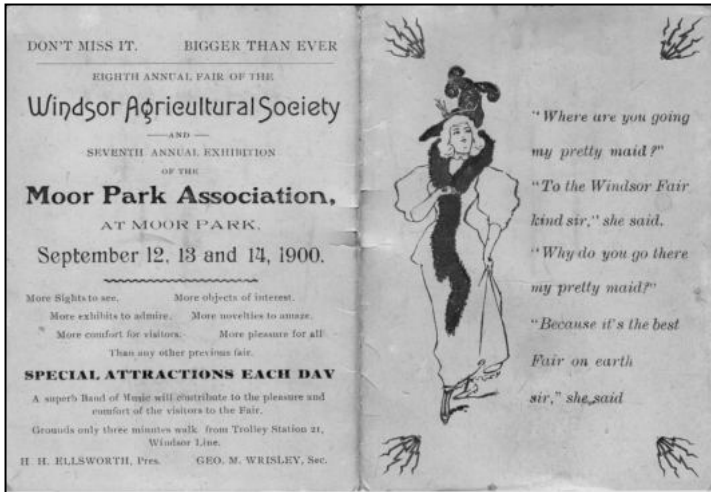




## Fair Days in Windsor

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian



"Where are you going my pretty maid?" "To the Windsor Fair kind sir," she said. "Why do you go there my pretty maid?" "Because it's the best fair on earth sir," she said.

Windsor Historical Society Collection, 1987.46.1

The Windsor Agricultural Society incorporated in February 1889 and held its first fair the following September. The event was held at the Windsor Town Hall and featured exhibitions of fruits, vegetables, poultry, decorative arts, butter, and even catsup and cider vinegar. In addition there were competitions between the village fire companies and a potato race. A premium booklet in the Society's collection lists prize money ranging from twenty five cents to three dollars for each of the dozens of exhibit categories. By the time of the Third Annual Fair in 1891, the show was the "biggest kind of a success" with "four or five hundred teams [of horses and oxen] being about the grounds" and the exhibit hall "packed to suffocation all the afternoon." [*Hartford Courant*, Sept. 11, 1891]

Clearly the fair needed room to grow. Although the Town Hall was conveniently located on the trolley line at the town green, the cattle show and horse racing needed a bigger venue. Orson Moore offered a tract of

land on Capen Street to the Town of Windsor for a racing park, and the Moore's Park Corporation organized in the spring of 1893. The land was wooded, but a "lovely spot for a park...in a grove just off the main street." It was quite a task to remove the trees, stumps, and roots, but "the undertakers of the project went at the job full of determination" and they had a level track "second to none in New England" ready in time for the fair in September. [*Hartford Courant*, Sept. 11, 1893]

In 1900 an advertising leaflet (actually a folded card containing a free set of sewing and darning needles) exhorted Windsor women to submit "1000 Loaves of Bread and Cake, 1000 Pieces Fancy Work, and 1000 Paintings, Antiques, etc.... and Flowers in profusion" for exhibit and to help make the Eighth Annual Fair of the Windsor Agricultural Society bigger than ever. Whether the women contributed this many entries is unknown, but the fair organizers were eager to publicize the daily concerts by the Colt's Armory Band from Hartford, the large cattle show, bicycle races, trained pigs and dogs in the side show, and the largest purses ever for the horse races.

Despite aggressive promotion, the 1900 fair was the last one sponsored by the Windsor Agricultural Society. Perhaps the participation and attendance were not enough to cover expenses for the stockholders. News reports indicate that fairs in other towns struggled with unpredictable weather, the increasing expenditures for prize money, and a demand for side shows and other entertainments. Indeed, at many fairs the horse racing was becoming the principal attraction and fair organizers despaired of the decreasing public interest in the agricultural exhibits and livestock shows.

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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**Editorial Advisor**, Christine Ermenc,  
Barbara Goodwin, and Christina Vida  
**Managing Editor**, Connie Thomas

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### CONTACT US

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



In the early 1920s an old Windsor home belonging to Frank Denslow became endangered. Thought to be one of the oldest homes in Windsor, it was sadly dilapidated, and developers had plans for the land it sat on directly across the street from First Church.

