

PROJECT APPLICATION FORM – 2006

Applicant: Town of Acton **Submission Date:** November 14, 2005

Applicant's Address, Phone Number and Email **Purpose: (Please select all that apply)**

472 Main Street, Acton, MA 01720
Contact: Mary Ann Ashton, 978-263-4399
MABAshton@aol.com

- Open Space
- Community Housing
- Historic Preservation
- Recreation

Town Committee (if applicable): _____

Project Name: Fitzgerald Piano Preservation

Project Location/Address: _____

Amount Requested: \$ \$17,000

Project Summary: In the space below, provide a brief summary of the project.

When the Acton High School opened in September 1926, Honorable John Francis Fitzgerald, former Congressman and mayor of Boston, presented a "baby grand" piano to the town of Acton. The gift, made in memory of his wife's parents, Acton residents Michael and Mary Ann Hannon, paid tribute to the town that held so many fond memories for Fitzgerald and was intended to bring enjoyment to its citizens for future years. This piano, unplayed and in disrepair for many years, needs a complete restoration and a permanent home where it may be heard and admired by Acton's citizens. The proposed project requests funds from the Community Preservation Fund to restore the piano, and would embark on a private fundraising campaign that would serve to collect funds for the ongoing upkeep and annual maintenance of the piano. The private fundraising events anticipated would both draw attention to the public funding as well as raise awareness of Acton's rich history and its connection with regional historic figures and events. The town of Acton will explore permanent locations for the piano, including the Acton Memorial Library, and such a public location would offer Acton residents increased cultural programming in the form of occasional piano concerts by our talented pool of local pianists.

Attachments:

- Narrative, including answers to specific CPC questions
- Minutes, Acton Public School Committee, April 3, 2000
- Undated newspaper article entitled, "Twas Acton Men Who Gave Their Blood, by the Rude Bridge That Arched the Flood – Ex-Mayor John F. Fitzgerald." Approximate date April 19, 1925.
- Undated newspaper article entitled, "Dedication of Acton High School." Approximate date September 4, 1926.
- Letter from Acton Board of Selectmen
- Letter from Acton Historical Commission

Estimated Date for Commencement of Project: 1-2 months after funding becomes available

Estimated Date for Completion of Project: 5 months after funding becomes available

Narrative

Background: In 1926 when the Acton High School opened its doors, the town of Acton received numerous gifts to furnish and equip the new high school, including a gift from Honorable John Francis Fitzgerald and his wife, Mary Josephine ("Josie"). John Fitzgerald (former Congressman and mayor of Boston, father of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, and grandfather of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Senator Ted Kennedy) presented the gift in memory of his wife's parents, Michael and Mary Ann Hannon of South Acton. The gift was emblematic of Mayor Fitzgerald's fond memories of trips to Acton as a boy, coming from his home in the North End of Boston to rural Acton to visit with the Hannons. Mary Ann Hannon was a first cousin of John's father, Thomas; upon first arriving in the United States, Thomas had lived with the Hannons in Acton for several years. Throughout his life, John Fitzgerald kept a close association with Acton. Town reports indicate that he served on the celebrations committee that planned the 150th anniversary of the battle of Concord in 1925, and he spoke at the ceremonies at Town Hall on that day about Acton's role in the battle: "The little Massachusetts town of Acton has never got its just dues for what it did on the 19th of April 1775. The names of Lexington and Concord have been heard all over the world – but Acton men brought them the fame." When his son, Tom, was born on April 19, 1895, he named his son Thomas *Acton* Fitzgerald.

