



ANNUAL REPORT

2016

WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## From the President...

2016 was a very busy year for Westport Historical Society. In addition to our usual exhibits, programs, educational activities and fund-raisers, the Board and I devoted much of our time and energy to laying the foundation for continued improvement to secure the future of WHS and our town's cultural and historic heritage. A busy year indeed, and the work will continue in 2017.

As you will read in the following reports, we are fortunate to have a strong complement of volunteers at all levels who support our staff in providing the services that enrich the cultural experience of our members and visitors. It takes a great deal of work to mount the exhibits, stage the programs, and generally make WHS, the Bradley-Wheeler House, and the Sheffer Gallery a place for all ages to enjoy and learn.

Once again, our Exhibits Committee welcomed the public to a series of enlightening and enjoyable presentations:

- *Window to Westport's Past and Present*, WPA images of historic Westport houses
- *The Beautiful Pond*, celebrating the heritage of the Compo Cove section of town
- *Art to the Max*, a glorious look at the works and personalities of the past fifty years of Westport's flourishing artistic period

Our Educational Department hosted all of Westport's third-graders for the annual look at life and times in Westport's unique past. In 2017 we will be adding a corresponding tour for first-graders, all to help ensure that those who will be responsible for our future have a firm grounding in our area's past.

This was a very special year for our ever-popular fundraisers: the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Hidden Garden Tour and the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Holiday House Tour. For the House Tour, this year every one of the six homes open to the public was a historic house, a true blending of history and holiday celebration.

Much more was presented, as you will read below. But at the same time, we were and continue to be hard at work at efforts designed to make WHS a more professional organization, more closely attuned to the needs of our publics, and firmly grounded financially and organizationally.

2016 was the second year of our involvement in the state-wide StEPs-CT program, a program for historical organizations to improve our practices and performance. This year we focused on collections management, stewardship of our buildings, and interpretation: how we use all our assets to enrich the experience of you, our audience.

As an outgrowth of the StEPs work, WHS has embarked on its first formal Strategic Planning effort in over ten years. The goal is to prepare and implement a three-five year blueprint for action, both internal and external, designed to make WHS an even more vibrant and significant member of the thriving Westport community. For example, we are significantly ramping up our collaborative activities with our fellow cultural and service organizations around town.

In September we held a formal Board Retreat to which we invited representatives from local cultural organizations, Town government, and the School system to ensure that we will be responsive to the

needs of our larger audience as we chart our course for the near and more distant future. It was a thrilling activity, and the insights we gained from within and without are proving invaluable.

I am honored to have led this extraordinary group over this significant year, and look forward to serving them and you in 2017.

**From the Executive Director**

### **Annual Report 2016**

The Westport Historical Society (WHS) has prospered enormously this year by the talents and passion of members of our very own Board of Directors and Advisory Council. These programs included: two wonderful annual historic walking tours of Saugatuck with Bob Mitchell: tours of the Kings Highway Historic District with Ed Gerber; a riveting presentation of the Danbury Raid by Edward Hynes; and a stimulating series of architectural lectures led by Jeffrey Kaufman.

#### ***We offered a rich and varied programming calendar at WHS:***

- ***3000 people attended special events and programs.***
- ***400 students enjoyed Exploring Westport History at the Wheeler House as part of the third grade curriculum in the Westport schools.***
- ***Our exhibitions attracted audiences young and old:***
- ***Window to Westport's Past and Present- WPA Images of Historic Homes***
- ***the beautiful POND about Old Mill Pond, Compo Cove***
- ***Art to the Max – A loving tribute and celebration of Max's Art Supplies***
- ***Coffee House at the Wheelers- three concerts that rocked the gallery and overall attended by 200 people.***
- ***An informative and scenic walk through the Haskins Preserve in Westport.***
- ***Four tours of Compo Cove with artist Judith Katz and Environmental activist Robin Tauck.***
- ***Engaging hands- on presentation at Camp Compo to 150 campers about Westport's early history.***

WHS continues to be actively involved in the StEPs-CT – a 26 month integrated program of professional development, training and mentorship. Our staff and board attend meetings in Hartford and other historic facilities to learn from each other in order to implement positive changes to encourage growth and financial stability.

2016 has been a year to try new ways of connecting people to their community. We embarked on an exciting brick walk campaign to invite residents to leave their permanent mark on a new brick path in front of our historic landmark. We continue to collaborate with other non-profit groups and host events for the Westport Garden Club, Westport Center for Senior Activities, Westport Public Library, First Night Westport, Westport Schools Permanent Art Collection Committee, among others.

