

Town of Groton, Connecticut

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

PRESERVATION PLANNING ASSOCIATES

Gregory E. Andrews & Karen P. Will

August, 1996

TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Groton Historic Preservation Plan was funded with the assistance of a matching grant-in-aid from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, through the Connecticut Historical Commission, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Plan was commissioned and partly funded by the Town of Groton.

James Butler, AICP, Planning Director for the Town of Groton, capably oversaw the project on behalf of the Town. For his expert knowledge of Groton and planning issues, generous guidance, and readiness to meet informational needs, the consultants wish to express deep appreciation.

Among many individuals and organizations in Groton who took constructive interest in the Historic Preservation Plan, the contributions of Carol Kimball, Groton's Municipal Historian, and architect James Gibbs of Mystic Environmental Design, stand out. Their past work documenting town history and architecture formed the framework without which the Plan is not possible. We appreciate the continuing support of Delores Hauber, Mayor of the Town of Groton, Ronald LeBlanc, Town Manager, Bette Giesing and Debra Dickey, Mayor and City Clerk of the City of Groton, respectively, Nancy Mitchell and Richard Seager of the Groton Historic District Commission, David Barron of the Gungywamp Society, Joan Cohn of the Indian and Colonial Research Center in Old Mystic, and numerous other members of the community.

We wish also to thank J. Paul Loether, Certified Local Government Coordinator of the Connecticut Historical Commission, for his ready advice and cooperation in planning and execution of the project. Nick Bellantoni, the State Archaeologist, has been indispensible to our understanding and appreciation of Groton's archaeological resources. We thank him for his availability and willingness to help.

All photographs were taken by Preservation Planning Associates, except those marked ICRC (Indian and Colonial Research Center), and the historic postcard of Town Hall on page 61, courtesy of Liz Carlson.

PRESERVATION PLANNING ASSOCIATES

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1. Introduction and Summary of Recommendations

1.1 Introduction

The town of Groton has a history unique in many respects among Connecticut communities. For centuries a bastion of Native American culture, it was the site of the 1637 armed engagement that nearly destroyed the Native inhabitants and established European dominance in southern New England. During the early Colonial period, it was a typical community of small-scale subsistence farming clusters, but from early times the European settlers exploited its maritime location and engaged in shipbuilding. Before the end of the 17th century, Groton was producing some of the largest ocean-going vessels in the Colonies, and this record of achievement has continued to the present. The town's water orientation and related commercial activity in fishing, whaling and construction contributed in large part to the 19th-century prosperity of Mystic, West Mystic, Noank and Groton Bank, eclipsing the earlier prominence of Poquonnock Bridge, Old Mystic, Center Groton, and Burnett's Corners. Groton is known worldwide today for its submarines, both as manufacturer and naval home base.

The town's distinction also takes other forms. Establishment of a Baptist church in 1705, the first alternative religion in Connecticut, created a precedent of religious toleration unique in the state. During the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Groton Heights was the only one fought in Connecticut. In the late 19th century, Groton's reputation as a summer resort grew and is today an essential part of town life.

As the 21st century approaches, Groton is fortunate in having much of its traditional character intact. Historic buildings, sites, and landscapes are abundant and form an essential part of town fabric. The significance of many is recognized by their listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Altogether, the town as a whole represents a highly significant historic resource that is worthy of careful planning for preservation.

Future growth, however, poses a threat that must be addressed. The town's fortunate location along Interstate 95 and amidst major tourist attractions promises to generate considerable development. Commercial expansion and new residential subdivisions are changing the face of the community. The preservation of the town's historic resources, based on experience nationwide, is not certain. The commissioning of the Historic Preservation Plan represents the town's commitment

to the goal of balancing growth with the preservation of Groton's significant historic heritage.

1.2 Objectives and Approach

The objectives of this report as defined by the Town of Groton are the following:

- 1. To identify Groton's resources that reflect its historic and prehistoric heritage.
- 2. To recommend methods and incentives to protect and enhance these resources.
- 3. To recommend ways to increase public appreciation for and benefit from the historic resources.
- 4. To propose a preservation strategy, with priorities and timing for implementing the plan recommendations.

The number and variety of historic resources in Groton are most impressive. Rather than take the more traditional approach in preservation planning of focusing primarily on the town's historic architecture, the consultants elected to take a more comprehensive and integrated approach. This plan, therefore, addresses all of the town historic resources, which are defined as those elements of historic significance that have modified, or been added to, the natural landscape by the activities of people over time. Besides individual buildings and historic districts, they include archaeological sites (e.g., sites associated with Native American habitation and colonial settlement and expansion), historic bridges, old cemeteries, scenic vistas and scenic roads.

Meeting the plan objectives involved the analysis of existing conditions and resources. The first step was a review of town history and documentation of the town's historic resources, followed by an examination of economic character, land use patterns, past and present, development opportunities and existing and potential problems. Town ordinances, regulations, and a wealth of other documents concerning growth and planning were also reviewed. The consultants conducted numerous interviews, especially of Town staff, Town commission members, and interested citizens. Throughout the planning process, legal, financial, and administrative tools, among others, were evaluated for inclusion in the report.

The outcome is the set of goals and recommendations that form the Historic Preservation Plan. It is important to note that the Plan constitutes a non-binding agenda; its implementation depends on the commitment of Town government and all relevant groups and individuals.

1.3 Groton Historic Resources Plan: Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Goal: Strengthen Groton's Historic Resources Policy
- A. Make Historic Preservation a Stronger Priority
- B. Integrate Historic Preservation More Fully into Public Decision Making
 - 1. Complete the town Historic Resources Survey and create a central database.
 - 2. Improve coordination among Town commissions with historic preservation-related responsibilities.
 - 3. Monitor public actions and expenditures for consistency with historic resources policy.

