

# Chaplin Historic District Commission

## Minutes

### Annual Meeting

RECEIVED  
CHAPLIN  
TOWN CLERK:

9/18/23, 11:25 AM  
*Shaw Smith*

Tuesday, September 12, 2023

*These unapproved Historic District Commission meeting minutes are forwarded to the Chaplin Town Clerk in a draft format. These minutes are unofficial until they have been read and approved by a majority vote of the Commission. Should edits be necessary, they will be made at the next regularly scheduled meeting, voted upon and noted in the meeting minutes.*

#### **A. Continuation of Hearing:** Town of Chaplin. Moving Chaplin Museum building to the Chaplin Library site.

Chairman Warren Church continued the hearing at 7:02 P.M. Present were regular members C. Smith, P. Peifer and alternate members L. Ricklin and W. Rose. Mr. Church read a letter from the First Selectman's Assistant Sue Welshman relating that Mr. Roman had met with representatives from the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) at the Chaplin Museum and the proposed new location. He has not yet received a recommendation and would like to continue the hearing in November. Allen Olsen and Sally Zimmerman owners of 46 Chaplin St. submitted copies of a letter Ms. Zimmerman wrote to Jenny Scofield of SHPO about concerns they had on what information about the move was available to the public. The letter also spoke of the changes to the Library parking area. In Ms. Scofield's reply letter, she spoke of meeting with Mr. Roman and mentioned the availability of Community Investment Funds (CIF) for town projects and that Chaplin is one of 55 Connecticut towns eligible. Ms. Zimmerman emphasized that these funds could be used to fully underwrite town project planning and the Town should be consulting with as many resources as they can to create the best plan for development. She also submitted their historical research on the old Museum/Town Hall. Mr. Peifer asked if the First Selectman submitted an application for the entire scope of the move project. Mr. Church said he understood the application was not finalized. Ms. Smith asked whether number 1 or 11 is the correct address of the Museum. Number 11 is what is considered correct. In response to Mrs. Ricklin's question about the Town's original C of A application, Mr. Church replied the Town would probably need to submit an additional application covering the planned changes to the Library site. Mr. Church continued the hearing at 7:20 P.M

#### **B. Business Meeting**

1. Call to order, roll call and seating of alternates. Mr. Church called the meeting to order at 7:20 P.M. Present were regular members W. Church, P. Peifer, C. Smith. Alternates L. Ricklin and W. Rose were seated absent regular members J. Givens and D. Cox.

2. Approval of July 25, 2023 minutes. Ms. Ricklin made the motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Peifer seconded; the minutes were approved by Church, Peifer, Smith and Ricklin; Rose abstained.

3. Audience for citizens: None

4. New Business

a. Certificate of Appropriateness for moving the Chaplin Museum Building to the Chaplin Library site. Motion to continue the hearing at the November 14, 2023 regular meeting made by W. Church, seconded by W. Rose, approved unanimously.



b. Election of Officers: Mr. Peifer made a motion to approve the same slate of officers as are presently serving: W. Church, Chairman, D. Cox, Vice-chairman and C. Smith, Secretary. Mrs. Ricklin seconded, motion passed unanimously.

c. 2024 Meeting Dates: Mr. Church proposed four regular meeting dates: February 6, May 7, September 10 and November 12. Mrs. Ricklin moved to approved these meeting date, C. Smith seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

d. 2024 Budget: Mr. Church proposed a budget of \$855.00 for f/y 2024-2025. It shows a \$100 increase to cover increased public hearing notice costs. Mr. Peifer moved to approve the budget as presented, Mr. Rose seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

#### 5. Old Business:

a. Solar Panel Guidelines. Mr. Peifer wrote guidelines to help residents with the Certificate of Appropriateness application process for solar panel installation in the Historic District. He would like the Commission to approve the guidelines so they can be added to the Town website. Mr. Peifer made a motion to approve the guidelines as written, Mrs. Smith seconded, motion passed unanimously. Mrs. Smith mentioned she noticed solar panel installation at 350 Phoenixville Rd. and asked if that was approved at an HDC meeting she didn't attend. There was no application received and Mr. Church will talk to the owners about it.

b. Other: none

6. Correspondence: Received the Preservation Connecticut News magazine. Mr. Church wanted to add that he had been in touch with several Historic District residents recently. Sarah Cassidy of 47 Chaplin St. wants to get a chicken tractor, a large rolling coop that would be moved around the yard to fertilize. Mr. Church said the HDC cannot regulate portable things but since this would be a year-round proposition, it would need a C of A, no application has been submitted so far.

He spoke to Kellie and Benjamin Murphy at 5 Chaplin St. about a fence visible from the Street that was installed without a C of A. He mentioned the prospective Museum move and Mrs. Murphy said she loved that building and would love to put her cookie business in it.

