

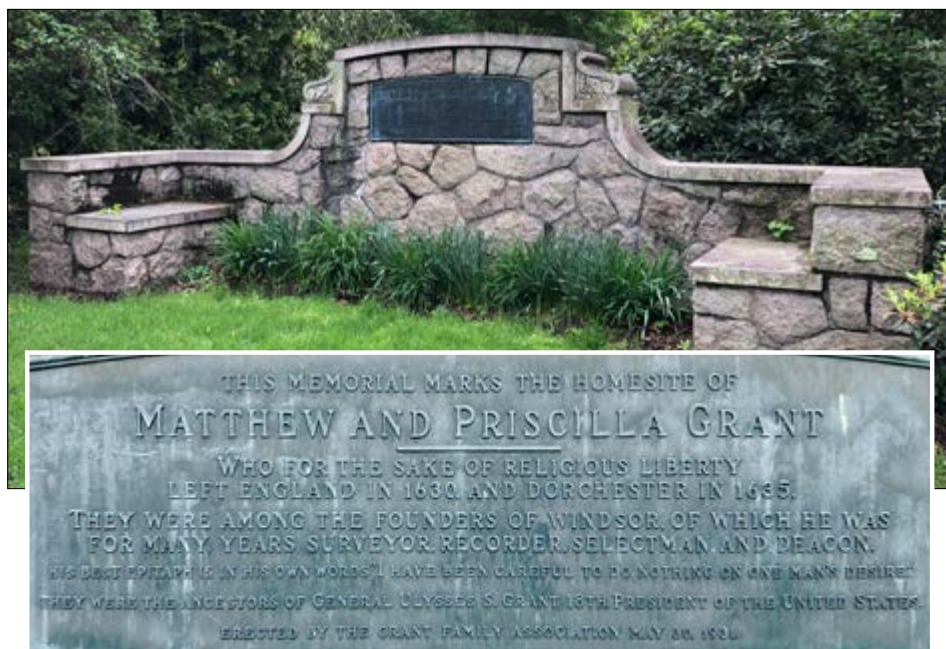


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Windsor's Founders: Matthew Grant, Diligent Documentarian

by Kristen Wands, Curator

For students of Windsor's early history, there are few figures more important than Matthew Grant. It is thanks in large part to his careful record keeping during his years as town clerk that we are able to piece together much of our information about Windsor's beginnings. Historian Henry R. Stiles said it best, writing, Grant's "early records of the town show that his duties were always conscientiously performed."¹ Conscientious is the word most often used to describe Grant's personality.



Matthew and Priscilla Grant monument, Palisado Avenue, Windsor | Photo by Michelle Tom

According to Grant's own family register, he was born October 27, 1601, "Tusdaye". He married his first wife, Priscilla, in 1625. Their daughter, also Priscilla, was born in 1626. Together, they sailed for Dorchester, MA in 1630, probably aboard the *Mary and John*. Matthew and Priscilla had four sons, Samuel, Tahan, Matthew, and John. In Windsor, the family lived on a large lot inside the Palisado, but Grant, like many of his compatriots, gave up much of that land during the Pequot War so that his neighbors could build safer homes inside the palisade walls. Grant was appointed to care for the town house and orchard in the lot adjoining his own.

Following his first wife's death in 1644, he married Susanna Capen Rockwell in 1645.

Grant was among the first of the Dorchester group to come to Windsor, beginning to survey the first lots in the Great Meadow here in September 1635. Grant continued in the role of surveyor for many years. As he himself wrote in a 1675 deposition, "I have been employed in the measuring of land and getting out of lots to men, which has been done by me from our first beginning here, come next September is 40 years."² By all accounts, he was a skilled surveyor. Surveying equipment, believed to

have belonged to Matthew Grant, is on display in Windsor Historical Society's North Gallery.