This was an era of rapidly changing transportation. Automobiles, no longer a novelty, were fast replacing horse-drawn vehicles. The house was slated for demolition to make way for a new gasoline station.

Saving the old house became a rallying cause of the fledgling Windsor Historical Society. Donations came in from near and far enabling the Society to purchase the home for \$7,400 in 1925. We knew the house sat on land deeded to Lieutenant Walter Fyler in 1640. We also knew that the house had later wings and additions. We named it the Fyler House assuming that the original structure had housed Walter Fyler and his family.

From the mid-twentieth century on, scholars suspected that the original core of the Fyler House had been built in the eighteenth, not the seventeenth, century. In the late 1990s, curator Elaine Olson urged historian Beverly Garvan, whose specialty is deed research, to look further. Garvan painstakingly traced the history of the building back to two quitclaim deeds. The first deed, dated October 1758, transferred ownership of eighteen rods of land from Henry Allyn to John Strong for fifty shillings. In the second, dated August 1762, Strong transferred the same real estate to Alexander Allyn for ninety-five pounds, almost forty times the value of the previous quitclaim. This document stated "said land hath a dwelling house, well and small barn..." which accounts for the added value. It was not a decision made easily; but, faced with this evidence, the Society renamed the Fyler House the Strong House.

It is no surprise that a structure more than 250 years old has restoration needs. The first step for the Society was to determine those needs more exactly. In the winter of 2005, funded by a grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, architectural consultant Tom Pasko began an extensive examination of the building's structure and condition. Pasko's findings confirmed Garvan's research and added to our knowledge about how the house evolved. Pasko determined that the people who occupied the home for the longest period and made the most changes to the Strongs' original structure were the Howards, who owned the home from 1772 to 1837. As the Howard family grew, they extended their modest home with lean-tos and wings. The changes they made are what you experience when you tour through the building today. Faced with this evidence, and again after much deliberation, our Board of Directors voted in June to rename the structure the Strong-Howard House in acknowledgement of the two families that built this home.

*(Director's message continued)*

History often seems fixed and permanent yet our understanding of it can shift as historians uncover new details about the past. Think of it this way: these name changes signal that the Society is actively

pursuing the past and learning new information we want to share with you. But don't worry. We will know what you mean if you happen to refer to the little red house on the corner as the Strong House or the Fyler House!

*(Fair Days, continued from page one)*

The declining interest in local fairs was probably related to the broader decline in New England's agricultural economy. Farmers faced strong competition from larger agricultural operations in the Midwest as well as increasing dominance of manufacturing and commercial businesses in the urban areas. Windsor, too, reflected these agricultural changes. Some old family farms were sold for development and others were taken over by first generation immigrants. Farmers adopted innovative techniques such as the tenting of shade tobacco and the use of mechanized equipment to increase productivity.

The Great War - World War I - refocused American attention on the need to stimulate both the production and conservation of food. The Windsor Agricultural Association formed at the beginning of August 1918 and immediately decided to hold a genuine, old-fashioned fair in October. It called for

exhibits of home-grown fruits and vegetables, canned products, and a children's garden at Windsor Town Hall with silver loving cups and ribbons as prizes. Along with patriotic entertainment, the Red Cross and defense council mounted exhibits and officials promoted the slogan "Let Hartford County eat what Hartford County grows." Within three years the crowds had again outgrown the Town Hall area and the WAA moved the fair to Sage Park (the former Moore Park). The 1920 fair was the last one held in Windsor, but local residents continue to this day to showcase their produce, handiwork, and livestock at other regional fairs.

*Enjoy one of these area fairs this fall:*

- *Four Town Fair, Somers, CT, September 13-16*
- *The Big E (Eastern States Exposition),  
West Springfield, MA, September 14-30*
- *Northwest Park Country Fair, Windsor, CT, Sept. 22*



*The Horace H. Ellsworth family was actively involved with Windsor fairs for many years. Mr. Ellsworth was President of the Windsor Agricultural Society, Mrs. Ellsworth judged floriculture exhibits, and their daughter Minnie won dozens of blue ribbons for her fair entries.*

Windsor Historical Society Collection, 2007.9

## Come to the Auction !

Friday, November 16, 2012  
6 - 9 p.m.

