

**Community Preservation Act Committee- Proposal Request Form for FY 2018**

**Project Title:**  Jones Library Historic Structures Report

**CPA funding category:** Check all that apply

<input type="checkbox"/>	Community Housing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open Space
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Historic Preservation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recreation

**Amount of CPA Funds Requested:** \$  35,000

**Submitting Entity:**  Amherst Historical Commission

**Contact Person:**  Jonathan Tucker, Senior Planner

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**Please complete this form in its entirety and include the following in your proposal.**

**Overview of Proposal:** Please describe your project and your feasibility analysis.

According to the U.S. National Park Service, which oversees the National Register of Historic Places:

*A historic structure report provides documentary, graphic, and physical information about a property's history and existing condition.*

It is, as one Historical Commission member said, "the homework you're supposed to do."

Obtaining a Historic Structures Report for the Jones Library will serve several important purposes:

- It will provide a fundamental and comprehensive assessment of the library building and its history that is currently lacking.
- It will help to inform and guide final designs of the Jones Library expansion plans, if those plans proceed, by providing an objective framework of professionally-developed information about the building's historical fabric.
- It will document the extent and nature of changes that the library building has undergone since its opening in 1928, as the building has responded to evolving community needs.

**Describe how your request meets the CPA criteria:**

1. Description of funding needed, including:
  - a. Documentation of cost estimates, budget

The estimated cost of the project is \$35,000, a figure obtained from historic preservation professional Myron Stachiw, who prepared Historic Structure Reports for the Amherst History Museum (Strong House) and the Emily Dickinson Museum.

The research required for the Jones Library will be of a different nature, more centered on the historic architectural plans, documents related to the original construction, and research in any surviving library and town records about alterations over the years. . . . I would imagine a cost in the range of \$35,000 to \$50,000 depending on the extent of the scope would be required, also taking into consideration the deliverables you will require, planning and public meetings, etc.

There is a possibility of further lowering the cost if the consultant involved worked with and supervised a UMass graduate architecture class. That option is being explored.

b. Other sources of funding, e.g., grants, self-funding, fund-raising

No other funds have been sought for this project. The possibility of conducting such a report only arose in October 2016, and few sources of funding for local historic preservation studies exist other than CPA funds.

c. Timeline on how CPA funds would be spent, including over multiple years

If the requested funds are appropriated, the project would be let and a consultant selected by July 1, 2017, a time close to expected notice of the Library's grant award. Whether the library receives its grant or not, the study would be conducted and the Historic Structures Report completed to inform future changes in the building. The study which develops the report is estimated to take two (2) months—a compressed timeframe made necessary by the schedule for the library's design process.

2. Urgency of the Project, if any.

The Historical Structure Report is needed to inform final design of the Jones Library expansion, the process for which may begin as early as summer 2017.

3. Estimated timeline from receipt of funds to Project completion.

The project would be scheduled to begin as soon as funds are available and be conducted and complete in time to inform the Jones Library expansion design process—a period of no more than two (2) months.

4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources.

The Historic Structures Report would provide the information needed to determine which historic resources constituting aspects of the library's original; historic fabric should be preserved.

5. Population(s) to be served by the Project.

All of those served by the Jones Library—Amherst residents and visitors alike.

6. How will the CPA investment in your property, facility or project be maintained over time?

A new comprehensive Historic Preservation Restriction will be developed that subsumes previous restrictions for the building and Universal Commercial Code (UCC) designations for library artifacts preserved using CPA funds. It is proposed to cover the exterior of the majority of the original 1928 building and selected interior features, as well as artifacts.

7. Which relevant Town committees and/or commissions are you working with?

This proposal is an initiative of the Amherst Historical Commission, which will work with the Jones Library Trustees, Town and library staff, consultants, and others as necessary to complete this project.

8. Other information regarding the Project deemed necessary for CPAC

See attached excerpts from the Historic Structures Report for the Strong House. The complete report totals 173 pages, with 191 pages of appendices.

