



BHC-MSS 0256

Guide to the Papers of Charles W. Brilvitch

By E. Van Tuyl, Michael Hawkins, and Sharaya Smith

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## **Descriptive Summary**

Creator: Charles W. Brilvitch

Title: Papers of Charles W. Brilvitch

Dates: 1978-2001

Quantity: 5 record cartons and 1 oversize folder

Abstract: The collection consists of large numbers of subject files, reports, newspaper articles, pamphlets, and correspondence related to Charles Brilvitch's historic preservation activities in Bridgeport, Connecticut and the surrounding area. The collection reflects that Brilvitch did extensive research on individual buildings. It also highlights his role as Bridgeport's City Historian and his work with Neighborhood Housing Services.

Collection Number: BHC-MSS 0256

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library

## **Biographical Information**

[by Charles Brilvitch]

Charles Brilvitch was born in 1952 and grew up in the Mill Hill neighborhood of Bridgeport. He attended Summerfield elementary school and Kolbe High School. From a young age he took an interest in his surroundings and in particular the historic buildings of his native city. At age 13 he volunteered his services as caretaker of the 1788 Captain John Brooks House, then located on lower Pembroke Street and owned by the predecessor of the Discovery Museum. He researched the surrounding historic neighborhood--his first encounter with the History Center at the BPL--and, while still in the eighth grade, submitted a detailed proposal to the City Planning Office to turn it into a historic district.

Charles attended Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, majoring in Urban and Environmental Studies. He became involved with preservation efforts on the Near West Side of that city, once a separate municipality and rival to Cleveland known as Ohio City. He conducted an architectural inventory of the entire neighborhood and became involved in the restoration of three historic houses while still a university student. He watched the neighborhood transform from an urban basket case where blighted homes were being demolished at the rate of one per day to the most desirable residential neighborhood in the entire city through preservation and historic restoration.

Returning to Bridgeport, Charles became a charter member of the Bridgeport Architecture Conservancy. He proposed the creation of the Black Rock Harbor Historic District, first in the city, and authored its study report. He was a driving force in efforts to preserve 'The Block,' an area of downtown comprised of 1830s commercial structures, a 1790-period house, and a pair of 1880s proto-skyscrapers. Despite managing to list the site on the National Register of Historic Places, he saw the City succeed in demolishing everything and replacing it with a Holiday Inn. It would be the first of many losing battles.

Charles obtained a position as a page at the Bridgeport Public Library in charge of the Newspaper Room. While attending to his duties he read through all the Bridgeport newspapers on microfilm between 1861 and 1918, making photocopies of anything having to do with the city's historic architecture and physical development. This became the core of this collection. He began conducting walking tours of various historic neighborhoods in the city and writing National Register nominations for sites he considered important. In 1978 he purchased the Octagon House in the Washington Park neighborhood and began restoration of what had been a fire-gutted ruin.

In 1980 Charles was hired by Neighborhood Housing Services as Construction Specialist in the South End office. Two years later he was promoted to program director, and used his office to promote preservation efforts in that part of the city. There were more National Register nominations, the creation of a Friends of Seaside Park organization, and the restoration of the Bergh Memorial Fountain and Fayerweather Island lighthouse. In 1985 he was hired by Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City as director of an office in Queens.

In 1990 Charles returned to Bridgeport and assumed the duties of City Historian. He undertook the creation of four local historic districts at Pembroke City, Stratfield, Marina Park, and the Barnum/Palliser Development. He remained in this position until 2003, when he was named Historian of the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe by Chief Quiet Hawk. He delved into the mysterious "gap" in the tribe's history in the middle of the 19th century, and found the "missing link:" Bridgeport's Little Liberia community in the South End. This became the basis of his Petition for Federal Recognition filed with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, which in turn led to a book entitled A History of Connecticut's Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe. A further outgrowth of this research was the effort to bring about the restoration of the 1848 Mary and Eliza Freeman houses on lower Main Street, sole survivors of that African American-Native American community.

Charles retired at the end of 2015 to Chautauqua County, New York.