Central Street Antiques  
25 Central Street, Windsor

Cost: \$25/person

Hors d'oeuvres, wine, and beverages

Call or email us with your donation for this major fund raiser that benefits area school children, Windsor families in need, and public programs at the Society.

Suggested donations: a week at your cottage, hotel stays, dining experiences, golf packages, pool parties, landscape services, baked goods for the holidays. Call Christine Ermenc (860/688-3813, ext. 101) with your ideas.

Buy your tickets at the Society or we can mail them to you.

# Remains of the Oil City Hydroelectric Plant

Jim Trocchi, Volunteer

In the fall of 2009, an announcement in the newspaper of planned maintenance to the existing Rainbow Hydroelectric Plant Dam on the Farmington River in Windsor, CT, was news I had been waiting to hear for many years. This activity would dramatically lower the water in the reservoir that the dam impounds and to my knowledge would reveal a scene that hasn't been visible since 1976 - the remains of the Oil City Hydroelectric Dam.



**Photo 1: Oil City Dam and Power House Remains, 1976**  
Richard Daley Photography, Inc., 2010.58.28

## Photo 1

When the present 60-foot high Rainbow Hydroelectric Dam was built in 1925, the large reservoir it created submerged the older Oil City Hydroelectric Dam built in 1890-1891 a quarter of a mile further upstream. An April 12, 1890 article titled *A Great New Project* announced the building of the original dam and electric power plant. It was to be a 27-foot high dam providing power to Hartford to light streets and power motors in factories there at great cost savings. The plant produced 2,000 horsepower a day. The Oil City dam and the hydroelectric equipment was used to generate and transmit electric power over copper wires eleven miles to Hartford. In these pioneering years of electric power use, this plant also served as a laboratory for experiments with different electrical frequency and phase generation. This 1976 image shows the Oil City dam's timber and trap rock that impounded the water and its powerhouse remains below the dam. These are normally submerged underwater. The photo was taken from the bottom of the dam looking upstream on the Farmington River on the Northwest Park side of the Reservoir.



**Photo 2: Powerhouse Remains, 2009**  
Photograph by the author, 2010.58.30

## Photo 2

During the month of September 2009 when the water receded, the submerged remains of the Oil City Dam and hydroelectric complex could be viewed again and compared to photos taken in 1976. The comparison reveals that the remains have deteriorated. In Photo 2 there is a noticeable difference where you see what appears to be a roof or floor above the powerhouse's turbine/generator assembly that has collapsed to a greater degree. The powerhouse burned in 1897. A *Hartford Courant* article dated September 7, 1897 detailed the story. The fire broke out at 2:30 in the morning because of short circuited wires. The powerhouse burnt to the ground and Hartford's downtown experienced a power outage but for only fifteen minutes. The outage was so short because the Hartford Electric Light's former steam powered Pearl Street plant was brought online to provide the needed power until the hydro plant was rebuilt. The article also stated that if additional power was needed because of the outage, there were big storage batteries at the rear of the Courant building.

## Photos 3 & 4

I took many photos of the submerged remains but the two that I think are most interesting and perhaps the first time ever photographed are Photos 3 and 4. Photo 3 shows a sliding wood input gate in the arched cavern at the bottom of the impounded Northwest Park side's stone abutment. When this input gate was opened, it allowed water to flow in the penstock and turn the turbine/generator remains seen in Photo 4. A penstock is simply a conduit to channel water. With a 27-foot head of water, one can imagine the tremendous and efficient hydraulic force that went through the input gate to feed that turbine. It was a remarkable engineering accomplishment in its' day.



**Photo 3: Sliding Input Gate Remains, 2010**  
Photograph by the author, 2010.58.32



**Photo 4: Penstock Remains, 2010**  
Photograph by the author, 2010.58.33



**Photo 5: Abutment Remains, 1976**  
Richard Daley Photography, Inc., 2010.58.29



**Photo 6: Abutment Remains, 2009**  
Photography by author, 2010.58.31

#### Photo 5

This 1976 view was taken slightly downstream from the dam's abutment and focuses on the logs and trap rock that made up the dam and impounded the water.

