HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

The George Greenman House
Greenmanville Avenue
Mystic, Connecticut

An Historical and Architectural Analysis

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June 9, 1995
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The activity that is subject to this report has been financed in part by the Connecticut Historical Commission with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Commission or the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Commission or the Department of the Interior.
INTRODUCTION

From the time Mystic Seaport Museum acquired the George Greenman House in 1970, there has been an interest in restoring the house as that of the owner of the George Greenman and Co. Shipyard, and opening it to museum visitors. Since then, a number of studies have been undertaken by Mystic Seaport staff, history students, and researchers that have focused mainly on the Greenman family and their influences on the economic and social history of Mystic and the community that surrounded the shipyard.

This purpose of this study has been to document the history of the house in which the Greenman family lived for use as a planning tool in its eventual restoration. The study is made up of three main components. The Historic Structure Report deals with the history of the house from the time it was built through the present day. Measured drawings were produced to record the house and an adjacent outbuilding their present form, and to show how the house evolved over the years through additions and alterations. Finally, an analysis of house and outbuilding’s exterior paint layers was undertaken to determine previous color schemes. Both the paint analysis and measured drawings also provided important information used in the Historic Structure Report on the history of the house.

The study was undertaken between March of 1993 and May of 1995 and was funded, in part, by a Survey and Planning Grant from the Connecticut Historical Commission to Mystic Seaport Museum. Because the time frame and budget of the study was limited by the terms of the grant, the primary focus was confined primarily to
documenting changes made to the house, especially to its exterior. A more thorough investigation and documentation of the interior and of the site on which the building stands will be needed before the history of the building can be fully understood. This work will continue during the next few years.

In preparing the Historic Structure Report, an analysis of the building's components was used along with primary and secondary documentary sources to track the building's history. The physical analysis of its components was undertaken to determine when the house was built, which parts were original, and what alterations had been made and when. This involved an investigation of construction techniques, fastenings, stylistic details, and sequence of paint layering.

Documentary evidence, which included historic photographs of the house, local maps which showed outlines of the building's first floor plan at various times, and a late 19th century perspective view (bird's eye map) of the exterior, provided valuable clues about architectural changes and elements since removed. The photographs also revealed information on exterior paint colors schemes at different times.

Secondary sources, such as histories of the town of Stonington and of the Mystic Bridge section, gave a general background of the area in which the George Greenman House is located. Records of land transactions and tax assessments, statistics of births, marriages and deaths, genealogies and biographies, and federal census reports revealed information on the occupants of the house and on the building during the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Historic Structure Report was written by Wick York, Architectural Restoration Specialist in Mystic Seaport's Curatorial Department. The measured drawings were produced by Mark Starr, draftsman in the Seaport's Shipyard Department. The paint analysis report was prepared by Brian Powell, a conservator at the SPNEA Conservation Center in Waltham, Mass.
PART I: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

George Greenman Ownership: 1839-1891

George Greenman was the oldest of three brothers who were partners in the shipbuilding firm of George Greenman and Co. Born in Westerly, Rhode Island on August 27, 1805, he began his shipbuilding career in 1821 as an apprentice to his father, Silas Greenman, who worked as a ship carpenter in the Westerly yards.

In 1827, George moved to Mystic to work with his older brother Silas in shipbuilding at the head of the Mystic River. The following year, he married Abby Burch Chipman of Mystic (Figs. 1 & 2, MSM Photos # 72.928 & 81.177.2) George and Silas continued until working together until 1835, when Silas returned to Westerly. George remained on his own for two years until 1837 when he was joined by his two other brothers, Clark and Thomas, and together they established the George Greenman and Co. That year they purchased a twelve acre lot for $1,700 from Joseph Stanton Williams on the east side of the river known as Adams Point on which to build a shipyard. Today, Mystic Seaport Museum occupies the area where the shipyard was located.

