



## A Treasured Tradition: The Shad Derby

Sheryl Scruggs, Volunteer

No, it's not just about a hat; no, it's not about a soap box derby. It's about a fish! The shad, largest member of the herring family, is also known as *Alosa sapidissima*, which roughly translates from Latin as "good to eat" or "most delicious." Females are called roes while males are called bucks. Most shad today are between five and seven pounds, with the roe generally being heavier by two or three pounds. Shad are an anadromous fish meaning they spend most of their lives in saltwater but lay their eggs in freshwater. The shad come up the Connecticut River and pass through tributaries such as the Farmington River. After spawning in the spring, most of the fish, with the exception of the young ones who stay until fall, remain about six weeks before they head down the Connecticut River to the shoreline, then back up the Atlantic Ocean to Canada's Maritime Provinces.

During Connecticut's colonial era, it was said that shad were so abundant and cheap that masters would have chosen to feed their servants nothing but shad had not a law been passed to restrict the number of shad meals a master could feed his servants in a week. In the spring of 1879, the shad run was estimated at 400,000 shad; but by 1920 this number had dwindled to a mere 13,000. By this point the shad were also much smaller in size and weight than their predecessors. This decline was attributed to overfishing, pollution, and the newly constructed dams in Enfield, Connecticut, and Holyoke, Massachusetts. These

dams sealed off part of the spring run of the shad. Shad numbers have increased since then. In 2008 it was reported that a total of 163,460 shad were observed migrating through Connecticut dams. While the number of shad has dropped since colonial times, they still hold a special place in Windsor with its annual Shad Derby, which has become a treasured tradition.

It all started 55 years ago when the director of the Windsor Rod and Gun Club, John Cardillo (more fondly known as Mr. Shad), became concerned with the polluting of the Connecticut River. To draw attention to the river's condition and the resources it had to offer (and to have a sport competition to rival Wethersfield's big golf tournament), the club organized a one-day fishing tournament. The first headquarters for the shad tournament were simply a trailer located behind the cottage Cardillo built for his parents on Cottage Street in Windsor.

The Shad Derby evolved into a full-blown festival when the Windsor Chamber of Commerce joined forces with the Rod and Gun Club in 1966. The Chamber of Commerce did this to promote the town of Windsor and its businesses to those attending the event. That same year the Shad Derby coronation ball was established by Al and Gloria Kousch to select a young woman as queen to reign over the various festivities. In order for queen candidates to meet the various people



Float from the 2008 Shad Derby parade. Photo by Julia Baldini.  
WHS Collections.

(Continued on page 7)

## 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 Message

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director



### Continuity and Change: Navigating our Way

It's a bittersweet time for us as Curator Erin Stevic prepares to return to Ohio, her fiancé, and their new home. Erin's four years here have been a time of expansion and of pushing our institutional envelope in exciting new directions. Many of you have enjoyed the bright and beautifully designed exhibitions she's created for us each year. A highlight was her *Windsor Artists: Then and Now* exhibition which, in the wake of our local art museum closing, kept artistic consciousness very much alive in Windsor and drew new and enthusiastic audiences to the Society. What you haven't seen is the steady progress Erin has made improving collections storage areas, bringing historic images on forgotten glass plate negatives to light so all can see them, organizing collections data, solving problems, and uncovering long-buried historical information. Considering Erin's significant knowledge base built over these four years, the long-distance research possibilities offered by remote VPN (virtual private network) connections, and current fiscal constraints which prevent us from hiring another full-time curator, we felt we couldn't quite let her go.

Thanks to a planning grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council, the miracles of technology, and Erin's willingness, we will be able to keep her working part-time from Ohio. She will be planning a new exhibition on Windsor history that will expand into the North Gallery space we use for changing exhibitions each year. From her computer in Ohio, Erin will have access to historical databases in our region and to our collections records. This, plus several site visits over the next year, will allow her to conduct the research necessary to draft plans for the new exhibition.

Changing exhibitions have been effective at drawing new audiences to the Society over the past decade. However, when compared to public programs, these exhibitions are an expensive way of attracting audiences to one's site when the cost of a curator's time is considered. Over the past year we have also come to realize that we can't adequately accommodate our growing audience of school children in our 600 square foot Windsor history gallery. A new Windsor history gallery spread over 1300 square feet will enhance our visitors' experience.

