



Windsor Historical Society

# News



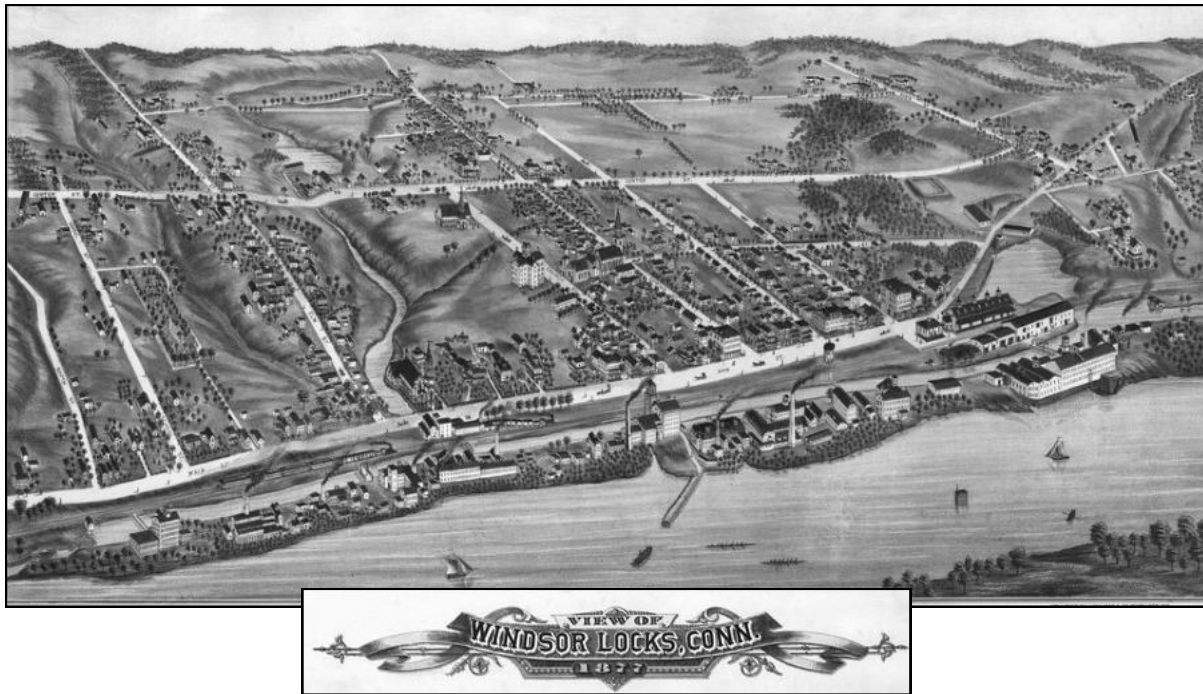
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## Transportation of Gunpowder on the Windsor Locks Canal: A Booming Business

*Chris Kervick, an attorney and former probate judge, was born and raised in Windsor Locks. Ten years ago, it dawned on him that despite his lifelong proximity to the canal, he knew very little about its history. Since then, his passion for the canal and its history has taken him to archives all over the country. On October 9, 2012, he spoke before a standing-room-only crowd at the Society. His article is drawn from his research.*



View of Windsor Locks, Conn. 1877

Published by O. H. Bailey and Co., Boston, MA.

Image courtesy of University of Connecticut, University Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center

In November 1829, one of four hundred Irish immigrant laborers emptied his last wheelbarrow of earth on an embankment in the Connecticut River near Suffield, thereby completing what is now known as the Windsor Locks Canal. During the first fifteen years of operation, the Connecticut River Company, the operator of the canal, enjoyed a monopoly on upper Connecticut River transportation. The benefits of that monopoly were not long-lasting. In 1844, the Hartford and Springfield Railroad was completed and began operations in the Connecticut River Valley.