Adelaide Northrop wants to install a generator that would be masked by shrubs at 80 Chaplin St.

Mrs. Ricklin remarked how wonderful the Street looked during the Bicentennial Celebration and how it really has changed little from the 1800s and might make a great film setting and is that something to pursue. Members thought it might be good to contact the State liaison for the movie industry just to get information.

Ms. Zimmerman and Mr. Olsen said they have been researching the Historic District properties and have almost completed histories of all the properties in the District, they hope to put it in a format that will be available to the HDC and the Library.

September 30th, Warren will be giving a talk on the Ross Preserve at 1:00 PM in the Senior Center.

7. Adjournment: Mr. Church adjourned the meeting at 8:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted, Susan Peifer- Recording clerk- HDC



September 1, 2023

Jenny Scofield, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
Todd Levine, Environmental Review Coordinator  
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5,  
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Ms. Scofield and Mr. Levine,

I am writing with concerns about the proposed move of the Chaplin Museum (aka Old Town Hall), 11 Chaplin Street, Chaplin, CT along with other associated changes to the Chaplin Historic District which we understand are elements of a comprehensive \$2.1 million project application to the Community Investment Fund submitted by the Town of Chaplin, a Public Investment Community.

I, and others in Chaplin, have voiced concerns before the Chaplin Historic District Commission, about the preliminary nature of the planning for such a move, and for the potential adverse impacts of the larger economic development project under consideration for CIF funding at the north end of the Chaplin Historic District.

There has been little to no public communication on this project from the Board of Selectmen although I understand some communications between the SHPO and the first selectman have taken place. That which has been publicly presented appears preliminary in nature and still within the early planning stages for such a large, complex, and impactful project.

Thus far, only one informational presentation to the Historic District Commission has been made. Planned public hearings for formal review of the application for Certificates of Appropriateness for the parking lot reconfiguration and the Museum relocation have been postponed. No substantive planning studies or statements have been publicly posted or disseminated. The CIF application submitted for the third funding round has not yet been made available for public review in any format.

The CIF application, as I understand it from verbal statements at a meeting of the Chaplin Community and Economic Development Commission, includes reconfiguration of the Library and Senior Center parking lot, new sidewalk construction along Route 198, and the proposed relocation of the Museum to the west side of the Chaplin Public Library adjacent to the Chaplin Center Cemetery. While the Route 198 sidewalk also has the capacity to impact the Historic District, my concerns center on the parking lot and Chaplin Museum proposals which will directly affect the integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association of the Chaplin Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

Relocating the Chaplin Museum from its current location to the west side of the Library would constructively address conditions that critically limit the use of the building on its historic site (lack of universal access as well as the incapacity of the current site for code-compliant sanitary systems), but relocation will also inevitably cause "disruption or alteration" of the "historic, architectural, and archaeological resource and setting" of the Museum, which recent research indicates is a purpose-built 1860 dry goods store associated with a woman entrepreneur. (See attached *Updated Description and Significance Statement*).

Alternative locations for the Museum's relocation at the north end of the District appear to have potential that has not yet been examined and could include sites closer to Chaplin Street and in a more sympathetic relationship to another existing town-owned historic structure (Old Post Office) that is itself in need of adaptive reuse. The proposed Library-adjacent site, on slab and set far back from Chaplin Street, while expedient for service access,

renders the smaller building secondary to its setting and removes it from the immediacy of purpose (commercial and municipal) it has had with its streetscape since its construction.

While of lesser concern, even reconfiguring the parking lot will impact the design and location of the historic school bus driveway entrance to the 1948 Chaplin Elementary School, and will have an impact on the integrity of the district. While the Elementary School might appear to be of less historical consequence in comparison to most of the District's resources, it was the first comprehensive public school constructed in town and has as much significance to Chaplin's 20th century history as the Museum does for its 20th century service as the Town Hall.

Both of these project elements, and perhaps others that have not as yet been publicly vetted, have the potential to alter or disrupt the integrity and setting of a rare and exceptionally intact early 19th century town center village. Further planning and community engagement around the entire CIF proposal would appear to be beneficial in this case. Indeed, the CIF anticipates that some communities may need preliminary grant support for community engagement, feasibility studies, and engineering and architectural planning as a precursor to successfully applying for larger CIF grants. With the current round, I see the CIF has added a Project Planning Category for grants of \$250,000 or more for just this purpose.

As this project comes before your office under the authority and regulations of the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, I respectfully urge you to comprehensively and carefully consider its potential effects on the Chaplin Historic District and to actively engage in consultations with sister agencies and the applicant to avoid, resolve, or mitigate any potential adverse impacts on the integrity of this uniquely well-preserved and significant historic and cultural resource.