We are on the road to creating a treasured resource that will celebrate the beauty and richness of Westport by building a solid strategic plan and offering year-round programs for kids and adults to be a “go-to” place for other Westport organizations.

## **Annual Appeal 2016**

The Annual Appeal began in early September when we mailed out the 2015 annual report brochure to around 225 donors. 22 people responded to this early appeal, bringing in \$4,800 to begin this campaign. Most nonprofits schedule the annual appeal at the end of the year but there is no rule on this and we could try mailing at an earlier date, to beat the crowd.

The Annual Appeal came out ahead of budget, despite a late mailing date (because of a timing issue with the HHT soiree) and higher costs (the notecards and envelopes cost \$1,000 to print). We mailed around 1,600 notecards out in December. I believe that the new format was part of the reason it was a success. Keeping the letter short, with highlights from 2016 and a list of what the reader's support would help us with was another contributing success factor. I think that we should continue the notecard format in future years.

One of the most important details involves choosing the list of recipients. We have to be diligent to mark all donors in the database throughout the year to be mailed at year end. Our database has recently been upgraded, giving us more information so that we can target relapsed donors more easily.

By Leigh Gage, VP Development

## **SPONSORSHIP**

The Westport Historical Society (WHS) is honored to be supported by a distinguished group of businesses and financial institutions that continue to provide substantial contributions. The Annual Sponsorship category is the level of support that covers all aspects of the organization. These sponsors donate a minimum of \$5000 and include: BNY Mellon Wealth Management, Berchem, Moses, & Devlin, PC, Sachs Walsh Insurance, Brown's Monument Works, and Maplewood Senior Living.

Additional significant personal and family foundation support included: Adolph & Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation, Thomas & Jeanne Elmezzi Foundation, Grace Salmon Trust, The Andrews Family Foundation, Chris and James Corgel, The Pequot Running Club and Westport Rotary Club

Our two major fundraisers this year included The Hidden Garden Tour and The Holiday House Tour. Sponsor support from local businesses is essential to the success of these events as well as our silent and live auctions. These two community celebrations raise a large part of our budget, approximately \$80,000 in 2016.

WHS believes strongly that the alliance with our sponsors is two-fold. It helps with our economic stability while creating wonderful opportunities for people in the business and financial arena to build personal relationships in their community through the events hosted at WHS. The sponsors feel empowered because they have initiated a closer tie with the community they do business in and this, in turn, nurtures growth and prosperity.

Sponsorship development will continue to be an important goal of WHS. As an organization we will create opportunities for increased participation of individuals and businesses to have a stronger local presence.

Submitted by Susan Gold, Executive Director

## **Facilities Report**

The building and grounds at 25 Avery Place remain in good condition although time is taking its toll and several areas are in need of repair which is reflected in our 2017 Facilities budget.

Thanks to Nancy Axthelm and Michaela MacColl we plan to replace the entire front sidewalk and fund the cost through the sale of “named” bricks. The cost of the sidewalk, labor and materials, which is significant will be covered, and may possibly even profit as a result. Roof drain repairs were completed last year at a fraction of the estimated cost, but in doing so it was discovered that the cupola on top of the house needs repair and painting. Flooring replacement in the Newman Room is in progress and the installation may be completed by volunteers. It is important for document preservation that humidity control be maintained and the installation of a dehumidifying system in the lower level is again recommended. Lastly, we hope to be able to pave the driveway this year.

We were able to keep our facilities budget lean this past year, thanks again to our staff and members for volunteering their time, and the continued support of contractors James Izzo Electric Service, and Guinta-Bolduc Masonry Services (snowplowing) who have generously some or all of their services. Their loyalty is appreciated.

Peter Jennings, VP Facilities

## **Membership**

A membership drive is needed as membership dropped almost 14 % during 2016. Note that membership levels go up and down during the year. WHS needs to come up with a compelling marketing plan to convince people why they should become a member. At Fairfield Museum, a membership allows a free entry, value \$5.

We welcomed 68 new members in 2016. The problem is renewals. 125 people did not renew in 2015 and 188 people did not renew in 2016. Often it is an oversight on the part of the person and with additional reminders, I think more people will renew.

In last year’s report, I introduced the idea of automatic renewals. This is still an option worth exploring and would require some investment and technical expertise.

