



Windsor Historical Society

# News



Volume 24, No. 3

A quarterly publication of the Windsor Historical Society of Windsor, Connecticut

September 2006

## Exhibition Opens - *Windsor Artists: Then and Now*

Erin Stevic, Curator

What inspires an artist? Some artists see a tree and envision a table, others use the memory of a field to paint a landscape, and still others make the human body a canvas for their creativity. Each artist's work is a unique mixture of experience and inspiration. As 19<sup>th</sup> century writer Oscar Wilde explained, "Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has ever known." But can an artist function exclusively as an individual? How much does environment influence an artist's work? How does the artist respond to his or her surroundings?

The Society's new exhibition, *Windsor Artists: Then and Now*, explores the many ways past and present artists have contributed to Windsor's artistic heritage. Opening September 9, 2006, the show brings together artwork from 25 contemporary artists and 15 historic artists, including painters, printmakers, photographers, sculptors, woodworkers, potters, textile artists, and metalworkers. Modern and historic pieces hang side by side in the exhibition; and visitors have the rare opportunity to compare the artistic technique, style, and

subjects of *Windsor Artists: Then and Now*.

*Windsor Artists* highlights the Society's collections of fine and decorative arts. Some of the artists in the collection are nationally known like 19<sup>th</sup>-century painter Albert Fitch Bellows. Bellows lived in Windsor while he painted his three-canvas series, *Life's Day: Thrice across the Stream*, which depicts Windsor residents crossing the Farmington River to commemorate the milestones of birth, marriage, and death. Other pieces of artwork in the exhibition come from lesser-known artists. Esther Moore Halsey was a local wife and mother when she designed a beaded bag in 1837. Halsey decorated her bag with a floral needlework pattern commonly taught in 19<sup>th</sup> century female academies. While never a masterpiece, her bag reflects a period of American history when women's education emphasized training in the decorative and domestic arts.



Excerpt from *Life's Day: Thrice across the Stream* by Albert Fitch Bellows

**WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
Presents

**WINDSOR ARTISTS**  
Then & Now

**Public Opening**  
September 9, 2006  
12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Windsor Artists Exhibition  
Windsor Palette and Brush Club Show  
Painting Demonstrations in Historic District  
Free Supplies for Creating Your Own Art

96 Palisado Avenue • Windsor, CT

The Society also collects contemporary artwork showing aspects of Windsor's history. Included in the exhibition is Daniel Mack's 2003 painting *The Ballad of Mack Street*, which recalls the artist's childhood on Mack Street in the 1930's. Also displayed are Jan Dagenhart's painting of Windsor's Victorian-style town hall before

(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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Open Tuesday - Saturday  
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Closed major holidays

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Vol. 24, No. 3 September 2006

## Director's Message

### *Sights on the Future*

How many times have you heard the saying "Our children are our future"? Because of it, most history museums make special efforts to attract school audiences. In 1923, Society members voted an appropriation of \$15.00 for the best Windsor-history-based one-act play, essay, or short story by a Windsor school student. Today, devoted volunteers take suitcases filled with photocopied documents and reproduction artifacts into area classrooms and welcome school audiences to our facilities. Yet, much of our school tour business comes from outside Windsor, a situation we'd like to change.



Christine Ermenc

Field trips are increasingly tough for schools; with gasoline prices on the increase, school bus costs have risen significantly. Disposable time for student activities is decreasing rapidly. As a result of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, school-wide testing in Connecticut is now mandated in grades 3-8 and 10. In the past, when museums created quality museum programs tied to social studies standards and marketed them adequately, school audiences followed. Today, museum programs must align with literacy, mathematics, and science skills on the tests to have a chance of being used.

The Windsor schools are in the process of extensive curriculum revisions. Pamela Brisson, Windsor's grades 6-12 social studies curriculum supervisor, told me, "Staff members in Windsor schools deeply value our relationships with the Windsor Historical Society and look forward to strengthening them to help nurture a passion for history among our students." Pam encourages development of summertime, vacation week and after-school programs linked to the language arts sections of the Connecticut Academic Performance Tests for grade 10 and Connecticut Mastery Tests for grades 3-8. Field trips during classroom time are harder for her to justify, but she hasn't ruled them out completely. Windsor teachers are learning new ways to teach these literacy skills, and Pamela Brisson has generously offered to coordinate teaching workshops with our staff and volunteers.