In addition to his work as surveyor, Grant served the town as a jurist. In part because of that duty, he had connections to two of Connecticut's early witchcraft cases. In 1651, Grant served on the jury for the trial of Thomas Allyn, who accidentally shot and killed Henry Stiles during a training exercise. Grant and the other jurors on the case at the time found Allyn guilty, but another jury overturned his conviction several years later, and instead found neighbor Lydia Gilbert guilty of using witchcraft

(Continued on page 3)

OUR MISSION

Windsor Historical Society invites people to connect with Windsor's evolving history by preserving, interpreting, and sharing our community's artifacts and stories.

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Dr. Chaffee's Home: A Work in Progress

Windsor Historical Society operates two historic house museums. Our mid-eighteenth-century Strong-Howard House is furnished with reproductions of furnishings that the Howard family would have had around 1810. Captain Nathaniel Howard's detailed probate inventory, which listed all of the family's possessions (valued at \$4,731) at the time of his death in 1819, helped us furnish their home with accuracy.

Our other historic house was built by Dr. Hezekiah Chaffee in 1767. It was the largest home on the Palisado Green, exceeding even the minister's home in scale and decoration. Like Captain Howard, Dr. Hezekiah Chaffee died in 1819. The doctor's estate was worth \$18,510.86, four times that of Captain Howard's. As you might expect, Dr. Chaffee's home was furnished to the nines. In 1844, his son John, who lived in the house, died and the family possessions were auctioned. The home passed to distant relations, then to the Chaffee School for Girls, then to the Town of Windsor.

In 1992, the town leased the Chaffee House to Windsor Historical Society to operate as a museum. How would we furnish it? The committee charged with this task put out a call for artifacts. Ruth Morgan Porteus, then 99 years old, lived a few houses south of the Chaffee House. Her great-grandfather, Deacon Jasper Morgan, had purchased one of the Chaffee's fire buckets in 1844 and passed it down through his family. Ruth felt the fire bucket should return home and donated it back to the Society. We were thrilled!

Much of the rest of the home was furnished from Windsor Historical Society's collections. But this posed a challenge. Dr. Chaffee owned several sets of late 18th-century chairs, over thirty of them. The Society did not possess

even one set of chairs from Dr. Chaffee's period, but we did have a set of six Colonial Revival Hartford Chippendale-style chairs made in 1880. These look like chairs Dr. Chaffee might have had, so into the North Parlor they went with the thought that if ever the Society acquired more appropriate chairs, we would upgrade.

Dr. Chaffee owned a fancy desk, far more ornate than anything in the Society's collections. However, the Connecticut Historical Society has many fine furniture pieces in storage without exhibition space to display them. We were fortunate that a few years ago, they lent us a beautiful desk and bookcase made by Westfield cabinetmaker Erastus Grant, who trained in Hartford. While this is not Dr. Chaffee's desk, it is the sort of desk he might have owned.

Enter the Porteus family once again. Ruth's grandson, Milton Porteus is preparing to sell a family home after many generations in our neighborhood. He is donating a wonderful collection of family furnishings and photographs to Windsor Historical Society, including more Chaffee-period appropriate pieces. These include a Connecticut Valley high chest and a desk-bookcase, some Connecticut Valley chairs, a Pembroke table, two candle stands, some porcelain, a sampler and other textile pieces, and some amazing family photograph albums showing our neighborhood in the late 19th and early 20th century. Milton's siblings already have housefuls of things, and his daughter is at a mobile stage in her life, not wanting the responsibility of caring for family artifacts. The family has agreed that they want Windsor Historical Society to be the new home for these precious family items.

For us, it's an honor to preserve them and to share them with the public. The Morgan family, like the Chaffee family, once stood near the economic apex of Windsor society. Their furnishings will fit right into the Chaffee house and enhance the tour experience. And we are still on the lookout. The collecting work of the Society is never complete!

