

## Plans Unveiled for 24th Hidden Garden Tour

So, we've pushed the clocks ahead and welcomed in spring; now thoughts are turning to summer sunshine and flowers. And this goes double for planners of the Westport Historical Society's June 14 Hidden Garden Tour, who have been busy for months sowing the seeds for an exciting new edition of this annual fundraising event.



Their efforts have yielded seven beautiful properties: six in Westport and one in neighboring Southport that is Fairfield County's only flower farm. Darcy Sledge, co-chair of the event, put it this way:

"We have a wide variety of gardens this year, from those planned and executed by professional landscape architects, to those nurtured over many years by owners experimenting with their properties. We have cutting gardens, woodland gardens, rose gardens, shade gardens, and one which I venture to call a 'micro-garden.' It is very small, but every square inch is meticulously planted with interesting combinations of plants, sculpture and stonework."

Tour day will also see a Garden Market from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the grounds of WHS's Bradley-Wheeler House where home-grown and home-made items from gardens and cottage businesses will be available.

In the evening from 5 to 7:30 p.m., we'll gather at Gilbertie's Herb Gardens

at 7 Sylvan Lane in Westport for a festive Garden Party catered by A Dash of Salt. Founded by Culinary Institute of America graduate, Jonathan Mathias, Norwalk-based A Dash of Salt offers a menu inspired by cuisines from around the world.

The Hidden Garden Tour is **Sunday, June 14**, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Participants must first stop by Bradley-Wheeler House, 25 Avery Place across from Westport Town Hall, to pick up their tickets and directions to the "hidden gardens."

This year's outing will be easier on drivers as three of the gardens are either on or just off North Avenue in the Coleytown section of Westport.

Another sits atop Old Hill, and yet another, bearing the whimsical name "Tidebrook," nestles beside a tidal stream just off the Saugatuck River. Sneak preview: one of the tour homes belongs to a celebrity friend of the Historical Society, Westport author and lifestyle expert, Mar Jennings.



Photo by The Scottish Gardener

Rose gardens will be near their peak at tour time, and beds of these elegant flora are the main attraction at one of the homes. Another, owned by a doctor who served a tour of duty with the military in Japan, features bonsai'd Japanese maple, cherry and weeping redbuds, and ornamental pines and broad leafed evergreens.

The owner of another describes her property as a sloping wooded lot with lovely old stone walls, a pool, lawn sculptures and a fern walk along a pond, all on a parcel designed by Frank Geiger, namesake and founder of the Westport lawn and garden firm.

How do displays of white daisies and drifts of frothy, chartreuse lady's mantle sound? Or borders backstopped by tall,

white spires of aruncus and false astilbe, along with spires of deep pink lupines and dark purple salivas? Or globes of purple allium, pink and white peonies and

mature clumps of deep pink astrania? The names alone are beautiful and inviting.

Given that onions were once a staple crop in Westport, it is not surprising that one of the gardens occupies a former onion farm. The setting is essentially woodland in character and notable for its many weeping trees. In early June,

azaleas and rhododendrons paint the landscape with swaths of pink, yellow and orange.

Lastly, there will be an educational aspect at a home planted with native, pollinator-attracting, drought-tolerant and disease-resistant species that provide a diverse and robust habitat for birds and bees.

**Hidden Garden Tour, Sunday, June 14**, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Tour tickets are \$45 members, \$55 non-members, \$60 day of tour. Garden Party tickets are \$60 members and non-members. Combo tickets are \$90 members, \$100 non-members, \$110 day of tour. Tickets can be purchased in advance online at [www.westporthistory.org](http://www.westporthistory.org), by calling 203-222-1424, or visiting the Westport Historical Society, 25 Avery Place.

## Minute Man Day, Sunday, April 26, 2015 • 8:30am to 5pm

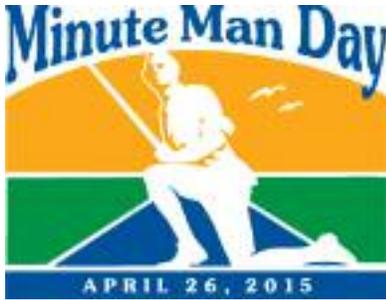
For 104 years Westport's *Minute Man Monument* has honored the heroism of local patriots who took up their own arms in "a minute's notice" to defend their country when British forces invaded Connecticut on April 25, 1777. That day Tryon's forces landed on what is now Westport's Compo Beach.

On Sunday April 26<sup>th</sup>, let's come together as a community to celebrate Westport's iconic, newly restored Minute Man Monument, whose bronze patriot has a muzzleloader in hand and eyes peeled for British troops.