I am currently applying for funding for an educator to work closely with Windsor schools on community programs for Windsor's 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. We have a good chance of finding support and developing school programs Windsor and area schools can use. The Connecticut Mastery Test's Fourth Generation Language Arts Handbook (p. vii) states that a "language art program:

- provides a foundation for students' success in all content areas and in future careers;
- enables students to obtain and communicate information;
- provides exposure to others' lives and to worlds beyond their own...;
- helps students use language to think critically and solve problems in everyday life; and
- provides students with the tools and motivation to continue their learning beyond school."

History provides an equally viable means of achieving these goals, and we look forward to working in closer partnership with the Windsor schools.

(Continued from page one), Exhibition Opens - Windsor Artists

its demolition, and Barbara van Winkelen's painting of the O.W. Mills homestead, which she based on a 1879 photograph.

Looking to Windsor's present as well as its past, the exhibition highlights artwork from artists working in Windsor today. The exhibition includes over 30 original pieces on loan from local artists, including painters Patricia Day, Cathy Doocy, Holly Pelton, Jane Pelton, Lotti Greer, Betty Rice and Susan Tait Porcaro. Guests can study photographs by Wayne Dombkowski, Leonard Hellerman, and Ann Hodgdon-Cyr; pottery and jewelry from Lis-el Crowley and Alexis Crowley; prints and mixed media images from Linda Fellows; and sculptures from Lon Pelton. Guests can also enjoy textiles from Ina Forman, Chris Gooding, Maureen Sullivan, Barbara West Jarvis, and Nightwing Whitehead; and furniture from Jack Alberti and Jonathan Tarbox.

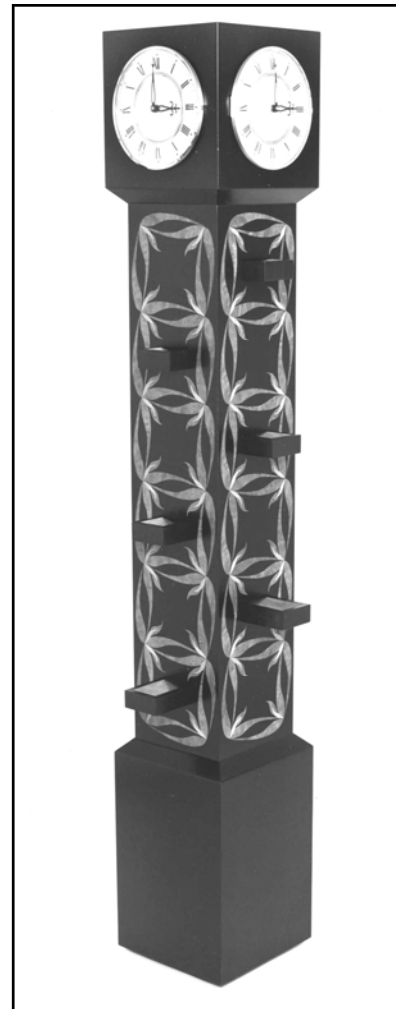
*Windsor Artists: Then and Now* features a special section on Windsor's art organizations. These groups offer individual artists camaraderie with their peers, lessons in new techniques, and opportunities to display and sell their artwork. Three of Windsor's art organizations have contributed to the *Windsor Artists* exhibition. The Friendship Quilters have loaned the Society a quilt created as a group project. The Windsor Palette and Brush Club pays tribute to four deceased

members in the exhibition, and current members will show their artwork in the Society's Meeting Room from September 9 through mid-October. The Women Artists Collective's display includes paintings, photographs, and art books made by its members. The Collective will also hold their semi-annual sale in the Society's Meeting Room on October 27 and 28. Items not sold at the sale will be displayed in the Meeting Room through November 30, and the Society will receive a 40% commission on any Collective artwork sold from the Meeting Room display in November.

There is plenty for art lovers to see and do at the Society this fall. Come to the free exhibition opening September 9 from 12:00 - 4:00 pm and return for one of the many art demonstrations, talks, and tours on the Society's fall program calendar. Let *Windsor Artists: Then and Now* inspire your artistic side as you investigate Windsor's deep artistic roots, revisit favorite pieces, and discover new artists.