Christie

(Continued from page 1)



Surveying equipment: brass and wood compass and chain, ownership attributed to Grant. On display in our museum gallery | On loan from the Wadsworth Atheneum, F64.17

to cause Stiles's death. Grant's more famous witchcraft connection comes from his compulsion to write down important events in the town's history. A note written in his personal diary names the first woman hanged for witchcraft in New England. It reads: "May 26 47 Else Young was hanged" and goes on to list the hanging deaths of John Newberry (for bestiality) and the Carringtons (also for witchcraft).³ Were it not for Grant, we might never have known who Else Young was.

Grant's most notable role was as town clerk, a position he held from 1652 until 1677. He succeeded Bray Rossiter in the appointment. The town records are full of examples of Grant's diligent attention to his duties. He appears to have understood his place in shaping the history of the settlement. Not only did he record events that occurred during his time as town clerk, he also recorded prior occurrences in the town which he believed were of

significance. In addition to earlier births, deaths, marriages, and church memberships, he recorded in detail the great flood of March 1638/9, when "ye waters rose verey hoy more than euer had ben known by ye Indans. It drowned many howses verey deep."⁴ The flood forced many families to relocate their homes to higher ground.

Grant also made corrections to the work of his predecessor, Bray Rossiter. In January 1659, Grant wrote a note in the *Windsor Land Records* which states, "When this book was delivered to Matthew Grant to Keep, and order the Record of Land for the Town, in August 20th 1652, he found that the page where his Land was Entered was rent out and Lost by the former Registrar."⁵ He set about correcting the omission. Later, in 1668, Grant allowed George Griswold to write a note in the town records regarding dissent in town between two ministers, Reverend Warham and Reverend Woodbridge, who had both been granted permission to preach on the Sabbath. Grant clearly sided with Warham as minister of the original church, but felt compelled to let Griswold make a note in the records, which Grant followed with his own note, reading in part: "I told him I would not have no hand [sic] in the business, nor enter their vote. Then he desired me to let him have the town Book...He being a townsman I laid the Book upon the

table, and there he wrote himself what is entered by his own hand."⁶ Grant may not have been impartial, but he was rigorous and thorough.

What comes through most in Grant's writing is that he cared deeply about the justness of his own work and the success of Windsor as a settlement. In the same 1675 deposition mentioned earlier, Grant said, "I have been careful to do nothing upon one man's desire."⁷ He worked to act only upon the wishes of the magistrates and in the town's best interest. Thanks to Matthew Grant's diligence and sense of purpose, we are able to more fully understand Windsor's long, rich history today.

Footnotes

¹ Henry R. Stiles. *The History of Ancient Windsor, Vol. I, Somersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1976, 86.*

² Quoted in *ibid.*, 85-86.

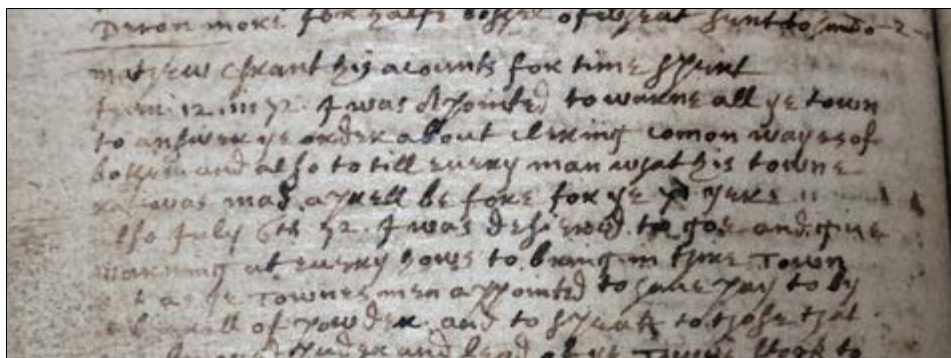
³ An image of Grant's list of hangings is found here: <http://cslib.cdmhost.com/digital/collection/p15019coll14/id/307>, accessed May 8, 2019.