**Minute Man Day** will offer people of all ages opportunities to explore Westport's colorful Revolutionary War era through engaging and family friendly activities sponsored by the Westport Historical Society, Westport Library and Westport Young Woman's League.

The day starts in the morning with running of the **37<sup>th</sup> Annual Minute Man Race**, which begins and ends at scenic Compo Beach. The 10K Run and 5K Run/Walk weaves around the historic Minute Man Monument.

From 10am to 5pm on Jesup Green, you can visit a recreated **Revolutionary War militia encampment** and learn about the American Revolution from [CT Society of the Sons of the American Revolution](http://www.ctsocietyofthesonsoftheamericanrevolution.org).



Next, join the Westport Historical Society at Ned Dimes Marina, Compo Beach, for a **guided walking tour to the Minute Man Monument**. Over the course of the 30-minute (1-mile round trip) tour, you will explore the his-

tory of the monument and the 1777 Battle of Compo that it honors. You will also hear about daily life of the colonial families living here and the locals who rallied as patriot minutemen. At the Marina Clubhouse, you can laugh at *I Love Lucy's* famous "Minute Man" episode and enjoy family activities. *Tours will leave every 15 minutes from noon to 1:45.*



Next, spend the afternoon at the Westport Library where, beginning at 2:30pm in the **McManus Room**, you can learn and see how **Francis Miller of ConserveArt, LLC** restored the Minute Man Monument, working with the Town of Westport's Historic District Commission and Arts Advisory Committee. And at 3:00 pm local historian and WHS Advisory Council member **Ed Hynes** will present an engaging interpretation of the Danbury raid.

### List of Minute Man Day Events

**8:30am**

#### Minute Man Race

Compo Beach

For information, race times and registration, visit [www.minutemanrace.com](http://www.minutemanrace.com)

**10:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

#### Sons of the

#### American Revolution

#### Encampment, Jesup Green, Free

*Rain or shine; No dogs permitted*

**12:00 PM - 2:00 PM**

#### Minute Man Walking Tours

Meet at Ned Dimes Marina, Compo Beach

*Rain or shine; No dogs permitted*

**Advance reservations are encouraged: (203) 222-1424, Westport Historical Society**

*Tours leave every 15 minutes:*

*Noon; 12:15; 12:30; 12:45; 1:00; 1:15; 1:30; and 1:45*

*\$10 donation for Adults; Youth, 12 and under, \$5*

*Net proceeds will be donated to the ongoing care of the monument.*

Parking is located at Ned Dimes Marina within the gates at Compo Beach. You do not need a beach sticker; parking is free.

**2:30 PM – 3:30 PM**

#### Minute Man Lectures

Westport Library, McManus Room, Free

## *A Folk Art Collection from our Volunteer Extraordinaire Ann Levine*

You'd expect one of the world's most extensive collections of American folk art carvings to be housed in a museum — the Wadsworth Atheneum perhaps, or the Smithsonian. It's not.

But you'd never guess that this amazing array of pieces — 800 wood carvings, of everyone from Pocahontas and Knute Rockne to Charles Lindbergh and Hillary Clinton — is right here in Westport.

In a private home — Anne and Bob Levine's. Anne is a Staples graduate who has been volunteering on the exhibits committee of WHS since 2009; he's a Brooklyn native who's lived here since 1969.

Soon after getting married they went to a Westport Arts Center exhibit on folk art. They knew nothing about the subject but they were intrigued. They bought a couple of inexpensive pieces. Then they added a few more items. Soon they were going to antique shows and auctions, and scouring eBay, building — without even realizing it — a world-class collection. Today it spills through every room of their unpretentious home.

The first thing you see is a collection of Uncle Sams, in every imaginable pose. A World War I piece shows Kaiser



Wilhelm bowing at Sam's feet. One room contains perhaps America's largest collection of whirligigs, along with frontier pieces. But the crown jewel is a fantastically detailed diorama of Franklin Roosevelt's cabinet, bought at a Christie's auction. Each member is individually carved. An electric chandelier shines overhead.

"These are beautiful works of art," Bob says. "But most of them were done just as a hobby, to give as gifts, or keep as decorations in the home."

Each has a story. He shows off a carving of a Japanese soldier, surrendering in World War II. It was done by a disabled American soldier, as therapy. The piece rests atop a wooden box — where the soldier kept his medal. The Levines commissioned another piece: a carving of the flag-raising in New York, after 9/11. That artist was losing his

vision to macular degeneration. It was the last work he ever did.

