

Bullard House

The Historical Commission accomplished much in 2023 to move structural rehabilitation and septic issues forward at the Bullard House and we expect to see the visible results of this careful planning in 2024.

- A TFMoran structural engineering proposal to rehabilitate the **foundation and drainage issues in the “deep cellar”** of the building was evaluated and accepted. Procurement documents will be forthcoming. To prepare for this work, the furnace, oil tank and ductwork must be relocated from the cellar. We thank Plumbing Inspector, Al Roseberry for estimating the cost of this removal and for his advice and site visits that have helped us to understand septic and drainage issues.
- Options for **alternatives to our heating system with attention also to cooling** have been sought. We thank Lars Nielsen from Viking Mechanical and Paul Maney from Northboro Oil who took the time to meet with us at the Bullard House and offer their observations.
- A **Title 5 inspection** was conducted by Roger E. Wheeler and Sons, Inc. demonstrating that the Bullard House was in full compliance. Because of the close proximity of 3 Linden Street to our existing septic tank, a water test was performed at that location. The change in building use from residence to small museum necessitated an investigation into the feasibility of an additional septic tank. A septic tank plan has been submitted by David E. Ross Associates for review by the Board of Health. We anticipate the installation of this additional tank in 2024.

Commission members and Architect Dan Barton exhaustively explored multiple options for an **accessible entrance and accessible parking** for the Bullard House. A decision was made to retain the accessible entrance on the east side of the Bullard House and to use the parking area adjacent to the 1870 Town Hall with appropriate ramping that connects to the house’s accessible east entrance.

- A proposal from **Hancock Associates** of Marlboro has been accepted to complete **survey work that comprehensively informs drainage issues for both the 1870 Town Hall and the Bullard House** that impact the parking area and shared driveway as well as the Bullard House itself. ARPA monies will help to cover part of the cost that will benefit both buildings and finally result in designated accessible parking.
- We were fortunate to have two willing and capable volunteers to take measurements of **“existing conditions”** at the Bullard House, Timothy Wheeler and Kevin Pond. Their good and careful work was welcomed by Nikki Fletcher at Mangel Architects who assisted Architect Dan Barton in this final part of Master Planning. Grateful thanks to Timothy and Kevin who stepped in to take over a task that would have created additional work and expense for the Commission. **Members will work together to markup enlarged drawings of these “existing conditions” with our comments and desired placement of fixtures, restorative/rehabilitative work and exhibit spaces.**
- At the May 2023 Annual Town Meeting, residents approved the Commission’s warrant article to place a **Historic Preservation Restriction on the Bullard House**. This is a **requirement for a Massachusetts Historical Commission MPPF grant**. We appreciate the Town’s support which will allow us to move forward with the preparation of this matching grant application.

And finally, we are grateful to Fred Cummings and the Highway Department for removing backyard debris after volunteer clean-ups and for continuing to maintain the lawn area at the Bullard House.

Town Historical Collection

Our work-off employee Karen Belaskas continues to assist our Custodian of the Town Collection, Barry Eager. We are fortunate to have Karen's willing and capable hands to help Barry preserve collection items with appropriate storage containers and enclosures and use our Past Perfect software for listing and accessioning.

June Miller and Barry are available at the Curatorial Building on Wednesday afternoons 2:00-4:00 pm. We encourage visitors to call ahead with research and donation questions so we can be better prepared to help.

Website and social media outreach

Lucy Ayers was appointed to the Commission early in the year allowing us to function as a five-member team. Lucy's background in website design filled an important void in the work of the Commission. She has expanded the Commission's webpage on the Town website allowing many of the Town Collection's newly digitized artifact images to become accessible to the public and has added a helpful and informative menu that includes Demolition Delay activity. <https://TownofBerlin.com/historical-commission>

Berlin Art and Historical Society member Mary Redington produced an exceptional website for the Society this year. Because the Society partners with the Commission in so many of its activities, we are indebted to Mary whose skills and enthusiasm created a much needed social media presence.

We continue to be grateful to Society member Rebecca von Geldern who maintains and administers the Society's Facebook page. Thank you, Rebecca, for making this first foray into social media a few years back that fosters popular interest in historic preservation.

Demolition Delay

The Commission held three Demolition Delay hearings this year.

The old house at 136 Central Street, having been declared historically significant because of the survival of its interior features from the first decade of the 19th century, was not declared preferably preserved because of severe electrical damage suffered in the recent past. The Commission toured the site and has been given permission to salvage features and take documentary photographs once the dwelling has been cleared out for demolition.

Having also been declared historically significant, separate hearings were held for the farmhouse at 39 Sawyer Hill Road and the English barn on that property.

Generations of the Wheeler family, who farmed and brought up their families at this site, participated widely in town government and community affairs. The farmhouse was declared preferably preserved and a six-month delay imposed to document the site and explore options for its preservation. We thank Marty Miller for a complete photographic series of all the building exteriors at the site.

The early English barn circa 1815 was not declared preferably preserved because of its unsafe and deteriorated condition. Owners will salvage early timbers for incorporation into a new building and have provided a series of interior documentary photographs.

Hop House

Berlin has a rare survivor from hop cultivation in the 19th century, the hop house at 36 Sawyer Hill Road. Walter Bickford and June met with owner Bud Haworth to encourage him to preserve this exceptional landmark. With the owner's permission, Walter cleared brush that had grown up around the structure and persuaded National Grid to remove a large tree

limb that endangered it. We extend our grateful thanks to Walter for his advocacy and hands-on work to aid in its preservation.

The hop house has shown some recent deterioration that was not present six years ago when Willard Wheeler spoke to June about its importance and took her there to see it up close. The interior has not been documented as it continues to be used for storage, but we have a series of fine exterior photographs from 2017 taken by Marty Miller and recent images that show Walter's clean-up work and its present condition.

It is the Commission's hope that we can offer assistance and encouragement that will help stabilize the Hop House on Sawyer Hill Road. It is likely the most important surviving agricultural feature on the Berlin landscape.

Hearse House

Although now owned by the Berlin Art and Historical Society, the preservation of the 1805 Hearse House is a high priority for the Historical Commission. It is our earliest surviving structure originally in town ownership and one of a very few surviving hearse houses in Massachusetts. The Hearse House Building Committee presented both a history and a project update at 19 Carter in January which was recorded by Berlin Cable. Competitive pricing for building materials was obtained in the early months of the year. In June, Berlin's building inspector informed the Committee that because the Hearse House had been removed from the Old Burying Ground in excess of two years, a past variance would need to be re-approved by the ZBA for its relocation. HHBC member Bob Blair completed the application and all the due diligence requirements. In July, a presentation was made to the ZBA and at the end of August, a variance was approved for its relocation to the Old Burying Ground. Unfortunately, Preservation Carpenter Tim Wolhueter was unavailable to continue work on the project at that time. The Committee hopes to begin re-erection at the Old Burying Ground during the spring of 2024.

The Commission gratefully acknowledges the hard and careful work to preserve this special little building from our town's early history. Thank you to the Society's HHBC Committee members Mary Redington, Bob Blair and Rebecca von Geldern.

The passing bell was tolled as in years past.

Congratulations to Wesley H. Durant, Jr, William J. Howes and Dolores C. Jenkins who celebrated 90th birthdays in 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

June Miller, *Chair*; Janet Woodward, *Clerk*; Barry Eager, *Custodian of the Town Collection*; Eleanor Bergen, *CPAC Representative*; and Lucy Ayers, *Outreach Coordinator*.