



Windsor Historical Society

News



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September 2009

Windsor's Tornado Thirty Years Ago

Connie Thomas, Administrative Assistant



1979 tornado damage. WHS Collections

Next month marks the 30th anniversary of an F4 tornado that hit the village of Poquonock and killed three people. An F4 tornado has winds between 207 and 260 mph, can level well-constructed homes, and create heavy projectiles. An F5 has the highest intensity. When the tornado left Poquonock, it went on to flip over jet planes at Bradley International Airport and destroy historic aircraft at the Bradley Air Museum. Though these violent storms can happen in any state, Connecticut ranks number 42 out of the 50 states for tornado frequency. In fact, between 1950 and 1995 statewide we had 61 tornadoes with four deaths. We've written about this event before in this newsletter, but I thought I'd share a personal perspective of this big event.

Late in the afternoon of October 3, 1979, I delayed a trip to the library with my 3 and 5 year old sons when I saw purple clouds overhead. Soon they were followed by fierce winds, rain, and a green sky. Half an hour later we did go to the library where I bumped into Ruth Budlong who said she'd heard there was a tornado in Poquonock! This was later confirmed on the news, and throughout the night we heard the sound of helicopters at a nearby athletic field evacuating the injured.

The next day was my 32nd birthday, and my dear friend Wendy Mitchell asked me what I'd like. I asked if she could help me see history in the making and get me into the village of Poquonock as all the roads were blocked by police and National Guardsmen. We

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WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Our Mission

The Windsor Historical Society aims to inspire public awareness and appreciation of the diverse peoples, places, and events that contribute to Windsor's evolving history. We preserve and interpret Windsor's historical record through active collecting, research, exhibitions, programs, and communications in the belief that an understanding of history can provide individuals and communities with connections to the past, a sense of belonging in the present, and responsibility for the future.

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Director's Message

Christine Ermenc, Executive Director



We are planning a new exhibition on Windsor history for our North and South Galleries opening in 2010. Staff, working with a team of academic historians, museum colleagues, and school administrators, held planning meetings early in 2009. To determine which exhibition themes would be most compelling, a survey with twenty-six thematic questions was circulated in the spring of 2009. We were astonished when the first online response came back within minutes.

Of the 213 people completing the survey, sixty-eight percent responded online. Seventy-four percent of the respondents are Society members, and fifty-six percent live in the greater Hartford region.

The questions that engendered the most interest were, in order:

- What has made Windsor distinctive over time? Why should I care?
- Why have the Connecticut and Farmington Rivers mattered?
- Why did Native American people want the English to settle here?
- How have Windsor people remembered their history?
- What has been the importance of transportation arteries such as rivers, railroads, roadways, and interstates to Windsor over time?
- What has been Windsor's relationship to the region over time?
- How has life changed here over the centuries?

Respondents were encouraged to add comments. Many told us of their interest in genealogy and Windsor's early settlement. Others campaigned for more recent history and inclusion of the voices of Windsor's older residents. One person acknowledging older Windsor residents wrote: "What is their vision for Windsor when they will no longer be with us? What is the legacy they want us to pass on?" Four people wanted to see more about Windsor business and agriculture. Others mentioned maps of early homes and businesses. "This has been a year of apologies," wrote another. "Apologies to Native Americans. Apologies for slavery. Yet, no apology for executing 11 Connecticut citizens for the capital crime of witchcraft. It's time to apologize to Alse Young!" [a Windsor resident hung for witchcraft in 1647]

"Why is there not more integration between Windsor's history...and Windsor's educational...curriculum...? And what can be done to address this?" asked one respondent. "Since I am in southern California, I will not see the exhibit," noted another. "Could some of it be online?"

While one person commented, "My universal advice to historical societies is to stick to your knitting ...history...avoid current events and politically correct attitudes," another wrote, "I noticed that at the [375th anniversary] parade, there was hardly a black face among the spectators. I would like to have the results of a person to person interview as to the reason as well as a plan to remedy this lack of interest/participation."

Clearly, building an engaging and balanced exhibition will be an interesting challenge in 2010. The people who completed our survey are passionate about different and sometimes conflicting aspects of our town's history. We thank them for sharing their thoughts and will take their suggestions to heart as we move forward.

Jumpstart Your Research

Barbara Goodwin, Librarian

Did you miss our recent genealogy lecture series? The speakers covered a variety of topics and gave their listeners many tips for more effective research results. **Next year's seminar series is already in the planning stages.** If you have suggestions for speakers or topics, contact our Museum Educator Julia Baldini at jbaldini@windsorhistoricalsociety.org.

