



Roger Wolcott's Mysterious Ferry

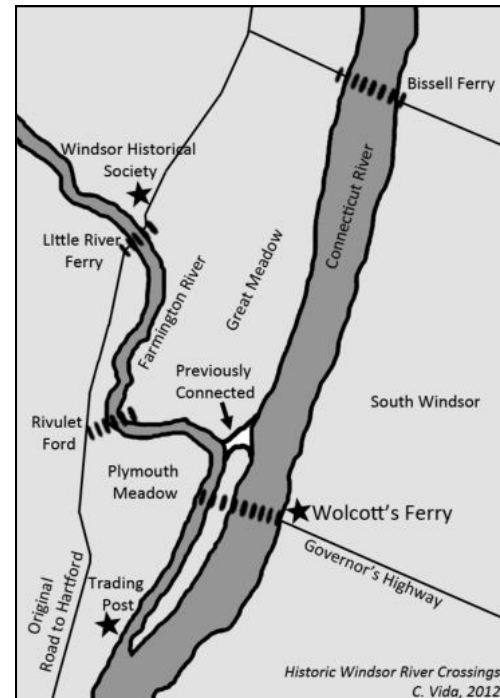
Beverly Garvan, Historian

Most people know that there were once two ferries in Windsor: the Little River or Rivulet Ferry on the Farmington River and the better known Bissell Ferry across the Connecticut River. However, there was also another, almost unknown, ferry operating here – it was called the Wolcott Ferry. Let me tell you first a little something of the man behind this mysterious ferry.

Roger Wolcott was born in 1679, the son of Simon and Martha Pitkin Wolcott. Roger was born across the Connecticut River in what is now South Windsor, but was then still a part of Windsor. He married Sarah Drake in 1702 and they resided in South Windsor. In 1707 he began his political career as a selectman, state representative, on the Bench of Justices, the Council, and a judge of the County Court. He was chosen Deputy Governor of the Colony in 1741 and appointed Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court. In 1750 he became Governor of the Colony. In 1754 he was dismissed as Governor over an incident concerning the plundering of a Spanish ship in New London from which he spent some years trying to clear his name. At that point he retired from public life and divided his time between agriculture, his devotions, reading, and the enjoyment of his friends. He died in 1767 after an illustrious career. Now on to the tale of this mysterious ferry and the times surrounding it.

A band of approximately sixty to 100 men, women, and children came in a caravan driving their cows, horses, and swine along Indian trails and reaching Windsor in 1635. They forded the Great River (Connecticut River) somewhere near the present day Loomis Chaffee School meadows and joined traders who had established a trading post in 1633. Another fording place was located

on the Little River or Farmington River which would have enabled them to get from the Plymouth Meadow over to the Great Meadow, providing them with access to many acres of good farm land. This ford was located at the corner of Joseph Loomis' home lot.



- 1648 Bissell Ferry across the Connecticut River started operating under John Bissell and continued to operate until 1917.
- 1650 The Little River ferry shows up in the Windsor town minutes in reference to getting the clergy across the Rivulet to the meeting house. The minutes refer to a great canoe carrying thirty-five people and a little canoe holding six people.
- 1725 Roger Wolcott, wanting a ferry for his own purposes, petitioned the General Assembly for a double ferry. He wanted a double ferry because at that time there was a long peninsula at the junction of the Great River and the Little River. Today it is one long island and a small channel north of it.

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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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Vol. 30, No. 2 June 2012

Director's Message

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director



In March, I asked you to share thoughts about creating a great visitor experience in the Strong House and 175 of you did. Thank you! What you told us has already been folded into our planning, and will help us obtain the grant funding so necessary to actually making this project happen. So who responded and what did you say?

Eighty-two percent of our survey respondents were over forty years of age and seventy-six percent were female. In the "very interested" category amongst all ages of survey respondents, guided tours and viewing historic photographs and paintings inside a historic house tied for first place (61%). In second place were looking at historic and modern maps and reading signs and labels (45%). Touching objects and household activities tied for third place (42%). The least popular categories were role-playing with other visitors in your group followed by trying on reproduction costumes and computer activities.

A follow-up question asked respondents which household activities they would enjoy experiencing in the house. Eating and drinking was the top-rated category for 67% of the respondents, followed by hearth cooking (59%) and making candles (50%).

