



Windsor Historical Society

News



Volume 26, No. 1

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

March 2008

FOUR CENTURIES HOUSE TOUR

Saturday, April 26

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



Christine Ermenc, Executive Director

Photos by Priscilla Ford

Mark your calendars and plan to attend a memorable community event! It's Windsor Historical Society's fourth house tour happening Saturday, April 26th. Eight homes representing four centuries will be open for touring. Once again, the Windsor Jesters will portray early homeowners by greeting visitors in historic costume and sharing details of their lives.

The theme of this year's tour is *Four Centuries of Building Preservation*. Windsor has always been proud of its first-town status. Architectural preservation is a long-standing tradition in town, as our house tour will show. You'll tour modest and grand-scale homes of different ages in a variety of architectural styles. Tickets are on sale at the Society and at various spots around town for \$20 in advance of the tour and \$25 the day of the tour. Here's a sneak preview of the homes you'll be seeing:



302 Rainbow Road

This 1898 Victorian home was built for teamster Fredus Case and his family. In the 20th century the family ran Case Oil Company, and oil trucks were garaged out back. Architectural features of the home include wrap-around porches, a stunning display of Victorian fretwork at the entrance to the front parlor, original Victorian door knobs, hardware and stained glass, canvas ceilings, and the original mudroom where oilmen stripped off their boots and outer garments before heading upstairs to the kitchen to wash.

37 Elm Street

The survival of any 17th century building is rare. This building, originally constructed in 1664 by Deacon John Moore, has been moved three times. It retains its 17th century overhangs and several original pendants plus small windows that held in the heat. The home has lost its center chimney, and its interior floor plan has been significantly changed to accommodate central heating and plumbing and the more open flow arrangement preferred by modern homeowners. The original wide pine floorboards can still be seen upstairs, and the posts and beams used to frame the house are visible throughout.



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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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Closed major holidays

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Director's Message

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director



As we launch our community oral history and photograph collecting initiatives, I find myself returning to the heart of Windsor Historical Society's mission: *connecting people with Windsor's past, encouraging a sense of belonging in the present, and promoting responsibility for Windsor's future as a community.*

Connecting, encouraging, promoting, belonging are positive and easy words to embrace. Responsibility is one of those "heavy," "act your age" words; as an oldest child, I heard that word a lot growing up. It implies obligation and effort, something of a weight on one's shoulders. And yet it's the word I return to when I think about what we're trying to accomplish with our oral history project.

Windsor is an interesting community. There are people whose families have been here forever, and there are people who have just moved here and may not be here long. Windsor is a more diverse community than many in Connecticut. Our town incorporates several village centers with residents of varying ages and ethnic backgrounds, a fascinating mix of people who lead increasingly busy lives. With the internet has come a whole new level of regional, national, and global interactivity, which is exciting. On the other hand, fewer and fewer of our town residents, (particularly newer ones and younger ones,) feel a deep connection to the place they live in.

Starting our community oral history project requires a leap of faith, a lot of organization and some luck. What will our focus be? Will community elders be willing to share their stories and will we reach them in time? Will we be able to find interviewers? Will the reminiscences be accurate? How will we make our oral histories accessible to the public? Our "Coming of Age in Windsor" initiative places seniors and high school students together to share school and work experiences, ethnic traditions, and the joys and awkwardness of growing up. Will it foster the kind of intergenerational connections we hope for? Will the oral history project inspire a sense of belonging and sense of place in Windsor's newer residents?

Think back to the pleasure you took from a parent or grandparent's stories about life long ago. Think back to a relative or community elder who inspired you once. Think back and remember a place that held special meaning in your life. A community oral history project is a compact with our community's past and with its future. It's effort. It's responsibility. But it's also a chance to make a connection, feel a sense of belonging, and discover others who share your interests. Each connection, each interview helps to build a more complete picture of Windsor's 20th century evolution. Join us!