⁴ Some Early Records and Documents of and Relating to the Town of Windsor Connecticut 1639-1703. *Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 78.*

⁵ *Windsor Land Records, Book 1 Page 10.* Accessed from <https://www.searchiqs.com/ctwsr/InfodexMainMP.aspx> May 8, 2019.

⁶ *Transcribed in Stiles, History of Windsor, Vol. I, 201.*

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, Vol. II, 635.



Page from *Town Acts Layouts of Lots, 1650-1714*, probably in Grant's handwriting | *Town of Windsor Collection* | Photo by Michelle Tom

19th-Century Eddy Electric Automobile Motors

Originally published in the Windsor Historical Society Newsletter Vol XV, No. 1, January 1997.

Updated by Michelle Tom, librarian/archivist, 2018.



Eddy Electric Manufacturing Company building at 33 Mechanic St. in Windsor, 1892. | WHS collections 2007.1.37, photo by Fred Barry

The Eddy Electric Manufacturing Company occupied the three-story brick building to the east of the railroad depot in Windsor center. Here they built electric motors and generators from 1885 through 1902. The head of the company was Arthur Eddy (1857-1937), an inventor who resided on Hayden Avenue in Windsor. His *Hartford Times* obituary noted that “the Eddy dynamo which he invented was a big factor in the electrical world during the infancy of the electrical age...At the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893, products of the Eddy Electric Manufacturing Company formed one of the outstanding exhibits. In addition to the dynamos and other electrical machinery, they included a moving platform on which visitors were transported around the fair grounds.”

In addition to these accomplishments, one particular type of product that the company made formed the backbone of some of the world’s earliest electric cars.

Sometime around 1899, Ransom E. Olds, Chief Engineer and co-founder of the then fledgling Oldsmobile Automotive Company, placed an order for a number of electric motors from the “Eddy Electrical [sic] Company” of Windsor, Conn. Said motors were to be used to power a line of electric passenger vehicles then under development in Olds’ newly built automobile factory in Detroit, Mich. ...A number of these electric-powered Oldsmobile vehicles were built, shown and tested in 1899 and 1900. Hard evidence points to some 10 or 12 electric cars and possibly more being produced and stock-piled at the factory for sale to the public when the spring driving season of 1901 arrived. Unfortunately in March 1901, the Oldsmobile factory burned to the ground along with (supposedly) all the finished electric cars... Olds’ dream of producing electric-powered vehicles died in the 1901 fire. Just now, in 1996, the Oldsmobile Company has announced its current plans to once again produce electric vehicles for sale to the American public.

The above is an excerpt from a June 1996 letter to Windsor Historical Society from brothers Donald J. McDowell and Kenneth R. McDowell, automotive historians from Lake Odessa, MI. Before they both passed away, they owned the only known surviving Oldsmobile electric vehicle from 1899 and, after restoring it, had loaned it to the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum in Lansing, MI. Their research showed the car originally had a motor and floor-board-mounted voltammeter produced by Eddy Electric, though both were missing when the car was uncovered in a Lansing garage in 1959. The car did manage to retain its original Eddy-built electric controller.

This 1899 Oldsmobile was not the first electric automobile to employ an Eddy motor. In 1896, a Hartford-based company called the Columbia Electric Vehicle Company produced their Mark I model car. According to David Corrigan in an article in *Connecticut Explored* magazine, “the Eddy Electric and Manufacturing Company in nearby Windsor, was able to provide a motor that met all of [vehicle designer Hiram Percy] Maxim’s weight, speed, and traction requirements. The Eddy motor was light and could run at 2,000 revolutions per minute.” The Mark I was only ever built for demonstration purposes, but their later Mark III version went on sale to the general public to great success. Corrigan quotes an 1897 *New York Times* write-up on the Mark III, which noted “that the vehicle was equipped with a ‘two-horse power Eddy motor’ powered by four battery units each weighing 200 pounds and that ‘the total weight of the carriage is about 1,900 pounds.’”

