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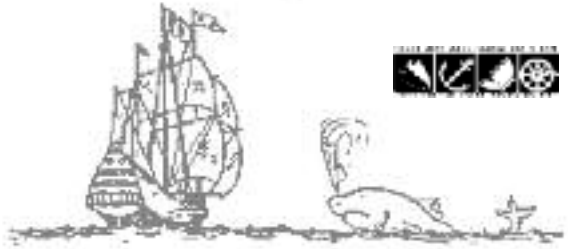
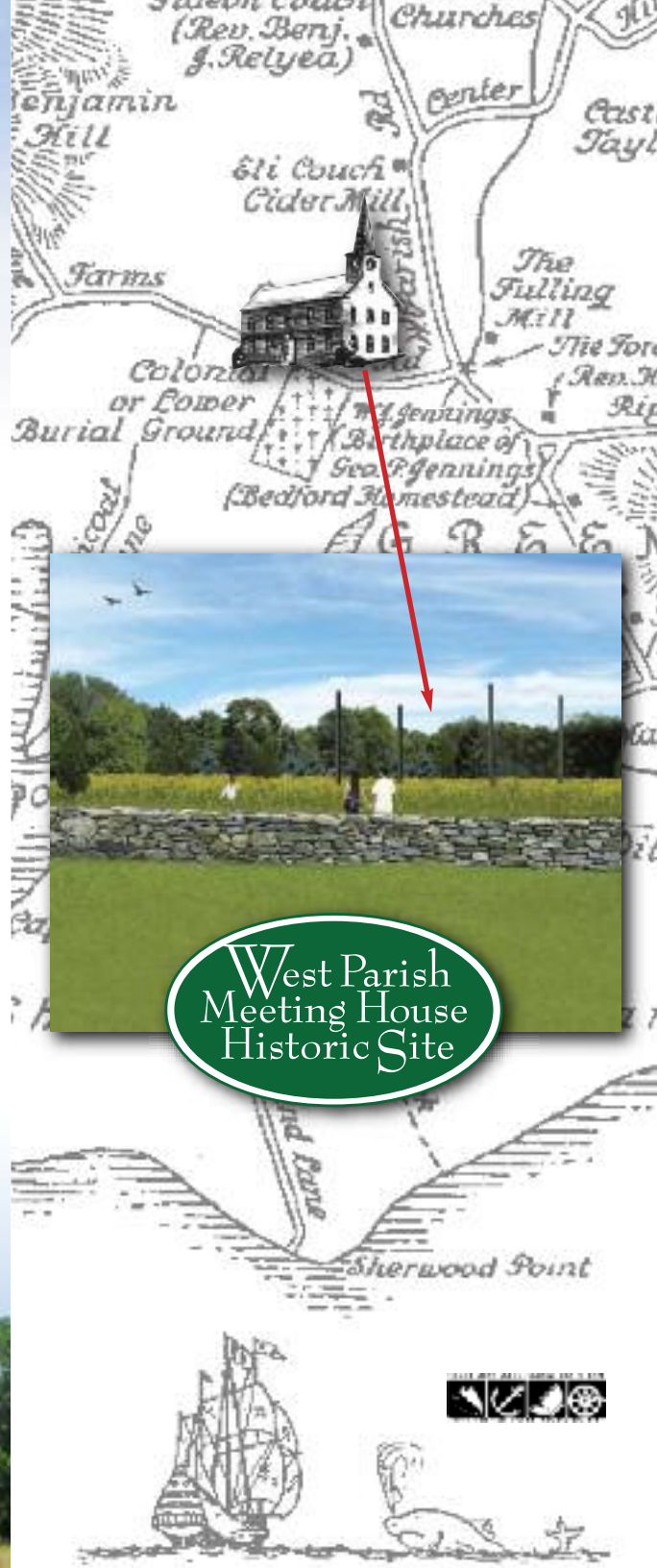


Photos by Elena M. Pascarella, LLA, ASLA,
Landscape Elements LLC, Pawcatuck, CT.



Westport Historic District Commission

Town Hall
110 Myrtle Avenue
Westport, CT 06880
203-341-1184



Introduction

The West Parish Meeting House Historic Site was designated as a State Archaeological Preserve in 2010. The Town of Westport and the Historic District Commission (HDC) initiated the preservation of this town-owned property to protect a legacy left to this community by those who came before. The site provides an opportunity to experience a cultural landscape that is unique to the evolution of Westport.



