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*The Browning Automatic Rifle was used as a light machine gun by the American military from 1918 through the early 1960s. 2012.1.99 | All photos by Christina Vida.*

## Inadvertently Armed and Dangerous

*by John Mooney, Educator*

Back in November of 2012, Windsor Historical Society's former curator, Christina Vida, was preparing the Strong-Howard House for an ambitious reinterpretation. One of the many initial steps in implementing the project was to clean out the house, including its second floor which had been used as storage space. The Society hosted a community cleanup event where numerous volunteers helped in the process. During this seemingly routine cleanup, two unique discoveries were made. First, they found an early twentieth-century tetrachloride fire extinguisher in the house. These early extinguishers were thrown at the fire like a grenade and used a powerful chemical that is also extremely poisonous. Christina quickly handed over the fire extinguisher to the police for proper disposal. The second major discovery of the day happened when one of the volunteers came across a rare artifact that had long been tucked out of sight behind a shelving unit. Although it was wrapped in plastic,

it was immediately apparent that the object was a rifle. Christina quickly discerned that this rifle was an M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR).

The M1918 BAR was developed alongside the M1917 Browning machine gun during the United States' entry into the First World War. Both weapons were meant to supplement the meager supply of outdated machine guns stockpiled by the U.S. Army before the start of the war. While Browning designed its M1917 machine gun as a traditional immobile machine gun, like the majority of those used at the outbreak of the war, the BAR was developed with a newer, light machine gun design. The intention was to use the rifle for walking or marching fire, where soldiers would maintain suppressing fire on the enemy while simultaneously crossing the no man's land between the trenches. The concept of combining the firepower of a machine gun with the portability of a rifle was

just materializing during the First World War. The widespread use of stationary machine guns during the war had brought all strategic advances to a standstill and armies on both sides desperately sought a means to gain an upper hand and remobilize their offensive capabilities. Portable machine guns operated by a single soldier were one of the many technologies implemented to achieve this goal. Even though the new BAR was still relatively heavy at fifteen pounds and could only hold twenty rounds in a clip, its design was cutting edge for the time. Despite its innovative nature, the BAR's deployment and effectiveness were both limited during World War I, which ended only months after the rifle's deployment in combat. However, during World War II the BAR was recommissioned as the M1918A2. It ended up proving itself as a versatile and dependable weapon amongst American troops deployed in both the Pacific and Europe.

*(Continued on page 3)*

**OUR MISSION**

We aim to inspire public awareness and appreciation of the diverse peoples, places, and events that contribute to Windsor's evolving history. We preserve and interpret Windsor's historical record through active collecting, research, exhibitions, programs, and communications in the belief that an understanding of history can provide individuals and communities with connections to the past, a sense of belonging in the present, and responsibility for the future.

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**Planning for the future**

You know that saying: "Can't see the forest for the trees"? Sometimes, in the crush of planning, publicizing, and delivering programs for school children and adults, putting those social media posts out every day, helping library patrons, getting mailings out, and processing new collections items, crossing items off the "to-do" list seems like a major accomplishment. It is sometimes hard to keep mission — the overarching reason we do what we do (the forest) — in mind as we complete our day-to-day tasks (the trees).

One of our frequent funders, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG), wants to make sure their support goes to organizations grounded in strong missions that guide day-to-day work. One way to accomplish this is through strategic planning, a process supported by HFPG. Thanks to them, we will be working with consultant Francine Christiansen this summer on a strategic plan to guide us through the next three to five years. What are some of the questions we need to address?

This is a challenging period for historical societies and for history in general. How can we remain relevant and viable in a rapidly changing world?

Windsor is demographically diverse. Our audiences tend to be older, but ideally, they should reflect our community's make-up. Here's an example of what we have been doing to attract younger families. A year ago, we began offering free family learn-and-play sessions on the first Saturday of every month. We promoted the programs through "mommy blogs" and through flyers to neighboring daycare centers. We tweaked the programs to include more structured activities like puppet shows, balloon making, storytelling, and face-

painting. We stopped offering learn-and-plays during the summer months, when it's tough to tempt anyone inside. The few families who attend these programs enjoy them very much. But it's just a few. In contrast, the free genealogy support group we just started threatens to overflow the library. This is a program that clearly meets a need. However, attracting families to the Society is a worthy aim. Do we push on with more tweaks or give up on our family programming?

