

ALMANAC



THE WETHERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER ■ VOLUME 38 ■ NUMBER 1 ■ WINTER 2012

The Wethersfield Historical Society announces its 19th season of the Keeney Cultural Series. The first in the series is a theater performance on Sunday, February 12, followed by two cabaret performances on Sunday, March 11 and Sunday, April 22, in the Keeney Memorial Cultural Center, 200 Main Street, Wethersfield. The cabaret settings are perfect for patrons to bring their own special beverages and food. Soda and a snack will be provided by the society at all three performances. Doors will open at 1:30pm. Admission is \$20 per performance, with a special member price of \$18.

Tammy Denease

Interpretation of Elizabeth Keckly
Sunday, February 12, 2:00pm

Tammy Denease, storyteller, teaching artist and living historian, will introduce the audience to the world of Elizabeth Keckly, a former slave woman who purchased her own and her son George's freedom for \$1,200. After receiving her freedom, she became known as the premier couturier of her time. As a successful seamstress, Elizabeth "Lizzy" Keckly dressed the elite in the finest of fashion. Her list of clients included Varnia Davis, wife of Jefferson Davis, and Mary Anne Randolph Curtis Lee, wife of Robert E. Lee. Not only was Keckly instrumental in helping to get the Contraband Relief Association established in Washington, D.C., but she also became a confidante to Mary Todd Lincoln and an informal advisor to our sixteenth president.



THE KEENEY CULTURAL SERIES IS BACK WITH THREE PERFORMANCES ALL ON SUNDAYS AT 2 PM

*What a wonderful
time to gather with
friends and family*



Infinitango

Connecticut's Leading Tango Band
Sunday, March 11, 2:00pm

Infinitango's performances combine the essence of Tango Argentino, Nuevo Tango and International Tango. Formed in Hartford, Connecticut and comprised of accordionist Markus Centola, pianist Maria Centola, violinist Jessica Meyer, and double bass player Sean Rubin, this dynamic ensemble has created a bright and unique repertoire. While evoking an unforgettable Argentine sentiment with classics from "Golden Age", they also create new, innovative works with a timeless sense of beauty. Infinitango plays the music with a deep understanding of tradition as well as an obsessive desire to evolve the art form to new levels.

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2012 LECTURE SERIES
February 6, March 12, April 9 & May 7
See page 6

7th ANNUAL
TASTE OF WETHERSFIELD
Save Saturday, April 14th



FORECAST: Our 80th Year

Eighty years ago, on February 4, 1932, the Wethersfield Businessmen's and Civic Association founded Wethersfield Historical Society in the anticipation of the celebration of our Town's 300th anniversary in 1934. "All residents of the town interested in historical matters pertaining to Wethersfield" were invited to join. Our first president was William E. Hanmer, and by April of 1933, we had 432 members.

Our first home was three rooms in the Governor Welles School (also called the Center School), now the Keeney Center. Community members donated money and objects for the museum's collection. The museum was open to the public two nights a month. Society meetings were held in the assembly room of the Welles School (now Keeney Hall), and included lectures by scholars from such noted institutions as the Connecticut State Library and Yale University.

In 1959, when the new Town Hall was built on Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield Historical Society moved into the Old Academy building, recently vacated by the Town offices, and was able to unpack many of the museum objects that had been in storage. In his November, 1959 letter to the membership, WHS President John C. Willard asked members for help staffing the building during open hours, help with cleaning, identifying and recording the collection, and asked for more donations of objects related to Wethersfield's history. President Willard also thanked the members who had sent monetary donations to the historical society in excess of their annual dues – the funds received more than paid for the cost of moving to the Old Academy. He also asked for our members to help recruit new members for WHS.

Last year, we celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the opening of the Keeney Center in 1990 – the fundraising for and renovation of the old Welles school, a mammoth undertaking, was accomplished by generous donations and hard working volunteers from our community.

Wethersfield Historical Society is, and has always been, a community-centered organization. All of the strides we have made in the past 80 years have been due to the support and involvement of our community members.

