

WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

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Welcome Home

Christina Vida, Curator

Many four-letter words evoke complication – help, love, hope – but none more so than *home*. “Home is where the heart is,” but sometimes our hearts are full of joy and sometimes they are filled with sadness. Home can be heartwarming and heartbreaking and everything in between. When you visit the Strong-Howard House, you will undoubtedly learn some history, but we also want you to experience the Howards’ *home*, and all its complications.

Before you step over the threshold, you will know that Capt. and Mrs. Howard did not live in a vacuum. Many of their neighbors’ larger and fancier homes still stand around the Palisado Green. How would you feel to live in their shadows – proud or envious? The Howards, having built many additions onto their house, likely had mixed feelings. Their home was also their place of business and nicely situated in Windsor’s commercial district right across the street from the church. While advantageous for their store, the Howards’ particular location must have felt like a fishbowl with neighbors, townsfolk, and travelers constantly meandering on or near their property. Would you fare well with so little privacy at your home?

Once inside the Howards’ 1810 parlor, the complications continue. It is decorated with their best furniture – new painted chairs, a mahogany desk, a tilt-top tea table – ready to entertain friends, family, or store patrons. And yet the fancy décor contrasts sharply with the humbleness of the architecture. The bright paint also masks the family’s sadness since Nathaniel and Ann’s son and grandson passed away the year before. Their widowed daughter-in-law, Nancy, and surviving granddaughter, Annie, returned from New York, bringing vitality to the home, but the mourning continued. And to complicate

things more, the Howards’ 23-year-old son, George, and his bride, Sarah, moved in as well. The New England merchant economy was still lagging after President Jefferson’s Embargo, and many young adults did not have the financial means to support themselves yet. Does this sound familiar in our post-recession world? So with three generations in the same home, the Howards tried to make the best of a complicated situation.

Capt. Howard’s store along Palisado Green was his retirement venture. After a life at sea, he settled down to sell fineries to Windsor’s elite and be with his family. But did his restless spirit settle down as well? Perhaps he continued to regale his guests gathered around the dinner table with salty stories from his former life. You can almost feel Ann cringe as she tried to elevate the conversation. Her polite sensibilities, and wealthy upbringing, meant she was keenly aware of her husband’s low brow tendencies. And the juxtaposition was even more striking given their well-appointed dining room. Capt. Howard also frequently discussed his

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The Strong Howard House Hearth
Photo by Christina Vida

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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Director's Report

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director



Building for the Future

When I took this job fifteen years ago, one of my first actions was to read Henry Stiles' *History of Ancient Windsor* and look at old Society records -- minutes, annual reports, correspondence -- to bring me up to speed. I was so impressed with the way Windsor Historical Society members gathered together in 1925 to raise the \$5,700 it took to purchase the modest red gambrel-roofed home we now call the Strong-Howard House. The thought of one of the most historic buildings in town being razed to make way for a gasoline station was unacceptable to those long-ago folks. Eloquent appeal letters from Society President George Crosby included photographs of the sadly deteriorating little historic home tipped in with a call for action.

In the Society's 1925 *Annual Report*, Crosby stated that the organization should serve as more than a "soulless repository of antiques and curiosities." The little red house at the corner of Palisado Avenue and North Meadow Road, the new institutional seat of the Society, was intended to be more than a museum. Crosby and the Society's founders hoped it would function as a lodestone, connecting young people and old with the history of those who had gone before, drawing people with Windsor roots who had migrated elsewhere back to town. An upstairs bedroom was reserved for the use of people with Windsor roots who no longer had family members in town. The Society operated the then-Fyler House as a museum and a tea room in its earliest days, then just as a museum.

Over the years, repairs were made, and collections and buildings added as the Society grew. Many thousands of visitors and schoolchildren passed through the Society's doors. Eight decades later, the little red house, now called the Strong-Howard House, found itself in need of significant restoration. The dollar figures were large. The Society had not mounted a capital campaign in over eighty years, but now it was our turn if we truly intended to keep faith with the past. When we thought about how to make our house truly shine, we felt that we needed to address the experience inside as well as stabilizing the structure. So the restoration project became a restoration and reinterpretation project. Since we knew an enormous amount about the Howard family who lived there from 1772 to 1837, we decided to recreate their home using reproductions of household furnishings. That way, visitors could touch as well as look, explore on their own as well with a guide. The cost: \$775,000 to do things right, including \$100,000 to fund continued maintenance and programming. Intimidating!

