

Cheshire Historical Society News

Volume 42, No. 2

Keeping Cheshire's History Alive!

Fall 2019

Our Mission: Keeping Cheshire's history alive through our museum's collections, exhibitions and programs.

Our Vision: The Cheshire Historical Society will be integrated in the life and interest of the community as an accessible source of historical information and knowledge.

COLOR VERSION OF OUR NEWSLETTER IS ON OUR WEBSITE

1500 POINTS OF LIGHT

What annual Cheshire event requires 10 months of preparation, seventy volunteers, 1500 mason jars, and 6000 tea lights? Spirits Alive Historic Hillside Cemetery Lantern Tour 2019.

Our Spirits Alive Historic Hillside Cemetery Lantern Tour is back for its sixth year. The tour will be held on Friday and Saturday, October 11th and 12th.

Guests will be guided by lantern along paths lit by more than 1500 candles, stopping among the tombstones to hear eight firsthand accounts of Cheshire's dearly departed.

Thomas Mulholland has spent months thoroughly researching our stories digging into newspaper articles, court and public records, genealogy records, and interviews of residents sharing family stories. The result is that Cheshire's forgotten history will be revealed through the true stories of Cheshire's former residents, caught in the crosshairs of a revolution, a World War, an opioid epidemic, a marriage, witch trials, and more. All new stories, always!

Cheshire's Stephen Holt returns for the second year as the director of Spirits Alive. Dawn Marchand once again has dramatized our scripts and is co-directing. Our returning actors include local residents Mark Sullivan, Mary Dattilo, Tracey Burrill, Randy Yale, Stephen Mulholland, Dawn Marchand, and Stephen Holt. We are welcoming the fresh faces of Jim and Rachel Bevins who are joining us as actors for the first year. Angela Jannetty will greet guests at the Widow Kye and again provide costuming for our cast. This year our scripts are again written by Ted Holtzman, Diane Calabro, Dawn Marchand, Thomas Mulholland, and Joyce Mulholland.



Thomas Mulholland spent an evening with Jean McKee, collecting facts for one of the 2019 Spirits Alive scripts.

IMPORTANT TICKET INFORMATION

Last year, Spirits Alive tickets sold out within three days of public sales, so buy your tickets early.

SALE DATES: Tickets go on sale to Cheshire Historical Society members on **August 15**. Tickets go on sale to the general public on **September 1**.

SALE PROCESS: Again this year, all tickets are being sold online, *through Eventbrite*. They are **\$16 each + \$2.87 Eventbrite service fee (total \$18.87)**. The October 11th and 12th performances are 2 separate links at Eventbrite. Information and links, as well as answers to the Tour's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be available on the Historical Society's website.

SEE PAGE 8 for a COMPLETE LIST of UPCOMING EVENTS

RECENT HISTORY

A recap of events involving the Historical Society since the publication of our last Newsletter.

April 3rd – Cheshire Grange’s Community Citizen Award

It was standing room only at the Cheshire Grange on April 3rd, when the Grange presented its annual Community Citizen Award to our own Diane Calabro, and her friends and family showed up in force to show their appreciation. We know Diane is a great leader for the Historical Society, but her resume illustrates just how many hidden facets she has! The Award was presented following musical entertainment provided by the Bennett Family Musicians (from bell ringing to accordion playing and everything in between), and was followed by the gift basket drawing and a reception in the hall downstairs, where Diane was presented with a beautiful cake.

**April 22nd - Annual Meeting and Skits**

After concluding the business portion of the Annual Meeting, we segued into the entertaining (and educational) Historical “House Stories”. Each skit focused on an inhabitant – or possible inhabitant - of the Hitchcock-Phillips House at different points in time. Ron Gagliardi provided the introductory reading of Rufus Hitchcock’s Will and “Rufus, Eat Your Egg!”, starring Ted Holtzman and Clare Leake was the first tale told. This was followed by the Clarke sisters, Maria (Ana Arellano) and Lucretia (Cara Luciani), reflecting on 201 years of Cheshire history in 1895, after receiving a copy of the new book “Old Historic Homes of Cheshire.” The audience next heard from the first owner of the House who was not a member of the Hitchcock family, Alfred S. Bennett. Alfred was portrayed by Ray Bennett, no relation ... but one of Alfred’s grandchildren was actually in the audience! The story cycle ended in 1942, with Cheshire Academy student Boy Frame (portrayed by Justin Navarro) working on editing the Academy’s Yearbook in his dorm room at the Phillips House.