Arthur Eddy designed and built his first electric motor in 1886. By 1900, the Eddy Electric Manufacturing Company had an entire catalog of electric motors specifically made

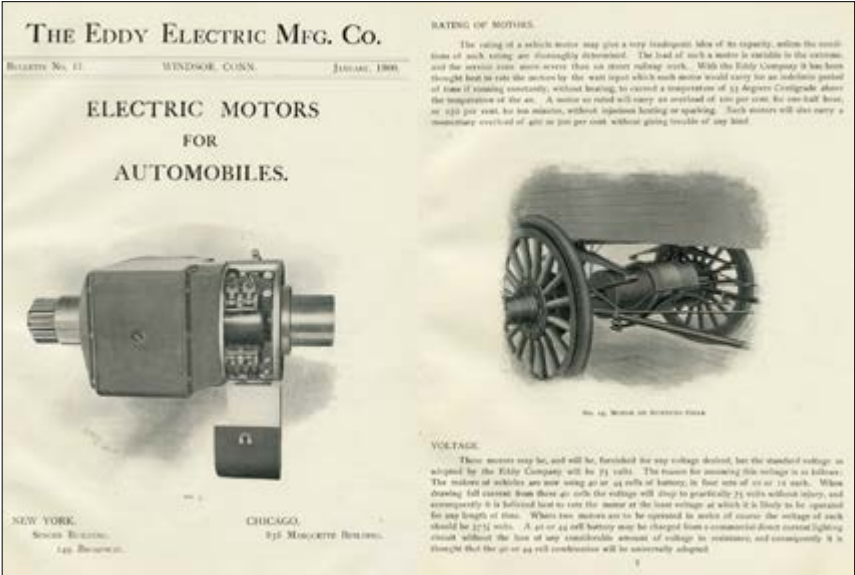
for automobiles. But their business did not last much longer, as they suffered a few major financial losses, including an unexpected overcommitment of resources in support of their 1893 Chicago World's Fair

exhibit, from which they never fully recovered. In 1902 the company came under the control of General Electric, and in 1910 they sold GE its rights and land entirely. GE remained in Windsor until 1928 when it moved its operations to Lynn, MA.

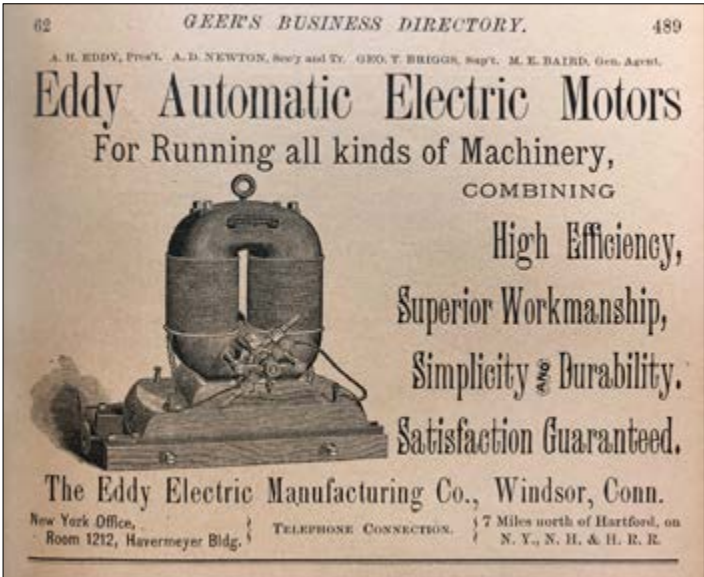
Despite financial challenges making their achievements short-lived, Eddy Electric Manufacturing Company's contribution to the field of electric vehicles remains indisputable.



