HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF JAIL HILL

Jail Hill, a rocky prominence which overlooks downtown Norwich and its harbor, is a distinct neighborhood which has evolved to its present condition through a combination of physical geography and historical development. The hill itself is teardrop-shaped in configuration. Its longitudinal axis lies in a north-northwest to south-southeast direction. The highest point of the hill is 223 feet above sea level and is located near the junction of Cedar and Fountain Streets. On the north and west sides, the slope of the hill is fairly gentle. To the south and southeast, however, the hillslope is very steep and rocky. This phenomenon is the result of glaciation. The direction of glacial movement was from the northwest, smoothing slopes on that side, but creating steep lee slopes on the southern and southeastern sides.[1] The settlement pattern on Jail Hill reflects its geography: the steeper and rockier portions of the hill are less densely built upon than the gentler slopes. The rock ledges of the hill also afforded materials used extensively for retaining walls and stone fences.

Prior to the European settlement of Norwich in 1659, Jail Hill was the location of a Mohegan fort.[2] The Mohegan Indians, led by the Sachem Uncas, had allied with the

English in 1637 to overthrow the Pequots, the dominant tribe in eastern Connecticut. Following the Pequot War, Uncas and the Mohegans became embroiled in rivalry with the Narragansetts, located in what is now Rhode Island. Overlooking the point where the Yantic and Shetucket Rivers join to form the Thames River, Jail Hill--or Waweekus Hill--as it was called by the Mohegans, was a vital strategic asset. The purchase of Norwich by English settlers from Saybrook in 1659 ended the necessity for the fort. The English colonists, led by Major John Mason, a friend of Uncas and the commander of the Connecticut forces during the Pequot War, were sympathetic to Uncas and acted as a buffer between the Mohegans and Narragansetts.[3]

Norwich was first settled as an agricultural community centered about the present Norwichtown Green, two miles to the north of the downtown. In 1688, a wharf was established at Yantic Cove, near the new settlement. The area of the present downtown, including Jail Hill, was used for the pasturage of sheep and known as "The East Sheepwalk." A reservation of 900 acres held in common, the sheepwalk took advantage of the natural geography of the point of land between the Yantic and Shetucket Rivers. Because of the confluence of the two streams to form the Thames, all that was needed to secure the area for pasture was to build a fence in a roughly straight line between the two rivers. This use of peninsulas for grazing purposes

was common in early colonial times, reflecting the lack of labor for fence building.[4]

In 1684, a public wharf was constructed at the head of the Thames River and a highway established over Waweekus Hill from the wharf to the Norwichtown settlement. The wharf was followed by other wharves, warehouses, and shipyards. This development was restricted to the shoreline itself. The remainder of the sheepwalk continued to be held in common until 1726, when it was divided into 20 acre lots and distributed to 42 proprietors.[5] In 1740, two new highways were laid out on either side of Jail Hill, the East Road, corresponding to Union Street, and the West Road, present-day Washington Street. Modern Church Street was a continuation of the West Road. The old highway over the hill was abandoned.[6] The vigorous seaport community which developed at the foot of the hill became known as New Chelsea or Chelsea.

By 1790, with the opening of Middle or Main Street, the basic street pattern of Chelsea was established. Water Street was known as First Street, Lower Street, or Main Street. Main Street was called either New Street, Middle Street, or Second Street, while Church Street was known as Third Street, Upper Street, or Back Street. Church Street contained a number of residences, including that of Rev. John Tyler, a noted Anglican clergyman. Tyler's wife Hannah was a descendant of Richard Bushnell, one of the proprietors

granted land in the 1726 division. Much of the land in the survey area east of Cedar Street was owned by the Tyler family.[7] On the west side of the hill, the Kinney family were major property owners. In the early 19th century, the hill was often known as Kinney's Hill. The steep and rocky nature of the terrain proved a formidable obstacle to its development, however. Until 1828, the only building on the hill north of Church Street was a small schoolhouse constructed between 1800 and 1801 near the east end of School Street.

In 1828, the Norwich Female Academy was constructed on the slope of Jail Hill facing School Street. The academy represented a major improvement in educational opportunities for females in Norwich. By 1833, almost 90 students were enrolled. Unfortunately, it disbanded several years later and the building converted to residential use. Frances Manwaring Caulkins, a teacher at the school, described the appearance of Jail Hill in 1828:

> Neither court-house or jail had gained a foothold on the height, which was well forested, and toward the north surmounted by a fine prospect station, overtopping the woods, and known as Rockwell's Tower. The academy had the rugged hill for its background, but on other sides the view was varied and extensive; and when at recess the fair young pupils spread in joyous freedom over the height, often returning with wild flowers and oakleaf garlands from the neighboring groves, neither poetry nor romance could exaggerate the interest of the scene.[9]

The growth of Chelsea in the early 19th century outstripped that of the Town-plot, today's Norwichtown. In 1827, Chelsea voters outnumbering those of the older section, it was voted to construct a new town house in Chelsea rather than on the Green in Norwichtown. The victorious residents of Chelsea chose a location on what is now Court Street. The proximity of the site to the flourishing business district was a factor, as well as the availability of undeveloped land on the hill. The new town house was completed in 1829 and destroyed by fire in 1865. Its replacement is the Norwich City Hall and Courthouse of 1870-1873, located on nearby Union Square.[10]

New London County is unique in the State of Connecticut in having a dual court system. As early as 1674, irritated at having to journey to New London for court sessions, the inhabitants of Norwich petitioned the General Court to be disassociated from New London County. In 1720, efforts were made to divide the county court sessions between Norwich and New London. After a protracted struggle, Norwich succeeded in becoming a "half-shire" town by act of the General Assembly in 1734. Court sessions were held in the town-house on the Norwichtown green and a jail built nearby. Following the construction of the new town-house at Chelsea in 1829, the court and jail functions were transferred to Chelsea in 1834. Court sessions were held in the town-house, while a new jail was constructed on the hill above the town-house.

