



BHC-MSS 0089

Guide to the Papers of Edna M. Richardson Regarding the Preservation of the Harral-Wheeler House

By Meg Rinn

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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Edna M. Richardson

Title: Papers of Edna M. Richardson Regarding the Preservation of the Harral-Wheeler House

Dates: 1957-1969

Quantity: 1 manuscript box

Abstract: Edna M. Richardson was an active part of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Bridgeport Historical Society, which starting in 1957 began a campaign to save the remarkable and well known Harral-Wheeler House. The collection documents the local level campaign to save the home.

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical History:

Edna M. Richardson was an active part of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Bridgeport Historical Society, which starting in 1957, began a campaign to save the remarkable and well known Harral-Wheeler House.

Considered one of the best examples of Gothic Revival architecture in the United States, the house was built by Alexander Jackson Davis in 1846 for Henry Kollock Harral. It was later bought by the Wheeler family who made their fortune in sewing machine manufacture. The interiors were lavish by any standard, and the vast majority of the furniture survives, having been split between the Smithsonian Institution and the Barnum Museum.

In 1956, Archer C. Wheeler gave the house to the City of Bridgeport for use by the city in the hope it might be a museum, library, or serve as an extension for a high school. Instead, the City of Bridgeport – led by then Mayor Jasper McLevy - expressed the desire to tear it down and build a new city hall. An extensive campaign to prevent this from happening began. The fight was a part of the 1958 mayoral election, with Mayor Tedesco claiming that no, he would not tear down the house.

Tedesco did not deliver on his promise, leaving many pro-conservationists both in Bridgeport and on a national level extremely unhappy with his eventual decision to approve the demolition. The house was eventually torn down in 1958. For a time, City Hall had recreated rooms from the mansion that retained the furniture. These items are currently kept by the Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The loss of the Harral-Wheeler House is considered one of the turning points in building

preservation in America, as after its destruction there was a great uptick in trying to preserve historic homes.

Scope and Content note:

The original order of the material is unclear, as the box contained material in unlabeled folders at time of processing. Clippings were mixed in with newsletters and correspondence. This was consistently done with magazines stuffed with clippings, implying some level of intended organization by Richardson.

As such, the material has been left in folders it was placed in, with broad categorizations (see arrangement note.)

Clippings make up the bulk of the collection, reflecting news coverage of the mounting tensions of the house's potential destruction by the City of Bridgeport. In addition, there are newsletters, campaign flyers, and other instruments used to try and save the home.

Arrangement Note:

The collection has been placed into three series. The first, Bridgeport Historical Society preservation efforts, contains folders of mixed clippings, correspondence, newsletters, flyers, and other material that the Bridgeport Historical Society created to help save the Harral-Wheeler House. Some material stretches to 1968, reflecting the long conversation had after the home's destruction.

Series 2 contains clippings and offers constant coverage of how the fight became a national level discussion, with articles appearing in places like Harper's. The final series, additional material, contains a small amount of Daughters of the American Revolution correspondence related to Richardson herself.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Unknown

Preferred Citation:

Papers of Edna M. Richardson Regarding the Preservation of the Harral-Wheeler House (BHC-MSS 0089) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

Richardson, Edna M.

Seeley, Elizabeth S.

Corporate names

Bridgeport Historical Society

Daughters of the American Revolution

Subject tracings

Gothic revival (Architecture)

Harral-Wheeler House (Bridgeport, Conn.)

Historic preservation

Detailed box and folder listing

Series 1, Bridgeport Historical Society preservation efforts

Box 1

1. Bridgeport Historical Society correspondence, agendas, newsletters, 1957
2. Bridgeport Historical Society correspondence, agendas, newsletters, 1957-1958
3. Bridgeport Historical Society correspondence, agendas, newsletters, 1958-1965
4. Bridgeport Historical Society correspondence, agendas, newsletters, 1957-1968
5. Bridgeport Historical Society correspondence, agendas, newsletters, 1957-1968
6. Mailing list, 1957-1968
7. Flyer to save the Harral-Wheeler house, c. 1957
8. Metropolitan Museum Studies Vol. part 2 and Bridgeport's Gothic Ornament stuffed with additional newspaper clippings, 1936-1957

Series 2, Clippings

9. Clippings, 1957
10. Clippings, 1957-1958
11. Clippings, 1957-1969
12. Clippings, 1967-1970

Series 3, Additional material

13. DAR material, 1957