



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

Summer 2023



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President's Message

We are now in the process of planning the dismantling the present exhibit: FAMILY MATTERS: INSIGHTS AND INSPIRATIONS FROM MISS JAMES AND ANN PETRY. We started four years ago to plan and execute a meaningful project that would bring the lives of these two extraordinary women, who supported by strong family ties, overcame gender and racial obstacles to make significant and meaningful contributions to Old Saybrook and our Country. We considered it an honor to present their lives and accomplishments by film and a Forum at the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center. The Exhibit's opening program provided an afternoon not to be forgotten by those who attended.

Over the two years that we had the Exhibit, students of all ages, visitors from almost every State and age heard their stories and saw many artifacts pertaining to their lives.

We are grateful to Steven and Diana Gernhardt for their James Pharmacy collection as well as the Ct. Museum of Culture and History, Ct. Humanities and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, Lamar LeMonte, design and publicity, Laurie Pasteryak, exhibit assembly, Tedd Levy, Forum program and film producer, Ed Armstrong, display construction, Jesse Nasta, Executive Director of Middlesex Historical Society, Con Brio, Cathy Logiudice, Hospitality, our administrative assistants, Diane Hoyt and Teddi Kopcha, the leading tour guides, Kathy DelMonico, Donna DiBella and Arlene Sakatos and our student volunteers.

On August 13, I spent time with the family of Elisabeth Petry Riley who had come to see the exhibit. Liz, the daughter of Ann Petry and niece of Miss James, was our primary consultant. She grew up in Old Saybrook and was valedictorian of her class and won

a full scholarship to Vassar College. She received a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. After practicing law for ten years, Liz returned to Ct. and lived in Middletown. During that time she wrote for various local papers and devoted much of her time and talents to telling her family's stories as well as helping veterans in the Community. On February 22, 2023 Liz died after a few months battle with cancer. It is a shocking loss and we will honor her and her accomplishments as well as the other extraordinary members of her family.

Ashley James and Kathryn Golden of Searchlight Films have received a National Endowment of the Humanities to complete a documentary for national publication of Ann Petry and her family based on the 400 family letters she preserved. The Society, before Covid, provided our Campus for the filming and interviews from our area. We plan to partner with the Acton Library to provide a Writing Award each year to a student at the high school whose essay will be based on the lives and writings of Elisabeth and Ann Petry. We will have an extensive section devoted to all their writings and the many books critiquing their works in the Archives Building. All three women will be part of a permanent display in the General William Hart House.

We have learned so much from each of them and are grateful for all of it.

Marie



James/Petry family and friends visit the exhibit.
Courtesy of Lamar LeMonte

The Society's House and Garden Tour held on Saturday, June 24th featured five beautiful homes in addition to the General William Hart House, home to our Society. The six gardens were alive in all their splendor and colors ready to greet visitors as they arrived.

Those in attendance were treated to all things special and numbered approximately five hundred visitors. The evening before, seventy guests were entertained at the home of William and Donna DiBella for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. The rain held off somewhat and those who attended had a good time in spite of the weather.



The Society specifically owes a debt of gratitude to the house and garden owners. They are true examples of our Mission... to preserve, protect and promote the history of Old Saybrook. In addition, they were willing to

share their stories and open their doors to an entire community and beyond.

Friends, supporters, Ways and Means Committee and many, many, volunteers made this all possible.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Donna DiBella

Ways and Means Committee, Chair

Summer Classes for Students - Herb Class

The students from Goodwin Elementary School are once again participating in a Summer Education Program. The students along with their instructor, Katie Lemieux, paid a visit to the Hart House Heritage Gardens. Mrs. Bonnie Penders, the Historical Society's Herb Garden specialist, met with the nine students who were "well behaved and good listeners".



The students learned about the different herbs and local ingredients that can be used in cooking and baking. They will be using honey, eggs, herbs and fruits in their different baking creations. All the ingredients have been purchased locally. They will be baking something different every day while learning about each "special" ingredient!