The jail, located between what are now Cedar and Fountain Streets, burned in 1838 and was replaced by a new granite structure.[11]

The New London County jail in Norwich contained separate accomodations for male and female prisoners, its own kitchen, laundry, work area, and chapel. The jailer and his family lived in an attached dwelling at the south end of the jail, separated by iron gates from the prisoners' section. Prisoners worked from 7:00 a.m. until dusk with a half-hour dinner break at noon. In 1867, the work was reported to consist of seating chairs, reupholstering beds and similar tasks.[12] In 1873, a group of local entrepreneurs built a suspender factory on the jail lot to exploin prisoner labor. This building was completely destroyed by fire in 1874. The jail was expanded by a brick addition at the north end in 1876, and the old cell blocks demolished and replaced by chilled steel cages and cells in 1908.[13] In 1913, local businessmen began a movement to end the prison labor system and substitute a prison farm. This eventually resulted in the establishment of a prison farm in Niantic, Connecticut. The old jail was demolished in the mid-1950s after the construction of a new correctional center in Montville, midway between New London and Norwich.[14]

The establishment of the County Jail on Jail Hill had a profound impact on the development of the area. The site

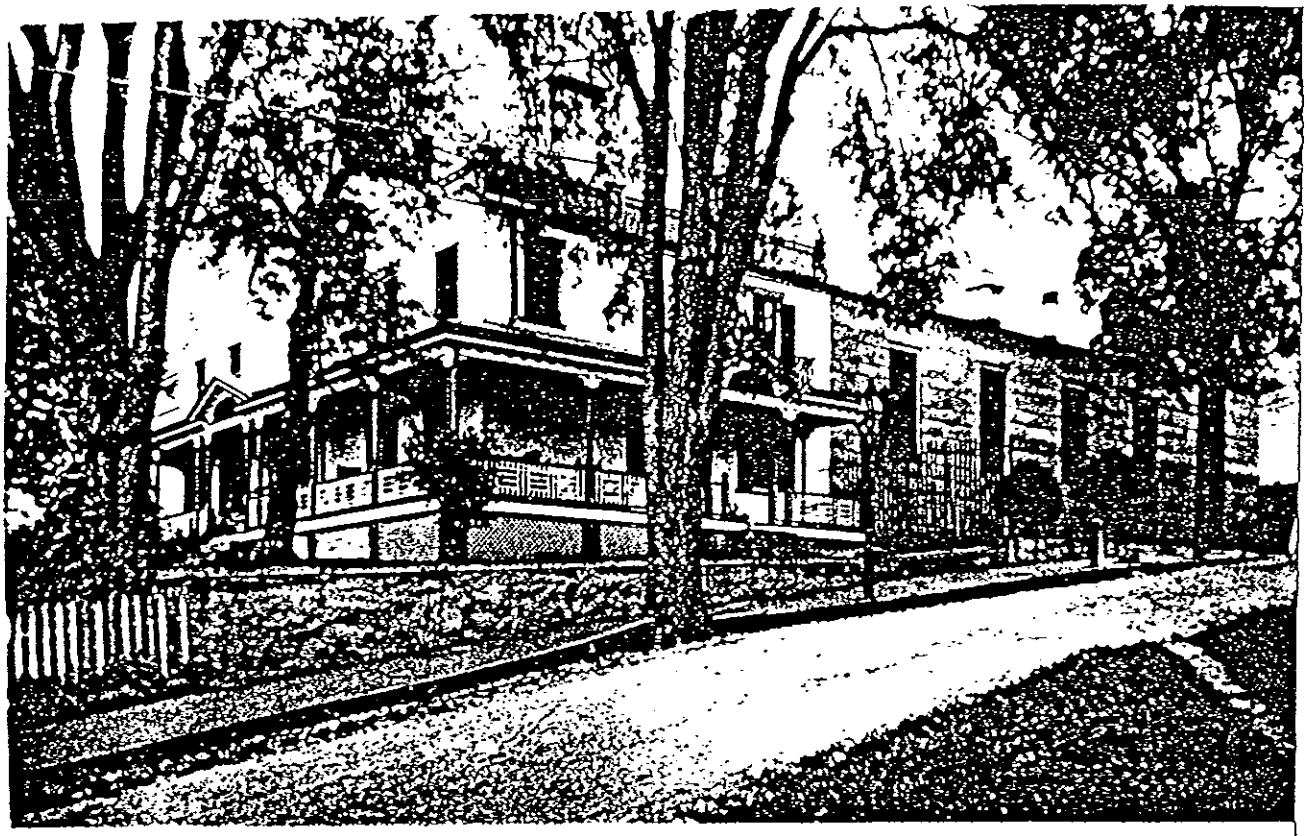
was undoubtedly chosen for its favorable location near the downtown and the new court facilities, together with the absence of other structures in the vicinity. The presence of the jail, however, was a negative factor in the development of the hill. Caulkins remarked on the 1838 reconstruction of the jail in her

History of Norwich

> The buildings were reconstructed on an enlarged plan, and though the taste which seated such an establishment in the most conspicuous part of the city may be questioned, yet the buildings themselves are pleasing objects to the perspective.[15]

The name Jail Hill was felt by some residents to be a disgrace. Occasional efforts were made to substitute other names for that of Jail Hill. A letter to the Norwich Bulletin in 1881 suggested either Monheage Hill or Uncas Hill as alternatives. In 1883, an article in the Bulletin summarized the opinion of many:

> The residents of the hill facing the central heights of the city of Norwich, naturally object to its being designated by the name of a penal institution which was built there long after the hill was inhabited. Yet the sobriquet of Jail Hill has been so long and universally applied that the original name has been lost sight of. The history of Norwich speaks of the place as Fort hill, but a Church street lady recently found an old land deed that sets it forth as Waweequaw's hill, the Indian name from which came the present Anglicized name Waweecus. She after much research is satisfied that the original name of the hill was



JAIL.

NEW LONDON COUNTY JAIL- early 20th century

Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Herman A. Johnson, Old Jewitt City Road, Preston, Connecticut.

> Weewacus," or short hill, while "Waweecus," or long hill, was applied to the hill at Norwich Town, which still bears the name. This similarity of names may have led to the abandonment of "Weewacus" for that bad English title Jail Hill. The hill is stately enough to be known as Norwich heights.[16]