Although the Strong-Howard House has received accolades and awards from the museum community, this has not translated into increased walk-in visitation, but we do feel our school programs are much improved and our school numbers are growing. What can we do to better promote this unique treasure?

For our town's 375th anniversary in 2008, we made the decision to expand our Windsor history galleries into space we had previously used for temporary exhibitions. The Windsor history galleries work wonderfully well with school groups because they are now spacious enough to accommodate tour activities. But this means less of our collections come out on view. We preserve these collections well, and share them readily when asked. Is that enough?

Windsor Historical Society will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2021 and I will be retiring around that time. How can we ensure that the next executive director inherits a strong, viable, creative organization that is recognized, respected, and treasured by our community?

As always, I love hearing your ideas. If you have thoughts about anything mentioned above, forests or trees, shoot me an email (cermenc@windsorhistoricalsociety.org), pick up the phone (860-688-3813), or write me a letter. And have a wonderful summer!

(Continued from page 1)



*Browning contracted production of the BAR out to other Connecticut arms manufacturers, such as Marlin Rockwell, in order to meet the production demands of World War I. 2012.1.99b*

Through the course of her inspection and research, Christina found that Windsor Historical Society's newly discovered BAR was unregistered and an especially rare model. North Haven's Marlin Rockwell Firearms Company had produced this specific model of the rifle during World War I. From June of 1918 through the end of the war Marlin Rockwell built 20,000 BARs under contract for Browning, a deal necessitated by the strain that

increased military supply demands had placed on Browning's own facilities. The military kept these rifles in storage, upgrading and reusing them during World War II, with some possibly still being in service as late as the Korean War and during the early stages of the Vietnam War before the M60 machine gun replaced the BAR's role. Most of these rifles had been scrapped when they were taken out of service; and there are currently so few still in existence, that a model with mostly original parts can take in up to \$40,000 in an auction. Unfortunately without proper registration and a record of the donation, we could not sell the rifle at auction.



*The mechanism above the trigger allowed the BAR to switch between automatic and semi-automatic fire. Theoretically this meant that the BAR could take on the roles of both a machinegun and a traditional rifle. 2012.99c*

Over the course of three years, Christina searched for documentation on the BAR in the numerous binders that the Society had used to record donations before the advent of digital cataloging. Because the rifle itself contained no markings or tags with accession information, Christina had to search every page of every binder, hoping to run across its entry. Despite her prolonged effort, she never found any documented record of the rifle. This meant that Windsor Historical Society could not legally



keep the BAR. Christina found that only two nearby institutions, the Connecticut State Library and the Springfield Armory, were licensed to store and display the weapon under these circumstances. In the end, it was the Springfield Armory that expressed interest in the rifle. The Armory's curator, Alex MacKenzie, pictured here, visited WHS and transported the rifle to Springfield on October 21, 2015, ending the Society's long saga with the BAR. The Springfield Armory subsequently had the rifle properly conserved and it is now a part of their permanent collection.

## Changing Streetscapes in Windsor – Progress on Central Street

by Michelle Tom, Librarian/Archivist

Central Street is less than 500 feet long, much smaller looking in person than these photographs suggest. Despite its small size, over the years it has experienced many alterations, with only the Windsor train station enduring, sitting as its eastern anchor since 1869. Indeed, the train depot gave the block its previous name of “Railroad Ave”, which was only changed to Central St. around 1915.



This page, from top to bottom:

1. c.1915. In the 1910s, the block accommodated a series of livery and trucking companies, carpenters, cobblers, and blacksmiths. This photo was taken only a few years before the “Best Building” (with cupola) burned down. WHS collections 1954.2.6.41, photo by William S. Leek.



2. c.1940. Some building shapes are the same, but the faces are different. In 1922, Arthur W. Lovell built the Lovell Building that housed the Tunxis Theater, which was renamed the Windsor Theater in the 1930s. Next to the theater are the Railway Express Agency and the Windsor Animal Hospital. 1954.2.4.88, photo by William S. Leek.



3. 1971. Bill Selig’s Ford dealership took over the entire block. 1998.12.1.362, photo by Adelbert Coe.



This page, from top to bottom:

4.c.1880s. Men pose outside the Garvan Brothers' grocery store in the basement of the Best Building, named for William Best's cigar company, another prominent tenant. Above them is George Wilbraham's hardware store. Both stores would move their businesses to Broad Street by the early 1900s. 2017.1.8.