Canal transportation, heralded as the long-term answer to a growing nation's transportation needs just fifteen years earlier, was no match for the speed and efficiency of the emerging railroads. But while it is undisputed that the arrival of the railroad signaled the eventual demise of the Windsor Locks Canal, the decline in shipping on the canal was far more gradual than historians have previously supposed. One product in particular, gunpowder, was shipped through the canal for several decades after the railroad appeared.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Our Mission

The Windsor Historical Society aims 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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Open Tuesday - Saturday  
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Closed major holidays  
96 Palisado Avenue (Rt. 159),  
Windsor, CT 06095

860/688-3813, fax 860/687-1633  
[info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org)  
<http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org>

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## Director's Message

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director

### Grants: *Balancing The Bottom Line*

It truly takes a village to keep Windsor Historical Society active and strong. You know this already because twice a year I send a letter asking for financial support. You are not alone in being approached; our newsletter team felt you might like to know more about the grants that aid us and how they work.

Granting agencies are very careful about where they give money. They like to see evidence that the institutions they fund are valued by their community. So your support does double duty: it sustains Society operations, but it also signals to the many granting agencies we approach that we have strong community backing.

Most granting agencies will fund only a portion of the costs of a program and require us to match their funds from other sources. The Civil War programs we have been offering are funded by **Connecticut Humanities** which supports the costs of bringing speakers to the Society. Admission fees contribute towards our match, but don't quite fulfill our end of this grant bargain. Consider this: the programs themselves are just the tip of an iceberg. We also spend time organizing, publicizing, setting up for, and running the programs; we can use the costs of this staff time as part of our grant match. Here's where you come in as supporters: remember that your donations support daily operations including salaries. So you are essential in helping us achieve balance.

**Greater Hartford Arts Council** is supporting a great new student exhibition, *Building Bridges, Windsor Walks* that will open January 10, 2013. We applied to them for half of the project costs, but they awarded us significantly less. This happens a lot; granting agencies are stretched too. So we had to make a decision: hold or fold? As a healthy not-for-profit organization, we can sometimes choose to host a worthy program, whether or not it is profitable. In this case, we decided to go ahead with a scaled-back budget. Arts Council funds will pay for exhibition supplies, some publicity costs, and honoraria for participating artists. Our match includes school buses donated from our November auction, the food at the exhibition opening donated by Rabbett Insurance Agency, and staff time organizing, leading and promoting the project. Our school partners are donating the art teacher's time and the art supplies used by the students, so we will not lose money.

Our biggest upcoming project is the restoration of the Strong-Howard House, which will take place over the next few years. Already, grants have helped move this project toward the starting gate. Last year, a



**Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation** grant funded a restoration plan. Another grant from the **1772 Foundation** is funding some of the restoration of the Strong-Howard House exterior and updates to its ancient electrical systems. Our Buildings Reserve Fund, accumulated slowly but steadily over the past two decades, plus staff time is providing the match.

As you are reading this, I am working on a large capital grant request to the **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving** to fund half the total cost of the house

restoration. We will be matching the rest with other grants, with staff and volunteer labor, and with funds raised from friends like you. The Hartford Foundation is very careful about allocating its funds. I feel confident that when they look at our application, they will see an institution that has flourished for ninety-one years thanks to careful stewardship and a committed base of members and friends. So here's a glass raised to you! Can you see what a difference you make? Happy New Year, and yes, you will hear more.

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*(Continued from page one, Windsor Locks Canal)*

On March 16, 1875, the Windsor Locks Board of Selectmen enacted an ordinance regulating the transportation of gunpowder upon the canal. This action confirms that powder, most likely from the Hazard Powder Company of Enfield, was still being transported upon the canal in 1875, nearly thirty years after the introduction of railroads to the area. More significantly, when one considers the historic role the Hazard Powder Company played in the Civil War (by some estimates, as much as forty percent of all powder used by the Union Army and Navy was produced in Hazardville), it becomes apparent that the Windsor Locks Canal served a vital role during that terrible conflict.

