

ALMANAC



THE WETHERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER ■ VOLUME 34 ■ NUMBER 1 ■ SPRING 2008

LIGHTNING STRIKE AND FIRE DAMAGE KEENEY CENTER

Flagship Museum Building Benefits from Resulting Restoration

The Keeney Memorial Cultural Center sustained a lightning strike and fire on the evening of October 11, 2007. Lightning struck the base of the cupola and fire damaged the cupola and portions of the slate roofing. Water used to extinguish the fire caused damage to the interior of the building. While the damage to the Keeney Center was serious in terms of both fire damage to the cupola and roofing, as well as the water damage to the interior walls, ceilings and flooring, the Town of Wethersfield and the society are very fortunate in that there was no significant damage to the museum collections or exhibits.



SUE WILLARD PHOTO

WFD fighting fire after lightning strike.



WHS PHOTO

Water-damaged ceiling tiles.

The society is deeply appreciative of the dedication and professionalism of the fire fighters and key Town of Wethersfield staff who responded to this emergency, as well as the countless volunteers, friends and professional colleagues who provided assistance in the hours immediately following the fire. The society's most sensitive objects have been removed to alternative storage as a precaution against the extreme conditions that existed within the building.

The society anticipates a full recovery of normal operations. Recovery and restoration are currently underway and full museum and cultural center operations are expected to resume in the near future. JP Maguire and Associates led

Continued on page 4.

"TASTE OF WETHERSFIELD" BENEFIT RETURNS APRIL 12

Bigger, Better, "Tastier" Event

The 3rd Annual "Taste of Wethersfield" Benefit opens the newly-restored Keeney Memorial Cultural Center on Saturday, April 12, from 6:00-9:30p.m.; 6p.m. patron early admission; 7p.m. general admission. This enormously popular event will feature the area's finest purveyors of food, desserts, wine and beer for your dining pleasure. With live music, a jumpin' juke box and competitive fun with Silent Auction prizes, the "Taste" lives up to its name as the "social event of the season!"

More information on page 3



KEENEY CULTURAL SERIES MOVES TO APRIL FOR 2008

Cabaret Format Returns for Good Music, Good Times

There is only one place to hold the Keeney Cultural Series – at the Keeney Center! This popular music series in cabaret format begins in April. See full story on page 5.



Souled Out

FORECAST

Big Rocks, Little Rocks and Grains of Sand...

You may wonder if I am referring to the society's groundbreaking exhibit "Connecticut Rocks!" or those rocks that some say are in my head? Actually, this refers to the need to know your **priorities** and is derived from the story of the student whose teacher required him to fit a pile of sand, rocks and boulders into a box. After many attempts, the student learned that the **ONLY** way to fit everything into his teacher's box was to first put in the **big rocks**, then the **little rocks** and finally to pour in the **sand** to fill in all the empty spaces. Tackling the job in any other sequence would invariably leave several rocks on the table rather than in the box. Like the student and the rocks, we here at the society must identify our "big rocks" and work hard to place them in the box first!

Just what are those "big rocks"? While we have many ongoing programs and priorities, the society's Governing Board has identified several "big rocks" for 2008 in our annual planning and budgeting process.

Here are the really "big rocks" for this year:

■ Restore the Keeney Memorial Cultural Center.

Restoration of the fire and extensive water damage resulting from the October 11th lightning strike is proceeding smoothly and we are currently on schedule to reopen this flagship building in early April! We are grateful for the efforts of Town Council, Town staff, the good work of JP Maguire Associates, Inc. restoration contractors and our wonderful "Keeney Angels" who have offered their volunteer services to help protect our collections and restore this important historic structure.

■ **Prepare for Wethersfield's 375th Anniversary in 2009.** The society is an important part of the Town's 375th Anniversary planning team and we have also received a Connecticut Humanities Council Planning Grant to support our own exciting anniversary project! During Spring 2008, we will reach out to residents across Wethersfield seeking their important family photos for inclusion with photos from society collections in a new **Arcadia** Publishing Company book on **Wethersfield**. Aided by veteran society curator and author Beverly Lucas, collected photos will also be used in the society's signature anniversary exhibit at the Keeney Center and will update the society's photo collections.

