

Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Olivia Gaidry, and I am a junior at Old Saybrook High School.

It's great to see so many people here with the Old Saybrook Historical Society on this 250th anniversary celebration of the General William Hart House. As I look around at the faces gathered here today, I see people of many different ages, from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, with different jobs, interests and beliefs. On each of your unique faces, and in your individual hearts is written a unique history, a unique story of how you came to be, where you have been and where you are going. Each unique person here today is a creation of, not only the genes of your ancestors, but the lives you've lived, the people you've loved, the lessons you've learned and the multitude of moments that add up to a life that is hopefully greater than the sum of its parts. Yet these unique threads that run through our lives are not separate from one another, but rather intertwined, and today those threads, like the strands of a web, have pulled us together, drawing us to the historical and cultural *heart* of our community — the appropriately named Hart House.

The Hart House is so much more than a house, for many of us it's our home. A house is a physical structure, but a home offers an intellectual, emotional and spiritual structure as well. A house offers protection and rest from the outside world, but a home connects us to the world and engages us to participate in the fullness of life. A house offers rooms and doors to separate us when we need privacy, but a home is where we learn to come together as a family and share our unique gifts in a spirit of imagination and abundance. All of you who are part of the Hart



The following summer, although I was still in middle school, I was somehow able to convince Mrs. McFarlin to let me volunteer at the Hart House. This year marks my (4th?) year as a volunteer, giving tours in the summer, incarnating the spirit of Miss Anna James at the graveyard tour in the fall, singing carols in the winter, and eagerly awaiting the first blooms of the garden each spring. Sharing in the life of the Hart House throughout the changing seasons, and contemplating the tides of unimaginable change this home has seen since it was built 250 years ago, helped me understand that history is not simply things that happened long ago to people who are long gone. All of us are making history everyday, right here, right now, whether we are conscious of it or not. The real question is, what *sort* of history are we making?

At this particular time in our history, when our nation is so divided, when the social, political and economic fabric of our society has been torn apart, when so many of our institutions have been raided and emptied out of meaning or value, I find comfort in a meaningful, tangible, relevant, local history that says we have been divided before. Disparity, inequality and corruption are nothing new, and yet we are still here. We have survived and overcome catastrophes of our own making before and *if* we are willing to learn from the lessons of our past, we will not only survive, but thrive once again. In an era of “alternative facts”, I find the strength to resist deception in the deep cultural roots and solid factual foundation of a living history that has been lovingly preserved, protected and promoted by institutions like the Old Saybrook Historical Society. That is why it is more important than ever that we continue to support the critical, meaningful work of the Old Saybrook Historical Society.

The Hart house is more than a relic of our past, it is the living, beating heart at the center of our community today, and a priceless gift and profound symbol of hope for our future. The Hart House stands here today in all of her splendor and glory after 250 years, because of the dedication and hard work of individuals who explored the unknown, searched attics and archives, uncovered facts and artifacts of meaning and relevance, and brought them back here to rebuild the collective cultural heart of our community together. This is what makes the Hart House the perfect symbol for restoring our community and our country. Each of us has a responsibility to our own heart to journey courageously to the dark edges of our lives, find our own threads of meaning, pull them back to the center, and weave them together with the threads of our neighbors lives in order to restore the unity in community and rebuild the heart of our broken society.

For so many people, the world feels increasingly *rootless*, *powerless*, *futureless*, and generally *meaningless*. The antidote for this malaise is for us to tap into the hidden abundance and create institutions like the Old Saybrook Historical Society and the Hart House which inspire us to be MORE and imagine the FULLness of life. The historians, teachers, mentors and elders at the Hart House have inspired me through history to become more *powerful*, *mindful*, *hopeful*, *joyful* and discover a world that is more *meaningful*. And for this I am truly *thankful*.

Thank you.