

■ GothicHouse

Historic Preservation Strategy

Gothic House Team

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Background

Built by wealthy trader James Dawson around 1815, Gothic House is one of Cape Coast's most important architectural sites. Named "Gothic House" for its wealth of Gothic Revival architectural features, the building and its compound have become a landmark in Cape Coast. Jacob Wilson-Sey owned Gothic House for many years before turning it over to the Ghanaian government shortly after Ghana achieved independence. The Ghanaian government housed its Public Works Department (PWD) in the compound until recently. Only a few PWD offices remain in the compound, soon to relocate to new facilities elsewhere. Gothic House now belongs to the Oguaa Traditional Council, who plan to use it as a palace and cultural center featuring a museum, library, and a genealogical research facility.

A New Direction for Gothic House

The government's transfer of the compound to the Oguaa Traditional Council provides a chance for Gothic House to regain its former glory as one of Cape Coast's most prestigious and attractive locations. Presently, the compound is in very poor condition. The removal of PWD offices has left many buildings in the compound abandoned. No one remains to provide much-needed maintenance to the deteriorated structures. The Oguaa Traditional Council wants to remedy this

problem by reusing the compound and rehabilitating it according to preservation standards contained in the Cape Coast Design Review Guidelines. They will breathe life back into Gothic House by occupying it, using it, caring for it, and promoting it as a symbol of Oguaa pride and of Cape Coast heritage.

The specific uses the Oguaa Traditional Council desires for the compound are a chief's residence, an ethnographic museum, and a library focusing on Oguaa and Cape Coast history and culture. The site will also serve as a genealogical research facility, and a lodging facility for the Council's guests. The Gothic House compound has more than adequate space to accommodate all of these uses and its floor plan is well-suited to the diverse uses the Council desires.

Planning for the Future, Honoring the Past

In breathing new life into the Gothic House, the Oguaa Traditional Council should follow the guidelines adopted by the Cape Coast Historic Preservation Commission. Although the new uses the Council proposes will assure the compound remains a vital space, their installation and operation must be conducted in a manner that will preserve as much of Gothic House's historic design and materials as possible. Areas of the compound that have deteriorated should be repaired and their original materials should be

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retained. In cases where original materials cannot be retained, new materials that are similar to the original materials in appearance, texture, and lifespan should be used. In areas of the compound where original materials have already been replaced by dissimilar materials, research should be conducted to determine the type of original material and replacement with a similar material should follow.

Conducting the Restoration

Restoration of the Gothic House will involve research, documentation, and project planning, and will be best executed in phases. To begin, the Oguaa Traditional Council should employ interns coordinated through an outside organization (Peace Corps, SYTO, US/ICOMOS or other NGOs). Interns could provide the following crucial services to both the restoration and redevelopment of the Gothic House compound:

Fundraising/ Grant Writing

- Physical and Structural Analysis of the Site (could use student interns from UST in Kumasi)
- Cataloging Library (could use student interns from University of Cape Coast)
- Museum development (The Getty Institute could arrange an intern)
- Construction

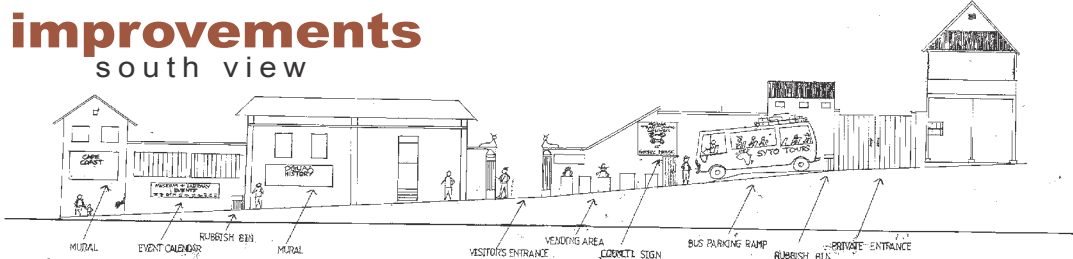
and Historic Preservation details such as plastering, woodworking, etc. (could use student interns from Cape Coast Polytechnic)

Ghanaians undertaking their one-year National Service should assist interns. Contacts with government authorities should begin immediately to arrange for placement.

Restoration can only begin once the necessary research, documentation and planning have been completed by both interns and professionals. A two-phase restoration plan consists of:

The first phase addresses the buildings and open space around the compound's primary entrance, as well as the wall enclosing the compound. This phase will include restoring the buildings that will house the Omahene's residence, the library/genealogy facility, the museum, a formal reception and event space, and a public reception and office building immediately adjacent to the primary entrance. It will also address the outdoor stairway and gazebo-like entrance pavilion that are signature visual elements of Gothic House, and should include significant landscape improvements to the main courtyard area.

