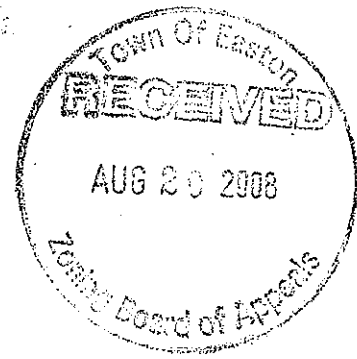


To: David Colton, Town Administrator
Stephanie Danielson, Land Use Planner
From: Melanie Deware & Greg Galer
Easton Historical Commission
Re: Ames Shovel Shops Complex
Date: March 14, 2007



This memo outlines the Historical Commission's basic thoughts and concerns regarding potential redevelopment of the shovel shop complex located between Main and Oliver Streets, and the abandoned rail bed in North Easton.

Description

The complex is comprised of approximately fifteen buildings (the count can vary depending on how one considers a variety of attached buildings) which date from approximately 1852 to 1928. The Commission can provide a more detailed inventory if and when desired.

The majority of the buildings were built in the mid-19th century and are of stone rubble construction. In addition there are some 19th century wooden structures and 20th century steel-walled buildings and additions.

Significance and brief history

The Ames Shovel Shops complex is one of the most important historic sites in the town of Easton. There is no debate about the national historic significance of this site. It is a critical and central element of the North Easton National Register Historic District established in 1972.

With American ironworking roots to 1635, the Ames family become one of if not the first in America to make the most basic but critically needed tool, the iron-bladed shovel. Blacksmith Captain John Ames began the enterprise in West Bridgewater in 18th century and began making shovels ca. 1774. The Ames Shovel Company was more formally established when his son, Oliver Ames, opened the shovel works in Easton in 1803. The company created the tools that literally built America and grew to become the largest shovel-maker in the world in the latter 19th century. The town of Easton became known throughout the US by the middle of the 19th century and around the world soon thereafter through the millions of Ames shovels made here. Ames was at the forefront of American industrialization and part of the global economy for both raw materials and sales long before such breadth was common.

Every major American construction project and most of the minor ones in the US utilized Ames shovels: creating the nation's transportation networks (the Erie Canal, the transcontinental railroad, the American highways system), building American cities, settling the west, mining our gold and coal, and the list goes on and on.

Furthermore the success and profitability of the shovel works is the source of the great Ames family empire. Without these shovel works there would be no H.H. Richardson National Historic Landmark with its five world-famous Richardson buildings and Olmsted landscapes. There would be no LaFarge stained glass and other significant elements of Unity Church. There would have been no Governor Oliver Ames nor an Oliver Ames High School. There would be no Oakes Ames and Borderland State Park. There may have been no Transcontinental Railroad until years later.

The list can go on and on. Suffice it to say Easton, Massachusetts, and the nation would have developed very differently were it not for this historic industrial complex. Its significance and the importance of its preservation is without doubt.

While the company left this Easton complex in 1953 the company remains in business today. Thus the surviving Ames complex is a critical piece of extant historical fabric that traces the full expanse of American industrial and business history. Complimented by the entire "company town" of North Easton and extensive historical collections held by Stonehill College the Ames shovel shops represents a unique and tremendously significant piece of American history.

The Commission considers the shovel complex of major significance in its entirety. The organic growth of, interrelationships between, and functionally determined architecture of each of the buildings are a critical part of the story of the development of the Ames Company and correspondingly the town of Easton.

That significance being said, the Commission recognizes that a few elements within the complex are of less importance in comparison to the site as a whole. Of less significance are:

- the 1928, steel-walled store house
- the small, metal addition to the southwest of 1868 Antrim opening shop
- a small outbuilding just north of the 1868 Antrim opening shop
- the various southern, metal-walled additions to the 1857 machine shop
- the small, concrete block building adjacent to the southeast side of the 1928 steel store house
- and perhaps the small connector between the 1852 long shop and 1870 store house (we don't have construction date but suspect it to be 20th century)

In addition to the structures themselves it is important to remember that this was in part a water powered site and any remnants of the hydropower system remaining archaeologically or within the buildings would be important to preserve if possible or, at least, carefully document before alteration or destruction. Subsurface artifacts and structures on the entire site are of potential significance and any work should be monitored and pre-construction archaeological testing should be considered.

Support for Preservation

The importance of preservation of this complex is clear and its national significance can easily be supported beyond the local community. If desired we could easily obtain a host of letters from the state, region, and nation to support preservation of these structures. Representatives from both the Massachusetts Historical Commission and Preservation Mass, the state-wide historic preservation organization, have both expressed willingness to provide statements of concern regarding potential redevelopment of this property. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and other organizations of this type as well as historic preservation professionals and history scholars would certainly provide similar letters of concern and support for preservation of these structures.

Redevelopment

The Historical Commission welcomes the potential opportunity for enhanced preservation, restoration, and adaptive reuse of the historic shovel shop complex. We look forward to working cooperatively with a property owner who recognizes the benefit of working within these unique and nationally significant buildings centrally located among one of the most important historic areas in the nation. A redevelopment that sees the historic attributes as benefits rather than burdens can add much to historic North Easton and the Commission looks forward to working cooperatively on such a project.

The Commission urges any redevelopment to take advantage of state and federal historic preservation tax credits which can not only return to the property owner up to 40% of restoration costs but will assure that any work on the properties is properly reviewed to assure preservation and compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties. Such a tax credit project is a win-win with financial benefits to the property owner, an enhanced and more desirable final project for purchasers or renters, and a redevelopment of benefit to the community.

Concerns

Any projects which meets Secretary of the Interior Standards will likely address most concerns of the Historical Commission. However, in summary the Commission's concerns are as follows. Except for the buildings considered of less significance the Commission would oppose demolition or significant exterior alterations. Again, these less significant buildings are:

- the 1928, steel-walled store house
- the small, metal addition to the southwest of 1868 Antrim opening shop
- a small outbuilding just north of the 1868 Antrim opening shop
- the various southern, metal-walled additions to the 1857 machine shop
- the small, concrete block building adjacent to the southeast side of the 1928 steel store house
- and perhaps the small connector between the 1852 long shop and 1870 store house (we don't have construction date but suspect it to be 20th century)

More specifically:

- A. Demolition: The Commission would vehemently oppose demolition of any buildings except those specifically noted above.

- B. Rehabilitation: The commission supports and in fact encourages efforts to rehabilitate and upgrade the extant buildings for new functions that will in fact encourage better use and appreciation of this historic site. However the Commission would oppose any proposal to make major alterations to the exterior facades, rooflines, window and door opening patterns, or overall massing of any but the buildings noted. However, working within the general guidelines of the Secretary Standards the Commission looks forward to reviewing and approving reasonable plans for alterations to these structures which preserve their historic character.