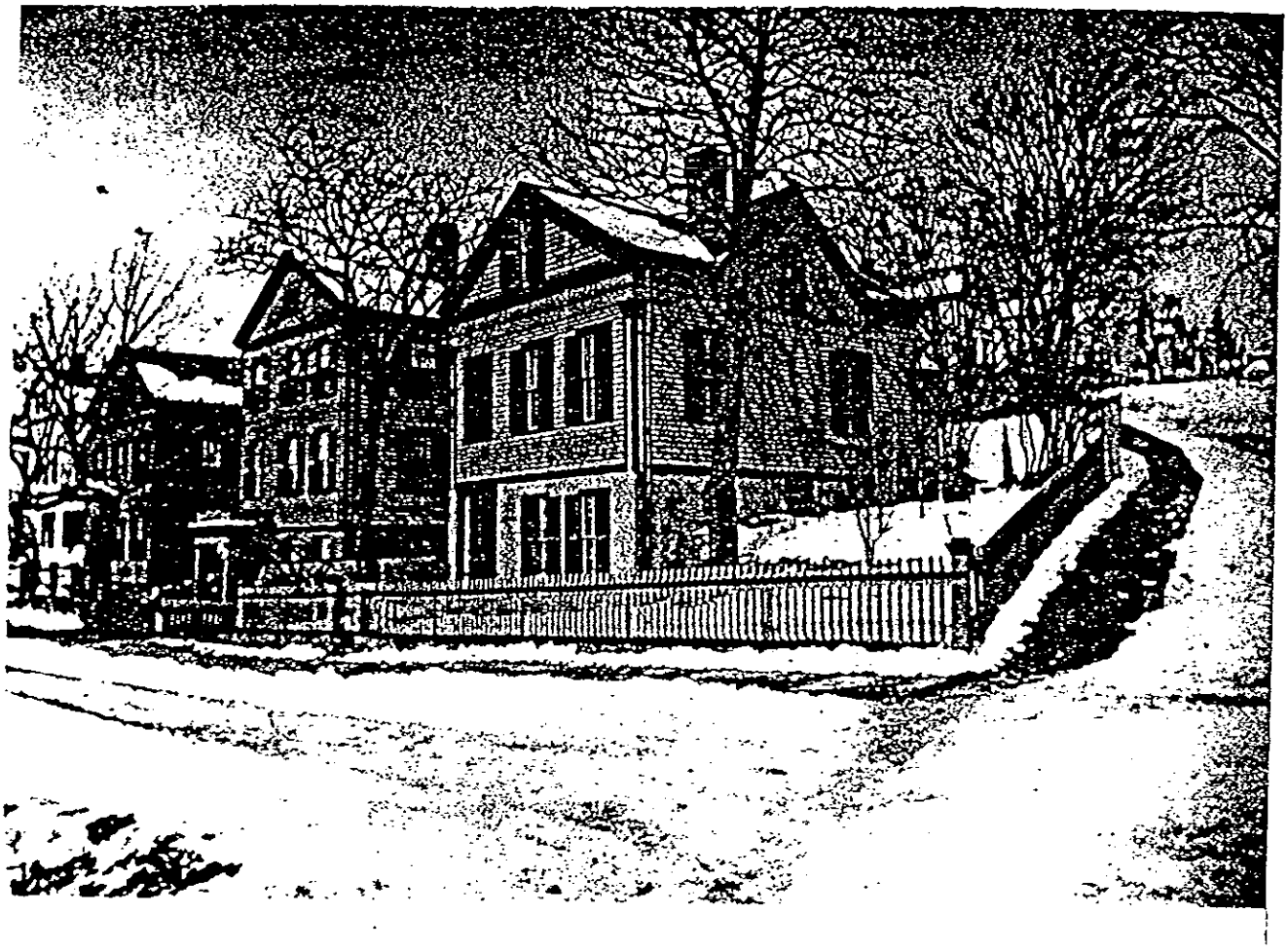
Despite these efforts, the name Jail Hill continues to the present, long after the demolition of the jail itself. The most marked result of the jail's presence is to be seen in the character of the neighborhood itself. Ordinarily, a site so close to the downtown, offering spectacular views of Norwich harbor and the surrounding countryside would have attracted large numbers of the wealthy. Laurel Hill on the east side of the Thames is a good example of this phenomenon. The presence of the jail depressed property values and discouraged the influx of the wealthy to its immediate vicinity. Instead, the neighborhood developed as one of small-scale houses inhabited by the less affluent of Norwich's population. Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, Jail Hill was home to various immigrant and other groups of lower social and economic status. Only at the north end of the hill and along Washington Street on its western edge, at a distance from the jail, were homes of the well-to-do found.

Reverend Seth Paddock erected the first home on Jail Hill proper in 1835. At the north end of the hill, William F. Greene and Charles Rockwell settled in 1824 and 1833,

respectively. Located on the gentle northern slope of the hill, far from the jail site, these large estates were atypical of the remainder of Jail Hill.

The late 1830s and 1840s witnessed a building boom on the hill. Homes were erected rapidly throughout the survey area. Many of these were constructed for middle-class downtown merchants and artisans of relatively modest means. Many homes were built on speculation by developers such as James Hoyt and John Charlton. The building firm of Fanning and Willoughby was especially active in the area, Willoughby living in a house on School Street. Occupations well represented in the survey area include those of carpenter and of gardener. The general prosperity of the downtown and its attendant construction boom encouraged the building trades. The occupation of many of the sections adjacent to the downtown by wealthy merchants and manufacturers created a demand for gardeners. Interestingly, "floriculture" was one of the activities encouraged at the jail.[17]

Blacks comprised a significant proportion of the population of Jail Hill. Norwich had a large black community during the colonial period due to its extensive West Indian trade and the comparative wealth of its population, many of whom owned black slaves as servants or laborers. Manumission of slaves had resulted in a sizeable free black population by the Revolution. Anti-slavery sentiment was



SCHOOL STREET, 1880s, corner of Fountain Street.
Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Herman A. Johnson, Old Jewitt City Road, Preston, Connecticut.

expressed as early as 1774. This black population clustered about the downtown, many residing on Church and Union Streets. With the development of Jail Hill in the 1830s and 1840s, many families moved onto the hill, building new homes.[18]

Most of the houses built by blacks on Jail Hill were in the immediate vicinity of the jail, a situation analogous to that in New London, where a small black community thrived in the shadow of the Franklin Street jail. The black community of Jail Hill contained a number of individuals of importance in the struggle for abolition of slavery and improved educational opportunities for blacks. Among these were James L. Smith, a former slave, shoemaker, and Methodist minister, who lived on School Street, and Pelleman Williams of Cedar Street, later an educator in Louisiana. Most notable were the Harris family, active abolitionists who acted as agents for William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator and were embroiled in the controversy over the school for "colored" girls opened by Prudence Crandall in Canterbury, Connecticut. Sarah and Mary Harris were pupils in the school. Charles Harris, their brother, introduced Prudence Crandall to the Liberator, indirectly provoking the entire incident. A more detailed discussion of the black community of Jail Hill will be found in the Appendix.

The dominant ethnic group on Jail Hill in the mid-19th century was that of the Irish. From a single Irish inhabi-

tant of Norwich in 1824, the Irish population mushroomed to a total of 4,000 in 1866.[19] The major influx of Irish occurred because of the potato failure of 1845-1846 and 1846-1847. Norwich attracted large numbers of immigrants due partly to the availability of unskilled manual labor on railroads and docks. The immigrants who came to America as a result of the potato famine were peasants with few skills and little if any education, in contrast to earlier immigrants from Ireland. In the 1850 Census, approximately 50% of the adult Irish population of Norwich were illiterate. By contrast, both the black and white populations in Norwich had almost no illiterate members. The Catholic faith of the newcomers also distinguished them from the predominantly Protestant majority in Norwich. The homes built by Irish immigrants on Jail Hill are modest in scale and conservative in style. Most are 1½-2 stories in height and are constructed in a vernacular version of the Greek Revival style. Homes built after 1860 show the influence of Victorian era styles, but are also small in scale and conservative in stylistic characterists.

Despite relatively intense development pressure, Jail Hill retained tracts of open land into the second half of the 19th century. On July 12, 1875, the Fire Department was called out to extinguish a brush fire set by "unknown person or persons" on Jail Hill. Several large tracts survive to the present, lending Jail Hill an openness rare in

an urban area so close to the downtown.[20]

Non-residential property use was also found on the hill during the 19th century. A bowling alley of the 1850s survives on Cedar Street, although converted to a residence. The conversion of the building to residential purposes seems to have occurred shortly after the Common Council of Norwich passed an ordinance in 1869 to regulate billiard and bowling saloons.[21] A popcorn factory active in the 1870s on Old Division Street was also converted to a residence at a later date. Small shops operated by craftsmen working in their homes seem to have been prevalent in the earlier part of the 19th century, particularly on the streets skirting the fringes of the hill.

