



DEDICATED TO PRESERVING, PROTECTING AND PROMOTING THE HISTORY OF OLD SAYBROOK

Late Fall/Winter 2016

Holidays at the Historical Society



Eva Louise Downes, granddaughter of Society trustee J.H. Torrance Downes, led our contingent in Old Saybrook's December Torchlight Parade (Photo: Ed Armstrong)



A Wassail guest enters the Hart House.



The Hart House's front parlor at Christmas.

Photos: Bill Roberts



Student volunteers Adina Ripin, left, Kunsang Dorjee and Olivia Gaidry at the Society's annual Wassail Party.

President's Message

Recently I read the first book of minutes of the Society starting in 1958 and ending in 1966. The first meeting was held at the home of Frank Tinsley (see related story, page 7), who eventually became the first president. It brought together a small group of residents of Old Saybrook who wanted to save, as much as possible, the history of Old Saybrook. They had no budget, no "home", no Constitution, but they had a mission.

One of the interesting articles pertained to an idea in 1966. The old Acton Library was the repository of many artifacts and documents that dealt with Old Saybrook history. A new library was built and the Society was the recipient of all that was saved at the Library... where to put it?

One idea was to lease the old Library from the Town. The historic building would be saved; storage for the historical materials and artifacts would work and the Society would have an office. The vote of the governing board was not to do this. One of the arguments against it was the fact that the cost of upkeep from insurance to telephone usage could run up to \$600. Their income was \$1,000. We recently paid almost \$600 to update our fire extinguishers! The dollar is certainly not worth what it was then but the message still resonates: the changes to the Society over the years are incredible!

Each event of the past year was successful. Our Community Outreach continues to grow and the repairs to the Campus are impressive. This year continues along the same path as you will see in the list of activities. We are also beginning to plan for 2017, the 250th anniversary of the Hart House.

One of my favorite memories of the past year was the email I received from Mackenzie Marien, a senior at Old Saybrook High School and an OSHS student volunteer. Seniors pick their own venue for their yearbook pictures and their choice is extremely important to them. This often involves professional photography. She asked if she could use the Hart House and grounds and, of course, my answer was affirmative. When Mackenzie arrived with the photographer, I asked why she picked the Hart House. She wanted a place that she loved and was so important to her town.

When you think of the Society, I hope that you will think of Mackenzie's words. They are powerful and meaningful and make all of our efforts worthwhile.

With gratitude and best wishes for 2016.

Marie



Mackenzie Marien: senior picture on the Hart House stairs

World War Two Exhibit Planned for this Summer



Local service members march down Old Saybrook's Main Street in World War Two Victory Parade.

Last year, the Society mounted a powerful exhibit commemorating the 100th anniversary of the First World War. It featured numerous propaganda posters from its Archives along with many loaned, Old-Saybrook-related items from local antique expert Bill Temple's personal collection.

In 2016, the focus shifts ahead to the Second World War for a planned summer-long exhibit on our Campus. Again, Bill has graciously agreed to donate a number of items of local interest for the exhibit.

In addition, the Society is looking for stories, pictures, artifacts and people to interview from Old Saybrook residents or those associated with Old Saybrook in some way. All materials will be returned to their owners at the end of the summer exhibit.

Please call us at (860) 395-1635 or email us at contact@saybrookhistory.org, if you'd like to contribute to the exhibit.

Martha Soper: Saving History with a Passion

The Historical Society is saddened by the passing of Martha Soper, a dedicated member, outstanding volunteer and benefactor. She was determined to save the



Martha Soper

history of her town and the Borough of Fenwick and never wavered in this mission in spite of the lack of a facility. The history she wrote of this journey is filled with stories, as she and her friends worked under many adverse conditions to keep records, letters, books and artifacts from being destroyed.

However, Martha had a goal and nothing was going to stop her. That goal was to have a permanent home for all that was and would be collected

and preserved. When it was the opportune time, she rallied her family and friends, wrote letters, generously contributed and helped get contributions from others... doing all she possibly could to get an Archives Building built at 350 Main Street. After this goal was achieved, she worked tirelessly there until it was physically impossible to come.

Today the building Martha envisioned and helped bring to fruition is thriving and the envy of many historical societies. It continues to receive accolades for its unique structure and the vision that created it. It serves those from all over the country seeking to do research and genealogy and Old Saybrook residents looking for information about their Town. Also, it is the center for the work of the Society as it continues its efforts to fulfill its mission.