C. Strengthen and Focus Advocacy

- 1. Designate a Town Historic Resources Coordinator.
- 2. Establish a stronger town-wide public advocacy group.

2. Goal: Preserve, Protect and Enhance the Town's Historic Resources

A. Preserve and Protect Historic Resources

- 1. Enact a Delay of Demolition Ordinance and strengthen minimum maintenance compliance.
- 2. Identify endangered properties and work for their survival.
- 3. Designate more Local Historic Districts and Historic Properties.
- 4. Nominate more districts and properties to the National and State Registers of Historic Places.
- 5. Implement historic resources overlay zoning.
- 6. Create a Groton historic resources fund and acquire protective easements.
- 7. Prepare a comprehensive inventory and map of significant archaeological sites.
- 8. Seek protective designation of Gungywamp area.
- 9. Strengthen protection of historic and archaeological resources in the subdivision approval process.

B. Enhancement Tools for Groton's Historic Resources

- 1. Create a loan/grant program for property improvements.
- 2. Establish a community reinvestment fund.
- 3. Grant property tax relief.
- 4. Clarify the "Antique Property" tax assessment classification.
- 5. Help owners of National Register-listed properties obtain tax credits for rehabilitation work.
- 6. Offer building permit incentives and code compliance assistance.
- 7. Reduce intrusive street signs and utility wires in historic areas.
- 8. Reduce the impact of parking on streetscape integrity.
- 9. Continue to make Poquonnock Bridge and Groton Bank priorities for historic preservation enhancement activity.
- 10. Seek state Historic Preservation Grants for historic buildings.
- 11. Participate actively in state and federal activities affecting Groton historic properties.

3. Goal: Protect and Enhance the Environment for Historic Resources

- 1. Offer tax relief to qualifying open space.
- 2. Promote open space subdivisions.
- 3. Encourage Traditional Development patterns on village edges.
- 4. Designate more scenic roads.
- 5. Protect scenic vistas.

4. Goal: Increase Public Appreciation for and Benefit from Historic Resources

- 1. Expand public information and media coverage.
- 2. Create attractive signage.
- 3. Establish a Town Visitors' Center.
- 4. Offer a wider range of activities and events for the general public.
- 5. Improve educational programs for young people.
- 6. Enlarge public holdings of town-related historic artifacts.

2. EVALUATION OF RESOURCES

2.1 Historical Overview

The rich and distinctive history of Groton has been thoroughly documented and presented. Town historian Carol W. Kimball's <u>The Groton Story</u> and <u>The Poquonnock Bridge Story</u> cover in vivid detail both the grand and daily aspects of the town's long history. Consultant and historical architect James Gibbs, in an appendix to his <u>Historic and Architectural Resources Survey Report</u>, <u>Phase I, Volume 1</u>, has presented a clear and thorough history of the town. These works serve as a solid historical context for this Historic Preservation Plan.

Presented here, then, are summary descriptions of Groton's geographical setting, its patterns of historical development, and an evaluation of their relevance to planning for preservation of Groton's historic heritage.

2.1.A. Groton's Geography and Location.

Groton is distinguished by its location on three rivers and several bays or inlets. Its flat and fertile central plain is surrounded by gentle hills that have produced adequate but not abundant water power for industry. While rocky soils have been difficult to farm except in the Poquonnock basin and river lowlands, the hills have yielded good timber for shipbuilding and construction. Overland transportation has always been difficult because of water incursions, so rivers were the original routes for communication and transportation. (See Fig. 1)

Groton's natural amenities explain its role from earliest times as a site of major importance to the original native inhabitants, while foreshadowing similar significance for European settlers. Waterways on three sides that penetrated to inland winter hunting grounds and allowed cross-sound travel, rock quarries for stone tools, abundant forest and game on the uplands, a flat plain for agriculture with surrounding heights for security, all made this area a strategic crossroads. It was here that the powerful Pequots established their main forts, villages, growing fields and pathways while dominating other tribes in the region. It is likely that this strategic location had attracted other pre-Columbian explorers as well.

Native American pathways for north-south migration and east-west inland travel routes determined colonial patterns of settlement and growth, e.g. river heads and crossings or connections between them. The Groton area has been less developed than Norwich and New London on the Thames River, but it has played a

strategic role at the entrance to Long Island Sound. Groton's proximity to Rhode Island has also been influential in its cultural development.