My request to our members and our community at large is the same as President Hanmer's and President Willard's – we continue to need your time and your financial support, now more than ever. Many of the loyal volunteers who began supporting us at the Keeney Center twenty years ago have become too frail to continue their weekly shifts at the Keeney reception desk, or to serve as docents in our historic houses. Difficult financial times have worn away over a third of our already small endowment, and individual donations have not grown as much as we have hoped.

We are so fortunate to have a core group of loyal supporters, but we need more help. We need volunteers to help with a variety of tasks, from chairing fundraising events to helping with the collection to staffing the Keeney desk, and everything in between. We need to increase financial support so we can meet our obligations for the care of our buildings and collections.

Wethersfield Historical Society, through our exhibits, programs, research library and website, has continued to expand its reach to the community. We continue to add objects, images and information related to more contemporary Wethersfield history to our museum and archival collections. Today, we are more relevant and more connected to our community than we have ever been in our 80 year history. Please help strengthen our organization so we may continue our mission to "preserve and promote Wethersfield's history and culture to inspire people today and tomorrow" for the next 80 years.

Amy Northrop Wittorff, *Director*

WETHERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The *ALMANAC* is a publication of
Wethersfield Historical Society,
a 501(c)3, non-profit organization chartered in 1932.

Wethersfield Historical Society:
Preserving Wethersfield's history and culture
to inspire people today and tomorrow.

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Newsletter Staff

Rachel Quish, Co-editor
Elaine St. Onge, Co-editor
Phil Lohman, Design
150 Main Street
Wethersfield, Connecticut 06109
860.529.7656
email: society@wethhist.org
Web: www.wethhist.org

SPRING KEENEY KIDS RESCHEDULED !

Due to the October snow storm and power outage, the Wethersfield Public School System has suspended April vacation. Normally Spring Keeney Kids is held for two days during this vacation, but it has been rescheduled for one full day program during a professional development day on Tuesday, April 24. For more information please visit our website at www.wethhist.org or contact Mary Pat Knowlton at 860.529.7656.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

This past year we have been blessed with fabulous volunteers, volunteers who help make everything run smoothly, from the Antiques Show to reorganizing our library to being a docent or leading a school group. Volunteers are worth their weight in gold and we would like to highlight a few volunteers who have changed us for the better!



Martha Smart is resident volunteer librarian and we appreciate her. Martha has been working with Rachel to reorganize the Old Academy Research and Genealogical Library to reflect more professional standards and easier access for the public. Martha was trained as a librarian and has worked at various institutions prior to volunteering her time with us. Just this past summer, Martha has managed to catalog all regular use books and now is focused on the manuscript vault. In addition to reorganizing the library, Martha is also a great help to researchers and a walking encyclopedia of Connecticut history.

Allison Golomb is an intern from Central Connecticut State University and now volunteers with us. Allison started this past summer as an intern, learning all about the small museum world. After writing the scripts for the October Lantern Light Tours, she found a passion in the local burying ground. As Allison was nearing the completion of her Graduate Degree in Public History, she needed to create a Capstone Project, the equivalent of a thesis. Allison approached the Society with the idea that she would continue to volunteer with us for fall and winter cataloging the entire



Ancient and Village Burying Grounds and then digitize the information on our website. She has been working diligently and is nearing the digitization step.

Caroline Taylor also began her time with us this past summer as an intern from CCSU. Caroline aided in the collections care and reorganization of the upstairs of the Old Academy. Rachel and Caroline proceeded



to catalog and shelve objects that remained in safekeeping from the Keeney Fire in 2007. Caroline showed special talent in cataloging textiles and learned the new skill of sewing on labels!

We are always looking for volunteers to assist as docents at the Keeney Center, provide tours at our properties, teach programs to school groups, aid in collections and special events. If you are interested in volunteering, please do not hesitate to contact the Old Academy at 860.529.7656.

History Day for Families was held on Sept. 17th with demonstrations of life in Connecticut during the Civil War.



The Society Scene

Lantern Light Tours were held on October 21st and 22nd inviting visitors to "encounter" the past through first person interpreters on Main Street and in the Burying Ground!





The 11th Annual Wethersfield Antiques Show was a huge success with over 40 antique dealers and a lively Preview Party.