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The Oliver Ellsworth Homestead
778 Palisado Avenue

This imposing home was built in 1781 by Samuel Denslow, Jr. for Oliver Ellsworth, Windsor's most famous 18th century citizen. It cost 310 English pounds. Ellsworth served as an influential member of the Continental Congress. His voice was instrumental in framing the U.S. Constitution, and he went on to serve as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. His home, maintained as a museum by the Connecticut Daughters of the American Revolution, was extensively restored in 1989. Its elegant wallpaper, paneling, and closets and high ceilings in the 1790's wing testify to the national status of its famous owner.



336 Palisado Avenue

This double-hipped roof Georgian mansion house with white corner quoins is said to have been built in 1740 for Jonathan Ellsworth. Other sources say it was completed in 1784. It remained in the Ellsworth family for generations before its restoration in the 1960's by Albro Case. An elaborate Connecticut

River Valley scroll-pedimented doorway added to the home by Case opens onto a spacious central hallway with grand staircases reaching the attic. Interior architectural features include an elaborate newel post at the base of the staircase, ten working fireplaces, and decorative wall paneling. The home recalls the prosperity of 18th-century Windsor when shipping was king.

33 Mechanic Street , Unit 108

In the spring of 2007, 50 residential condominium units opened in the old factory complex which once housed Spencer Arms Company, Eddy Electric Company and General Electric. Unit #108 is located



on the first floor of the 1891 Eddy Electric Company building. This airy unit features the high ceilings, large windows, exposed brick work, massive load-bearing ash beams stabilized with iron collars, and exposed fireboxes typical of late 19th century factories. While visiting, you may see and hear a train going by, another legacy of the factory era. Railroads shipped the coal necessary to power factory equipment. Raw goods were shipped in and finished goods were shipped out by railroads.

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Purchase your tickets at:

- the Society (for \$2 additional, we'll mail them) or online at <http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org>.
- Ashley's Jewelry at 555 Day Hill Road
- Beanery Bistro at 25 Central Street
- Bill Selig Jewelers at 161 Broad Street
- The Water Closet at 46 Bloomfield Avenue.

Volunteer for a two-hour shift on April 26 by calling Agnes Pier at 860/688-4471 or ampier@sbcglobal.net.

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1244 Windsor Avenue

This 1921 Colonial Revival home was built for Hartford furrier Henry Burdette Williams and designed by architect A. W. Olds. The architect's blue-prints and the Williamses' original dining room furniture have been passed down with the house. Bradley and Hubbard light fixtures, built-in corner cupboards and bookshelves, a working dumbwaiter, a laundry chute extending from the attic staircase to the basement, and a fabric-lined walk-in closet with birdseye-maple cupboard doors are just a few of the original architectural features remaining in this house.



The Loomis Homestead Batchelder Road

The main part of this home dates from the mid-18th century but the one-story ell to the right was built in the 17th century by Joseph Loomis. The homestead, occupied by eight generations of the Loomis family for 300 years, has been extensively expanded and modified. At the core of the homestead is the central chimney with fireplaces that originally radiated heat out into each chamber. Wide pine floor boards and

wall paneling have been carefully preserved as have Loomis family artifacts including a 16th-century iron fireback brought over from England, family furnishings, documents, and art work.

5 Settlement Hill

This home, built in 1989 as an enhanced reproduction of the David Camp house in Newington, cloaks modern conveniences in an 18th-century setting. The owners cook at their open hearth almost every weekend and enjoy their four working fireplaces. Their collection of cooking implements includes a tin rotisserie oven, iron kettles, griddle, and toaster. The



home is heated with a high-efficiency natural gas/hot-air system. The keeping room thermostat is hidden inside a watch box, and the television is hidden inside a cupboard. Settlement Hill, an award-winning development by Edward and Linda Sunderland, features four relocated, once-endangered historic homes and five reproduction period homes grouped in a village setting.

Want to know more about Settlement Hill?