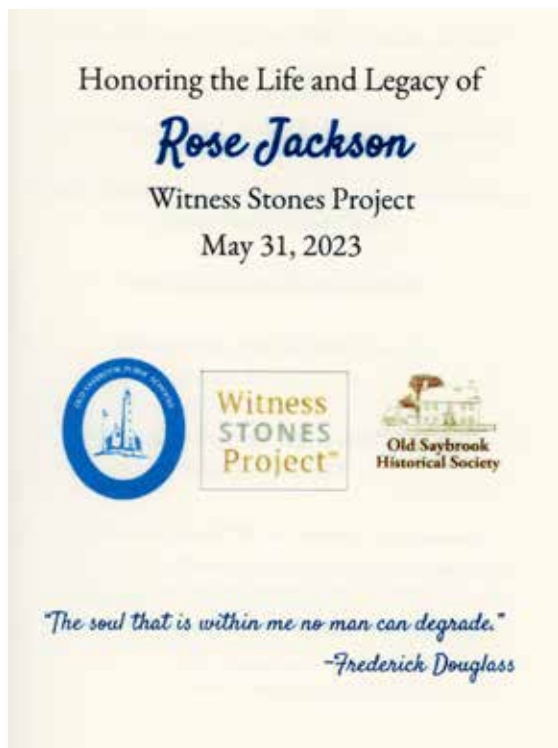
Courtesy of Bonnie Penders



Courtesy of Lamar LeMonte

Helena Gernhardt and her parents Steven and Diane Gernhardt at Trustees' meeting . Helena was awarded a Certificate of Merit and a stipend from the Society for her outstanding service as a student volunteer during her high school career. She is now a student at Georgetown University.

Witness stone



Third graders visit the memorial



Inscription on Witness Stone
ROSE JACKSON
Daughter of Cato and Tamar
Born November 26, 1778
Enslaved Here
Freed October 18, 1866
In her 88th year
Buried at Cypress Cemetery



July 2023 Facilities Report

As of July 2023, the Old Saybrook Historical Society's spring and summer maintenance has focused on repair of garden features including granite walls, Gallery foundation, granite steps at the Gallery North entrance, a picket fence for the Gallery heat-pump, installation of a new rose arbor, replacement of the herb garden faucet and the installation of a witness stone recognizing Rose Jackson.



Restored Garden Wall and Gallery Foundation

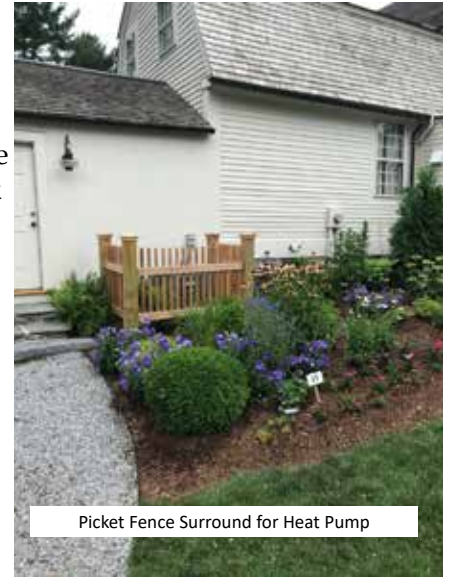
Two significant restoration projects are scheduled to start late summer. The first project is a new cedar roof for the Hart House gambrel roof (over the old kitchen) and porch roof. Preservation Connecticut and The 1772 Foundation made the roof replacement possible with a matching grant for half of the

estimated \$20,000 roof replacement cost; with the other half from the continued assistance of the Old Saybrook Community.

The second late-summer project will be replacement of the Hart House Gallery South wall vertical siding, replacement of the two Gallery doors and restoration of the Gallery South-garden to improve drainage and return the soil level of the garden back to its condition in 1767.

The top priority on our facilities watch-list is the Archives building cedar roof and HVAC system. Archives was constructed in 1998 and although we have been fortunate that the roof and HVAC have lasted 25 years, we will now plan for appropriate maintenance and replacement.

Ed Armstrong



Picket Fence Surround for Heat Pump

Decoy Collection Revision

The decoys pictured in the last newsletter (Canada goose, 2 buffleheads, sandpiper, and 2 unfinished decoys, were made by my grandparents, Richard (carver) and Marion (painter) Harris.

The small duck to the right of the Canada goose in this picture is a blue-winged teal, carved and painted by Old Saybrook resident Harry Ross (no relation).

There is a green -winged teal donation was carved



and painted by Richard and Marion's son, Robert Harris, my uncle. This piece has a carved notation at the bottom, dedicating it to my mother, Richard and Marion's daughter. Information and collection donation are from Tammy Eustis, Chester, Ct.

The decoys by Marion's grandparents and the small duck by Harry Ross are

displayed in the Archives Building.

Hart House Heritage Garden - Summer 2023

The heritage garden is lush and flourishing these hot mid-summer days. The early work done by our garden group for the June 24th, House and Garden tour has produced a delightful, flowering habitat for pollinators and for people. I hope everyone's home garden is doing well too.

This time of year, you might like to take a notebook with you as you walk around your own garden. Write down each perennial plant name, color and size and sketch a diagram of where the plant is situated in the bed. It will not only help you identify the plant when it begins to emerge next spring, but it will avoid accidentally weeding out slow growing specimens.

Several heritage plants have wire markers with labels of both the common and botanical name. We remove the markers before winter, so in the spring, it's often guesswork as to what's coming up. It really helps to have a garden diagram and photos.

Carin Roaldset, who tends the Artist's garden - Bed 11, has placed her garden design on a shepard's hook for visitors to view the plant arrangement. Of course plants often re-seed themselves to a different spot the following season, but that's another story.