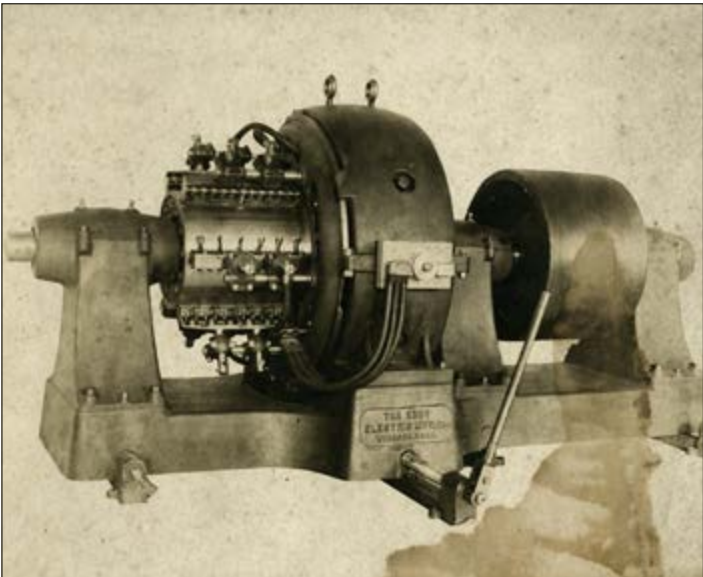
1899 Oldsmobile Electric Vehicle, originally boasting an Eddy Electric motor (not extant). | From the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum. Photo by Michael Barera, CC BY-SA 4.0.



The Eddy Electric Mfg. Co. Bulletin No. 17, January 1900. | WHS collections.



Ad for Eddy Electric in the Hartford City Directory, 1893. | WHS collections.



Eddy Electric-built dynamo, a standard generator for electroplating and electrotyping. | WHS collections 2018.1.297.

Windsor's Death Trap

By Michelle Tom, librarian/archivist

Some Things Windsor Needs.

- **A Town Probation Officer**
- **A Town Map**
- **A Prompt Increase in Teachers' Salaries**
- **Removal of The "Death Trap"**

This opinionated list appeared in a short-lived local newspaper from 1916 called *The Windsor Town Crier*. The same "Death Trap" also showed up in the official Annual Town Report from 1916 (a grim year for the normally mundane Annual Report, which also included amongst its lists of court cases for the year a murder in the first degree: the state vs. Archer-Gilligan). That year the town paid \$2,460 in land damages relating to the Death Trap, and then another \$14,540 in services for "Death Trap eliminator". For that was the year that the Death Trap finally met its own end.

Just what was this Death Trap? It was a narrow stretch of the lower part of Palisado Avenue that runs underneath the railroad overpass. Today this is a straight road, but in those more treacherous times it was a 90-degree hairpin turn at the bottom of a hill. While this was difficult enough for early automobile drivers to traverse, it was doubly more hazardous for trolley cars to execute, and on top of that, the road was also frequented by pedestrians and bicyclists, and prone to flooding.

Throughout its 20-year existence, residents and travelers alike railed against how unsafe this road was, but disagreements over who would pay for the fix meant that ultimately it took a bill passing through the state legislature to straighten it out. The law mandated that all dangerous highway crossings at railroad and trolley lines be eliminated, and indeed, the *Hartford Courant* reported that Windsor's Death Trap was "generally considered the most dangerous in the state."