Thursday, April 17

7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

LECTURE WITH SLIDES: Developers Linda and Edward Sunderland will show how their plans to buy and dismantle a historic home in Windsor became a prize-winning neighborhood of historic homes. Sponsored by Rabbett Insurance Agency and MiddleOak Specialty Insurance offering Restorationist® antique home insurance. COST: Free with your April 26 house-tour ticket; otherwise, \$6/adults; \$5/seniors and students; \$4 WHS members.

1700 Women Scientists View Eclipse in Windsor

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

The early morning hours of January 24, 1925 were frigid. Nonetheless, men, women and children from all over the Windsor area dressed in their warmest clothes to view the long anticipated spectacle ~ a total eclipse of the sun. Few people were left on the streets as excited crowds gathered on high rooftops in Hartford, on the Connecticut River Bridge, and at Plymouth Meadow Country Club on Windsor Heights in Windsor.

The event would be considered a total eclipse within a narrow 100 mile swath through central Connecticut; north and south of that band the moon would only partially block the light of the sun. Visiting astronomers set up complex viewing and data-collecting stations at Yale, Wesleyan, and Trinity Colleges.

Nearly 1700 women students from Smith and Mount Holyoke Colleges boarded special trolleys to carry them to the railroad station for their “eclipse expedition” to Windsor. As they disembarked from the train in Windsor Center, crowds gathered on the hill at the fourth and fifth holes of the golf course. The girls were greeted by bonfires, colorful banners, coffee and sandwiches, and Loomis Institute boys.

Although the sun was obscured by thin clouds just before the eclipse was scheduled to start, the skies soon cleared and all the dramatic phases of the eclipse were visible. The spectators were prepared with pieces of smoked glass, exposed film, or special eclipse viewing cards so that they could safely look at the bright sun. At the moment of totality, the halo of the corona appeared. A universal hush fell over the crowd as everyone marveled privately at the awesome phenomenon in the skies. The darkness lasted about two minutes, and then a spontaneous and joyful shout erupted as the sun began to peep out again and light was restored.

Soon the fair scientists made their way back to the waiting trains puffing and clacking back and forth on the tracks. Trolleys resumed their schedules, businesses reopened, cars which had pulled off to the side of the road faced temporary traffic jams, and the many employees who had enjoyed a brief respite returned to their work.

Astronomers’ dreams of seeing a total eclipse of the sun under ideal conditions were realized. We are fortunate to have personal, first-hand reports published by *Hartford Times* journalists, for the eclipse was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The next total solar eclipse in the Windsor area will be in the year 2144.

Welcome, Julia Baldini WHS’s new Educator

It is with pleasure that I introduce myself as the new Educator for the Windsor Historical Society. Since January second, I have been warmly welcomed by staff, members and the community that I now feel part of this family.

While pursuing a master’s degree in Public History from CCSU, I have focused my studies on museums and Connecticut History. I have worked in the museum field spending a season as a Museum Guide at Newgate Prison and Coppermine and also as Educator & School Services Assistant at the Old State House/Connecticut Historical Society. I always enjoy working directly with the public and showing kids, families, and adults how fun, exciting and important our local history is.

I live on a small farm on Poquonock Avenue and spent many summers working in tobacco fields at Christian Farms in Suffield and locally at Brown’s. As a resident of Windsor, I have always been impressed by our town’s strong sense of community, one of the things that drew me to this position.

Over the next few years, I hope to sustain and create more programs for all ages. I look forward to working with Windsor’s local public and private schools and developing strong partnerships with more diverse programs that will enhance children’s educational experiences in and out of the classroom. However, none of this is possible without the generous support of our volunteers! If you’re interested in volunteering to teach school programs, work at the front desk, guide tours, or staff evening programs, please contact me at jbaldini@windsorhistoricalsociety.org. I look forward to meeting you at one of our programs!

New Photograph Exhibition Explores Windsor's Changing Landscape

Erin Stevic, Curator

Photographs have a special way of transporting viewers back in time. The Society's upcoming exhibition, *Windsor Then and Now: A Photo History*, uses photographs to time travel through the past hundred years and uncover how Windsor has grown and changed from 1900 to 2008. Opening May 15, the show is the second of three photograph exhibitions on view in the Society's North Gallery during Windsor's 375th year. Stop by and test your knowledge of Windsor in this engaging exhibition!