A new feature has been added to the Filemaker database which shows at the touch of a button who is a “new” member. (Note that this is accurate for the dates that the database has been in existence--since 2011.) So someone could have been a member for 20 years but then dropped out prior to 2011 and rejoined and we would show them as a new member. I would like to give a shout out to Paul Davis who is our database volunteer guru. Thank you Paul! He has made the database more user friendly; for example, in an update this month (January 2017) he has added some features such as:

- Showing members last year who aren’t members this year. If we use this information intelligently, we should be able to retain more members. Two years ago I wrote that “we need to look closely at how to increase mailings from an administrative point of view.” This still stands true and we need more marketing initiatives aimed at increasing membership.

Leigh Gage, VP Membership

## Archives Committee

- During 2016, the Archives Committee volunteers replied to about 120 requests for information; coming in via telephone and email, these requests originated all over the country. We also had about 80 walk-in researchers and several by appointment including some from the states of Washington and California. Research requests were for house history, photos, town events & celebrations, genealogy, Westport & Connecticut history, and businesses.
- We charge \$15 to non-members to do research for them (WHS members pay no research fee and receive a discount for copies/scans). A new fee for scanning photos has been implemented. We are charging \$5/scan. Once we have our collections digitized, this fee will turn over to a fee for sending digital files. A comprehensive policy for photographic and document reproduction is in the works and will be implemented in the near future. In 2016, we raised \$445 and received several open donations as well. Notably, the Westport Garden Club gave a generous donation of \$1000 this year at the end of a summer long effort to rehouse some of their archives which are stored in our vault. In addition, the Town of Westport contributed funds for the storage of Town materials.
- Two of our long-time volunteers are working to catalogue a unique and large collection of papers donated by Ruth Adams. This collection currently takes up about 24 archival boxes as well as 10 file boxes of unsorted materials. The bulk of this collection is correspondence, however there are also wills and deeds as well as an extensive genealogy of the Adams family. The papers range in date from the mid-1700s through the 1960s. When this collection is complete, it will be an invaluable resource.
- The archives also welcomed the Eunice Dennie Burr Chapter of the DAR in April to review the archives from the Compo Mill Chapter (now discontinued) that were donated to the WHS and are now housed in our vault. In November, we welcomed the Westport Garden Club as they held their board meeting in the Raymond Room and toured their newly refurbished archive. WHS friend, Louise Demakis with the help of Sara Krasne, carried out this summer-long project.
- The archives has also been the recipient of many generous donations throughout the year. Notably a large donation of materials and objects related to Westport and Westport history was made by Ann Scheffer and Bill Scheffler. This donation included many rare objects such as an embalming fluid warmer from the Embalmers Supply Company. We are extremely grateful for their generosity.
- The archives committee has been hard at work taking a full inventory of the vault contents ahead of our efforts to digitize the collections. It is a long and painstaking task, which is still ongoing at this time. Between the main members of the archives committee and high school/college interns and volunteers, over 1,700 hours were logged in 2016. The archives is an incredibly time intensive labor of love that benefits all of the residents of Westport (past, present & future).
- Members of the Archives Committee are: Sven-Eric Selander, Sara Krasne, Alice Lamberson, Hope Hickok, Mark Perlman, and William Chase. We meet Monday mornings and by appointment as requested; we are always looking for new volunteers and will train those willing to help.

Sven-Eric Selander – Archives, Co-Chair

Sara Krasne – Archives, Co-Chair

# **COSTUME COLLECTION**

## **Inventory of Children's Costume**

- Examined each garment
- Verified and updated descriptions in the database
- Ensured proper care and storage methods

## **StEPs-CT Program Project Implementation**

- Attended Collections Unit sessions held at Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford March through June
- Reorganized and cleaned the costume workroom
- Began to sort and reorganize all documentation according to professional museum standards
- Plans being developed to revise all outdated forms, policies, and procedures from the 1990s and develop ones that are needed

## **Program for Westport Senior Center**

- Cheryl Bliss conducted a program in late September for ladies from the Westport Senior Center. Her presentation showcased a variety of garments from the collection. Highlights included: ladies' dresses from the 1860s to 1910s, several late Victorian children's garments, Paul Newman's high school football uniform, and Neil Sedaka's early 1970s red jumpsuit - so groovy!
- They enjoyed it so much they asked to schedule another one for March 2017

## **Third Grade Tour in October**

- Created a vignette in the Parlor with child mannequins (loaned from Wilton Historical Society) dressed in late 19<sup>th</sup> century costumes
- Selected dresses and arranged for loans from Ed Vebell's extensive reproduction costume collection for the Docents/Role-players to wear

## **Donations**

- Several items were donated to WHS and left with no contact info and/or documentation; this highlights the need for WHS donation policies and procedures to be addressed through StEPs projects.
- Ed Vebell has decided to donate some of his costume collection to WHS. The Costume Committee along with Nicole Carpenter, Director of Education, began the process of perusing his collection in mid-December and determining appropriate garments for both the historic costume collection (to be accessioned as artifacts) and the education costume collection (garments that can be worn).