"I believe an interior should look like the inhabitants just left the house" wrote one of the sixty-three respondents who commented at the end of the survey. "I want to see laundry storage...children's toys on the floor, a just-read letter displayed on a table...garments peeking out of drawers...What was the town gossip exchanged in the house?" "I would like to feel the house has remained unchanged...." wrote another. "Computers, too many note cards stuck to objects, etc. lessens this experience. A knowledgeable docent is the best."

"We like hands-on activities, inquiry, things that can apply in real world," wrote someone aged twenty-six and under. Another respondent in this age group wrote, "Having a tour guide is nice, but it is a little nicer to go at your own pace through a home. Things you can touch are great for both kids & adults & help make a tour interesting and relevant." One older respondent commented, "At my age, I'm not really interested in the activities.... However, it would seem that families with children would find these doings of great interest." This comment was echoed several times.

In response, staff agrees wholeheartedly about authenticity in a historic house. We know that tour guides have the power to make a historic house come alive for their visitors and that other visitors like exploring on their own. We promise: no computers inside the Strong House and you *will* be able to touch, test, and try things for yourself. For those of you who love reading, visual images, and maps, we are thinking about self-guided tour brochures to help you understand what life was like inside the house and an orientation area where labels won't detract from the "life as it really happened" experience inside the home itself. Stay tuned, and thanks again for your help!

(Continued from page one)

When Wolcott came across from his South Windsor property, he had to land on the peninsula, cross it on foot, and then have another ferry to cross the Rivulet to Plymouth Meadow. Without the second ferry, passengers would have to go across the foot of the Great Meadow to ford the river at Loomis's site or go another half a mile north to the Little River Ferry site. Wolcott wanted the town to pay for this road and there was much litigation over it. He had paid for the road on the east side of the river at his own expense. It went from the river to the road called, to this day, the Governor's Highway.

1735 The town voted "that there be a ferry set up across the Connecticut River near against the Little Ferry" at a place called "Newberries Landing Place." They also formed a committee to oppose Wolcott at the County Court "for a way [highway] from the ferry over the Little River through the Great Meadow to the point the ferry crosseth the Great River." So, you see, they were still opposing Wolcott's road.

1736 A committee was chosen to negotiate with Wolcott concerning his ferry and to buy his ferry house and boat if they judged it best. They did purchase it!

1737 The town voted to move the "new ferry lately set up at Newberry's Landing." Nothing said about where it was going to be moved to.

1738 It was voted "to have but one ferry across the Great River on the town cost." They also voted to reimburse the committee for the amount of £192 13s 3d which had been expended in the purchase of Wolcott's ferry boats and grants.

1741 Wolcott obtained from the General Assembly a renewal of his former grant of a ferry across the Connecticut and Little River "where he formerly had it." This was remonstrated against by the town, but from that time on there is no mention of the Wolcott Ferry in any town meeting records. It is as if they washed their hands of it!

1745 The General Assembly regulated the fares on Roger Wolcott's ferry over the two rivers so he must have still been running two ferries at this time. The regulations spell out the fare over each river.

1746 & 1749 Rates were reduced by the General Assembly.

1748 Mention was made of a bridge across the Rivulet. A good cart bridge, the first ever erected across the Little River, was built in 1749.

1755 The town voted "to take into their care the Little River ferry house, boat, and ropes, and to dispose of them according to their best judgment for the best

advantage of the town." Thus ended the Rivulet Ferry!

1762 The second bridge across the Rivulet was built. It was funded by a lottery authorized by the General Assembly. Storms carried away several of the bridges throughout the years, and they had to be rebuilt many times.

1785 The Higley family of South Windsor is said to have taken over the Wolcott ferry but little evidence of this can be found. The last mention of Wolcott's Ferry was found in a *Hartford Courant* ad in April 1785:

TO BE SOLD,
SIXTY THOUSAND WELL BURNT BRICKS,
LYING AT WOLCOTT'S FERRY, EAST WINDSOR
ENQUIRE OF NATHAN HIGLEY, FERRYMAN.

Legend has it that Wolcott cut a channel through the peninsula so that he only had to use one ferry to get across the Connecticut and the Rivulet. Proof of who actually did this has not been found, but obviously through the years something or someone cut the existing channel, creating an island out of the former peninsula and changing the access to the present Farmington River.

