

WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

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Windsor
Historical Society
of Windsor,
Connecticut



A Touch of Home

Christina Vida, Curator

On October 5th, the parlor and store in the Strong-Howard House will reopen after nearly a year of structural restoration and reinterpretation. The completion of the two rooms will finish Phase 1 of this three-phase project. While the work on the physical plant of the Strong-Howard House is necessary to preserve the building for future generations, the Society decided to take this opportunity to completely reimagine the way in which you – our visitors – experience the home. The focus of the new interpretation will be the Howard family in the year 1810. You will be able to touch all the items in the Howards' parlor and store because we will be furnishing them entirely with reproduction objects. So what will the house feel like? Hard, soft, heavy, light, rough, and smooth.

A desk, eight chairs, a tea table, and two breakfast tables will satisfy your desire for hard surfaces in the parlor. You will want to open the desk, sit on the chairs, tilt the tea table, and expand the breakfast tables. Each piece is based on a period object with a local history and constructed by New England craftsmen. These careful reproductions form the backbone of the parlor, just as the shelves and counter will form the backdrop of the store. A Venetian carpet, handcrafted in Vermont, will soften the room



Restored North façade of the Strong Howard House, August 2013

with its striped greens, yellows, oranges, and touches of red. The design is based on the historic patterns of Silas Burton (1775-1827), a Connecticut weaver whose draft book is preserved at the Stratford Historical Society. You will be welcome to sit on this soft rug or turn up a corner to see what has been “swept under the rug.” Softness will also be found in the ladies' garments in Mrs. Howard's mending basket and the fur top hat on Captain Howard's desk.

Heaviness will be readily available in the reproduction account books, a bible, and a book of sermons that will be found in the parlor and store. Also surprisingly hefty is the clothing of the period as well as the bolts and bolts of fabric stocking the store shelves. Nearly 375 yards of fabric will fill the shelves representing the broadcloth, calico, linen, muslin, flannel, nankeen, cassimere, and silk sold by Captain Howard.

The weightiness of the books, clothing, and fabrics will be offset by the lightness of many of the other wares in the store. The Howards catered to

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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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Director's Report

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director

Connections

On this rainy summer afternoon, as I distract myself from a challenging grant application to write this, I hear two sisters from Massachusetts who are delightedly making connections between our library resources and the history of their family. It's not my business to catch the substance of their conversation, but its tone is lovely to hear in the background -- companionable, focused, and happy.

History has the power to enrich one's life experience; many of us working in museums became involved because we love making connections between present and past, and guiding people to discover their own passion for history.

Much of my connection-making these days involves linking projects to funds, but once or twice a year, I allow myself to develop a historical program just to stay sane. This summer, it was a tour of Windsor's Riverside Cemetery. Initially established in 1894 as a cemetery for the poor, it evolved into a place where those of means and those without are buried side by side, some in unmarked graves.

Some stories: there was the Civil War veteran who survived bombardments to lose his life on Windsor's stone railroad bridge when he misjudged the space between two passing trains. There was the eight-year-old in the days before antibiotics who lost his life seven weeks after an ear infection started. There was the benefactor who relinquished his admittance to Tufts Medical School when he was needed to help run the family dairy. Decades after his death, his estate still maintains this cemetery.

The week before the tour, we got a call from a woman in Lowell, Massachusetts, who had seen the tour advertised online. Her elderly mother's grandfather had died in the Buckland Home, Windsor's poor farm once located near the cemetery. The grandfather had been completely estranged from his family and his grave was unmarked, but they knew he was buried next to a "Roy Jackson" and they wanted to find him. Bev Garvan had unearthed wonderful information on the Buckland Home that we could photocopy for them. I knew exactly where a "Leroy Jackson" was buried.

So these two women drove down from Lowell on July 27th for our 8:30 a.m. tour and were finally able to know where their relative rests. After the tour, they came to our library where Barbara Goodwin helped them find more information. They were profoundly grateful. And this is why I keep writing grants and asking for money -- so that we can continue to add value to peoples' lives by leading them to make their own connections through history.



(continued from page 1)

Windsor's finer set with dainty knitting needles, ladies mitts and gloves, watch chains, combs, cravats, and fans, among other items. Captain Howard's desk in the parlor will also contain reproduction letters and newspapers that, while light in weight, will be full of content about the local, regional, and national issues of the day. Some letters will even be left over from when Captain Howard was Windsor's postmaster from 1802 to 1806.

