesthetic and sentimental value, of this built environment have never really been doubted. But it is unlikely that simply identifying the preservation tools will lead to their implementation. There is a sense of complacency in Jamestown, and even antipathy towards preservation, that stands in the way.

When an egregious new house was built, with features in violation of a century-old covenant, and a scale and nighttime illumination completely out of context, homeowners on Shoreby Hill found that their own means were insufficient to protect their neighborhood. They then sought help from the municipality in the form of a historic district ordinance, as is encouraged and enabled by the state.

94 Email correspondence with Jeffrey Emidy, Rhode Island Deputy SHPO, May 2, 2016.
95 Ibid
One councilor’s sudden interest in a fact that had been true since the nineteenth century led to the ordinance’s defeat. The ordinance was never revived as interest dwindled, and the stalwarts saw no way forward with regard to historic districting.

Motives regarding opposition to preservation appear in the local newspaper, and in the minutes of town meetings, while the motions were being carried out. One group called the effort to preserve Shoreby Hill “selfish.”\textsuperscript{96} Residents have expressed their fears of others telling them what to do with their property, even if compliance were voluntary.\textsuperscript{97} One participant at a workshop cited an aversion to “being like Nantucket.”\textsuperscript{98} But a shifting zeitgeist cannot be understood solely from public documents. Elizabeth Delude-Dix, a Jamestown resident, documentary filmmaker and former adjunct professor of Historic Preservation, offers the following words regarding the current attitude on the island towards preservation:

Shoreby Hill is a very interesting illustration of the challenges facing Historic Preservation today. There is a contradiction at the core of the resistance to local preservation efforts to create an Historic District. On the one hand, people really value historic resources. Neighborhoods and homeowners truly believe that historic structures are important and help define them. Then on the other hand, there is growing reluctance to the protections preservation offers. There has been a profound cultural shift at the end of the twentieth century, which can be quickly described as “less government is better.”

Historic Districting is a proven, effective preservation approach. However there is a perception that local Historic Districts are an unwarranted intrusion on ownership. I believe that in Jamestown and elsewhere, there is a lack of clarity around the extent to

\textsuperscript{96} Phil Zahodiakin, Taxpayer Advocacy Group Flags Top Issues, \textit{The Jamestown Press}, August 13, 2009. Residents who seek historic districting for their own homes are seeking to surrender their own right to freely modify their exteriors, for the betterment of the community. This makes the houses more public, not less.

\textsuperscript{97} Jamestown Planning Commission Meeting Minutes, August 20, 2014.

which these well-loved historic landscapes are at risk. People want historic resources to endure, but they resist using the available planning tools of local governance to protect them.99

Preservation has not always been met with such resistance. In the decades following World War II, the American landscape was changing rapidly. The National Housing Act (1934) and the Interstate Highway Act (1956) facilitated suburban sprawl and urban disinvestment. As entire communities were replaced by highway onramps, and farms became tract housing seemingly overnight, Americans realized just what was at stake and sought to protect their environment. The movement culminated in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, establishing institutions such as the National Register of Historic Places and State Historic Preservation Offices. Instrumental in the passage of the act was the beforehand publishing of *With Heritage So Rich*, a collection of essays extolling the value of preserving the built environment. The publication included recommendations on the matter to the federal government, with nearly every major recommendation enacted as law.

In the foreword of *With Heritage So Rich*, Lady Bird Johnson writes, “the buildings which express our national heritage are not simply interesting. They give a sense of continuity and of heightened reality to our thinking about the whole meaning of the American past... We must preserve and we must preserve wisely. As the report emphasizes, in its best sense preservation does not mean merely the setting aside of thousands of buildings as museum pieces. It means retaining the culturally valuable structures as useful objects: a home in which human beings live, a building in the service of some commercial or community purpose.”100 Before the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, a select handful of American cities, including Newport and Providence, had already enacted landmarks laws or historic district ordinances. But in the decades immediately following, nearly every

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99 Email correspondence with Elizabeth Delude-Dix, April 28, 2016.
other major American city followed. Since 1966 over a million properties have been added to the National Register of historic places, either individually or as part of a district, with the first designation being Slater’s Mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Today, the scope of preservation has expanded, but the First Lady’s words are still at the core of the movement.