■ **Complete planning and secure funding to preserve the James Francis House.** Funded in part through a Historic Preservation grant from the **Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation**, the society is undertaking research and planning to restore the roof, gutters, trim and other important, but deteriorating, parts of this society property. Nationally recognized architectural historians **James Sexton** and **Bryan Green** are completing a Historic Structures Report this spring which will enable architect **James Vance** (Keeney restoration architect) to complete design work and oversee repairs to this wonderful historic home once the society secures additional funding.

■ **Complete and implement our Technology Plan.** In Fall 2007 the society was accepted into the **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Technology Assistance Program** and since this time the society's "Tech Team" has been working closely with HFPG staff and consultants to develop a technology plan for the next three years. Once developed and accepted, the HFPG will fund a significant portion of the plan's implementation costs. Projects identified will include updating technology infrastructure – ranging from new computers or copiers to a new website – designed to improve our ability to serve society members and our broader audience!

Needless to say it will be a very busy year! These "big rocks" must be placed in the box along with all of our other "rocks" (big and small) – our ongoing programs and services – and every program, like every grain of sand, is important. This will not be possible without the continued support of each of you through your wonderful volunteer efforts and generous financial contributions. If you would like to help with any of these projects – big rocks or little rocks – we'd love to hear from you!



Doug Shipman
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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"TASTE OF WETHERSFIELD" BENEFIT RETURNS APRIL 12

The event runs from 6:00p.m.-9:30p.m.; tickets are \$50 for patron early admission at 6p.m. (and exclusive patron drawing) and \$35 for general admission at 7p.m.; \$30 in advance for 7p.m. entry.

Already on board for this year's "Taste III" are Ascot Catering, Buy-Rite Liquors, Cold Stone Creamery, J Michaels Tavern, Mainly Tea, Krause Catering, Narcissus Chocolate Café, Olde Burnside Brewing Co., On the Border, Patty Cakes Bakery, Saybrook Fish House, Tastefully Simple, Village Pizza, Vito's Restaurant and Wood'n'Tap.

The event raises funds to support the society's educational and cultural programming. We are pleased to be working with collaborative fundraising partners at selected Wethersfield school PTOs as well as this year's corporate contributor, D'Esopo's Funeral Chapel.

For more information or advance ticket sales, please contact the society offices at (860) 529-7656 or visit www.wethhist.org.

2008 KEENEY CULTURAL SERIES RETURNS FOR 15TH SEASON

"Keeney Cabaret" Begins April 22



Wethersfield Historical Society announces its 15th season of the Keeney Cultural Series scheduled to coincide with the planned reopening of the newly restored Keeney Memorial Cultural Center at 200 Main Street.

The popular cabaret setting returns to provide the perfect milieu for three lively spring programs. Patrons may bring their own beverages; set-ups and snacks will be provided by the society. The series may be purchased for \$56; \$45 for society members; individual performances for \$20; \$18 for society members. All concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. in Keeney Hall. Doors will open at 7:00 p.m.

On Tuesday, April 22, actress and vocalist Ida Zecco will present her captivating and hilarious musical show, "Estro-Gin & Tonic," accompanied by music director/arranger/pianist Jim Rice. The show is a unique blend of courage and comedy performed in great theatrical style, pondering the universal dilemmas of middle-age.

On Thursday, May 1, New York based Christine Spero Group will perform songs that tell stories of love against the backdrop of Latin and jazz rhythms. Christine's music is refreshing, soulful, moving, exciting and appeals to all ages. Each piece is a unique vehicle for creative improvisation that adds pop, jazz and Brazilian music.

The final concert on Thursday, May 29, will feature Souled Out, a musical ensemble that specializes in the great Motown and soul sounds.

Featuring a three-voice vocal section and outstanding musicians, the group will weave its way through familiar Motown and 70s era songs with choreographed dance routines and great musicianship. Not only is Souled Out a sensational listening experience, it is an awesome visual treat as well!