# Strong House Historic Structure and Landscape Report

June, 2002

Amherst Historical Society

67 Amity Street

Amherst, MA 01002

Consultant: Myron O. Stachiw

## **Chapter 1**

### **I.1 Introduction and Methodology**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In the Spring of 2001 the Amherst Historical Society contracted with historical consultant Myron O. Stachiw to conduct a Historic Structure and Landscape Report and Conditions Assessment of the Strong House, located at 67 Amity Street, Amherst, Massachusetts. The building and about one acre of land have been owned by the Amherst Historical Society since 1916 and is now operated by the Society as its headquarters and as the Museum of Amherst History. Stachiw assembled a team that included social and architectural historian Claire W. Dempsey; architectural preservation specialist Thomas Paske; landscape historian Nan Wolverton; and historical archaeologist J. Edward Hood.

The project received partial funding from the Massachusetts Historical Commission through its Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund. It is part of the continuing efforts of the Amherst Historical Society (AHS) to preserve and conserve the Strong House and to establish a reliable level of knowledge about the history of the building and site. However, prior to a larger effort at reinterpretation of the house and site and a major campaign of interior conservation and restoration, the AHS wanted to learn as much as possible about the often confused history of the house and site. For the past century, the house has been mistakenly identified in numerous published and unpublished sources as having been built by Nehemiah Strong in 1744. Over the years several scholars have conducted research on various components of the history of the family, building, and site, and have revealed clues that suggested that the date of construction of 1744 for the house and Nehemiah Strong as its builder may not be correct. Some scholars postulated that the house may have originally had a saltbox form, but systematic and sustained investigation was never undertaken to determine the truth of those assertions.

This project was undertaken to address those uncertainties and questions about the history of the building and site. The objectives of the project as defined by the Amherst Historical Society included:

- research and documentation of the history of the building and site through physical and archival resources;
- an assessment of the interior and exterior architectural fabric of the building;
- research and evaluation of the landscape to record past and current uses of the site;
- identification of existing plant material on the grounds;
- preparation of recommendations for period interpretation of the landscape;
- identification of locations that may contain archaeologically-sensitive deposits;
- development of prioritized treatment recommendations for repairs to the building and grounds;
- recommendations for a phased schedule of repairs to the building;
- development of a cyclical maintenance plan for the building.

The report that follows presents the findings of the assembled research team in two volumes. Volume I contains a discussion of the methodology (Chapter 1.2); an executive summary of findings (Chapter 2); a narrative history of the house and site as defined by phases of construction and alteration, accompanied by a discussion of the physical evidence that supported the definition of the phases (Chapter 3, by Myron Q. Stachiw and Thomas Paske); a narrative history of the site and its occupants based on research involving the chain of title in a variety of documentary sources (Chapter 4, by Claire W. Dempsey); a history of the landscape and related features that once surrounded the house, as well as recommendations for future treatments of the landscape (Chapter 5, by Nan Wolverton); and an assessment of the archaeological sensitivity of the site (Chapter 6, by J. Edward Hood). Four appendices will present the chain of title for the property since the early eighteenth century (Appendix I); a chronology of alterations to the property as documented in the records of the Amherst Historical Society (Appendix II); a room-by-room

evaluation of the surviving historic fabric in the house (Appendix III); and phased elevations and plans of the Strong House (Appendix IV).

Volume II presents a report of the thorough conditions assessment of the house conducted by Thomas Paske. The volume also includes recommendations for both short- and long-term maintenance needs.

## **1.2 Methodology**

The assembled project personnel bring an assortment of skills and disciplines to the task of researching, assessing, and interpreting the documentary and physical history and conditions of the Strong House and landscape. These include extensive and overlapping training and experience in social history; architectural history; historical archaeology; landscape history; architectural preservation, conservation, and restoration; and interpretive planning in both large and small historical museums.

A fundamental premise underlies the methodological and analytical approach taken by the project team to the research of historic buildings and landscapes: the research must involve and carefully integrate as wide a range of historical resources as possible. These must include careful readings and evaluations, cross-checks and comparisons, of all possible documentary, visual, and physical evidence. Where possible, physical evidence gathered from the building, landscape, and sub-surface investigations, is given equal or greater weight than documentary or visual evidence, and frequently results in a return and re-evaluation of written or visual evidence. Rarely is the documentary, visual, or physical record intact enough or complete enough to provide all of the required information. However, a careful comparative and integrative evaluation of these often contradictory and incomplete sources can provide a much richer understanding of the history of a site or building than reliance on any one or two sources alone.