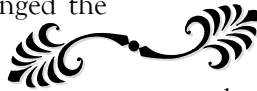
On February 23 and 24<sup>th</sup>, a high-powered group of three professors, a museum designer, a museum educator, and the Windsor school system's social studies coordinator met with Erin, Julia, and me to begin planning the new exhibition covering the most recent four centuries of Windsor's history. Each participant read hundreds of pages of Windsor history materials before the meetings. They toured our exhibitions, houses, library, and collections areas. We discussed historic threads and themes that should fit into an exhibition, historical resource materials in the region to be plumbed, and questions the exhibit should answer. As part of the planning process, we'd like to know your thoughts about what you'd like to see. And you can start right now by completing and sending in the survey which follows. It is also available on our website, <http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org>; and we will send it via e-mail as well. We'll keep you posted on our progress.

## Curator News

When I became the Windsor Historical Society's curator four years ago, several Windsor residents told me that my first tasks were to learn to pronounce Poquonock correctly and to eat a hot dog at Bart's Drive In. I'm pleased to report that today I can effortlessly say Poquonock (and Matianuck too!) and have enjoyed many lunches at Bart's. I also know the history of Windsor's villages and have catalogued hundreds of historic photographs of the town's many businesses and restaurants. It has been a privilege to explore Windsor's rich history, from its founding to its more recent past. Now as I pack my bags for Ohio and transition from a full-time, on-site curator to a part-time curatorial contractor, I'll be taking that history along with me and am pleased to continue my relationship with the historical society.

This year I will design a two-gallery, permanent, Windsor history exhibition that will update and expand the one-gallery exhibition currently on view. This project will double the size of the exhibition, providing new interactive learning spaces for school groups and visitors of all ages. I hope to complete the gallery designs by the end of the year so that the Society can seek implementation funding for the exhibition in 2010.

The new permanent exhibition is still in a formative stage, but I already know that the final product will bring Windsor's history to life in new ways by exploring topics ranging from the town's colonial history to the seldom-heard narratives of Windsor's diverse 20<sup>th</sup> century residents. The exhibition will investigate why people came to Windsor, why they stayed, how they have faced life's challenges, and how they changed the



### Summer Genealogy Series, July 7, 14, 21, and 28

For the second year, the Society is offering a four-part genealogy series on four consecutive Tuesdays in July from 7–9 p.m. Session 1 on July 7 features technology expert Dan Lynch who will present how to "Google Your Family Tree." Session 2 on July 14 will feature Laura Prescott who will explain the advantages of using diaries, letters, and journals in compiling a comprehensive and

community and the landscape. Ultimately, the exhibition will reflect the Society's mission: connecting Windsor's present with its past while looking to its future.



Designing such a large exhibition is a formidable task that will require me to combine my knowledge of the historical society's museum and library collections with current historical scholarship and input from the Windsor school system. The historical society will also survey its members, visitors, and town residents to learn what aspects of Windsor history interest the wider community. I encourage everyone to be a part of the design process by sharing your ideas with the historical society through its surveys and focus groups.

Since its founding, the historical society has been blessed with talented volunteers and staff. Their work has placed the historical society among the elite of New England's small institutions. I believe that this new exhibition will not only maintain the historical society's tradition of excellence but will be an outstanding model that other institutions will emulate. I anticipate many hours of work, many challenges, many surprises, and many successes as I work with the historical society in this new endeavor.

Along with the Society's staff, I have worked with countless volunteers, donors, and members during my time in Windsor. Thank you all for your support. I look forward to working with many of you in the future.

Sincerely,

Erin Stevic

appealing genealogy. Attendees will explore a few examples of the different types of journals and diaries available, where to find them, and how to apply what you find to your research and your family history. Session 3 and 4 speakers will cover topics such as census information and immigration records. COST: \$15/session or \$50/series.

**Annual Report:** Would you like a copy of our 2007–2008 annual report? We can mail a copy to you. Please call Connie at 860/688-3813, ext. 102; or email her at [info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org).