2.1.B. Development Factors

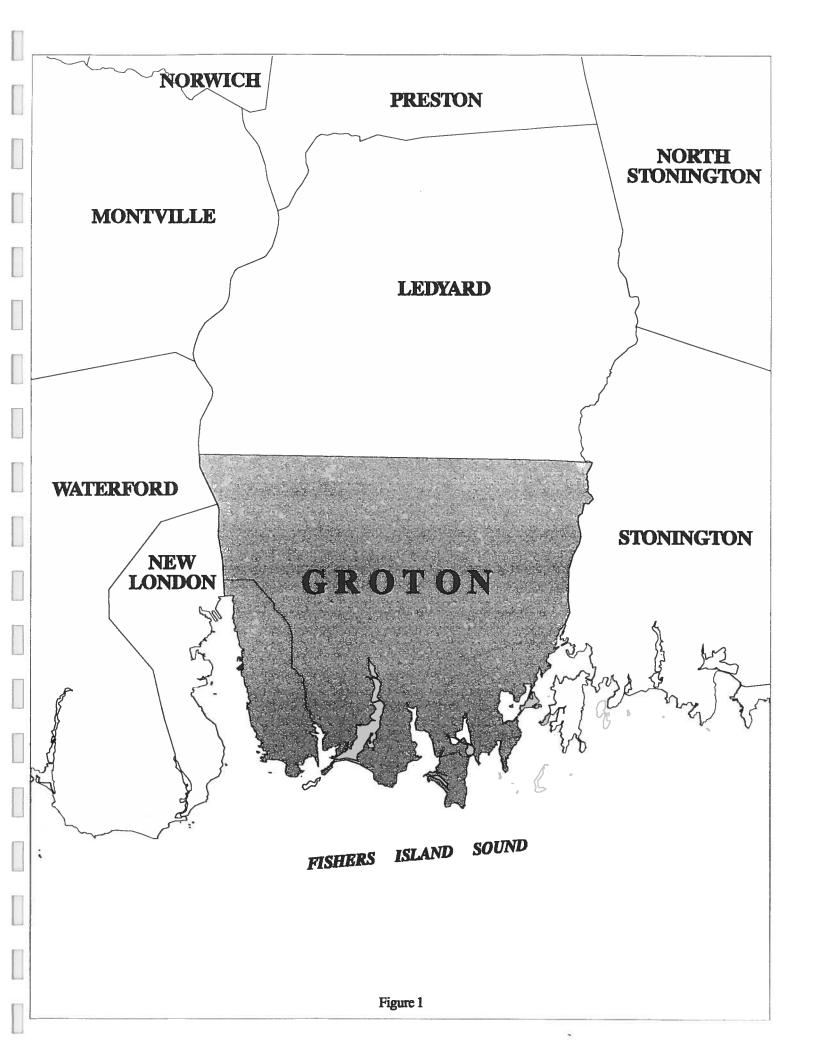
Four major overlapping influences on growth patterns dominate the European-American period of Groton's history:

- 1. The early European settlement period, characterized by agrarian pursuits and religious toleration, was initiated by the Pequot War in 1637 and continued until the American Revolutionary Battle of Groton Heights in 1781.
- 2. Maritime orientation, which extends from early shipbuilding and fishing in the late 17th and 18th centuries, continues through 19th century dominance of the economy and town form by seafaring activities, to today's identity of Groton as "Submarine Capital of the World".
- 3. Transportation-motivated growth patterns, beginning with the town's role as a stopping point in overland coastal travel between New York and Boston, dictating early roadside stagecoach stops and taverns along the "Boston Post Road"; followed in the 1850s by the completion of railroad service through Groton and the development of the Midway freightyards; and culminating in this century with the construction of the Groton-New London Airport, and the powerful impact of the automobile.
- 4. Growth along the waterfront of seasonal resort and vacation communities with their strong independent identities, and the related increase in tourism as part of the town's economy.

An overview of Groton's history shows how these forces have played a vital and inter-related role in defining town life.

The virtual elimination of the Pequots in 1637 by the colonial militia under Captain John Mason was the first conquest of native peoples in the name of English colonial settlement in the New World. This event opened up the possibility of unthreatened development of new communities throughout southern New England, and the advantages of the Thames River area soon became evident. John Winthrop, Jr., was granted a charter by the Massachusetts Bay Colony to establish a plantation here in 1644, which also required that land be reserved for resettlement of native peoples, another first in the New World. The Mashantucket Pequot Reservation was eventually established in Ledyard, then part of Groton, in 1667.

Groton's original colonial purpose was to serve as pasture land for New London settlers. Land that had been used similarly by native residents for centuries (Poquonnock means "cleared land" in the Algonkian language) was readily appropriated by new residents frustrated by rocky and hilly land on the Thames' west bank. The first land allocation by lottery, held in 1649, included the flat lands that now underlie the Groton-New London Airport. Earliest homesteading happened



here, in what is now the Poquonnock Bridge area, the first as well as the latest civic center of Groton.

The role of the church is significant in town development patterns. The established Congregational church required attendance by all town residents, a difficult undertaking for east bank settlers who had to contend with ferrying across the Thames. In a pattern typical of many Connecticut towns, the more remote settlers in the large geographic area of New London petitioned for a separate parish, leading to establishment of both a new church in geographically central Center Groton in 1702, and a new town in 1705.

That same year a dissenting group of Baptists, arrivals from the more tolerant Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, were allowed to build a new church near Burnett's Corner, half way between Center Groton and the Baptist-oriented settlement of Old Mystic. Groton thus became the first Connecticut town both to tolerate a non-Congregational church and thereby to acknowledge the separation of church and state affairs. The Baptist presence in Groton was increasingly dominant, and they were influential in framing the new state constitution of 1818 that officially acknowledged this separation. By this time, Groton led the state in its number of different religious groups.



Wightman Cemetery on Cold Spring Road is next to the site of the First Baptist Church (1705), the earliest of its denomination in Groton and in Connecticut.

It is interesting to note the physical impact of the Baptist or Rhode Island philosophy on town form. That state's prohibition of town greens was based on the theory that location of any church thereon implied public endorsement. Thus Groton, unlike so many New England towns that grew up around their public greens, has had no visually defined town center.

In the absence of a specific central focus, several self-contained clusters of development arose, at first along transportation routes. Early native east-west pathways connected river crossings, from canoe landings on the Thames River northeast to the headwaters of the Mystic River, now Route 184, and southeast across the Poquonnock River basin on today's Route 1. The Groton Bank settlement in its turn centered on the ferry landing and water-oriented activity. Early churches, stage coach stops and related housing were built at crossroads along the northern route (the official Post Road) in CenterGroton, Burnett's Corner and Old Mystic. The Poquonnock Bridge area on the first recorded "highway" (1652), while less cohesive physically, continued to generate commercial activity and exercise civic leadership into the 20th century. Some of the oldest remaining buildings are found in these earliest settlements.