The couple do not know every artist in their collection. Many are anonymous. But they know the story behind each piece — where they found this Thomas Edison, why there are so many carvings of show girls, how come William McKinley was so popular back in the day.

There is hardly any room left in the Levines' home for new works. Which is why Bob (who in retirement runs the neurology clinic at Norwalk Hospital, serves with Americares, and is writing 2 more books) and Anne (who after retiring from her job managing an architectural office volunteers for the Westport Historical Society, Westport Schools Permanent Arts Collection and Norwalk Hospital) are now giving away some of their precious collection.

It will go to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, for a show next year. That's the oldest public art museum in America. However, Bob says, it has almost no folk art.

No wonder. The best collection in the country is 60 miles away, right here in Bob and Anne Levine's Westport home.

*by Dan Woog*

## *April Promises to be a Busy Time in the Education Department*

Over the Spring school break, I will be running a vacation program for children, entitled *Party like it's 1799*. For three days, we will explore what it was like to be a child in the early days of Saugatuck. We'll hear about the button factory in Saugatuck and the children who worked there. Students will later be encouraged to get their "creative on" using vintage buttons to decorate antique wooden bowls. They will

learn about the importance of the tin industry in Westport, and get inspired to construct large, tin-like mobiles.

Children will tap into their hometown pride while designing, stitching, and sewing their own Westport Flags. We'll celebrate spring and Earth day with planting and cooking. In recognition of the Westport farms of old, we will bake apple

pies and make vintage crate labels. The campers will get a little dirty planting flowers and herbs, but decorating the black-board planters will prove to be good clean fun.

Yoga and drama will be sprinkled in, with some old time landscape painting.

The big news is, after a one-year hiatus, we are thrilled to be back on track with the annual Third Grade Tour. As part of the Westport school's 3rd grade's social studies program, students are learning how Westport contributed to Connecticut's story, past and present and what roles our town played in America's history. The children get a tour of the Wheeler house, and the exhibit, and are taught through the "inquiry" method, with questions and answers.

We will be hosting the Staples internships at the same time this late spring and they will be able to help with the third

grade trip. I think having the big kids teach the little kids will be brilliant. We're all very excited to have the tour reinstated, which has become a Westport tradition after almost 30 years. Almost 500 third graders and their teachers will be touring the Historical Society from May 26 thru June 6.

The Newman Room is being reorganized and will be up and running again very soon. I have a bevy of children's books looking for good homes or a worthy charity if you have any suggestions.

I love teaching and working with the children, and welcome the opportunity to do more creative and educational programs. I always welcome volunteers if you would like to get in on the fun!

*Elizabeth DeVoll, Education Director*



*Local Girl Scouts learn how to make samplers at the Adams Academy*



*A happy camper learning about the Saugatuck trains – during February vacation. Photos by Laurence S. Untermeyer*

## *Westport Historical Society Selected for StEPs-CT*

WHS is going back to school!

Westport Historical Society was recently accepted into StEPs-CT, a program of professional development conducted by Connecticut Humanities (CTH) and the Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO). StEPs is an acronym for *Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations*. Since 2009, StEPs has helped nearly 600 organizations nationwide, including 27 in Connecticut, begin taking "steps" to plan for positive change.

StEPs-CT aligns with the national curriculum created by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) to help history organizations

strengthen themselves in six standards sections covered over the course of two years: Governance, Audience, Management, Collections, Stewardship of Historic Buildings, and Programming. WHS is one of 23 Connecticut history organizations accepted through a competitive application process into the class of 2015-2017. And we are enrolled in a local sub-group including the Weston, Wilton, and Newtown Historical Societies, and the Danbury Railway Museum.

The first module of the program currently underway – Mission, Vision, and Governance – addresses everything from a critical review of our mission statement, to revising crucial policies, to

developing a new strategic plan.

Support and training is provided through a series of curriculum-based workshops led by subject area specialists, coaching from a dedicated professional Mentor, and access to a special CTH grant program tied to StEPs initiatives.

Participation in this program by WHS staff, board members, advisory council, and interested volunteers will help us work toward achieving the highest standards of museum practices and management as we strive to fulfill our mission as the steward of Westport's heritage and better serve our community and visitors.

*by Robert Mitchell and Stacey Danielson*

## From the Executive Director's Desk...



The power of suggestion is sometimes all it takes to set something in motion at WHS and then there is no turning back.

Wheeler House is a hopping place. It begins with a conversation that leads to a discovery and from that germinates an idea for a new exhibit, presentation and/or lecture series in the Sheffer Gallery. This is how our calendar evolves throughout the year and as an organizer I am in awe of how much talent this town possesses and how enthusiastic people are about what they feel is important about Westport and its past.