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adventures during the Revolution, including two imprisonments by the British. The fervor with which he despised the British was not only at odds with his need to sell their products but also with many of his neighbors' hopes to avoid war. Most New Englanders despised President Madison and his hawkish policies. Although they were native New Englanders, the Howards were in the minority as Democratic-Republicans who supported the coming war. Have you ever held a minority opinion in your home, in your family, or in your community? Did you express it openly?

While Capt. Howard's politics dominated dinner time discussion, guests also had a clear view into their bedroom – an intimacy that we shy away from today. The hangings on the bed, as well as their quilts, sheets, and blankets, were symbols of their wealth and were advertisements for textiles the Howards could supply from their store. What Ann Howard shielded from view was her Keeping Room – her kitchen, her family's functional workspace, and a relaxed room filled with the “stuff” accumulated over 37 years of marriage and inherited items from family. It was also Ann's classroom – where she first raised her four boys and

then later taught her daughters-in-law and granddaughter how to run a household, keep a pantry stocked, read a recipe, prepare a meal, and pass down knowledge from one generation to the next. Is the kitchen in your home multipurpose? Intergenerational? Messy? We welcome you to come explore the Howards' kitchen and the rest of their complicated lives in the year 1810, and we hope that you will feel at *home*.



Actors Walter Mantani and Susan Buchholz
portraying Captain Nathaniel and Ann Howard

Photo by Christina Vida

Director's Message

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But we got to work. A development committee helped us map out a strategy for raising the money. Board President John Berky and I started making development calls. I wrote lots of appeal letters and grants. Archaeologists, painters, printers, craftspeople, and community members donated their services to reduce project costs.

So where does this leave us three years later, on the eve of reopening the newly restored and reinterpreted Strong-Howard House to the public? Two hundred and thirty donors and grantors have sustained this project, indicating a broad base of support. Project backers range from those who live in Windsor to those who have a connection to Windsor but live across the country. Grants and donations range from \$5 to \$220,000. Of the 230 donations, 189 have been given by individuals, 29 by local businesses and civic organizations, and 12 by granting agencies and foundations. And the very good news is that we have raised \$710,000 of what we need! The restoration and reinterpretation costs have been covered. What is missing is \$65,000 of the costs we estimated for future

maintenance and programming.

And what might those costs include? Some of you saw actors Susan Buchholz and Walter Mantani playing Ann and Nathaniel Howard last spring. We'd like to continue their performances on a periodic basis. Hearth cooking requires wood and food supplies, some of which can be built into the cost of classes. We certainly don't expect house repairs for a while, but after this past winter, we know that New England weather has a way of throwing curve balls.

So if you still have a pledge to complete, or if you've meant to give but have not yet, yes, we are still in need! And to those of you who have gotten us this far, would you consider adding something to what you have pledged, allowing us to cross the finish line? Help us keep faith with those who preserved the house ninety years ago, and the 230 generous donors who have supported this campaign so far. Your support will aid us in preserving the investment sustained by so many. Your support will continue to make our Strong-Howard House shine bright for the future.



The 1954 chimney and fireplace came down in late 2014.
Photo by Christina Vida



After extensive archaeology, the original function of this pit is still unknown.
Photo by Christina Vida



Kane Brick in Middletown, CT, supplied the bricks in 1954.
Photo by Christina Vida



Jim Trocchi digging inside the masonry-lined pit under the old hearth.
Photo by Christina Vida



Rod Bishop working on the beehive bake oven.
Photo by John Armstrong



Contractor John Armstrong lighting the first fire.
Photo by Christina Vida

Q&A with the Contractor

John Armstrong, owner of New Harmony Builders, has been working on the Strong-Howard House restoration since we approached him in 2012. As the project nears completion, we sat down and asked him for his perspective.

Why did you want to take on this project?

I was apprehensive at first about working with tons of red tape, but once I learned that the Society was going to be adaptable, I jumped at the chance to work on this historic structure. Its rambling construction and previous restorations provided lots of layers to unpack as we inspected it. The three-year phasing also allowed me to stay ahead of the curve for the larger elements of the project like the electrical upgrades and the hearth rebuild.

What have you enjoyed most?