#### Photo 6

I took this image in 2009 slightly upstream from the dam's abutment. It shows that the logs and trap rock are still holding up well. The submerged logs are over 120 years old and well preserved. The trap rock used possibly came from the abundant basalt quarries on nearby Metacomet Ridge.

At the conclusion of the Rainbow Dam's repairs in 2009, the great watershed of the Farmington River soon refilled the Reservoir and now only the Oil City stone abutments are visible. Submersion will help preserve these remains. Perhaps in many years to come the Reservoir's impounded water will be again drained and the thrill of seeing the remains between the abutments will once again be a treasured event for industrial archaeologists.

Rainbow Reservoir can be reached by a short hike in Windsor's Northwest Park or by boat from a state boat launch in the Rainbow section of town.

#### References:

1. Roth, Matthew. *An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites*. Society of Industrial Archaeology, Houghton, MI, 1981.
2. *Windsor Historical Society Newsletter*. January 1995, volume 13 no. 1. Visit the Society's website to read the article: [www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org/nl\\_list.html](http://www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org/nl_list.html)

## Family Focus

Christina Keyser Vida, Curator

If you have toured the Strong-Howard House in recent years, you already know that we interpret the Strong family who built the original structure, the Howard family who made major additions and alterations between 1772 and 1833, and the Stiles sisters who lived in the home from 1837 until 1887. As we plan for the reinterpretation of the Strong-Howard House, we decided that the narrative should focus on a single family. This will allow us to provide more meaningful content and also solve the temporal whirlwind brought about by covering over 100 years of Windsor history in the typical thirty-minute house tour. So we asked ourselves, "Which family do we interpret?"

Although the Strong family built the original section of the dwelling house, the bulk of what visitors see today is a product of the Howard family. We narrowed our choices to the Howard family and the Stiles sisters – families that lived in the current footprint of the structure. The Stiles sisters witnessed the completion of the railroad in 1844 and the Civil War from within this house. The Society owns a few objects likely used in the house by these ladies, and we have census records, church records, and a few accounts detailing their daily activities. But the majority of our documentation for the home's inhabitants comes from the Howard family. Records and newspapers survive detailing Nathaniel Howard's participation in the American Revolution as a sea captain, his continued forays on the high seas after the war, and the store that he ran inside the Strong-Howard House from the 1790s through the War of 1812. Although Captain Howard's own account books do not survive, historian Beverly Garvan meticulously sought out the Howard family in our account book collection and discovered some of their financial interactions within the community. And, the Connecticut Historical Society owns a manuscript memoir written by Nathaniel Howard's son, George, providing more insight into the Howard family.

With this wealth of information, we have decided to narrow our interpretation of the Strong-Howard House to provide an in-depth understanding of Ann and Nathaniel Howard, their family, their surroundings, and the world in which they lived. The Strongs and the Stiles will not be forgotten, but our visitors – young and old – will benefit from an immersive experience in the Howards' home.

## Civil War Day

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director

Plan to attend a fascinating Civil War Day at Windsor Historical Society on Saturday, October 20<sup>th</sup> from 10



Dr. George Bronson,  
hospital steward, 11th  
Connecticut Infantry.

Photo courtesy of  
Mary Lou Pavlik.

a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. One hundred and fifty years ago, Connecticut citizens at home were still reeling from the impact of the battle of Antietam fought in Sharpsburg, Maryland on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1862, the bloodiest single-day conflict in American history. Re-enactor John Callahan has planned a day that will transport you back in time. You will experience military and civilian displays and activities including a soldier's life in the field, a rare

demonstration with a Gatling gun and other Civil War repeating weapons (blanks fired, of course!), plus a display and demonstration of Civil War field medicine. The Vintage Radio and Communications Museum will demonstrate how telegraphed messages were used to send critical reports from the battlefield to newspapers and the War Department in Washington. Society Director Christine Ermenc will lead participants across the street to Palisado Cemetery and share stories about a few Civil War-era markers and the Windsor people they commemorate. Learn the basics of formations and drill and fall in for drill as the 'boys of 1861' did or just watch their militia routines. Learn more about Connecticut battle flags and how they inspired acts of heroism.