The change in landscape is significant for another reason. History tells us that the 1633 trading post was "at the mouth of the Little River." Today this would make you think that it was in an entirely different spot; in reality it was much further south at the tip of the peninsula. Quite a difference!

There is nothing definite about when the ferry was permanently discontinued. Roger Wolcott kept a journal which is now at the Connecticut Historical Society. While he writes about his many undertakings through the years, he makes no mention of ever having owned a ferry. What was its true purpose? It would seem to have been mostly a convenience for the Wolcott family in their agricultural pursuits on both sides of the Connecticut River. It plied the waters here for over sixty years but so little is known about it. With few historical records and a completely changed landscape, it is not surprising that knowledge of this ferry has faded from our historical memory. Hopefully more research will help solve the remaining mysteries about it.

Roger Wolcott

Something Borrowed, Something Blue...

Christina Keyser Vida, Curator

Do you still have the silver sixpence you wore in your wedding shoe? You are not alone if you have held on to these memory-laced keepsakes. For centuries, the wedding day attire of brides and grooms has carried enough significance for future generations to preserve as relics. The Society owns many wedding-day souvenirs from Windsor couples, and we recently acquired a pair of eighteenth-century ladies' shoe buckles that were possibly worn by Hannah Allyn (1743-1765) on January 6, 1763, the day she wed Captain James Hooker (1742-1805).

Hannah Allyn was a Windsor native and daughter of Alexander Allyn (1718-1790) and Hannah Ellsworth Allyn (1713-1796). Just nineteen years old on her wedding day, her groom, James Hooker, was a young merchant from Hartford who was expanding his father's business into Windsor in 1762. Just like today's brides, Hannah wore her finest attire on her wedding day. Ear bobs and a necklace would certainly have been fashionable. But in the eighteenth century, young women had another mode of accessorizing – shoe buckles.

Hannah's shoe buckles survive in almost perfect condition. The silver buckle frames hold twenty-six stones that resemble diamonds but are actually pastes. Pastes are composed of a lead glass that is soft enough to be cut into faceted stones but is hard enough to resist scratching. The glass is clear and does not sparkle without the assistance of a thin tinfoil lining. Hannah's paste shoe buckles shine brilliant white with only one

stone missing. The buckles themselves are a rare survival, and their original packaging is even more uncommon. For almost 250 years, these buckles have been accompanied by part of their silk-lined leather box. It is on the bottom of this box that a Hooker descendant faithfully wrote a note: "Slipper Buckles / worn by Hannah Allin / wife of James Hooker / on her wedding day / 1763."

While most wedding mementos inspire tales of long and fruitful marriages, this story is bittersweet. Hannah died in 1765 at the age of 22, just two years after marrying James Hooker. Their only son, Alexander Allyn Hooker, was only eighteen years old when he passed away in 1781. However, like the shoe buckles, Hannah's name endured. James Hooker married twice more, and he and his third wife, Mary Chaffee (1760-1846), named their eldest daughter Hannah Allyn Hooker (1785-1859).

Many of the Hooker children migrated to New York in the nineteenth century. These shoe buckles eventually landed in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY). This past March, the MCNY deaccessioned a portion of their costume collection, and we successfully bid on them at the auction. Hannah Allyn's glee as she purchased her wedding day couture 250 years ago could only be matched by our delight when these shoe buckles returned to Windsor. During this wedding season, come share our joy and see these buckles on display at the Society.



*Hannah Allyn Hooker's Shoe Buckles with Paste Stones
England or America, ca. 1762
WHS Collection, 2012.25.1*

Collection Connection Program

Dining in Style

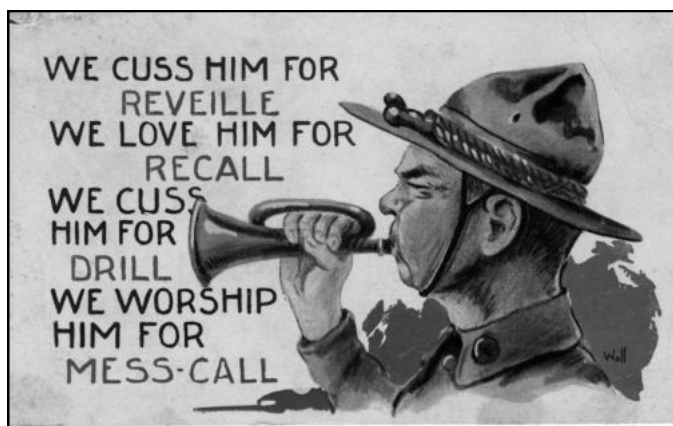
Tuesday, June 12 7 p.m - 8 p.m.

