

# The Whitehill Report

**The Whitehill Report, from 1968, approximately 22 years before Hillside Place was opened as condominiums, addresses the issue of historic preservation.**

This Report was written by a study committee chaired by Walter Muir Whitehill, Director and Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, 1946 to 1973.

The points in the Report pertinent to Hillside Place are:

- (1) Rapid change in U.S. communities has caused the loss of ties to the past;
- (2) Fine examples of architecture provide “beauty and dignity. . . distinction and variety” in the community;
- (3) Although there is no more need for preservation for the purposes of instruction and exhibition, fine building need to be preserved and used, with the original use if possible, or a use which “will do the least harm to salient features”;
- (4) With changes in building techniques and materials, the knowledge and skills needed to maintain older “historic” buildings had, from around 1030, begun to be lost and must be regained; and
- (5) “it is only by continued practical use of some kind that most buildings can or should be preserved.”

Comments:

This building, on Walnut Hill, 1882, was the first designed and built for the State Normal School. When, in the early 1920s, the need outgrew the space, the school was relocated across town and New Britain used the Hillside Place property first for the Administration and Board of Education. Although needed maintenance was included in the city contract, the Board of Education moved out after bricks began to fall from the bell tower in the 1980s. The building was sold for the purpose of becoming a condominium. This major renovation took place from 1989 to 1991.

These events indicate that the City of New Britain made three critical decisions. First, the decision was made not to demolish this building at the time that the Normal School relocated to a campus across town. Second, the decision was made to sell the property to a private company. Third, the decision was made to sell the property to a private company with the full knowledge that renovations would change it from a school to individually owned condominium units.

Fortunately, many salient features remain.

## **The Whitehill Report on Professional and Public Education for Historic Preservation**

*The Whitehill Report on Professional and Public Education for Historic Preservation was submitted 15 April 1968 to the Trustees of the National Trust for Historic Preservation by the Committee on Professional and Public Education for Historic Preservation, Walter Muir Whitehill, Chairman.*

### *I. Professional Education for Historic Preservation and Restoration*

*In the past twenty years the speed of change in the appearance of the United States, both in city and countryside, in buildings and in landscape, has been vastly accelerated. Continued prosperity combined with rapid growth of population bring about more changes in a year than were previously normal in a decade. A sudden awareness of this new rate of change has aroused a vastly enhanced interest in historic preservation, for many Americans have now become aware that, unless they do something, and do it*

*fast, they will soon have lost all ties with their past and will have reached George Orwell's 1984 a number of years ahead of schedule.*

*A century ago historic preservation was chiefly the concern of historians and antiquarians, who sought to save, for exhibition and edification, buildings and sites associated with the lives of great men or with great events. In the present century men became aware that fine examples of architecture, regardless of their age or events associated with them, added dignity and beauty to the scenes in which they stood, and shouldn't thoughtlessly be demolished in the quest for "progress" (a word frequently used to justify needless change). One cannot pickle or crystallize the past; indeed no sensible person would wish to live surrounded by obsolete artifacts simply because they were old. But many fine survivals of the past can lend distinction and variety to their surroundings, and so preservation turned from its earlier concept of exhibition and edification to the idea of keeping such buildings in use--their original use, if possible, and if not, a new one that will do the least harm to their salient features. Thus historians and antiquarians ceased to be the only advocates of historic preservation. In this new phase, everyone concerned with maintaining the character and integrity of their surroundings has a part.*

*Forty years ago most architects had been trained in the grammar of historic styles and in draughtsmanship, while many older carpenters and masons were still familiar with the traditional techniques of their crafts. Through changes in the curricula of architectural schools beginning in the 1930's, only an occasional architect of the present day has the interest in and knowledge of the past that were once a commonplace of the profession. With rapidly changing techniques in the building trades, inspired by new materials and pre-fabrication, the ability to repair (or where necessary reproduce) details in old buildings has become extremely uncommon. The larger public and private organizations engaged in historic preservation--of which the National Park Service and Colonial Williamsburg are conspicuous examples--have been forced to train and develop their own staffs of archaeologists, research historians, architects, and craftsmen. As these specialists are normally fully occupied with the work of their own organizations, the number of professional restorationists available for general work is very small indeed. The pressing need to increase their number is the main problem to which this committee has addressed itself.*

*Our concern with professional education in historic preservation is rigidly limited to architecture and the building crafts, for it is only by continued practical use of some kind that most buildings can or should be preserved. Only a limited number of highly exceptional buildings are important enough to be preserved solely for exhibition. We already have on exhibition more museums and (supposedly) "historic houses" than we need, or can afford to keep up, or are good for us as a nation. Therefore we are not, as a committee, concerned with matters of museum administration or interpretation, or anything else to do with exhibition, but solely with the problem of the people who are so urgently needed to carry out the physical aspects of preservation and restoration.*