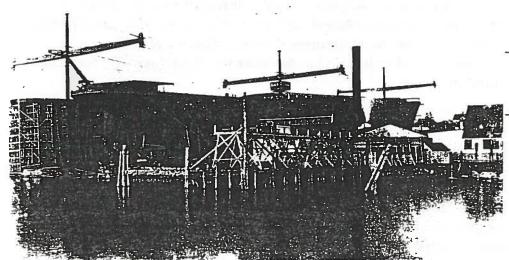
Despite the early prominence of these inland districts, Groton's relationship to the water has always played a major role in determining growth. The combination of forested hills and sheltered harbors made shipbuilding and seafaring natural early activities, with Groton's first recorded ship being built in 1683 near the ferry landing on the Thames. By the early 1700s, several shippards had been established there, launching three centuries of expansion, development and commitment to the industry. Whaling, sealing, fishing, Caribbean and coastal trade, and eventually privateering and defense, all drew Groton residents to the sea.

Small scale shipbuilding had occurred during the 18th century on the lower Poquonnock and upper Mystic rivers as well as at Groton Bank, but it was the increasingly volatile relationship between Britain and her American colonies that spurred increased seafaring and construction, as well as the growth of new shipbuilding communities at the larger river mouths. The first authorized American naval force was established in Groton in 1776 under the direction of town native Silas Deane. Groton ships were major players in the privateering that circumvented British attempts to control trade, and the area's association with these practices led to Connecticut's only Revolutionary engagement, the memorable Battle of Groton Heights.

Groton's strategic location near the entrance to Long Island Sound and between British-occupied New York and Newport dictated the order for construction of Colonial Forts Trumbull in New London and Griswold in Groton in 1775. For five years, British embargoes and their successful evasion by the Thames River area "nest of privateers" seemed to be the extent of Groton's involvement in the war. When the British attacked in September of 1781, the defense of Fort Griswold by only 150 volunteer militia against the well-equipped troops of traitor Benedict Arnold led to decimation of the town's able-bodied men and destruction of the village of Groton Bank. The battle's place in state history, its commemoration as a State Park, and the highly visible monument (1825) marking the site are vital parts of Groton's heritage.

The post-revolutionary period saw the decline of agrarian pursuits as original settlers moved west and local residents focused increasingly on maritime activity. With New London serving as one of two custom centers in the state, and Groton having so many natural harbors for shipbuilding, this became its major economic

focus. After an interuption during the War of 1812, the Mystic River shipyards of Mystic, West Mystic and Noank grew in importance as whaling became more lucrative and ships were developed for longer distance travel.



This early 1900's photograph shows the bustling shipyards of Groton Bank. (ICRC photo)

Groton's contribution to American maritime history is remarkable. Highlights include construction of the largest merchantman vessel built in the colonies before the Revolution, raising of the first American flag in Alaskan territory, the fastest recorded trip (89 days and four hours by a Mystic-built clipper ship) between New York and San Francisco via Cape Horn, one captain's record number of roundtrips via Cape Horn without losing a ship, the construction of the Union's first (though ultimately ill-fated) ironclads during the Civil War, the founding of Key West, Florida by Noank fishermen, and the development of the largest steel freighters in the world at the turn of the 20th century. This heritage is dramatically recalled by Electric Boat facilities in Groton Bank as well as vestiges of shipbuilding operations in Noank and West Mystic, all of which are on the sites of some of Groton's earliest shipyards. The fine homes of shipowners and captains in Mystic, Groton Bank, and Noank stand as striking reminders of these glory days.

The same inlets that made shipbuilding practical also limited the ability to lay railroads along the Sound. The earliest Providence and Stonington Railroad (1837) didn't connect across Groton until the consolidation of several independent lines in 1858 as the New Haven, New London and Stonington Railroad Company. A bridge across the Thames didn't follow until 1889. Significantly, this system provided passenger and freight service to Groton Bank, Poquonnock Bridge, Noank, West Mystic and Mystic, with the Noank and West Mystic stations still standing.

The Midway freight yard on the Poquonnock flatlands, considered "one of the greatest railroad centers in New England" (Kimball, <u>The Groton Story</u>, p. 92), marked the peak of the railroad's influence in Groton's development. Imported

lumber for shipbuilding, easier export markets for fishing, as well as increased local industrialization, particularly in support of shipbuilding activity, resulted from this link to the railroads. The Amtrak through passenger service that remains on this line has the potential to dramatically affect Groton's scenic coastline as electrification is added.

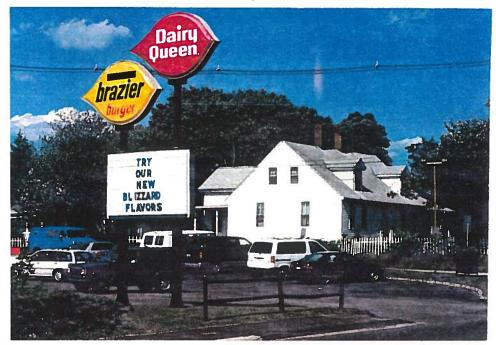
The same flatlands in Poquonnock attracted the Trumbull Airport in 1928, later renamed the Groton-New London Airport. After a dormant period in the Depression, the airport experienced its greatest activity in the years following World War II. Its site on the west bank of the Poquonnock River, where the first agricultural grants were laid out, should also be important archaeologically for early riverside activity of Native peoples.

Access by railroad, steamboat and later (1904) by the Shoreline Railroad, or trolley, stepped up the influx of vacationers and seasonal residents to the scenic shoreline communities, a trend that had begun in the 1880s. The picturesque fishing village of Noank was and is still particularly appealing as reminiscent of village life. Eastern Point at Shennecossett, with its elegant Griswold Hotel replacing an earlier one on the site, and later Groton Long Point attracted well-off summer residents and their activities, such as golf and yachting, activities still very much in evidence today and important to continued growth. This is the period that attracted Morton Plant, known for his flamboyant Branford House on Avery Point, his gift of a new Town Hall (1908), and his establishment in 1911 of the New London Ship and Engine Company (Nelseco), predecessor of today's Electric Boat.

