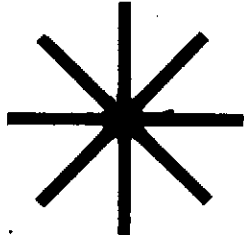


# HISTORIC BUILDING DOSSIER



GEORGE M. COHAN BIRTHPLACE  
536 Wickenden Street

Prepared for Mayor Walter M. Reynolds  
February 27, 1958

PROVIDENCE CITY PLAN COMMISSION  
COLLEGE HILL DEMONSTRATION STUDY



COLLEGE HILL

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT  
PROVIDENCE CITY PLAN COMMISSION



Property Record of  
#536 WICKENDEN STREET.....Wood

Built by Patrick Costigan c. 1866

#372 >  
1894

- 1854 Property taxed to Charles Potter
- 1866 Administrator of the Estate of Charles Potter sells Lot #552 for \$300 on Plat #17 to Patrick Costigan... "being on plot of What Cheer Estate belonging to heirs of the late Governor James Fenner, surveyed and platted in 1847 by Atwater and Shubarth" Plat Book #2, page 19...Plat Card #61.
- 1871 Property taxed to Dennis Costigan
- 1913 Property taxed to Mary A O'Hearn - cousin  
1942 Plaque put on house by Town Officers
- 1945 Timothy Sullivan, executor of the will of Mary A. O'Hearn sells this property to John Gonsalves for \$5200. Bounded S by Wickenden Street 50'; W partly by Knos and partly by Beatrice P. Andrade 104'; E by estate of Michael D. Linn and partly by Pires land 104'. This deal includes lot #552 and the s/ly 4' in depth and the entire width of lot #539 in the above survey of 1847  
Brown University wished to confer an honorary degree on Property taxed to John Gonsalves  
"Graves accepted"

1934  
SM attended  
Brown 140.

\*1940  
1935  
1945

Compiled by the Providence Preservation Society from  
Deed Records in Providence City Hall.

1949 Fox Pt Blvd - name changed to Fox<sup>M</sup> Colman Blvd

1959 Statue of Colman unveiled in N.Y.

\* 1940 Pres. Roosevelt awarded a Congressional  
Medal to Colman in recognition of  
"Over There" work. It's a grand old flag

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Architecturally, the Cohan birthplace house does not particularly rate special preservation action. ~~Its style is mediocre and represents an era not customarily associated with the famous men whose home it once was.~~
2. Consideration might be given to use of the house as a possible museum of memorabilia of George M. Cohan. Its location for this purpose, however, is rather poor, and would not attract many visitors other than those who would seek out such materials wherever they may be located.
3. Mr. Cohan currently is memorialized by a granite monument on the Boulevard bearing his name and in special collections of materials in the various libraries in the city. Although these have little direct physical relation to his birthplace, they are accommodated with more attractiveness and dignity than would be possible in the house itself.
4. The plaque on the house is a good method of designating its historic significance. Encouragement of private maintenance of the structure is warranted. So also is encouragement of the formation of a private group or organization concerned with continuing recognition of the memory of Mr. Cohan.

*Geo. Cohan. Found*  
*This house was built by my*  
*9 great-grandfather Thomas W.*  
*Barry who was a builder and*  
*built many houses in Providence*  
*especially in the Fort Point area*  
*where he owned quite a few houses*  
*himself. The records & contact*

(3)

George M. Cohan was born on July 4, 1878 in the house at 536 Wickenden Street, where his parents were apparently tenants. According to the enclosed property transcript, the house was built by Patrick Costigan, probably soon after 1866 when he bought the plot of land from the administrators of Charles Potter's Estate. (This lot had been in the possession of Charles Potter at least as early as 1854.) It remained in the Costigan family until 1913 when it was owned by Mary A. O'Hearn. John Consalves, who owns it now, bought it in 1945.

The house is a two story gable-roofed wooden building set with the gable end to the street. This is the general scheme followed for ordinary Greek Revival structures which were being built about twenty to twenty-five years earlier, but the architectural detail is ~~late, nondescript, and~~ of Victorian character. The doorway, especially, is typical of other Victorian doorways. It is hooded, and has heavy bracketed and turned drop decoration.