Calling all collectors, American antiques lovers, and everyone interested in historic foods and foodways. Join Curator Christina Vida as she shows highlights from the Society's collection of ceramics, silver, and glassware plus recent archaeological evidence recovered from the Society's Strong House. Artifacts from the 18th through 20th centuries will be shown. This is the second in a series of programs on the wide-ranging objects in the Society's collections.

New on the Website – Letters, Photos, Business Records, & More!

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

Something for everyone – that’s one of the goals we have for the Society’s website. Our audience includes Windsor residents, out-of-state visitors, genealogists, and casual historians. We hope everyone will find something of interest! Check our website weekly if you are interested in our programs; we post additions to other parts of the website more irregularly. Recently we have added a number of new items to the Research Library section. Brief descriptions of these will convey the breadth and variety of materials we have here in the Society’s library collections.



WWI Propaganda Postcard
by Connecticut Artist Bernhardt Wall, 1919
WHS Collection, 1986.14.29

Fred S. Kibbe was a young man who enlisted in the US Army in the spring of 1917 and served in France during World War I. In a series of letters to his Windsor friend Mrs. Jessie Sipple, Kibbe describes his experiences during basic training, in the trenches and at camp behind the lines in France, and while serving several months in the military police after the armistice in 1918. On July 18, 1918, he wrote, “I think if I am ever lucky enough to get back to the good old USA and ever hear a tire blow out, why I will find myself running for a dug-out or shell hole. I am beginning to be a dug-out lover and I am not kidding you either. ... It’s too bad I didn’t know a year ago what I know now.” Transcripts have been prepared for the 27 letters in the **Kibbe/Sipple Correspondence** and are now available on the website.

The **Old Letter Project** contains about one hundred pieces of personal correspondence which have come to the Society from a variety of sources. Half the collection is comprised of letters between various members of the multi-generation David Ellsworth family of Windsor.

The writers comment on everyday family, school, church, and travelling news. Many other Windsor area surnames are included in the collection as well. You can search the index database by the date, by name of recipient, or by name of the author of the letters.

Helen R. Stevenson was very active in the performing arts community in Windsor for more than thirty years. She founded the Windsor Ballet in 1976, mentoring both beginning students and semi-professional dancers until her retirement in 2007.



Helen R. Stevenson, 1966
WHS Collection, 2011.56.11

Helen also lent her choreographic talent, directing experience, and enthusiasm to a variety of local groups including the Windsor Youth Theatre and the Windsor Jesters. Scrapbooks and albums in the **Stevenson Collection of the Records of the Windsor Ballet and the Northern Connecticut Ballet** contain photographs and memorabilia from the *Nutcracker*, *West Side Story*, and other local dance and theatrical productions between 1976 and 1982.

We are often asked about books and other sources of information about the history of Windsor. We’ve posted a narrative history of the town under the website’s Research Library tab, and there is a useful list of the core bibliographic resources at the end of the article. All of these titles are readily available in our library.

Our *Combustion Engineering: A Windsor Landmark* exhibit was viewed by hundreds of visitors in 2011. Now a guide to the entire **Combustion Engineering, Inc. Collection** is available on the website. The collection contains photographs, publications, and artifacts which portray some of the history of this company during its fifty-five year tenure (1955-2010) in Windsor, CT.