# The 1890 Census: “First in the Path of the Firemen”

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States was at a turning point, nearing the end of a century-long transition from a rural and agricultural economy to an urban, industrialized nation. The results of the Eleventh Federal Census conducted in 1890 were eagerly anticipated. This would be an opportunity to take measure of the nation’s new identity and to assess the impact of a decade of prolific immigration and population mobility.

The Eleventh Census is noteworthy for several other reasons too – it was the first to be counted using electrical tabulating machines; it was the first to utilize a separate form for each family; and it is infamous for ‘being destroyed in a fire.’ Although the story is a complex one, the resulting gap in the historical record is well known to genealogists and social historians. Volunteers at the Windsor Historical Society have begun compiling names from several sets of local records in an attempt to fill this gap, but the result will not be as comprehensive as a true census.

Two key decisions contributed to the loss: the sheer bulk of the records created and the laxity of their custodial care. Before 1880, census laws mandated two full copies of the completed forms. But for the 1890 census, it was decided that municipal governments could obtain copies of the data for their territory only if they paid for the handwritten copies at the rate of 25 cents for each one hundred names. Apparently few jurisdictions requested them. Census officials wanted the returns sent to Washington quickly; they were eager to have the data keypunched and tabulated on the new Hollerith Electrical Tabulating Machines. Some of the data from the schedules was encoded, but the names and detailed personal information recorded on the single family schedule were not. Soon these voluminous schedules were bundled in packets by enumeration district, tied with cord, carefully packed in specially-made wooden boxes, and placed in storage. The sheer volume of the bundled schedules amounted to nearly 200 tons. The schedules were not bound as had been the custom in previous years, saving the government \$30,000.

As time passed, interest in the contents of the 1890 schedules waned. The Census Bureau and its bulky records did not have a permanent home and were transferred around Washington several times. In 1913 they were assigned to the Commerce Building. The 1890 schedules were stacked on rows and rows of pine shelves just outside a basement vault in an area adjacent to the boiler room. On the evening of January 20, 1921, a fire broke out in the

furnace area. The ill-fated records were in the way of the firemen battling the blaze and bore the brunt of the fire, smoke, and water damage. Several weeks after the fire, the salvageable remnants of the 1890 census were moved to the stable of an old brewery, but no attempts were made to work on the records. Despite the pleas of the Daughters of the American Revolution and other patriotic and genealogical organizations, delays and lack of appropriations were the congressional response.

In the 1920s, the federal government began to wrestle with the problem of its mushrooming collection of records. Politicians considered the cost of steel shelves and cement buildings extravagant and asked instead for disposal schedules to reduce the volume of paperwork. Somehow, the damaged 1890 census forms were added to a long list of records marked for destruction under the provisions of ‘useless paper’ laws. Congress approved the list, and the records were destroyed sometime in 1934 or 1935.

Today all over the country 1890 census surrogates are being constructed from city directories, tax rolls, voter registration lists, and other local records. We are fortunate that Windsor’s voter registration and tax lists from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been preserved and are part of the Windsor Historical Society archival collections. Currently we have volunteers transcribing names from the 1890 voting lists. Out of an estimated Windsor population of 3,000, about 730 men’s names are included on these lists. It was not until 1893 that women in Connecticut were given the privilege of voting – and then only for their local school officials. Separate registration lists were kept for the two Windsor voting districts established by an act of the state legislature in 1881. Voters living in school districts 1-6 voted at the town hall in Windsor Center, and voters in school districts 7-10 voted at the newly constructed Poquonock Town Hall.

Although it is heartening to be able to reconstruct the names of some of Windsor’s residents, surrogate census lists are not a replacement for the detailed snapshot of the American population that was captured on those ill-fated family schedules in 1890.

Blake, Kellee. “‘First in the Path of the Firemen’: The Fate of the 1890 Population Census, Part I.” *Prologue* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 1996): 64-81. [www.archives.gov]

Dorman, Robert L. “The Creation and Destruction of the 1890 Federal Census.” *American Archivist* 71 (Fall/Winter 2008): 350-383.

# The Oral History Project

Connie Thomas, Administrative Assistant

Several years ago our staff discussed launching an oral history project. There were so many people in town willing to share their remembrances of building homes; raising families; and surviving hurricanes, wars, and floods. However, we reasoned that before we could tap these terrific stories, we should begin to transcribe the oral histories recorded by the Society years ago. We consulted local universities for the latest technology, bought the equipment, and dug in.