5. c.1930s. The Windsor Garage was a longtime occupant of Central Street, and in this photo you can see they are actually in the same building as the Windsor Theater. 1992.42.30, photo by Adelbert Coe.



6. 1987. What is now the Selig Ford building changes its face again, and would undergo yet more cosmetic adjustments in the years to come. 1992.42.41.325, photo by Adelbert Coe.



## Windsor's Founders: Margaret Barrett

by Kristen Wetzel Wands, Curator

In continuing our Founders' Series, we decided to examine the life of one of Windsor's founding women. Studying women from this early period can be challenging because it is often difficult to find evidence of them in the historic record. Margaret Barrett Huntington Stoughton's life, however, is surprisingly well-documented and full of quiet drama.

Margaret was born in the late 1590s to a family of some means in Norwich, England. Her father, Christopher Barrett, was a well-respected grocer who served as sheriff of Norwich in 1615 and Mayor in 1634. He was a man of property. For at least part of her childhood, Margaret lived at Suckling House, a fine merchant's house on St. Andrew's Street in Norwich. Part of that home survives today and has been re-purposed as a cinema. The house gives a sense of Margaret's material life before she married and came to America.

Margaret married her first husband, Simon Huntington, at their home church, St. Andrews, Norwich on May 1, 1623. Together, they had five children, all born in England between 1624 and 1631. By 1629, church records indicate that Simon Huntington had become a Puritan, as did many other St. Andrews congregants. Simon was brought before the Bishop's Visitation of the Diocese of Norwich "for that he doth not use to stand up at the Creed, nor bow at the name of Jesus." These deviations from expected church behavior were common among adherents to Puritanism.

In 1633, spurred on by their religious beliefs, Margaret and her family set sail for Roxbury, Massachusetts. Simon Huntington did not survive the journey. He is

said to have died of smallpox and was probably buried at sea just before arriving in America. It is easy to imagine how frightened Margaret must have felt, arriving on a new continent with her four surviving children to care for, but no husband. Back home in England, Margaret's brother Thomas was left to wonder about her fate. In 1671, nearly 40 years after Margaret left, he wrote a statement of pedigree to Sir Edward Bysshe, saying, "Margaret who married to one Symond Huntington who carried her to New England & had several children by her; but we can give no account of her or them, yet think that she & several of her children are living there." Margaret must have felt isolated, unable to correspond with her family.

A little over a year after Simon Huntington's death, Margaret married Thomas Stoughton. In December 1634, James Cudworth, nephew of Thomas Stoughton, wrote a letter to another family member, saying, "my uncle Thomas is to be married shortly, to a widow that has good means and has five children." By 1635, their newly-formed family had settled in Windsor.

Thomas Stoughton was born in Manchester, England but had come to Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1630 following the death of his first wife. He became a freeman there in 1631, and seems to have been a respected member of the community. He served numerous stints as an assessor once he moved to Windsor. According to land records written in 1640, Thomas owned a homelot with fifty-two acres of meadow here, where Margaret is thought to have remained until her death. Margaret herself passed away in March of 1665/6, after John Winthrop Jr. treated "Mrs. Stoughton, Margaret of Winsor" for her final illness.

Margaret's life was one of change. Though she married men who, like her father, were respected property holders in their communities, the difference between her childhood as the daughter of a wealthy businessperson in Norwich and her life as a farmer's wife in the new settlement at Windsor would have been vastly different experiences. Her children embraced change as she had done, and went on to become prominent citizens themselves and founders of settlements at Saybrook, Norwich, and Windham.



*The Suckling House in 1935, home of Margaret Barrett in Norwich, England.  
Photograph by George Plunkett and used with permission of Jonathan Plunkett  
georgeplunkett.co.uk.*



**A Great Big Thank You!** *by John F. Mooney, IV, Education and Outreach Manager*

This impressive poster (6 x 4.5 feet!) was provided to us by the 1st grade classes at Oliver Ellsworth Elementary in order to thank us for their field trip to Windsor Historical Society back in April.

*Photo by Sue Tait Porcaro*

**Many thanks to our volunteers**

We are so grateful to all our volunteers. Between our volunteers, staff, and donors, we are able to accomplish so much more and even surprise ourselves!