The speakers who we invite to present a topic either live in Westport or have a talk that will inspire or educate us about our town. Here are two local authors who are presenting programs at the end of April that will touch on themes very relevant and thought-provoking.

Christopher Byron grew up on Blue Water Hill in Westport in the 1950s when Westport was still known as Beverly Hills East. You could see movie stars wandering into Oscar's Delicatessen every Saturday morning. Nothing like that happens anymore, so the point of his book is to memorialize a fast-fading set of memories before it's too late. Chris' book *Tales from Bluewater Hill: Tom Sawyer vs. the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* is a fun and laugh-out loud retrospective of growing up here. Chris has asked his friend Barry Tashian, leader of a group called *The Remains* to give a free concert at the Westport Town Hall on Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is invited to dance to the music of the 1940s and 1950s. A book signing and reception at the Westport Historical Society will follow with Oscar's Deli hosting the reception. It will be a great evening of people going down Memory Lane.

A local author/psychotherapist, Dalma Heyn will be behind the podium on

Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup> to share another great topic of interest to women from her book titled *Matrimorphosis: An Emotional History of the Modern Wife*. Dalma's book will discuss an idea that has many followers: why women feel flawed next to that "perfect wife" they believed they should be. Catamount Wealth Management will host a reception to follow.

Coming this fall is a series to touch on topics that evolve around architecture; including landscape architecture, preservation, green architecture and more. The experts will help us create great indoor and outdoor living space. Jeff Kaufman, a local architect and a new member of our Advisory Council, will be hosting this Saturday morning series. It's another example of a suggestion leading to a concrete program that sparks the imagination. All of your ideas help WHS stay on a path of creative programming that bring our community together to laugh, learn and love Westport.

## President's Message

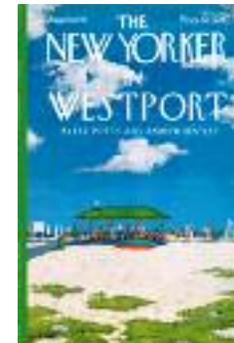


Since becoming involved with the WHS in late 2010, I have wondered why our house and garden tours seldom involve *historic*

homes. Seeking to remedy this, I organized a Historic House Tour of three pre-1800 homes on March 14. This was a member's only tour, and was followed by lectures on the current "Saugatuck" exhibit and the upcoming



"Westport and the WPA" exhibit. The homeowners served as the docents for the tour, which was limited to 34 registrants. Two of the homes have been remodeled by restoring the 18<sup>th</sup> century cores and adding 21<sup>st</sup> century additions to satisfy the requirements of modern families. All of these properties have WHS plaques, several have won a Westport Historic District Commission's Preservation Award, and are Local Historic Landmarks. One will be added to the National Register of Historic Places this month. The audience was very positive in their comments, many calling it a perfect day, which included a fine lunch donated by The Spotted Horse Tavern. WHS Plaque Coordinator Bob Weingarten was inspired to volunteer to do a Historic Barns Tour in the fall. His own home is in a historic barn that was converted into a residence.



An interesting project has been underway since my last column: based on the popularity of our "New Yorker Cover Story Exhibition", Eve Potts and Andrew

Bentley have written a fascinating book entitled "The New Yorker in Westport". The book is a collection of 50 wonderful *New Yorker* covers, by local artists and all portraying local scenes. Each image is accompanied by stories and historical facts about our special town. It is anticipated that it will be launched in early summer with all proceeds benefiting the WHS. Stay tuned for more details. The book's cover art should be familiar to all Westporters:

## *Upcoming Events: April to June 2015*

Go to [www.westporthistory.org](http://www.westporthistory.org) for updates and more information on all events.  
For reservations, call: 222-1424 • M-F, 10 am – 4:30 pm, Saturday, Noon – 4 pm

### **Tuesday, April 14**

Spring Break Kids Program:  
Party like it's 1799 (10:00 am)

### **Starting Wednesday, April 15**

Qi Gong with Susan (12:10 pm)(weekly program)

### **Friday, April 17**

Coffeehouse at The Wheeler's:  
Music of James Taylor & Linda Ronstadt (6:00 pm)

### **Sunday, April 26**

Minute Man Day: All Day Events

### **Thursday, April 30**

Dalma Heyn:  
The Transformation of Women Into Wives (6:30 pm)

**Saugatuck@Work Exhibit – through June 14th**



If you are not a member,  
we invite you to join.  
Please visit our website:  
[www.westporthistory.org](http://www.westporthistory.org)  
and go to the  
Membership page  
or call 203-222-1424.