A review of the Hazard Powder Company's holdings confirms its reliance on river transportation to distribute its products. Tax Assessor's records from 1856 and 1862 reveal among the company's many holdings, two dwelling houses on the Connecticut River, a magazine and store house at the river, and three acres of land upon the river. These holdings suggest an elaborate shipping complex upon the banks of the river allowing for the storage, loading and shipment of powder products from the site.

These records confirm the transportation of Hazard Powder Company products upon the canal well after the assumed "demise" of the canal, but they also raise two significant questions. The first, "Why did transportation by boat remain the preferred method of powder transportation for decades after the introduction of railroads?" The answer lies in the fact that boat transportation was considered a less dangerous means of transporting powder. Transportation by rail often meant a turbulent, steamy

and spark-filled ride, none of which boded well for the safe shipment of gunpowder.

Conversely, transportation by boat promised a smooth ride, with plenty of water available in the event of an emergency.

The second question raised is, "Why did the residents of Windsor Locks wait until 1875 to express and act upon their concerns relative to the transportation of powder?" The citizens of Windsor Locks were responding to recent catastrophic events nearly half a world away.

On October 10, 1874 a barge carrying three barrels of petroleum and five tons of gunpowder exploded upon the Regents Park Canal in London, England. The barge, named the Tilbury, was the third in a line of five barges being towed by a steam tug. Just as the barge went under the MacClesfield Bridge, the barge caught fire and exploded in what was described as the largest explosion in the history of London. The blast destroyed the bridge, several nearby homes, and broke windows as far as one mile distant. The four-man crew upon the barge was killed instantly. Several of the connected barges were sunk. The horrific catastrophe was prominently reported in the newspapers of the day. The Illustrated London News carried a dramatic drawing and detailed article recreating the explosion. There is little doubt that word of the explosion reached the United States swiftly. It is with the memory of the Regents Park Canal Explosion fresh in their minds that the Windsor Locks Board of Selectmen took up the cause of regulating the transportation of gunpowder upon the canal. Those regulations, along with the evidence of Hazard Powder Company's extensive riverside shipping complex, confirm that the Windsor Locks Canal served a vital role in commercial transportation well into the latter half of the nineteenth century.

# Lon Pelton's Windsor Locks Canal Model

Christina Vida, Curator



Lon Pelton's studio  
January 25, 2012

At the exhibition opening of *Windsor: Bridging Centuries, Bridging Cultures*, a blank space in the South Gallery waited to be filled. The Society turned to Lon Pelton, Windsor's metal sculptor and general fix-it man, to make a model of a canal to fill the void. Lon insisted on crafting the complex machinery for a historically accurate model of the Windsor Locks Canal. He set to work in January 2012. This photo shows the bare bones of the model including a wooden base, high-density foam, and choices of stone tile to replicate the canal's masonry walls.



Lon Pelton's studio  
September 20, 2012

Lon worked over the summer fine tuning the gates, creating a tank to hold the large amount of water needed to run the model, and installing a small water pump. On September 20<sup>th</sup> he filled the model with water and maneuvered a small piece of foam down the canal and back up again – just as a steamboat would have traveled the canal in 1829.

After a coat of paint and some more tweaking, the eight-foot-long model arrived at the Society in the back of Lon's truck. It fit perfectly in the waiting gallery space and was in place in time for Chris Kervick's lecture on the history of the Windsor Locks Canal.



Lon Pelton's studio  
May 14, 2012

By May the general form of the canal was in place with grouted stone tiles, butterfly gates for the three locks, and sluice gates to allow for overflow water. Waterproofing was well underway, and Lon began addressing the issue of sealing the butterfly gates without the full force of the water that would have been in the actual canal. Water pressure is very hard to duplicate, but Lon tackled the problem with foam seals and tight hinges.