Committee: Cheryl Bliss, Stacey Danielson, Maggie Parkhurst, Alicia D'Anna (joined in September)

Submitted by: Stacey Danielson



## Education

The primary function of every history museum is to educate visitors about the past in a way that is engaging and leaves a mark on the memory; enticing patrons to support the institution, but more importantly, embrace history and learn from it. Educational programming, for both young and old, is key in achieving the primary function of loving history and letting it influence the future.

Though I am new to the Westport Historical Society, starting in September of 2016, I have strived to make this mission a reality in the Education Department. Over the last four months existing children's programs were re-imagined and several new programs were created.

The annual third grade tour was moved to the fall, per the schools request to fit into the new social studies requirements. This tour, named "Exploring Westport History at the Wheeler House," received overwhelmingly positive feedback from chaperones, teachers, and students. Additionally this field-trip, which reaches all of the third grade students in the Westport Public Schools district, has been nominated for the 2017 CLHO Award of Merit.

Existing school holiday programs such as Election Day were re-vamped to include more inquiry-based learning, as well as craft projects and history themed activities. Future school holiday programs will follow this framework to create a fun educational experience.

Several scout groups also visited WHS to fulfill badge requirements, including the Inside Government badge for Junior Girl Scouts. Connections are being made with other scout groups through social media outreach to increase the number of groups in 2017.

A new program starting in January of 2017 will be a monthly site visit to the YMCA, for "History on Wheels"; a mobile program that can be taken to children rather than them having to come to WHS. This program was strengthened by a YMCA fieldtrip to WHS to introduce history and the Wheeler House to their group of after school students. "History on Wheels" is to be expanded in 2017 to reach local preschools and daycares, as well as other local children's groups.

In 2017 the Education Department is looking forward to revitalizing programs for all generations of Westport residents, as well as working collaboratively with even more institutions in Fairfield County.

Submitted by Nicole Carpenter, Director of Education

## ***Exhibits***

### **Window to Westport's Past and Present: WPA Images of Historic Houses, Nov 8, 2015 to Mar 26, 2016**

Westport Historical Society opened an exhibit of photographs of historic Westport homes taken in the 1930s under the auspices of the federal Works Progress Administration. All of the homes were at least 100 years old when photographed, making the exhibit a rare peek into the town's past. To show how the homes have changed, the WPA images were displayed alongside photos taken today.

The idea for the exhibit was born when the Society's house historian, Bob Weingarten, was going through boxes in the organization's vault and found one labelled Works Progress Administration. It contained more than 90 photos of Westport homes. Searching through the website of the Connecticut State Library, Weingarten found dozens of additional WPA photos of Westport dwellings.

Weingarten was able to identify most of the homes using skills acquired during his years of research as the WHS's historic homes specialist. Those that he could not identify were posted on Dan Woog's "06880" blog with requests for information on their location and history. The result was that only four of the photos remain unidentified. Twenty of the homes are no longer standing.

### ***the beautiful POND: May 15 – September 1, 2016***

The town of Westport, CT can attribute its very existence, in part, to the Sherwood Mill Pond. As the first working mill and first commercial enterprise in what is now part of Westport, the pond's grist mill (c. 1705) gave the area the commerce required to be chartered. Westport author, artist and teacher Judith Oreseck Katz wrote her book *the beautiful POND*, as a celebration of the pond and dedicated it to the preservation of our waters and our history. The exhibit features Judith's original artwork and never before shown pieces of the rich history of the area. Judith also curated the exhibit

*the beautiful POND* featured stunning water colors of the pond and its environs. The copy walks readers through the transformation of the pond from a working mill to a beloved and bucolic sanctuary for coastal life. The very personal history of the pond and the area known as Compo Cove was revealed through documents, photographs and memoirs that belonged to our late town historian, Allen Raymond, and from a descendant of one of the original builders of the cove, John Colburn.

### **Art to the Max October 7, 2016 – January 7, 2017**

The exhibit, "Art to the Max", featured original art that graced Max's windows from 1975-2014, including hand-drawn calendars by Nina Royce. Curated by Nina Bentley and Miggs Burroughs, the exhibit included a recreation of Shirley Mellor's "back office" decorated with cards and original art work gifted to her by local artists. Shirley was Max's wife. "We played a huge role in the art life of Westport". The legendary art supply store (and, just as important social hub for painters, illustrators and cartoonists) –closed on September 1, 2016. For 59 years Max's had occupied prime real estate, directly opposite the Y. But the end of Westport as an "artist' colony," coupled with increasing role of technology in both art and commerce, spelled the end. Max's dates back to 1956, when Max Kaplan bought Fine Arts Stationers. All in all, it was a very good Westport Historical Society 2016 exhibit year.

