



Strong-Howard House: The Restoration Begins

Christina Vida, Curator



Figure 1: Ironwood Landscaping begins work on the Courtyard drainage, November 23, 2012.

Preservation has been an important community priority in Windsor - Connecticut's first town - for many years. Our historic homes and barns, factories and office buildings, rivers and meadowlands all tell the story of an ancient New England settlement which has evolved, adapted, and flourished for almost four centuries. In 1925, the fledgling Windsor Historical Society mobilized to save an historic home on the Palisado Green from being razed to make way for a gasoline station. Since then, the home has served as an anchor for Windsor's historic district, as a backdrop for Windsor's anniversary celebrations, and as a gallery for the Society's growing antiques and archival collections. The Strong-Howard House on the Palisado Green is one of Windsor's most recognizable and best-loved landmarks, making it imperative for the Society to preserve and restore our red clapboard house.

After years of planning, November 23, 2012 was a momentous day at the Windsor Historical Society. Fog hung in the air as a team from Ironwood Landscaping began the initial work (Figure 1). Why would a house

restoration begin with landscaping? Well, moisture aggressively attacks old wooden structures, and the Strong-Howard House basement has extremely high humidity due to the water penetrating the stone foundation. With winter and frozen ground looming, Ironwood Landscaping started correcting the drainage issues to prevent another spring thaw from further harming the home's foundation and wooden sills.

As Ironwood continued their work on the drainage, our general contractor, John Armstrong of New Harmony Builders, began restoring the porch. We want our visitors to be able to use the home's main entrance and see the carved Connecticut Valley doorway. To that end, New Harmony Builders and Ironwood Landscaping removed the stones, confirmed that the porch posts were on firm foundations, and replaced portions of rotten posts. Then they reconstructed the porch decking using thick cedar boards that will last for generations to come (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The porch decking has been replaced with long-lasting materials.

Next on the list was a new brick walkway leading to the replaced porch. Not only did we want a smooth path for our guests, we also wanted to eliminate the need

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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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Barbara Goodwin, and Christina Vida

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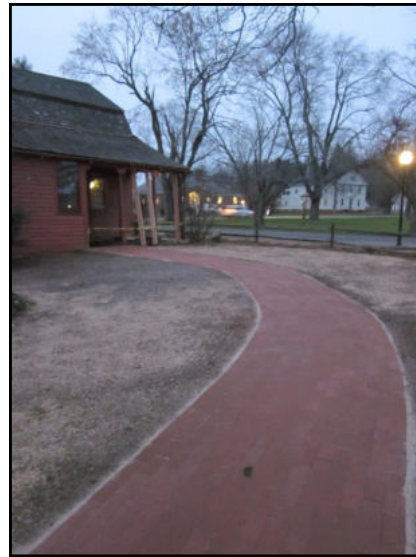


Figure 4: The new walkway is gradually sloped to accommodate all visitors.

for a step up onto the porch. This will allow our visitors with restricted movement to easily approach the house. Figure 4 shows how the ground has been tapered to the walkway making it appear as if it has always been there. Once on the porch, our handicapped visitors will be able to access the house using a removable ramp. Although wheelchairs will still have limited mobility inside the house, we are thrilled to finally give *all* our guests the opportunity to visit the interior of the Strong-Howard House.

With winter's cold temperatures and frozen ground, the restoration turned to the house interior. Frequent blown fuses have plagued the home for a while now - alluding to major electrical issues enclosed in wooden walls. To correct this major fire hazard, the electricians ran new wires from the Mills Building to the Strong-Howard House basement and installed a circuit breaker panel. They did not stop there. They rewired most of the outlets in the home, making it a safer building and a safe worksite for the rest of the restoration. As the phases of the restoration progress, the lighting will be upgraded - making the house accessible for evening tours and programming.

Springtime will bring a new wave of projects, some interior and some exterior. The most visible will be the restoration of the deteriorated siding on the north façade, which is rotting and buckling away from the frame. Other tasks include laying a vapor barrier in the basement, refinishing the ceilings and walls of the Parlor and Store, and stabilizing the floors in those two rooms. The Store floor will temporarily be lifted out completely, allowing Nick Bellantoni, Connecticut State Archaeologist, and the Friends of the Office of State Archaeology the opportunity to dig in the ground underneath the Store. Stay tuned for future updates on the archaeology, the restoration, and community work days - when you too can get a hands-on experience!