South Gallery, WHS  
October 8, 2012

We are thrilled with this addition and are thankful that Lon's ingenuity will continue to be on display at the Society. The miniature lockmaster's house, painted by Jane Pelton, and a model barge, crafted by Paul Suto, perfectly complement the installation. Demonstrations of the Windsor Locks Canal model will be run from 10 am - 1 pm on the first Saturday of each month or by special appointment.

# New to the Collection: The Polka Maestro

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

How many times a week do you drive over the Farmington River bridge on Palisado Avenue (Route 159) in Windsor? Have you noticed the bronze plaque that says "Ray Henry Memorial Bridge?" Have you asked yourself "Who was Ray Henry?" You may be surprised to learn he was a Windsor musician, composer, and conductor whose energy, talent, and love of performing touched thousands of people during his career.

Born Henry MocarSKI, he learned to play the accordion as a boy. In 1939 at the age of sixteen he started a polka trio with friends who played the saxophone and drums. Within a short time they added more musicians and the ten piece ensemble called itself the Ray Henry Orchestra. Although the group played a wide variety of music, MocarSKI's first love was the polka and he became known as "Ray Henry the Polka Maestro."

His band played all over the northeast, travelling to perform at dance halls and social events from Chicago into Canada. The group had more than 1,000 musical pieces in its repertoire; amazingly more than 800 of them were composed by Ray Henry himself. The orchestra was featured on live radio shows, such as the ones emceed by Stan Ozimek on Sunday afternoons in Connecticut, and made dozens of recordings. Ray Henry was inducted into the International Polka Association Hall of Fame in 1972.

At the height of the ballroom dance craze of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly every town and city in Connecticut had at least one dance hall and frequently there were dances every night of the weekend. Traditionally there were slow dances on Saturday nights and polka hops on Sundays. In the 1950s the standard admission was one dollar for four hours of dancing. In the Wilson

neighborhood of Windsor, the Polish National Home on Windsor Avenue held polka dances in their second-floor ballroom. This was located in the same block as the Wilson Dept. Store, more commonly known as Syd's General Store. Other popular venues near Windsor were the Chrystal Ballroom in Ellington and the Polish National Home in Hartford.



Ray Henry  
Photo courtesy of the  
International Polka Association

Windsor's Ray Henry passed away on January 24, 1998. Immediately his friends, fans, and fellow musicians formed the Ray Henry Tribute Committee. They held dances to raise funds for a Ray Henry Musical Scholarship at Windsor High School, displayed memorabilia at the Windsor Public Library, played concerts on the Windsor Town Green, and arranged for the dedication of the Farmington River bridge in Ray Henry's memory on July 24, 1999. The dedication was followed by a picnic, music, and dancing at the boat launch by the bridge.

Recently the Society received copies of three Ray Henry Orchestra recordings: "Polka Session with Ray Henry," "Wicked Good Polka," and "Fifty Years and Better." January is National Polka Month. Why not take

a few minutes to watch some of the Ray Henry Orchestra videos available on YouTube, download recordings from iTunes, or visit the Windsor Historical Society and listen to one of our CDs. A lively polka is guaranteed to elicit a light-hearted gaiety in the listener, no matter what the age. You may even feel like dancing!

*Did you dance to the music of the Ray Henry Orchestra?*

*We are interested in stories and photos from that era.*

Contact Librarian Barbara Goodwin at  
[bgoodwin@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:bgoodwin@windsorhistoricalsociety.org)

## Significant Objects Writing Contest

In the past few years, Windsor Historical Society has showcased the artistic efforts of talented photographers, print-makers, textile artists, jewelry-makers, sculptors and more, all of them inspired by Windsor's places, people, and things. This fall, the Society sought out talented authors. The result was a Facebook contest for writers interested in weaving together a story about Windsor and a story about an object. Authors selected from a Coca-Cola bottle, a rotary dial phone, or a piece of tobacco shade cloth to use as inspiration for their writing.