Esther Moore Halsey's beaded purse, c. 1837  
WHS Collections



Tower Clock #2  
by Jack Alberti

# 1830's Account Book Returns to Windsor

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

What a wonderful surprise! Several months ago our curator received a call from a man in Illinois offering us the gift of an 1830's account book with records of transactions in "Windsor." He had purchased the book hoping that it was from an early Illinois merchant. Volunteer researcher Bev Garvan took on the task of checking the names and entries in the volume to verify its possible Windsor, CT, provenance. This was necessary before the Collections Committee could formally accept the book. As her examination proceeded, three distinct sections to the book became apparent. Determining the connection between them took more research, but the clues and leads she found to solve the puzzle of whose account book it might have been captivated everyone who was following the investigation.

The first step in the evaluation was to confirm that the names in the book were of people who actually lived in Windsor in the 1830's. The daybook contained a litany of familiar names: men such as Levi Hayden, Jasper Morgan, Eliakim Marshall, Henry A. Sill, and William Pierson. Reading the account book more closely, Bev could see that beginning on January 1, 1830, the entries recorded regular transactions for the sale of a wide range of dry goods, food, liquor, and general merchandise. A "waggon whip" was sold to Capt. William Alford and 3 yards of "full'd cloth" and a dozen buttons to William Porter, Jr. Brandy, tea, tobacco, lamp oil, molasses, calico, and even raisins appeared in the listings, but after a few months these transactions come to an end.

The second portion of the journal details work that was done for a variety of other people and the amount the laborer was paid for each job. The unknown writer took in boarders, did haying and fencing, and cared for family members. In March 1832 he earned \$3.50 for "boarding school master" and another \$1.25 "for carting one load wood as agreed." On April 9, 1833, he spent a "1/2 day loading hay & going to get a buckett for Increase Mather" and received 50 cents.

The final two pages include inventories of personal goods that were stored at five separate houses in Windsor in the spring of 1839. It appears the owner may have left town, for among other things he left "3 trunks linen bedding, tea table, candle stand, mahogany clock" at Roger Phelps'; a "parlour stove pipe cap & legs, kitchen baking

stove Motts Patent with pipe, 1 shovel & tongs brass head" at a Broad Street house; and "1 box day books, 1 box private library, 1 box caps & stockings" at J. Baker's.

Apparently the author did quite a bit of work for Increase Mather, both outdoor chores and personal care. On April 10, 1838, he was paid by Increase for "attending on his family 42 days from his confinement to this day." A few months later on September 20 he records "3 days taking care of Uncle at different times, 1/2 day at a time," and on October 24 he was paid \$3.63 "for shaving him 29 weeks at his house." Increase Mather died just a couple of days later, on October 26, 1838, at the age of 87, a widower with no children of his own. Using the Mather genealogy, Bev made a list of his nephews and wondered if one of them was actually our subject. She hoped that the writer did not use the term "uncle" as an honorific title!

Close attention to the entries also shows that the owner of the daybook had made a point of recording when he settled his personal accounts. On April 25, 1832, he made the entry "This day settled with Henry A. Sill for all accounts and notes." Several years later a similar entry on February 24, 1837, says "This day settled with Elihu Loomis and paid him by dues \$4.50 in full." This entry is followed by the signature: **Allyn M. Mather**. Sensing this was an important discovery, Bev looked back

**AUCTION**  
OF A STOCK OF  
**DRY GOODS, &c. &c.**  
*TUESDAY, 31st March, 1830,*

**W**ILL be sold in front of the Auction Store, by order of Return S. Mather and Henry Sill, Trustees of Allyn M. Mather, his entire Stock in Trade, consisting of **DRY GOODS, HARDWARE, AND EARTHEN WARE**, comprising almost every article usually found in a county store.

**Also, 2 One Horse Waggon,**  
1 Gig and Harness, and a good Family Horse.  
**B. HUDSON & CO. Auctioneers.**  
If the weather is stormy, the sale will take place the first fair day afterwards.

1w0

Connecticut Courant newspaper, March 23, 1830

at the list of Increase Mather's nephews. Indeed there was one named Allyn M. Mather. Could he be the person responsible for our account book?

We next turned to the *Historical Hartford Courant*, a searchable digital archive of the early issues of this Connecticut newspaper. We found seven notices between 1797 and 1826 that advertised goods for sale by Allyn M. Mather and his sometimes partners, Edward Selden and Job Allyn, Jr. Then in the March 23, 1830, issue there was a public notice for an "AUCTION of a stock of DRY GOODS, &c. &c. ... comprising almost every article usually found in a county store." The date of the auction of Mather's "entire Stock in Trade" correlates with the end of the entries in the first part of the account book.