The Ivers & Pond piano bears a plaque inscribed as follows:

**In memory of
Michael & Mary Hannon**

THE ACTON HIGH SCHOOL

**From
Mr. & Mrs. John F. Fitzgerald
1926**

The piano, part of the Acton High School for many years, was moved to several locations following the closing of the Acton High School and opening of the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School in 1955. By the 1990s, it was housed in the cafetorium at the Douglas School, and had been in need of repair for some time. The Douglas School principal, Lisette Kaplowitz, expressed concerns to the Acton School Committee for the safety of the piano, as the school had become more crowded and there was no adequate room to store the piano. In April 2000, at the request of the Douglas School principal and Superintendent Isa Zimmerman, the Acton School Committee voted to transfer ownership of the piano to the town of Acton, in hopes that a restoration could be accomplished and that a public and permanent location could be found for the piano. Since 2000, the piano has been stored in the Vaillancourt building, and there have been no funds available for the one-time restoration required.

Project Scope: Our request for Community Preservation Funds would provide for a complete restoration of the piano, including mechanical parts and refinishing of the cabinet, while we seek a permanent home for the piano. One possible location would be the Acton Memorial Library, which currently houses other artifacts of Acton's history. There is no other facility that routinely welcomes such a broad cross-section of our residents, or that regularly opens its doors to our citizens on various days and times. Its presence would enable the library to offer weekly or monthly piano concerts in the library on Sunday afternoons, for example, a time when the library has a particularly relaxing and community atmosphere. Preliminary research indicates that there are various Massachusetts libraries that offer such concerts, including our neighbors in Sudbury whose Friends organization sponsors a series of programs entitled, "Sunday Afternoons at the Goodnow." While the request is under review by the Trustees of the Acton Memorial Library, there has been no decision about the request, and we will continue to explore other possible, but certainly less public, sites for the piano, including the Faulkner Room (formerly Selectmen's Hearing Room) in Town Hall, or the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

Additionally, private citizens would undertake a fundraising campaign to garner sufficient funds for ongoing upkeep and tuning of the piano, regardless of its location. Ideas under consideration would

include inviting author and Concord neighbor, Doris Kearns Goodwin, to come speak at a fundraising dinner about the connection of the Fitzgerald family with Acton. Ms. Goodwin has published numerous books, including *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, which details many aspects of the families' histories, including a chapter devoted to John Fitzgerald's courtship of Josie Hannon and his association with Acton. Such an event would not only raise funds, but would raise awareness and interest among Acton residents in certain aspects of Acton's history, including its rural history as well as a portrait of the town in the late 19th century.

Costs of Project and Work Plan: Work would commence as soon as funds became available and the project could be put out to bid. We requested that Bernie Toothaker of Apple Valley Piano Works inspect the piano and provide assistance with what work is required and the range of costs. Mr. Toothaker has tuned and maintained the pianos for the Acton/Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for several years, and was able to request information from a number of piano restorers for the project. Mr. Toothaker has indicated that the piano needs a full restoration which would cost approximately \$15,000 to \$18,000 and approximately three months to complete. Once completed, he believes that the piano could be maintained with semi-annual tuning indefinitely, and would look and sound like a new instrument.

Responses to CPC Questions:

The project would benefit the Town and citizens of Acton in several ways:

1. A treasure of great sentimental value to the town of Acton would be preserved for the enjoyment of the citizens of the town.
2. Through public focus on the Fitzgerald piano and expected fundraising avenues, Acton citizens would have an opportunity to learn about Acton's rural history, the building of Acton's own High School, and the many generous gifts that contributed to the beginning of Acton's High School, as well as the connection with the Fitzgerald and Hannon families.
3. Once located in a public place of prominence, the piano could serve as a focal point of piano concerts, thus enhancing the cultural offerings of the town and providing a venue for our talented pool of local pianists.
4. Successful preservation of another historic artifact would serve as an impetus for other projects that could be funded with a combination of public and private funds, and continue to enhance Acton's citizens appreciation for Acton's rich history.

The project is consistent with the Community Preservation Plan's "Guidelines for Submission" and "Review and Recommendation Criteria."