This is evidently a "type house" because there are others in the city that are almost identical. Its architectural quality ranks as "fair" on the enclosed evaluation sheet being used to score historic buildings in the College Hill Study area. Since it is the house of a famous man, however, its total score is raised to 64, which rates it as "excellent" (50-70) in the total scoring.

Grand-Morehouse

Biography. "

Geo M Cohan

History of the American Theatre

Father's name Robane

HOUSING SURVEY

Built by Patrick Costigan  
House of George M. Cohan

College Hill Demonstration Grant Project  
Providence, R. I. - 1957-58

Address 536 Wickenden Street Plat 17 Lot 552 Zone \_\_\_\_\_

Present Use: 1 family 2 family \_\_\_\_\_ multiple family x public  
or semi-public \_\_\_\_\_ commercial \_\_\_\_\_ industrial \_\_\_\_\_  
religious \_\_\_\_\_ Wood - c. 1866

Style of Architecture:

- Colonial \_\_\_\_\_ type \_\_\_\_\_
- Federal \_\_\_\_\_ type \_\_\_\_\_
- Revival \_\_\_\_\_ type \_\_\_\_\_

Victorian x type late modified Greek Revival type,  
2 1/2 story gable end to street, with  
bracket and scroll drop detail on  
hooded doorway at right front.

Historic Significance  
 1. Value to: Nation x State \_\_\_\_\_ Community \_\_\_\_\_ Score 5

Architectural Significance  
 1. As an example of its style:  
 excellent \_\_\_\_\_ good \_\_\_\_\_ fair x poor \_\_\_\_\_ Score 10

2. Importance to neighborhood  
 great \_\_\_\_\_ moderate x minor \_\_\_\_\_ Score 8

Deseccration of original design  
 none or little x a moderate amount \_\_\_\_\_ a great deal \_\_\_\_\_

Magnitude of effort to restore to original style  
 very little x a moderate amount \_\_\_\_\_ a great deal \_\_\_\_\_

- Physical and Environmental Conditions
- 1. Structure: good \_\_\_\_\_ fair x poor \_\_\_\_\_ Score 5
  - 2. Grounds: good \_\_\_\_\_ fair x poor \_\_\_\_\_ Score 2
  - 3. Neighborhood: good \_\_\_\_\_ fair x poor \_\_\_\_\_ Score 4

Is this building an intrusion in the neighborhood? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No x

Describe But it is not an important type, architecturally.

The high narrow scale detracts from its appearance and the detail is ordinary.

Comments: (Notable features of building, grounds, etc.)

Total Score 84

Architectural rating FAIR

Physical Condition FAIR

Journal 11/10/66



—Journal-Bulletin Photo

MISS Katherine Tucker with flag to be unfurled tomorrow at Cohan birthplace.

# Grand Old Flag Will Fly Over Cohan Homestead—Thanks to Miss Tucker

By KIKI SCOTT

"IT'S A grand old flag, yes, a high flying flag, it's the flag of the free and the brave . . ." wrote George M. . . .

music. Miss Tucker didn't just bang on the door of 536 Wickenden St. shouting "I'm a George M. Cohan fan. Let

and a Cohan Living Museum. She hopes that the Fourth of July concert and the Armistice Day celebration will become

"IT'S A grand old flag, yes, a high flying flag, it's the flag of the free and the brave," wrote George M. Cohan. And tomorrow, on Armistice Day a special flag—a flag that flew over the Capitol in Washington on May 5 to honor the Providence composer, actor and producer—will wave over the simple wood structure at 536 Wickenden St. where Cohan was born.

At 2 o'clock the Navy band from Newport will play Cohan music. Chief Judge Robert E. Quinn of the U.S. Court of Military Appeals who knew Cohan, will speak. So will Harold C. Arcaro, a former probate court judge. Councilman Joseph McNulty, D-Ward 10, will introduce the speakers and a telegram from James Cagney who played Cohan in the movie version of *Dwelling*, another local born theatrical, may come and invitations have been extended to the Cohan family. To pay tribute to the author of "Over There," color guards from veterans' groups and the National Guard will be on hand. The Fox Point Neighborhood Association will provide chairs and arrange decorations for the event which will all take place in front of the George M. Cohan homestead. And in case of rain, the festivities will be postponed until the following Saturday.

