The Arthur Building

38 Green Street

Henry D. Barrows

National Historic District

1924 Professional Building

Businessman and real estate developer Henry D. Barrows is remembered locally for his Barrows block, a three-story office building on 253 State Street, New London, built in 1916, designed by Morris B. Payne. When it opened, the building was home to Barrows’s dry goods and shoe and boot store as well as leased retail and office space. Barrows also owned buildings elsewhere in New London, including 130 Bank Street, and a building on Water Street, Stonington Borough, another in Pawcatuck, and no doubt others located elsewhere. The building on Green Street, named the Arthur Building, was constructed in 1924, possibly designed by Payne in partnership with Edward R. Keefe.

In the 1920 Census, Henry D. Barrows (1858-1927) and his wife Rillie (Coates) Barrows (1853-1937) lived at 205 Broad Street, with their extended family. In 1905, their daughter, Myrtle, had married Walter G. Woodworth, who worked for Barrows. Their son Arthur was born in 1907. Myrtle divorced Woodworth, and in 1915, she married Edeson Strickland, who, as had Woodworth before him, worked as a shoe salesman for Barrows. In June 1920, young Arthur Woodworth petitioned the court to have his last name changed to Barrows, adopting his grandfather’s surname.

In 1924, the year the Green Street building was constructed, Arthur Barrows (1907-1982), age 18, went on a trip around the world, leaving from New York on the *Empress of Canada* on 30 January, according to his passport. He graduated from Wesleyan in 1931 and received his law degree from the University of Pennsylvania and the next year married Henrietta Hull. He was a New London attorney, served in the Navy during World War II, and was state representative from Waterford (1946-48).

Arthur Barrows owned his grandfather’s building at 130 Bank Street from 1954 to 1978, where he had offices. He owned the 38 Green Street building until 1978.

The Arthur Building’s Businesses

City Directories from the 1920s show 16 spaces in the Arthur Building, and the number of businesses from 1924 to the present would take up an entire book. Here, we will attempt to give a few highlights.

The early businesses at 38 Green Street tell a national as well as a local story. One occupant, starting in 1925, was the Business Service Bureau, also known as the New London Employment Bureau, part of a network of variously organized groups helping to match employers with potential workers. Such organizations grew up in the 1890s and officially following the creation of the Department of Labor in 1913. Often rather ineffective, they were reorganized and standardized in the wake of the Great Depression in 1933.

First tenants of the building also included the United Negro Welfare Council with its agent/secretary/director, Sadie (Dillon) Harrison Fulford (1889-1949). Supported by the Council, Sadie co-wrote a precursor to the famous Green Book, *Hackly and Harrison’s Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers,* published in 1930 and 1931*.* Sadie’s house, “Hempstead Cottage,” at 73 Hempstead Street, shows up in the *Negro Motorist Green Book* from 1938 to 1950.

Negro Welfare Councils, in one form or another, could be found in many cities in the U.S. by the 1920s. Also known as the Negro Urban League, such groups provided a nation‑wide network for African Americans, though membership often included whites, as it did in New London. The group moved to 39 Tilley Street in 1928.