May 16th - Shed Renovation

After days of shed-cleaning and clearing efforts by several Historical Society members, Team Depot arrived on site to lead the restoration and renovation efforts to turn the Shed into a “Grade A” display and sales space. These included – but were not limited to - painting, installation of new flooring, replacement of the entrance door, and replacement of rotted framing. While significant progress was made on Team Depot Day, Society members continued to work on unfinished items on the following weekends, to get the Shed into shape for the Boutique sale on June 8th. The main kitchen even received new flooring as part of this project (to replace the floor that was damaged by the water leak this winter). We had over 35 volunteers assisting with these efforts: preparation, Team Depot Day, and follow-up work afterwards. Naturally, they were led by President Diane Calabro and her trusty Sawzall!

May 27th - Memorial Day Parade

No rain this year! Once again, a great turnout with the Hitchcock-Phillips House float as the centerpiece (expertly towed by Steve Mulholland) and the Spirits Alive cast and crew filling in the gaps. Parents in the crowd were pleasantly surprised to find our marchers giving out inedible necklaces instead of candy as the sugar highs were already getting out of control!



June 8th - Open House Day

Another warm and sunny day, another big event. Well, actually, three events! For CT Open House Day, we set up a coloring station in front of the House, as a quiet activity alternative for both children and adults. Ana Arellano provided the historical coloring pages, as well as the coloring implements. Nearby, we set up the refurbished red dollhouse (thanks to Scott Romano and Pat Germain for the renovations and repainting) for ongoing redecoration efforts (Clare Leake provided the furniture and other decorations). For those looking for a more active pursuit, we offered a passport scavenger hunt. Take a passport, find the described items, stamp the passport with the appropriate stamp, and redeem the completed passport for a limited-edition Historical Society magnet. This turned out to be a great family activity. Clare was the driving force behind the scavenger hunt, and Diane Calabro was the passport creator. Special thanks to Sam Dunlop for helping to man the coloring station when Ana was under the weather.

Another popular spot was in the side yard, where Diane Calabro's historical character cutouts came out of mothballs and were set up to provide the perfect photo op! Thanks to Dave Calabro and Scott Romano for setting these up. They are still standing tall behind the shed, if anyone is interested in checking them out and grabbing a photo or two.



June 8th - Boutique in the Shed

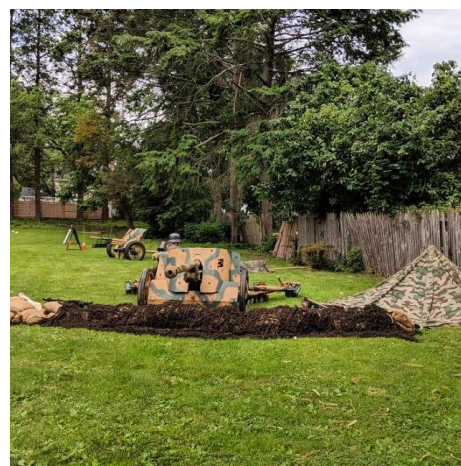
Meanwhile, in the back yard, business was booming in the Boutique, where we invited shoppers to name their own prices! Colleen Fitzgerald oversaw the activities, with help from Tracy Ajello in the Shed, and José and Aida Rodriguez at the sales table. José was instrumental in making sure that shoppers would go home with clear consciences as a result of the prices they named. Preliminary indications were that Boutique sales alone exceeded \$1,000.00.

June 8th - Cheshire Market (formerly Antiques & Collectibles Sale)

All around the property, the Cheshire Market was in full swing, under the watchful eye of Clare Leake. Popular new additions were the Carmody's Farm stand and Old Bishop Farm's homemade strawberry ice cream free samples, which disappeared before we could even grab a photo! The Market also brought over \$1,000.00 into the Historical Society's coffers.

June 28th and 29th - WWII Encampment

On June 28th, the First Canadian Parachute Battalion Reenactors set up camp on the grounds of the Hitchcock-Phillips House. The following day, the reenactors shared displays and demonstrations of vintage equipment and firearms with visitors.

**July 4th - Declaration Celebration**

The crowd was rather small this year, due to scorching sun and the lack of shade, but they were all receptive to the "Rufus, Eat Your Egg" skit, performed this time by John Bates, Diane Calabro, and Daniel Desmond. This year, the Historical Society's Declaration readers included Pat Vita, Ana Arellano, Mitzi Romano, and Diane Calabro assuming the familiar role of reader of the signatories. We suspect she has them all memorized by now!

LET'S BE SOCIAL

The Cheshire Historical Society has had a website for quite some time now, which we hope you have found helpful in obtaining contact information, event notices, and access to prior newsletters.

More recently, we created a Facebook page for the Society, followed by one specifically for Spirits Alive. In 2016, we also set up Instagram accounts for both the Society and Spirits Alive. While we use these accounts to communicate about upcoming events and showcase recent activities, we also use the Society's Facebook page to share information about Cheshire's history.