### **Scope and Content Note**

This collection reflects the many and varied activities of Charles Brilvitch as he engaged in historic preservation activities in the City of Bridgeport and the greater region, especially in the later 1970s and into the early 1990s. Researchers will find articles on individual buildings or Bridgeport home owners and citizens, surveys of the architectural features of historic structures, report preparation, correspondence on or final reports for historic districts. Brilvitch served as City Historian and there is correspondence stemming from his duties in that office. There is also

significant correspondence and paperwork related to his various jobs with Neighborhood Housing Services.

Throughout the collection, Brilvitch's dedication to the cause of historic preservation and his knowledge of the City's building are readily apparent, sometimes in minute detail. His subject folders explore many avenues that those with a more superficial interest in historic preservation in the Bridgeport area might not have considered.

### **Arrangement Note**

A large portion of the collection came in original folders created by Brilvitch, but there were loose items as well. The collection is divided into three series. Series I, subject files, is arranged alphabetically by the subject assigned by Brilvitch while he was using and creating his collection. Series II, Reports and Reports-Documentation, contains just a few items that are actual reports written in support of historic district establishment or on a particular building or site and accompanying documentation. There is no original order to these items found in the collection. There is one oversize sketch of an historic site. Series III, Administrative, agencies, miscellaneous, is arranged alphabetically and consists mostly of folders originally labeled by Brilvitch with some additions made by the archivist. This series has files dedicated to City Historian activities.

### **Name and Subject Tracings**

#### *Personal names*

Brilvitch, Charles W.

Freeman, Mary

Freeman, Eliza

#### *Corporate names*

Bridgeport Architecture Conservancy

Bridgeport (Conn.). Historic District Commission

Bridgeport (Conn.). Planning and Development

Bridgeport (Conn.). Zoning

Bridgeport (Conn.). City Historian

Bridgeport (Conn.). Housing Authority

Bridgeport Neighborhood Trust

Bridgeport Trust for Historic Preservation

Community Development Agency

Connecticut Historical Commission

National Register of Historic Places

### *Subjects*

Block grants | sh 85014912  
Historic buildings | sh 85061097  
Historic districts | sh 85061107  
Historic preservation | 92002913  
Church buildings | sh 85025854  
Neighborhoods | n 84738275  
Tours | sh 85136278

### **Administrative Information**

#### **Preferred citation**

Papers of Charles W. Brilvitch, (BHC-MSS 0256), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

**Provenance:** Donated by Charles Brilvitch; ACC.#2015.34

### **Detailed Description of Records/Container List**

Series I: Brilvitch subject files

Box 1

1. Architects
2. Architects—Briggs, Warren
3. Architectural Styles with photographic prints
4. Association of CT Municipal Historians
5. Bank + Court Exchange Buildings-Downtown
6. P.T. Barnum
7. Bartram Estate
8. Beardsley Park
9. Biographies
10. W. D. Bishop Development + Bassickville + Waldemere Park
11. Black Rock
12. Black Rock
13. Black Rock Shipyard
14. The Block
15. The Block
16. Blacks in N.E.
17. Book-Landmark architecture in Bridgeport
18. Bridgeport Hydraulic
19. Bridgeport Landmarks Preservation Plan
20. Bridgeport Neighborhood Trust – Newsletter
21. Bridgeport Preservation and Development Trust, Inc
22. Bridgeport Trust for Historic Preservation
23. Bridgeport Trust for Historic Preservation, Inc Certificate of Incorporation 1999
24. Boys + Girls Club