Guidelines for Submission

1. The project was submitted using the *Community Preservation Plan* "Project Application Form."
2. The project was submitted to the Planning Department as the CPC's agent by November 14, 2005.
3. The completion period is less than five years.
4. The Community Preservation Act (MGL 44B), the Acton CPA Bylaw (Chapter 5), and the Community Preservation Plan have been reviewed.
5. A professional knowledgeable about project costs has been consulted.

Review and Recommendation Criteria

1. The project is consistent with the *Town Community Preservation Plan*, which specifically mentions real properties of historic significance, and the need to "provide education and community outreach regarding the extensive historical and cultural resources within Acton."
2. The project is consistent with the *Town 1998 Master Plan Update*, specifically "Preserve Acton's historic and cultural resources," "Encourage the use of conservation areas and historic resources for educational purposes," and "Encourage greater access for all residents to cultural events, opportunities and services" (pp. 41, 43).
3. The project is feasible to implement.
4. The project would serve all residents of Acton, of all ages and of all cultures. The project would provide an opportunity to both educate citizens about an aspect of Acton's history as well as

enhance the town's cultural offerings, thus providing another focus for gathering Acton's citizens together as a community.

5. The project intends to leverage private fundraising; the private fundraising would both draw attention to the public funding piece as well as raising awareness of Acton's rich history and its connection with regional historic figures and events.
6. The project would utilize, preserve, protect, and enhance a historic artifact owned by the town of Acton.
7. The town of Acton has successfully implemented similar projects, and will work in collaboration with the Acton Historical Commission as well as other individuals knowledgeable about the historic and cultural aspects of the project.

Ownership of the piano is affirmed in the attached minutes from the Acton Public School Committee, dated April 3, 2000.

ACTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Conference Room C
High School

April 3, 2000
6:30 p.m.

Members Present: Mary Ann Ashton, Michael Coppolino, Pam Harting-Barrat, Jesse Liberty,
Michael Scanlon

Also Present: Isa Zimmerman, Bill Ryan, George Frost, Nancy Kolb, Marie Altieri, Jo-Ann Berry

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Mary Ann Ashton, chair.

CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - None

OLD BUSINESS

1. Stamski Study

Bill Ryan referred to the Stamski and McNary, Inc. report of October 1977 which evaluated the Arlington Street property (27 acres), which is owned by the town, but designated for school use. The site was looked at, potentially, for a new school, and found that it could support a sewage flow design of 4,216 gallons per day. The Acton Board of Health concurred with the analysis.

Now, with the new buildings on the central campus replacing some of the current playing fields, there was concern that new sites be found on which to construct playing fields for the schools and town athletic activities. There was a suggestion from the Board of Selectmen that the schools might consider trading some of the Arlington St. land for the newly acquired Robbins Mill land.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that it was premature to make such a decision, and they would need to see the High School feasibility/construction plans before any determination could be made. Then the playing field situation on campus would be obvious.

Dr. Zimmerman supported this decision, noting that a decision to sell the school's land next to the High School (for a childrens' day care center) had been short sighted.

Bill Ryan commented that we should be trying to acquire more land for the schools.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Gifting Piano to Acton Town Hall

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: That the baby grand piano, given to the Acton High School in 1925 by Mrs. and Mrs. Michael Hannon (great-grandparents of John F. Kennedy), be given to the Town to Acton. (It has been at the Douglas School for many years, and is in need of restoration. Because of its historic significance, it was felt that it rightly belonged in the Town Hall.)