I've really enjoyed working with the staff and volunteers of the Windsor Historical Society. I've learned so much from them about the history of old houses and their role in how a community develops. And, I've realized that it takes an engaged group of people to make these sorts of projects possible. They really stepped up to the plate to make this restoration successful in ways that other organizations can't or won't. I've also had fun finding bits of historic materials – like wallpaper, newspaper fragments, and structural evidence – that hasn't been seen for decades, if ever.



John Armstrong planing clapboards
Photo by Christina Vida



Tom Gasser and John Armstrong laying floorboards in the Strong-Howard House Keeping Room
Photo by Christina Vida

What was the most difficult part of this project?

That's easy, when we took down the 1954 chimney and fireplace and then realized that there was an unexplored pit lined with stone and brick underneath it. I was excited to know what was inside, but it totally blew up our work schedule this past winter. The archaeology was really important because we had to cover the space over with concrete to rebuild the hearth, but it meant some extra juggling with my subcontractors to keep the restoration on track.

Would you do it again?

Yeah, in a New York minute.

Volunteers

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

Collections: Dorothy Ball, Donna Baron, Marianne Curling, Lynn Kloter Fahy, Kevin Ferrigno, Tristan Kijak and Karen Parsons.

Development: Daniel Crittenden.

Education: Ruth Budlong, Mary Kelling, Marsha Mason, Carlton Parkinson, Barbara Tanguay, Katie Tanguay and Jim Trocchi.

Front desk and administration: Deb Dusseault, Sue Gallagher, Bill Harris, Betsy and Gordon Kenneson, Willa Nemetz, Marion Nielsen, Libby Parker, Barbara Tanguay and Jim Trocchi.

Grounds: Ruth Fahrbach, Laura Jary and the Town of Windsor.

Library: Elaine Brophy, Bev Garvan, Elena Peters, Betsy Kenneson, Sandy McGraw, Barbara Tanguay, Gail Tinto and Lois Warner.

Publicity: Gordon Kenneson.

I Never Anticipated...

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

When I first came to the Windsor Historical Society in the summer of 2004, it was to work on a narrowly focused cataloging project. Then I was asked to stay on for another five weeks and that was fine; I like cataloging and there was lots more to be done.

Who could ever have dreamed that eleven years later the Librarian's role would be so broad or that I would have built enduring relationships with so many of you – fellow staff members, colleagues in the field, board members and community friends, library patrons near and far, and my dedicated volunteers.

As I think back, there are so many experiences I could never have anticipated, but that have helped to make this a most rewarding and satisfying time of my life. Who would have guessed that I would:

- come to know more about Windsor than my own home town,
- help write and publish two books,
- talk about historic personages on a first name basis,
- find a genealogy conference so invigorating – and fun!
- hand-carry treasured documents to the paper conservation center in Boston,
- meet a third cousin of my own when she came to do research in the library,
- help identify the authors of anonymous diaries,
- learn from reference inquiries that there are more than a dozen other Windsor's in the US, plus of course England, Canada, and Australia,
- actually see the installation of compact shelving for the archival materials, and then
- change the location field in our database for over 1,200 cataloging records.

People ask me about my favorite items in the collection. There are so many wonderful things that it is hard to choose. But the evocative late-19th/early-20th- century photographs are high on the list. Other favorites are Sarah Hayden's 1842 letters from Matanzas, Cuba; Abiel Griswold's personal accounting of the 36 marriages he performed as Justice of the Peace (which are not recorded in town records); and Augustin Hayden's journal of his experiences during the Ticonderoga campaigns in 1758 and 1759. Come see them for yourselves!

I get the most satisfaction, however, from making connections – connections between our visitors and the Windsor landscape of their ancestors, between objects within the collection, and reconstructing the stories of Windsor families and neighborhoods from the past. Might this be my legacy? Certainly there are plenty of notes in my handwriting in the files cross referencing photos, ephemera, books, and memoirs with other parts of the collection. Our cataloging database gets more robust every day. But when a library visitor or student or volunteer is awed by the direct personal connection they feel with the people, places, and evidence of the past, I really feel I've done my job. We hold the objects in the collection in trust for just these moments.

Thank you for the opportunity to learn something new every day, to make serendipitous discoveries and research-based connections, and to leave with a host of friends who have made a lasting impact on my life.

I'm grateful to you all, near and far.