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Dorothy Ball, Donna Baron, Marianne Curling, Kevin Ferrigno, and Karen Parsons

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**PUBLICITY**

Ruth Fahrback, William Harris, Betsy and Gordon Kenneson

**Visit us**

Admission is free to browse the museum store, the *450 Years of Windsor Stories* galleries, and the Hands-On-History Learning Center.

Wednesdays - Saturdays  
11 AM - 4:00 PM  
closed on major holidays

Tours of Historic Houses  
11 AM & 1 PM

Tours & Library Admission  
\$8 Adults  
\$6 Seniors & Students  
FREE for children under 12 and WHS members

Can't make it to the Society in person? For in-depth research resources, check out our website, [windsorhistoricalsociety.org](http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org)

## Upcoming events

For more information contact the Society at 860-688-3813 or [info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org)

September 7, 5:30 PM to 7 PM  
**First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group**

Located in Windsor Historical Society's library. Just starting out? Experienced but stumped? Want access to Ancestry.com? Join others for discussion and problem-solving.

*Free.*

September 13, 7 PM to 8 PM  
**Connecticut Steps Up: World War I with Christine Pittsley, Project Director for Remembering World War I Project at Connecticut State Library.**

The Society's *Windsor Reacts to World War I* exhibit shows how our town contributed to and commemorated the war effort; Pittsley will provide perspective on other Connecticut towns and cities.

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 WHS members.*

September 20, 7 PM to 8 PM  
**Windsor Reacts to World War I Exhibit Wrap-Up**

John Mooney, WHS Education and Outreach Manager, will look at the build-up to the war, alliances and strategies, and what life was like in the trenches on the Western Front. Last chance to see exhibit.

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 WHS members.*

September 26, 7 PM to 8 PM  
**Connecticut Civilian Conservation Corps Camps at Windsor Historical Society.**

FDR's New Deal program put young men to work on conservation projects during the Great Depression. Author

Marty Podskoch will talk about Connecticut's CCC Camps including Camp Britton in Poquonock.

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 WHS members.*

October 5, 5:30 PM to 7 PM  
**First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group**

Located in Windsor Historical Society's library. Just starting out? Experienced but stumped? Want access to Ancestry.com? Join others for discussion and problem-solving.

*Free.*

October 14, 11 AM to 4 PM  
**Great Windsor History Hunt starting at Windsor Historical Society**

Pick up your book of clues at the Society, your passport to discovering a fascinating array of historic sites in town and a little history along the way. Once you have found each site, snap a picture. When finished, return to the Society to have photos checked. If you found all the sites, you'll be placed in a drawing for some neat prizes! Refreshments and prizes awarded from 3:30 – 4 PM. For all ages; families encouraged.

*\$10 per carload, \$5 per individual.*

October 18, 5 PM to 7 PM  
**A Visit to the Doctor, Then and Now**

Tour Dr. Hezekiah Chaffee's house and doctor's office at 5, then listen to Dr. William Harris and Dr. Melissa Grafe, head of the Medical History Library at Yale University as they explain the state of medical training in the late 18th century and speculate about Dr. Chaffee's daily life and practice.

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 WHS members.*

November 2, 5:30 PM to 7 PM  
**First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group**

Located in Windsor Historical Society's library. Just starting out? Experienced but stumped? Want access to Ancestry.com? Join others for discussion and problem-solving.

*Free.*

November 18, 6 PM to 9 PM  
**Windsor Historical Society's Festive Pre-Holiday Auction**

At The Lodge on Deerfield Road. Provides the perfect opportunity to find great holiday gifts and getaways for someone you love, sponsor free admission to the Society, or make the holidays special for a Windsor family in need! Enjoy a delicious buffet dinner, beer, and wine. To purchase your tickets or offer an auction donation, call 860-688-3813 or email [info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org).

*\$40 in advance, \$45 day of auction.*

December 1, 6 PM to 8 PM  
**Historic Libations: Connecticut Beer and Brewing (with Samples!)**

With Will Siss, author of *Connecticut Beer: A History of Nutmeg State Brewing*. Start the holidays right by sampling delicious traditional and creative products of Connecticut's microbreweries while absorbing sometimes amusing, sometimes shocking facts about the history of beers and brewing in Connecticut, and the recent microbrewery revolution. Over 21 only. Admission is non-refundable.

*\$15 adults, \$14 WHS members. Books available for \$22.*