25. Bridgeport Boys Club, 237 Middle Street
26. Bridgeport Landmarks Preservation Plan
27. Building Components – Glass, Stucco, Trees, Fences
28. Buildings
29. Buildings -- Articles
30. Buildings – Crescent Building
31. Buildings – Eastside Addresses
32. Buildings – Hubbell Block
33. Buildings – Land plots – Misc. Newspaper Articles
34. Buildings – Newspaper Articles, 19<sup>th</sup> Cen, “Bpt. Standard”
35. Buildings – Warner Bros. Factory
36. Central Business District – Schiavone Project
37. Chief Quiet Hawk – Final Report
38. Churches
39. Churches – Baptist, Report by Rev Ronald Wells
40. Churches – Christ Church-Tashua
41. Churches – First Baptist Church
42. Churches – New First Baptist Church
43. Churches – St. Augustine’s
44. Churches – St. Mary’s R.C.
45. Churches – St. Patrick’s R.C.
46. Churches – Summerfield Methodist Church
47. City Landmarks Proposal
48. City Plan
49. CT State Historical Commission
50. County Jail
51. Court House – State
52. Court House and City Hall
53. Courtland Hill
54. Downtown Bridgeport Activities Board
55. Downtown Survey
56. 244-245 Eagle Street
57. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> Cen. East Bridgeport Addresses
58. East End Historical Investigation Study Commission
59. East Side – Notes and Articles
60. East Shore – Development Proposal
61. Ethnic Groups
62. Exhibition – Neighborhoods, Proposal
63. Environmental Review 1991
64. Fairfield
65. Fairfield County – Other Towns
66. Fayerweather Island
67. Grand list and Buildings

Box 2

1. Historic District Commission

2. Historic District Commission
3. Historic District Committee – Report, 12/1/1975
4. Historic District Enabling Statute CT General Statutes
5. Historic District Study Committee, January 1975
6. Historic Districts – Barnum – Palliser District
7. Historic Districts – Barnum – Palliser District
8. Historic Districts – Barnum Palliser District
9. Historic Districts – Black Rock, 1976 District Proposal
10. Historic Districts – Black Rock, Proposal to CT Historical Commission
11. Historic Districts – Central / Business Districts with NHS Register Info
12. Historic Districts – Cottage Park
13. Historic Districts – Deacon’s Point H.D. Report
14. Historic Districts – Division Street H.D.
15. Historic Districts – Golden Hill Historic District
16. Historic Districts – Lindencroft H.D.
17. Historic Districts – Marina Park
18. Historic Districts – Nomination forms + Documentation
19. Historic Districts -- Ownership Lists
20. Historic Districts – Pembroke City
21. Historic Districts + Sites – Proposed / Potential
22. Historic Districts – Proposal for rehabilitation 1992
23. Historic Districts – Railroad Avenue
24. Historic Districts – Sterling Hill Historic Dist.
25. Historic Districts – Sterling Hill H.D. Report
26. Historic Districts – Sterling Hill + The Hollow – Proposals
27. Historic Districts -- Stratfield H.D. Report
28. Historic Districts – Stratford
29. Historic Districts – Stratford
30. Historic Districts – Stratford
31. Historic Districts – Stratford Center, Nomination forums
32. Historic Districts – Summerfield (proposed) [Articles + list of addresses]
33. Hist. Dist., -- Washington Park
34. Historic District – Washington Park, Resources Inventory
35. Historic Marker – Dedication Speeches
36. Hospitals
37. Hotel Beach
38. Houses – Thomas Bartram House
39. Houses – Colonial, 1640-1776
40. Houses – Denney – Bulkley House
41. Houses – Dewhurst House
42. Houses – Dundon House Project
43. Houses – Dundon House (Black Rock)
44. Houses – Edwards, George Clarke
45. Houses – Freeman Houses