Groton's most recent growth period has been dominated by two factors: the submarine and the automobile. Morton Plant's Nelseco first built diesel engines and parts for submarines until after World War I when they finally focused on the shipyard. Nelseco built Groton's first submarine in 1925, followed by 17 more before 1939. Production soared during World War II to 74 submarines, the most of any yard in the country. Electric Boat is famous for the development of the first atomic sub, <u>USS Nautilus</u> in 1953, which is now a National Historic Landmark and has become Groton's principal tourist attraction. Output and employment at Electric Boat have steadily decreased with the ending of the Cold War, but the company's history, continuing but more modest output, and the presence of the US Submarine Base (reputedly the largest in the world outside the former Soviet Union, Gibbs, HARS Phase I, p. 225), still justify Groton's title, "The Submarine Capital of the World."

A glance at the map of Groton shows the impact of the automobile on town development since World War II. Interstate 95 is clearly the main artery for through traffic, with growth of commercial activity on Routes 184, 12 and 1 tied closely to it. Route 1 connecting the major river crossings has become since its development in the 1950's the dominant commercial strip for local business, Groton's Downtown Development District, and thus the town center in the absence of any other that can be claimed by the whole town. A closer look at commercial growth shows the infiltration of auto-oriented businesses amidst historic clusters such as Center

Groton and Poquonnock Bridge, destroying or threatening their historic integrity. The dramatic growth of the Pfizer plant in the City of Groton has created growth and conflicting scale and land use patterns into the Eastern Point area. New residential subdivisions scattered fairly randomly along Groton's byways don't reflect the character of or relate functionally to historic concentrations of development.



Rapid growth conflicts with the character and scale of this historic house in Poquonnock Bridge, leaving its fate uncertain.

Through all the changes and in spite of increased accessibility to all parts of town, the original patterns of development based on isolation by geography persist, including the fragmented government structure of the town. The distinct districts each seem to have a strong sense of their own history and identity, expressed in varying degrees of commitment: the Fort Griswold State Park and Groton Battle Monument, the several National Register and local historic districts, active historical societies, the Gungywamp Society, the Nautilus Museum, the Submarine Base and the fight to save it, the fine libraries and their historic collections, the studies previously and now being done to acknowledge the proud architectural heritage throughout the town.

Continuity with this heritage will depend on the town's response to the challenges it faces as growth continues.

2.2 1996 Town Profile and Projections

2.2.A. The Present

The Town of Groton covers 38.3 square miles and had a 1990 population of 45,144. Its location on Interstate 95 offers convenient access to the Connecticut population centers of New Haven, New London, and Norwich, and to New York, Providence, and Boston beyond. Submarine construction, shipbuilding, and the manufacture/research of pharmaceuticals are the principal components of town employment. A strong retail sector serves Groton residents, neighboring towns, tourists and resort visitors.

The significant 10% growth in population during 1980-90, almost double that of the entire state, is a measure of the town's generally good economic health, although prospects are somewhat mixed. The recent vagaries of the Connecticut economy have not left Groton untouched. With the national decline in defense-related expenditures has come a dramatic drop in employment at Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics, Inc. Once southeastern Connecticut's largest employer, the workforce is projected to drop to around 6,500 by 1998 from a peak of nearly 28,000 in the 1970s. The town's other major employer, Pfizer, Inc., the pharmaceutical giant, remains a growing and important presence. Despite setbacks, the town's unemployment rate as of 1993 stood at 5.8%, well below that of the county (6.5%) and state (6.9%).

Tourism in recent years has assumed a much larger economic role in Groton as well as statewide. Mystic Seaport, Mystic Marinelife Aquarium and Mystic Village, all located in the town of Stonington, and the <u>USS Nautilus</u>, have proven track records as tourist destinations. Foxwoods Resort Casino in neighboring Ledyard, however, is almost single-handedly transforming the tourism economy of southeastern Connecticut, creating jobs and demand for more services and retail offerings. Regional tourism facilities promise to grow, with more attractions planned.

The town's physical appearance mirrors the economy. Groton Bank has suffered in response to Electric Boat's diminished presence, especially in reduced commercial activity, although Pfizer's modern corporate campus offers new opportunities for growth. Mystic, Noank and Groton Long Point, on the other hand, have prospered from tourism dollars and summer resort activity. The shops and services along Route 1 ("Downtown Groton") have benefitted from both this market and the nearby Navy Base. Strip development along major routes near Interstate 95 continues apace, while new residential subdivisions are transforming the central and northern parts of town into suburbia.

2.2.B. The Future

In large part because of its locational advantages, Groton should enjoy sustained growth over the next 10-15 years. Population projections for the year 2000 show almost 50,000 residents, a healthy 9.2% increase over 1990.

Predictions as to the state's economic future have clear implications for Groton. In the anticipated gradual recovery from the recession, the Connecticut Economic Conference Board has identified tourism and biomedical technology as the most promising sectors for growth and jobs. In each of these areas, Groton is well-positioned to benefit. The figures for tourism are especially impressive: tourists spent \$3.6 billion during 1993 in Connecticut, up 10% over 1992 despite the recession, and the figure topped \$4 billion in 1995. According to the state Department of Economic Development, this growth has greatly outpaced all other economic activity.