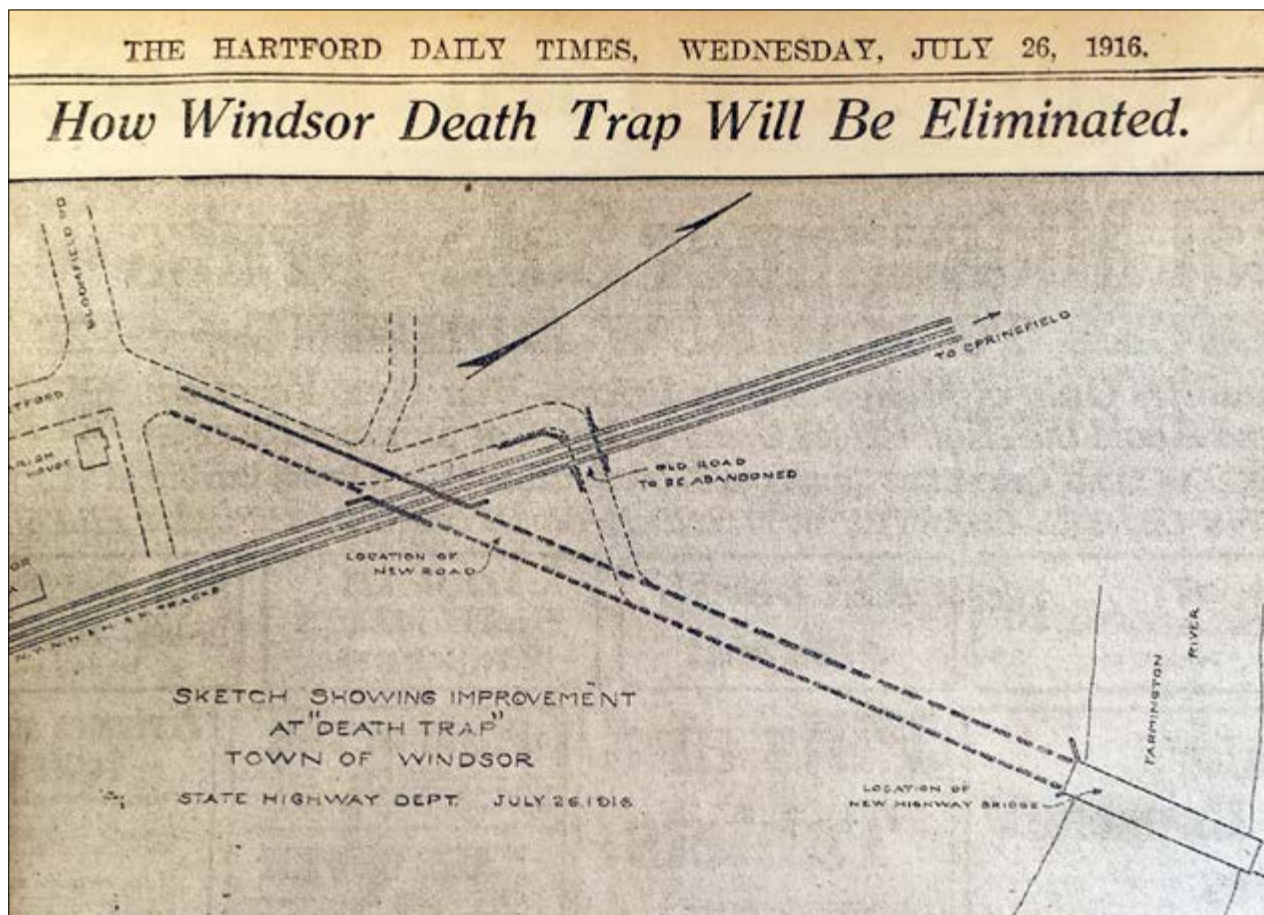
The caption handwritten on the back of this photo says, "Springfield trolley coming thru the 'death trap' - the wire always came off the pole." Imagine trying to make this turn on icy rails. WHS collections 1991.12.1, gift of Henry Newhaus.



This danger sign alerting travelers to repairs might well have stayed up indefinitely. The road directly connected to Phelps St. (on left) in this era. A New York, New Haven, and Hartford (NYNH&H) train rumbles overhead. WHS collections 1954.2.4.37, photo by William S. Leek.



This view looking south down Palisado Ave. shows workers posing on the tracks above a flooded out road. WHS collections 1954.2.6.6, photo by William S. Leek.



When the various stakeholders finally planned to straighten out the Death Trap, the Hartford Daily Times helpfully published an overhead map showing the old and new roads. Ultimately it cost \$100,000, split between the town, state, NYNH&H Railroad Company, and Hartford and Springfield Railway (trolley) company, to complete the fix. WHS collections 2011.1.60.