The driving force, the spirit behind the Cohan celebration, is Miss Katherine P. Tucker, who singlehandedly waged a Cohan crusade.

A Providence native and 1939 graduate of Pembroke College, Miss Tucker recalls her grade school days when her mother would point out the Cohan birthplace. In high school she remembers wondering why the local composer received so little recognition here.

Then in 1939 Miss Tucker finally shook hands with the "Yankee Doodle Dandy." The occasion was a reception in his honor given at the Biltmore Hotel after the final performance of "I'd Rather Be Right." Miss Tucker has been a Cohan devotee ever since.

About two years ago, she visited the Cohan birthplace, now occupied by the Evans' family and, quite appropriately, listened to Cohan

music. Miss Tucker didn't just bang on the door of 536 Wickenden St. shouting "I'm a George M. Cohan fan. Let me in." Her visit occurred by chance, if that's what you call a sprained ankle. In the summer of '64, Miss Tucker sprained her ankle. While she was indisposed, two young boys helped her with work around the house. One of them was Kenneth Evans.

Then, a year and a half ago Miss Tucker heard rumors that the Cohan homestead would soon be razed. Her crusading instinct flared. She talked and telephoned and wrote letters about him. At first only interested individuals responded. Then veterans' groups gave their support and gradually more and more people began thinking about George M. Cohan.

The Rhode Island General Assembly passed a resolution that was signed by the governor. It praised Cohan, advocated an annual Cohan concert and encouraged school orchestras to include some of his compositions in their repertoire.

On May 5, Sen. John O. Pastore arranged to have a special flag flown over the Capitol in Washington in tribute to Cohan and praised the Rhode Island song and dance man from the floor of the Senate. Thirty years before, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had presented Cohan with a gold Congressional medal to symbolize his patriotic contributions.

—Advertisement—

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Wrinkles form in colder weather because skin contracts, making it difficult for the tiny oil ducts to feed the surface skin. Avoid winter-dry skin by smoothing oil of Olay over the face and neck daily before making-up. This oil, available from your druggist, gives the complexion a lovely peach-and-cream bloom and is the finest protection against wrinkle dryness.

... Margaret Merrill.

A Cohan concert was given at Roger Williams Park on the Fourth of July, an appropriate day. Although he was born on July 3, 1878, Cohan always claimed the Fourth as his birthday. Remember his song, "real live nephew of my Uncle Sam born on the Fourth of July...."

But Miss Tucker's campaign did not end there. When the East Side Redevelopment Agency suggested that the Boys' Club be moved to a lot on Wickenden Street between Governor and Ives Streets where the Cohan house stands, Miss Tucker led the opposition in a public hearing on Sept. 1. And won her point. The Boys' Club will be relocated but it won't disturb the famous birthplace.

Miss Tucker is now working on the establishment of a George M. Cohan Foundation

and a Cohan Living Museum. She hopes that the Fourth of July concert and the Armistice Day celebration will become annual events. If Miss Tucker's dreams are realized, Cohan's memory will be perpetuated in his home state.

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**"GLOWING HEARTH" at**

**Old Apple**

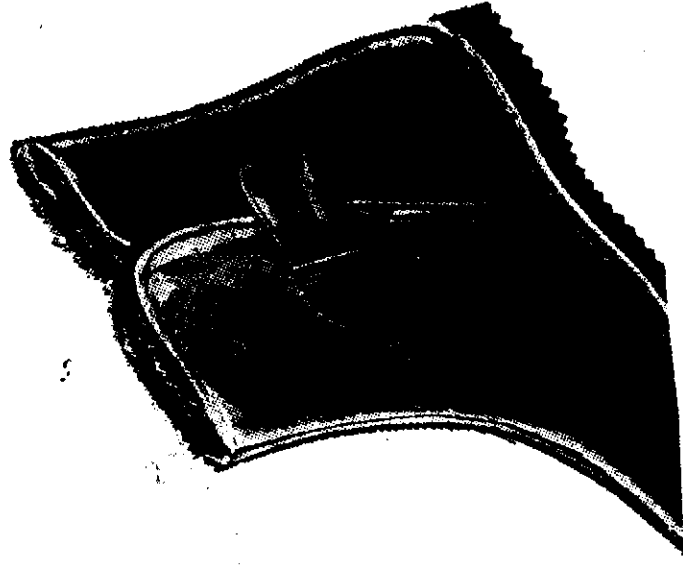
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Westminster Mall





# Calls on Rhode Islanders to Turn Cohan's Birthplace into Shrine

Broadway producer Eddie Dowling, one of Rhode Island's favorite sons, called upon Rhode Islanders last night to make a shrine of the Fox Point house where George M. Cohan was born on July 10, 1878. It stands today as a two-story and a half-story apartment building at 53 Wickenden Street.