The multi-generational Egan family on the steps of the Windsor Hotel, ca.1905
Photo by Ralph Frost. *WHS Collection*, 1989.23.2

Upcoming Programs at Windsor Historical Society

For more information contact the Society at 860-688-3813 or info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org

October 4, 1:30 PM - 4 PM: **FREE: The Grand Re-Opening of Windsor Historical Society's Strong-Howard House.** Be one of the first to experience Windsor Historical Society's newly reopened Keeping Room and Pantry which completes the restoration! See hearth cooking in process and examine food preparation and storage tools used by Ann Howard. Sit in the parlor or at the dining table, examine bolts of fine fabric and millinery goods in the story, try out a four-poster bed, and pull some clothing out of the high chest or mending basket to try on. At 1:00, hear briefly from Curator Christina Vida and contractor John Armstrong about the restoration and view the official ribbon-cutting ceremonies at 1:30. Enjoy cake, punch and some foods of the period. Try period games such as graces and rolling hoops, and take home a keepsake tour booklet. Cost: FREE.

October 13, 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM: **From Memory to Memoir: Writing Your Life Story** at Windsor Historical Society's Research Library. **Session 1 of 6: Why You Want to Write Your Life Story and Quieting Your Inner Critic.** Turn memories of significant events in your life into a memoir for posterity. No previous writing experience required. Susan Omilian has been encouraging and guiding budding memoir writers for many years. Sessions follow on October 20 (**Mining a Childhood Memory for the Jewels, Working with Memories**), October 27 (**Focusing on Defining Moments**), November 3 (**Deciding Theme and Structure for your Life Story**), November 10 (**Using Pictures, Documents and the Rest**), and November 17 (**Editing your Memoir, Preparing it for Publication, Tips on Self-Publishing**). COST: \$75 for six session course. Class size is limited.

October 16, 5 PM: **Windsor Historical Society's Significant Objects Writing Contest Submission Deadline.** The mystery of the shoe buckle found buried underneath the Howards' fireplace is the subject of this year's writing contest. Archaeologists uncovered the silvered shoe buckle dating to the late 1700s as part of the Strong-Howard House renovations, but questions still remain. Why was this fancy item in a pit? Where is its mate? Who did it belong to? Authors must intertwine the shoe buckle and Windsor in a 500-word submission in any genre (creative fiction, poetry, non-fiction, letter, etc.). **Submissions will be accepted anytime until Friday, October 16th at 5 p.m.**, then reviewed by the Society and judged based on creative use of language, Windsor connections, and overall quality. All entries will be displayed in the Society's Meeting Room. Five writings will be selected for a public reading inside the Strong-Howard House on Sunday, November 1st at 2 PM. Awards of \$100 will be given for the best adult (over 18) and the top student (18 and under) submissions.

Email your submission to Christina Vida at cvida@windsorhistoricalsociety.org. For more information, criteria, and contest details, contact the Society.

October 21, 7 PM - 8 PM: **In Search of the 1757 Meetinghouse: How a Bridge Divided then Reunited First Church** at Windsor Historical Society. All that remains of the 1757 meetinghouse today is the cornerstone on the northeast corner of the iconic 1794 Meetinghouse that anchors Palisado Green. For the past year, Al Boehm has combed through the archives, exploring town and church records, highway records, and correspondence in a search to learn more about the church's third meetinghouse. In this special Archives Month program, see what Al has learned about the meetinghouse, church politics and the Great Awakening, Windsor bridges and highways, and how towns formed in the 1750-1800 time period. Al's programs are popular. Come early to be assured of a seat! Cost: \$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 WHS and First Church members.

October 29 5:30 PM - 7 PM: **Reception and Unveiling George Belden talk at Windsor Historical Society.** Enjoy a wine and cheese reception with us to celebrate the return of a Windsor cabinetmaker George Beldon's bowfront chest of drawers. It will reside in Windsor thanks to a generous long-term loan from The Connecticut Historical Society. At 6:30, Windsor Historical Society Christina Vida will share details of George Belden's life and practice in Windsor from 1793 until the mid-1830s, and the sources she has plumbed to reveal more about George Belden and his world. She will also highlight other Connecticut Historical Society objects on loan that help us tell the stories of Windsor's history and development. Cost: \$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 WHS and CHS members.