The minutes of the Court of Common Council of the City of Norwich also reveal a certain community spirit among its inhabitants. Numerous petitions are to be found in the Council minutes requesting improvements for "Jail Hill, so-called." These include petitions for better police and fire protection, for sidewalk and street repairs or alterations, for sewers and for streetlights. In July, 1880, Richard McFadden and others petitioned for a policeman on Jail Hill. In August, the Chief of Police reported that it was not feasible to patrol more territory with the limited numbers of policemen at their disposal. The response of the Council was to appoint McFadden as a Special Constable.[22]

Another source of difficulty was caused by the topo-

graphy of the hill itself. Several walks led from School Street to Church Street. Remonstrances for their maintenance are to be found in the Council minutes, together with at least one lawsuit for injuries sustained in a fall.[23] On Court Street, a large retaining wall was constructed opposite the old courthouse lot in 1874. According to local tradition, a team of horses plunged over the retaining wall from School Street, necessitating the construction of an iron railing atop the wall.[24] Progress continued to be made, however, and by the end of the 19th century, Jail Hill enjoyed good public services.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Irish and black communities on Jail Hill began to disperse. They were replaced by new groups of immigrants, first Italians and, later, East Europeans. Jewish families engaged in downtown business activity also settled on the hill in this period. This demographic change was common in American urban centers, reflecting the outward movement of families as greater social and economic status was achieved, and the movement of immigrant groups into older neighborhoods offering lower rentals and home prices. Today, as a result of this process, a variety of families from a number of ethnic backgrounds live on Jail Hill.

At the northern end of Jail Hill, the Greene and Rockwell estates were developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Greene Street was opened across a portion

of the Greene property in 1891. John Fox Slater had purchased the Rockwell estate in the 1840's, adding a number of buildings. In 1873, Slater Avenue was opened on part of the Slater estate. Lots were rapidly developed along the south side of the street. The opening of Elmwood Avenue in 1909 resulted in further development, as did the sale of lots on Broad Street. Most of these new homes were built for middle-class families and reflected the popular styles of the time: Georgian Revival and Bungalow are well represented.

The post-war era has witnessed some deterioration of the Jail Hill neighborhood. In common with urban neighborhoods throughout the United States, substantial disinvestment took place in the area. Numbers of homes were abandoned and eventually destroyed through fire or vandalism, or by action of the city. The jail lot, now vacant, is overgrown with weeds and other vegetation. An active neighborhood organization, the Jail Hill Association is seeking public acquisition of the lot for conversion into a public park. During the field survey of the area, survey personnel encountered widespread interest in rehabilitation work among the residents of Jail Hill. This interest, and the active participation of the Jail Hill Association and Norwich Heritage Trust in preparing a preservation plan for the area, offers an important opportunity for the preservation of a significant working- and middle-class neighborhood.

Footnotes

[1]Jorgensen, Neil. A Sierra Club Naturalist's Guide to to Southern New England. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1978, pages 74-75.

[2]Caulkins, Frances Manwaring. History of Norwich, Connecticut. Hartford: Case Lockwood & Co., 1866, p.23.

[3]Ibid., pp.30-46.

[4]Ibid., pp.103,300.

[5]Ibid., pp.304-305.

[6]Ibid., pp.306-307.

[7]Ibid., p.547, footnote.

[8]"The Old School Street School House," The Bulletin, January 1, 1869.

[9]Caulkins, op.cit., p.546.

[10]Ibid., p.570-572.

[11]Ibid., pp.572-573.

[12]"The County Jail: Its Occupants, Management, Etc.," The Bulletin, February 1, 1867.

[13]"The Norwich Suspender Company," The Bulletin, March 20, 1873. "Improvement at the Jail," The Bulletin, January 15, 1876. "Jail Cells are Completed," The Bulletin, January 30, 1908.

[14]"Betterment of Jail Conditions," The Bulletin, June 18, 1913.

[15]Caulkins, op.cit., p.573.

[16]"The Old Name Found." The Bulletin, January 18, 1873.

[17]"Our Jails," The Bulletin, May 12, 1873.

[18]Caulkins, op.cit., pp.328-331. It should be noted that Caulkins was Secretary of the Norwich Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1837.

Footnotes (continued)

[19]Ibid., p.643.

[20]Journal of the Proceedings of the Court of Common Council of the City of Norwich From June, 1876, to June, 1877. Norwich: Gordon Wilxoc, 1877, p.35.

[21]Journal of the Proceedings of the Court of Common Council, 1869. Norwich: Campbell & Co., 1876, p.14.

[22]Journal of the Proceedings of the Court of Common Council, 1880-1881, pp. 35, 45, 47.

[23]Journal of the Proceedings of the Court of Common Council, 1878-1879, pp.91,97.

[24]Journal of the Proceedings of the Court of Common Council, 1874-1875, p.70.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Jail Hill and Architectural Survey has revealed a number of potential individual and district listings to the National Register of Historic Places. It is our recommendation that these potential Register properties be listed as soon as practicable. In addition, the possibilities for further investigation within the district must also be mentioned. Several important topics for additional scholarly research beyond the scope of the survey have been identified. Potential sites for archaeological investigation also exist within the survey area and should be more thoroughly investigated.

Potential Individual National Register Properties

At least four individually eligible sites for the National Register are found within the survey area. While all are also within potential districts, it is felt that their importance merits individual treatment here. These properties include the Norwich Female Academy at 132 School Street (140), the Huntington Memorial Home at 99 Washington Street (187), the Charles Rockwell House at 18-20 Elmwood Avenue (60), and the James Lloyd Greene House at 127 Washington Street (191).

The Norwich Female Academy (140) is significant for both architectural and historic reasons. It is an example of the style known as Jeffersonian Classicism, a precursor of the Greek Revival. The monumental portico, which uses Roman Doric columns, is the most prominent feature of the building. The

definition of the facade into bays by brick pilasters is also typical of the style, as is the use of arches between the end bays. The dramatic siting of the building, overlooking the Thames River, contributes to its monumental character. As an early example of an institution built specifically for the purpose of instructing females, the Academy is an important illustration of early 19th century educational reform.

The Eliza Huntington Memorial Home (187) derives its significance from the quality of the buildings itself, and for its historic associations both as the home of a prominent Norwich family and as a retirement home for women. Built about 1832 for Jonathan Dodge, the house soon afterwards came into the possession of Eliza Huntington. One of the finest Greek Revival homes in Norwich, the house is noteworthy for its use of the Ionic order not only in the monumental portico on the south side of the house, but in pilasters on the west side, and in porches on both the north side and on the eastern ell. Semi-circular attic windows have elaborate leaded glass designs. Cast-iron railings and balconies are of exceptional quality and may have been cast locally. Historically, the association of the house with the Huntington family is significant. The Huntingtons were wealthy merchants and landowners who were very active in state and local politics in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The establishment of the house as a retirement home for women in the 1870s is also an historically important event in the local community, again illustrating the progress of re-

form in the 19th century.