The overall impact of tourism is pervasive and critical, and Groton should take note. It supports 106,000 jobs and generates \$2.1 billion in wages, \$508 million in state taxes, and \$141 million in local taxes. Pleasure travelers comprised 61.5% of commercial lodging visitors in 1993, and pleasure travel to hotels, motels and resorts ("HMRs") increased 61.5% in the same year. Surveys show that almost 70% of visitors to HMR accommodations are from out-of-state, with most coming from the New York metropolitan area, followed by New England. Groton has the opportunity, more than most Connecticut communities, to derive great economic benefit from tourism, but must be alert to its impact on the quality of traditional village life.

The demand for housing will continue, especially among the town's sizable market of families with young children. Residential subdivisions will claim substantial tracts of land, while the commercial strips are sure to expand, with critical implications for historic ambience. Current zoning and land development patterns will orient commercial growth toward areas with best automobile and highway access, which favors sites along Routes 1, 12 and 184. The size of new retail facilities, based on new stores such as Wal-Mart, promises to overwhelm existing merchants. Historic buildings in these areas will face threats of demolition or insensitive alteration from development pressures, while Groton Bank and traditional merchants in other areas may suffer similar threats from competition and disinvestment.

2.3 Historic Resources: Assets and Issues

Historic resources are those elements added to the environment over time that reflect the experiences of people who have shared the same space. Those places qualify as assets that have historic relevance, architectural quality, sense of place or

historic character, or provide continuity with past events or appearances. Good planning recognizes the role these assets can play in creating a rich and distinctive community. Not all can or should be preserved just as they are, but in Groton their quality and contribution to a sense of continuity with the town's impressive past should be considered thoughtfully in planning for the future.

In this section, against the backdrop of historic factors discussed above, Groton's assets are outlined and evaluated. A townwide list of significant historic resources is included in Appendix A, and priorities for preservation are set forth there and in Chapter 5.

This section also raises issues that may impede the enhancement of these assets and limit their full contribution to the quality of town life. Some obstacles may be easy to overcome, while others may be more difficult to surmount, thus creating the challenge of working around them. It is important to emphasize that problem-solving is the essense of both progress and good planning.

2.3.A. Historic Events as Assets to Town Identity

Assets

Several events or periods of Groton's history are unique in Connecticut and have contributed significantly to state and national history.

1. The Pequot War. A defining moment in 17th-century American history occurred when the colonial militia, under the leadership of John Mason of Windsor, attacked and virtually eliminated the Pequot nation. While Pequot territory covered much of southeastern Connecticut, it was in Groton on Pequot Hill that the "first recorded instance of European massacre of indigenous people in the region" took place, according to the text of the memorial dedicated to the Pequots' memory at the site of their fort.

This event is significant both for initiating a pattern of belligerant relationships that would last for centuries and across a continent, and for ensuring the settlement of territory by European immigrants, again foreshadowing a centuries-long and continent-wide pattern. It was in Groton, also, that land was first reserved for conquered Native Americans, in what later became the Town of Ledyard. In our current view of history, Groton is therefore doubly significant. The development of Foxwoods Casino has brought Pequot history into the limelight, so that there are now few Connecticut residents who don't know the name of this tribe of early Groton inhabitants.

2. Religious Toleration. Groton was notable for the founding in the early settlement period of the first church in Connecticut not of the state established Congregational faith. The First Baptist Church, established here in 1705, followed the lead of Roger Williams and Ann Hutchinson in Rhode Island, supporting the

separation of church and state and the toleration of other religions, such as Quakers and Anglicans. The Baptists became a predominant force in Groton and the state, setting a long-standing pattern of religious diversity and helping to formulate the 1818 Connecticut constitution that formalized the distinction between church and state.

The other significant impact of Baptist influence was on town form. Following the Rhode Island theory that town greens tended to promote hierarchical distinctions, Groton never developed a defined central green so typical of many other Connecticut towns. Thus today Groton remains a collection of settlement clusters without a visually identifiable historic town center.

3. The Battle of Groton Heights (September 6, 1781). The culmination of Britain's invasion of the Thames River area, this battle was significant in state history for several reasons. It was the only Revolutionary battle fought in Connecticut, and it featured the leadership of the British by traitor Benedict Arnold. A study is currently being done to incorporate the Fort's history into town education programs, with a particular focus on the role of minorities and women.

The dramatic Battle Monument, an obelisk designed by noted architect Ithiel Town and financed by public lottery in 1825, is a distinguished piece of Egyptian Revival architecture, unique in the state. Its completion (1830) predates that of the Bunker Hill Monument in Boston, thus it is considered the first patriotic monument in the United States.



The Groton Monument (1830) is unique in the state and likely to be the earliest commemorative monument to a Revolutionary War battle.

4. "Submarine Capital of the World." During the 20th century, Groton has come to occupy a central place in world naval history, easily justifying its title. The pre-eminent position in naval construction and technology of Electric Boat culminates a long maritime history at its Thames River location, and reflects the pattern of submarine development nationally. The first marine diesel engines were built here, powering the first American submarine to cross the Atlantic. By World War II, the yard was producing more fleet submarines than any in the country. It launched the first nuclear sub, <u>USS Nautilus</u>, in 1954, now Groton's main tourist attraction and a National Historic Landmark.

The <u>USS Nautilus</u>, now berthed in the Thames River near the US Submarine Base, honors Groton's premier maritime heritage.



Groton's submarine base began with the determination of area residents to create a naval presence on the Thames. In 1868, they raised the money to buy and donate to the government the land on which the base now stands. After decades of relative inactivity, the yard was officially commissioned by the Navy in 1917 as a submarine base and school, inaugurating a memorable history as one of the largest such bases in the world. The base and its related housing now comprise a significant proportion of both the area and population of the town, thus creating a considerable impact on its economy and character.

Problems

The only problem here is that these outstanding events are not as widely known or celebrated as they deserve to be.