There is every reason to believe that with constructive planning support and robust community engagement, all of the desired goals of the Town of Chaplin can be met in a way that respects the historic character of the village center, enhances the economic and community life of the town, and becomes a source of pride and achievement for all of its residents.

Sincerely,

Sally Zimmerman  
46 Chaplin Street, Chaplin, CT 06235

Zimmerman Preservation Consulting  
6 Beaufort Road, #2  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
781 698 8591

cc: Warren Church, Chair, Chaplin Historic District Commission



Sally Zimmerman <sjzpreservation@gmail.com>

## Town of Chaplin CIF 3rd Round Application

**Scofield, Jenny** <Jenny.Scofield@ct.gov>

Wed, Sep 6, 2023 at 4:15 PM

To: Sally Zimmerman <sjzpreservation@gmail.com>, "Levine, Todd" <Todd.Levine@ct.gov>

Cc: "wchurchchp@earthlink.net" <wchurchchp@earthlink.net>

Hi Sally,

Thank you for your letter.

SHPO staff (myself and an archaeologist) met with the first selectman to see the Chaplin Museum building and provide general guidance on the types of items to consider for relocations of historic buildings.

In terms of the CIF program, SHPO environmental review staff reviews proposed projects after funding is awarded to those applicants. We do not have a role in selecting which applications are awarded. The relocation of Chaplin Museum is a part of the current CIF application. SHPO does not fund relocations because a relocation is an adverse effect to the historic resource; since this is not something we can fund, if the community chooses relocation, CIF funds could be helpful in ensuring appropriate treatment of the building and both sites during a move.

My understanding is that once awarded, the detailed scope of CIF projects are flexible and can allow for some adjustments.

We're happy to help facilitate a meeting to discuss the Chaplin Museum if that is helpful.

Regards,

Jen Scofield

**Jenny Fields Scofield, AICP**

**Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer**

**National Register & Architectural Survey Coordinator**

State Historic Preservation Office

Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5

Hartford, CT 06103

Phone: 860-500-2343





Note: all references  
to "1 Chaplin Street"  
are now "11 Chaplin"

### Supplemental Information

#### **Expanded Information for Chaplin Museum/Old Town Hall (1978 Chaplin National Register District Nomination, Description and Significance, Sections 7 and 8)**

##### *Introduction*

The Chaplin Museum/Old Town Hall, 1 Chaplin Street, is one of several surviving small non-residential buildings in the Chaplin National Register district. These non-residential buildings include four "stores" (retail commercial spaces) and several "shops" (artisanal workplaces). Of these, the Chaplin Museum is the most intact, the other structures having been modified, converted to new uses, or incorporated into later structures. These non-residential buildings include the Goodell-Lincoln Store (c. 1828, 46 Chaplin Street), the Rindge-Dorrance Store & Shop (1830-32 and 1936, 31 Chaplin Street), the Backus Store (c. 1857, currently the garage of 31 Chaplin Street), the Burdick Store (c. 1913, 142 Chaplin Street) and the Davenport Dry Goods Store (c. 1860, 1 Chaplin Street). Of these buildings, the Davenport Dry Goods Store arguably is the best preserved, with an intact interior and very lightly modified exterior structure.

The Chaplin Museum stands on a small 2520-square foot lot that was removed from its original holding with the dwelling house and barn at 5 Chaplin Street, on two different occasions: once in 1891<sup>1</sup> and then, after having been transferred back into the 5 Chaplin Street parcel in 1898, again separated in 1905.<sup>2</sup> The small Museum lot has been owned by the Town of Chaplin since 1905. It is believed, on the basis of recent deed research, to have been constructed in the spring of 1860 by Chaplin master builder Edwin Eaton and for Catherine Davenport (1814-1867), a dry goods merchant.<sup>3</sup>

The building operated as the Davenport Dry Goods store until 1891. It was deeded as a small separate parcel at 1 Chaplin Street to the Natchaug Grange No. 68 (1891-1897), and later reincorporated with the parcel at 5 Chaplin Street from 1898 to 1905. In 1905, it was sold to the Town of Chaplin with a right of reversion and then became town property. It served through most of the 20th century, briefly as the Chaplin Public Library (1901-1911) and later, as the Town Hall (c. 1929-1974). Beginning in 1985, the

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<sup>1</sup> Chaplin Town Records, Book G, Pages 693-695, Mar. 2, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Chaplin Town Records, Book H, Page 273, Oct. 13, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> George J. Clark sold the full property at 5 Chaplin Street to Edwin Eaton in early 1860 (Chaplin Town Records, Book F, Page 29, Mar. 30, 1860). Edwin Eaton three months later sold the property to Catherine Davenport (Chaplin Town Records, Book F, Page 30, June 13, 1860). This now seems to be the period in which the dry goods store was constructed as the building is inconsistent architecturally with the "shoemaker's shop" cited in earlier deeds. If not constructed in 1860, the building would have been built as part of an earlier sale, also involving Edwin Eaton, in 1841-43 (Book C, Page 265; Book D, Page 197).

town informally allowed the Chaplin Museum, an offshoot of the Chaplin Historical Society, use and occupancy of the building for historical displays, collections, and programs related to Chaplin history (1985-2012). The building has been vacant and unused since 2012 when the Society disbanded and transferred its collections to the Chaplin Public Library. [CORRECTION: the Museum was a separate non-profit; see p. 10, below.]