Oh my, what awaited us! I soon found that it was the best part of my work day to put on my earphones and listen to a gentleman who was born right after the Civil War describe our town in the 1920s. The words he chose and his New England accent enriched his descriptions of racing horses on Palisado Avenue as well as his accounts of cemetery managers. I heard a 104-year-old woman speak of hiding her overshoes in the trusses of the covered bridge so her mother wouldn't know she hadn't worn the ugly things to school! Tom Finley described his 1939 trip on the ship *Athenia* which was so overcrowded with Germans fleeing their country before the start of World War II that cots were set up in the public spaces. He told how a German torpedo hit the ship in the early evening, sending everyone into life boats to float quietly into the night until they were rescued. A Society neighbor described how her family made coffee to warm the firemen battling a nearby house fire during a cold January night in 1923. We struggled with the spelling of Lithuanian surnames when a high school principal described on tape the multi-ethnic neighborhoods in Poquonock in the early 1900s. Ever hear of Hammer Lane in Poquonock? Al Endee discussed it as well as harvesting ice from Hatheway Pond and swimming in the Farmington River.

The pleasure hasn't been all mine. We've shared this project with multiple volunteers who have put on the earphones and transcribed the taped words. You can enjoy these stories, too. A number of transcripts have been completed, bound, and put on our library shelf. Stop in and enjoy an hour of reading or put on the earphones and listen to these fascinating voices from long ago.



# Volunteers

We are so grateful to the following volunteers:

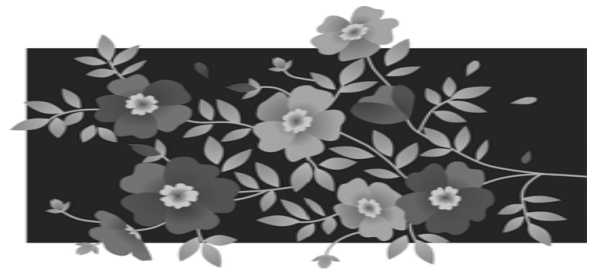
**Educators:** Jay Davenport, Carolyn Doyle, Sue Lescher, Yvonne McGregor, Heather Renaud, Dorothy Simon, Jan Stevens, and Bob Stisser.

**Events:** Ada Martin and Anita Mips.

**Focus Group:** Bill Harris and Tommy Lee Davis.

**Front desk and administrative:** Bill Allen, Marsha Anderson, John Berky, Marie Bruhn, Barbara Byczkiewicz, Carolyn Doyle, Ruth Fahrback, Bill Harris, Cora Lee Jones, Dee Jubrey, Laura Kahkonen, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Ada Martin, Stephen McGoldrick, Libby Parker, Mary Ransom, Dorothy Simon, Sisters Timothy and Howder of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints, Jim Trocchi, Sue Viner, Nancy Von Hollen, and Bill Warner-Prouty.

**Library and curatorial:** Elaine Brophy, Carolyn Doyle, Ruth Fahrback, Bev Garvan, Bill Harris, Sara Hawran, Marni Lydecker, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Bob McAllister, Sandy McGraw, Margaret Quigley, Mary Ransom, Sheryl Scruggs, Jim Trocchi, Sue Viner, and Nancy Von Hollen.



# Wish List

Please call us at 860/688-3813, ext. 102, if you can provide us with help for the following items:

- Snow blower, at least 7 HP and 24" wide in good working order.
- Guest room for three to four nights for our former Curator, Erin Stevic. She'll be working with us occasionally and needs a place to stay. No meals or entertainment needed.
- Garden workers to weed and maintain flower beds.

# Education Corner

Julia Baldini, Educator



## April Vacation Week: April 13 - 17

Are you looking for something fun to do with your children or grandchildren during April Vacation week? Visit the Windsor Historical Society and take part in some fun, educational, and earth-friendly crafts! Programs will run Monday through Friday, April 13 through April 17, from 10 am to 1 pm. Each day in our Hands-on-History Learning Center families can make pine cone birdfeeders and plant flowers to take home. On Friday, April 17, at 10 am, grab your bike and helmet and take part in a mini-historic bike tour perfect for children and families! Learn about the importance of the Farmington River and take a look at some of the architecture that surrounds the old town green on Palisado Avenue. Adults must accompany children at all times during programs. \$10 per family; or \$5/adults, \$4/seniors, or \$2/for children & Society members. See [www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org) for more information. **Reservations required** for historic bike tour but not crafts.