Meet the Howards

Christina Vida, Curator

While the restoration of the Strong-Howard House progresses, the stories we will tell inside the house are also beginning to take shape. Here is an introduction to the residents of 96 Palisado Avenue in the year 1810.

Nathaniel & Ann

Nathaniel Howard was born in 1745 in Mansfield, Connecticut, son of Nathaniel and Martha Howard. Little is known of his early years, but following in his elder brother's footsteps, he took to the sea. East Windsor's shipbuilding industry made it an attractive town for those seafarers hoping to one day captain their own vessels, and by 1772, Captain Howard resided there. In that year, however, he purchased a small house alongside Palisado Green in Windsor. The following year, he married Ann Watson, daughter of Ebenezer and Ann Watson of East Windsor.

With the start of the Revolutionary War, Captain Howard enlisted in the Navy and captained the *Ranger*. The British soon captured the vessel and imprisoned Howard on the prison ship *Jersey* in New York Harbor. After the war Howard returned to the sea, sailing to the West Indies, London, and Amsterdam for trade. All the while, his family in Windsor continued to grow. His eldest son, Nathaniel, Jr. was born in 1777, followed by John, William, Anne, and George. Anne died at age 2 in 1787, leaving the Howards with four boys.

By the 1790s, the aging Captain retired from the high seas and opened a small store inside his home in Windsor. He offered for sale imported fineries suitable for refined ladies with taste. His wife was one such woman. Ann came from a wealthy East Windsor family, and her brother, John Watson, became the richest man in East Windsor. It is written that Ann Howard sported the first umbrella in Windsor and was soon mocked by neighbors carrying broom sticks topped with sieves. Captain Howard clearly kept his wife provided with the latest fashions, but he also fancied up his modest dwelling with a carved front doorway, enlarged windows, and added triangular pediments for visual effect – perhaps in a vain attempt

to compete with his brother-in-law's architectural behemoth of a home in East Windsor.

Nathaniel and Ann were 65 and 61, respectively, in the year 1810 and should have been winding down after a lifetime of working. But, their world had been upturned in 1809 with the death of their eldest son, Nathaniel Howard, Jr.

Nancy & Annie

Nathaniel Howard, Jr. married Nancy Vibbert of Hartford in 1800. The following year their daughter, Annie, was born. Within a few years, Nathaniel and Nancy moved to New York City where the younger Captain Howard launched trading vessels to Europe and the West Indies. Nancy and their two-year-old son, Nathaniel, accompanied Captain Howard on a run to Martinique in 1808. They were captured by the British and fell ill while awaiting their trial. Nathaniel Howard, Jr. and his infant son died in St. Lucia in 1809. Nancy Howard recovered, returned to America, and moved to Windsor with her daughter, Annie, age 9. The Howards' comfortable home on the Green was a natural refuge.

George & Sarah

In contrast to his older brother, Nathaniel and Ann's youngest son, George Howard, did not become a sea captain. Instead, he apprenticed in the country store of his first cousin, John Watson, Jr., in East Windsor. While there, he courted Sarah Trumbull. They married in June 1810 at the end of his apprenticeship. Not having a home of their own, the newlyweds moved into the Howards' home in Windsor. George partnered with his elder brother, William, to run a grocery and dry goods store just down North Meadow Road from the Howards' home. Nathaniel and Ann now had a full household again. And by the end of 1810, they were expecting another member – George and Sarah's first child.

In the year 1810, Nathaniel, Ann, Nancy, Annie, George, and Sarah grappled with all the aspects of life that still affect us today – birth, death, marriage, status, commerce, politics, religion, local issues, global concerns, and never-ending chores. As our reinterpretation of the Strong-Howard House progresses, we will shed more light on these issues that shaped their world and ours.

Director's Message

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director

In October of 2011, the Society's Board of Directors approved a new and ambitious strategic plan. The plan recognized the urgency of addressing the significant restoration needs of the Strong-Howard House. Even in advance of the plan's unveiling, we recognized that restoring the home was far more than "business as usual." A grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation funded a 2009 Historic Structure Report that laid out the building's structural history and condition. Another funded a restoration plan, completed in the spring of 2012 that outlined what needed to be done to restore the Strong-Howard House.