Windsor Train Station, c. 1900
Photo courtesy of William S. Leek, WHS Collections

Communities are constantly changing. People come and go. Buildings rise and fall. Roads are built and transition to accommodate new forms of transportation. Woodlands are logged for fields that later become office parks and subdivisions. Of all the records kept of Windsor, photographs provide some of the best visual details of these transformations. The Society's upcoming exhibition, *Windsor Then and Now: A Photo History*, uses photographs to compare Windsor's best-known views at different times between 1900 and 2008.

The exhibition highlights photographs from every Windsor village: Deerfield, Hayden Station, Poquonock, Rainbow, and Wilson, as well as Windsor Center. Visitors will recognize historic scenes of Broad Street Green, the Farmington River Bridge in Poquonock, and downtown Wilson. "Dead-Man's Curve" on Deerfield Road, Palisado Green, and Owen Hayden's store in Hayden Station will also be among the over sixty photographs featured in the show. These historic views will be juxtaposed with photographs of the same scenes taken in 2008 by Windsor photographer Wayne Dombkowski. By showing photographs of the same landscape over time, the exhibition encourages viewers to discover what has changed and what has remained the same about each view. While contemplating the town's evolution over the past century, visitors will also consider current town issues and envision Windsor's bright future.



Windsor Train Station in disrepair, 1957.
Photo courtesy of Julius Rusavage, WHS Collections.

Windsor Then and Now debuts in the Society's North Gallery with a free members and



Windsor Train Station remodeled, 2007
Photo courtesy of Erin Stevic

supporters opening on Thursday, May 15, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. and a free public opening Saturday, May 17th from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The show will be open during the Society's business hours through August 30th. Some of the photographs in the show also appear in the Society's new book *Windsor*, an *Image of America* book from Arcadia Publishing, on sale in the Society's gift store or online at <http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org>. For more information about the exhibition or the book, please contact the Society at 860/688-3813 or at info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org.

Volunteers

Our thanks to the following volunteers for their help:

Educators: Jay Davenport, Heather Renaud, Dorothy Simon, Bob Stisser. **Front desk /administrative:** Marsha Anderson, Barbara Byscovicz, Doris Butler, May Checho, Carolyn Doyle, Anne Drake, Shirley Grossman, Bill Harris, Josephine Mitchell, Jane Morris, Elizabeth Parker, Margaret Quigley, Mary Ransom, Evelyn and Marion Singer, Jim Trocchi, Nancy Von Hollen, Priscilla Wabrek, Vivian Webster, Connie Whigham. **Library/collections:** Elaine Brophy, Bev Garvan, Sara Hawran, Sandy McGraw, Susan Smoktunowicz. **Special Events:** Bill Allen, Betsey Blaisdell, Elaine Brophy, Bev Garvan, Elaine Hargrove, Bill Harris, Mary Ransom, Ron Renaud, Laura Toal, Ellie Word.

Virginia Chagnon is a private cleaning contractor who has been keeping our Society beautiful for thirty years this month. Thanks for all you do, Virginia!

“GREEN” April Vacation Week Programs, Spring Fling!

Julia Baldini, Educator

Windsor residents battling the winter weather can't help but dream of spring. Spring time reminds me of a lot of things, but mostly our deep connection with the earth. Pollution and global warming issues plague our thoughts frequently, but there are little steps that we can take daily to make a difference. This spring, while school children are on April vacation, come celebrate Mother Earth by bringing them to the Windsor Historical Society. Families and friends can “Go Green” and find a variety of crafts and games to delight, entertain and even educate!