The pergola and rose arbor received a fresh coat of paint this spring. The trumpet vine that was cut to the ground last fall, to facilitate the pergola being painted, has grown back, climbing up eight feet to the top and blooming. Hummingbirds visit the flowers regularly..



Carin Roaldset, Joanne Goduti, Susan Murphy, Nancy Dziame, Bonnie Penders, Jim Madden, Mary Walter, Jessica May, Jennifer Randel. Missing: Elizabeth Normen, Marcia Zup



A very nice, three sided, "Sight-block" fence was built this spring to enclose the A/C condenser. And we enlarged the Herbs with a Purpose - Teaching garden for school tours.

Since our 2023 March 1st meeting the gardeners have worked weekly, preparing the beds for the succession of blooming perennials. The early hellebores, trillium, primrose, daffodils, iris, old garden roses, lilac,

deutzia and other early flowering shrubs, have all died back. They were replaced by showy, red echinacea, white Shasta daisies, pink and yellow achillea, purple balloon flowers and verbena, just to name a few. Plus, there are various culinary and medicinal herbs growing in all the beds. Bees are buzzing about, collecting pollen and butterflies are back.

It's a wonderful place to visit.

In May the gardeners, with assistance from Edward Armstrong, created a special garden at the north west corner of the Hart House for the installation of a permanent "witness stone" to remember the life and legacy of Rose

Jackson, 1788-1856, an enslaved woman, who lived with the Hart Family from age 9 until her death. She is buried in Cyprus Cemetery. The ceremony on May 31st included music by the Middle School Chorus and moving presentations by some of the eighth grade students who had researched Rose's life. This project was under the direction of Robert Labriola, their teacher. See Page 4

Linda Kinsella, Keeper

Grants

The Society was awarded a 2023 matching grant of \$10,000 for the partial replacement of the wood gambrel roof on the General William Hart House from the collaborative historic preservation technical assistance program of Preservation Connecticut and the 1772 Foundation.

It also received a FY23 Ct. Cultural Fund Operating Grant for \$7,300. Support is provided to the Society from Ct. Humanities (CTH) with funding by the Ct State Department of Economic and Community Development/Ct Office of the Arts (COA) from the State Legislature. Funds are being used to develop a digitization plan that will advise and guide our efforts for digitizing parts of our collections. It will institute new policies, train staff, obtain some equipment and improve operations to support the preservation of our assets and increase access to our unique historical collection. Plan will be developed through the hiring of two expert consultants in this field

A grant of \$8,288 was awarded through the American Rescue Plan Act. The Society will partner with the Saybrook Chamber of Commerce for the updating of the historic walking tour brochure that will include historic homes, buildings and monuments from Main Street beginning at the Railroad Station to Saybrook Point and North Cove. This grant covers the creative concept, photographs, descriptions and printing.



Photo courtesy of Frank Sciamie, owner and preserver of the OS Outer Lighthouse. The 2022 Preservation plaque from the Society is the entrance door to the lighthouse.

Exhibit Event

Siobhan McGirl, a reporter from NBC, CT. requested an interview with an Old Saybrook Historical Society member to discuss Anna Louise James who is part of our present exhibit and the first licensed African American pharmacist in the State of Ct. The reporter arrived at the General William Hart House with her camera crew for the interview with Tedd Levy, the Society's Special Projects Coordinator. They took many photographs of the various aspects of the Exhibit. Tedd Levy gave the factual information and Teddi Kopcha, Society administrative assistant, provided the anecdotes and personal experiences because she knew Miss James and would often visit the James Pharmacy and fondly remembers the Ice Cream Parlor. The video aired on the evening news.



May She Rest in Peace

Carol Rzasa, an OSHS Trustee passed away on August 2nd. She was an active member of the Community who was always willing to give of her talents and time for public service. We wish to express our sympathy to her family and are so grateful for her time with us.

Documentary

Newly graduated Wesleyan University film student, Hannah Carroll, presented her documentary thesis about Katharine Hepburn and her life at Fenwick. During her senior year she produced, directed, and edited after hours of research. The film was awarded top honors from the thesis jury as well as the Leavell Memorial Prize which recognizes outstanding work in the film medium.

She gathered material from many sources including the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center and OSHS. Elisabeth Petry was interviewed because the James/Petry family had a special relationship with Miss Hepburn. Hannah dedicated the film to Liz whose untimely death resonated with all of us.



The Old Saybrook Historical Society

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Upcoming Events

October 15th 3:30 to 5:00
Annual Meeting

October 29th 4:00 to 5:00
Cyprus Cemetery Tour
conducted by JH Torrance Downes



United States Coast Guard Preservation Jazz Band Concert
in our Public Heritage Gardens on July 24.
Courtesy of Edward Armstrong



www.saybrookhistory.org