*Section 7, Description:*

The property at 1 Chaplin Street is located at the south end of the Chaplin Historic District on the west side of Chaplin Street at its intersection with Route 198. The property, which slopes down to the southeast and abuts a historically swampy area to the south, comprises a very small, 2520-square foot parcel that was first carved out of its original lot in 1891.<sup>4</sup> Standing on the site are the one-story, 20' x 30' 1860 wooden dry goods store, an early 20th-century two-stall privy structure (8' x 5'), both painted white, and at the north and south corners of the property, a pair of 19th-century granite hitching posts with iron ring attachments. The dry goods store is offset to the north side of the lot, with a grassy lawn to the south side and a mature maple tree fronting the street edge.<sup>5</sup> The property retains integrity of location, ~~design~~, setting, design, materials and association. *workmanshop, Jeeley*

The dry goods store is a simple, gable-roofed timber-frame structure standing on a rubble fieldstone foundation, exposed as a half story on the south elevation due to the sloping site. Consistent with its original commercial function, the building is entered at the center of its three-bay width. Two oversized windows flank the center entrance and reinforce the building's commercial use in their capacity to reveal and display the interior. These windows, which are original to the construction, each contain three 8-lite sash (upper sash fixed with two lower sliding sash, not counterweighted) in recessed openings without casings.

<sup>4</sup> The 2520 sf current lot is somewhat larger than the 1356-sf that was extracted from the property at 5 Chaplin Street in 1891; it is likely the additional 1164 sf likely were added via takings by the State of CT in the 1920s/30s when Route 198 was widened.

<sup>5</sup> The store as originally constructed was placed directly on the southern boundary of the property at 5 Chaplin Street. This configuration necessitated granting a right-of-way to Catherine Davenport to allow access to the basement level of the store on that side. In 1863, Lester Bill, a cattle dealer and owner of the pasture directly south of 5 Chaplin Street entered into a 90-year lease (Chaplin Town Records, Book F, Page 433) allowing Catherine Davenport passage via a barway over his land to her store. This right of way was not explicitly cited when that land was sold from Bill's estate (Book G, Page 637, Jan. 14, 1884).

The entrance, also in a plain recessed opening, features a simple four-panel door which has been cut down and may be a later replacement. The store is accessed from a full width concrete landing platform, 20' feet wide by approximately 5' deep and two steps above grade level that probably replaced a set of wooden steps in the early 20th-century. The landing features an iron pipe railing at the south end, where the grade drops away and a set of granite ledge-stone steps are cut into the slope.

The store is sheathed with 8-inch vertical board/barn siding with narrower horizontal finished sheathing in a simply-detailed pediment on the facade elevation. The board siding gives the structure a planar simplicity that is offset by the raking cornice and base molding of the pediment and the molded eave of the side and rear elevations, the only ornamental details of the exterior. A wide flat board frieze circles the entire structure.

Evidence of the commercial nature of the structure (in which the interior wall space was typically given over to the display of goods) can be seen in the side elevations, where only two additional windows, one each at the rear of the south and north elevations, punctuate the walls. The rear elevation is blank. The southwest corner window, with a 6-over-6 lite single-hung sash, fixed at the top, is likely original while the northwest corner window is a later 2-over-2 replacement, possibly in the original opening. These windows are set in flat-board casings.

The foundation, slightly exposed at the north elevation, slopes down at the opposite (south) side to a low half-story cellar, accessed at the center by a low door. Two early 20th century paired steel casements with 8-lite leaves flank the door. The casements, and the concrete pointing with which the foundation has been patched on that side, appear contemporary with the concrete front entrance steps, and with the foundation and floor of the freestanding two-seat privy structure located just off the southwest corner of the structure. An early photo of the south end of Chaplin Street (c. 1920?) shows the south elevation of the store with sash windows, a different door, and no adjacent privy structure.