Warning Out

Marian Pierre-Louis introduced the audience to an interesting 17th and 18th century New England custom. The tradition was based on old English laws giving the town the right to “warn out” persons who were not inhabitants of their community. An inhabitant was someone who was born in town, had acquired land in town, had married an inhabitant, or had completed service as an apprentice to a master in town. The warning was a legal maneuver so that the town could avoid being responsible for the care of strangers if they became ill, incapacitated, or unable to support themselves. Strangers could be issued warnings regardless of their race, economic status, or even legitimate relationships to other community members, but the individual did not necessarily have to actually leave the village. The warning was issued by an official of the town such as a constable and was recorded in town record books. Warnings are an interesting source to pursue if you are looking for an ancestor who did not own land or who appeared to move frequently.

Diaries, Letters, and Journals

Where can you find family diaries or letters to enhance your understanding of your family history? Laura Prescott suggested looking in the archives of historical societies or public and academic libraries in the area **where your subject's children or even grandchildren lived.** For Connecticut families following typical emigration patterns, that could be in New York state, Ohio, or even points further west. Several years ago the Society became aware of one such treasure trove, a collection of Hayden family papers, in the Newberry Library in Chicago.

The letters of Hannah Hayden (1778-1823) were written between 1806 and 1822. Born in Windsor, she moved with her husband and family to the remote Cooperstown, NY, area where they established a saw mill and fulling mill. Her poignant letters home were

carried back and forth by passing travelers. They convey her longing to see her sisters, parents, and especially the young son she had left in their care. She frets over feeding and clothing her growing family, the need to prepare large meals for the hired laborers in her husband's saw mill, and the lack of time for her spinning. She delights in the antics of her toddlers and is proud when the children are able to go to school. The evocative voice of this young woman reminds us that mothers have had many of the same worries for generations.

Google's Similar Words Feature

Most of us use the internet search engine Google just about every day. One hint I gleaned from Dan Lynch's talk, “Google Your Family Tree,” is this trick: add the term “~genealogy” to your string of search terms, and you will retrieve hits that may not contain the exact word “genealogy” but do contain words or phrases with a similar meaning. The web pages that are found may contain terms such as family history, ancestry, vital records, roots, surname, or family tree. The tilde (~) symbol can be used to focus any type of search with synonyms for your topic of interest.

Birth, Marriage, and Death Records

Birth, marriage, and death records can be elusive ones to find; understanding a little more about the history of recordkeeping practices may help in your search. In the early days of the New England colonies, the churches were the keepers of vital records. Ministers in many localities were expected to report the births and deaths of their parishioners to the town clerk, and these were written into a register book. The book entries may have contained little more than the date and appropriate names. From the end of the Revolutionary War until about 1850, it was not uncommon for vital events to go unrecorded. Registrants may not have been able to pay the fee, or perhaps they felt recording the event in the family Bible was sufficient.

Standardized, printed certificates did not become commonplace until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Jim Leatherbee reported to the audience that each town in Connecticut converted their registration system from book entries to certificates on their own schedule. **It took decades, from the 1840's until about 1905,** for all 169 towns in the state to make the transition. The State Vital Records Office in Hartford maintains a copy of all vital events recorded from July 1, 1897 up to the present, but the earlier records are only available at the local level.

(Tornado, continued from page one)

loaded my bike in the back of her truck and somehow fit a car seat and little children in seat belts. Wendy promised to pick up my kindergartener when school was over that afternoon. We unloaded the bike at the intersection of Kennedy Road and River Street where an unguarded sawhorse blocked the entry into "Tornado Land."

It was a quiet ride down River Street under the hardwood trees and alongside hay fields until I was about a half mile from Route 75. As I pedaled along the Farmington River, leaf debris and tree limbs littered yards and then the remains of whole trees were on the side of the street. Bird song dimmed and was replaced with the overpowering sound of many chain saws. People emerged in their yards raking, and the sound of chain saws grew louder. Many working people came into view with their chain saws removing large tree limbs and clearing the roads. Downed telephone wires hung off poles. I pedaled by unnoticed.

Turning north on Route 75, I was astonished to see so many downed trees that the road was nearly impassable. Trees were snapped off midway up their trunks, a telltale sign of a tornado. I was shocked to look across the street and see the second-floor interiors of people's homes. Walls of brick homes lay in piles around their foundations leaving gaping holes where their wallpaper, beds, and privacy were exposed for all to see. Windows were smashed, and roofs were missing or demolished on their lawns. I wheeled around wires, trees, and clothing near the street. People were working in their yards and around their houses hurriedly and didn't seem to notice me, the interloper. I turned down Ox Cart Drive where the tornado had missed Poquonock Elementary School and then to Hollow Brook Road and a scene of astounding devastation.