In 1838, George bought out Clark and Thomas' share in a half acre lot of the original shipyard parcel along the road to Mystic Bridge (now named Greenmanville Avenue) on which to build his house. Soon afterwards, Amos Clift (1805-1878), a prominent local house builder, began work on the George Greenman House in 1838. It is not known from whom Clift received his training, but by 1836 he was actively building houses in the Mystic area in the Greek Revival style. Exactly how many buildings Clift
constructed is unknown, but his day books mention thirty-two houses under construction between 1836 and 1845, as well as numerous alterations for earlier houses. Notable surviving buildings attributed to him include the Captain John Holdredge House (1838) on Gravel Street and the Portersville Academy (1839) on High Street (both in Mystic), and the original 1843 Baptist Church (no longer standing) in Noank. Although no records have been found to indicate that Clift also built houses for Clark and Thomas Greenman, the close similarity of these two buildings to the George Greenman House, and the fact that all three were built within three years of each other, strongly suggests his work.

At the time the George Greenman House was completed in 1839, George and Abby had three children; Mary Abigail (age 10), Harriett (age 8), and George Henry (age 2). A fourth child, George Jr., who was born in 1835, died at a young age, probably before the family moved into the house.

The 1840 federal census taken in Mystic listed a total of ten occupants living in the house. Although the census gave only the age and gender of the occupants, and not their names, it seems likely that in addition to the five members of the George Greenman family, Clark (aged 32) and Thomas (age 30) Greenman were probably also living in the house as well. The two single brothers were both helping George manage the nearby shipyard, and both were having their own houses constructed next to the George Greenman House at the time. The Clark Greenman House, directly to the north of George's house was completed in 1841, while Thomas' house, to the north of Clark's, was finished the
following year. Little is known about the other three occupants living in the George Greenman House in 1840 except that two of them were males between 15 and 19 years old, and one was a female in the same age range. The two men might have been shipyard workers who boarded at the house, while the woman may have been a domestic servant.

Between 1841 and 1847 three more children were born to George and Abby. They were Martha (b. 1841), Laura A. (b. 1843) and Maria A. (b. 1847). By 1850, the census listed seven occupants living in the house. These included George and Abby, and children Harriett, George, Martha and Laura. Maria was not listed as she died on January 1, 1850 at the age of three, before the census was taken. Also living with the Greenmans at this time was George's sister Catherine, who later married John Edmondson.

Eldest daughter Mary Abigail, who would have been 21 years old in 1850, was also not listed on the census. She had left home in 1848 to marry George Edwin Champlin, who was born in Stonington, but at the time of their marriage was listed as a printer living in New York City. (His death notice states he was born in Hopkington, R.I., although his marriage record lists him as being born in Stonington.) It is not known for how long George continued to work as a printer, as he later became a druggist and founded the E. G. Champlin and Co. of 26 Main Street in Westerly.

George Champlin died of epilepsy in 1874 at the age of 51 in Westerly. Mary continued to live in Westerly at least until 1882 as she is listed (as Mrs. E. G. Champlin) in the 1875-1882
Westerly city directories as living at 114 Main Street. It is not known how long she remained there or when she died, but she is named in an 1892 deed to George Greenman’s house as one of her father’s survivors and living in the town of Stonington. Although the deed gives the town of Stonington as her residence, it is possible that she had moved back to the George Greenman House by this time since Mystic is part of the town of Stonington.

During the 1840s and 50s a small community, later called Greenmanville, grew up around the George Greenman and Co. shipyard. Clark and Thomas Greenmans’ houses were among the first built, but other shipwrights working at the yard soon followed with their own dwellings, most of which were constructed in the Greek Revival style. In 1849 the Greenmans expanded their operations with the establishment of the Greenmanville Manufacturing Co., a textile mill located along the river a short distance to the north of the shipyard. With the opening of the mill, the Greenmans built a number of nearby boarding houses for the workers and their families.