All performances are open to the public and reservations are not necessary. The series is made possible through a grant from the Keeney Trust at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Series subscribers will receive preferred seating. For reservation and ticket information, call Wethersfield Historical Society at 860.529.7656. The Keeney Memorial Cultural Center offers free parking and is handicapped accessible.



Christine Spero



LIGHTNING STRIKE & FIRE DAMAGE KEENEY CENTER

the initial restoration efforts in removing all water-damaged materials from the building and thoroughly drying out all water soaked areas, a process which took more than a month. Special sensors that measure water content within the building's structure were used to accurately determine the need for further dehumidification. Representatives from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation provided technical advice and approved the methods used in the drying process.

Once dry, the restoration process began in December and is expected to be complete by March 31. When it reopens, the Keeney Center will boast: new ceilings and refinished floors in Keeney Hall and most of the first floor spaces and galleries; new rubberized flooring in the building's two stairwells; a bright, updated paint scheme in the public spaces; and new wiring, insulation and a new fire alarm system. Newly installed monitoring equipment tracks the changes in humidity in all collections spaces and off-site facilities. In addition, the Town of Wethersfield is funding the replacement of two stairwell heaters and a new lightning suppression system for the building.

While the list of restoration projects is long, the society hopes to reopen the Keeney Center in April 2008. Society Director Doug Shipman speaks highly of everyone involved in the recovery and restoration efforts, "We had incredible support. I think it shows you that Wethersfield Historical Society has a good reputation, but, more importantly, people really value their history and want to save it. There still is a lot of work to be done, but this building will be put back together as well as, if not a little better than, it was before."



Interior specialist Alan Cloutier prepares a stencil to repair damaged stencil art in Keeney Hall.

VOLUNTEERS AID KEENEY CENTER DURING RESTORATION

Society Sends a Hearty **Hats Off** to
Our "Keeney Angels"

Immediately after the lightning strike to the Keeney Center, dozens of the society's good friends offered their support to protect our collections and ensure smooth operation of society business. For their selfless contribution of time and talent, Wethersfield Historical Society would like to publicly thank these volunteers:

Town
Physical
Services
staff move
Connecticut
State Prison
cell walls
to prepare
space in the
Keeney
Center for
renovation.



Wethersfield Volunteer Fire Department
Gary Santoro, Fire Marshal

Tom LeClair and the team
at Clearing House Auction Galleries

John Oldham and Oldham Studios

Pamela St. Jean

John Oblak

Dick Fippinger

Phil Lohman

Doug Simpson

Sebastian Kolodziej

Bill Spigener

Wes Sargent

Jocelyn Valente and the team

at the Pitkin Community Center

Beverly Lucas, Scott Wands and Rebecca

Taber-Conover from Connecticut Landmarks

Holly Malloy, Eileen Cormier, Linda Crawford
and Jim Late from Newington Historical Society

JP Maguire & Associates, Inc.

Andy Adil, Martin Walsh

and members of Town Council

Bonnie Therrien and Town of Wethersfield staff

Mike Turner, Jim McDonald, Rich Bailey and the
Town of Wethersfield Physical Services Department

Helen Higgins and Greg Farmer,

Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Chubb Insurance Company

Greg Bedula, TD Banknorth Insurance Co.



"KEENEY KIDS" RETURN

ON APRIL 16 & 17

**Children will learn-by-doing
that history is fun!**

"Keeney Kids" explore Wethersfield history through historical activities, tours, stories and games at the Wethersfield Museum at the Keeney Memorial Cultural Center and surrounding historic sites.

**Spring Program Dates and Themes:
(Grades 1-6):**

Wednesday, April 16, 2008:

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Can you hear me now?;

Thursday, April 17, 2008:

Markets, Shops & Tavern Stops

Admission: 1 Day: \$20; \$15 for society members;
2 Days \$40; \$30 for society members

For more information, please contact
Education Coordinator Mary Pat Knowlton,
860.529.7656
emailto: marypat.knowlton@wethhist.org

SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER ON MAY 21

**Enjoy the Newly-Restored Keeney Center
and the All-School Art Show**

All members of Wethersfield Historical Society are invited to attend the society's Annual Meeting and Dinner on Wednesday, May 21 at 6:30p.m. in newly-restored Keeney Hall.

