

Summer-long “Back to Our Roots” Festival Showcases Westport Farming Then & Now

What’s cooking at the Westport Historical Society? In recent years, for nutritional, health and gastronomic reasons, Westporters have joined a larger national consumer movement back to local produce and organic growing methods. As supermarkets, manufacturers, restaurateurs and even school curriculum planners know, this shift in demand selectively is undoing a century of “improvements” to land use, fertilization, water management, food growing, pest control, packaging, shipping and menu preparation.

Responding to this popular trend, the Westport Historical Society’s **Back to our Roots**, exhibits and programs are exploring and celebrating 350 years of Westport farming heritage, and how that experience is shaping our lives today. Local barns, stone walls, artifacts and archival records—dating to the 17th century—link generations of crops, livestock, tools, fertilization and food preservation wisdom to today’s farmers markets, community gardens and CSAs. Specific periods covered will be: pre-Contact through Puritan/Colonial Settlement, the Long Lots through the American Revolution, Local and Regional Market Trade (War of 1812 to Civil War), Interstate and National Trade (Civil War to 1900) and Farming Decline and Resurgence of Sustainability in the 20th and 21st



Centuries.

Developed collaboratively with Wakeman Town Farm, Green Village Initiative, the Westport Farmers Market, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the WHS’s

own Hidden Garden Tour, **Back to our Roots** will run until Friday, September 2.

Featured elements are: **Westport Farming: Then & Now**, with a special

focus on **Wakeman Town Farm: Modeling Sustainable Farming in Westport**, in the

Sheffer Gallery; **Barn Again!**

Westport’s 2011 Barn Survey, in the

foyer; **Rock On!**

Westport’s Stone Wall Story, in the little gallery, and, finally, an exhibit of authentic vintage farm tools in the WHS’s very own 1846 Bradley-Wheeler Cobblestone Barn/ Museum of Westport History.

Through an illustrated timeline and local artifacts, **Westport Farming: Then & Now** explores evolving local farming practices from the Pre-Contact era/indigenous tribes, through the Colonial Puritans and Connecticut Yankees, to today’s return to local produce. The spectrum includes crops and livestock, shell-fishing and even ice harvesting, along with related commerce such as

food shipping by market boat and rail. During the early 19th century, Westport market boats supplied fast-growing Manhattan with fresh produce. During the Civil War, Westport was a major supplier of onions to the Union Army. Culminating this exhibit section are Larry Silver’s black and white photos of Westport farms and farmers.

The Wakeman Town Farm section compares WTF’s legacy as a family farm with its new role, developing a model of sustainable farming practices for Westport and other towns. Throughout the term of the exhibit, WTF will host sustainable farming demonstrations for the public on its Cross



Highway property.

In the Foyer, **Barn Again! Westport’s 2011 Barn Survey**, features a map of nearly 250 extant (in 2010-11) barns (structures that once had an agricultural use) in Westport. The WHS team that canvassed the town were trained by the CT Trust for Historic Preservation, as part of its Statewide Barn Survey initiative. Paintings of local barns by Hardie Gramatky are another highlight.

The Little Gallery houses **Rock On! Westport’s Stone Wall Heritage**, including photographs of colonial-era dry-stack stone walls, by Larry Untermeyer, and notes on the geological origins of local fieldstone, by UConn Geology professor, Robert Thorson, who is head of the Stone Wall Initiative and author



of *Stone by Stone*.

Major support for **Back To Our Roots** comes from annual sponsors, including lead sponsor, BNY Mellon Wealth Management, along with the Betty R. & Ralph Sheffer Foundation, Janet & Fred Plotkin/The Ruth and Adolph Schnurmacher Foundation, Berchem Moses Devlin, Kowalsky

Brothers, The Leapley Financial Group/Morgan Stanley Smith Barney, TD Bank, Weichert Capital Properties and Fountainhead Wines. Additional exhibit sponsors include Green Village Initiative, Tauck-Romano Innovative Philanthropy (TRIP), Webster Bank, Westport Farmers Market, Catamount Wealth Management, Gault, Gilbertie's

Herb Gardens, Longshore Sailing School and Bank of Fairfield.

Special **Back to Our Roots** programs for food and farm lovers of all ages are running every Saturday at Wakeman Town Farm on Cross Highway, Thursdays at the Westport Farmer's Market, and at a variety of times at the Westport Historical Society.

From the Executive Director's desk...