The Charles Rockwell House, (60), built in 1832, is important for its architectural merit and its association with two prominent Norwich families, the Rockwells and the Slaters. The Rockwell house was evidently Greek Revival in design when constructed in 1832. However, extensive remodelling in the 1860s has overlain the original Greek Revival characteristics with features of the Renaissance Revival. The rusticated corner pilasters, modillions, window hoods, and other features probably derive from this work, associated with John Fox Slater, who acquired the property in 1862. Charles Rockwell, a wealthy downtown businessman, was associated with Sunday School classes for blacks taught by the Second Congregational Church on Church Street. Rockwell's successor, John Fox Slater, was a successful textile manufacturer and the wealthiest man in Norwich at the time of his purchase of the property. Slater was noted for his philanthropy, his most well-known gift being the creation of a million-dollar fund in 1882 for the education of blacks in the American South.

The James Lloyd Greene House (191) is an important early example of the French Second Empire style, built about 1858, and is associated with one of Norwich's leading industrialist families. The house features a mansard roof, typical of the French Second Empire style, with elaborate dormers. The front entrance porch is monumental in scale and embellished with

rich ornamental detail. James Lloyd Greene, son of wealthy textile manufacturer William P. Greene, was an important political figure in Norwich. He was elected Mayor in 1862.

Potential National Register Districts

The central portion of Jail Hill, consisting of School Street, John Street, Fountain Street, Happy Street, and Cedar Street to its intersection with Greene Avenue, is recommended for inclusion of the National Register as the Jail Hill National Register District. This is the traditional Jail Hill neighborhood, a working-class neighborhood having its origins in the 1830s and 1840s, which still retains a strong sense of cohesion. Although several buildings of architectural merit are included within the district, its major significance is that of social history. From the 1830s until about the turn of the century, Jail Hill was the site of a significant black community. Members of this community included black educators who went south after the Civil War to assist in the education of the Freedmen, abolitionists and a significant number of black entrepreneurs, who operated restaurants in the downtown area. In the late 1840s, Irish immigrants settled on Jail Hill, occupying existing housing, or building new homes. By the 1860s, the Irish were a major component of Norwich's population. Jail Hill Irish included a number of Fenians, one of whom, Captain McDonald, led a band of 60 men in the Fenian invasion of Canada in 1866. Of particular interest is the vernacular architecture built by

both the black and Irish population of Jail Hill. Small in scale and very conservative in architectural style, these homes offer a valuable glimpse of black and immigrant housing in the 19th century. Other immigrants in the area included Germans, Italians, and Jews in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A second recommended district would include the western side of Union Street from Union Square to the intersection of Crossway. It is intended that this district should extend eastwards to include the other side of Union Street and both sides of Broadway, as belonging to a distinctive middle-class district in which many of the homes are of early 19th-century date. On completion of the next survey, it should be possible to define this potential district more clearly. Preliminary indications based on the portion completed in the Jail Hill survey are that this area also has a significant social history.

A third potential district comprises the west side of Broadway and would include that portion of Union Street not covered in this district mentioned above, Slater Avenue, Elmwood Avenue and Broad Street from its intersection with Cedar. Also included in this district should be the east side of Broadway. The district has many buildings of architectural interest from the late 19th century. It would also include "Fairlawn", a planned development of the early 20th century on the former

Slater Estate, composed of Slater Avenue, Elmwood Avenue, and Broad Street. These homes are representative of early 20th-century architecture, most in a good state of preservation.

The fourth proposed National Register District would be based on Washington Street, and would incorporate the large mansions on the street which date from the early to the late 19th-century. This should include both sides of the street and will probably necessitate further survey work, as well the second and third districts. The district would also include the south side of Greene Avenue, developed in the late 1890s and featuring homes designed by local architect James Hiscox, who had been formerly employed in Richardson's office.

Topics Indicated for Further Research

Several topics for further research have been suggested by the survey. First is the black community on Jail Hill and in Norwich. Little is known about the black community and its involvement in the struggle for the abolition of slavery or educational rights. Research in the vast corpus of Abolitionist writings and manuscripts may well reveal more information about the involvement of Norwich blacks in this important 19th-century movement. The relationship of the black community to the white community and to figures such as John Fox Slater must also deserve scholarly attention. The papers of such figures as Leonard W. Bacon, the Congregational clergyman instru-

mental in convincing Slater to endow his million-dollar fund for educating southern blacks, is also a potential source of information regarding this relationship.

A second topic of importance is the question of the vernacular architecture of Jail Hill, particularly that built by blacks and by Irish immigrants. Small in scale and very conservative in design, these buildings are worthy of more detailed analysis than is possible within the confines of the survey. Why, for example, were these buildings so different in style from contemporary structures being erected by the rest of the Norwich community? Were choices in style made consciously by immigrants and blacks, or were local builders responsible to some extent for the limited range of available styles?

A third question regards the Irish community in Norwich and its involvement in the Fenian movement. The Fenian Brotherhood, an organization which sought to free Ireland from English domination, was apparently an active and vital group among Norwich's Irish population. Participation in the invasion of Canada in 1866 was the most obvious manifestation of this movement, which deserves much closer scrutiny.

Jail Hill may also have potential for archaeological research. Historic documentation indicates that the site of Jail Hill was occupied by the Mohegan Indians prior to the arrival of the first English settlers. Its strategic location made the hill

a valuable asset in the protracted struggle between the Mohegans and the Narragansetts. Several large lots on Jail Hill have apparently remained free of disturbance since the European occupation of Norwich. This includes a lot on the east side of Cedar Street, and another on the west side of Fountain Street. The possibility for historic archaeology on Jail Hill also exists. One opportunity is the lot of the former New London County Jail. This was demolished in the mid-1950's, but remains of foundations are still visible. Also within the jail lot is the site of the William Spelman house, dating from about 1844. It was later acquired by the state and demolished. Spelman's son James was a prominent black journalist in the post Civil war era. Another occupant of the house was Lester Skeesucks, a Mohegan Indian who had married into the black community. Public acquisition of this land, now in private ownership, is being considered. If the site of the Spelman house is undisturbed, investigation might reveal valuable information about the black community in Norwich and also about the cultural relationship between blacks and Native Americans.

APPENDIX I

The Black Community of Norwich and Jail Hill

The black population of Norwich had its origins in the colonial period. Mercantile ties with the West Indies provided a ready source for the importation of slaves. The Pequot War of 1636-7, fought more than twenty years before the settlement of Norwich, had resulted in the enslavement of many of the surviving Pequots. Indian slaves represented a small but significant proportion of early colonial slaves in Connecticut, and were readily absorbed into the expanding population of black slaves. Slaves were employed as manual laborers, domestic servants, and also as skilled craftsmen. Although this population was dispersed among many families throughout Norwich, concentrations of blacks were found in Norwichtown and in Chelsea, the thriving port community later to become today's downtown Norwich.