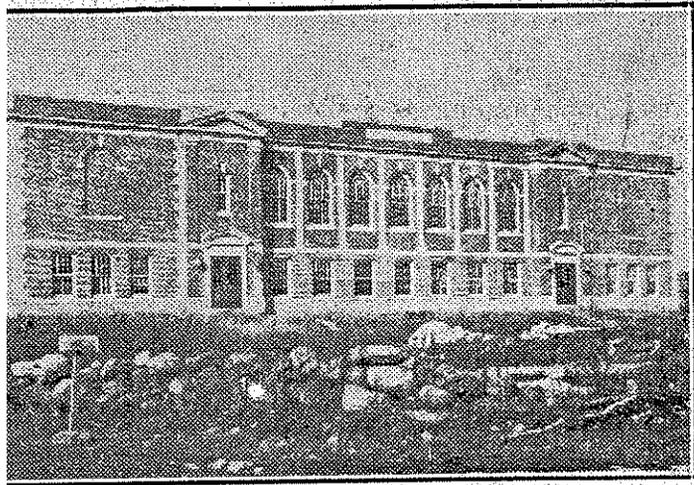
NEXT MEETINGS: April 4, 6:30 pm, Jt. Exec. Session, High School
May 18, 7:30 pm, Merriam School

The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 pm.

Sarah T. Lawton
Notary Public
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
My Commission Expires
January 19, 2012


Respectfully submitted,
Sarah T. Lawton, Secretary pro tempore

Notary Public



(John H. Bickford Co., Architect)

Completed Building Is in the Geographical Center of the Town, One Mile from Each of the Four Villages

completed its new high building. It contains seven me rooms, a complete com- ent, laboratories for physics a domestic science labora- aining shpp, library, prin- offices, teachers' rest room, ital room and an assembly 5. The heating plant ad- building in the rear. The ture of the schoolhouse is it is built of New England al stone finish. The building xclusive of the fee of the H. Bickford Company and 0. Money for the furni-

ture and fittings in the assembly hall was donated by Arthur Blanchard, a citizen of the town, and the same applies to the library for which the furnishings were donated by A. B. Conant, and the fittings and furniture of the laboratories were given by Mr. Wright and other citizens. Situated in the geographical center of the town, one mile from each of the four villages—West Acton, South Acton, Acton Center and North Acton—on what is termed Massachusetts avenue, the school accommodates 250 pupils. The building committee comprised William Rawitser, Edgar Hall, George H. Richardson, Waldo Whitcomb, E. H. Touhey and W. Stuart Allen.

DEDICATE HIGH SCHOOL

ACTON, Sept. 4—The new Acton High School building, located at Kelly's Corner, was dedicated this afternoon. The building was used part of last year, although not completed. It is the town's first high school structure, for before last year high school pupils went to Concord.

1926

DEDICATION OF ACTON HIGH SCHOOL

The dedication exercises of the new high school building opened with flag raising Saturday afternoon at 2 o'clock, by the Isaac Davis Post 138, G. A. R., with George L. Townen, commander, and the Boy Scouts assisting. Ellsworth McLaughlin, bugler, played "To The Colors," and James B. Tuttle gave an address.

After the flag raising there was a social hour during which the building was inspected. Instrumental music was furnished by Miss Clara Durkee, Mrs. Eliza Fletcher Wells, Miss Annie E. McCarthy, Miss Eleanor Hall and Alfred H. Tracy.

The hostesses of the afternoon were: Mrs. E. W. Harris, chairman, Mrs. Arthur Lowden, Mrs. James Kinsley, Mrs. A. H. Wetherbee, Mrs. F. H. Holden, Mrs. Sidney White, Mrs. W. A. Charles, Miss Virginia Sanderson, Mrs. William Lewis, Mrs. B. E. Hall, Miss Clara L. Sawyer, Mrs. G. F. Edney, Mrs. W. T. Merriam, Mrs. Brooks Parker, Mrs. W. B. Holt, Mrs. H. F. Tuttle, Mrs. Murray Brown and Mrs. G. Dusseault.

Refreshments were served during the social hour and after the dedication program.

At 3.30 o'clock the program was carried on in the Assembly hall. The program was as follows:

Instrumental music by Miss Annie McCarthy, Miss Eleanor Hall and Alfred Tracy.

Invocation, Rev. Ralph A. Barker. Presentation of stand of National Colors by Isaac Davis Relief Corps No. 62, Minnie M. Munn, president.