Dear WHS members,
There is a wonderful energy in the Wheeler House. As an observer at many planning meetings, I can honestly tell you "magic happens here." It's magic because when ideas get shared and people make a commitment to get something done, the result is always amazing. I recently returned from a trip to Israel and what stuck with me from my journey throughout this desert was the sheer will of people to make something out of nothing and never give up. My tour guide Vivi taught us that **Sababa** means "Awesome" or "Amazing" and when it comes to describing my experience at WHS, it's a term that can be used to describe the exhibit committee

that has made the Sheffer Gallery a true masterpiece.

Back To Our Roots, our current exhibit, is an ideal example of local groups that are keeping "farming" in our community coming together to share our mission, and to create a display that not only tells a story but also engages the viewer in many hands-on demonstrations and exciting seminars that educate and enlighten.

Many of the great events and projects that we offer you are also organic in nature. A seed is planted in someone's mind and gets shared and it feeds another person's thoughts, and before you know it, it is a full-blown project. It is tended and nourished by a group of dedicated people to enable it to "bloom." I hope that all of you will enjoy the fruits of our labor and bring your

friends and family to enjoy a great exhibit that is a testimony to what has made Westport special. The exhibit is on display until Friday, September 2.

So how can you support what happens here? Spread the word and it will germinate everywhere. Our website continues to be our superior messenger and you can also be a friend on Facebook. We hope you can come to all our special events or relax outside in the beautiful outdoor furniture donated by Patios.com. There is always something new to uncover once you delve into history. So stop by often and bring your friends. We love to hear more about what you'd like us to offer. As Aristotle reminds us, "In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous."

Have a beautiful day.

Susan Gold, Executive Director

Farewells and Thank You's to:

Kathy Nixon, for her dedication and hard work as the WHS Treasurer (and her wonderful talents in creating novel gift packages to sell in the Remarkable Gift Shop

Hilary Gibson, for her amazing job as Education Director, facilitating many groups in and out of WHS and sparking a true love and admiration for our town's rich history. She engaged children for hours with her creative projects and genuine love of teaching. She brought many innovative approaches to

teaching history and made our house exhibits interactive with original materials to involve children.

Esta Burroughs, for her dedication as a WHS greeter. Her knowledge of Westport couldn't be surpassed and she welcomed everyone with her warm smile and gentle manner. Esta is a Westport gem that continues to bring joy to everyone who knows her.

Mollie Donovan, whose drive and special talents as a curator of our exhibitions, among many other hats she wore,

will forever be in our hearts, remembered for her passion for the arts and the people in Westport who nurtured the creative spirit.

Ellen Naftalin, for her multitude of organizational skills, artistic flare, and strong desire to pitch in and co-chair our exhibits with Mollie. She'd take charge of whatever needed to be done with professionalism and a vision. The high quality of our exhibits was due to Ellen's participation and desire to make every show shine.

President's Message



Who knew what a "hit" that this summer's our *Back to Our Roots* Exhibit would be? (If you have not yet visited, it continues until Friday, Sept.

2, so come and bring friends!) And who knew what extra fun that this Exhibit's theme would add to our annual Hidden Garden Tour?

The reasons for this popular success, including extensive press coverage, have much to do with some fortunate new partnerships forged by our able Exhibits Committee (Larry Untermeyer, Anne Levine, Sue Kirby, Brian O'Leary, Elizabeth Juviler, and Miggs Burroughs, with special assistance from Helen Klisser During and Tom Reilly). For example, for the local Farming History portion of *Back to Our Roots*, the WHS collaborated with Wakeman Town Farm/Green Village Initiative and the Westport Farmers' Market. WTF's Carrie Aitkenhead, Deirdre Price and Eileen Flug, along with Rebecca Howe of the Westport Farmer's Market, contributed important content and images. Rindy Higgins of the Shellfish Commission provided valuable insights into our undersea harvest. Enhancing the overall presentation, which included documents and images from the WHS Archive, are original watercolors, depicting Westport farmscapes, by Hardie Gramatky. (And don't miss Brian O'Leary's digital frame powerpoint explanation of WHY the Puritans created Long Lots...)

Our barn red Foyer houses the **"Barn Again!"** portion of our Exhibit. Our WHS Survey of Westport Barns was done with benefit of guidelines and training by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation's Statewide Survey of extant barns, and the CT Trust has been so impressed by Westport's "phenomenal" Barn Survey effort, they are

giving us an Award! Thanks to the teamwork of my fellow volunteers, Peter Jennings, Joni Andrews, Larry Untermeyer, Sal Porio, Linda Gramatky-Smith, Ed Gerber, Maggie Feczko, Betsy Wacker, Katie Chase, Andrea Cross, Jack Fanning, Lorraine Feliciano, Mary Lee Clayton and Bob Weingarten, nearly 250 barns have been identified, and documentation continues. A map of Westport barn locations, along with a powerpoint of local barn photos, is on display. Much of the assembly work for the map and powerpoint were done by Constance Chien, a college intern working with us for the summer.