"It seems a sort of commentary on the laxity of our own state that we haven't done anything to honor one of our most famous citizens," Mr. Dowling said in a Sherafontaine Biltmore Hotel press conference.

He said the state neglects the work of its famous composers and showmen. "I look upon it as a slur on the way New York City is about to honor Cohan. A \$100,000 monument to him, topped by an eight-foot statue, is soon to be erected at the head of Times Square.

Mayor Walter H. Reynolds, apprised of the producer's suggestion, said "I look upon it favorably." He added that he will refer the suggestion to the City Planning Commission and study it further himself.

Explaining his interest in the city, Mr. Dowling declared: "I'm still a Providence boy and I will be until I die. . . . I've never been in a New Yorker." He was born in Lime Rock in 1874 and followed an adventurous, rags-to-riches path to Broadway.

Cohan, said, "had a background pretty much like my own, suggesting that the same



Eddie Dowling

—Journal-Bulletin Photo

own," and served as the producer's inspiration as a child. "I don't think there has ever been a person who did as much for the American theater before or since," he added.

"They bought the old Constatation with the pennies of school children," Mr. Dowling said, suggesting that the same

might be done with the old Wickenden Street dwelling.

"Why should New York be ahead of Providence in erecting a monument?" he asked.

He said he would be happy to help in a fund drive any way he could, and so did urge toward M. Fay, long-time Providence impresario who gave Dowling his start in the theater and who was present at yesterday's news conference.

