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Waite Potter House: Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Application for Archeology Dig

Anne W. Baker

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TOWN OF WESTPORT COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PROGRAM FOR FY09

Project Submission Sheet

Community Preservation Committee

Submitter: Anne W. Baker

Submission Date 12/18/08

Submitter's address and phone number.

29 Drift Rd.

Westport. 02790

508 636 3272

Town committee (if applicable)

Westport Historical Commission

Purpose: (please select all that apply)

Open Space

Affordable Housing

Historic Preservation

Recreation

Project Name: Waite-Potter Site.

Archeology dig

Description:

The nationally significant Waite/Potter site holds the essences of Westport History, and is the oldest surviving 17th century stone-end chimney in all of Bristol County.

Not only is the site distinguished as Westport's earliest structure, but holds an honorable position on Westport's town seal.

Westport's Architectural History.

The Waite/Potter house, built circa 1677, began as a one room, one and one half story structure with an exposed gable-end chimney made of stone. The house, known as a Rhode Island Stone ender, was blown over in the 1954 Hurricane. Fortunately the massive stone end chimney survived.

In 2007 the CPC and the Town, recognizing the significance of this site, gave \$16,118 to stabilizing the 1677 Waite/Potter stone-end chimney, and Robert Kirby's brick chimney built in 1770 when he added an addition at the west end of the original house.

Attachment A:

Before and after photographs of the chimney stabilization.

While working on the Waite/Potter chimney it quickly became apparent that the site was riddled with artifacts— Glass, china, earthenware, iron, tin, silver, pewter,.etc., artifacts that could reveal a wealth of information No documentation about Westport's past is complete without an analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.

To date we have the 1903 report written by Norman Isham, (a recognized architectural historian) about his findings after examining the structure. We have HABS (Historic American Buildings Survey) 1933 measured drawings of Thomas

Waite's 1677 original house and Robert Kirby's 1770 addition. Deeds have told us about the land. Genealogy has told us about ancestry, a cemetery in the woods has told us how the families were buried, but only an archaeological excavation can tell us how the families lived, what they owned, what they ate, what they did, how they set their tables, and their relationship with the Indians. 331 years of information that can only be found through archaeology.

Attachment B:

Recently photographed samples of Waite/Potter artifacts that range in date from the late 17th century to the early 20 century.

Realizing the importance of how the underground artifacts could uncover the human history of Westport's inhabitants from the 1600s to the present, I felt a responsibility to investigate the possibility of having a professional archaeologist appraise the site. I talked to various people and was told that Kate Johnson and Kate Descoteaux , archaeologists who are presently working at Little Compton's Wilbor House, would be an excellent chose. When Johnson and Descoteaux took a look at the Waite/Potter site they were overwhelmed, not only because of the historical potentials that the many artifacts could reveal, but also because some of Waite/Potter's salvaged material from the '54 hurricane was now in the Wilbor House museum and available for study. Like artifacts found in the ground this salvaged material could also tell about the fabrication of the Waite/Potter House; the types of wood and tools used, and interior architectural details inherited from English ancestors.

Attachment C.

Kate Johnson's & Kate Descoteaux's report and budget

Because the Waite/Potter house is a private site I talked with the owner Muriel Bibeau, a Potter descendant, and would be owner of all artifacts. Mrs. Bibeau is very willing to give the artifacts to the Westport Historical Society on permanent loan with an understanding that the Westport Library can borrow said items from time to time.

How does this project help preserve Westport's Character?

To give the Town of Westport a first hand look at what would be the completed Waite/Potter story The Westport Historical Society will have an exhibition of the artifacts with explanation of what the artifacts revealed thus telling us what we can no longer ask Mr. Waite, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Potter or their ancestors. The exhibition will also include all relevant information such as measured drawings, wills, deeds, maps, photographs, and 3 dimensional samples of how the house was built.

Waite, Kirby and Potter ARE the roots of Westport's character

