

# City of Gardiner Historic Preservation Commission

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As a Certified Local Government (CLG) community in Maine, our active Historic Preservation Commission has engaged the business community in application of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties that apply to our downtown historic district. Recently, the Commission considered the nomination of Brunswick Square (Gardiner Common) to be included as part of the city's historic district.

At its regular monthly meeting on March 16, 2021, the Gardiner Historic Commission endorsed the nomination of Brunswick Square as a significant historic property within the City of Gardiner. The nomination has the support of the Gardiner City Council and local officials.

Brunswick Square (Gardiner Common) was conveyed to the City of Gardiner by Robert Hallowell Gardiner in 1824. It is believed to be the "earliest known example in Maine of a green space known as a square".<sup>1</sup> The gift was made "in consideration of my desire to promote the convenience of the inhabitants of the town of Gardiner and with the intention of ornamenting said town..."<sup>2</sup> The Square is bordered by a fence constructed of granite bollards and wooden cross rails, the fence rails painted and maintained through a partnership of volunteers and the city. It has been and remains an important *cultural landscape* in our community.

The adjacencies include the site of the Gardiner Lyceum, Christ Church, St. Joseph's Church, the newly restored St. Anne's Burial Ground and a number of historic period homes.

We believe that Brunswick Square has made a significant contribution to the history of the City of Gardiner and to the State of Maine. Robert Hallowell Gardiner, an important figure in Gardiner's history, was one of the architects of the industrial development of the city. Brunswick Square stands as an illustration of his legacy in Gardiner. As a public park, a *vernacular landscape* that functions as a *recreational greenspace*, the Square is dearly loved by residents young and old. It is the cherished location of several contributing features including the Civil War Memorial, the E.A. Robinson Memorial, and the War Memorial. The presence of the memorial to Edwin Arlington Robinson, Pulitzer Prize winning author, is a defined marker of

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<sup>1</sup> "Ice Storm Recovery Project" Johnson's Arboriculture/Treekeepers, 1998

<sup>2</sup> Iglheart, Elizabeth, "Greens Squares or Commons?" Maine Olmsted Alliance, Summer 1994

Gardiner's literary past. Just as important, but not yet a contributing feature, the Palmer memorial fountain commemorates the life and work of Doctor Gideon Stinson Palmer, Civil War Surgeon. In addition to his career as a local physician and regimental surgeon during the Civil War, Dr. Palmer would become the Director of Freedmen's Hospital and the Dean of Medicine at the newly founded Howard University, both in Washington D.C. Dr. Palmer provided care for black Union soldiers and indigent people in that city.

We believe that Brunswick Square is indeed an appropriate property to be nominated by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission as a significant cultural landscape. Our Common is the site of the annual Memorial Day observance, also the location of a children's playground, home of the Farmers' Market and many community activities. It functions as a walking/exercise trail with its many historic pathways and attracts visitors during the summer season for the operation of the Palmer Fountain. The gazebo is the home of many outdoor concerts, a gathering place for committee meetings during the pandemic, a dry space on rainy days. Picnics, football, soccer, yoga – all are practiced and played on this lovely greenspace throughout the year. It is the crown jewel of Gardiner situated at the top of the hill overlooking the Kennebec River. The city has been supportive of the property through improved maintenance, the removal of diseased trees and a proposal to Project Canopy for replanting. Though the majestic elms of centuries ago are gone, the Square is thriving. With the rebuilding of the Gazebo in 2012, the planned restoration of the Palmer Fountain and the move of the swing set to restore one of the historic pathways, Gardiner will take pride in this space into the new century.

Summary of Public Comment:

Public in attendance suggested the importance of the location of Brunswick Square – to include Saint Anne's burial ground, The Lyceum and two Churches, Christ Church and St. Joseph's. Comments also cited the life and work of Gideon Stinson Palmer, Civil War surgeon for whom the fountain on the Common is dedicated.

Public in attendance were in favor of this nomination.