Life was rougher in 1810 – and so was American-made wool. A wool coat in the parlor and wool broadcloth in the store will not prickle your fingers because they represent the English-manufactured wool from the time. But the wool socks and mittens that would have been crafted with local wool from local sheep will make you long for your modern snugglies. In contrast, your hands will be delighted by the smoothness of the Howards' teawares – a teapot, teacups and saucers, and a creamer – made by Wedgwood. The family could have purchased pocked redware or stoneware



Strong-Howard House Phase 1 By the Numbers

98  parts of eight fancy chairs that require steambending	15  wooden and paper fans available in the Store	72  square feet of the Venetian carpet in the Parlor	8  support posts bracing the floors of the Parlor and Store
0  fuse boxes left in the house after being replaced by a panel	9  years of research conducted on the house for this project	373  yards of fabric purchased for the Store	42  craftsmen and vendors who supplied reproduction objects

made from Connecticut clays, but the smooth texture of Wedgwood's creamware was second-to-none in the eighteenth century when the Howards would have bought their tea service. The silver teaspoons also serve as a showpiece to the Howards' wealth and taste for the smoother things in life.

We look forward to welcoming you and your sense of touch to the Strong-Howard House in October. Mark your calendars for October 5th from 1:00 - 4:00 pm for our FREE grand opening!

Going, Going, Gone!

The Windsor Historical Society's Annual Pre-Holiday Auction is right around the corner! It's a perfect chance to find a unique holiday gift for someone special, or to share the season by sponsoring a school bus field trip to the Society or helping a Windsor family in need. In past years, lucky bidders have gone home with hand-made jewelry, antiques and collectibles, event tickets, gift certificates for dinners and services, and much more.

This year, the event will be held at Birch Meadow on East Dudley Town Road. Your \$35 ticket will include hors d'oeuvres, buffet dinner, desserts and non-alcoholic beverages and, of course, the auction itself.

A cash bar will be open all evening as well.

The Auction Committee will be happy to consider any items that you may have to donate. Please contact the Society at 860-688-3813 for more information.

So save Friday, November 22, from 6:00 until 9:00 pm and join us for a truly winning evening!



Merwin's Wareroom: *Satisfaction Guaranteed*

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

"No charge for personal service." James J. Merwin's advertisement in the 1886 *Windsor Herald* newspaper promised satisfaction in all aspects of his services for undertaking and funeral arrangements. The first funeral director in Windsor, Merwin was known throughout the region for pioneering new methods and practices to advance his profession. After his death in 1902, his son George Merwin continued the business with his partner William S. Leek, maintaining its regional reputation for another forty years.

The Windsor Historical Society is fortunate to have three volumes of record books from the Merwin Funeral Home in its collection. These detail the services provided to Windsor area residents between 1877 and 1906. Library patrons regularly use the ledgers for research and the fragile bindings are beginning to show signs of frequent handling. Recently the three volumes were digitally reproduced by the Bridgeport National Bindery. The actual-size

facsimile books are now readily available to researchers in the Society library. Funeral home records are an under-appreciated genealogical resource. The entries frequently confirm information in an ancestor's death or cemetery record, or they might augment that information with details about the funeral and the family members involved.

When 35 year old Mary Crowley died in 1897, her father Timothy ordered an oak casket, 24 candles, eight pairs of gloves for the pallbearers, and twenty chairs. Merwin arranged for the use of a hearse and hired seven horse-drawn carriages to transport the mourners. Entries for other funerals mention flowers, a sheaf of wheat, candelabras, opening the grave, and the renting of sleighs in the wintertime. Notations of the cause of death remind us yet again that we are the beneficiaries of significant advances in medicine and hygiene.

In 2007, Society volunteers transcribed some of the biographical information about the deceased individuals and summarized the details in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

This index is accessible on the website at http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/finding_aids.html. More recently, volunteer Elaine Brophy has found the Merwin Funeral Home records to be one of the richest resources for her project to recreate the 1890 Windsor census.

The Merwin Funeral Home ledgers are more than the records of a local business and more than a simple listing of names. The entries provide a glimpse into the personal and social life of the community of Windsor at the turn of the twentieth century.

MERWIN'S
Undertaking Warerooms,
POQUONOCK, CONN.
Caskets, Coffins, Shrouds,
and Habits,
Supplied at the Lowest Rates.
All things appertaining to the burial of the dead furnished. No charge for personal service. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Embalming done when desired. Telephone in warerooms.
J. J. MERWIN.