Noyce. Vocal selections, Mrs. Elizabeth Forbush. Introduction of donors by Edgar H. Hall. Instrumental selections, Miss Irma Dunkee and Mrs. Eliza Fletcher Wells. Presentation of Building, by William Rawitser, chairman of the Building Committee, to Board of Selectmen, Murray Brown, chairman. Transfer of Building to School Committee, Spencer H. Taylor, chairman. Remarks, by C. W. Lawrence, superintendent of schools. March, Exit.

The following donors contributed largely to the furnishing of the high school rooms, and in so doing seek to perpetuate the memory of the early settlers of the town in whose names the rooms were dedicated: Messrs Augustin B. Conant, Elbridge F. Conant and Father Conant, jr., Mrs. Susan C. Conant Parker and Miss Charlotte Conant, furnished the library and reading rooms, Arthur Blanchard, the assembly hall; George S. Wright, the chemical laboratory; Mrs. Emma A. Wright, the typewriting room; George V. Mead, Fred S. Mead and Adelbert F. Mead, the domestic science room; Mrs. Estelle A. Citter, the bookkeeping room; and Hon. John F. Fitzgerald gave the grand piano. Mrs. A. Bertie Tuttle Watson, Mr. and Mrs. T. O. Watson and Miss Jennie A. Tuttle furnished the east room 11 and 12 Frederick H. Nash, rooms 13 and 14, Messrs Eugene L. Hall, Bertram D. Hall and A. Stanley Hall room 15, Mrs. Marion Clark, Mr. Carlos P. Clark and Miss Henrietta Clark, the senior class room, Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Bradford gave the oil paintings and busts, Mr. and Mrs. William Raitser, the bronze lanterns, A. Merriam and Co. the piano bench and the Woman's Relief Corps the eight flags.

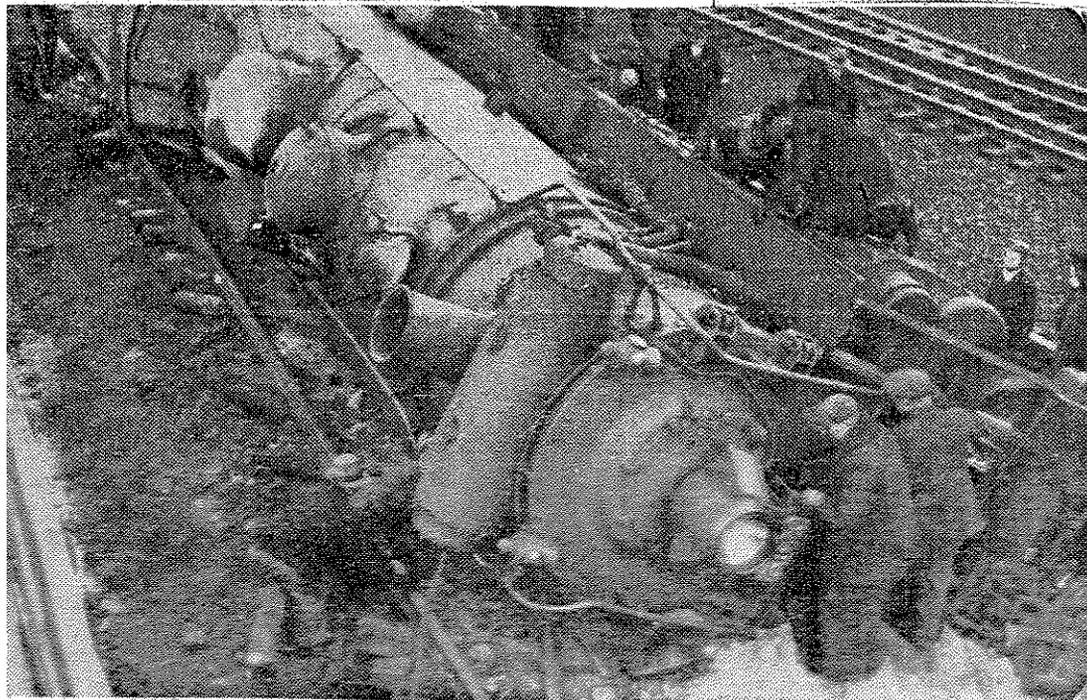
There were many others who contributed their time and labor to make the school a success and it is certain that the townspeople cooperate in thanking the school committee, the building committee, the town officials and other workers for the splendid result which is the fruit of their labors.