November 1, 2 PM: **The Mystery of the Shoe Buckle Lecture and Writing Contest Award Ceremony at Windsor Historical Society.** Archaeologists uncovered the silvered shoe buckle dating to the late 1700s as part of the Strong-Howard House renovations, but questions still remain. Join us inside the Strong-Howard House (where it was discovered) to hear about its uncovering from Curator Christina Vida and learn from Robyn Beausoleil and Matthew Grillo of AHS, Inc. in Storrs, CT, about the conservation techniques they used on the 18th-century metal buckle. The highlight of the event will be the reading of the top five entries in the juried Significant Objects Writing Contest and the awarding of \$100 prizes to the top adult and student authors. The event is FREE and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

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Programs, continued from page 7

November 8, 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM: **A Ride to Remember: Bus Tour of Hayden Station, Rainbow and Poquonock** with historian Beverly Garvan and Sterling Viets, and Windsor Historical Society Director Christine Ermenc. Where did these villages of Windsor get their names? Who were the people who lived in these areas and what were the significant landmarks and businesses? Hop on a school bus and find out. Each participant will receive a packet of historic maps, photographs and images from Windsor Historical Society collections to compare with the features they see as the tour progresses. Evocative stories about the area from the *Windsor Storytellers* books will be shared. Spaces are limited; our bus tours sell out fast. Reserve your spot by Friday, November 6 by calling 860-688-3813 or contacting info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org. School bus will meet participants at the Society. \$10 adults, \$9 seniors and students, \$8 WHS members.

November 11, 10 AM – 12 noon: **Behind the Mask: Living History at Windsor Historical Society.** In spring of 2015, the Society worked with director Kandie Carle and actors Susan Buchholz and Walter Mantani who performed as Ann and Nathaniel Howard. How did they bring these people to life? What historic source materials did they find most useful? What challenges did they experience before and during the performances and how did they address them? Living history is far more than putting on a costume and leading a tour; learn how the techniques of history and theater combine in fascinating ways. Cost: FREE. Limited space; to make your reservation, contact the Society by November 10.

November 20, 5:30 PM – 9 PM: **Windsor Historical Society's Festive Pre-Holiday Auction** provides the perfect opportunity to find great holiday gifts and getaways for someone you love, sponsor school buses for field trips to the Society or make the holidays special for a Windsor family in need! Tickets at \$35 cover a delicious buffet dinner, beer and wine at 130 Deerfield Road, Windsor (the

old Elks Lodge, beautifully renovated by the Carmons.) Purchase your tickets or offer an auction donation by contacting the Society.

December 4, 5:30 PM – 7 PM: **Holiday Fun for Adults: Discover and Sample Forgotten Drinks of Colonial New England at Windsor Historical Society.** Colonial New England was awash in ales, beers, wines, and spirits. Everyone from teenage farm workers to our founding fathers imbibed heartily and often. Ring in the holidays with an exploration of the origins and tastes of some of the favorite beverages of early Americans. Ever heard of flip? Syllabub? Rattleskull? Switchel? Learn more from Corin Hirsch, award-winning author of “Forgotten Drinks of Colonial New England.” Then visit four stations including the new kitchen of the Society’s Strong-Howard House to see the drinks made and to taste samples of these forgotten but surprisingly delicious beverages. Recipes provided. \$10 adults, \$9 seniors, \$8 WHS members.

December 5, 1 PM - 4 PM: **Holiday Fun for Families: Make Your Own Gingerbread House at Windsor Historical Society.** Celebrate this year’s reopening of the Strong-Howard House by making a holiday gingerbread house of your own to take home. We’ll start by passing out cartons of chocolate milk. Drink it, dump it, then use that empty carton as a base for home construction and unleash your creativity. Build your gingerbread house with frosting and graham crackers, and decorate it with Necco wafers, M&M’s, candy-canes, and more. While waiting for your house to “set”, explore in our Hands-On History Learning Center and tour the Strong-Howard House, where everything is hands-on. You may try out the beds, sit at the dining table, explore kitchen tools and implements and try on some clothing. Happy Holidays! Cost: \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, \$3 children, \$2 members. Help us know how many supplies to purchase; make your reservation for this program by December 3 by calling the Society.

Visiting the Society

The Society is open Wednesdays through Saturdays with tours of the historic houses conducted at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. Our admission fee is \$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.

Can’t make it to the Society in person? For in-depth research resources, check out our website, www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org.

For daily updates and historical tidbits, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @windsorct1633.