The practice of manumitting slaves, often done as an act of charity, or through self-purchase by the slave, resulted in a growing free black community which clustered around the Chelsea section. Guy Drock, a blacksmith and former slave, built a house on Church Street about 1759.[1] The majority of blacks in Norwich, however, were slaves. The election of a black "governor" was a yearly event in Norwich, as well as in many other colonial cities and

towns with a large black population. Attended with much ritual and ceremony, often using horses and costumes loaned from wealthy masters, these annual elections were a burlesque of colonial practice, although the figures elected as governor seem to have had some status within the black community. While earlier writers cited the election of the black governors as an example of the imitative powers of blacks, the custom probably had antecedents in the medieval practice of electing "Boy Bishops" at the Feast of Fools.[2]

Opposition to slavery began to emerge in Norwich just prior to the American Revolution. In 1774, Reverend Levi Hart of Preston preached a sermon critical of the slave trade and of slavery. The passage of legislation in October, 1774, forbidding the importation of slaves into the state, was an important step in the eventual abolition of slavery. Revolutionary idealism was also manifested in sentiment against slavery. On July 7, 1774, a letter addressed to the Sons of Liberty was published in the Norwich Packet:

> We that declare, and that with much warmth and zeal, it is unjust, cruel, barbarous, unconstitutional, and without law to enslave, do we enslave? Yes, verily we do! A black cloud witnesseth against us, and our own mouths condemn us! How preposterous our conduct! How vain and hypocritical our pretenses! Can we expect to be free, so long as we are determined to enslave?[3]

In 1784, a bill allowing for the gradual abolition of slavery was enacted by the state legislature. Thereafter, no slave born after March 1, 1784, could be held as a slave after attaining the age of twenty-five. Four years later, in 1788, the exportation of slaves from the state was declared illegal and punishable by fine. Connecticut residents engaging in the slave trade were also subject to severe fines. In 1792, this legislation was further strengthened, and provision made that slaves could only be manumitted between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five. The age at which slaves were to be freed was lowered to twenty-one in 1797.[4] As a result of these various legislative acts, the number of slaves in Connecticut steadily decreased. In 1830, only twenty-three slaves remained in the state. Two slaves were reported in New London County, in the town of Groton.[5] In 1848, the state legislature abolished slavery entirely.

In Norwich, the growing black population clustered about the downtown. The Second Congregational Church, located on Church Street, played a vital role in providing educational opportunities for blacks. A member of the church, Charles F. Harrington, initiated a Sabbath School for blacks in July, 1815. The following year, the school was incorporated in a Union Sabbath School Society sponsored by both the Episcopal and Congregational churches. Classes were held in the schoolhouse on School Street.

In 1817, forty-one blacks, male and female, were enrolled in the Sabbath School, ranging from six to fifty-six years olf. Reading skills were taught in addition to religious instruction. Although the Episcopal Church soon discontinued its involvement, the Second Congregational Church continued its support. The association of the church with the black community continued throughout the 19th century, surviving the division of the church in 1842.[6]

William Monteflora Harris, Senior, a mulatto born about 1783 in the French West Indies, had emigrated to the United States at an early age to receive an education.[7] Harris resided briefly in New London, where he was married and divorced prior to moving to Norwich. By 1810, when he married Sally Prentice of nearby Preston, he was residing in Chelsea. The union was performed by James Lanman, a prominent Norwich citizen and a member of the Second Congregational Church.[8] In 1816, Harris purchased a lot on Broadway from Calvin Goddard, an attorney, who was also a member of the church. Goddard later served as an attorney in defense of Prudence Crandall.[9]

Prior to their removal to Canterbury in 1832, the children of William and Sally Harris almost certainly attended Sabbath School classes of the Second Congregational Church. In 1828, Sarah Ann Major Harris, the second child of William and Sally, was accepted into the Congregational

Church as the family still resided nearby.[10] Other black families were also associated with the Second Congregational Church. In 1826, Joseph Quy, the youngest son of Revolutionary War veteran Lebbeus Quy, joined the church. He did repair work for the church school building.[11] In 1828, Fitch Pelham had three sons baptized in the church: George, Uriah, and Thomas.[12]

In January, 1831, William Lloyd Garrison began publishing The Liberator in Boston. Advocating the immediate emancipation of slaves as opposed to gradual emancipation, Garrison had an important impact on the anti-slavery movement in the U.S. His attacks on the American Colonization Society, which sought ot return blacks to Africa, yet was ineffectual against slavery itself, helped to end the influence of that movement. Although Garrison's paper addressed primarily whites in both North and South, it received critical support from free blacks in most of the urban centers of the northeast.[13]

In 1832, both William M. Harris, Senior, and his eldest son, Charles Floreval Harris, were agents for The Liberator.[14] The senior Harris had moved to Canterbury in 1822, while his son Charles apparently remained in Norwich, where he had built a house on Broadway about 1831. The Harris family soon came into contact with Prudence Crandall, who had opened a boarding school for females in the previous year. Her servant, Ann Marcia Davis, was engaged to

Charles F. Harris. The younger Harris introduced The Liberator to Prudence Crandall. Persuaded to allow Harris' sister, Sarah Harris, to attend her school, Prudence Crandall soon encountered resistance from the parents of her white students, who threatened to withdraw their children unless Sarah was dismissed. Closing the school, Crandall consulted with Garrison and others before determining to re-open the school for "young ladies and little misses of color." She advertised in The Liberator and travelled to several major cities to recruit students. In April, 1833, the school was re-opened with 15-20 students. Among these were at least four students with ties to Norwich: Sarah Harris, her sister Mary, Julia Williams, and Eliza Clasko.[15]

The citizens of Canterbury petitioned the state legislature for passage of a bill to prohibit schools for blacks from out of state without the consent of the town in which the school was established. The bill, known as the "Black Law," was passed on May 24, 1833. Shortly afterwards, local authorities arrested Prudence Crandall for violation of the law. Calvin Goddard of Norwich, W.W. Ellsworth and Henry Strong represented her in three court trials. The last trial, on July 22, 1834, before the Court of Errors, resulted in the case being thrown out on a technicality. The question of the constitutionality of the Black Law was not addressed by the court, much to the disappointment of Prudence Crandall and her supporters.[16]

Shortly after the trial, an attempt was made to set Prudence Crandall's house on fire. Fortunately, the fire was discovered soon enough to save the house and its occupants. In September, 1834, a mob attacked the house with crowbars, scoring the clapboards and breaking many of the windows. Faced with such unrelenting hostility, Prudence Crandall closed her school and sent her students home.