An important principle to the physical investigation as undertaken by the project team is an approach that is best described as “building archaeology.” By adapting methods and concepts from the discipline of archaeology, traditionally thought of as excavation in the ground, building archaeology applies the principles of superposition and chronology that form the basis of establishing and understanding sequence in time and space to the three-dimensional structure of a building – to the ceilings, walls, floors, foundations, and other components of the building. The sequential and chronological attributions of various building parts and phases are based on many different factors. Although style is clearly one of those factors, it is far from the first or leading element that contributes to the understanding of a building or phase of its history. Such factors as building form; framing; tool marks; molding profiles; the type of fasteners used (wrought or machine-made nails, screws, etc.); or the types of surface treatment and their sequence (whitewash, stain, paint, wallpaper, etc.), often provide far more important information about chronology than stylistic attribution. The amount of information that can be discovered in a building from systematic and meticulous investigation, especially in a building that has not undergone “restoration” in the modern sense, is truly astounding. When viewed in an integrated manner which seeks to link often disparate bits of information, these physical clues build a body of evidence that must then be evaluated in light of any existing or relevant documentary and visual evidence.

Documentary research is conducted not just to provide a sequential list of owners of a property, but to provide the context for understanding the sequence and chronology of alterations discovered during the physical research. Changes in room configuration, opening and closing of doorways, relocation of staircases, changes in paint color or wallpaper, all take on extra meaning and significance when one understands such factors as the number, ages, and relationships of the occupants of a building at a particular point in time. Understanding how the size of a property or its uses or landscape treatment changed can help to understand why changes in the



configuration of a house were made. The conclusions resulting from a contextually-rich interpretation are always stronger and historically more valuable than those that are based on a single body of data presented without benefit of integration with other sources.

To achieve this goal of integrated analysis and interpretation, several avenues of research were pursued during this project. Documentary research and analysis was undertaken primarily by Claire W. Dempsey, but was also carried out by Nan Wolverton and J. Edward Hood. Research began with a compilation and analysis of previous research efforts and records of the Amherst Historical Society. Additional research was done in the Hampton and Hampshire County Land Evidence and Probate Court records, as original documents were consulted and copies of these documents collected. Special collections of maps, census records, tax records, photographs, and manuscript files were examined at such places as The Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts; and in local, state, and federal record repositories.

Physical investigation of the house entailed a thorough examination as part of the conditions assessment and preparation of measured drawings. The process of examining a building to assess its conditions, and especially of taking measurements for the purpose of creating detailed drawings, requires the investigator to look very closely and to understand spatial relationships. This process leads directly to many questions that must be explored and explained before any understanding of the building can be achieved. Thomas Paske and Myron Stachiw spent many days exploring, measuring, photographing, and drawing the building before any removal of building fabric occurred. Once questions had been formulated, strategies for finding the answers were devised, and selective removal of trim, floorboards, siding, wall coverings, and some plaster and sheetrock was undertaken. The removal of fabric was approached very conservatively, as it was not possible to indiscriminately cut holes through plaster walls and ceilings or remove tongue and groove wall sheathing and flooring without causing some damage. Exploration sites were chosen very

carefully to provide maximum information with minimum damage and intrusion.

Although the investigation and analysis of paint layers is often a critical component of building archaeology, the budgetary limitations of this project did not allow a formal paint study to be undertaken in conjunction with the other physical investigations. Nevertheless, Stachiw and Paske did conduct very limited field investigations of paint layers using hand-held field microscopes when it was essential to their research questions. These explorations merely confirmed or denied presence of particular paint layers among several building components. The conclusions reached, however, are not as reliable as those that would be achieved with proper sampling and laboratory analysis of paint layers.

The investigation of the landscape history of the site conducted by Nan Wolverton was also based on documentary, visual, and physical evidence. Deeds, probate records, maps, and photographs all provided valuable information on past uses of the property and landscape features, including historic plantings on the site. Physical investigation of the property involved identification and creation of an inventory of existing plant material and approximation of age and time of planting, as well as an assessment of physical features on the ground.

