

METHOD

This original town greens survey, completed in 1993, was conducted by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, a statewide, nonprofit, historic preservation organization chartered by a Special Act of the State Legislature in 1975 and the Connecticut Historical Commission. The project was managed by Mary Williams Neustadter (Phase One) and W. Phillips Barlow (Phase Two) with the help of the staff at the Connecticut Trust, consultants and qualified volunteers.

Greens Surveyed

Because “town green” is such a loosely defined term, the Trust used a broad rather than narrow definition in order to ensure that the survey was as inclusive as possible. As a result, this survey includes both the traditional greens that evolved from a site set aside for the meetinghouse, pasture or parade grounds when the community was established, and nineteenth and twentieth century open spaces that were set aside or evolved into greens. In order to be considered for the survey, a “green” had to meet one or more of the following characteristics:

1. **Origin:** It evolved from traditional sources. (Either it was set aside as a site for the meetinghouse and/or the parade ground and burying ground; or it was initially designated as common land to be used as pasture or serve public needs.)
2. **Present Use:** It is used as a public gathering place to acknowledge and celebrate local events and holidays; it serves a commemorative function as the site for memorial markers and public gatherings honoring those who served the community and the country; it is a site for traditional events such as town fairs.
3. **Context:** It is the focal point for civic, religious and/or cultural activities around which the buildings serving those functions are oriented; or it is the focal point of an historic residential neighborhood.
4. **Public Perception:** It is perceived locally as “the town green.”

In order to identify open spaces around the state that met the above criteria, first the Connecticut Historical Commission was queried. Next the Connecticut Trust called each town and talked to town historians, librarians and clerks to develop a comprehensive list. The initial list contained approximately 200 greens, but because of time and money constraints, it was narrowed to 172 sites based on the information supplied in the phone interviews. We are interested in considering for inclusion in our web site data base a town green that local historians may deem omitted.

This was a reasonable approach but not a foolproof method to identify town greens. A list of those potential greens that were not included in the survey is included in this document. Some of them deserve inclusion in this survey, perhaps even listing on the National Register if not already listed.

The material gathered in the field on specially designed forms (created with the help of the Preservation Committee of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Landscape Architects) was transferred to the standard Historic Resource Inventory Form supplied by the Connecticut Historical Commission. These forms were designed to survey historic structures rather than landscapes. As a result, more text accompanies the surveys than normal and some of the questions are not filled in because they did apply to landscapes. For the town greens web site the Connecticut Trust amended the form to be more specific to landscapes.

Criteria

The historical and resource survey of town greens in Connecticut was conducted in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Identification and Evaluation (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1983). The criteria used for the evaluation of properties were based on those of the National Register of Historic Places, which is administered by the National Park Service under the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior. Priorities listed on the National Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture, and which contribute to the understanding of the states and the nation. The National Register's criteria for evaluation state:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess the integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and:

- a. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of history, or;
- b. that are significant in our past, or;
- c. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a distinctive and distinguishable entity whose component may lack individual distinction; or

- d. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history.

The use of this criteria has ensured that all properties recommended for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places meet consistent standards. Many of the greens included in the survey are already included within National Register Historic Districts, within local historic districts, or both. However, forms were completed on each green whether or not they were designated. The impetus for this survey by the Connecticut Trust was a concern that many of these resources are threatened despite designation, and in order to better understand the resource and the nature of the threats, it was necessary to survey each green.

Both the open space (the “green”) and the buildings around it were considered in the evaluation process. The assumption was that the buildings around it are functionally, historically and aesthetically integral to the green and should be part of the survey process. However, the focus of the survey was the green itself, more specifically: (1) how and when it was established, and (2) how it changed over time, both in appearance and use. The streetscape was used as a gauge to determine the use of the green over time and the overall integrity of the site.