Houses were shifted on their foundations on the east side of the road while those on the west side were gone leaving concrete foundations with plumbing prickling out of them. Siding, boards, and furniture littered the yards while people, seemingly in shock, wandered amongst the debris looking for salvageable items. Clothing and pink insulation hung from tree limbs

stripped of their leaves. I stopped my bike when an acquaintance came up to me in tears, weeping for her neighbors' loss of home and all that was familiar. My minister Van Parker was comparing notes with the Methodist minister in the middle of the road. They were there to comfort and assure those whose world had careened into craziness. I dodged broken glass and boards with protruding nails to get to a friend's home nearby. She was in tears and disbelief as she explained how she had put her son down for a nap in a back room while she rested with a toddler and infant on her sofa. The storm roared around her house, lifting up her son's bedroom and setting it back down slightly askew of the foundation. Window glass flew in her living room as she pulled a protective afghan over herself and her children. Miraculously they were unharmed but badly shaken. I listened, commiserated, and left to ride down the west side of Rt. 75.

The roof was torn from Poquonock Community Church leaving the wooden pews to deal with the elements. Telephone poles leaned threateningly towards the street, their wires draped between them and the houses lining the street. Mattresses were impaled on the tops of broken, leafless trees. Vehicles were overturned on their neighbors' lawns. The loss of electricity compounded the confusion and people's desperation. It was incongruous that the sun was still shining and birds still singing as I shakily biked along River Street to rendezvous with my friend, her truck, and my little boys. I'll always be grateful for Wendy's unusual birthday gift and the safety and warmth of our intact homes.

I took no pictures that day. I'm glad I didn't as the mental images are enough. However, the Society has a shortage of images from the 1979 tornado. If you'd like to share yours (we can scan and return them to you), we'd be grateful. Please call us at 688-3813 to set up an appointment.

Information from the National Climatic Data Center, NOAA, FEMA, and *The Hartford Courant*.



The Windsor Trolley Line: A Brief History

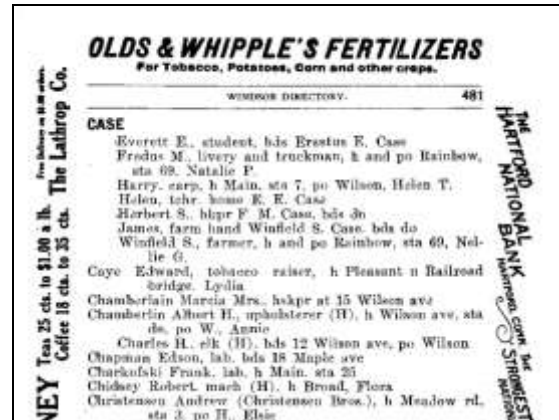
Julia Baldini, WHS Educator

Before public transportation initiatives in the middle of the 19th century, most people of modest means traveled by foot. If you were wealthy, a horse or carriage made things easier. Most people lived and worked within walking distance of their jobs. On March 31, 1863, the Hartford and Wethersfield Horse Railroad carried their first passengers by horse car on a line that ran from the Old State House in downtown Hartford to horse-car stables on Wethersfield Avenue. During the 1880's, the company was looking to make the lines more efficient at a more reasonable cost. Power lines furnished by the Hartford Light & Power Company helped lay the ground for the first electrically-powered trip from the Wethersfield Avenue stables to Wethersfield Green on September 21, 1888. The Hartford & Wethersfield Horse and Railroad became the Hartford Street Railway. They sought and received approval from the General Assembly to build lines to surrounding towns including Windsor.

During the next ten years, trolley tracks would be built from the Hartford city line along Windsor Avenue to Windsor Center. From there, riders could continue up Palisado Avenue towards Windsor Locks or follow the Poquonock Avenue line towards Poquonock Center and Rainbow. Workers were paid \$1.25 a day to dig the roadbed trench two feet deep, fill it with broken stone, and then lay the ties and tracks.

Fare for the trolley ride depended on the distance from City Hall on Main Street in Hartford. To the Wilson Station, only four miles away, a twenty minute ride was five cents. Windsor Center was seven miles from Hartford's City Hall and the thirty minute ride cost ten cents. Poquonock Avenue and Rainbow were between ten and twelve miles away at fifteen cents per passenger for a one hour commute, certainly a bargain today! The trolleys made scheduled stops at five major Windsor stations: Wilson, Windsor, Poquonock, Rainbow and Rainbow Park. In addition to the five major stops, there were over fifty smaller stations all spaced out a few blocks from each other. Because house numbers were not assigned in Windsor until 1915, the city directory listed addresses by their proximity to the closest trolley stop. For instance, if you were traveling to the Wilson Congregational Church you got off at station 6 1/2. The Windsor Public Library was located at station 28. Thrall School on Poquonock Avenue was located at station 44.