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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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

Upcoming events

For more information contact the Society at 860-688-3813 or info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org. Visit our website and pay for events online: windsorhistoricalsociety.org/events

June 19, 7 PM to 8 PM

The Evolution of Bradley Airport

Did you know that Bradley Airport started out as a training base for air combat units, and served as a camp for German prisoners of war during World War II? Popular lecturer Bob Bell returns, and will talk about the airport's evolution from 1941 to the present. He'll even share some future plans. Program follows short annual meeting.

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, WHS members FREE

June 28, 6 PM to 8 PM

Historic Libations: Mid-Century Tiki Drinks

Hollywood tiki bars in the 1930s, WWII servicemen returning from the South Pacific after the war, Hawaiian statehood in 1958. Sample Mai Tais, Royal Hawaiians, and more, and enjoy some tasty fabulous fifties snacks as you learn a little history. Over 21 only.

\$15 adults, \$14 members, \$1 off with Hawaiian shirts or 'fifties garb

July 17, 10 AM to 11:30 AM

Behind-the-Scenes Collections Spotlight: Fashions of our Friends and Neighbors

With curator Kristen Wands. Meet some of the Society's neighbors from 1795 to 1900 by examining their garments and learning about construction and stylistic changes over time. We'll show wedding gear, a tea gown, shirts, and a cloak from the Nelson, Morgan and Chaffee families.

Limited enrollment, reservations by July 16. \$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 WHS members

July 31, 1 PM to 6 PM

American Red Cross Blood Drive

We are excited to partner with the American Red Cross to launch the first of what we hope will be many blood drives. We'll be working together to give back to the community in a truly life changing way since each donation we collect can save up to three lives.

Sign up online at redcrossblood.org, or call 860-688-3813

August 1, 5:30 PM to 7 PM

First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group

Just starting out? Experienced but stumped? Want access to Ancestry.com including World Catalogue? Join others for discussion and problem-solving. Feel free to bring your laptop!

FREE

August 24, 9 AM to 10:30 AM

The Apothecary's Profession with Gordon Kenneson

Dr. Hezekiah Chaffee of Windsor was an apothecary. What was an apothecary and how did this profession evolve over millennia? What were some common treatments for disease in the late 18th century? Prepare to be fascinated!

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 WHS members

September 5, 12, 18, 6:30 PM to 8 PM

ABCs of Genealogy with Dave Robison

Genealogy research can be rewarding. Researching your family? Are you looking in all the right places? Genealogy research can be rewarding and frustrating at the same time. Knowing where to look (it's NOT all on the internet!) can make your adventure more rewarding and less of a major task. In 3 separate sessions we'll discuss websites both free and fee-based, libraries, archives, court houses, and many other resources. We will also cover different types of documents and what they can tell us: vital records (birth, marriage, death), pension

records, land records, immigration and naturalization records. We'll also talk about some very common pitfalls that can easily lead anyone "down the rabbit hole!" We will learn effective online research strategies that could save you time.

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 WHS members

September 19, 7 PM to 8 PM

What to Do with the Stuff the Kids Don't Want

Many seniors and their adult children face this dilemma. Come to Windsor Historical Society for a session with James Selig of James Selig Estate Jewelry and Antiques and discover some solutions that might work for you.

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 WHS members

September 22, 1 PM to 4 PM

Antiques Appraisal Day

Enjoy an "Antiques Road Show"-type event. Experts associated with Nadeau's Auction Gallery and James Selig Estate Jewelry and Antiques and their colleagues appraise manuscripts and paper goods, clothing and textiles, furniture, glass and ceramics, metal goods, toys, and jewelry.

\$5 per artifact, five artifacts per person.

If you love the work we do, please talk with your legal and financial advisors about leaving us a gift in your estate plan such as a bequest of cash or securities in your will.

What your legal and financial advisors will need to know:

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Address: 96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor CT 06095

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