Laurence S. Untermeyer, VP Exhibits

## 2016 Financial Report

This year we saw our operation revenue approached \$300,000, which is in line with previous years results. Revenues exceeded our budget expectations by approximately \$25,000. These result were less than 2016 by \$20,000 due primarily to the unanticipated success of the New Yorker Books sales in 2015.

We experienced significant contributions from our membership, sponsors, donors and participants in our various fund raising activities. We were very pleased with the financial outcome of our Hidden Garden Tour and Holiday House Tours. We also experienced strong sales of our Brickwalk campaign, which will continue into 2016.

Our endowment fund saw positive performance and the income from the fund added to our revenues.

Management kept an eye on expenses such that we spent less than expected in our budget. Needed facility upgrades came in under budget and the upgrades to our heating system and plumbing will pay for themselves in short order. Our financial results are audited every year and the reports are available for review after mid-year.

Jay A. Dirnberger, Treasurer

## Remarkable Gift Shop

Once again the **Remarkable Gift Shop** owes much of its success to Andrew Bentley and Eve Potts. *The New Yorker in Westport* continues to be a "remarkable" seller with people from all over the country. It's been the most popular gift to give and to receive again this year.

Other great selling items this year were our Long-sleeve T-Shirts, caps, mugs, totes, kitchen towels and our beautiful hand-painted Christmas ornaments.

Of course we're all still missing our dear Olivia. We keep in touch weekly and we love reminding her what she's missing, not only at WHS, but in lovely Connecticut in the winter. Don't know why she prefers Hawaii to Easton.

BUT, on the positive side we have the wonderful Kathy Nixon. Not only is she an excellent assistant, but she loves to decorate and is making the inside as well as the outside of WHS look terrific. We have often been accused of having too much fun so I guess it's a great match. As well as selling, decorating, inventory, ordering stock, creating lovely bags and everything that it takes to run the gift shop, Kathy enjoys sewing seat cushions, tablecloths and generally takes pleasure in sprucing up the hallway cabinets and the period rooms.

Looking forward to another good (better!) and profitable year in 2017.

*The Remarkable Gift Shop* works in conjunction with non-profit organizations, passing the profits directly to the cause. For example: Project Return, Compo Gold Honey just to name a few. **The Remarkable Gift Shop** remains the premier place to shop for "Westport" inspired maps, books, art and gifts.

Mimi Burroughs, Gift Shop Manager

## **Plaques 2016 – The Best Year Yet**

2016 was extremely successful in the ordering and distribution of plaques. The year ended with 36 plaques ordered which was over 2 times the average number of plaques ordered per year since 2004. That average number was 15 plaques per year. Prior to the 2004-2015 yearly average, about 5 plaques were ordered per year between 1978, the year the program started, and 2003.

The plaques ordered commemorated houses that were built between c.1780 and 1930 with most of them, twenty, receiving plaques for houses built in the 1700s and 1800s. Of the 36 plaques, 4 were for replacement of which three were initially placed on house in 1978! For each replacement plaque the history was reviewed and if in error was fixed. Of the four replacement plaques two had incorrect year built information. The homeowners were appreciative of this new information. Of the rest of the plaques, 3 were for houses receiving Preservation Awards, one for a house designated as a Local Landmark Property, one for an actress, Gene Tierney, that lived in the house and two for artists, Prendergast and von Schmidt. Two plaques were for the Women's Club to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the addition of the Saugatuck Church Sabbath Meeting Hall to their current building.

Other interesting facts are that one plaque was ordered as a Christmas gift from husband to wife, two plaques were ordered for married children by their parents moving into houses purchased in Westport. One plaque was ordered for an 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for a parent who lived in the same house for 52 years, another plaque was ordered after four years of "sitting" on the plaque agreement form. In one other case, a plaque was ordered after an "on and off" investigation of 4 years to determine when the house was built. Another plaque was ordered for a house that was built in c.1837 but moved because of the Merritt construction to another location in 1937. Most plaques have a unique reason for ordering but there is not enough space to identify all.

– submitted by Bob Weingarten, House Historian and Plaque Coordinator.