Now, we wondered, exactly where was this property located? One of the *Courant* notices had mentioned Broad Street, so it was time to examine our early maps and to take a trip to look at land records in Town Hall. Allyn Mather owned the house at 306 Broad Street. It was located across the street from his uncle Col. Oliver Mather's house, the present home of Windsor Public Library. Land records show that he owned a number of pieces of property in the center of town but during the 1820's and 30's sold most of them to satisfy outstanding debts.

Our library files also describe this house as the Patterson house adjacent to the Windsor Hardware Co. and Creamery Brook. Originally the structure stood near the road, but it had been moved back a short distance at the

turn of the 20th century. In 1957 it was moved down the road to the former Moses Holt property to make room for the First National Store (now Geissler's Supermarket).

A portrait has emerged of a man who operated a general store for more than thirty years, had a succession of business partners, and eventually auctioned or sold much of his property. For several more years he took on a wide variety of jobs, paid his creditors, and finally divided up his possessions and stored them with relatives and neighbors. Allyn Mather was in his 60's when his wife Parthena and uncle Increase died in 1838, only a few months before the end of the account book. Did he go to live with his daughter Sarah and her husband in Illinois? We can only speculate, but apparently he died in Illinois in 1860.

Windsor Historical Society has many account books in its collection. If more of them were given such a close examination, many interesting stories might be revealed. Our researcher found that each careful reading of the daybook revealed fresh details. She was able to make connections and build this story out of diverse bits and pieces of documented history. Focusing closely on the details is one way to study history. It allows us to take an in-depth look at the everyday lives of ordinary people and thoughtfully compare them to our own.



Allyn M. Mather's house at 306 Broad Street, Windsor.  
The Bruce MacClintic Photo Collection, WHS.

### New Indexes for Old Document Project Collection

The Old Document Project is a composite collection of some of the Society's primary documents. It contains more than 1500 items dated from 1640 to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Land records, bills and receipts, probate inventories, tax lists, and legal notices are some of the kinds of materials in the collection. New indexes to the project have recently been placed in the library. Researchers may now search across the whole collection by name, date, or type of document. In the past, each of the 21 notebooks in the collection had to be searched individually. Now associations between documents can be made more easily. Look for the index on the Society's website soon.

# Update from the Strong House Historic Structure Report

(Continued from March 2006)

Erin Stevic, Curator

For architectural historian Tom Paske, head of the research team studying the Strong House, every mantel, floorboard, and nail reveals a moment in the house's 250-year history. Tom spent this spring examining the house, recording structural observations, photographing architectural details, and compiling a timeline of the house's history. I recently toured the house with Tom for a progress update on his team's Historic Structure Report.

Tom's research shows that the Strong House has undergone six major construction phases. The original house, likely built by John and Sarah Strong around 1758, was a small, gambrel-roofed house with two first-floor rooms, an unfinished second floor, a cellar kitchen and possibly a lean-to. In the second phase, a gable extension was added to the house's west side between 1760 and 1800. This extension stopped at what is now the large beam in the "Keeping Room".

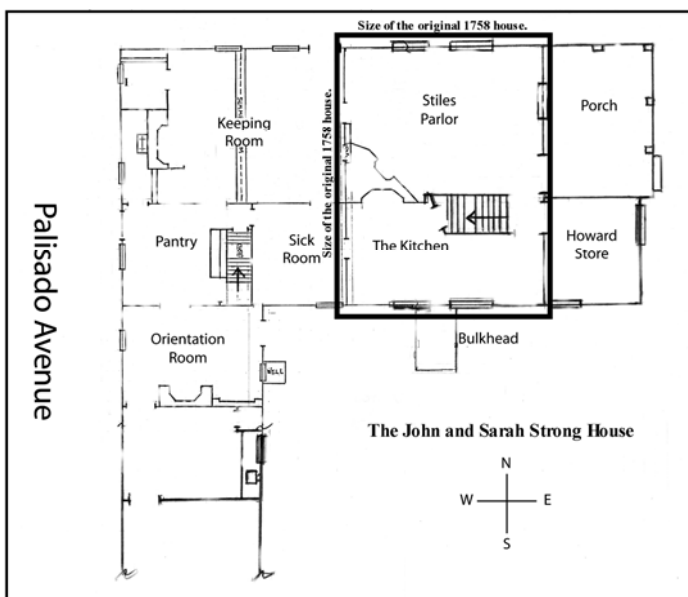
Captain Nathaniel Howard finished the two rooms on the second floor and extended the west gable to its present size between 1800 and 1820, creating a large first-floor kitchen and additional attic space during phase three. In the fourth phase, the Howards added a lean-to on the east side of the house, which required that they move the original bulkhead from the east side of the foundation to the south side. The Stiles sisters

made the fifth set of changes to the house after they arrived in 1837. They added Victorian details to the house's interior and exterior, closed the kitchen fireplace, and added a kitchen stove.