The last station in town which brought you to the center of Rainbow at the end of the line was station 70.



1909-1910 Hartford Suburban Directory. WHS Collections.

Trolley operators had their share of trouble. Account books housed in the Dodd Research Center at the UConn/Storrs campus from the Hartford Street Rail Company dating between 1894 and 1907 report many accidents and deaths. We know that in 1894 there were



Trolley and automobile posed near "The Death Trap" under the railroad bridge to Palisado Avenue. WHS Collections.

six people killed and ten injured on the brand new trolley lines in Hartford. The following year when the Windsor line was complete, four people were killed and forty-six injured. One of those injured and listed in the report was James Sugland from Hayden Station who jumped from the car while it was in motion. He received several head wounds. Fights and accidents that occurred on the trolley were also reported in the *Hartford Courant*.

In 1906 the Connecticut Company took over a majority of trolley lines in Connecticut. In 1924, the track mileage reached a peak of 834 miles with 1,640 passenger cars. The same year, the first conversion of a

(Continued on page 6)

Education Corner

Julia Baldini, WHS Educator

Summer Mural Workshop

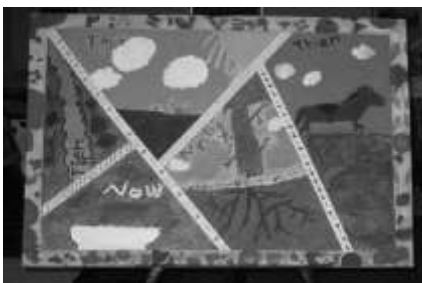
In August the Society held its second annual summer art workshop for kids in the mornings of August 10 - 14. We teamed up with local artist Jeanne Manzelli who led the students in a group mural project.

The first day was spent looking through historic maps and photographs of Windsor schools and children in the Society's research library. Children identified where they live today then discovered how that landscape has changed since Windsor's early settlement by the English. Two live on Windsor streets that have been occupied for over 300 years. Most live on land once used for farming. When the children went home they were directed to compare their neighborhoods today with what they had discovered about their neighborhood's past. The next day the students took those ideas and got creative (and a bit messy). Each child was supplied a large canvas,



Anna displaying her taped canvas right before she starts.

and easel, and a variety of acrylic paints and brushes. First the students took painters tape to section off pieces of the canvas. Then they created a series of images.



Anna's finished canvas.

While each student was given full artistic freedom, they were encouraged to connect the past and the present and to think about where they live today.

They finished the week by creating a border using stencils that will connect each of their canvases so they can be displayed together as a mural.

Before the children can take home their pieces, the whole mural will be displayed around town in its entirety. The children had a lot of fun and are looking forward to more artist workshops next summer.

Phelps Family DNA Project

To celebrate Family History Month in October the Society is holding a special lecture on the Phelps Family DNA project. Blaine Bettinger, The Genetic Genealogist, will give a PowerPoint presentation about genetic genealogy. His introduction to the field will begin with an easy-to-understand science section and then offer real-life examples of using genetic genealogy to answer genealogical questions. Afterwards, Larry Phelps of Windsor will share his family's experience with DNA testing and his own personal results. The program is being held on Saturday, October 24 from 10am–noon. Cost is \$6 for adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 Society members. Light refreshments will be served.

(Windsor Trolley Line, continued from page 5)

street car line to motor coach operation took place. In August 1924, the Hayden Station line to Windsor Locks was discontinued. On October 21, 1930 trolley service from Windsor Center through Poquonock and Rainbow was converted to motor coach operations. That same year the Bloomfield and East Windsor trolley lines were discontinued.

The depression years dealt harshly with the transportation industry. On October 31, 1935, the Connecticut Company filed for bankruptcy. On April 14, 1940, trolley service was discontinued on Windsor Avenue between Hartford city line and the remaining Windsor rail to the center.

Young Volunteers

The Society has had the great fortune of mentoring two young volunteers recently. Here's how they feel their work here has helped them. All of us wish them great success both at school and in their futures.