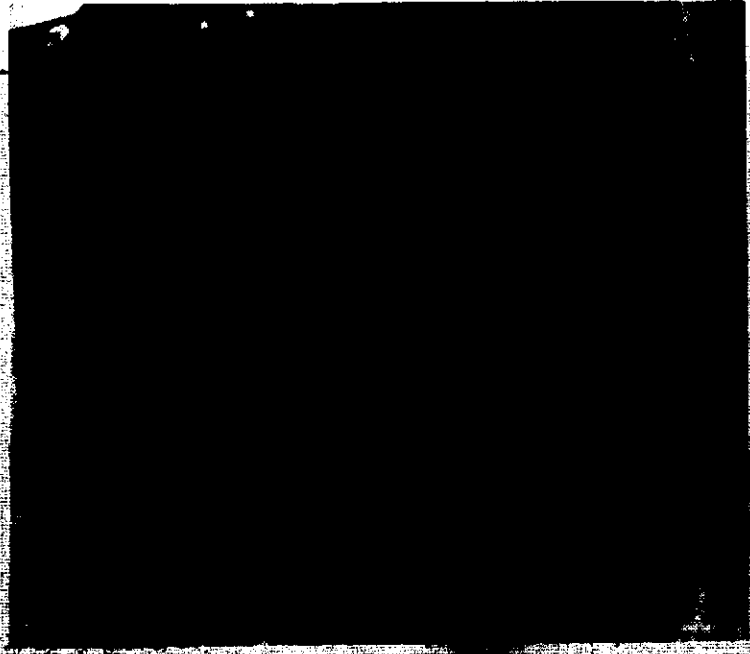
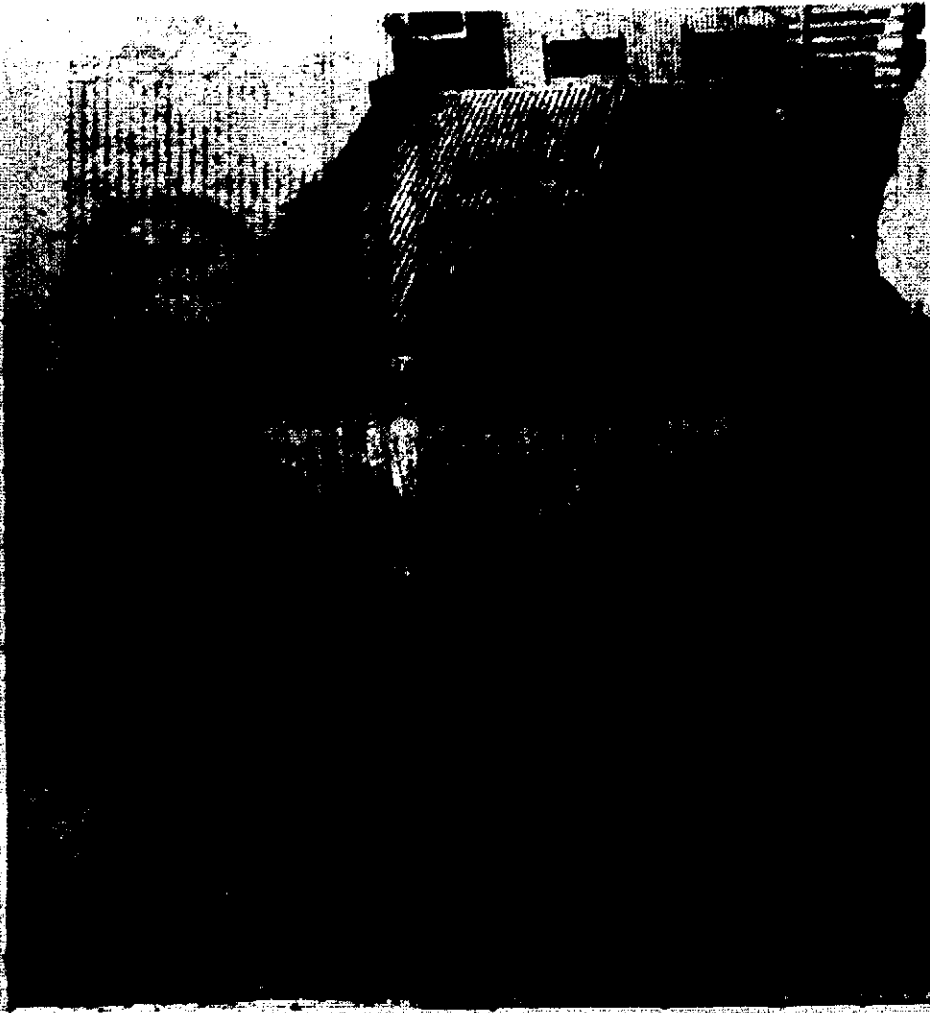
While Mr. Dowling had no definite plan in mind for raising money to create the Cohan shrine, he suggested that contributions might be forthcoming from the city, the state and private citizens.

He lauded the composer, who died in 1942, as the writer of America's best patriotic songs — "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Over There," and "It's a Great Old Flag."

Cohan's birthplace is marked today only by a small plaque affixed to the front of the house three months before he died. It was put up by the Town College of Rhode Island.

Mr. Dowling is no stranger to the task of praising the famous composer. It was his suggestion to Governor Roberts, then mayor of Providence, that led to the change of name from Fox Point Boulevard to George M. Cohan Boulevard in 1937.

"I think it would be something could be done now," he declared at the end of his remarks with the event. He pointed out that the same



**Mr. Dowling** will study it further and make it a part of the City Plan Commission.

Mr. Dowling, born in Lima, Pa., and had been happy to help in a bond drive for the Co. former Fox Point Boulevard be taken over by the City.

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—Journal-Bulletin Photos

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PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Record of

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*George William Brown  
correct name George Kahan  
son of Dennis*

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# City Plan Commission

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*Suite 103, City Hall,  
Providence 3, Rhode Island*

February 28, 1958

The Honorable Walter H. Reynolds, Mayor  
The Honorable City Council  
of the City of Providence  
City Hall  
Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Mayor Reynolds:

In accordance with your instructions, the staff of our College Hill Study has prepared this dossier of information regarding the house in which George M. Cohan was born, and which Eddie Dowling suggested be made a national shrine.

On the whole, it would appear that proper recognition of the memory of Mr. Cohan could be achieved by means other than the preservation of this particular structure.

Respectfully submitted

FRANK H. MALLEY  
DIRECTOR  
CITY PLAN COMMISSION

FHM/ejd