Additional growth of this area over the next two decades coincided with the growth of the shipbuilding industry in Mystic during this period. In 1862, the Greenmans sold half of their interest in the Greenmanville Manufacturing Co. to raise capital for expansion, and with the proceeds, a large brick addition (now known as the Stillman Building) was added to the mill in 1862. To make it easier for the workers to purchase food and supplies, a general store was opened by the George Greenman and Co. in 1863 on Greenmanville Avenue a few buildings south of George’s house.
As the Greenman shipyard and textile mill continued to prosper through the 1850s, the personal wealth of George Greenman increased during this period as well. Although the 1850 census does not give a value for his personal estate, his real estate is valued at $3,500. By 1860 his real estate was valued at $10,000, while his personal estate was listed at $30,000.

The 1860 census listed seven occupants of the George Greenman House. These were George and Abby, George H., Martha, Laura, and the youngest daughter, Lucia Annette, age 10. Harriett died in 1854 at the age of 23 and was thus not included. George H., 23, was listed as a ship carpenter, but also as attending school, as were Martha, Laura and Annette. A 25 year old Irish woman, Anne Kelly, was employed as a live-in domestic.

In 1864, at the age of 21, George H. Greenman married Ann Elizabeth Bowler of Little Genesee, New York, and moved out of his parent's home to take up residence nearby at 35 Greenmanville Avenue, a house owned by the George Greenman and Co. (Figs. 3 & 4, MSM Photos # 89-1-31 & 89 -1-32). He continued to work for the shipyard, serving as its bookkeeper and treasurer.

In 1868, Martha Greenman married Lon (Zebulon) Weston of Concord, New Hampshire who moved into the George Greenman House with her after they were married. Both were listed in the 1870 census as residents of the house along with their 10 month old son Robert. Lon's occupation was given as an agent of the Greenmanville Manufacturing Co. Also living in the house in 1870 were George and Abby's children Laura and Annette, and Phoebe Chipman, age 52, sister or cousin of Abby.

It is not known how long the Westons lived in the George
Greenman House, but they are not listed there in the 1870 or later censuses. By 1892 they had moved to Brockton, Mass. where Martha died as a widow in 1930.

The 1880 census lists only four occupants as living at the George Greenman House. These were George and Abby, Phoebe Chipman, who was also living there in 1870, and Catherine Edmondson, George’s widowed sister.

By this time, all of the Greenman children who were living with their parents had moved out of the household. In 1872 Laura married Walter Price, who was born in Plainfield, Ct. but who moved to Mystic as a boy with his family. At the time of their marriage he was working as a commercial agent and naval store keeper for the U. S. Government in Samana in the Dominican Republic. Laura moved to the Dominican Republic with Walter soon after their marriage, and there she died of unknown causes only two years later in 1874 at the age of 31.

Shortly after Laura’s death, Walter moved to Westerly where he bought an interest in the E. G. Champlin and Co. and began working as a druggist. This was the same company that had been owned by the late husband of Lucia’s oldest sister Mary Greenman Champlin.

In 1877 he founded his own drug company, the Walter Price and Co., the successor to the E. G. Champlin and Co. George Greenman must have also had an interest in the company as he is listed as one of the company’s partners in the 1881-82 and the 1885-86 Westerly directories.

Also in 1877, three years after the death of his first wife,
Laura, Walter Price married Laura's sister Lucia and she moved to Westerly after they were married. The Westerly directories give their residence as 114 Main Street for the years 1877 through 1892, and they continued to live in Westerly for the remainder of both their lives. For at least a few years, and possibly longer, they lived with Lucia's sister, Mrs. E. G. (Mary) Champlin at 114 Main Street as all three are listed there in the 1881 directory. Walter and Lucia had four children, Abby Katerine, who died in 1882; Fanny Annette, who died in 1907; Walter Smith; and Katerine Greenman.

Walter was active in local community and business affairs, and was one of the best-known and well-respected citizens of Westerly. He was a member of the Westerly town council in 1894, served in the Rhode Island House of Representatives between 1895 and 1897, and was then elected to the state senate for a year. In 1897 he sold his interest in his pharmacy, perhaps because his political work was taking up too much of his time, and three years later he was appointed Westerly postmaster, a position he held until his death in 1910. He was also an early investor in the development of Watch Hill section of the town of Westerly, and at the time of his death he was one of the largest land owners there. Walter died in Westerly in 1910 at their home on Main Street. Lucia died in 1914, and her address at that time was given as 124 Main Street Westerly.