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<http://www.chaplinpubliclibrary.org/historic-photos-of-chaplin/>

1 Chaplin Street at center between telephone poles, c. 1920.

The interior of the structure retains its original plaster walls and ceiling, along with most of its early floorboards, now painted and laid north/south. A framed and plastered chimney enclosure with a stove-pipe opening bisects the rear (west) wall. On either side of the chimney enclosure, a set of shallow cabinets with tongue-and-groove hinged doors covers the full width of the west wall. The cabinets are framed above an open shelf with curved supports. Since the doors of the cabinets appear not to be original to the structure, they may cover the original commercial shelving on that wall (not seen). Other interior woodwork includes narrow trim boards and picture rails on the north and south walls.

There are two generations of lighting in the space: a hanging kerosene lantern at the center rear of the space and four 20th century pendant globe schoolhouse fixtures on chains deployed at the four corners. Also present is a range of historic hardware, including some porcelain picture knobs on the side walls and, in the ceiling, a variety of angled wrought iron hooks and other hangers.

At some point in the 20th century (likely when the concrete work was accomplished at the exterior), a concrete slab was laid in the floor along the north wall, probably at the location of the original cellar stairwell. This slab supported the vaults (now removed) used to house municipal records during the Town Hall period.

A unique survival of the original mercantile interior is the wooden security system for the two large front windows and the other surviving original window at the southwest corner. This consists of a set of narrow projecting trim pieces running along at the head and sill of the windows and extending to either side of the window; these constituted a support system for pairs of interior wooden panels or shutters (no longer extant) that could be closed to secure the openings in off-hours. Rabbets in these trim pieces allowed the panels to be slid open and stowed on either side of the window when the store was open for business. (A similar sliding mechanism has been observed in the surviving commercial building at 46 Chaplin Street.)

[cellar - not examined]

#### *Section 8, Significance:*

The 1978 National Register nomination for the center village of Chaplin<sup>6</sup> cites its “architectural cohesiveness” as a “New England village entirely constructed in a compressed period of time” with “a unique record of the architecture and community planning of the 1820’s and 1830’s”. The “complete integrity” of the village, the nomination continues, is represented in the survival of the “church, tavern, Town Hall, store and nineteen houses in the late Federal and early Greek Revival styles.” The nomination misattributed the construction date and use of 1 Chaplin Street as an 1840 purpose-built town hall. Further research now suggests the building was constructed in early 1860 as a dry goods store by master builder Edwin Eaton and for Catherine Davenport.

In addition to its architectural significance as a contributing resource in the district, the Chaplin Museum/Old Town Hall possesses significance at the local level in two additional areas of importance under National Register Criterion A: as a country store contributing to the town’s period of economic

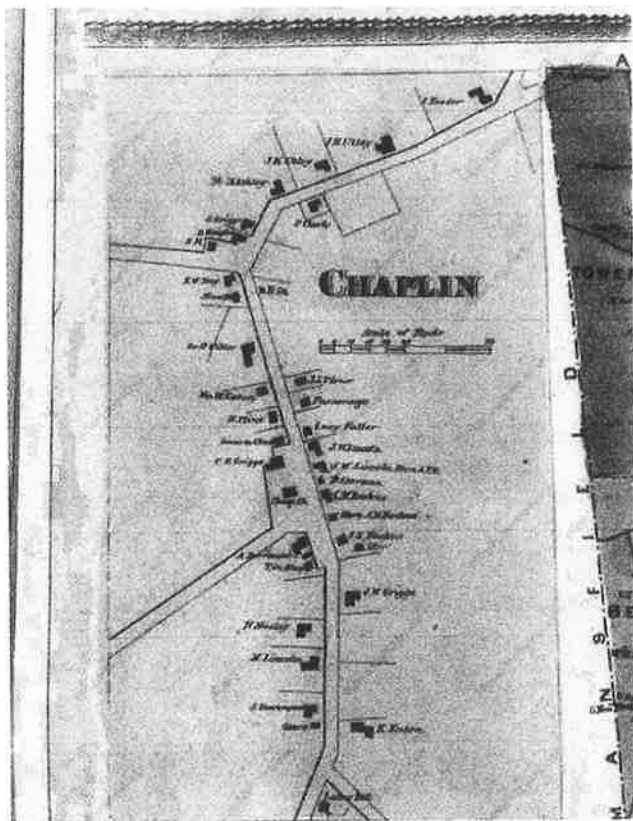
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<sup>6</sup> [https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78002856\\_text](https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78002856_text)

expansion following its 1822 founding, and later, as a critical element of the small town's 20th-century civic and community life in its function as the Town Hall and then as a volunteer-led local history museum. The rarity and number of the village's surviving commercial buildings further add to the district's significance through association with the commercial, economic, governmental and social history associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the Town of Chaplin and of the State of Connecticut.