FIRST CLASS TO GRADUATE IN ACTON'S NEW BUILDING

ACTON, June 23—The initial Commencement event of the Acton High School class of 1926 was held yesterday. They left in a bus for Mt Wachusett, accompanied by Miss Mabel Noyce and Miss Leona Albrecht.

This evening the banquet will be held in the High School Auditorium. Miss Ruth Fullerton will read the class will, Miss Arlene Jones and Miss Viola Merriam, class "slams," and Miss Mildred Tuttle and Miss Grace Chickering, the prophecy. Then the senior dance will be conducted.

The exercises will be Thursday evening. Harry Gardner, deputy commissioner of education, will be the speaker. Miss Marion Forbes will extend the greetings, Sumner Tassie will read the class history, and Alberta Hodgen, the valedictory. Music will be by the High School Orchestra, under the direction of L. Ashley Rich; choruses by High School pupils, and solos by Miss Leona



Derails Train! Nine-car Boston & Maine R. R. milk train, Boston-bound, struck

Ad. Arch. photo. photo. 9/11/1926



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Peter K. Ashton, Chairman
Board of Selectmen

November 14, 2005

Mr. Matt Lundberg, Chair
Town of Acton Community Preservation Committee
cpc@acton-ma.gov

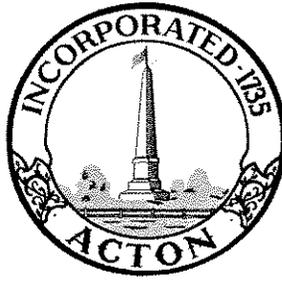
Dear Matt and Community Preservation Committee members,

On behalf of the town of Acton, the Board of Selectmen is pleased to present a grant application to the Community Preservation Committee to request funds to restore and preserve the Fitzgerald piano. At our meeting on November 1, 2005, the Board of Selectmen voted to move forward with this proposal after reviewing the historical background about the piano. We believe that restoring and finding a permanent home for this piano, whether it is the Acton Memorial Library or some other venue, would provide a significant opportunity to educate Acton's citizens about another aspect of the rich history of our town as well as expanding the cultural offerings through occasional piano concerts.

The Acton Historical Commission has endorsed this application (letter attached), and members of our board have heard from other individuals who are involved with preservation and historic efforts in town that they support this application as well.

Sincerely,

Peter K. Ashton
Chairman



Acton Historical Commission

November 11, 2005

Mr. Matt Lundberg, Chair
Town of Acton Community Preservation Committee
cpc@acton-ma.gov

Re: Fitzgerald Piano Application- Letter of support

Dear Mr. Lundberg, and members of the Committee:

The Historical Commission would like to submit this letter in support of the Fitzgerald Piano Restoration application currently under review. The applicant has forwarded to us the historical background and significance of this piano, and we think this application is an excellent use of CPC funds.

We find the background of the piano quite interesting for its many facets; with its relation to the opening of the Acton High School in 1925 (National Register eligible) as well as President John F. Kenney, this is clearly a valuable cultural and historical resource that the Town should preserve and honor for future generations.

The application further hopes to place the refurbished piano in the Memorial Library, a perfect location for such an artifact. If it could become the centerpiece for a future concert series, this would reinforce its cultural impact on the town.

In short, the Commission is strongly supportive of this application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Grover". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter Grover, Chair
Acton Historical Commission

Cc: file
MABAshton@aol.com
hc@acton-ma.gov