The centerpiece of the day will be a presentation by Torrington resident Mary Lou Pavlik, dressed in period attire. In a vivid portrayal of her great-great grandmother, Pavlik will read evocative excerpts from letters that her great-great grandfather, Dr. George Bronson, wrote home to his wife while serving as a hospital steward for the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Infantry and caring for sick and wounded soldiers. Again, this is a FREE public event! Snacks will be for sale on the grounds.



# Volunteer Profile

Connie Thomas, Administrative Assistant

We are featuring a profile of one of our volunteers in each newsletter issue. Our volunteers supplement and compliment 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, 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.

In this issue we are featuring three volunteers. These young people may join the history field or quite possibly become Board members or employees of a heritage organization. It is a privilege to mentor them for a while.

## Katie Tanguay

"I had a great time this summer at the historical society doing various projects. My favorite project was the Sarah Hayden papers which took me many weeks to type up, but I felt like I really got to know Sarah and her family from it even though they lived here over one-hundred years ago. I learned how to treat history with a personal perspective here."



## Chelsea Jenkins

Chelsea became acquainted with the Society in November 2010 when she met our Curator Christina Vida at Manchester Community College. Chelsea was encouraged to attend one of our volunteer-training sessions and has been assisting the Society ever since. She was a student at Clover Street Elementary School for two years before moving to East



Windsor and has longed for a Windsor connection ever since. Chelsea's interests lie in English, Dutch, and French colonial imperialism. She loves learning and sharing historical information with our visitors.

## Jamie Copeland

Jamie has completed a wide array of projects this summer as a curatorial intern. He inventoried our framed-art collection and the objects in the Strong House, and he rehoused items in a basement storage area. Jamie also edited an index to a mimeographed newsletter sent to servicemen during World War II. As a history major, Jamie hopes to enter academia after completing his B.A. in History at Eastern Connecticut State University.



## 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!*

**Curatorial:** Jamie Copeland, Bev Garvan, Becky Hendricks, Katie Tanguay; **Front desk and administration:** Joyce Barber, Barbara Byczkiewicz, Carolyn Doyle, Deb Dusseault, Bill Harris, Chelsea Jenkins, Coralee Jones, Mary Kelling, Willa Nemetz, Marion Nielsen, Libby Parker, Mary Ransom, Barbara Tanguay, Jim Trocchi; **Grounds:** Jamie Copeland, Ruth Fahrback, Willa Nemetz, Barbara Jo Rockwell; **Library:** Geoffrey Barans, Joyce Barber, Elaine Brophy, Jamie Copeland, Bev Garvan, Sara Hawran, Chelsea Jenkins, Coralee Jones, Sandy McGraw, Walter Stevenson, and Katie Tanguay.



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.

Saturday, September 8 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
**Out and About: A Tour of Windsor's Historic Palisado Cemetery** with Christine Ermenc.

Sunday, September 16 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
**Constitution Celebration!** Family fun learning about the U.S. Constitution. FREE.

Sunday, September 23 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
**Out and About: Status Wars - The Architecture of Palisado Green.** This is a walking tour led by Christine Ermenc around the Palisado Green.

Monday, September 24 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
**Out and About: Beauty and The Beast - 300 years of Connecticut Architecture** with Bill Hosley, preservationist and scholar.

Tuesday, October 9 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
**Windsor Locks Canal Model Unveiling and Lecture**  
 Enjoy our hospitality, see Lon Pelton's scale model of the canal, and hear the history from J. Christopher Kevick.

Saturday, October 20 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
**Civil War Living History Day at the Society**  
 Campfires, drills, demonstrations, and more. FREE.

Saturday, November 3 8 a.m. - noon  
**Strong House Basement Clean Out**  
 Flex your muscles and join the free fun. RSVP.

Wednesday, November 7 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
**Picturing the Civil War: Prints and Photographs by Connecticut Artists and Photographers**  
 See the way the locals did through the imagery collected at the CT Historical Society. Nancy Finlay will demonstrate in our meeting room.

Friday, November 16 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

**Pre-holiday Auction!**  
 Come to the auction held at Central Street Antiques, 25 Central Street, Windsor. Call now to offer your donation to this fun event. Cost: \$25.