It was essential that we assemble a strong team to address the challenge we faced. As we conducted a curatorial search in 2010, we looked for a

creative candidate thoroughly familiar with historic house museums. In Christina Vida we found that and more. And because we knew financial resources required for restoration would be large, we obtained a Heritage Advancement grant from the Greater Hartford Arts Council to work with development consultant Kathy Frederick. Led by Frederick, a small but high-powered group including John Berky, WHS Board president and former executive director of SS&C SummerWind; Debbie Baker, development director for Riverfront Recapture; Bob DeMallie, director of Media Relations at Prudential Individual Life Insurance; and Lynn MacDonald, development director for Operation Fuel, began to strategize how to fund the project.

Restoration presented us with an opportunity to consider how we wanted people to experience the house. Some of you participated in our historic house tour survey a year ago. Results indicated that people are becoming less interested in the standard "look, don't touch" guided tour. Most prefer to be invited

into a home by an experienced guide who encourages them to explore the home, its furnishings, and to some extent participate in historic household activities. We have made the radical decision to furnish this home not with antiques but with reproductions of items that would have been used by the Howards ~ items that can be touched and manipulated. Re-interpretation of the house as well as its restoration is a critical part of this project.

How do we know what the Howards had in their home? Christina Vida and volunteers Beverly Garvan

and Carlton Parkinson have spent months combing probate records, account books, tax lists, court records, and period newspapers to flesh out the lives of

merchant Nathaniel Howard and his family whose home this was from 1772 to 1837. This research was the basis for a detailed listing of likely house furnishings and personal belongings of the three generations of the Howard family who all lived together under this modest roof in 1810.

Anticipated project costs, barring unforeseen circumstances, are \$650,000; of course when you are dealing with an historic house, there are *always* unforeseen circumstances. We are expecting total project costs of close to \$700,000. So how will we make this happen? We anticipate that over fifty percent of the money will come from grants. In December and January, Christina and I worked together to prepare major applications to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Connecticut Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. More grants will follow later in the spring. Last summer we received a grant from the 1772 Foundation allowing us to begin the project work outlined elsewhere in this newsletter.



The Strong-Howard House Project: Working Together

About ten percent of the project costs will be offset by volunteer help and in-kind services. Contributors include archaeologists, craftsmen who are lending their expertise, designers, painters, and printers. Our first community workday in November of 2012 attracted twenty-eight eager volunteers who cleaned the basement in record time - and then cleaned the attic too!

In the past few months, we have begun to approach local individuals and businesses for support as well. Board and staff members have pledged over \$55,000 towards the project. Another \$60,000 has come in from generous individuals including Sam and Marcia Hinckley, Dan Mack, Bob and Dorothy McAllister, Hugh and Kate McLean, Mike and Lu Rabbett, and Peter and Lisa Souza. Windsor Federal Savings Bank has pledged another \$30,000. Carmon Funeral Homes has pledged \$3,000, and the Bill Selig Family Foundation has pledged \$1,000. These with the grants we have raised brings us close to \$200,000 pledged towards this project. An excellent start! This leaves \$500,000 needed.

In the coming months, you can expect to receive more details about the project. You'll receive a case statement generated by the development committee. And please don't hesitate to contact me for more information about the project. I would love to share more details with you. As you begin thinking about how you might help, keep in mind that development professionals say a capital gift should be about twenty times the amount of an annual gift. Of course this is just a suggestion. Whether you live near or far from Windsor, whether you contribute funds or service, everyone's help will be needed and much appreciated. Together, we will make the Strong-Howard House shine.

Architectural Tour on Broad Street Green



Col. Oliver Mather house currently serving as Windsor Public Library. WHS Collections 1976.5.601

Saturday, April 27

1-3pm

Take advantage of this rare opportunity to see inside four historic buildings along the south end of Broad Street Green in Windsor. The 1777 Colonel Oliver Mather House at the Windsor Public Library, Grace Episcopal Church's 1865 Tuttle House and George Keller-designed church, and the 1930 Plaza Building. Tickets are \$10/person (children 12 and under free) and will be available for purchase in advance at the Society beginning April 1 or on the day of the tour at the Registration Tent in front of Grace Episcopal Church. Come reminisce and learn about our local history as you walk through these important structures that line the town green.