1. Houses – General
2. Houses – James Lo Harlem House Fairfield Avenue
3. Houses – John Hawley Beach House 1984 Park Avenue
4. Houses – Thos. Hawley House (Monroe)
5. Houses – Johnson-de Rivera House
6. Houses – Mallett House
7. Houses – Mallette House, Jean
8. Houses – C.B. Middlebrook House
9. Houses -- Bradley Nichols House
10. Houses – Octogen House
11. Houses – Old
12. Houses – David Perry House
13. Houses -- David Perry House / Perry / Bolster House
14. Houses – John Peet House
15. Houses – Abram Skaats House
16. Houses – Thompson – Jennings House – Huntington Tpk
17. Houses – Tom Thumb House
18. Industries of Bridgeport
19. Inner-cities Ventures Fund – 1992 App.
20. 129 James St. Proposal
21. (Proposed) Kirtland Hill Hist District
22. Laurelton
23. The Legal Center
24. Lindencroft Park
25. Maps
26. Miscellaneous notes
27. Morehouse Jennings House
28. Mountain Grove Cemetery
29. N.R. Lists
30. National Register Nominations – Misc.
31. Native American history – Notes and Articles
32. North Avenue – Chronology of Deeds, 976-980
33. Norwalk Green
34. James O’Rourke
35. Old Washington Park Proposal
36. Palace + Majestic Theatres
37. Parks
38. Parks – Beardsley Park
39. Paugussett Tribe – Research
40. Petition – Nuclear Arms Race
41. Pixlee Tavern
42. Pleasure Beach
43. Preservation Plan (5/90)
44. Prosperity
45. Putnam Hill Historic District – Greenwich
46. Railroad

47. Remington City Historic District
48. Remington Woods
49. Richtel, C. F.
50. Rivers Creeks / Oystering / Parks
51. Rivoli – Bijou
52. Schools
53. Scientific American Houses
54. Scientific American – List of Bridgeport Homes
55. Seagrove Cottage
56. Seaside Institute
57. Seaside Park
58. Seaside Park -Newspaper Articles; Statues and memorials
59. Seaside Park – NRHF Nomination Form
60. 1522-32 Seaview Avenue
61. Sept, 11<sup>th</sup> 2001
62. Shelton Hall. Prospect Street -- Development Proposal
63. Ships – Charles Cooper
64. South End – Henry St. Slip, proposed development
65. South End Neighborhood Housing Services
66. South End Neighborhood Housing Services, 381-383 Myrtle Avenue
67. South End Other South End Activities
68. Southport
69. Stained Glass – Artist Vivian Hast Faulkner
70. Sterling Block and Arcade
71. Stratfield
72. Streets
73. Streets – Development
74. Synagogues

#### Box 4

1. Tabachnick [various cultural organizations?]
2. Thatchersville
3. Walking Tours – Black Rock + Southport
4. Walking Tours – Multiple Sites
5. Warner Brothers
6. Wartime Emergency Housing
7. Washington State
8. Waterside H.D.
9. West End
10. Wheeler Memorial Fountain + St. John's Church
11. Whitehead, Gustave [Inventor]

#### Series II – Reports - Reports and documentation

12. Reports – Deacon's Point
13. Reports – Kirkland Hill Historic District
14. Reports – Theater Taskforce



15. Reports – Pequonnock River (Peck) Railroad Bridge
16. Historic Districts – Official city documentation and correspondence

Oversize – Folder 1 [FF D, drawer 4]

Series III - Administrative, agencies, miscellaneous

Box 5

1. Calendar
2. Clippings
3. City Historian
4. City Historian -- Daily activities log from, 05-01-1990+
5. City Historian – Miscellaneous Correspondence
6. City Historian – Notes and Instructions
7. Cleveland
8. Community Development Agency
9. CDBG Year XVI Correspondence [Community Development Block Grant]
10. Connecticut State Historic Preservation Officer
11. Consultancies and Contracts
12. Correspondence
13. Correspondence
14. Correspondence – L. Cerino, Curiale School
15. Correspondence -- Miscellaneous
16. Grant Applications
17. Letters – In
18. Newsletters – Black Rock
19. Newsletters – East Side News
20. Newspaper articles – Human Interest, Misc.
21. Newspaper Clippings
22. Newspaper Clippings
23. Newspaper Clippings – Misc.
24. Newspaper Clippings + Newsletters
25. Notebooks – Notes on buildings, etc.
26. Ortiz
27. Periodicals – Fairfield County Magazine, Feb. 1976 – Featuring Bridgeport
28. Photographs
29. Photographs
30. Photographs – Norwalk
31. Photographs – Trolley
32. Photographs – University of Bridgeport
33. Photographs – Petition 807-85. Report #4 exhibit #1
34. Preservation Guides
35. Preservation Groups/Events
36. Remington Arms – Employee Pamphlet
37. Resume