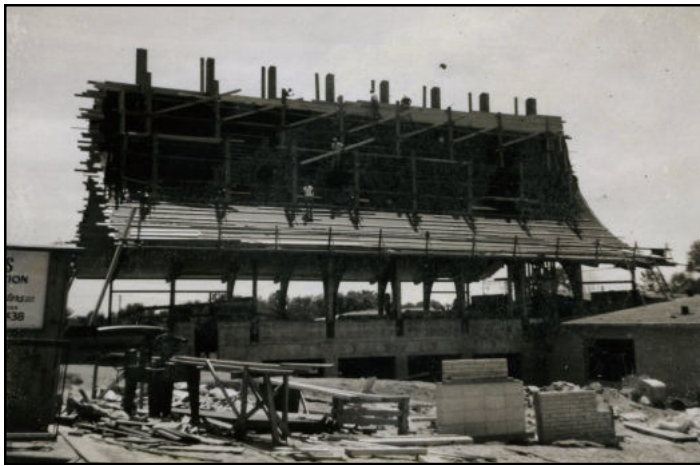
Two years ago the Wilson Congregational Church on Windsor Avenue in Windsor made the very difficult decision to close after 187 years as an active local congregation. Historic church records, building plans,

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photographs, and other memorabilia were transferred to the Society for permanent safekeeping. Volunteer Sara Hawran will soon complete the organization and description of the **Wilson Congregational Church Records** collection and its finding aid will be uploaded.

Of course, the old favorites are still available. These include the informative articles in the past issues of the Society's newsletter and the chatty social news of the 1916-1917 *Town Crier* newspaper. So check back occasionally to see what is new at http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/finding_aids.html.



Raising the Roof on the Wilson Congregational Church, 1963
WHS Collection, 2010.44.37

The Legacy of Donna Siemiatkoski

The Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council makes an annual award to selected genealogical repositories in memory of Donna Holt Siemiatkoski, a Windsor resident who was very active in the state genealogical community. This year the Windsor Historical Society, along with nine other institutions in Connecticut, was honored to be chosen to receive a copy of Jolene Roberts Mullen's recently published *Connecticut Town Meeting Records during the American Revolution*. This two-volume work offers transcribed extracts from the minutes of local town meetings between 1775 and 1783. All persons who were mentioned in the meeting records are included in a full-name index. We are grateful to the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council for honoring both the Society and Donna's legacy with this award.

Volunteer Profile

Connie Thomas, Administrative Assistant

We feature a profile of a volunteer in each newsletter. Our volunteers supplement and compliment the work of our paid staff in so many ways. It is a privilege and honor to work together to preserve and share Windsor's history.



Elizabeth Parker

When and why did you start volunteering at the Society?

Probably around 1985 I served as a docent. This was before the 1990 Mills Building was constructed, so the visitors welcome area was a small office on the south side of the Strong

Elizabeth Parker, 2011
WHS Collection,
2012.5.17

House. Mrs. Hillemeier was the Society's director, and I remember typing a lot of scripts for school tours on a typewriter. Visitors came to see the Lt. Walter Fyler House mostly (currently the John and Sarah Strong House). There weren't that many researchers then.

What influenced you to develop an interest in Windsor's history? I started volunteering because my neighbor, Peg Martindale, said I was putting in too many hours helping at the nursing homes and the Society was a fun place, so I came weekly. My parents and in-laws had always been members, and my Windsor roots go back to the Gaylord, Newberry, and Clark families. My husband Frank and I have always promoted Windsor by belonging to the church, fraternal organizations, and the Chamber of Commerce.

What are some of the memorable events at the Society you like to recall? I've always enjoyed doing tours. In the early 1990s there were always two people sitting at the front desk so we could socialize. Before that, the tours included the basement of the Wilson Museum where visitors could see a large ship's model, an Eddy Electric Company motor, and Indian arrowheads. I greatly enjoyed the tea parties when Doris Butler and I were responsible for dressing up a table with our china and silver for ticket holders. I served on the Board of Directors.

What do you enjoy about volunteering now?

I enjoy being with the staff. I'm no longer physically able to give tours, but I enjoy helping visitors at the front desk. It always amazes me when I discover a little more about the town's history and how my family fits into it.

20, 19, 18... Countdown to Genealogy Success

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

The fifth annual genealogy lecture series will be held on three Tuesday evenings in July. Our speakers will be taking a fresh look at resources from the 20th, 19th, and 18th centuries and hope to stimulate a burst of new incentive for both beginning and experienced family history researchers. The programs will be held at the Society on July 17, 24, and 31 from 7 until 8:30 pm. The Research Library will be open from 6 until 6:45 pm before each week's program. Come early and take a quick peek at the resources available upstairs. Cost for the complete three part series is \$25; individual sessions cost \$10 (\$9 for WHS members). Preregister by calling 860-688-3813 or check the website for more information.