2.3.B. Villages and Historic Areas

Assets

Among the villages and areas that make up the Town of Groton, seven have been distinguished by selection as National Register Historic Districts (see Fig. 2):

- -- Groton Bank
- -- Fort Griswold
- -- Eastern Point
- -- Branford House/Avery Point
- -- Mystic River
- -- Pequot Fort
- -- Noank

In addition, there are four locally designated historic districts (see Fig. 3):

- -- Eastern Point (with its own City Historic District Commission)
- -- Burnett's Corner
- -- Center Groton
- -- Mystic (the last three all under one Town Historic District Commission)

The original Historic District Study Committee (1974) had also proposed Old Mystic, Poquonnock Bridge and Fort Hill for consideration, and consultant James Gibbs in his ongoing <u>Historic and Architectural Resources Survey of Groton</u> (1992-present) recommends an additional dozen. This recognition testifies to both the richness of Groton's physical and built heritage, and to the wisdom of the town in its attempts to protect these resources.

It is important to note that one of Groton's distinctive assets is its diversity -of the scale, density, and character represented by these distinct districts. Each
generates its own constituency of loyal residents, but together they embody a richly
varied town sharing a common heritage and similar goals of maintaining the quality
of their environment.

The assets represented in these villages and areas are outlined here in roughly chronological order of their growth and development. Discussion will include the distinctive features and contributions of each in defining Groton today, not just the architectural resources, but also setting, texture and sense of the historic period. A more thorough discussion of historic and architectural resources can be found in James Gibbs' multi-volume historic surveys.

1. Poquonnock Bridge. Geography dictated both Native and colonial settlement of this "cleared land," which includes the whole river basin between Long Hill and Fort Hill, north to Poheganut Ledge and I-95. There are no remains of the earliest settlement, although the area is likely to be sensitive for both Native and colonial archaeological sites. Jabez Smith House, one of the oldest surviving farmhouses (1776, on earlier foundation) is on the National Register of Historic Places, and a number of fine 18th and early 19th-century houses surviving from the early farming village, located primarily along Route 1, deserve recognition and protection from insensitive alteration.

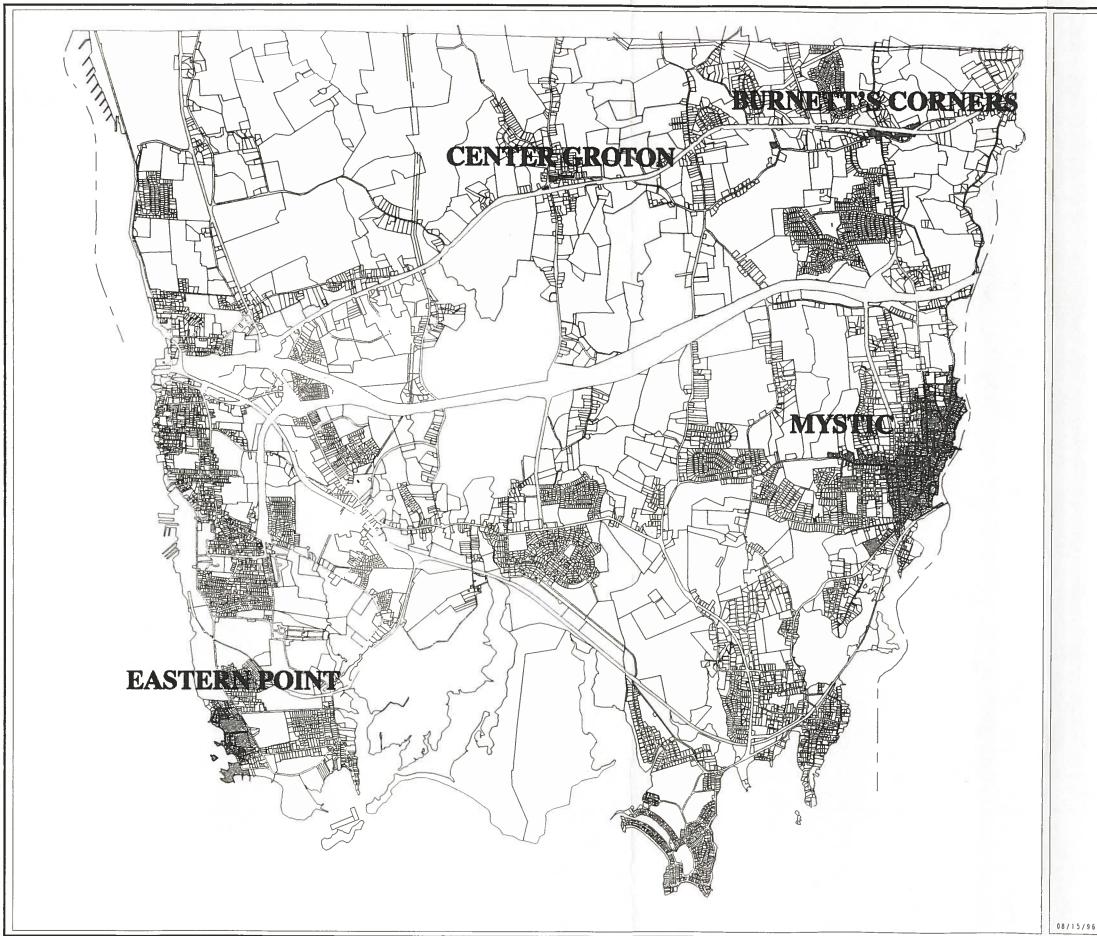
The Jabez Smith House (1776) on North Road, is a well-preserved reminder of 18-th century Groton.