May Pole Dance on Windsor Green, 1914
WHS Collections 2013.1.2

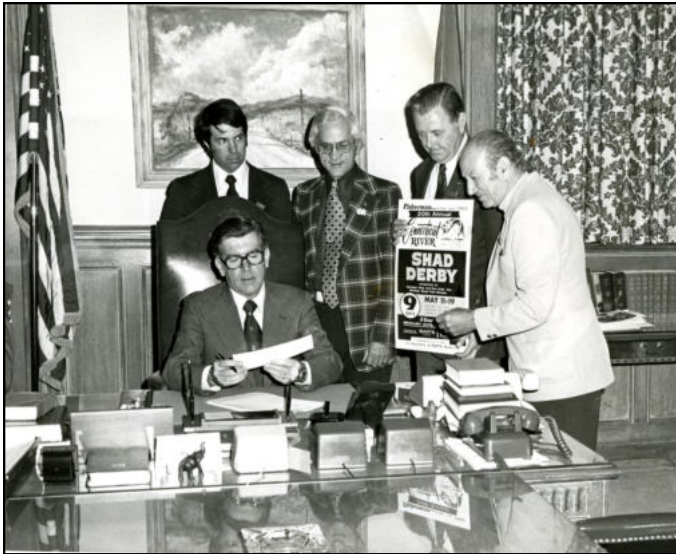
**OPEN
HOUSE
DAY** SAT JUNE 8
Connecticut
still revolutionary

Got Friends?

Bring them to the Society at no additional charge on Saturday, June 8, from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Shad Derby: A Windsor Tradition

Exhibit on view April 11 to May 31, 2013



Gov. Thomas Meskill signing a
Shad Derby Week Proclamation in 1974
WHS Collections 2012.61.1
Gift of Ernest Weisberg

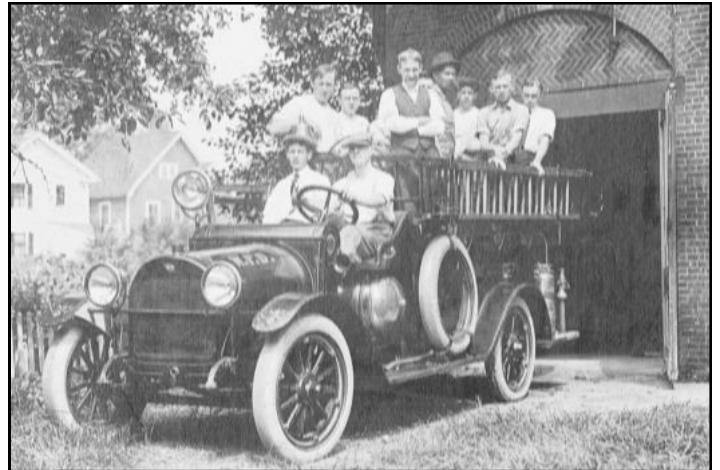
Since 1955 this event has grown from a two-day fishing contest to months of events hosted by a wide range of community organizations. Come learn about the origins and traditions of the Shad Derby and leave behind memories of your own! To celebrate the opening of the exhibit, the Society is also hosting its first annual Shad Derby Trivia Contest on Thursday, April 11th from 7-9pm. Teams of up to six can compete for a Shad Derby Trivia Trophy and year-long bragging rights. Light refreshments are available, and pre-registration is required by April 5th. Visit our website for more information and the registration form.



On Exhibit in the Library

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

In 2011, Windsor resident Mike Pietrarroia provided the Society with over 200 images of heavy equipment and fire company apparatus used by the Town of Windsor from the early 1900s up to the present. The historic photos of Windsor Public Works Department and Windsor Fire Company vehicles were scanned from an album compiled by Pietrarroia's father-in-law, Fred Brooks. The more recent images were taken by the donor. Pietrarroia was an active volunteer fireman for sixteen years with the Windsor Fire Company and has been involved as a retired volunteer for the past thirty years.