The Society will offer a range of fun activities and craft projects using simple household items. Each day kids will investigate a different theme accompanied with crafts and games. On Monday, learn about paper while creating a bouquet of flowers and rain sticks. On Tuesday, create bird feeders and piggy banks using plastics. On Wednesday, get in touch with nature while exploring the different uses of plants and gardens. Create a mini garden to take back to your home! Thursday we'll concentrate on the earliest residents of Windsor, the Native Americans and English settlers. Discover the natural resources Native Americans and European settlers used for their survival over 300 years ago without the conveniences of electricity, indoor plumbing and central heat. Create animal friends out of rocks and pipe cleaner to take home. On Friday we're recycling the week's crafts for a pick and choose day! Celebrate Arbor Day by making a pinecone bird feeder to hang in your yard. In addition to games and crafts, we will also offer daily guided walking tours down to the Farmington River, where families can connect with nature while exploring the importance of the river to early settlers. Or peek through our 18th century homes and see what life was like before modern conveniences. Don't forget to pick up a brochure with simple suggestions on what you can do to make a difference for our environment.

Activities for children ages 5 - 12 will run continuously from 10am - 1pm starting Monday, April 21 through Friday, April 25. A parent or guardian must accompany their children. Activities will take place rain or shine and participants are encouraged to wear clothing suitable for messy play. Education and Day Care groups can schedule a group program in the afternoon by reservation. Costs are \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors, \$3 for children, \$2 for WHS members, or \$10 per family.

Upcoming Events at Windsor Historical Society

Unless noted otherwise, all events are held at the Society. Go to <http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org> for more programs or call 860/688-3813 to have a list mailed to you.

Tuesday, March 25 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
WORKSHOP: Making Family Memories - An Oral History Follow Up Workshop (Part Two). The February 26 participants will return to share their first interviewing experiences with the group. Led by Bruce and Sondra Stave. **Reservations required** by calling 860/688-3813 by March 24. COST: Free.

Saturday, March 29 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.
WORKSHOP: Making Family Memories - A Beginning Scrapbooking Workshop (Part Two)
The March 8 participants will return and Renata Shields will present "Getting Organized: How to Sort and Organize your Photos." **Reservations required** by calling 860/688-3813 by March 28. COST: \$10/participant.

Tuesday, April 8 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
LECTURE WITH SLIDES
Doris Burgdorf will show slides of the 1936 and 1955 floods and 1938 hurricane. Share your memories and pictures. COST: \$6/adults; \$5/seniors and students; \$4/WHS members.

Thursday, April 17 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
LECTURE about Windsor's Settlement Hill. See p. 4 for details.

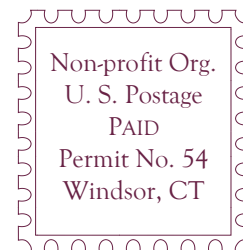
April 21-25 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
SCHOOL VACATION WEEK ACTIVITIES
Come celebrate Mother Earth where families and friends can "Go

Green" and find a variety of crafts using simple household items and games to delight, entertain, and even educate! For ages 5-12 years with a parent or guardian. COST: \$5/adults; \$4/seniors; \$3/children; \$2/WHS members; or \$10/family.

Saturday, April 26 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
FOUR CENTURIES HOUSE TOUR
A selection of Windsor residences will be open for public touring. Costumed members of the Windsor Jesters theater group will welcome you into each home and portray early homeowners. COST: advance tickets, \$20; day-of-tour tickets, \$25. Contact the Society to purchase your ticket on line or in the gift shop.

Thursday, May 15 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
EXHIBITION OPENING: *Windsor, Then and Now - A Photo History, 1890-2008.*
Discover what has changed and what has remained the same all over Windsor. See views of Deerfield, Hayden Station, Poquonock, Rainbow, and Wilson as well as Windsor center. Exhibition runs through 8/30/08. COST: Free for this event.

Tuesday, June 3 7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
VISIONS OF WINDSOR PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST
The Society invites local photographers to show up to five minutes of work in Power Point format. Audience members will vote for winners. COST: \$6/adults; \$5/seniors and students; \$4/WHS members.



Friends and families: There is no admission on the first Thursday of each month until 7 p.m. for tours, library, learning center, and exhibitions.