*Country Store Era (1860-1891)*

Chaplin's center village retains, in addition to the original 1814/1815 church, 1822 Gurley Tavern, and an array of late Federal and early Greek Revival houses cited above, at least four mercantile stores, as well as several artisan's shops.<sup>7</sup> A detail map of Chaplin center in the C. J. Keeney "Atlas of Tolland and Windham County" (Hartford, 1869) provides the ownership and function of the properties in the present historic district, including the commercial buildings.



These non-residential buildings survive, perhaps uniquely in the region and the state, to provide an expansive picture of 19th-century country life, with a village economy that engaged in commercial exchange and included small-scale artisanal and industrial production (boots and shoes, tin-smithing, straw hats, paper and lumber).

**Image: 1869 Keeney atlas; extant stores are (top to bottom)**

- R: J.W. Lincoln Store & PO, C.M. Backus Store**
- L: Dorrance Tin Shop, S. Davenport Store**  
**(Burdick Store, 142 Chaplin Street not yet constructed)**

<sup>7</sup> The typical terms used in the 19th century generally connoted a "store" as a retail location selling merchandise; a "shop" usually indicated the location where an artisan worked on and produced wares.

The five stores still extant on Chaplin Street are:

- 1 Chaplin Street (Davenport Dry Goods Store; “Old Town Hall” W1 in the 1978 nomination),
- – Chaplin Street (Chaplin parcel 075-003-000; the C.M. or J. S. Backus Store [1857]/G.A.R. Hall; “garage” E5 in the 1978 nomination),
- 31 Chaplin Street (the Dorrance Tin Shop [1832], aka “Eaton’s Store” W6 in the 1978 nomination),<sup>8</sup>
- 46 Chaplin Street (Goodell-Lincoln Store [1828], and “Old Store” E8 in the 1978 nomination);
- 142 Chaplin Street (Burdick Store, “Post Office” [c. 1913] E20 in the 1978 nomination and identified in 1978 as Non Contributing/N.C.)

Of these structures, the Chaplin Museum/Old Town Hall structure at 1 Chaplin Street is the best preserved with slight modifications to the exterior and a substantially unaltered interior, the others having been converted to other uses and altered to a greater extent.

These stores possess significance within the early 19th century economy of rural Connecticut as representatives of the shift from a largely self-sustaining colonial agrarian economy with comparatively little access to manufactured commodities to a complex system of local mercantile exchange that included artisanal and household goods produced in the community and intended for the commercial market. Historian David Jaffee summarized the role of rural storekeepers as prompters of “change in the rural economy. They collected farm surpluses and sold them to urban dealers; they functioned as third parties in local exchange networks; they promoted improvements in the transportation system.”<sup>9</sup>

The center village of Chaplin supported at least two stores that operated fully in this manner: the Goodell-Lincoln Store at 46 Chaplin Street and the Searls-Clark-Rindge Store originally at 31 Chaplin Street.<sup>10</sup> Both were what was called in the deeds a “merchant’s store” and which an 1856 source defined as a “Country Store.” i.e., offering “A general assortment of Dry Goods, Groceries, Crockery,

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<sup>8</sup> This property was not historically associated with the prominent Eaton family, but was constructed 1830-32 by builder Edwin Eaton as a “merchant’s store”, along with the dwelling house and barn at 35 Chaplin Street (Chaplin Town Records, Book C, Page 33, Feb. 21, 1832) for the original owner, store-keeper Bela Searls. It was later owned and operated by Isaac and Jared Clark (Book C, Page 180, Sept. 6, 1838) and then by Erastus Rindge (Book D, Page 403, Mar. 3, 1845). Alexander Dorrance purchased the dwelling house, barn and store from Rindge’s estate (Book F, Page 71, Mar. 13, 1863).

<sup>9</sup>Jaffee, David, “Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860” *The Journal of American History*, Sep. 1991, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Sep. 1991), p. 516.

<sup>10</sup> The house at 31 Chaplin Street was constructed in 1936 reusing and combining components of the Searls-Clark-Rindge Store, the Dorrance Tin Shop and an unidentified school house. The Goodell-Lincoln Store has lost its interior fittings and carriage sheds but is otherwise intact.

Agricultural Tools, etc., etc.”<sup>11</sup> Surviving account books for the Goodell-Lincoln Store and probate records for storekeeper Erastus Rindge provide ample evidence of the vibrant nexus of commercial exchange carried on in these two merchant stores.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the village storekeeper, the itinerant peddler was a key figure in bringing finished goods to rural farms. Commercial exchange via the peddler constituted an especially significant role in the store at 1 Chaplin Street, in the person of the Civil War-era storekeeper, Catherine Davenport. Mrs. Davenport was unusual in that it was she, and not her husband Seymour Davenport, who held the mortgage deed for the property (Book F, page 217, June 12, 1860) and she who was licensed and taxed both as a retail merchandise dealer and as a third class peddler in the I.R.S. Tax Assessment lists for 1862. Jaffee notes that itinerants “were at the center of [the] process of commercialization; they moved from facilitating local exchange to fostering the expansion of production in the countryside and the expansive role of commodities in everyday life.”<sup>13</sup>