Adding aesthetic power to the Foyer display are Larry Silver's black & white photos of Westport farmscapes, mostly done in the 1980's and 1990's.

The Little Gallery houses our **"Rock On!"** celebration of Westport's stone walls (the first harvests of the Puritan Farmers were lumber, from clearing the forests, and fieldstone, from clear-

ing the land; many understandably then pursued maritime commerce as an easier way to make a living). A centerpiece of the exhibit is Tracy Sugarman's superb watercolor of one of the landmark Gault Barns. Then, in addition to Larry Untermeyer's spectacular, vivid color photographs (taken this Spring) of ancient local stone walls and stone foundations to barns, the room features—thanks to a partnership with Gault, for the stone, and Tim Romano, for expert masonry, a stunning custom-built fieldstone wall. Gault also sponsored a fabulous guest speaker, Prof. Robert Thorson, the UConn geologist, author of *Stone by Stone* and head of

the New England Stone Wall Initiative, who held a June 18th crowd in thrall here for nearly 2 hours!

The last stop in this *Back to our Roots* tour is our own WHS Cobblestone Barn, including the diorama and Museum of Westport History, featuring an array of vintage farm tools. Be sure to ask to have the MP3 audio turned on, so that you can enjoy Joanne Woodward's tour!

Early in June, complementing the *Back to Our Roots* Exhibit, our annual **Hidden Garden Tour** leadership (Joni Andrews, Deborah Herbertson, Deborah Gordon, Cynthia Lee, Maggie Feczko, Pat Voris) selected gardens that showcased farmscapes, barns and stonewalls. Tour-goers and visitors to the **Garden Marketplace** were able to preface their field trip with benefit of the

background information provided by the exhibit. This year's Tour's success owed in part to some other wonderful partners: TRIP (Tauck-Romano Innovative Philanthropy), Dragone Vintage



Motorcars (site of the glamorous **Toast the Tour** party), Fountainhead Wines and HSBC, which hosted an after-party.

In the coming year, for Exhibits, Programs, Special Events and Fundraisers we look forward to expanding relationships with our new partners, and meeting many new ones! If you or your business would like to explore these opportunities, please do contact me or Susan Gold.

Meanwhile, DO visit or re-visit *Back to Our Roots* before Sept. 2, and join us at as many of our upcoming August and September events as you can!



Westport Historical Society
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August Calendar

August Calendar, please check our website at www.Westporthistory.org for more specific information on these and all of our other programs

Aug 4, Thursday, 5 – 7 pm. TV Neighbors

This new book, covers nearly 100 TV personalities living in Westport-Weston during television broadcasting's heyday. Wally and Denise Woods, dear friends of late author, Tom DeLong, vowed to finish this follow up to *Stars in Our Eyes*, and will introduce the work. Copies available.

Aug 5, Friday, 5:30 pm Suzanne Sheridan and Friends, Music on the River, at HSBC

Suzanne Sheridan sings Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen; drinks and appetizers on the rooftop. Bob Cooper on keyboards and Randy Brody on percussion.

Aug 11, Thursday, 7:00 pm, Poetry Reading

A Run on Seasons with Janet Kraus, former Westport News poetry editor, author of two poetry books and writing and literature instructor at Fairfield University.

Aug 20, Saturday, A Kayak Adventure, 1:00 pm to Cockenoe Island

Cockenoe Island (less than 1 mile from shore) is known for birds and wildlife crabbing, shellfishing and trails. Ideal for camping and picnics.

August 26, Friday, 6:30 pm Westport Country Playhouse-Pre Show Event

Please join us for a special reception prior to attending the Playhouse's stunning performance of Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly Last Summer*. Mingle with fellow WHS & WCP guests and hear from members of the Playhouse artistic team who will share some creative insight about *Suddenly Last Summer*. Call WCP to reserve tickets and mention WHS.

August 27, Saturday 4:00 pm Saugatuck Walking Tour and Wine Tasting, Complimentary Cocktails at the River House

With Allen Raymond and Loretta Santella Hancock as guides for this 1-hour walking tour.

August 28, Sunday, 9 am Kayaking, Yoga and History Tour

Start off the morning beside the river with homemade muffins and yoga warm-up stretches with Certified Yoga Teacher and Westport Historical Society Director, Susan Gold.

Town historian, Allen Raymond will introduce the history of the Saugatuck River before we paddle off to explore its secret shoreline and estuaries.