The opening reception begins at 5:30p.m. on the first floor.

We will be reviewing our past 75th Anniversary Year, the Great Fire of 2007, plans for the

Town's 375th Anniversary in 2009 and electing new members to the society's

Governing and Advisory Boards.

Please watch your mail for the reservation form.

18th ANNUAL CHI PSI PROGRAM

Eleanor Roosevelt Comes to Town

On Thursday, June 12 at 7:00 p.m., the society will present actress Robin Lane with her one-woman dramatization, "In Her Own Voice: A Visit with Eleanor Roosevelt." Robin Lane, a Boston-based actor, writer and producer has been bringing history to life since 1980.

She is well-known to Wethersfield

Historical Society audiences, having

appeared here as

Isabella Stewart

Gardiner and Jackie

Kennedy Onassis. The

annual Chi Psi program,

presented in memory of

Robert Allan Keeney who perished

aboard the *USS Indianapolis* at the close of World

War II, is supported in part by his Chi Psi

Fraternity brothers, Wesleyan University. There

will be a reception following in the Rotary Room

where audience members will have the opportunity to meet Robin Lane.

Admission for members is \$10 for adults, \$12 for non-members and \$5 for students.

Reservations are not necessary.



**Actor Robin Lane as
Eleanor Roosevelt.**

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Learn About History While Making New Friends

If you, a friend, neighbor or family member would like to expand your horizons through learning about history, making new friends and serving your community – then you are the perfect person to help staff the Keeney Center and other society properties!

Training is provided; no experience necessary; flexible scheduling available. Please contact Volunteer Coordinator Roberta Simpson at 860.529.7161 (after April 1) or society@wethhist.org. "I enjoy meeting and talking to people from so many different areas of the country and abroad. Also, with all the educational activities and exhibits at the Keeney, there is always something interesting to learn. It can be great fun."

– Dot Bender,
Keeney Center Desk Volunteer



Look at all these smiling faces! Even cleaning historic properties is fun when shared with fellow volunteers! From the left, are curatorial volunteers: Linda Yorton, Doug Shipman, Elaine Strecker, Michelle Slater, Adie Beller, Mary Jones and Mary Mahar.

WELCOME NEW SOCIETY MEMBERS

The society welcomes these new members who have joined since September 2007:

From Wethersfield

Carol Belau
Joan Driscoll
Jack and Marita Eppler
Marilyn and Louis Fehrenbach
Andrew Jurasin
Walter Murphy
Steven and Lisa Peery
Mary Procyk
Rebecca Stanford
Charles and Patricia Viani

From Elsewhere

Celia Allison, West Hartford
Linda Bosnak, Chester
Margaret Gunn, Virginia
Steven Thompson, Minnesota



2007 Holiday Floral Show House Attracts 400 Visitors to historic Hurlbut-Dunham House

Even without the use of the Keeney Center, the society continued with all of its regular fall programming. Here, musician Ami Montstream plays her hammered dulcimer during the Holiday Floral Show House at the Hurlbut-Dunham House.

WETHERSFIELD TURNS 375 IN 2009

Society Receives Planning Grant to Spark New Community History Project

The society is pleased to announce that it received a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council to plan its portion of the celebration of the Town's 375th anniversary in 2009. Part of a town-wide celebration, the society will be producing an "Images of America" book by Arcadia Publishing, entitled *Wethersfield*, which will feature more than 200 photographs of the town's past 150 years drawn from the society's collections as well as those from community groups and the general public.



Harry L. Welles, Wethersfield's 'Horse Radish King', one of many photos under review for the new Wethersfield book.

Watch for further announcements as we call for photos! Authored by the society's former curator, Beverly Lucas, the upcoming book is scheduled for publication in early 2009.

J MICHAELS TAVERN OFF TO A SUCCESSFUL START!