## **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Hidden Garden Tour Garden Market and Garden Party**

Event Chair – Edward F. Gerber

Garden Tour Chairs – Darcy Sledge and Stacey Danielson

Garden Market Chairs- Cynthia Alexander and Joni Andrews

Garden Party Chairs – Betsy Pollak and Edward F. Gerber

HGT Committee – Michaela MacColl, Nancy Axthelm, Tara Brownlee, Miggs Burroughs, Jim Corgel, Robin Hammond, Jeff Kaufman, Ric Kallaher, Amy Van Arsdale, Teri Walsh

### **Garden Tour, June 12<sup>th</sup>**

To highlight our 25th Anniversary, we choose six exceptional gardens all with "wow" factor. They varied considerably from in-town rose garden excellence, to waterside serenity, and everything in between. The public was enthusiastic, declaring this the best tour in 25 years. Three gardens were located in Westport, two in Fairfield.

## The six gardens

- *Rose House* on Harbor Road, Southport: Lovingly created rose gardens featuring a color scheme of orange, purple, and chartreuse, coupled with plants that attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.



*Beanacre Farm*, Congress Street, Fairfield: The owner's amazing 21-year project of reviving spectacular gardens of roses, hydrangeas of every possible hue, lilies, peonies, lavender and hollyhocks combined with obelisks, arbors, and tuteurs provide visual stimulation.

- *Stoneboat Gardens*, Stoneboat Road, Westport: The bones of this garden began in 1953 when the longtime owner purchased the property. Now with the guidance of The Scottish Gardener, the gardens have 5,000 bulbs, towering 50-year-old trees, 140 varieties of trees, shrubs and perennials. A greenhouse of the owner's orchids, and a massive raspberry patch that provides the best jam in town.
- *Rustic Retreat*, Minute Man Hill, Westport: Built in 1952, by the owner's grandmother, the property now has been transformed into a charming Adirondack-style house, with lovely shade gardens, beneath massive maples reflecting the welcoming woodsiness and cozy relationship of the indoors and the outside. Of special note, is the crescent of rhododendrons that lead to a "pool in a garden."
- *A World Away in Westport*, Compo Mill Cove: This spectacular property is comprised of two houses and vast gardens overlooking Sherwood Mill Pond and Long Island Sound. Inspired by the landscapes of Block Island, the owner has planted hydrangeas, perennials and large swaths of green grass to highlight the unobstructed views of beach with salt- and storm-resistant trees.

## Garden Market

It was a very small Garden Market on the grounds of WHS with approximately 6 sellers. The windy weather precluded the use of tents for vendors. The vendors paid a percentage instead of a fee. WHS made \$688. It is recommended that WHS not do the market in this way next year.

## The Garden Party, June 10<sup>th</sup>

A wonderful celebration was held in the restored Bedford Hall and Garden of the Westport Woman's Club. The festive evening included:

- Prosecco and white wine from Mionetto USA, and special martinis;
- Hors d'oeuvres and desserts provided by A Dash of Salt;
- Bidding on unique items in silent and live auctions;

- Fortuneteller, Henna artist, and Tarot Card Reader;
- A unique Hat Competition, which has become a yearly tradition;
- Scrumptious frozen custard from The Shake Shack;
- Music provided by pianist Rex Cadwallader, Music Director at Greens Farms Academy.

## **Income**

Sponsors—\$15,790.00

Tour Tickets – \$16, 210.00

Garden Party Tickets – \$5, 835.00

Garden market – \$688.40

Auctions – \$13, 303.00

Total Income – \$51, 826.40

Less expenses – \$10, 930.47

Net income – \$40, 895.93

Annual Sponsor Allocation – \$8,125

Grand Total Income – \$49, 020.93

## **Holiday House Tour, Holiday Market and Holiday Soiree**

Event Chair: Edward F. Gerber

House Tour: Stacey Danielson and Darcy Sledge

Holiday Soiree: Betsy Pollak

Garden Market: Cynthia Alexander

Committee: Joni Andrews, Mira Auxier, Tara Brownlee, Miggs Burroughs, Angela Capone, Nicole Carpenter, Eileen Flug, Robin Hammond, Jeff Kaufman, Terri Keppel, Margaret LeBedis, Michaela MacColl, Elizabeth Marks, Kelle Ruden, Amy Swanson, Suzanne Tanner

### **Holiday House Tour**



WHS celebrated its 30th Anniversary Tour on Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. More than 325 visitors toured the six houses, five in Westport and one in Easton. In addition, the Adams Academy opened its historic doors. Of special note was the fact that all of the houses were historic and built prior to 1830. It was our intention to show that today's families can live quite comfortably in historic houses.