Volunteer Holiday Party: A great time was had by all, especially when President Bob Fisher played Christmas tunes accompanied by the angelic voices of volunteers.



RED ONION RENT: Wethersfield Historical Society President Bob Fisher paid Mayor Donna Hemmann the traditional rent for the Cove Warehouse with a rope of Wethersfield Red Onions.



CRAFT FAIR: On the first weekend of October we hosted the 30th annual Wethersfield Craft Fair. Although the weather didn't cooperate, we still had a great time!



HOLIDAY DECOR: Between the Chamber of Commerce's "Holidays on Main" and the first two weekends of December, the Hurlbut-Dunham House Holiday Tour was a stop for many families getting into the Christmas spirit.

KEENEY CULTURAL SERIES

Continued from cover

Phil Rosenthal *American Melody*

Sunday, April 22, 2:00pm

Phil Rosenthal is a nationally renowned singer, songwriter, recording artist and record producer. With firm roots in folk, bluegrass and country, Phil's music is a delight for all ages. His rich baritone, expert picking on banjo, guitar and mandolin and warm stage presence have charmed audiences throughout the U.S., Europe and Japan, including appearances at the White House and The Grand Ole Opry. His original compositions have been recorded by Johnny Cash and Bill Monroe. In an article about Phil Rosenthal, The Washington Post wrote, "One of the most expressive singers of traditional country music."



2012 LECTURE SERIES IS ALMOST HERE

The 2012 Lecture Series is better than ever with four Civil War themed lectures held in the months of February through May. Each lecture begins at 7pm, with doors opening at the Keene Memorial Cultural Center at 6:30pm. Lectures are \$5 per person at the door, free to members.

February 6 – Dr. Robert M. Bedard, President of the Hartford Medical Society will present "Civil War Medicine: They Did Their Best"

March 12 – Charles (Ben) Hawley of the descendants of the 29th Connecticut Colored Regiment will present "Blacks in the Civil War – Will They Fight?"

April 9 - Dean Nelson, Executive Director of the Museum of Connecticut History will present "Connecticut Arms and Equips the Union."

May 7 - Nancy Finlay, Curator of Graphics at Connecticut Historical Society will present "Picturing the Great Rebellion: Prints by the Kellogg Brothers of Hartford and Other Connecticut Printmakers and Photographers."

NEW EXHIBIT: The newest temporary exhibition in the Watson Gallery is **Wethersfield Woodworking**, which opened on September 17th and will be open through March. Wethersfield

Woodworking is another collaborative community exhibition highlighting local talent along with collection objects, like the previous needlework exhibition. Woodworkers, joiners, crafters and turners in our community are celebrated through the display of historic and contemporary pieces. Come explore the remarkable craftsmanship from your own community, past and present.



THE RED ONION SOCIETY: On a chilly evening this past October, a group of the historical society's most



generous supporters enjoyed an intimate gathering at the home of Development Committee Chair and Governing Board member Candace Holmes and her husband Bill. Candace and Bill's warm hospitality, their magnificent 18th century home filled with beautiful antiques, a crackling fire, and a chef from Carbone's made the evening unforgettable. This was the inaugural party for our newly formed upper-level giving group, the Red Onion Society. Donors with \$500 or more cumulative annual giving to Wethersfield Historical Society are automatically members of this congenial group. Director Wittorff was honored to attend this gathering where she thanked donors for their support and gave partygoers a special up-close look at two of our more interesting and recently-donated collection objects.

The Red Onion Society will hold member gatherings like this annually – all of our donors are encouraged to consider joining!

**WELCOME TO
NEW MEMBERS**

Frances Bertelli, Rocky Hill, CT; Herbert W. Croysdale, Destin, FL; Richard Erickson, Cheshire, CT; Dave Goodrich, Hampton, CT; Nina Vasques, Newington, CT

CHRISTMAS WITH THE ROBBINS FAMILY

The Hurlbut-Dunham house was open this year for holiday tours embracing the Christmas spirit of the 1890s. Visitors enjoyed the Robbins' family Christmas traditions during the December 1st Chamber of Commerce's Holidays on Main and the first two weekends in December. The first floor of the historic house was decorated by staff and volunteers in the high Victorian style for a child's Christmas party.



