



**Harlan H. Griswold Award, 2019
Guilford Preservation Alliance, Inc.**

Harlan H. Griswold was a founder of the Connecticut Trust and longtime chair of the Connecticut Historical Commission — predecessor to today's State Historic Preservation Office. After his death, those two organizations established the Harlan H. Griswold Award in memory of his outstanding contributions to historic preservation over a lifetime of service. The award recognizes individuals, corporations, or organizations whose activities exemplify Mr. Griswold's leadership, vision, and dedication to preserving Connecticut's heritage and who by deed or example have made our state a better place to live.

This year's recipient, the Guilford Preservation Alliance — or GPA — has demonstrated effective leadership and tireless efforts to advance the cause of preserving historic and natural resources within the town of Guilford.

The GPA was formed in 1980 by a group that included architectural historian Betty Brown and former First Selectwoman Marjorie Schmidt, along with other passionate and committed residents. They recognized that development pressures and lack of awareness could and would erode the character of a unique town that dates back to 1639 and comprised farmland, village center, and coastal habitat. Today, volunteer board members still carry out this mission in partnership with fellow citizens, related organizations, and local and state officials.

Underpinning the GPA's efforts are several key understandings:

- that conservation and preservation require considered planning that must be periodically updated;
- that information regarding resources needs to be compiled and publicly accessible;
- that individual preservation and conservation efforts require both financial support and public celebration;
- that Town officials must continually address and balance economic growth with preservation of character; and, importantly,
- that day-to-day participation in governmental processes is essential for community understanding and collaborative dialogue.

With those understandings in mind, here are just some of the GPA's accomplishments over its thirty-nine-year history.

Built Environment

The GPA's protection of the built environment began in 1981 with a survey of significant buildings. This initial survey, encompassing 450 sites, was expanded in 2010 with a survey of barns, and again in 2014, with a professional survey of more than 200 additional sites. As a resource for officials and citizens, all 680-plus survey entries are posted on the GPA's website.

Based on these surveys, the GPA provided research and funding to list National Register districts at Meeting House Hill and Dudleytown and promoted the establishment of Guilford's two local historic districts, Guilford Center and Whitfield Street.

Support for the built environment extends beyond surveys and designations to hands-on preservation. In 1988 the GPA rescued the 1694 Comfort Starr house from demolition by buying the house and re-selling it with preservation restrictions. With the proceeds, the GPA established the Hugh McKay Jones fund, which makes loans or grants for projects such as restoration of the Chittenden bowling alley, Regicides' Cellar, and Women and Family Life Center, among others, as well as the launch of the Dudley Farm Museum.

For several years, the GPA has spearheaded efforts to stabilize and identify development opportunities at a brick water tower and engine house at Guilford's railroad station. With permission from Amtrak the group cleaned vines and debris from the structures and brought in professionals to document the buildings and evaluate restoration requirements. With donations from local citizens, the GPA has established a \$25,000 fund for stabilization of these endangered structures.

Education

Education at all levels is central to the GPA's mission. Longstanding educational efforts include sponsorship of "Early Guilford Days" for fourth-graders, in partnership with the Guilford Keeping and Dorothy Whitfield Societies; and developing and installing historical exhibits at the railroad station.

One of GPA's most recent partnerships has been sponsorship of the Witness Stones project in cooperation with town schools. Inspired by the *Stolpersteine*, or 'Stumbling Stones' used in Europe to mark the homes of Holocaust victims, the Witness Stones project trains students to research the lives of enslaved persons in Guilford's past and install small brass markers where they lived. One site is the Hyland house museum which incorporates information collected through the Witness Stones project to tell the story of Candace, a spinner and baker who lived in the house from 1773 to until she was freed in 1793. The project has now spread to West Hartford, where the Noah Webster house museum is using the GPA's curriculum.

Heritage Tourism

In 2013 the GPA hired a consultant to identify ways that Guilford could benefit from heritage tourism, initiating a broad-based program to encourage economic development that builds on and enhances the town's historic, cultural, and scenic resources through cooperation among twenty-six nonprofit organizations and Town leaders. Results have included a new website to promote tourism within Guilford (maintained by the GPA); heritage walking tours, some led by local high school students; markers for significant sites; and a Visitor's Center kiosk given and operated by the GPA.

Natural and Scenic Environment

Recognizing that natural and scenic resources are intertwined with historic resources in determining town character, the GPA has long participated in efforts to preserve the natural environment, including establishment of the town open space committee and helping write and pass ordinances to protect street trees and stone walls. Roads are key to historic and natural character, and so the GPA helped initiate State Scenic Roads legislation and participated in designating Routes 77 and 146 as scenic roads. The organization also worked with state

representatives to pass legislation that allows towns to modify state DOT standards when reconstructing historic bridges.

Looking to long-term sustainability, the GPA is represented in Sustainable Guilford, a townwide commission that promotes greater sustainability in environmental matters, as well as cultural life, and historic structures.

In these and many other accomplishments three principles guide the work of the Guilford Preservation Alliance:

First, the mission of preservation is broad — encompassing not only historic buildings, but the landscapes, community histories, and cultural and natural resources that shape town character and sense of place.

Second, that education is crucial, for the sake of increasing knowledge as well as to build public support for preservation.

And, third, that almost every undertaking is a partnership with other entities.

Perhaps most remarkable is that for nearly 40 years the GPA has operated as a volunteer organization. The depth and breadth of the GPA's accomplishments would never have been possible without the time, talent and energy of generations of committed volunteers — a testament to leadership, stewardship, partnership, and effort.

Harlan Griswold once said, "To me, preservation is more about my grandchildren than about my grandparents." The Guilford Preservation Alliance exemplifies that attitude: by reaching beyond traditional preservation to encompass planning and natural resources conservation the GPA is helping to build a better future for its children and grandchildren. We are honored to present the Harlan H. Griswold Award to the Guilford Preservation Alliance for its outstanding contributions to preservation in Connecticut.

*Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office
Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation
Hartford, Connecticut
4 April 2019*