Abby Greenman died in 1887 at the age of 81, and George died four years later on May 21, 1891 at age 86. In his will, the George Greenman House House was left to his son George H. Greenman, who had been living with his family at 35 Greenmanville
Avenue since 1864. However, his siblings may also have had an
interest in the house since an 1891 deed records its sale to
George H. Greenman for $243.75 from his three living sisters.

George H. Greenman Ownership: 1891-1935

Exactly when George H. and Ann moved into the George
Greenman House is unknown, but it was probably sometime during
the period between 1891, when George died, and 1893, when
alterations to the house had been completed. Because the 1890
Federal census reports for this area have been destroyed and no
city directories were published during this period, it is has
been more difficult to determine who was living at the house
during this period.

By 1891 George H. and Ann Greenman's six children ranged in
age from 12 to 26. They were Annie Bowler, age 26, William
Clark, 24, Elizabeth, 21, George Bowler, 20, Laura Abigail, 16,
and Mary, age 12. When the family moved into the George Greenman
House, at least four, and possibly five, of the children were
still living with their parents. This is based on the 1900
census which shows Annie, George B., and Mary with their parents.
Although Laura is not listed on the 1900 census, she was probably
living at home in 1891 as she would have been only 16 at the
time. It is not known if the oldest son, William, was living
with his parents in 1891 as he is not listed on the 1900 census.

There is a possibility that Mary Champlin may have also been
living at the George Greenman House when George H. and his family
moved in as she is mentioned in the 1892 deed to the house as
living in the town of Stonington.
Elizabeth was probably the first Greenman child of George H. and Ann to leave home. In 1887 she moved from Mystic to attend Wellesley College, from which she graduated in 1892. After graduation she took courses at the University of Chicago and M.I.T., and then moved to Boston in 1893 to teach school until her retirement in 1938.

William C. Greenman moved from Mystic as a young man and for an unknown reason changed his name to William C. Graham. The exact date he left is not known, but it probably would have been sometime between 1890 and 1895 when he was in his mid-twenties. He married Helen Mathewson and had one natural son, William C. Graham. Two or three other children lived with them, but it is not known for certain if they were legally adopted or merely taken into their home. In 1922, he was living in New Castle, Del., by 1934 he had moved to Allentown, Pa., by 1937 he was living in Trenton, N.J., and by 1943 he had moved to Philadelphia.

In 1901 Mary Greenman married Herbert S. Davis of Mystic, who at the time was employed as a telegraph operator for the New Haven Railroad. They had one child, Eleanor, who was born the following year. Herbert later went into the stock and bond field and then became a broker of import and export goods. Although he worked out of New York City as a broker, the family always maintained their residence in Mystic.

Between 1912 and 1933 the Davises were listed in the Mystic city directories as living at 4 Reynolds Hill. Sometime after 1933 they moved into the George Greenman House as this was given
as the residence of Herbert at the time of his death in 1941.

Around 1900, Laura Greenman moved from her parents home to Brockton, Massachusetts. Why she left Mystic is unclear, but she may have lived with her aunt and uncle, Martha and Lon Weston, who had moved there from Mystic earlier. In Brockton Laura became active in the local Baptist church, where she taught Sunday school.

In 1909 she married Louis Allyn, a physician from Mystic whose office was located at 24-1/4 West Main Street. Presumably, they moved to 22 Library Street in Mystic after their marriage as they were listed at that address in the 1912 Mystic city directory. Laura became active in public affairs, volunteering for the Parent Teachers Association, the Community House, and the Mystic Branch of the Red Cross. The couple had two daughters, Lucia Greenman, born in 1913, and Emily Maxson, born in 1916. Laura died at the family’s Library Street home in 1922 at the age of 47.