Tuesday, July 17: Part I, The 1940 Federal Census

Speaker: Laura Prescott

Professional genealogist Laura Prescott will speak about the newly released 1940 US Census. Learn what the census reveals about your relatives and perhaps even yourself! Taken at the brink of World War II, many of those enumerated in this census lived through the Great Depression and would soon participate in the next great war. While many of the questions are familiar to researchers from other censuses, a few are unique and will add insights to your family data.

Tuesday, July 24: Part II, African American Resources

Speaker: Joseph Carvalho III

Joseph Carvalho III, author and former Executive Director of the Springfield Museums, has recently revised his *Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts 1650-1865*. The book presents genealogical, biographical, and historical information about African American individuals and families who lived in western Massachusetts. For this session Carvalho will discuss the

range of 17th, 18th, and 19th-century genealogical sources including repositories, publications, government documents, and databases. Since this topic is so broad, attendees are encouraged to bring specific questions so that Mr. Carvalho can tailor his presentation to the particular research interests of those attending.

Tuesday, July 24: Part III, 18th-Century Diaries Come to Life

Speaker: Nora Howard

Nora Howard, Avon Town Historian and author of *Catc'd on Fire: The Journals of Rufus Hawley, Avon, Connecticut* will conclude the series with a talk on her ten-year project to research Rufus Hawley's life. Howard used a wide variety of 18th-century resources to enlighten and enrich the brief entries Hawley recorded in thirty three yearly journals. While many entries illustrate the routine of daily life, events of joy, disappointment, chaos, and sorrow emerge unexpectedly. Research around these rich nuggets of detail has produced insight into the life and times of this Connecticut resident.

Garden Delights

Building on the success of four previous events, Windsor Historical Society and the Windsor Garden Club again team up to present a fifth Windsor Garden Tour on Saturday, July 14th from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., rain or shine. We invite you to view eight Windsor gardens exhibiting the artistry and hard work of their owners. Some of the gardens are newly planted and some are decades old; all provide inspiration and delight! Garden hosts will be available at each site to answer your questions, so mark this important date on your calendar now.



Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 the day of the tour.

Proceeds support community programming offered by both organizations. Buy your tickets and map from a Windsor Garden Club member or at the Windsor Historical Society, Ashley's Distinctive Jewelry and Gifts, Jordan Florist, Bill Selig Jewelers, Flowers by Timothy Snelgrove. You can download the advance order form on our website www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org and follow directions to have tickets sent to you.

Additional Programs

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.



Wed., June 6 noon - 1 p.m.
LUNCH AND LEARN: Bob Steele's Century
Hear more about this local radio personality from his son Phil. Bring your lunch; dessert and beverages served. RSVP by June 5.

Saturday, June 9 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
CONNECTICUT OPEN HOUSE DAY. Free admission.

Wednesday, June 21 5:30 p.m. - 7 p.m.
ANNUAL MEETING FOR MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS
Wine, cheese, discounts, free passes, flowers! At 6 pm Christine Ermenc and Christina Vida will update you on upcoming plans for the Strong House.

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!

Booths at Shad Derby and Craft Fair: Carolyn Doyle, Deb Dussault, Ruth Fahrbach, Rick Hazelton, Chelsea Jenkins, Gordon and Betsy Kenneson, Dorothy Merz, Anita Mips, Marion Nielsen, Edie O'Donnell, Ron Renaud, and Walt Stevenson. **Education:** Helen Davenport-Senuta, Carolyn Doyle, Chelsea Jenkins, Mary Kelling, Edith O'Donnell, Barbara Tanguay, Jim Trocchi. **Front desk and administration:** Marsha Anderson, Joyce Barber, Carolyn Doyle, Ruth Fahrbach, Bill Harris, Coralee Jones, Mary Kelling, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Willa Nemetz, Marion Nielsen, Elizabeth Parker, Mary Ransom, Barbara Tanguay, Jim Trocchi, Bill Warner-Prouty. **Grounds:** Gordon Kenneson, Jim Trocchi, Windsor Garden Club, Civitans; **Library:** Geoffrey Barans, Elaine Brophy, Barbara Byczkiewicz, Bev Garvan, Sara Hawran, Chelsea Jenkins, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Sandy McGraw, and Marion Nielsen.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