Windsor Historical Society members are responsible for the final series of alterations to the house. After purchasing the home in 1925, they used it as their museum headquarters, a historic house, a short-lived tea-room, and lodging for guests and tenants. They struggled to make the house suitable for modern habitation while also restoring its colonial appearance. They strengthened the floors, added (and later removed) modern plumbing, tore down a Victorian front porch, and rebuilt several fireplaces. The Society's early work was not always historically accurate, but it set a precedent for historic inquiry and preservation that we still follow.

Tom Paske's research has uncovered new questions about the Strong House. He found trace evidence of early plaster and wonders whether plaster walls were part of the original house or an early addition. He also questions whether the home's ornate east doorway is original or a later addition. Tom hopes that further research will answer these and other questions, but he knows that architectural research will never reveal every chapter in the house's history. Colonial houses sometimes sat unfinished for years, lost historic details when additions were added, or were built with materials salvaged from other sources. These irregularities can taint a researcher's data and make it impossible to determine undisputable facts about a historic house.

The Strong House still holds unanswered questions, but Tom and the Society are certain that the house is a rare survival of an 18<sup>th</sup> century, middle-class house. Research on the Strong House will continue during the fall. Look for updates in upcoming newsletters as the Strong House continues to reveal its secrets.





## Museum Job Opening - Office Manager

Windsor Historical Society seeks an Office Manager to set up and manage internal systems including phone, database, mailings, bookkeeping, financial and other report preparation. Also serves as administrative assistant to the Executive Director. Excellent computer skills and experience with QuickBooks and MS Office required. Must be highly organized, accurate, and enjoy working as a member of a fast-paced team. Four-day work week (could become full-time in the future). Send cover letter, resume, and salary requirements to: Christine Ermenc, Director, Windsor Historical Society, 96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor CT 06095 or [cermenc@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:cermenc@windsorhistoricalsociety.org)

## Volunteers

**Curatorial:** Ruth Ann Graime, Tom McGrath.

**Front desk and administrative:** Doris Butler, Elaine Colli, Ruth Daly, Carolyn Doyle, Julie Fewster, Shirley Grossman, Alice Hooker, Ruth Kirschner, Jane Morris, Libby Parker, Janice Provost, Mary Ransom, Barbara Jo Rockwell, Evelyn Singer, Marion Singer, Jim Trocchi, Bill Warner-Prouty, Vivian Webster, Ellie Word.

**Library:** Kathy Bostwick, Elaine Brophy, Bev Garvan, Bill Harris, Sandy McGraw.

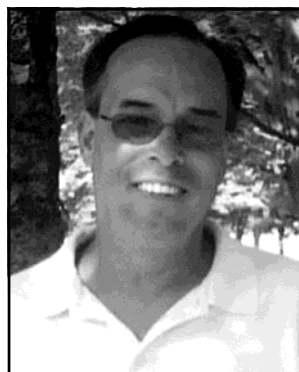
**Shad Derby helpers:** Abigail Blough, Ruth Budlong, Marsha Mason, Mary Ransom, Ron Renaud, Jim Trocchi.

**Grounds:** Town of Windsor, Jim Trocchi, Windsor Garden Club.

## Good Deeds Lead to Others: Paul Suto Paints Strong House

Christine Ermenc

Thanks to generous donors who responded to our appeal for grounds improvements, a new lighted street sign for Palisado Avenue is being constructed, our main entrance is clearly identified with new signage and all wood trim on the Mills building is freshly painted. As Paul Suto and his crew painted the Mills building, Paul couldn't help looking over at the Strong House and noticing that it too was badly in need of fresh paint.