## Artist Challenge!

Feeling creative? Children in grades 1 - 5 are challenged to create a piece of artwork at home out of recycled materials. Artwork should be no larger than 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide, but children are encouraged to be as creative as possible. Winners will be judged on use of materials and creativity by Society staff. Children should drop off their artwork to the Society by Wednesday, April 15, at 4 pm. A winner will be selected on Friday, April 17, and will receive a prize along with a picture in the Society's summer newsletter. All participants can pick up their artwork at the Society the following week, Tuesday through Saturday. Please call or email Society educator, Julia Baldini for more information (see below).

## Summer Workshops for Grades 3 - 12

This year, the Society is holding a special "Windsor History Mural Summer Workshop." For one week, students will work with local artist, Jeanne Manzelli, to complete a mural with a modern take on historic photographs of Windsor students. Students will learn different techniques while working together to complete this project, which will be on display to the

public. Cost is \$100 per student. Space is limited so sign up early! See [www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.windsorhistoricalsociety.org) for more information.

August 3 - 7	9 am - 12 pm	Grades 7 - 12
August 10 - 14	9 am - 12 pm	Grades 3 - 6

## Youth/Scout Programs

Do you belong to a scout program or youth group and are looking for an activity to fit a project? The Society has a variety of activities for youth and scout groups! If you're looking for something specific, feel free to contact our Society Educator, Julia Baldini, to custom make a program to fit your needs. All Society education programs are hands-on, interactive programs which include a craft project for children to take home. For more information, call or email Society Educator, Julia Baldini.

## Birthday Parties!!

Looking for a perfect place to hold your child's birthday party with little hassle for you? Our Hands-on-History Learning Center is the perfect place to hold a party for children who love history! Our birthday party rental package includes a two hour use fee for our Hands-on-History Learning Center, educational program, admission for 15 children (chaperones are FREE), use of kitchen space, cake, juice, history-themed goody bags, table cloths, and "birthday" paper goods. A museum educator will deliver a thirty minute, hands-on program on early colonial history followed by a Native American or colonial craft. Parties are held on Saturdays from 10 am - 4 pm. \$175 for members, \$200 for non-members. Contact Society Educator Julia Baldini for more information or to make a reservation!

## Facebook

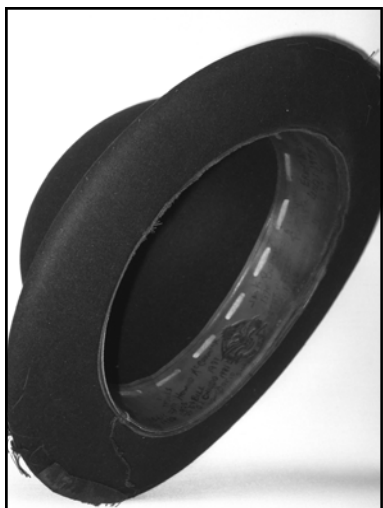
Are you on Facebook? Join the Windsor Historical Society's new Facebook Group! Search "Windsor Historical Society"; you'll see a picture of the John and Sarah Strong House; and click "Join Group".

## Contact information

Julia Baldini, Educator 860/688-3813, ext. 107  
[JBaldini@windsorhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:JBaldini@windsorhistoricalsociety.org)

*(Continued from page one, Shad Derby)*

involved with the derby, Vivian Whelan and Marge Ellingwood invited the candidates to tea. This special occasion began in 1969 under the chairmanship of William Dumais and Vera Daves and has now evolved into the Champagne Reception tradition.



Derby worn by Shad Derby Parade chairperson from 1970-2007.  
WHS Collections.