Notably, Catherine Davenport bridged both roles, maintaining a Dry Goods store in the Chaplin village while also engaging in itinerant trade (possibly via male hired help). Her 1867 probate record<sup>14</sup> consists almost solely of dry goods, including dress fabrics, ready-made clothing (cloaks, shawls, cuffs), ribbons, buttons, trimmings and two pages of account holders. She also owned, among real estate and other personal property, a peddler’s wagon, business wagon, horse, and in the store, one showcase and a box stove. After Catherine’s death, the store continued to be run by Davenports for another 24 years.<sup>15</sup> By that time, Chaplin residents could easily obtain a wide range of dry goods in nearby Willimantic.

### *Civic Era (1891-1974)*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The New England Business Directory and Gazetteer*, George Adams, publisher, Boston, Mass., 1856, p. 578.

<sup>12</sup> The Lincoln Store account books from 1858-1862 are held at the Yale University Archives, Box 50, Folder 286, Call # MS 29 Series 1, as part of the Account books collection. Rindge’s probate (Chaplin District Probate Records #267 Volume A, 1812-1880) includes an inventory with 14 pages of goods on hand including yard goods, hardware, groceries, books and stationery, crockery, tools, and boots and shoes, along with four pages of accounts.

<sup>13</sup> Jaffee, David, “Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860” *The Journal of American History*, Sep. 1991, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Sep. 1991), p. 516.

<sup>14</sup> Chaplin District Probate Records #81, Volume A, 1812-1899

<sup>15</sup> By 1868, Catherine’s widower Seymour Davenport (1807-1885) had married his neighbor (Cornelia Mosely, 1825-1897) and had a son, Edwin Lucius Davenport (1868-1945). Catherine and Cornelia were Davenport’s third and fourth wives; two earlier spouses, Delia (1802-1849) and Charlotte (1808-1851) are buried with Catherine in the Old Willimantic Cemetery. Seymour Davenport’s other surviving children by his earlier marriages were Mary L. Davenport (1840-1909) and Delia Handall (1834-1870). Seymour Davenport is buried in the Chaplin Center Cemetery.

<sup>16</sup> For purposes related to the National Register of Historic Places criteria, historic events less than 50 years old, such as the use of the store for the Chaplin Museum, must meet a number of exceptions to be considered significant by the NRHP



Beginning in 1891, the dry goods store began to be used in other ways. In 1891, six years after Seymour Davenport's death, his widow Cornelia Davenport sold a 24' x 56.5' portion of her property in trust for and mortgaged to the Natchaug Grange #68<sup>17</sup>. The Grange, which had formed in 1887, used (and probably let other groups use) the store for meetings and other gatherings. This use was short-lived, however, as the Natchaug Grange #68 disbanded in 1897 following a drop-off in membership (it regrouped in the early 20th century). With the death of Cornelia Davenport in 1897, the Grange parcel was sold back to her heir, Edwin L. Davenport and reabsorbed into the original holding. Edwin and his family lived at 5 Chaplin Street briefly before relocating to Boston in 1901 and selling that and several other Chaplin properties.

In 1901, Caroline P. Young (1835-1923) purchased the property with the "dwelling house, store and barn thereon standing" from Davenport, including a phrase that the store was the "grantee's [Young's] public library"<sup>18</sup>. A schoolteacher and farmer in Chaplin, and a widow for 31 years, Mrs. Young in 1905 conveyed the southwest corner of her property to the Town of Chaplin with two reversionary provisions<sup>19</sup>. It is clear from these terms that she sold the southwest corner of her property with the intent of housing a public library (which the town had voted to establish in 1901), since her 1901 deed showed the public library was already located there. The store's use as the library is corroborated in a December, 1904 article in *The Connecticut Magazine*, stating, the Chaplin Library was "unfortunate in being placed in a grange hall, which receives little care, and where the books are hidden from view by wooden doors on high shelves only to be reached by breakneck steps."<sup>20</sup> There is reason to assume that the library remained in the store until 1911 when the William Ross Library at 57 Chaplin Street was donated to the town.

How the town used the dry goods store following the opening of the Ross Library is unclear without further research into town records, but at some point after 1911, the town probably began to use the

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definition. For this reason, the "Civic Era" of the store closes with the move of the town hall to 495 Phoenixville Road even though the store served a public purpose for some time after 1974..

<sup>17</sup> Chaplin Town Records, Book G, Pages 693-695, Mar. 2, 1891.

<sup>18</sup> Chaplin Town Records, Book H, Page 217, Oct. 1, 1901; the deed refers to the store as the "grantee's (Young) public library" indicating that at that point Young had already begun to provide for the store to be used as a library.