An Indian proverb states: "All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today". We, at the Society, will continue to nourish the seeds planted by Martha. May she rest in peace.

Marie

Film Crew Interviews, Researches James & Petry Families at Society

By Tedd Levy

A small crew from Searchlight Films recently spent four days at the Hart House and Stevenson Archives interviewing scholars and researching materials related to the life of noted Old Saybrook author Ann Petry and local legend Miss Anna Louise James. The production is underwritten, in part, by grants from the Connecticut Humanities Council and Middlesex Community Foundation.

Searchlight Films was founded by Kathryn Golden and Ashley James and specializes in making documentary films for television.

Their films are designed to illuminate America's diverse communities and their clients have included PBS, CBS, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and BBC. Additional information is available on its website: www.SearchlightFilms.org.

The James and Petry families are just two members of this notable family that rose from slavery, triumphed over racism and made significant contributions to their community and country.

Ann Petry was the first African-American author whose book, called "The Street," sold more than a million



Barbara Maynard interviewed in the Hart House kitchen. (Photo by Ed Armstrong)

copies and Anna Louise James was the beloved proprietor of James Pharmacy.

The film will be designed for television and will be based on letters, historical documents, early artifacts, photographs, period film and interviews with historians and scholars.

Elisabeth Petry, a former journalist and author "At Home Inside: A Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry" and "Can Anything Beat White? A Black Family's Letters," is serving as consultant and producer of the documentary.

Scholars that were interviewed at the Historical Society included Walter Woodward, Connecticut State Historian; Farah Jasmine Griffin, Professor of English and Comparative Literature and African-American Studies at Columbia University, and Diane Isaacs, University of Delaware, who wrote her doctoral thesis on Ann Petry.

Others interviewed included Garth Meadows, who was proprietor of James Pharmacy and Barbara J. Maynard, former First Selectman and friend of both the Petry and James families. As a writer on Miss James and Ann Petry, I also was interviewed.

“Tea & Treasures” Focuses on Jewelry’s Evolution

By Donna DiBella, Chair Ways and Means Committee

The Old Saybrook Historical Society held a “Tea and Treasures” event Nov. 28 in the festively decorated Hart House. Attendees heard Gay Sherman Weintz, a local authority on costume jewelry, give the history of costume jewelry from the Victorian period to the present. She brought pieces for all to see and noted how history played a role in what women wore at different times throughout the years. This interesting lecture was



Volunteers donated a repast of delicacies.

followed by tea and goodies enjoyed by all who attended.

Mar Floral and Botanicals, Main Street Old Saybrook donated our lovely decorated “live” Christmas tree. Two Christmas Elves... Drinagh Garofalo and Cathy Logiudice

helped transform the house. A thank you to Linda Kinsella who made the tea and a giant “thank you” to

all those who donated food. Bee and Thistle Inn graciously donated a gift certificate for “Tea for Two” that we placed in our tea basket.

Also thank you to Reagan Mason and Ruthie LaMay, two of our dedicated students, who helped to serve and Kathy Delmonico who worked behind the scenes to ensure the success of the event. Those who attended had a great time!



Student volunteers Reagan Mason, left and Ruthie LaMay, aided Kathy Delmonico in preparing for the event.

Grant Underwrites Two New Hart House Campus Exhibit Signs

The Society applied for and was fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County for the design and production of two full-color exhibit signs to be placed on the Hart House Campus.

One will be placed inside the picket fence at the Hart House front door explaining the mission of the Historical Society and what visitors will find inside the House. A second sign will be located to the rear between the Hart House and the Stevenson Archive building. That sign will present information about our beautiful gardens, information about the Archives and what historical treasures can be found in there.

We’ll let you know when we’re about to install the signs.

Connecticut River Poets to Revisit, Write & Share Works

Over the winter, members of the Connecticut River Poets will be revisiting our Campus to choose subjects with the goal of writing and collecting poems that were inspired by their visits. These poems will be put together in a chapbook.

This project will be finished in late spring after which a date for a poetry reading on our Campus will be set. We are excited to have these talented poets bring another perspective to our mission.



As fall descended, Society Gardeners Joanne Goduti, Sherry Eldridge and Bev Keger harvested ripe pears from the carefully tended tree along the south side of the Hart House.

What's Happening in the Archives

We are forever grateful to both past and present donors who have entrusted us to protect and preserve the history of Old Saybrook.

