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Built of Stone: The Houses of Frazier Forman Peters



Robert A. Weingarten

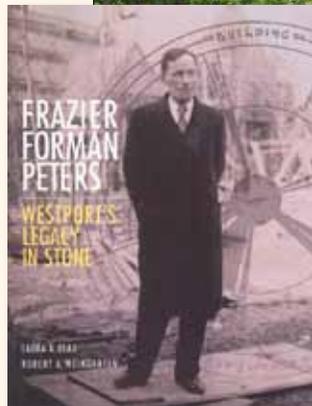
After World War I, prosperity and pent-up demand created a building boom that saw the rise of the last generation of vernacular homebuilders. Without formal training, they nonetheless produced designs that continue to be recognized for their high quality. These builders include such figures as Alice Washburn, in Hamden, Albert Hubbard, in Wethersfield, and in Westport and surrounding towns, Frazier Forman Peters (1893-1963), whose work is documented in *Frazier Forman Peters: Westport's Legacy in Stone*, a new book from the Westport Historical Society.

Peters' houses are distinctive, employing a hybrid concrete-and-stone construction method developed by the prominent architect Ernest Flagg. Peters modified Flagg's system but retained the basic idea: concrete walls poured into forms lined with fieldstone. Easier and less expensive to build than traditional stone buildings, they still have warmth, solidity, and romantic appeal.

In addition to their stone-and-concrete construction, Peters' houses are noted for



Frazier Forman Peters' own house (1930) is a good example of his concrete-and-stone construction and simple, economical style.



less—their sensitive siting in the landscape, and their orientation to capture sunlight and summer breezes.

During the Depression, when work was scarce, Peters promoted his building

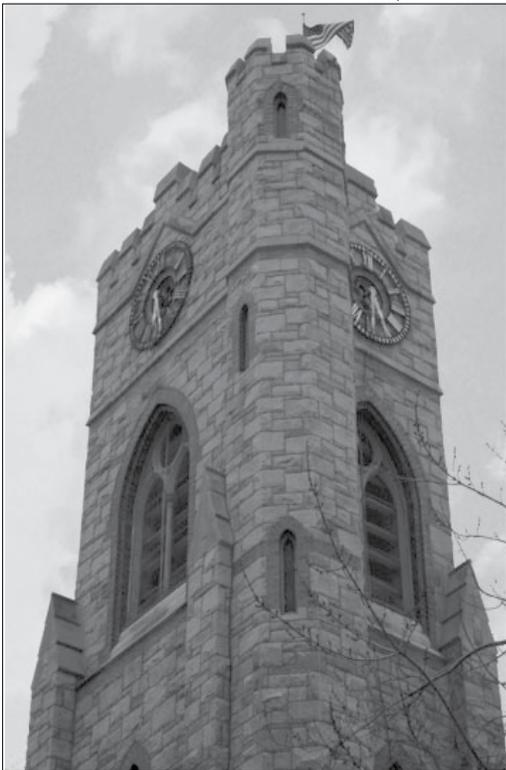
their stylistic simplicity—most are almost style-

methods in a series of books. These books were an integral part of his goal of not only building well, but also educating the public about what made a well-built house.

In his books and his houses, Peters insisted on building simply, economically, and with an eye to long-term durability.

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Trinity Episcopal Church (1897; NR) has completed restoration of its clock tower a downtown landmark. The project began in 2008, with an Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant from the Connecticut Trust to evaluate the work needed. Renovation included adding structural reinforcements, repointing the granite masonry, re-roofing, repairing and repainting window frames, and restoring the clock faces. The church has established a fund to support future maintenance of the tower.

His concerns for ventilation and sunlight, and his criticism of planned obsolescence and shoddy construction masked by cheap ornament prefigure present-day concerns about sustainability, according to the authors.

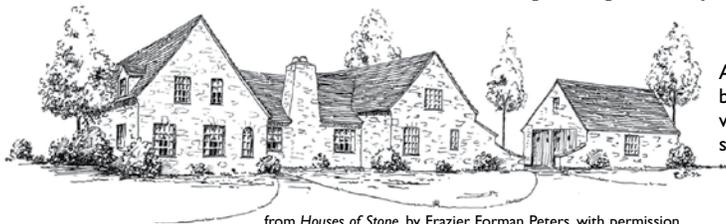
This strain of ethics and integrity in Peters' work seems to come from his upbringing in a family of Episcopalian priests. Although his life followed a different path, the idea that he nonetheless had a larger social responsibility apparently stayed with him.

Laura Blau and Robert Weingarten are well qualified to tell this story: Ms. Blau is Peters' granddaughter and an architect herself with a strong interest in sustain-

able building. She wrote the chapters on Peters' life and his design and construction methods. Mr. Weingarten, a real estate agent and Westport Historical Society's House Historian, contributed a description of the research methods by which he was able to document 41 Peters-built houses in Westport.

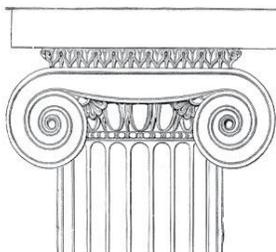
Although this book covers only houses in Westport, it includes a list of signature characteristics which will help readers carry on the work of identifying Peters' works in other places. 🌿

Frazier Forman Peters: Westport's Legacy in Stone is available from the Westport Historical Society, (203) 222-1424; <http://westporthistory.org/>.



A typical Peters design, built of stone and concrete, with low walls, big roof, and simple lines.

from Houses of Stone, by Frazier Forman Peters, with permission



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