The second phase of restoration should address the remaining structures and open space areas at the





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Eastern side of the compound. This area includes the building that will house the guest lodging facility and two open spaces that need significant landscape improvements.

Using a two phase restoration plan allows for the more crucial portions of the compound to be given precedence while the auxiliary areas await the next round of funding. The first phase of restoration will provide residential, formal, and office space for the Oguaa Traditional Council and will create revenue-generating facilities through the museum, gift shop and library/genealogy institute. The revenue and public support that are created from these facilities can then be applied to the second phase of restoration.

Funding the Restoration

As stated earlier, some restoration funding can be generated through revenues collected at the museum and library/genealogy institute proposed for the site. These revenues, however, will be meager and will only exist once some initial restoration is complete. To generate funds for the initial restoration the Oguaa Traditional Council will need to use grant funds. Interns researching and writing grants should pursue the following funding sources:

"National Resource Conservation and Historic Preservation Project" funds-available through the Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust.

"Economic Development and Democracy Initiative" funds-available through UNESCO (contact Mr. Bruno LeFevre in Accra).

The Getty Foundation-Getty funds could be useful for library and museum development. These funds must go through a United States partner.

British Council funds-Again, these funds are useful in library and museum development. Other National Councils and Embassies should be researched to determine if they could provide funds as well.

Grant funds should be available for a project of this nature. Grant funds alone are unlikely to complete the entire restoration and allow for the continued upkeep of the site, however. To ensure sufficient and comprehensive funding that will continue into the future, the Oguaa Traditional Council must consider other options as well.

One option is to solicit funds from the Muslim community to restore the mosque adjacent to Gothic House. The Aga Kahn Foundation has made international cultural preservation its priority.

Old Post Office Development Opportunities

Another, more profitable option is to partner with the government in the redevelopment of the STC Terminal and Post Office building that is across the street from Gothic House. This building is historic in its own right and has tremendous redevelopment potential.

This landmark building was built during the early 1960s to serve as Cape Coast's main post office. Constructed during the early years of Ghana's independence, the building's modernist design expresses faith in the new Africa for which Ghana was the flagship nation. The creator of an independent Ghana also helped create this unique building. On November 4, 1960 Ghana's first president Dr. Kwame Nkrumah laid the cornerstone for the Cape Coast Post Office. Standing out among the colonial-era structures that surrounded it, the Cape Coast Post Office gave Cape Coast's citizens a symbol of modernity, progress, and the institutional power of their new nation—a symbol of Ghanaian pride standing tall and proud beside the sea.

The design of the Cape Coast Post Office also explored the relationship between Cape Coast and the Ocean that has been its lifeblood throughout history. The original roof of the building was supported on a system of posts and curvilinear rafters visually reminiscent of fish bones or the ribs of a fishing boat. They also recalled the ribs of man—the human skeleton nurtured by the Gulf of Guinea to the South. Painted in a nautical pastel scheme, this building brought Cape Coast's maritime history into the perspective of Ghana's transition to a modern, independent nation. It is the architectural pivot point of Cape Coast, the moment where a rich past met a dynamic future.

Allowing the Oguaa Traditional Council to develop (with the help of outside private investors) the deteriorated portions of the Cape Coast Post Office building would benefit both the Council and the government. The Council could reap the revenues generated by the new uses developed in the building and the government could assure that an important

Cape Coast landmark is maintained while employment opportunities are created simultaneously.

This building would be an ideal location for a hotel with a supporting restaurant/bar, Internet café, conference center, and retail shops (the existing bus terminal and post office should remain). Its seaside location and proximity to historic sites would make it a popular location for tourists and locals alike. Tourists who wish to visit Gothic House could use this facility as their temporary home base while in Cape Coast, with their money going to the new proprietors of the space—the Oguaa Traditional Council.

Conclusions

It is important to consider any restoration efforts for Gothic House within the framework of a larger rehabilitation effort for a "historic corridor" that will extend from the Cape Coast Castle west to the Old Elmina Cemetery. Including Victoria Park, the old Cape Coast Post Office, Bentsir Paado, and other sites, this area has the potential to elevate Cape Coast's status as an internationally recognized center of culture and history.

Gothic House is only one piece in this puzzle. Restoration efforts for Gothic House should both feed into and feed off of this greater rehabilitation. When rehabilitation efforts for one site are successful they promote exposure and recognition of the other sites nearby. With each individual gain, the entire network is boosted.

Gothic House has the potential to be very useful to both the Oguaa Traditional Council and the public at large. A proper restoration will ensure that the Council has a palace compound in accordance with its prestige, and that the public will have a restored Cape Coast landmark to be proud of. The restoration of this site will promote Cape Coast and will help boost the local economy while it honors history. Born of the prosperity of one man, Gothic House can now work to bring pride and prosperity to Cape Coast through the initiation of historic preservation.