Newest Contributions

- Eight bound books containing selected articles from the Middletown Press "Valley Week Summer Guide", with index: 1960, 1966, 1967; 1970, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1976. Donated by **Tedd Levy**.
- Six hand-made 1920's eel pots and clam rake. Donated by **Dale Newton**. [Detailed story in next edition.]
- Sherry decanter and 6 glasses by Waterford (Lismore). Donated by **Marie McFarlin**.
- Giant matchbook advertising Casino Grill, Old Saybrook. Donated by **Christine Nelson**.
- Autographed booklet, "Opening of The Preserve, 1,000-acre forest". Donated by **Tom Curran**.
- Needlepoint folding screen with map of Old Saybrook. Done in the 1920's by Eleanor Bradley. Donated by **Barbara Pitcher**.

- Saybrook Colony residents in Civil War: 24th Reg't CT Vols. Extracted from various sources by **Mark Sanner**.
- Frank Tinsley painting, World War I aircraft dogfight, Great Britain vs. Germany. Donator unknown.
- Rule book and marbles made by Great American Marble Factory in Old Saybrook. Donated by **Nancy Hoffman**.
- "Historic & Architectural Resource Survey of portions of the Town of Old Saybrook" (2015), plus Survey Report and Historic Structures Inventory. Donated by **Tedd Levy**.

Library

- "The Street" by Ann Petry. Donated by **Marie McFarlin**.
- "The Great Migration", Immigrants to New England, 1634-1635 (volumes 6 & 7).

-- Diane Hoyt, Administrative Assistant - Archives

Extensive Shepard Family Materials Donated to Archives

We receive many donations of artifacts and documents throughout the year. Once in a while, we receive a special collection of materials from a person who cannot store his or her treasures, or safeguard them for the future.

I received an email from Merry Hill of Worcester, Mass., who asked if our Society would be interested in acquiring her family's collection of Shepard materials. I quickly jumped at the opportunity to have this wonderful collection come to the Old Saybrook Historical Society.

Merry Hill and her friend Theresa Paukel, drove from Worcester to bring us her materials, which included a wonderful family bible, pictures, letters, genealogies, several large family charts, notebooks, and a journal written by one of

her Old Saybrook ancestors.

We opened every box and she explained to me what the collection included. I am thrilled to have all of this information in our archives. Diane Hoyt and I will now begin to catalog and preserve for use by our patrons.

It is through the generosity of people, such as, Merry who help us build collections of materials that are unmatched anywhere else. We thank Merry for giving us the privilege of storing her materials and for making them available to other Shepard family members who may come research at our library.

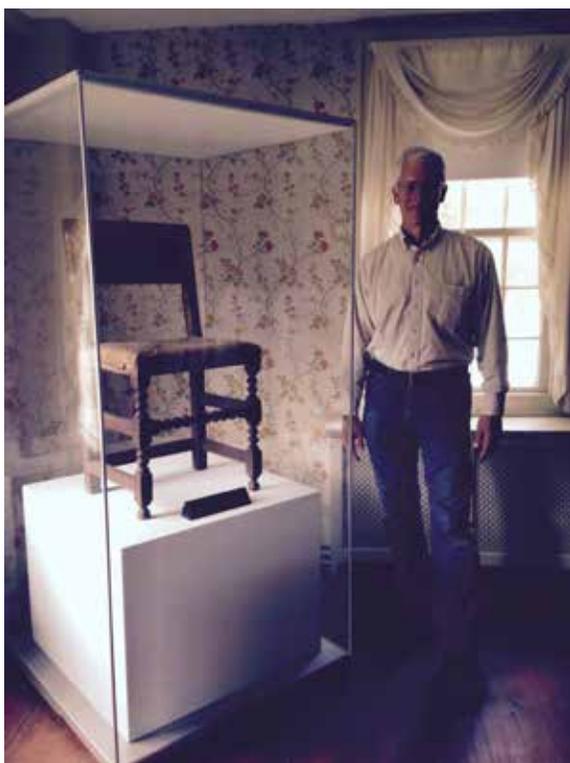


Merry Hill, left, and Theresa Paukel.
(Photo: Gregory Thompson)

-- Gregory Thompson,
Society Archivist

Society Welcomes Newest Members (Jan.-Dec. 2015)

