

CT Trust Resource ID: 2906

HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY – BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

State Historic Preservation Office, DECD, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

Inventory form modified for the Creative Places - Arts & Letters Project

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common): C.L. Griswold and Co.

Other Name(s) (Historic): C.L. Griswold and Co.; Stephen Jennings Co.; National Theatre of the Deaf/Chester Historical Society

Street Address or Location: 9 West Main Street, Chester

Town/City: Chester

Village: Chester Center

County: Middlesex

Designation(s):

Owner(s): Chester Historical Society

Public/Private: Non-Profit

Latitude: 41.4024 Longitude: -72.4520

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Recreation and Culture: Museum

Historic Use: Industry: Manufacturing facility / mill

Accessibility to public: Yes Exterior visible from public road? Yes

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: During museum hours and special events

Style of building: Date of Construction: 1850

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate) Clapboard

Structural Systems(s): Post & Beam

Roof(Type): Gable (Material): Asphalt Shingle

Number of Stories: 2 1/2 Approximate Dimensions:

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: If yes, explain: NA

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

Surrounding Environment:

Interrelationship of building and surroundings: The property is on the south side of West Main Street, on the bank of the South Branch of Pataconk Brook where a dam and mill pond are located near the southwest corner of the building.

Other notable features of building or site: The main mill building has been rehabilitated as the museum and offices of the Chester Historical Society. The building is a 2 1/2-story gable-roofed wood-framed building sited parallel to the river bank. A hip-roofed cupola on the ridge-line has louvered openings on all four sides. The steeply-pitched roof has deep overhangs and asphalt shingles; siding is wood clapboard.

Architect: Unknown Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

The building ... began in 1825 as Abel Snow's anchor forge. Over the next 25 years the factory changed hands several times and was apparently painted red, for it became known as the Red Factory. In 1850, Charles Griswold bought the site and erected the building now standing. Here he produced auger bits, wood screws, corkscrews, reamers, and other light-wear. He sold the factory in 1864 to Stephen Jennings. By the end of World War I, business had fallen off and manufacturing was discontinued in 1919. In 1924 the building became the Solar Masonic Lodge No. 131, and in 1983 it was purchased by the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD), who restored the original appearance of the exterior. The building held a theater and dining hall. In 2000 it was acquired by the Chester Historical Society and now houses their museum and offices (Houses and History of Chester).

In the 1950s, Dr. Edna Simon Levine, a psychologist working in the area of deafness, had formed the concept of a professional company of deaf performers. Arthur Penn and Anne Bancroft, the director and leading actress of Broadway's *The Miracle Worker*, were approached with the idea and, in turn, brought it to their colleague, Broadway set and lighting designer, David Hays. He was struck by the beauty and strength of American Sign Language on stage. In the spring of 1967, a national television program was aired which explored the experimental idea of NTD. Working with David Hays and Broadway professionals was Bernard Bragg, NTD's first actor. NTD began the annual Professional Training School that summer and held its first public performance at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. The company went on

their first national tour in the fall from a home base it shared with The O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. In 1983, NTD moved to its own home in Chester, where it stayed until 2000. After some years in West Hartford at the American School for the Deaf, in 2012 the company returned to the O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford (NTD web site).

Sources:

Chester Assessors Records at <http://www.mainstreetmaps.com/CT/Chester/#> . Map 14- Lot 329 - .30 acre
Chester Historical Society, PO Box 204, Chester, CT 06412 Web site <http://chesterhistoricalsociety.org/>. Chester Historical Society. 1976, 1984. 'The Houses and History of Chester.' 1976, 1984. Chester: Chester Historical Society. National Theatre of the Deaf web site. http://www.ntd.org/ntd_history.html

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock **Date:** 5/06/2015

View: Northeast view

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** December 29, 2015

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



NW view of 9 West Main St., Chester

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____

District ☐S ☐NR **If NR, specify:** ☐Actual ☐ Potential