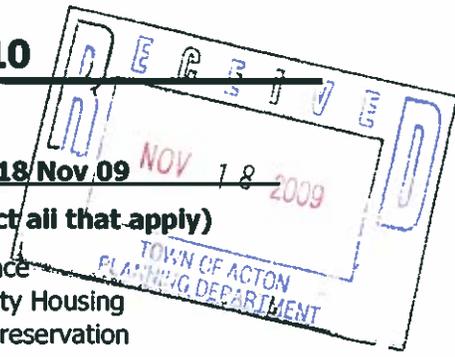


# PROJECT APPLICATION FORM – 2010



**Applicant:** Acton Historical Commission

**Submission Date:** 18 Nov 09

**Applicant's Address, Phone Number and Email**

**Purpose: (Please select all that apply)**

William A. Klauer, Chairman

70 Piper Road

Acton, MA 01720

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- Open Space
- Community Housing
- Historic Preservation
- Recreation

**Town Committee (if applicable):** Acton Historical Commission

**Project Name:** Testhouse Preservation Project

**Project Location/Address:** 110 Main Street, Acton

**Amount Requested:** \$ 54,100

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

This project involves moving of the American Power Mill's Testhouse from its present location at 56 Powdermill Road and moving it to 110 Main Street. This action is required to preserve a unique structure that is on the Acton Historical Commission's Cultural Resource List, a structure that is in immediate danger of being demolished. The goal is to move the building to Town of Acton owned land and preserve it.

**Estimated Date for Commencement of Project:** Immediately following approval of funding in the Spring of 2010

**Estimated Date for Completion of Project:** Summer of 2010 or as soon as possible

## **American Powder Company Test House Project History**

About 4 weeks ago, Terra Freidricks of the Board of Selectmen asked if we could find a new location for "The Dollhouse". This is a structure that is presently located on a parcel of land at 56 Powdermill Road in the heart of what was once Powdermill Village. The building was originally supposed to have a preservation easement placed upon it by Mr. Bertolami as a condition of his site plan approval process. This did not take place and the structure in consideration was removed from the Selectmen's list of requirements on 24 August 2009. Previous to this, Mr. Bertolami took out a permit to demolish the structure and the Acton Historical Commission conducted a public hearing and the six month waiting period, now expired.

The structure is surplus and Mr. Bertolami has offered it to the Town of Acton, a gift that would have to be accepted by Town Meeting. In addition, accommodations are necessary to accommodate the structure.

A couple of the members of the Historical Commission met with Terra, Roland Bartl and several of his staff to develop a list of different locations that could accommodate a building. Most locations did not appeal to us; however, the idea of replacing the current sewer pumping station at 110 Main Street with a historic building did seem to fit into the character of the South Acton Village and Historic District more than the present building.

Doug Halley of the Board of Health was enthusiastic over the possibility of both saving the Test House and seeing the structure in a historic environment. The project was brought before the Board of Selectmen on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, since it was scarcely more than 2 weeks old by then, much information was lacking. I was asked to ascertain the approximate costs and present them to the Board of Selectmen at their next meeting on November 16<sup>th</sup>. Due to the lack of time and money to get an architect involved, I went ahead and came up with the numbers that are being presented to you at this date. While the Board of Selectmen voted 4 to 1 to approve the project and send it to your committee, the fact remains that more accurate numbers are necessary and will be forthcoming.

The Selectmen are enthusiastic about the project but believe that a more suitable location must exist where the structure will be preserved and not

become a shield to another operation. Since time is lacking as far as the submission date is concerned, it is entirely possible that by the time the CPC gets to meet with us, scheduled for January 14<sup>th</sup> 2010, the location and cost could change considerably.

Since all options have expired on saving the structure, Mr. Bertolami agreed in August to give the Town 90 days to come up with a plan to save it. A recent meeting with our proposal advising him that while we are in the process of trying to relocate the structure, nothing is final until we get the approval of the Board of Selectmen, the Community Preservation Commission and finally, the vote of Town Meeting.

### **History of the Test House**

The American Powdermill Test House is a small structure measuring 24 feet wide and 17 feet along the sides, now located at 56 Powdermill Road. It was moved to this location following a severe flood that washed away a portion of High Street. Following the flood, the Town of Acton straightened out the roadway bringing it to its current location and the Test House appears to have been in the way of construction and was moved to this area about that time. The Annual Town Report suggests that much of the area was affected by the flood and the original foundation of the Test House may have been damaged.

The Test House appears on the 1929 Sanborn Map in your packet. It was located on the easterly side of Old High Street. A gun was mounted on the floor and aimed at a target. Each batch of powder was tested by firing several charges of powder from each batch, the objective being that it had to reach the target. Records of each batch were kept to track any problems with the powder. The American Powder Company was at this location from 1833 until 1946 when they left the area. Their product served the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I and finally World War II. Their land holdings were in Acton, Maynard, Sudbury and Concord.