Submissions under 500 words in any genre (creative fiction, non-fiction, poem, letter, etc.) were accepted and reviewed by the Society. They were judged based on creative use of language, connecting the object to Windsor, and overall quality. Three entries for each of the objects were posted on the Society's Facebook page for public voting, and the top three "liked" entries received cash prizes. Entrants ranged in age from 8 to 91, and their writings were evocative, engaging, funny, some even a bit spooky. The first-place winner's essay follows:

### The Green Coca-Cola Bottle

Mark S. Fitton

I'm 56 years old now, but I have fond memories from a couple of summers in the mid-1960's, riding my bike to Bart's Drive-In from my home on Glenwood Drive, back when that was a relatively newly developed neighborhood. The bottle of Coke cost 10 cents plus the 2 cent deposit, as I recall. But, if you drank the bottle on the premises and left the bottle, it only cost a dime. My best friend, Dennis, went on many of those bike rides. We'd ride by the tobacco fields, over the railroad tracks, turning right onto Palisado Avenue. We always stopped on the bridge over the Farmington

River to look back at the railroad bridge, then headed to Bart's. Sometimes, we would get an ice cream, but most times, it was a Coke. I can still taste the pleasant burning sensation as we drank them down. Life was so simple for a couple of 10-11 year old kids. Much of that summer, we played baseball in our back yards, or hit plastic golf balls with our Dad's golf clubs. Dennis' Mom made us peanut butter and butter sandwiches, a real treat if you hated peanut butter and jelly. Alas, memories aren't meant to last, in April of 1968, my Mom and step-Dad moved me and my siblings to Mansfield in eastern Connecticut, where I finished the 6th grade. Dennis and I wrote to each other a couple of times shortly after the move, but time and distance caught up with the both of us and we each lived our lives, apart, and each other all but forgotten.

Andrew Coe and Elena Anderson received 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place. To read the winning essays, visit the Society's website: [http://www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org/signifant\\_objects\\_writing\\_contest\\_12\\_winners.html](http://www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org/signifant_objects_writing_contest_12_winners.html).



### Building Bridges: Windsor Walks Exhibition Opening

Mark your calendars for **Thursday, January 10**, from 5 p.m. - 7 p.m. to take in the work of Windsor High School's Pre-AP art students.

FREE with refreshments!

Snow date: January 17, 2013.

# Volunteer Profile

Connie Thomas, Administrative Assistant

We are featuring a profile of one of our volunteers in each newsletter issue. Our volunteers supplement and complement the work of our paid staff in so many ways. Volunteers present school programs, conduct tours for our guests, maintain our facilities and grounds, work with our curator and librarian, and help with house and garden tours and other fundraising events. It is a privilege and honor to work together to preserve and share Windsor's history.

## Barbara Byczkiewicz

Barbara has been helping us with bulk mailings and other administrative tasks since 2008. She is a Windsor native and housebound so the Society's staff drives her to and from the office when needed. She wonderfully manages a large mailing, breaking it down into smaller components, and overseeing other volunteers who are working toward getting our news to you! When asked what she enjoys about donating her time and expertise to the Society, her number-one response is the chance to socialize with the staff. She appreciates being in new surroundings and enjoys the work itself. An occasional sweet tea from McDonald's can power her through a morning's work. Thank you, Barbara, for all you do!