One house was on our tour 25 years ago, and is still occupied by the same owners. Some properties included period barns and dry-stack stonewalls. Several experienced major stylistic changes – going from Colonial, to Victorian, to Colonial-revival styles. One was moved in 1979 to protect it from demolition. Several have received the Westport Historic District Commission's Annual Preservation awards.

One home was still undergoing a major restoration; however, the owner provided a fascinating tour explaining what he had done so far, and showing his plans for the future. He promised that the house would be open again for our tour in 2017, to show its completed interior restoration and finished grounds.

A pop-up store in one of the barns was a big success, as was David's Teas provided at the Adams Academy and other homemade refreshments.

Comments from visitors included, "I want you and your team to know how terrific I found this Holiday House Tour to be. The homes were all lovely and truly interesting."

### **Holiday Soiree**



The Holiday Soiree was held on Saturday December 3<sup>rd</sup> at The Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum in Norwalk. Its elegant Gilded Age rooms were decorated with vintage holiday decorations; sumptuous fare from Best in Gourmet was served, along with fine wine and Prosecco, donated by Mionetto USA.

Entertainment included seasonal songs by Suzanne Tanner. Guests also enjoyed the services of a henna artist and a fortuneteller! Tours of the historic rooms were conducted by Lockwood-Mathews docents, and were well received. Silent and live auctions completed the evening with much spirited bidding.

Of special note was the fact that pictures and descriptions of all of the silent auction items were available on-line, for viewing and bidding in advance of the event. E-blasts were successfully used to build up enthusiasm.

A new feature of the silent auction was "The Theater Corner", where guests could bid on tickets to popular stage productions in Western Connecticut and the Berkshires, which were paired with gift certificates for meals at restaurants near the theaters.

The Holiday Auction on November 26<sup>th</sup> was well attended offering a wide variety of holiday gift items.

Income:



HHT sponsors – \$16,213.46  
Tour ticket sales – \$17,000.00  
Soiree ticket sales – \$7,050.00  
Silent and live auctions – \$12,762.00  
Holiday Market – \$1,141.80  
Total – \$54,167.26

\$8,125.00 – Annual Sponsor allocation

Grand Total – \$62,292.26  
Less Expenses – \$13,635.47  
Net income – \$48,656.79

Edward F. Gerber, HGT and HHT Chair

## **Oral History Report**

### **Completed Projects**

1. Completed video edits for the **175 Anniversary of the Founding of Westport**. The video is an “Imaginary Re-enactment of the founding of Westport” and has been posted to the WHS Web Site.
2. Filmed and edited video of **Robin Tauck as she discusses Old Mill Pond at Compo Cove** and related book written called **The Beautiful Pond**, by Judith Katz. Video has been posted to WHS Web Site.
3. Completed edits to video of **George Marks, retired Police Officer and Detective of the Westport Police Department**. Video has been posted to the WHS Web Site.

### **Projects In Process**

Updates to the Mac Computer Operating System by Apple (under which all our video editing is worked-on.) have caused unexpected problems with any videos in progress and not yet completed. This has caused reediting work which is still on going.

## **Volunteers**

As a voluntary organization, we continue to cultivate volunteers throughout the year. This past year, we have had the pleasure to be the popular volunteer destination for the Staples High School AP History class and we were able to engage students in projects with our archives department, costumes and education. The students were wonderful additions to our vacation programs as assistants to our Director of Education. We are very fortunate to have Barbara Van Orden schedule volunteers year-round to welcome visitors to the Wheeler House. These volunteers are valuable additions to the staff and play a very important role in our organization as contributing team members and assisting us with meaningful office tasks. Volunteers who work with us have strong computer skills, technical experience, research talent and organizational skills that have served us very well.

We are able to offer the two signature fundraising tours: Holiday House Tour and Hidden Garden Tour with the help of nearly 80 docent volunteers for each tour. We continue to provide on -the -job training for our volunteers in learning about the history of the Bradley-Wheeler House and Cobblestone Barn. We solicit the help of volunteers to work at exhibit openings, concerts, lectures and hands-on family programs. The volunteer program will only continue to grow in 2017 with the expanded needs of the community. We are working closely with numerous groups who like to partner with WHS. We are truly fortunate to live in a town that values community spirit and celebrates its cultural heritage with passion and devotion. We applaud the over 200 volunteers who work with us on an annual basis and continue to nurture our bonds with people who want to help us present and preserve our local history.