In 1970, Roger Olsen began the tradition of passing a Shad Derby derby hat from the previous year's chairman to the present year's chairman, symbolically passing the responsibility for the care and coordination of the festival. The derby pictured here was used between 1970 and 2007. The leather hatband along the inside of the crown contains the names of all the chairmen who have worn the derby. The Shad Derby chairman wears the derby hat during the annual parade and other festivities. For Windsor's 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the original derby was donated to the Windsor Historical Society and a new derby is now being used.

The present day tradition of distributing numbered medallions and pins to the workers of the Shad Derby has its roots dating back to 1972. Roger Olsen designed the first medallion pin in 1971. Distribution of the medals occurs during a pre-Derby gala.

As the Derby grew, the need for manpower grew as well which resulted in Walter Whelan and Paul Wabrek seeking the addition of the Jaycees in 1972. The Jaycees were responsible for the organization of the parade and activities on the town green.

On May 7<sup>th</sup> of 1976, the Shad Fest Bureau was officially chartered with the State of Connecticut as a non-profit organization. The Bureau was created to control and

organize all of the Shad Derby activities as well as to determine policy and develop financial support for the festival. Each year the Shad Fest Bureau appoints a general chairman who organizes the necessary committees and appoints chairpersons for various events. The charter members of the Bureau were the Rod and Gun Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Jaycees, and the Junior Women. Additional organizations could be invited to join with unanimous approval of the charter members.

In 1980, the Lions Club joined the Shad Fest Bureau and established an art festival. Shortly after, the Kiwanis joined and their Runner's Road Race has become a very popular Derby event. In 1982 the Civitan Club came aboard and assumed responsibility for the queen's float in the Derby parade. The eighth group to join the bureau was the Valley Jaycees of Windsor, who assumed responsibility for the queen's committee. The latest group to join the bureau was the Windsor Afro-American Civic Association who joined in 1991.

To bring the festival back to its more humble roots, the members of the Rod and Gun Club created the "Shad Masters" tournament in 1992. There is an entry fee to take part in the tournament, and cash prizes are awarded. Each May shad still migrate up the Connecticut River and fishermen gather on the banks of the Farmington River to try their luck. Windsor's Shad Derby festivities provide area residents with a great opportunity to celebrate the beauties of a New England spring together.



Shad Derby Parade, 2008. Photo by Julia Baldini.  
WHS Collections.

# 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 an updated list mailed to you.

**April 1–30**

**Free admission** to museum for anyone arriving on a bike.

**Thursday, April 2** 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.

**FIRST THURSDAYS:** Celebrate the First Thursday of the month with a visit to the Society during these extended hours. Galleries and library will be open and refreshments served. COST: Free.

**Saturday, April 11** 11 a.m. - noon

**COMPOSTING:** Follow historic tradition by recycling kitchen and yard scraps into your compost container. We'll show you how. COST: \$6/adults; \$5/seniors & students; \$4/Society members.

**April 13 - 17** 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**SCHOOL VACATION WEEK:** Stop by the Society for some earth-friendly activities including crafts projects and a bike tour. An adult must accompany all children. COST: \$10/family; \$5/adults; \$4/seniors; \$3/Society members.

**April 23** 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

**LECTURE: Timely Topics - Revolution In News Distribution.** With print media in trouble, how will people continue to access local news and informed opinions? Hear

from Colin McEnroe and others. COST: \$\$6/adults; \$5/seniors & students; \$4/Society members.

**Saturday, May 2** 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.

**WALK IN PALISADO CEMETERY:** Meet at the Society. Learn about evolving gravestone styles and carvers as well as early Windsor residents with Society Director Christine Ermenc. COST: \$6/adults; \$5/seniors & students; \$4/Society members. Rain date is May 3.

**Thursday, May 7** 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.

**FIRST THURSDAYS:** Celebrate the First Thursday of the month with a visit to the Society during these extended hours. Galleries and library will be open and refreshments served. COST: Free.

**Saturday, May 23** 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**BIKE TOUR:** Meet at the Society and ride through Windsor center and the Historic District with Society Educator Julia Baldini. COST: \$6/adults; \$5/seniors & students; \$4/Society members. Rain date is May 24.

**Tuesday, June 9** 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

**ANNUAL MEETING AND LOWELL FEWSTER'S "BARN STORIES" EXHIBITION OPENING.** COST: Free.



**Windsor  
Historical Society**

96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor, Connecticut 06095