Tavern Business Exceeds Owner Projections

In September 2007 the society entered into an agreement with J Michaels Tavern for lease of the historic Deming-Standish House, and in October the tavern doors opened to an enthusiastic public. Since opening, J Michaels Tavern has attracted a strong customer following, including such notables as Governor Jodi Rell, television personality Scot Haney and Wethersfield Mayor Andy Adil! In addition to their own marketing efforts in local media, the tavern has been featured in the *Hartford Courant*, the *Boston Globe* and on Scot Haney's "Better Connecticut" show. The Tavern is very much a family business, headed by father Roger and son/chef Michael DiPiano and supported by the cheerful welcome of floor manager (and mom) Debbie DiPiano, all of Newington. Roger reports that business has exceeded original business plan projections and with features such as a new interior, great food, live musical performances and fresh local art, the future looks very promising for J Michaels Tavern at the historic Standish House!



From left, society Governing Board members Dorene Ciarcia, Gloria Gworek, Edward Zito and Pat Allen oversee the signing of the lease with J Michaels Tavern principals Roger and Michael DiPiano.

SOCIETY NAMED IN ROBERT BRUCE AND BEATRICE BLACKY GOODRICH TRUST

Family Cherished Connections with Wethersfield and Mary Comstock Strong

Wethersfield Historical Society has been named as a beneficiary of the Robert Bruce and Beatrice Blacky Goodrich Trust "in memory of Goodrich forebears, in particular Mary Comstock Strong, for general uses and purposes." Mr. and Mrs. Goodrich, of Franklin, Maine, died on May 26, 2004 and March 4, 2007, respectively. The couple had been extremely generous to the society in the past and in 2000 donated an 1811 blackwork sampler by Emily Butler of Wethersfield. This gift was also made in the memory of Mary C. Strong. "We are saddened by the loss of Mr. and Mrs. Goodrich," stated society President Dorene Ciarcia, "but pleased that they valued their Wethersfield connections so strongly and that they entrusted the society to safeguard their cherished objects and memory of Mary Strong. We will ensure that this trust has been well placed."

YOUR GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE !

Annual Giving supports the society now. Contributing to Wethersfield Historical Society's Annual Fund helps ensure that the society can continue to provide quality educational, cultural and research programs and services to our members and visitors throughout the year.

Planned Giving ensures your vision lives on beyond your lifetime. The Adventurers Circle recognizes society donors that have identified Wethersfield Historical Society in their estate planning. If you have named the society as a beneficiary in your will, trust, insurance or other estate planning, please let us recognize you through inclusion in the Adventurers Circle legacy donor program.

Please contact Director Doug Shipman at 860.529.7656 for more information about charitable giving to Wethersfield Historical Society.



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Non-Profit Organization

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CALENDAR *of* EVENTS



-
- Apr. 12 **"Taste of Wethersfield" Benefit**, 6-9:30 p.m., Keeney Memorial Cultural Center, \$30/\$35
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- Apr. 16, 17 **Keeney Kids Vacation History Programs**, Keeney Memorial Cultural Center, 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m.
-
- Apr. 22,
May 1, 29 **Keeney Cultural Series – Cabaret**: 7:30 p.m. Series, \$45,
Individual concert, \$18. Keeney Hall, Keeney Memorial Cultural Center.
-
- Apr. 24, 26 **Burying Ground Tours**, free to members. Thurs., 1-2:30 p.m.,
June 19, 21 Sat., 10-11:30a.m. Meet at the red barn in First Church parking lot.
-
- May 15, 17 **Walk around Wethersfield**, free to members. Thurs., 1-2:30 p.m.,
Sat., 10-11:30 a.m. Meet in front of Keeney Memorial Cultural Center.
-
- Apr. 25,
May 16 **Colonial Revival Walking Tour**, free to members, Fri., 1-2:30 p.m.
Meet in front of Keeney Memorial Cultural Center.
-
- May 17-
mid-Oct. **Cove Warehouse and Hurlbut-Dunham House** open weekends,
Sat., 10-4, Sun., 1-4. Free to members.
-
- May 21 **Annual Meeting and Dinner**. Reception 5:30 p.m., Dinner 6:30 p.m. in Keeney Hall.
-
- June 7 **Connecticut Open House Day**, 10a.m-4p.m., visit all society properties for free.
Rare opportunity to visit the James Francis House!