J.J. Merwin's Advertisement in 1886
WHS Collection, 2013.1.17

DATE	Charges	Date of Payment	Cash Book, Page	Payments	Number of Funeral	Number of Funeral for current year	Date of Death	Name of Deceased	Name of Husband	Sex	Color	Married, Single, & Widowed	Age	Months	Days	Primary Cause of Death	Secondary	Certified by	Residence	Place of Death	Place of Burial	Occupation	Place of Birth	Father's Name	Father's Birthplace	Brain's Maiden Name	Mother's Birthplace	Place of Interment
1897 Nov 8					744	53	Nov 8 1897	Mary E. Crowley		Female	White	Single	35			Diabetes		Wm. H. Crowley						Timothy Crowley	England	May Crowley	England	Nov 10/97
1 Casket, 24 Candles, Oak Coffin,	100.	Nov 15		130.00																								
1 Car,	3.10																											
24 Candles	5			1.20																								
8 Pair Gloves for	1.00																											
20 Chairs	5			1.00																								
1 Hearse	32.00																											
Cemetery Charges	.25																											
				139.45																								

Funeral Arrangements for Mary E. Crowley,
from the Merwin Funeral Home Record Books
WHS Collection, 2006.4.2

Significant Objects Writing Contest

All objects have stories to tell. But, those objects rely on storytellers to craft their narratives. Help the Windsor Historical Society bring objects to life! The Society is hosting our second-annual contest that asks writers to weave together a story about Windsor and a story about an object. Writers can choose a 1798 Windsor map, a child's sized red cloak, or a nutmeg grater



Prizes:

1st place - \$100,

2nd place - \$75

3rd place - \$50



Submissions accepted by email only. Email your submission to

Christina Vida, cvida@windsorhistoricalsociety.org, by Thursday, October 24th at 5:00 pm. To be considered, submissions must include your name, age, address, and phone number. Submission of an entry constitutes warranty of originality and non-infringement, as well as permission for the Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT, to publish the entry in print or online, including social media.



grater to use as their primary object. The objects are available for touching and viewing at the Society from September 17th through October 24th. Images of the objects are posted on the Society's website and Facebook page.

Submissions under 500 words in any genre (creative fiction, non-fiction, poem, letter, etc.) will be accepted until Thursday, October 24th at 5:00 pm. Submissions will be reviewed by the Society and judged based on creative use of language, connecting the object to Windsor, and overall quality. Up to three writings for each object will be posted on the Society's Facebook page for public voting. The Facebook voting deadline is Sunday, November 17th at 9:00 pm. To vote on Facebook, "like" your favorite entry. The top three "liked" entries will receive prizes.

Visiting the Museum

Effective April 1, 2013, the museum is open Wednesdays through Saturdays with tours of the historic houses conducted at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. Our admission fee is 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.

Note that the Society will be closed for Labor Day, Monday, September 2; Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 28; Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25; and New Year's Day, Wednesday, January 1.

“Played fiddle at night in barracks”

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian and Christina Vida, Curator

French warfare. U-boats. Doughboys. These are what typically come to mind when you consider World War I. But the recently-donated George Wolf Collection at the Society goes beyond the typical and details the experiences of a Windsor musician who served in Europe during 1918. This revealing collection includes photographs, newspaper clippings, a diary kept by George Wolf during his time overseas as well as the violin and case that he carried with him during his deployment.

Born in 1894, George Wolf grew up in the Poquonock neighborhood of Windsor and began taking violin lessons at an early age. By the time he registered for the draft in 1917, he was twenty-three years old and was employed by the Hartford Theater as a musician. He enlisted and set sail for France in late March 1918. His diary details how his transport always had gunners watching for submarines and at times zigzagged through the water to avoid the German U-boats. George’s regiment did not immediately deploy to the front, giving him time to endure the hardships of life away from home but without the realities of war. Poor quarters, low pay, and harsh weather were tempered by his freedom to play music and relax. On May 21st, he “went uptown at night and went to a house and played violin an hour. Fine day.” On June 3rd, he “played fiddle at night in barracks.” George’s training continued into July and he also began playing with a military band. In August, George shipped out to the front and encountered masses of troops, enemy shelling, and even



A young George Wolf (left) poses with his violin and a friend.
WHS Collection, 2013.38.14

witnessed a German intelligence balloon being brought down.

He played numerous concerts with the band throughout August, and one night in September he “played violin at a French hut with Frenchman. Good man. Enjoyed the evening very much.” However, his musical talents did not exempt him from serving on the front lines.