Sara Hawran

Since I began volunteering at the Windsor Historical Society nearly three years ago, I have been exposed to so many new things that have only increased my love of history and my appreciation for Windsor. With the help of Librarian Barbara Goodwin, I have learned how to catalog and file articles, photos, and artifacts for the **historical society's library**. I have enjoyed researching notable Windsor residents and their families and have learned to compile finding aids for collections of old documents and pictures so future generations can easily use them in their own research. I spent many hours transcribing the old diaries of a past Windsor woman, discovering her fears, understanding her worries, and following her extensive social life and endless games of Whist, and in the process learned more about Windsor society than I ever thought I would know. My time here has been filled with photocopying, filing, researching, organizing, and more; and all of it has been interesting and fun. I have done so many things and learned so much in just the few short years I have spent at the Windsor **Historical Society that I can't even list them all here**, and I will be sorry to leave; but I know that all I learned here will help me in the future. Thank you to everyone at the Historical Society who took the time to teach it all to me.

Volunteers

We are so grateful to the following volunteers:

Educators: Jay Davenport, Carolyn Doyle, Heather Renaud, Jan Stevens, Bob Stisser. Front desk and administration: Bill Allen, Abbey Blough, Al and Marilyn Boehm, Barbara Byczkowicz, Elaine Colli, Pat Congelosi, Patty Day, Carolyn Doyle, Bill Harris, Cora Lee Jones, Sue Lescher, Marni Lydecker, Mary Ann Maksimoski, Dorothy McAllister, Josephine Mitchell, Willa Nemetz, Libby Parker, Carlton Parkinson, Janice Provost, Mary Ransom, Dorothy Simon, Dianne Timpson, Jim Trocchi, Nancy Von Hollen. Grounds: Ruth Fahrback, Gordon Kenneson, Willa Nemetz. Library:

Rebecca Reel



Interning at the Windsor Historical Society was a perfect fit for me this summer, and I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to do so. I am a pre-modern history major with an English minor and a museum studies certificate at Connecticut College. I was looking for an internship experience that would not only combine my interest in colonial American history, but also that incorporated my interest in museum studies. Working for the Society provided me with a wonderful opportunity to learn more about local Connecticut history and also allowed me a firsthand look at how a historical society and museum function as an educational entity.

As an intern at the Society, I completed a variety of tasks. I created an inventory database of all of the materials that the Education department currently owns. I updated the subject file index list in the library and created a finding aid for the Jerijah Barber Papers. I also gained a little experience in working with PastPerfect, the cataloguing software the Society uses for their collection. I know these experiences will serve me well later in my career.

My career aspirations are to work for a historical society, specifically in an archiving capacity, or to work as a research librarian. My time working for the Society most definitely encouraged my interest in both of these fields.

Thank you so much to both the staff and the volunteers of the Windsor Historical Society for making me feel incredibly welcome and for teaching me so much.

Shirley Arnold, Elaine Brophy, Doris Butler, Diane Cameron, Elaine Colli, Carolyn Doyle, Bev Garvan, Bill Harris, Sara Hawran, Sue Lescher, Marni Lydecker, Sandy McGraw, Libby Parker, Mary Ransom, Rebecca Reel. Newly trained Guides: Willa Nemetz, Carlton Parkinson, Dianne Timpson, Helene Westenburg. Special events: Betsey Blaisdell, Bill Harris, Janice Provost.

Upcoming Events at Windsor Historical Society

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

Saturday, September 19 10 a.m. - noon
BIKE TOUR OF HISTORIC POQUONOCK. Reservations required before September 18.

Saturday, September 26 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
COLONIAL DAYS. Free of charge.

Tuesday, September 29 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
LECTURE: THE HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE AS TOLD BY BARN.

Thursday, October 1 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.
FIRST THURSDAYS - Enjoy the Society free of charge during these extended hours.

Wednesday, October 7 7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
TIMELY TOPICS: THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE.

Saturday, October 17 1 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
WINDSOR OPEN BARN TOUR - Admission charged.

Saturday, October 24 10 a.m. - noon
LECTURE: PHELPS FAMILY DNA PROJECT.

Sunday, November 1 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
WREATH-MAKING WORKSHOP. \$10 craft supplies charge.

Thursday, November 5 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.
FIRST THURSDAYS - Enjoy the Society free of charge during these extended hours.

Saturday, November 7 noon - 1:30 p.m.
LUNCHEON AND STORY TELLING

Thursday, November 12 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: WINDSOR BARN STORIES.

Saturday, November 21 6:30 p.m. - 10 p.m.
PRE-HOLIDAY AUCTION. Admission charged.

Thursday, December 3 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.
FIRST THURSDAYS - Enjoy the Society free of charge.

Friday, December 4 6:30 pm preview; 7:30 pm auction.
WREATH/TREE FESTIVAL & AUCTION.

Saturday, December 12 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
RECEPTION AND BOOK SIGNING: BALLAD OF MACK ST.



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