Meanwhile, Charles F. Harris married Ann Marcia Davis in Canterbury on November 28, 1833, in a double ceremony with his sister Sarah Harris and George Fayerweather, a blacksmith from Kingston, Rhode Island. Sarah and her husband later lived in New London from 1841 or 1842 to 1855, returning to Kingston in the latter year. The influence of the abolitionist movement and the Prudence Crandall incident is readily apparent in the names given to members of the Harris family in 1834. William M. Harris, Senior, father of Charles and Sarah, named his eleventh child, born in Canterbury in 1834, William Lloyd Garrison Harris. In the same year, his son Charles had a son christened William Wilberforce Harris after the great English abolitionist leader who had died in 1833. Sarah's first child, also born in 1834, was named Prudence Crandall Fayerweather.[17]

Jail Hill, located just north of Norwich's congested business district, was being opened for development in in this period. A Female Academy had been opened in 1828,

near the earlier district school. In 1829, a new town-house was constructed on Court Street. County court sessions were transferred to the new building in 1834. Shortly afterwards, a new county jail was erected on a large lot between present-day Cedar and Fountain Streets. The presence of the county jail exerted considerable influence over the development of the surrounding neighborhood. The jail reduced the desirability of the area, discouraging the influx of wealthy families into the neighborhood. Lower property values encouraged the growth of a largely working- and middle-class neighborhood.

Attracted by low property values and its convenient location near the downtown, black families soon moved onto Jail Hill and built houses. Peggy Williams purchased a lot for $30 in June, 1834, from Newcomb Kinney, "on the west side of the road leading over the Hill north of the City Hall." This was just north of the site of the county jail, still to be constructed. Peggy Williams was dismissed from the Congregational Church in Griswold the same year, joining the Second Congregational Church in Norwich, where her son, Thomas Horace Williams, had been married in 1832.[18]

In 1840, Peggy Williams' household consisted of four persons. She died at 58 years old in August, 1841. Her probate records indicate that she had a small dwelling house and lot on the "hill north of the town house," valued

at $250. The remainder of her estate was valued at $48.11, including a "lot of old books," assessed at $0.37. Also included were one bed and two straw beds. Bills in the estate papers included one from Rufus L. Fanning, carpenter, for $6.66 for work on the house. Later, Fanning was a member of the firm of Fanning & Willoughby, which built many homes on Jail Hill. Other debtors included Sally Law and Joseph Quy, both members of Norwich's black community.[19]

Unfortunately, the history of the Williams Family is obscure. The division of the estate into tenths indicates the possibility of ten heirs. One son, Thomas Horace Williams, sold a tenth part of the estate to Charles Johnson, a member of the Second Congregational Church, to settle debts on the estate.[20] Pelluman Williams, presumably another son, purchased Johnson's share of the estate in 1848.[21] Williams' wife, Mary Anderson Harris, sister of Sarah Harris, had been one of Prudence Crandall's students. In 1849, Pelluman Williams was nominated as vice-president of the Connecticut State Convention of Colored Men.[22] A teacher in Norwich, Pelluman and his wife moved to New Orleans after the Civil War, where both served as educators.

Another possible child of Perry Williams was Julia Williams. A student of Prudence Crandall, she was later associated with Noyes Academy in New Hampshire, which offered instruction to both black and white students. She apparently met Henry Highland Garnet there, whom she

married in 1841.[23] A famous black abolitionist minister and lecturer, Garnet was a school teacher in the 1840's, later serving as President of Avery College. He died in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1882, while serving as minister resident of the United States to Liberia. His wife had predeceased him by several years.[24]

Several Williams families lived on Jail Hill near Peggy Williams' home. These included Elisha Williams, who built a house about 1838 on Cedar Street, Thomas B. Williams on Fountain Street, and George L. Williams, a delegate to the 1849 Connecticut Convention of Colored Men. Lucius L. Williams lived next door to Elisha Williams in 1860. The relationship between these families is unclear, although their close physical proximity indicates the probability of family ties to one another.

In January, 1836, Charles F. Harris bought the lot immediately north of Peggy Williams.[25] By June 3, 1837, the Norwich Land Records indicate his residence there. In 1833, Harris had sold a lot on Broadway for the erection of an African church. A cook, he was later the proprietor of a restaurant and saloon on Water Street in downtown Norwich. His brother, William M. Harris, Junior, built a house on the lot to the north about 1845. He was listed as a cook on the Cleopatra in 1846, and as a cook on the City of Boston in 1869.[26]

To the south of Peggy Williams' house, William Spelman

built a house about 1844. A black minister and friend of the Harris family, he was also a delegate to the 1849 state convention. His son, James J. Spelman, born in Norwich in 1841, was later a journalist for both black journals and white newspapers. Following the Civil War, he became a Special Agent for the U.S. Post Office at Saint Louis. Later, he moved to Jackson, Mississipi, where he served as secretary to the school board and Mississipi correspondent for the New York Tribune.[27]

Another important black resident of Jail Hill was James L. Smith, author of a remarkable Autobiography in 1881. Born a slave in Virginia, Smith had escaped in 1838. With the assistance of abolitionists, he made his way to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he was also licensed to preach the Gospel. After his move to Norwich, he lived first on Franklin Street, moving to School Street on Jail Hill about 1844. In 1845, he purchased a house on School Street, paying off the mortgage in three years. In the late 1850's, he moved to Oak Street. Two of his daughters graduated from Norwich Free Academy and moved to Washington, D.C., where they were schoolteachers.[28]

Many other black families lived on Jail Hill itself or on adjacent streets. Mrs. Castilia Brown or Braun, a restaurateur and confectioner doing business downtown, lived on the corner of School and Fountain Streets. Uriah W.W.R.R. Pelham, Sarah Law, and George H. Bruce, lived on

Fountain Street. Jacob G. Benjamin, a son-in-law of Charles F. Harris, occupied the house on Cedar Street after Charles' death. Benjamin was a native of the Island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic, and had relocated to Montville in 1861. St. Helena was a port of call for New London whaling vessels. Like his father-in-law, Benjamin operated a restaurant downtown.

A number of native Americans lived on Jail Hill in the 19th century. Closely associated with the black community, these individuals often intermarried with local black families. Intermarriage between blacks and native Americans had begun in the colonial era, creating some confusion in census records and vital statistics. Further confusion in racial identity was caused by occasional intermarriage with whites. Native American tribal groups which intermarried with the black population of Norwich and southeastern Connecticut included the Pequots and the Mohegans. The Pequot tribe had reservations in Ledyard and North Stonington. The Mohegans clustered about their ancestral home in the Uncasville section of Montville. Drawn to Norwich by employment opportunities, they readily intermingled with blacks. The low status accorded to both groups probably hastened this process. Lester Skeesucks, a Mohegan, lived in the William Spelman house for a time, for example.