Research

Research on the greens included primary and secondary sources. Seldom were deeds referenced in the tax assessor’s records because of their ancient origins and the nature of the ownership. As a result, researchers relied heavily on the late-nineteenth century county histories based on research of town (church) records to ascertain the origin of the early greens. Other important sources included town and church histories; National Register Nomination Forms and Historic District Study Reports; historical society archives; special collections in local libraries; old maps and views; and personal interviews. In addition, contemporary sources discussing the green as an historic landscape were consulted in order to obtain an overall understanding of the resource type and its context.

Inventory Forms

Format: For every historic site surveyed, a standard Connecticut Historic Resource Inventory Form (now amended for the town greens web site) was completed according to the guidelines of the Connecticut Historical Commission. Each site was assigned a number which corresponds to a number on the inventory form. Sites were numbered alphabetically according to the name of the town. When more than one green existed within a town, they were alphabetized according to the name of the green. Each form is accompanied by a map prepared by Ariane Nyffefer, black white photographs and selected slides. Names of the current (1992-93) property owners were obtained from the town

assessor's office. The size of the green was included when it was available, again from the town assessor's office.

Maps: Maps are included to provide an overall image of the green as it presently exists and if possible, how it relates to its streetscape. In most cases, the base map was copied from the assessor's map and the landscaping was added during the field survey. While every attempt was made to be as accurate as possible, these are only sketch maps and should be used as such. They do not indicate the size of the trees and other plantings, nor in most cases is the species included.

Date of Construction: The date of origin of early traditional town greens is often murky at best. This is true for a number of reasons that have to do with early record keeping and the evolutionary nature of the resource. Greens as we know them today are generally nineteenth-century creations. The date appearing under "date of construction" on the form refers to the earliest mention of the site, which often is the mention of the first meetinghouse built on it. Thus, the date is a reference point only, and should be used in context with the text provided with each individual survey and an overall understanding of the evolution of town greens.

Conditions: Although the overall condition of both the green and streetscape were considered when assessing significance of the resource, just the condition -- the overall physical appearance -- of the green was considered when completing the "condition" portion of the form (#12). Generally speaking, the condition was considered "good" if the grass was watered and mowed, there were few or no bare patches, the vegetation appeared relatively healthy, and flower and shrub beds (if they existed) were relatively maintained. No judgments were made with respect to the aesthetics of the landscaping scheme nor the appropriateness of the species.

Ownership: Occasionally the ownership of a green was in question because of its ancient origins and/or because of its public nature. In some instances, the assessor did not have a card on a green. If that was the case, we generally took the word of the assessor. However, even when cards did exist, questions sometimes arose over whether the town or the church owned the green. This has been an issue in recent history with two greens in Connecticut. In both instances, the problem erupted because of the desire to build something on the green and the need to obtain permission. Extensive deed researches were done to determine ownership. This will probably happen in the future with other greens.

Integrity: The integrity of the green was a perplexing issue, particularly in 1992-93 when following a form designed for buildings. Greens are on their original site; they cannot be moved as buildings can. And, by their very nature, most greens have evolved tremendously since they were established, this

includes both the green and the streetscape. Therefore, the following variables were created to assess their integrity which include:

1. Does the streetscape relate to the green functionally, historically and aesthetically?
2. At what point in its evolutionary process was the development of the green arrested and to what extent are its significant features present in their historic form?

Significance: When determining the significance of a green, the streetscape was considered as a component, although the focus was on the green. While events and important personages associated with greens were considered in the evaluation process, more attention was paid to the distinctive characteristics of the resource. While a few of the greens included in the survey do not meet the fifty-year-old criteria of the National Register, the Trust thought it important to include recently created greens in order to have an overall understanding of the resource being evaluated. The Trust felt this was particularly important given the small body of knowledge that exists on this resource.

Historical and Cultural Overview

In addition to the 172 completed resource forms, this web site makes available, through the Connecticut Trust, a narrative history of Connecticut's town greens completed for the Trust in 2000. You may request a copy of this by contacting the Connecticut Trust via the TownGreens.com web site.