While lingering outside the home, visitors could enjoy the portico adorned with greenery and an antique sleigh. Upon first entering the Robbins' home, the hall is decorated with greenery, fruit, wreaths, bows, a poinsettia and small gifts. Looking up, the elaborate millwork is draped with greenery and a cluster of mistletoe. Proceeding into the Double Parlor, it is easy to imagine Jane Robbins (later Dunham) as an eight year old little girl enjoying the season with her mother, father and esteemed grandfather, Silas Robbins. The towering Christmas tree is decorated with real tinsel, handmade Victorian ornaments, presents and porcelain dolls. The Sitting Room is set up as a workroom where children are making ornaments and wrapping gifts they created for their parents. After all the excitement of playing parlor games, creating and wrapping presents, Jane and her five friends could enjoy a formal lunch. Crackers, a small wrapped tube filled with small toys and candies, were placed on a plate as a gift for each child.

MR. HANMER'S MUSEUM SHOP

COME IN FOR SOME AFTER HOLIDAY SHOPPING



The Wethersfield Historical Society's Wethersfield Family Heritage Cookbook is a must have. Submitted by Wethersfield residents and WHS members, this collection of recipes gives us a culinary history - a unique expression of our global heritage filled with memories. This isn't just a cookbook, it's a great read - \$20.00



Here is our 2011 Cove Warehouse Ornament, the third in a series of Wethersfield Landmarks. These are hand painted by artist Nancy Paine at her Old Meadow Studios in Simsbury, CT. We still have the 2009 First Church, 2010 Hurlbut Dunham House and Red Onion ornaments available.
3 inch - \$14.00



Our cloth Colonial Dolls are hand-made for us by designer Nancy Bagian from Cranston, Rhode Island. Each doll is unique - dressed in different fabrics, different colored hair and eyes.
11 inch - \$40.00

CLIP THIS MUSEUM SHOP COUPON...FOR MEMBERS ONLY!

TAKE AN EXTRA 10% OFF APPLICABLE ITEMS AT THE HANMER MUSEUM SHOP

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, 2012...ONE TIME USE!

COOKBOOK IS NOT APPLICABLE FOR DISCOUNT



Wethersfield Historical Society
150 Main Street
Wethersfield CT 06109
Website: www.wethhist.org
E-mail: society@wethhist.org

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CALENDAR of EVENTS

- Feb. 6 **Lecture:** Dr. Robert M. Bedard, "Civil War Medicine: They Did Their Best"
- Feb. 12 **Keeney Cultural Series:** Dramatic presentation – "Interpretation of Elizabeth Keckly" with Tammy Denease. Keeney Hall, 2 pm. Theater seating.
- March 11 **Keeney Cultural Series:** Musical presentation in cabaret setting – "InfiniTango," Connecticut's leading tango band. Keeney Hall, 2 pm. Snacks and soda provided.
- March 12 **Lecture:** Charles (Ben) Hawley, "Blacks in the Civil War – Will They Fight?"
- April 9 **Lecture:** Dean Nelson, "Connecticut Arms and Equips the Union."
- April 14 **"Taste of Wethersfield" Benefit:** 7-9:30 p.m. Save the date!
- April 22 **Keeney Cultural Series:** Musical Presentation in cabaret setting – Phil Rosenthal with "American Melody." Keeney Hall, 2 pm. Snacks and soda provided.
- May 7 **Lecture:** Nancy Finlay, "Picturing the Great Rebellion: Prints by the Kellogg Brothers of Hartford and Other Connecticut Printmakers and Photographers."
- May 10, 12 **Walking Tours:** Thurs., 5/10, 6-7:30 pm; Sat., 5/12, 10-11:30 am.
Meet in front of the Keeney Center 10 minutes prior to walk. Cancelled in the event of rain.
- May 17, 19 and June 21, 23 **Burying Ground Tours:** Thurs., 5/17 and 6/21, 1-2:30 pm; Sat., 5/19, and 6/23, 10-11:30 am.
Meet at the red barn in First Church parking lot. Cancelled in the event of rain.
- May 22 **Annual Meeting and Dinner** – details to be announced.