By 1900, after the departure of Elizabeth and William Greenman, and the marriages of Mary and Laura, George B. and Annie were the only two Greenman children still living with their parents in the George Greenman House. Both remained unmarried, and George B., at least, continued to live there for the rest of his life. He practiced architecture in the Mystic and New London area for many years, and while it is not known when he began his career, and with what firm he first worked, one of his projects included the design for the Edwin Noyes House in 1898 at 8 Willow Street Mystic. Between 1903 and 1928 he is listed in the New London city directories as a draftsman for a number of different
firms in that city, while the Mystic directory lists him as an architect until it stopped publishing in 1932.

George B. Greenman was also a long-term member of the Mystic Hook and Ladder Fire Co. and was well-known for his skill as a card player. He was considered to be a leading authority in Connecticut in playing rummy, and the unquestioned state champion.

Annie Greenman lived at her parents' house for most, if not all, of her life as well. She was mentioned in the 1922 obituary of her sister Laura as living in Boston at the time, possibly with her other sister Elizabeth, although the Mystic directory listed her in Mystic for that year. Annie was listed in the Mystic directories as a dressmaker between 1912 and 1917, but no occupation was given before or after these years.

News of George H. and Ann Greenman's wedding anniversaries and birthdays was often included in the local newspapers. The couple celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on June 13, 1914 with a large party at their house. Over 100 guests were invited to the festivities, which included a catered dinner and a musical program. Three years later, George observed his eightieth birthday with a smaller gathering of friends.

George H. Greenman died in 1935 at the age of 98. In his will, the house was left to his wife with the provision that when she died it would go to his five surviving children; Annie, William, Elizabeth, George B. and Mary.

Ann Greenman Ownership: 1935-1943

At the time of George H. Greenman's death in 1935, Ann, Annie and George B. were living at the George Greenman House.
Annie died in 1937 at the age of 72. In 1938, Elizabeth retired after 45 years of teaching school in Boston and returned to Mystic to live with her mother and brother. Mary and her husband Herbert Davis may have also moved back to the house around this time as their residence at the time of Herbert's death in 1941 was given as 51 Greenmanville Avenue, the address of the George Greenman House.

Ann died in 1943 at the age of 101 and the house passed to Elizabeth, George B. and Mary. William had sold his share in the house to Mary for $1,500 in 1941.

Greenman Children Ownership: 1943-1965

When George H.'s children inherited the house, Elizabeth, George, and Mary were living there. William Greenman returned to Mystic in 1946 to live with his surviving brother and sisters, but in 1961, with his health failing, he was taken by his son to a nursing home in Wilmington, Delaware, where he died the following year at the age of 95. Elizabeth died in 1961 at age 90, and George B. died three years later at age 92. This left Mary as the only occupant of the house after 1964.

Eleanor Davis Walker Ownership: 1965-1970

In 1965, Mary Greenman Davis gave the house to her daughter Eleanor Davis Walker of Hingham, Mass with the condition that she (Mary) be given life tenancy. Eleanor sold the house to Mystic Seaport Museum in 1970 for $80,000, but Mary continued living there until shortly before her death on January 31, 1972 at the age of 72.* After her death, the house was taken over by the museum. Eleanor Walker died on December 8, 1981 at the age of 92.
Mystic Seaport Museum Ownership: 1970 – Present

Soon after Mystic Seaport took over the house, it became used as a storage area and as an apartment for Seaport staff. By June of 1973, furniture from the Curatorial Department was being stored on the first and second floors of the front section of the house. The two floors of the ell were used as an apartment and during the summer of 1972 when it was lived in by teachers of the Munson Institute. In the spring of 1973, Barry and Dorothy Thomas, two staff members, along with their son David, moved into the ell and lived there until the spring of 1990. When they moved out, more furniture was moved into the ell, and the entire house became a storage area.
Figure 1, Photo # 72.928  George Greenman.
Figure 3, Photo # 89-1-31 George H. Greenman.
Figure 4, Photo # 89 -1-32 Ann B. Greenman.
Figure 6, Photo # 95-5-9B The George Greenman House, North and West Elevations, 1995.
Figure 8, Section from 1868 Plan of Mystic Bridge.
George Greenman House Circled.