In New London, the group had its roots during World War I when community leader Elizabeth Jeter Greene organized a group of young black women to aid and assist black soldiers stopping in New London en route to war theaters in Europe. According to civil rights leader, Linwood Bland, Jr. in his memoir *A View from the Sixties: the Black Experience in Southeastern Connecticut*, the group called itself “The Canteen,” and later became known as Negro Welfare on War Relief. This organization continued to aid troops and provide services for poor local residents until after the war, when its name was changed to the Negro Welfare Council. Elizabeth Jeter Greene was its first and only president, according to Bland. Greene and her staff helped with problems of rent, food, utility bills, and clothing, with the recipients often repaying the Council in some manner. The Negro Welfare Council eventually changed its name to the New London Service League and began to focus on disadvantaged youth. The league's first president, Bennie McKissick Dover, continued the work of Mrs. Greene.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Sadie Dillon Harrison’s half-brother, Benjamin Tanner Johnson, also was in New London at this time, living with his wife, Mary (Parker) Johnson, at his sister’s home on Hempstead Street. Born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1896 to John Quincy and Halle Johnson, Benjamin T. Johnson was a graduate of Howard University cum laude in 1919 and received his MBA from Harvard Business School in 1921, when he appeared locally at a regional economic conference on the promotion of black business opportunities. Meanwhile, he was employed by Roger Babson at the Babson Institute in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and he held other jobs as well. He lived in New London while working as a manager for the New England Peoples Finance Corporation between 1927 to 1934, with offices in the Arthur Building. Johnson also worked at the Works Progress Administration as a Connecticut state supervisor and the Social Security Board as a junior administrative assistant between 1936 and 1938. His later home address in New London was at 9 New Street, near Bayonet. According to New London city directories, Johnson removed to Boston in 1939 with his wife Mary and two sons.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Johnson was a tireless champion for African American-owned banks, and he helped found the New England Peoples Finance Corporation, an African American bank and lender. As of 1935, he also had a real estate company in New London, headquartered in the Arthur Building. Later on, he taught finance at Howard University, and he served as executive secretary to the Urban League of Canton, Ohio. Johnson earned a law degree after his time in New London.

Another early business was the Powder Puff Beauty Salon, which advertised in the Connecticut College News in 1926 and for years after that. This business was the joint venture of two single white women: Rose Reiger (abt 1900-1985) and Linda Jane Denison (1893-?). The business location in the Arthur Building lasted many years, at least through 1974. Another shop appealing to Connecticut College students was Miss O’Neill’s, which advertised buttons, yarns, and needlework supplies.

Barrows Real Estate always had offices in the building, but numbers of other realtors came and went from the Arthur Building. A significant early tenant was R.G. Dun & Company, local branch of what would soon become Dun & Bradstreet. Another was the black-owned Johnson Real Estate Company (see, above).

Other early companies included a window cleaning company, a number of different tailors and dressmakers, a jewelers, and the Air-Way Sanitary System Vacuum Cleaner Company, which sold revolutionary, lighter-weight uprights that used disposable bags. By the late 1930s, the tenants were fewer and included the Spiritualist Temple for about a decade.

A number of music studios maintained space in the Arthur over the years and in the 1970s there were also a number of artists, including Lou Bonamarte, James Russell and John C. Martin.

In 1942, Herrup’s Furniture of Hartford had space at the Arthur as did the International Detective Service. In 1958, Crandall and Sons Steeplejacks had offices there. In the 1960s there was a typewriter dealer and a collection agency. Meanwhile, Barrows real estate became Arthur Barrows’ law offices. Arthur Barrows sold the building in 1978 to Clara Manheimer. He passed away in 1982.

Clara Manheimer’s son, auctioneer Seymour Manheimer, sold restaurant equipment out of its ground floor for several decades, beginning in the late 1970s. Other more recent tenants included P.E. Typesetter and First Step, Inc., a mental health outreach organization.

From 2012-2014, the Monte Cristo Bookshop, a crowd-funded bookstore specializing in local, discounted and used books, occupied the ground floor. The bookstore hosted frequent author’s readings and musical performances.

In 2013, Gesher Associates bought the building and rented the second and third floors as artists’ studios and The Kitchen Gallery, a yoga studio/art gallery. Under Gesher Associates’ ownership, after the Monte Cristo Bookstore closed, the ground floor was occupied by Cathedral Stained Glass, a stained glass studio and showroom. Most recently, it was the headquarters for the New London Democratic Town Committee.

The narrative above starts with title information researched by Thomas Couser. From there we look at various primary and secondary sources, including census records, city directories, newspaper accounts, local and family histories, cemetery and military service records. In this case, the process was importantly assisted by Tambria Moore. The above narrative is by no means exhaustive, but is meant to give an idea of the people involved in the history of this building. – Mary Beth Baker for New London Landmarks, November 18, 2019.

1. Linwood Bland, Jr. *A View of the Sixties, A Memoir* (2001) 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, Baker Library Special Collections, Harvard Business School, Harvard University Benjamin Tanner Johnson papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)