The archaeological assessment of the site by J. Edward Hood employed similar sources and strategies. Documentary and visual sources provided the basis for an inventory of existing and potential archaeological resources, while physical examination and evaluation of the site allowed an inventory of visible archaeological resources and formed the basis for a discussion of the potential for survival of those resources identified in the documentary and visual sources. Evaluation of previous archaeological work at the site and comparison with other sites in the area of similar size, age, and social and economic context was also carried out.

## **Chapter 2. Executive summary**

A Historic Structure and Landscape Report and Conditions Assessment of the Strong House, 67 Amity Road, Amherst, Massachusetts, was conducted during the Fall, Winter, and Spring months of 2001 and 2002. The assembled project team included leading practitioners in the fields of architectural history, social history, building archaeology, architectural conservation and restoration, landscape history, and historical archaeology. The team consisted of Claire W. Dempsey, J. Edward Hood, Thomas Paske, Myron O. Stachiw, and Nan Wolverton.

The project met all of the goals proposed in the original request for proposals, and in the process overturned some long-held beliefs about the house and property, while sharpening and confirming others. The investigation was carried out on five fronts: documentary research to establish an accurate chain of title and to identify and learn about the various owners and occupants; an evaluation of the physical fabric of the building and generation of a conditions assessment and short- and long-term maintenance plans; an evaluation of the physical fabric of the building and generation of a phased architectural history of its construction and alteration over the past two and one-half centuries; an evaluation of the historic landscape and preparation of recommendations for its preservation and restoration; and an evaluation of the archaeological sensitivity and potential of the property.

Physical and documentary research have determined that the Strong House was probably erected sometime after the land was acquired by William Boltwood in 1754 from his father, and transferred with a house on it by Nehemiah Strong to his son, Simeon in 1761. Despite extensive research, a deed for Nehemiah's acquisition of the property could not be found, though it appears likely that the house was built for Nehemiah. The parcel was initially a small one of only a few acres, and contained a type of house known as a saltbox. Deed research has traced the tangled web of purchases of several small lots

of land by Simeon Strong to create a houselot of a little more than five acres by the time of his death in 1805. Simeon was responsible for a major interior modernization of the house in the 1760s or 1770s, and a later enlargement and remodeling in the 1790s that brought the house to its present two-storey gambrel-roofed form and exterior appearance. Landscape research documented the presence of several barns on the property and a long-lived garden plot located to the east-northeast of the house.

Strong descendants retained ownership of the house and lot until 1845, when it entered a period of nearly a decade when it was owned by absentee landlords and occupied by a series of tenants. During this period North Prospect Street was laid out, necessitating the removal of the west office wing and its relocation to the rear of the house to become the new west ell and most likely a kitchen. By the mid-nineteenth century several sales of land had reduced the houselot to less than two acres, where it remained throughout the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries. Documentary research finally untangled the location of the house erected on the front lawn by John Emerson Strong in 1824 as having been on the west side of what is now North Prospect Street.

From 1853 to 1916 the house remained in the possession of Sarah Emerson and her daughters, who left the house to the Amherst Historical Society after their death. After a brief period of taking in boarders during the mid-nineteenth century which resulted in the finishing of additional rooms in the garret, the main house underwent few substantive changes. The ells experienced some alteration, such as the raising of the west ell to two storeys and extending the east ell, and the addition of a small projecting entry bay on the west side, but overall, this was a period of stability and probably in a steady but slow deterioration of the building. Since 1916 the house was subject to varying degrees of care and attention from the Society, with considerable repair to sills and foundations in the last two decades.

The conditions assessment has found the building in generally good condition. However, a number of short- and long-term maintenance objectives have been outlined.

The landscape history survey has found that other than the large sycamore tree and a few other plants, little of the eighteenth or nineteenth century or landscape survives. Recommendations are offered for specific plant material that could be planted and for the reestablishment of an early nineteenth century landscape by recreating a kitchen garden and planting several fruit trees as well as a second sycamore.

The site was found to contain fairly high archaeological sensitivity. Portions of the east end of the site have been disturbed by the Jones Library construction, but much of the rest of the site has undergone little disturbance. The potential for intact sheet refuse deposits, garden and fence features, and even outbuildings is high and care should be taken in the future whenever subsurface disturbance is called for.