Why then in Jamestown, with its historic landmarks and beloved landscapes, in a U.S. state that has preservation in its DNA, is the movement floundering? Nearby towns that enacted their ordinances decades ago may have made preservation seem effortless and inevitable. The tendency for many owners on the island to value and care for their historic buildings could contribute to this sense of complacency, and preservation would therefore be a victim of its own success. Perhaps right now is simply not the time, and in a decade or so the pendulum will swing back and people will again value such benefits to the community.

Worldwide, there is the persistent notion that preservation is an elite undertaking, and this sentiment has surfaced in Jamestown. The historic district proposal was seen by some as a group of homeowners who wanted to use public resources to enforce the rules of their private club. But what the homeowners were seeking revolved public benefit. The ordinance was to preserve the historical features of the building exteriors, leaving the owners still free to change the private spaces of the interiors and rear yards as they pleased. The ban on front fences and high hedges that the covenant stipulates, and that the ordinance was meant to enforce, increases the sense of public welcome. Even if the public were not allowed on the roads (which has never been the case in all of Shoreby Hill’s history), the most important view of the neighborhood is the view from car, pedestrian, and boat traffic at the Conanicus Avenue waterfront. This was a view that the “elites” were attempting to maintain for the benefit of the public in the future.
The accusation that preservation is elitist also implicates historians, who form historical societies, cite the constructs that are architectural styles, and quote Yale professors. Although historians’ input is essential at the technical level, again historic preservation is about public benefit, often standing independent from academia. With its delightful cylindrical shape and weathered wooden shingles, the Round House on Racquet Road is still the same beloved Round House, whether or not you happen to know that one of the most prominent architects in U.S. history designed it. Learning this may or may not enhance appreciation for the building, however, and the same would go for the knowledge that Charles McKim designed it to imitate Old Fort Dumpling, which was then still standing. Likewise, the majesty of Horsehead or the charm of Clingstone speak for themselves, not needing professional input to be treasured landmarks. As one historian put it, “The past is not the
property of historians; it is a public possession. It belongs to anyone who is aware of it, and it grows by being shared. It sustains the whole society, which always needs the identity that only the past can give.”

Again, preservation reveals itself as being an inherently public benefit. By preserving its buildings Jamestown would protect not its history, but its identity, as the two go hand in hand.

Historic buildings enable us to connect with the past in ways that the printed word and photographs cannot. Steven Lubar of Brown University explains, “This is the great promise of material culture: by undertaking cultural interpretation through artifacts, we engage the other culture in first instance not with our minds, the seat of our cultural biases, but with our senses.” Material culture informs the preservation discourse, as what are buildings if not larger and inhabitable objects. By maintaining Jamestown’s historic fabric, we can relate to the lives of those who have come before us in ways otherwise impossible. One cannot help but be reminded of the famous quote from John Ruksin, who wrote in 1849, “For indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, or its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.”

Over the centuries, Jamestown has been home to farmers, millers, artists, admirals, soldiers and steel tycoons, lobstermen and lighthouse keepers. As we press forward into the 21st century, and continue to make the island our home, we must be careful not to erase the marks of these people who have come before us. Historic districting is the most effective way to ensure that any changes to key structures would be sympathetic. If not historic districting, then one or several of the other policy

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tools described may have to suffice. As it stands now, structures are vulnerable, as preservation in Jamestown is lacking, but this is well within our power to fix.
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National Register of Historic Places, Shoreby Hill Historic District, Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island, National Register #11000674.
National Register of Historic Places, Windmill Hill Historic District, Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island, National Register #78000067.


**Appendix**

**National Register sites in Jamestown.**

*Ordered by date listed. Excludes archaeological districts.*

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Historic Resources of Jamestown, Rhode Island
Source: MainStreet GIS, LLC; Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission
Author: WRR

Map of Jamestown, Rhode Island, highlighting historic resources and approximate year of construction.