<sup>19</sup> Chaplin Town Records, Book H, page 273, October 3, 1905, with two reversionary provisions: 1) that if the property is ever sold by the town, the grantor has a first option to repurchase and 2) that if the building "shall be permanently removed, the land shall revert to grantor."

<sup>20</sup> Hewins, Caroline M. "The Development of the Public Library in Connecticut", *The Connecticut Magazine*, Volume IX, Number 1, December 1904, pp. 181-182. The author misidentified the Chaplin and Hampton libraries, as the description of the grange hall clearly reflects the Chaplin Museum building.

building for meetings and other civic functions. Probably sometime after 1929, and during the tenure of long-time town clerk Bernard M. Church (1906-1981), the building was refurbished as the town hall.<sup>21</sup> Among the improvements made to the space (possibly in the 1930s when funds became available to the town during the Depression) were electrification of the building, addition of the two-seat privy structure to the south, insertion of steel casement sash in the basement windows, and construction of a new concrete entrance platform. Some form of heating was probably also installed at that time, although the basement level has not been examined.

Anecdotally, the interior housed two desks, one for the town clerk and one for the first selectman, both part-time positions. Records storage may at first have been in the shelving units at the back of the space but was probably improved in the 1930s with a row of fireproof vaults on the north wall. These vaults, since removed, stood on a concrete platform in the area of a basement stair whose opening could easily have been shored up to support the heavy floor and vaults. Again, examination of the basement level could confirm that alteration.

As Chaplin entered the post-War period, according to Gordon Naser's 1972 *Ben Chaplin's Town* the town shifted from a town "where workers toiled on family farms" to one where the "breadwinner came back to Chaplin after the day's work was done" and became a "town of commuters"<sup>22</sup>. A symbol of that change was the construction of the current Town Hall in 1974, after which the dry goods store at 1 Chaplin was vacant and unused. Some years later, in 1985, a group of townspeople organized to create and open the Chaplin Museum "exhibiting artifacts and memorabilia from Chaplin's past"<sup>23</sup> and the most recent phase of the dry goods store's civic existence commenced.

#### *Conclusion: The Chaplin Museum and After*

In contrast to some surrounding towns, in the 1970s and early 1980s Chaplin had no Historical Society, group or organization dedicated to preserving the history of the town. This perhaps reflected the effort expended during those years to establish the Chaplin Historic District, a goal that reached fruition in 1974 when the Town of Chaplin voted to create the district with an Historic District Commission appointed to preserve its integrity.

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<sup>21</sup> Philbrick, Johanne, *Historic Homes of Chaplin Village*, Exeter Press, Lebanon, Conn., 2002, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Naser, Gordon, *Ben Chaplin's Town 1822-1972: A History of Chaplin, Connecticut*, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Philbrick, Johanne, p. 4.

In the early 1980s a group of local Chaplin citizens interested in the history of the town, and spurred forward by Ruth Canfield, a Chaplin resident and artist who taught in New York universities, joined together with the idea to transform the vacant old town hall into a small historical museum. Through their efforts, the Chaplin Museum legally incorporated as a non-profit entity on June 11, 1985. The Museum opened its doors to greet the public on August 25, 1985.

A lack of adequate heat and water limited the seasonal adequacy of the use of the old town hall as a public facility. Handicap access and zero parking were also problematic. Despite these shortcomings, the Chaplin Museum functioned as a well-attended and strongly supported focal point of pride for the town for almost 25 years. In its best years it thrived through both financial contributions and multiple volunteers. Yearly special exhibits would draw more than 80 visitors on opening days. Its eventual demise in 2012 was perhaps hastened by the advanced age of its remaining founders and increasingly strict access laws.

Around 2017, the Chaplin Board of Selectmen began investigating options to reuse the building, including relocating it from its original site to the town property at 130 Chaplin Street. Discussions have continued and in February, 2022, members of the Board shared an informal plan to relocate the Museum with the Historic District Commission, including a draft site plan showing the structure relocated between the Library and the Center Cemetery. First Selectman Juan Roman stated that the Board was looking to reopen the structure as the Chaplin Museum on the grounds of the library in order to make the structure more accessible to all who visit Chaplin and to utilize the library infrastructure to facilitate the operation of the structure as a museum. In May, 2022, the Commission voted to seek a grant from the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office for a feasibility study that would be of assistance in determining the appropriateness of this proposal. If the grant application is successful, HDC Chair Warren Church and First Selectman Roman will co-manage the study. It is expected the application will be submitted in Fall, 2022.

*-Statement prepared by Sally Zimmerman, Zimmerman Preservation Services, with deed research by Allen Olsen, August, 2022*