# Volunteers

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

**Civil War Day:** Chelsea Jenkins, Sue Gallagher, Randy Graff, Coralee Jones, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Yvonne McGregor and Mary Ransom. **Craft Fair helpers:** Joyce Barber, Pat Congelosi, Bob DeMallie, Carolyn Doyle, Deb Dusseault, Julian McKinley, Willa Nemetz, Libby Parker, Walt Stephenson. **Curatorial:** Heather Renaud, Ron Renaud, and Walt Stevenson. **Education:** Carolyn Doyle, Mary Kelling, Carlton Parkinson, Edie O'Donnell, and Barbara Tanguay. **Front desk and administration:** Joyce Barber, Barbara Byczkiewicz, Pat Congelosi, Carolyn Doyle, Deb Dusseault, Susan Jackson, Chelsea Jenkins, Coralee Jones, Betsy and Gordon Kenneson, Willa Nemetz, Marion Nielsen, Libby Parker, Carlton Parkinson, Mary Ransom, Barbara Tanguay and Jim Trocchi. **Laundry:** Betsey and Dick Blaisdell. **Grounds:** brick walkway, Walt Stefanow. **Library:** Geoffrey Barans, Elaine Brophy, Diane Cameron, Bev Garvan, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Sandy McGraw, Anita Mips, Barbara Tanguay and Sylvia Sylvester. **Strong-Howard House Work Day:** Addison Abbot, David Alexander, Andrew Alvarado, Debbie Baker, Holly Beum, Matthew Craig, Mark Fearon, Suzie Jacques, Aidan Lee, Dave Meacham, Miles Meacham, Maria Pereira, George Petro, Joe Petro, Elena Peters, Lynda Peters, James Pinckney, Chris Raimo, Peter Souza, Al Stald, Walt Stevenson, Shannakay Sweeney, Fred Tanguay, Sean Tanguay, Jim Trocchi, Philip Vinh, and Julie Vumback.

Lon Pelton's Model Of the

## Windsor Locks Canal

Demonstrations held on  
the first Saturday monthly  
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.  
or by appointment

If you'd rather receive your newsletters digitally, please contact our website manager Jack Alberti at [jalberti@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:jalberti@windsorhistoricalsociety.org).



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



## Upcoming Programs at Windsor Historical Society

All programs are held at 96 Palisado Avenue (Rt. 159), Windsor, CT, unless stated otherwise. For more information call 860/688-3813 or see <http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org>. Unless otherwise noted, program fees are \$6/adults; \$5/seniors and students; \$4/Society members. These fees offset program costs, but we turn nobody away for lack of funds.

Thursday, January 10 5 PM to 7 PM

**EXHIBITION OPENING: Building Bridges, Windsor Walks.** Meet the young artists from Windsor High School's Pre-AP art class. Cost: FREE. Snow date: Thurs., January 17, 5 PM to 7 PM.

Monday, January 21 5 PM to 8:30 PM

**MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY COMMEMORATION: Crossing Cultural Boundaries with Archer Memorial AME Zion Church.** Start the evening at Windsor Town Hall at 5 PM for music and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) will provide information. Shortly before 7 PM travel north to the Society for a light dinner of sandwiches and sweets, then hear CCSU Professor of History Dr. Matthew Warshauer discuss post-traumatic stress disorder among Civil War soldiers. Cost: FREE. For more information, contact Archer Memorial Church, 860-688-5225, [archermemorial@snet.net](mailto:archermemorial@snet.net) or the Society.

Tuesday, February 26 7 PM to 8:30 PM

**LECTURE: John Brown - The Connecticut (and Windsor) Roots of an American Legend.** Hear about this evangelist, anti-slavery crusader, terrorist, and martyr with historian Bill Hosley. Snow date: Feb. 27, 7 PM to 8:30 PM.

February 18 to 22 10 AM to 1 PM

**CANDLE DIPPING:** Children and their families can learn how to dip candles and enjoy other family-friendly offerings. Cost: \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, \$3 children, \$2 members or \$10 per family.

textile arts. Snow date: Sun., February 10, 2 p.m.

February 18 to 22 10 AM to 1 PM

**PERFORMANCE: Sowing Seeds with Sankofa Kuumba Performance Ensemble** Artists from the Black African diaspora will lead you to a greater understanding of African culture with music, songs, dance, visual and textile arts. Snow date: Sun., February 10, 2 p.m.

Saturday, February 9 2 PM to 3 PM

**PERFORMANCE: Sowing Seeds with Sankofa Kuumba Performance Ensemble** Artists from the Black African diaspora will lead you to a greater understanding of African culture with music, songs, dance, visual and textile arts. Snow date: Sun., February 10, 2 p.m.