The construction of the bridge across the Poquonnock River in the mid-1700's led to the area's evolution from rural hamlet to core community along the main route between Groton Bank and Mystic. The homes of many of the town's early civic leaders who lived here no longer survive (Winthrop, Morgan, Avery). Notable residences span the 19th and 20th centuries, including Greek Revival and Queen Anne designs, as well as examples of modest workers' housing and Bungalows dating from the Midway Railroad Yard period early in this century. Fort Hill housing from the World War II era has survived to serve an important role in the town's housing market.

Anchoring the complex of town-owned offices and schools concentrated here is the Town Hall (1908), gift of industrialist Morton Plant. Its Colonial Revival design has suffered from recent additions. Fort Hill Road, which functions as the Town of Groton's de facto "Main Street," is defined more by automobile orientation than geography or historical social use pattern, making this a highly trafficked and visible area where modern strip development impinges on historic character.

Important natural areas are still intact and likely to remain so, notably Bluff Point State Coastal Reserve with its varied history of farming, resort (briefly) and now passive recreational use, the Poquonnock River, and the adjacent vast reservoir complex. The entire area is rich with stories from its diverse history: the Driving





TOWN OF GROTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Groton, Connecticut
Figure 2



Scale: 1 Inch to 3778 Feet

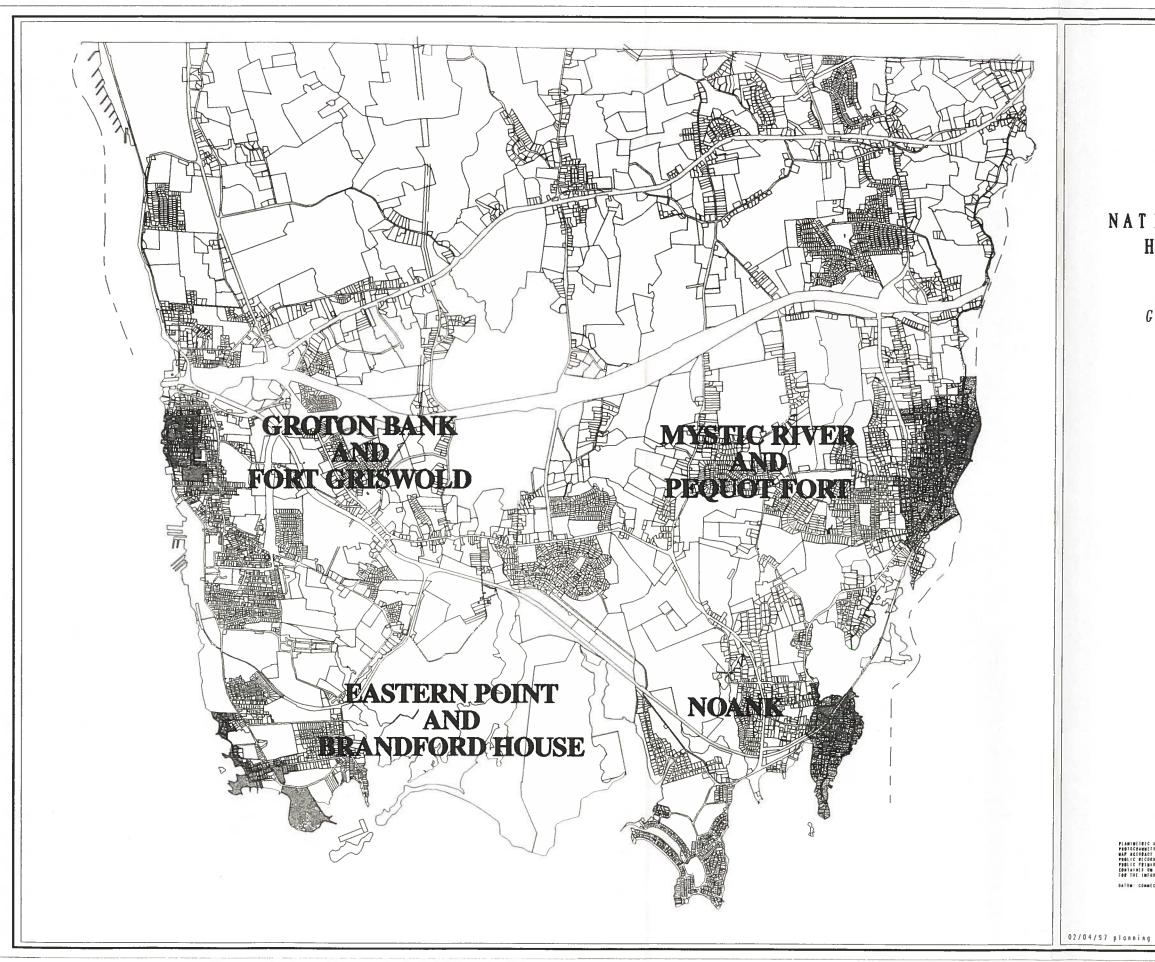
PLANTECTIC AND TOPPOCRAFIC INFORMATION SHOWN ON THIS MAP WAS PREPARED THROUGH THE USE OF MODIFICATION PROPARED FOR UPPORTCAMENT PATED WAS 1980. INTO STORMATION EXCEPT, ANTIONAL HAP ACCUPACT STANDARDS. REAL PROPERTY IS COMPILED FOR EXCENDED DECES, PLATS, AND DESCRIPTION OF PROFICE CORRESS AND BARA. UNIVERS OF THIS AND ARE HIREFUR MODIFIED AND THE AND THE APPRICATION OF PROFICE PROPERTY INFORMATION SHOWCESS SHOWLD BC CONSULTO PER PERFORMANCE OF THE INFORMATION OF

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Town OI Groton Geographic Information System

08/15/96 planning

Paul Duarte





NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES DISTRICTS

Groton, Connecticut

Figure 3



Scale: I Inch to 3778 Feet

Town Of Graton Geographic Information System