Since it was moved to the lot at 56 Powdermill Road, an addition was added to the rear to increase its floor space to about double its original 408 square feet. The addition would be removed prior to moving the structure and the rear portion of the building closed in.

While this proposal is to move the building to save it, at some future time an effort should be made to restore it to its original appearance. The unique part of this project is that while we have several mansard roofed structures in town, this is the only one that served as an office use. The style was prevalent at the time of the Civil War and a decade or so after that. When the structure was reshingled, the dormer on the mansard roof was removed but this change is reversible and the fact that the building is diminutive in size and was so important in the quality control of the powder makes it a desirable structure to consider.

### Location, location, location

Included in this packet is a copy of a Sanborn Map of 1929, the testhouse is the structure outlined in red. As previously stated, as previously stated, many locations were looked at with the 110 Main Street property decided on and the Board of Selectmen reluctantly considering. The Board of Selectmen has asked that the Historical Commission reconsider this location and try and find something that would provide a more desirable environment for the structure. As you will note in the map of Powdermill Village, much has changed and Powdermill Road has gone from manufacturing to retail sales, something that is not uncommon everywhere today.

The Town of Acton now owns the land opposite the location of the Test House. At present, the intent is to discuss this area with the Sewer Commissioners and other controlling agencies to see if a more desirable location exists where the Testhouse can be located. It is unlikely that the structure could be returned to its original location because of its proximity to the water but we will seek out a location where the structure can be removed to where it will both be visible and advise our residents of their entry into the former Powdermill Village.

With the time remaining from this submission until we meet with the Community Preservation Committee, we hope to explore this area with the hopes of relocating this structure where it will be noticed and admired for what it really is, something unique to Acton's past.

About Old High Street – if this proposal goes through and the structure is moved to the area of the entrance to Old High Street, it would be an ideal structure to introduce the populace to the other structures that remain on Old High Street. In this area is the Simeon Hayward House of 1800, the mixing plant, now ABC Cesspool Company, the former saltpeter plant now R & H Products, the 1922 generating plant and the open space that exists over the mill pond. Across the bridge from this vantagepoint is the woodworking shop where boxes were constructed to ship the powder in and in the river are the remains of the narrow gauge railroad where donkeys with rubber shoes pulled the cars that carried pulverized charcoal to be mixed with saltpeter and sulfur to be mixed into black powder. On the opposite side of Powdermill Road, the company office stands at the right side of Sudbury Road and behind the Subaru Dealership are the remains of the 1840's and 1850's grinders.

Since this is a dead end street and provides an abundance of historical structures and artifacts, the area should be investigated and studied to see if enough of it remains to consider future preservation efforts before it is too late.

In closing, on behalf of our Commission, I hope that on Acton's 275 Anniversary, the Test House can become the poster child for what we can do when we put our combined resources together.

Sincerely,

William A. Klauer  
Chairman  
Acton Historical Commission

## **American Powdermill Test House Moving Considerations**

- **Site preparation – will involve the expansion of the current foundation to accommodate the 22 by 24 foot structure and removal of the existing wood frame building, the existing structure measures 15’ 4” by 17’ 4” -**
- Relocate present structure to new location, will require a foundation of the above size or demolish

### **Moving Test House located on Powdermill Road to 110 Main Street**

- **Estimate to jack up place on trailer and move to new location**
- **Cost of Police traffic detail**
- **Cost of Fire Protection for Powdermill Village side of move**
- **Cost of raising wires if this is an issue**
- **Cost to place structure on new foundation**

### **Modification of Test House for new purpose**

- **Cost of modification of Test House for pump station – sealing interior and addition of a door for replacement of pumps or control equipment**
- **Cost to restore exterior of structure after current rear addition is removed**
- Electrical service and any other required utility

### **Future Costs and maintenance**

- **Replacement of historic elements, clapboards, doors and or windows**

Items that are in bold are items that have been identified as likely to be covered under a Community Preservation Grant, the items not bold are items that will require some other form of funding.

**Testhouse Cost Analysis Sheet**  
**Prepared by William A. Klauer, Chairman**  
**Acton Historical Commission**  
**November 18, 2009**

**Architect fees, permits and administration costs - \$10,000**

The State Building Code requires a series of documents so that the Building Department, Board of Health, Fire Department and Planning Department have the ability to review the proposal to ensure that the finished project meets state and local minimum codes. I have been advised that the Town needs to pay the prevailing wage; therefore, my estimates for the several portions of this proposal attempt to make that consideration. It has been suggested by Dean Charter that a lump sum of \$10,000 dollars be included to fund these requirements.