Paul Suto

Paul is a self-described "nostalgia nut" who owns a Greek Revival home, specializes in paint-restoration work, and considers himself lucky to live in Connecticut's first town. It just didn't seem right to him that a major symbol of Windsor's history should look shabby on the eve of Windsor's 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and he wanted to give something back to the community. He decided to offer us a free-of-charge paint job for the Strong House and asked the Sherwin-Williams Company to donate the paint. They were happy to oblige and liked this project enough to feature it in their nationwide publication this fall.

Next, we asked Historic Structure Report consultant Thomas Paske about the house's early paint colors. Tom took two paint samples from clapboards, one

from a window pediment on the Strong House's north side, and others from the door trim, door pilaster, and an east side corner board. The samples were analyzed by John Vaughn of Architectural Conservation Services in Bristol, RI.

Paint analysis uncovered 24 to 28 layers of paint on different sections of the house, not unusual for a 250-year-old building. Clapboard analysis unveiled a range of colors from reds to yellows to light green to purple-gray to brown. The home's most recent paint layers are red. But what was the color of the earliest layer? Would Windsor residents have to get used to a new color? Paint analysis revealed that the Strong House clapboards were originally painted red with off-white, possibly light yellow, trim on the east side doorway.

Thanks to Paul Suto, the Sherwin-Williams Company, our generous grounds-improvement donors, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and Connecticut Humanities Council who funded the Historic Structure Report, the Strong House will soon be sparkling and ready for Windsor's 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008.

# Upcoming Events at Windsor Historical Society

Unless noted otherwise, all events are held at the Society. Go to [www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org) for more programs.

**September 9** noon - 4 p.m.  
*Windsor Artists: Then and Now* exhibition opening  
Spotlight on Windsor painters and watercolorists program with plain air painting demonstration. Create your own art with provided supplies. COST: Free

**September 26** 7 - 8:30 p.m.  
Art talk: Spotlight on Windsor Photographers  
Wayne Dombkowski, Leonard Hellerman and Ann Hodgdon-Cyr show slides and talk about work and techniques.  
COST: Free/WHS members; \$6/adults; \$5 seniors and students.

**October 14** 1 - 4:30 p.m.  
Bus tour: Spotlight on 3-D Windsor Artists  
Start at WHS with puppets then visit Evelyn Batchelder sculptures around Windsor, Art and Soul Gallery for a pottery demo and Lon Pelton's property. Reservations required by October 10.  
COST: \$10/WHS members; \$15/non members.

**October 19** 7 - 8:30 p.m.  
Art Talk: Spotlight on Historic Ceramics  
Katherine Hunt, NEH Home Life Project Curator at the Connecticut Historical Society, will survey the evolution of ceramic types and forms from the 17th through 19th centuries.  
COST: \$4/WHS members; \$6/adults; \$5 seniors and students.

**October 27** 6 - 8 p.m. Free admission  
**October 28** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Free admission  
Women Artists Collective Show and Sale opening  
Interact with artists at the opening and see mixed media. The show and sale runs Tuesdays through Saturdays until Nov. 30 as part of WHS general admission.

**October 29** 3 - 5 p.m.  
Memory Walk through Palisado Cemetery  
Explore past lives with the Windsor Jesters theatrical group. Tour begins at WHS with hot cider, gingerbread and a lesson on gravestone art. We'll walk across Rt. 159 to the cemetery.  
Reservations required by October 27.  
COST: \$8/WHS members; \$10/adults; \$9 seniors and students.

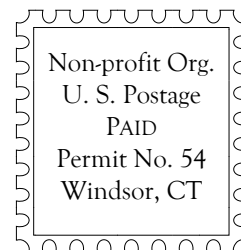
**November 11** 2 - 4 p.m.  
Fashion Show: Spotlight on Windsor Fiber Artists  
Clothing, felted-wool accessories, woven pocketbooks, painted silk scarves, quilted vests, woven jackets and more are featured.  
COST: \$4/WHS members; \$6/adults; \$5 seniors and students.

**November 16** 7 - 8:30 p.m.  
Art Talk: Spotlight on Windsor Furniture Makers, Past and Present. Jack Alberti and Jon Tarbox show slides and discuss work and techniques. Curator Erin Stevic provides historic perspective.  
COST: \$4/WHS members; \$6/adults; \$5 seniors and students.



**Windsor  
Historical Society**

96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor, Connecticut 06095



## *Come to the Tea Party*

Saturday, November 4  
3:30 p.m.



Kandie Carle

\$25/person.  
\$22.50/WHS members.  
Reservations req'd by  
October 28 by calling  
860/688-3813