Jolene Abrahams	Livermore, Calif.
Nancy Bell	Old Saybrook
Linda Cameron	Old Saybrook
Gerald Chapman	Roanoke, Va.
Kyi & Richard Cohen	Old Saybrook
Maryam Elhai	Old Saybrook
Mary Epifanio	Old Saybrook
Charles Fitzgerald	Old Saybrook
Alexys & Colin Heffernan	Old Saybrook
Merry Hill	Worcester, Mass.
Alison Kelley	Old Saybrook
Henrietta & Robert Mountz	Old Saybrook
Wayne Mountz	Old Saybrook
Bonnie & Bill Penders	Old Saybrook
Maura & David Silva	Old Saybrook
Nan Wachen	Old Saybrook
Anita & Robert Yust	Old Saybrook



The Society's "Cromwell Chair" is now housed in a custom case thanks to a gift in memory of Ella Terrell McClure, a direct descendant of Robert Chapman, one of the first settlers of Saybrook Colony. The chair was made between 1660 and 1680 with a seat and back covering of seal skin and is probably the only one of its kind in existence today. Facility Manager Ed Armstrong aided in the case's assembly.

Mark Your Calendars

- Feb. 25** **Chapman Lecture**
William Hosley
Acton Public Library, 7 p.m.
As an expert in heritage tourism, Hosley has studied, lectured and advised hundreds of museums and heritage destinations around the country.
- Mar. 24** **Chapman Lecture**
Capt. Wes Pulver
Acton Public Library, 7 p.m.
Captain Pulver is Ex. Dir. Of the National Coast Guard Museum; History of Coast Guard with focus on southern New England coast and new museum
- Apr. 28** **Chapman Lecture**
Carolyn Ivanoff
Acton Public Library, 7 p.m.
Author and presenter of educational programs for schools and organizations. Presentations on the "Fame and Infamy of Isaac Hull"
- May 26** **Chapman Lecture**
Will Siss
[Non-Library site TBD.
Beer-tasting fundraiser]
Columnist and author of "Connecticut Beer," will present "History of Beer in CT"
- June 4** **Antique & Appraisal Day**
Karen Emack-Dolson and Peter Dolson, and others
- June 12** **Rick Spencer program:**
Songs of WWII and
Chris Aradi, WWII re-enactor and exhibits;
Spencer will present program at Episcopal Church, 3:00, "Songs of WWII," and Aradi will display WWII jeep and exhibits on HH campus
- Sep. 10** **Hosting for History: Hometown Tour of Houses:**
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Ticketed event. See website and Facebook for details. More information in next newsletter.

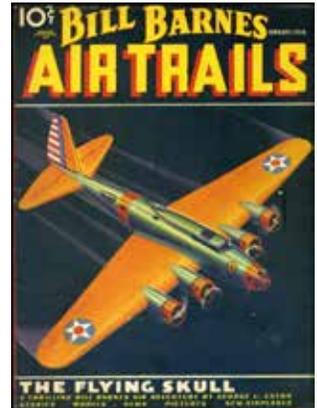
Frank Tinsley Materials Sought

Frank Tinsley (1899-1965) was the first president of the Old Saybrook Historical Society and a prolific artist and writer. His work appeared in many publications, including *Mechanix Illustrated*, *Barnes Air Trails*, *George Bruce's Contact*, *Lariat Story*, *North West Stories*, *Sky Birds*, *War Birds*, and *Western Story*.

As a 17-year old during the First World War, he designed helmets and body armor for the U.S. government and special weapons for the first American fighter planes. Refused field service because of the importance of his work, he enlisted in the

N.Y. National Guard and served in the 51st Machine Gun Squadron (mounted) and the 101st Horse Cavalry. He subsequently worked at the Metropolitan Museum as assistant curator of the arms and armor department and was a well-known authority on the subject.

We are interested in obtaining any of Mr. Tinsley's illustrated publications for placement in our Archives. If you have any Tinsley publications or know anyone who does, would you kindly contact the Society? Thanks for your help.



A January 1936 Frank Tinsley cover for "Bill Barnes Air Trails."

2015 Annual Appeal Contributors

"Thank you" to an unprecedented number of donors who are committed to the mission of the Society. The Annual Appeal is one of our most important revenue sources and this year's campaign was the most successful ever.

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Painters work on the wrought-iron fence surrounding The Old Mill Stone, owned by the Historical Society. It had originally been part of the gristmill which operated at Saybrook Point. According to tradition the stone was brought from Holland in 1638. (Photo: Ed Armstrong)



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If you have an account at Essex Savings Bank, please consider voting for us during the Community Investment Program survey through February 29th. Any funds received will be given in the form of small scholarships to our outstanding senior student volunteers who have helped us during the course of their entire high school term.

www.saybrookhistory.org