**Foundation expansion - \$7,000**

Present foundation is approximately 17 feet by 15 feet for the present set up. The Bertolomi building measures 24 feet along the front by 17 feet deep. The 17 foot dimension could be fully utilized; however, the front of the structure would not face Main Street.

Based on the expansion of the foundation to accommodate the 153 additional square feet would result in the following approximate costs

**Sitework**

Excavation	2000.
Concrete forms	1500.
Footing	700.
Foundation	1600.
Floor	1200.

**\$7000**

**Preparation of Testhouse**— Leo Bertolami has indicated he could prepare the structure for moving. This would require removing the rear addition of the building and I feel that the interior should be stripped of wallboard, ceiling tile, floor covering and the rear wall closed in prior to the move. This would have to be negotiated with Mr. Bertolami to ensure that it takes place.

**Moving the Testhouse - \$15,000 to \$20,000**

Building movers do not seem plentiful. As of today, Dean Charter suggested that I ask Yankee Building Movers of Chichester, New Hampshire for a quote. Without seeing photos or the building, they quoted \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the move and advised me that the utility companies cannot charge for the raising or dropping of wires that cross the public ways in Massachusetts. My original thought was to have the mansard roof portion of the building removed and ship it in two portions to Main Street. If this is true, removing the top portion would not be necessary. A problem with this concept is, does there exist enough slack to permit this to happen? This concept must be considered or the building will have to be partially disassembled.

The present condition of the building is not known and we should have the Building Inspector inspect it and report back. There are elements of this building such as the window trim that have been replaced and now appear to have dry rot. The mansard roof structure is another element that because of intense heat and periods of time where the roof leaked producing rot within. Because of increase of size of the Test House, maintenance will be more and this would likely be borne by those within the Sewer District unless the Commissioners know of other resources. Since the structure is larger than the present building, there is a possibility of utilizing the additional space for a resting spot for the rail trail or storage of Emergency Preparedness equipment. While I have tried to incorporate all facets of the move, there are undoubtedly gaps that have not been thought out nor addressed. The following may or may not be necessary during the project.

**Restoration - \$7000.**

Reshingle roof	\$2200
Replace rear wall and windows	1400
Replace rear clapboards	700
Replace rotted trim around windows	900
Repaint building	1800.
	<b>7000.</b>

**Utilities \$10,100**

The present gable roof structure contains two pumps and is protected by a fire alarm system that signals the Acton Fire Department in the event of a

fire. The larger structure could require an additional heat detector in the loft area. This estimate is based on removal and replacing of existing equipment. The electrical service is slightly more complex. The pump equipment operates periodically when the underground chamber fills and could be off for a short time, up to a few hours. For that reason, a temporary service will be necessary to maintain continuity of power. The quote includes funding for a new electrical panel since code may not permit reinstallation of the present electrical panel.

Electrical	8000.
Fire alarm	2100.
	<b>10,100.</b>

**Summary of costs**

<b>Engineering and permits</b>	<b>10,000</b>
<b>Foundation and floor cost</b>	<b>7000</b>
<b>Rigging and moving structure</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>Repairs and alterations</b>	<b>7000</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	<b>10,100</b>

**Cost of Project** **54,100.**

**This project involves a number of factors that could be over or under. Mr. Bertolami has not offered to cover any of the costs of the project other than to make the structure ready for the move, this will require the removal of the rear addition.**

**Disposition of current pump house – relocation and reuse of this structure will require the Board of Selectmen and Sewer Commissioners to declare the building surplus, make recommendations or conditions pertinent to its removal. It may have use within the other Town Departments; however, that is a separate project and not within the scope of this project.**

**Two weeks ago, mention was made about jacking the structure and placing it “in storage” if this proposal fell through. I have looked over the area and note that the abandoned portion of Old High Street terminates at Route 62. For temporary purposes only, this site might be considered since there is nothing immediately available that does not involve the moving of wires.**

**In submitting this proposal, I would like to thank the Roland Bartl of the Planning Department along with his staff for their input and assistance with the information and insight into the process to be followed. The Board of Selectmen for the opportunity and time to prepare the project and Terra Freidricks who has provided many suggestions during this process. Doug Halley of the Board of Health for the interest he has shown in trying to preserve a part of Acton’s past while encouraging us to move forward while the building is still available and see if we can preserve it. Additionally, there are the members of the Acton Historical Commission, each with their own area of expertise that makes a project come together.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**William A. Klauer**



**American Powder Company Test House  
Now at 56 Powdermill Road  
Town Atlas Plate J-3, Parcel 9**



**Pump Station at  
110 Main Street  
Town Atlas Plate H-2A Parcel 65**