George Wolf after returning home in 1919.
WHS Collection, 2013.38.10

George’s diary is empty for most of October and November during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. However, a *Hartford Times* newspaper clipping quotes a November 19, 1918 letter from George to his parents: “Most of the exciting and thrilling times were when I was with Battery F. I had some close calls and a good many times I wish I could crawl into a mouse hole, but it all must happen in a game of this kind.” He also wrote that his main concern was what he would do when he returned home because “my hands are all callouses and hard.”

For most World War I collections, a soldier’s story ends in Europe. But the George Wolf Collection goes beyond the war and beyond Connecticut. Wolf returned to Hartford where he conducted the orchestra for silent movies at the Strand Theater on Main Street. In 1926, he relocated to the vibrant city of Miami, Florida. His career as a conductor and concert violinist flourished. George was praised as the conductor of the Miami WPA Orchestra during the Depression. George Wolf passed away in 1959 in Miami, but he is buried in Windsor’s Elm Grove cemetery with his parents, brother, and wife. His daughter, Dorothy, carefully preserved her father’s relics for future generations. The George Wolf Collection is open and available for study in the Society’s Research Library.

Welcome Aboard!

We are happy to welcome Liz Henderson as our new Administrative Assistant. Liz takes over from Connie Thomas, who left us in late May to enjoy retirement.

Liz comes to us with a diverse background. She spent a number of years in corporate America, working in various technical, financial and customer support positions. She left that life behind to explore functions that offered greater interaction with people and better alignment with her interest in history. Most recently she taught children's history programs at the Noah Webster House.

She is a long-time volunteer with the Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation in Bloomfield and Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton. She is also a Revolutionary War era educator and re-enactor, with almost 20 years wearing the "funny clothes." Her group, Sheldon's Horse, the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons, is a cavalry unit. They have traveled the East Coast and have been featured at Mount Vernon, Connecticut's Fort Trumbull and Fort Griswold, and many other historic sites and museums. Her colonial era music group, Syllabub, has played at local historic events, including some at Windsor Historical Society.



She is enjoying getting to know our members and volunteers. She says that the variety of the Administrative Assistant position is its greatest pleasure: she's learning to use new systems and software, expanding her hobby interest in history and loving the friendly and welcoming environment.

Liz is looking forward to a long and rewarding time with us. Welcome, Liz!

Windsor Locks Canal Model

Windsor Historical Society is home to a fascinating working model of the Windsor Locks Canal. What does a "lock" do, anyway? Come and see for yourself. Model demonstrations held on the second and fourth (not the first) Saturday monthly, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm, or by appointment.

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, Karen Parsons, Walt Stevenson, Jim Trocchi.

Front desk and administration: Joyce Barber, Marie Bruhn, Carolyn Doyle, Deb Dusseault, Bill Harris, Susan Jackson, Margaret Jedziniak, Chelsea Jenkins, Coralee Jones, Betsy and Gordon Kenneson, Yvonne McGregor, Willa Nemetz, Marion Nielsen, Libby Parker, Barbara Tanguay, Laura Toal and Jim Trocchi.

Grounds: The Butler Company, Ruth Fahrback, Laura Jary and the Town of Windsor.

Legal Advice: Kevin Ferrigno

Library: Elaine Brophy, Diane Cameron, Bev Garvan, Sara Hawran, Betsy Kenneson, Gordon Kenneson, Sandy McGraw, Marion Nielsen, Barbara Tanguay, Lois Warner and Daniel Wildes.

Publicity Deliveries: Gordon Kenneson and Walt Stevenson.

Got Email?

Would you like to help the Windsor Historical Society and save a few trees at the same time? We would be happy to send the newsletter to you via email instead of traditional mail. You'll get it faster, and we'll cut down on our paper products and save a little money, too.

To be added to our newsletter email distribution, please send an email to jalberti@windsorhistoricalsociety.org. The next newsletter will come straight to your inbox.

Thank you!



As we move forward with the restoration of the Strong-Howard House, we extend our warmest thanks to the generous friends who have given and pledged. This unique project would not be possible without help from all of you.



Look how far we've come!

Two Anonymous Donors

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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.

We have a full slate of fascinating programs happening through the fall.

Please see the enclosed flyer for a complete list of programs for the rest of the year.

Flyer missing? Please visit our website: windsorhistoricalsociety.org or contact the Society at 860-688-3813 or info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org