Proposed ghost structure of Meeting House represented by four corner posts

Colonial Meeting House and School

In 1639, the Town of Fairfield was founded and for 200 years the entire area east of the Saugatuck River, in what is now Westport, was part of Fairfield. This area was originally known as Bankside and was first settled in 1648.

Emphasizing the importance of education

to the community, a school house was built on this site in 1703.

In 1708, the Bankside farmers petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly to become a separate parish, or community, within Fairfield. The first meeting house of the “West Parish” was completed in 1720 and located near Machamux Rock at the foot of what is now Morningside Drive South. The growth of the West Parish community required a larger second meeting house be erected between 1735 and 1740 on this State Archaeological Preserve site. Early records indicate that the location was just west of the school house. Right across



Aerial view, photo and map,

Site History

Native Americans inhabited this location for over 10,000 years. They lived off of the rich environmental resources of this coastal landscape by hunting, fishing, camping and eventually farming. Abundant in both salt and fresh water marshes, the area provided a variety of native plant resources for food, clothing and building materials.

“Country Road,” now known as Greens Farms Road, was the parish cemetery, or burying ground. Colonial and town records provide clues to the appearance of the meeting house: “timber for a house fifty two foot long and forty foot wide and twenty six foot posts.” The exterior of the two-story structure was covered with clapboards and had a wood shingled roof. A 1745 interior drawing shows the “front door” in the center of the long axis of the building facing the Country Road. The “pulpit” was directly across from the front door.

“Stairs” along the side walls indicate that there were balconies at each end of the meeting house. The drawing shows for whom the pews, or long benches, provided seating. At this time, Congregational meeting houses served as places of worship, social gatherings and government business.

This meant that West Parish, the cradle of Westport, was a self-governing community. The legal separation of church and state did not formally change until Connecticut passed a law in 1818.



present and past



Preservation Treatment Plan - legend

1. Site of the historic West Parish Meeting House
2. Site of possible Colonial schoolhouse
3. Proposed archaeological Conservation Area
4. Proposed parking area
5. Proposed vehicular entrance
6. Proposed vegetative buffer and fence
7. Proposed entrance to trails
8. Northeastern knoll with proposed trails and overlook
9. Proposed Wetland crossings
10. Existing pedestrian entrance at stone wall

Revolutionary War

As a coastal agricultural community the West Parish was involved in supplying the American troops. The British, under the command of General William Tryon, attempted to disrupt the colonists supply lines with a series of local raids. The British landed at Compo Beach on April 25, 1777 and marched to Danbury, Connecticut to destroy military provisions. Almost two years later General Tryon returned to Connecticut on July 7, 1779 to employ a new tactic known as “desolation warfare”. His troops set ablaze the West Parish Meeting House, as well as 15 houses and 11 barns nearby. The meeting house burned to the ground – Tryon had struck at the

heart of the community. As testament to the resilience of the parish, a third meeting house was built on Hillandale Road on the site of the present Green’s Farms Congregational Church.





West Parish Meeting House pew plan

Cemetery-Ancestral Community



While the West Parish Meeting House was destroyed, the cemetery remained a burial ground for the parish. Exceptional carved headstones can be found there that relate directly to the early members of the West Parish. The Rev. Hezekiah

Ripley was ordained as a minister at the meeting house in 1767. His house and barn were burned during Tryon's 1779 invasion but this did not deter Ripley from raising his family or from serving the parish for 42 more years.

A woman who represented two early parish families was Abigail Jennings. She was born in 1700, married Simon Couch, and died in 1766. Upon her husband's death in 1770, two of their slaves were freed and given land north of Westport.



Future Plans

The West Parish Meeting House Historic Site & State Archaeological Preserve: Preservation Plan and Cultural Landscape Assessment was written by Landscape Elements LLC and published by the Westport Historic District Commission. It shows a phased strategy of improvements (see Treatment Plan legend). The complete plan is available online or at the HDC office. This Preservation Plan seeks to protect, preserve, and provide educational and passive recreational opportunities for the community. It establishes the site's identity and sense of place as a State Archaeological Preserve and an important cultural landscape.

Donations of volunteer time and/or funds are welcome. Please contact the Town of Westport HDC office at 203-341-1184, hdc@westportct.gov or www.westportct.gov.



Proposed enhancements

Experience

The site is located on Greens Farms Road, east of the Sherwood Island Connector, in Westport, CT.