In the 19th century, Norwich provided an ambivalent atmosphere for blacks in their struggle for the abolition of

LESTER SKEESUCKS
Photograph courtesy of Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, Negative Number 24394

slavery and for educational opportunity. Anti-slavery sentiment in the city remained strong throughout the period from the Revolution to the Civil War. Organized anti-slavery efforts were certainly started by the 1830's. In 1837, both male and female anti-slavery societies had been formed. These were apparently exclusively white. Frances Manwaring Caulkins, author of both the History of Norwich and the History of New London, was secretary of the Norwich Female Anti-Slavery Society. Her male counterpart was Alpheus Kingsley. The abolition movement in Norwich awakened strong opposition, however. In 1834, a mob broke up a local anti-slavery meeting. Newspaper editorials decrying abolition appeared frequently in local newspapers. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 provoked an editorial in which the Norwich Aurora stated that "this Act of Lincoln's is the culmination of his stupidity."[29] An important factor in this reaction to abolitionism seems to have been Norwich's close business ties to the American South. The cotton textile industry was expanding tremendously during this period, increasing the economic interdependence between the Northern industrial cities and Southern plantations.

The southern terminus of the Norwich & Worcester Railroad since its completion in 1839, Norwich was an important way station for the Underground Railroad in eastern Connecticut. Escaped slaves would arrive in Norwich by steam-

boat from New York or by less direct overland routes. Receiving tickets from local abolitionists, they would be transported quickly to Worcester, Massachusetts, from whence they could continue their journey to Canada and safety. If necessary, more circuitous routes were also available through Eastern Connecticut. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the underground network in Norwich. Presumably there were at least one or more "stations," where fugitives were kept prior to departure by train. The identity of the local underground railroad "conductors" also remains unknown. David Ruggles, a black who played a key role in the New York Underground Railroad, was a native of Norwichtown. James Lindsley Smith was one of the 600 slaves Ruggles helped to escape. It is likely that Ruggles had friends in Norwich and assisted fugitives forwarded to them. At this time, however, such a link remains problematical.[30]

In the post Civil War era, a number of blacks with ties to the Jail Hill area went south to assist in educating the newly freed slaves. These included the two daughters of James L. Smith, Pelluman Williams and his wife, the former Mary Harris, and James J. Spelman. Remarkably, a number of white residents of Norwich also became identified with the education of blacks in the post-war era. Two of these were Edmund Ware, who worked with the Freedman's Bureau and helped to found Atlanta University; and August Wattles, who aided blacks in the Ohio Valley and persuaded several Ohio colleges

to accept black students. John Fox Slater, a wealthy Norwich industrialist living in the northern portion of the survey area, was influenced by local Congregational clergyman Leonard W. Bacon to establish a million dollar trust fund in 1882 for the education of blacks. Income from the trust was distributed to various Southern colleges serving black students. In its first ten years, the Slater Fund distributed more than $400,000 to thirty-six colleges.[31]

The research for the Jail Hill Survey has indicated the existence of an important black community on Jail Hill and the nearby streets which persisted into at least the early 20th century. The black community in Norwich was active in the abolition movement and in efforts to secure better educational opportunities for blacks. Significantly, this community was linked to national and state level movements for the abolition of slavery and improved education. Unfortunately, it has been beyond the scope of this survey to probe any deeper into this important and fascinating subject. Several topics for further research are immediately evident and should merit the attention of serious scholarship. First, participation in the abolition movement by Norwich blacks needs to be much more intensively researched and documented. The relationship between the local black community and William Lloyd Garrison needs to be defined more sharply. Also, the participation in various assemblies and conventions of "colored" men needs to be explicated

further. Second, the remarkable phenomenon of black participation in the education of the freed men in the post Civil War era demands scrutiny, as does black involvement in the war itself. Third, the relationship between black and white abolitionists and educators is a topic of vital interest. Given the close proximity of individuals like John Fox Slater to the black community of Norwich, and mutual involvement by members of both groups in the Congregational Church, it is plausible to postulate a link between the two. Further research may well throw light upon this link and possible cooperation between the two groups. Fourth, more research should be done on the interrelationship between blacks and native Americans in Norwich and Southeastern Connecticut. Evidence suggests that all of the above topics may yield important information of value in understanding the dynamics of both black and white communities in Norwich in the 19th century.

Footnotes

[1]Plummer. Dale S. and John M. Downtown Norwich Historical and Architectural Survey, Norwich Heritage Trust, June, 1981, Inventory number 35. Original on file at Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut.

[2]Steiner, Bernard C. History of Slavery in Connecticut. Johns Hopkins University Sutdies in Historical and Political Science, Eleventh series, IX-X, September-October, 1893, Reprinted by the Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York and London, 1973, pages 78-80.

[3]Caulkins, Frances Manwaring, History of Norwich, Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1866, reprinted in 1976 by the Pequot Press, Chester, Connecticut, for the Society of the Founders of Norwich, page 329.

[4]Steiner, op.cit., pages 30-32.

[5]Strother, Horatio T., The Underground Railroad in Connecticut, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962, page 216.

[6]Caulkins, op.cit., pages 556-557.

[7]Obituary of Sarah (Harris) Fayerweather. December 6, 1878, in files at Prudence Crandall House, Canterbury, Connecticut.

[8]Norwich Vital Records.

[9]Norwich Land Records, Volume 37, page 241.

[10]Obituary, Sarah Harris Fayerweather, December 6, 1878.

[11]Coit, George D., A Historical Sketch of the Second Congregational Sunday School of Norwich, Connecticut, December 16, 1894, page 6.

[12]Brown, Barbara W. and Rose, James W., Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650-1900, page 295.

[13]Thomas, John L., The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison, Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1963, page 131.

[14]Welch, Marvis Olive, Prudence Crandall: A Biography, page 22.

[15]Black Student File, Prudence Crandall House, Canterbury, Connecticut.

[16]May, Samuel J., Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict, Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869, pages 66-70.

[17]Brown and Rose, op.cit., pages 172-174, Sarah Harris File, Prudence Crandall House, Canterbury, Connecgicut.

[18]Brown and Rose, Ibid, page 446.

[19]Peggy Williams Probate Records, 1842, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut.

[20]Morrow, Reverend Cornelius W., Historical Address, Second Congregational Church, Norwich, Connecticut, 1795-1895, page 34.

[21]Norwich Land Records, Volume 55, page 122.

[22]Black Student File, Prudence Crandall House, Canterbury, Connecticut.

[23]The National Cyclopedia of Biography, "Henry Highland Garnet," page 414.

[24]New York Times Obituary Index, "Henry Highland Garnet."

[25]Norwich Land Records, Volume 45, page 250.

[26]Norwich City Directory, 1846, 1869.

[27]Smith, James L. Autobiography of James L. Smith, Norwich: Press of the Bulletin, 1881, reprinted by the Society of the Founders of Norwich, 1976, Introduction by James E. Rogers, pages vii-viii.

[28]Ibid, pages 56-58, 68-70.

[29]Strother, op.cit., page 187.

[30]Smith, op.cit., p.v, also, May, op.cit., pp.285-286.

[31]Smith, op.cit., p.viii.

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