Submitted by: Susan Gold, Executive Director

## **Collections**

There have been no additions to our object collection this year. However, it allowed us time to carefully record, identify and label every object. Our Registrar, Don Draves has done an outstanding job. Don may be joining his son's family in Alaska and it will be a great loss. WHS must give thanks to Don for his invaluable work

Barbara Van Orden, Collections Chair

## **StEPs-CT PROGRAM**

### **DESCRIPTION**

- Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations was developed by AASLH (American Association for State and Local History)
- Since its debut in 2009, StEPs has helped 585 organizations nationwide, including 27 in CT, begin taking "steps" to plan for positive change
- This program is offered by CT Humanities and the CT League of History Organizations
- WHS application was approved to be a participant in the second class (2015-2017) in CT
- Each StEPs participant is assigned to a Mentor who oversees and advises 5 organizations

Mentor - Jackie Haley

- Background: has worked as a consultant for historic house museums for 20 years, primarily at organizations in Westchester County including Historic Hudson Valley; has worked at the following CT sites: Bush-Holley House/Greenwich Historical Society, Mark Twain House, Florence Griswold Museum; has served on the GHHN Board/Greater Hudson Heritage Network for the past 6 years
- She is 1 of 5 Mentors in the StEPs- CT program; each Mentor has 5 Mentees

Mentee Group - Fairfield County

Danbury Railway Museum, Newtown Historical Society, and the 3 “Ws” – the Historical Societies of Wilton, Weston, and Westport

Six Standards Sections are covered over the course of two years. Instruction sessions are held at Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford and are followed by group meetings/discussions, and also site visits with Mentee organizations.

Year 1 - 2015

- 1) Mission-Vision-Governance: Jan - Apr
- 2) Audience : May - Aug
- 3) Management: Sep - Dec

Year 2 - 2016

Grant writing workshops: Jan - Feb

- 4) Stewardship of Collections: Mar - June
- 5) Stewardship of Historic Structures: Jul - Oct
- 6) Interpretation: Nov - Feb 2017 (What's Your Story - Exhibits, Education, Programming)

**PROJECTS COMPLETED**

**Governance**

- Revisions to Bylaws (last update was July 2005)
- Re-implemented Executive Committee per Bylaws; first meeting March 2016

**Collections**

- Wrote and Implemented Collections Security and Access Policies
  - Restricted Access: Vault & Art Collection
  - Restricted Access: Collections Storage Areas & Attic

**Connecticut Humanities Digital Project**

- As a result of our participation in StEPs, WHS was one of several CT sites invited to participate in this project, and have our most important objects and archival materials professionally photographed to be included in their two website programs: ConnecticutHistory.org and TeachItCT.org

- Members of the collections, archives, and costume/textile committees selected 25 items from the WHS collections, several WPA murals at Town Hall, and also two very important objects from Greens Farms Congregational Church
- These photos can be used to share our fascinating Westport stories in many ways such as: the WHS website, advertising, social media, grant applications, exhibits, and signage

## **BOARD RETREATS**

### **Board Training Retreat – July 15 at Wilton Historical Society**

- Submitted CT Humanities grant proposal and was awarded \$1500 to hire a professional Facilitator, Anne Ackerson, to conduct a Board Training Retreat about board governance fundamentals
- Determined list of *Top 10 Priorities* to address during the next 6-12 months, with the need for a Strategic Plan top priority

### **Visioning Retreat – September 30 at Saugatuck Congregational Church**

- To prepare for the formal strategic planning process, a second retreat was held with Board, Staff, 4 Advisory Council members, 6 invited community reps, and Anne Ackerson returning as Facilitator to help us envision a future for Westport Historical Society
- Discussed trends affecting the future of our community and region:

- demographic and physical development
- education and life-long learning
- information and entertainment
- philanthropy
- Brainstormed in full- and small-group exercises to discuss: *10 years in the future you attend a celebration at WHS, what successes are you celebrating?*
- Information gathered from these exercises will be used by the Strategic Planning Committee

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

- The committee of 8 includes: Bob Mitchell, Stacey Danielson, Jim Corgel, Jeff Kaufman, Teri Walsh (Board members), Sue Gold and Nicole Carpenter (Staff) and Cheryl Bliss (Advisory Council and Past President)
- Meetings were held in November and December with Anne Ackerson, who is continuing as our Facilitator through this process
- 4 major Goals were determined from results of the Visioning Retreat Summary:
  - 1) Community Engagement (includes audience, exhibits, and programs)
  - 2) Collections and Buildings Stewardship
  - 3) Funding
  - 4) Organizational Excellence
- Strategies and Tasks for each Goal will be developed to present to Exec, Board, Staff, Advisory Council and community representatives for further discussion and input

*Submitted by Stacey Danielson, VP at large*