1916 REO Chemical Car
WHS Collections 2011.18.2.1



1940s Case Tractor with Sweeper
WHS Collections 2011.18.1.4

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.

Mary Ellsworth Ransom

What great fortune for the Society that Mary could volunteer here every Friday afternoon. She followed in her parents' footsteps by promoting, supporting, and maintaining a life-long membership with the Society. She gave tours that delighted our visitors and shared a perspective that only an Ellsworth family member with a 375-year heritage could. She was born in 1923 at her family's home on Spring Street and graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1944. She married J. Ford Ransom Jr. in 1947 at First Church across the street from the Society, followed by three daughters and three grandchildren. She played tennis and bridge, loved reading, and followed the UConn Women's basketball and the Red Sox. As a dividend, Mary was a really nice person; her positive outlook on life remains an inspiration for all the staff. She shared so much with us before passing away on January 12, 2013, at the age of 89.



Mary Ransom at the Elm Grove Chapel, 2012 House Tour.
Photo by Society staff.

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!

Collections: Dorothy Ball, Donna Baron, Marianne Curling, Kevin Ferrigno, and Karen Parsons. **Education:** Mary Kelling. **Front desk and administration:** Joyce Barber, Barbara Byczkiewicz, Carolyn Doyle, Deb Dusseault, Bill Harris, Susan Jackson, Margaret Jedziniak, Chelsea Jenkins, Coralee Jones, Betsy and Gordon Kenneson, Willa Nemetz, Marion Nielsen, Libby Parker, Carlton Parkinson, Mary Ransom, Barbara Tanguay, and Jim Trocchi. **Grounds:** Town of Windsor. **Library:** Elaine Brophy, Diane Cameron, Carolyn Doyle, Bev Garvan, Sara Hawran, Betsy Kenneson, Gordon Kenneson, Sandy McGraw, Marion Nielsen, and Barbara Tanguay. **Publicity:** Gordon Kenneson and Walt Stevenson.

Windsor Locks Canal Model

Model demonstrations held on the second and fourth (not the first) Saturday monthly, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., or by appointment.

Holiday Closing

The Society will be closed for the Easter holiday on Saturday, March 30, 2013.

New Hours and New Admission

Effective April 1, 2013, the museum will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays with tours of the historic houses conducted at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Our admission fee will increase to \$8 for adults, \$6 for students over age 12 years and seniors over 62 years. Society members, children under 12 years, teachers, and New England Museum Association members displaying a card are FREE.

Receive This Newsletter Digitally

If you'd rather receive your newsletters digitally, please contact our website manager Jack Alberti at jalberti@windsorhistoricalsociety.org.



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Upcoming Programs at Windsor Historical Society 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.

Monday, April 1
PHOTO CONTEST: Windsor Icons Facebook Photo Contest begins! See our website for details about this event. Submit ONE jpeg file of Windsor with a brief caption to cvida@windsorhistoricalsociety.org before May 24 at 5 pm. All the voting takes place on our Facebook page until May 30th at 9 PM. Winners will be announced on Friday, May 31st. The first prize winner with the most votes will receive \$100. Second prize is \$75, and third prize is \$50. The first-place winner will also have their image sold as a postcard in the Society's gift shop.

Thursday, April 11
 7 PM to 9 PM
CONTEST: First Annual Shad Derby Trivia Contest
 Register your team of up to six members. Refreshments served and see the new exhibit, "Shad Derby: A Windsor Tradition" on view until May 31. COST: \$10/contestant.

Saturday, April 27
 1 PM to 3 PM
WALKING TOUR: Broad Street Green Architectural Tour. Turtle House, Grace Church, Mather House at Windsor Public Library, and the Plaza Theater will welcome guests. Buy tickets at the Society or on the green at our tent on April 27. COST: \$10/person.

Saturday, May 4
 2 PM to 3 PM
PERFORMANCE: Sowing Seeds with Sankofa Kumba Ensemble. Enjoy traditional African music, songs, dance, and visual/textile arts.

Saturday, June 1
 8:30 AM - 10:30 AM
WALK with us along Windsor Locks Canal. History and wildlife. Tour limited to 20 walkers so call us for a reservation. \$10/adults; \$9/seniors & students; \$8/WHS members.