For example, over the past three years, we have run the following series of posts:

- **Cheshire, Then and Now** – “Then” being Historical Society black and white postcards of local landmarks from the 1950s, and “Now” being current day photos of the same landmarks and the stories behind them.
- **Doors of Cheshire** – Updates on some of the doors shown on the 2002 Doors of Cheshire Poster (created by Cheshire resident Hope Reinhard and sold as a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society), what they look like now, and the history of the buildings behind those doors.
- **Quirky Landmarks of Cheshire** – The Tower at Tower Farm and the gravestone without a grave, to name just two.
- **Did You Know?** – What was Masonic Hall building before it was the Masonic Hall? Where did a commercial airplane crash in town, resulting in the deaths of 16 people?
- **Tails of the History Hound** – Various bits of town history, unearthed (so to speak) by our erstwhile History Hound. Do you know what is hidden on the slopes surrounding Mixville Park?
- **Cheshire Agri-Culture, From A to Z** – An ongoing series of posts highlighting the histories of the farms, orchards and nurseries that help make Cheshire “The Bedding Plant Capital of Connecticut”.

If you haven't done so already, please “Like” us on Facebook

- Cheshire Historical Society
- Spirits Alive Cemetery Tour

And “Follow” us on Instagram

- Cheshire Historical Society
- Spirits Alive

Of course, our website is located at: www.cheshirehistory.org

And if you receive the Cheshire Citizen weekly newspaper, you may have noticed that our History Hound and his trusty sidekick, Mitzi Romano (“A Duo with a Nose for History” ... well, maybe two noses), have been contributing almost-weekly stories about Cheshire's history this summer. They have been assisted by Joy VanderLek in bringing some of our Facebook posts to the print audience.

CHESHIRE AGRI-CULTURE – “B” IS FOR BOULDER KNOLL

A sampling from our Facebook page ...

Today, Boulder Knoll Farm is a Community Farm that is managed on a portion of the Boulder Knoll property, owned by the Town of Cheshire. The farm's sponsoring organization is the Friends of Boulder Knoll, a non-profit organization that was formed in 2006. The Friends of Boulder Knoll are committed to “an environmentally responsible, ecologically sound, holistic approach to farming.” The Farm, which began operation in 2009, provides a "Community Supported Agriculture" program, which allows shareholders to buy a "share" of produce from the farm and receive seasonal vegetables and herbs



each week. Members are also encouraged to help out on the Farm. The Farm also provides food donations to local soup kitchens, as well as educational opportunities.

However, Boulder Knoll Farm has its roots (so to speak) in three earlier farms. In 1994, the Town purchased the 35-acre Jackman Farm from Ralph and Shirley Jackman, who used the property to raise miniature horses and run a Christmas tree farm. Prior to the Jackman's ownership, the farm was known as the Weber Farm and Cross Rocks Farm.

Six years later, the Town purchased the 93-acre Lassen Farm. Beginning in the early 1900's, the Lassen Farm had been a working dairy farm. According to a 2010 article in *The Hartford Courant*, "the barn [once held] 325 milking cows [that] produced 6 million pounds of milk a year for the Guida-Seibert Dairy." In 2000, it was the Town's last remaining dairy farm. Just recently, the final dairy barn on the property was taken down.

The final farm property that contributed to the Boulder Knoll property is the 20-acre Blauvelt Farm, which was purchased by the Town in 2002. The property had formerly been used/leased by the Lassen family to grow silage for cattle.

PUTTING THE "FUN" IN FUNDRAISING

This past April and May, the Historical Society participated in a number of fun fundraising events. While the final tallies were not available at press time, we had another successful online Give Local campaign, even if we did not receive any special awards this year. We also participated in the online Great Give campaign once again.

New to us this year was Big Y Supermarket's Community Bag Program. We were notified that the Historical Society would be the Cheshire store's default non-profit for April, and immediately put the History Hound to work to get the word out. We may have also benefited from the Stop & Shop strike in April redirecting traffic to Big Y for 11 days, during the Easter and Passover holidays. Each time a reusable Community Bag was purchased at the Cheshire Big Y during April we received the \$1 default donation. At one point, we were notified that 128 bags had been purchased, but we are still awaiting the final count and related funds.

While we are no longer the default non-profit for this program, it is still possible to purchase a bag and direct the \$1 donation to us. Simply follow the instructions on the tag to go online within 7 days of purchase and direct your donation to our account. Just think, you can save the planet and help keep Cheshire's history alive, just by purchasing this awesome bag!



Of course, it is almost as much fun to spend these funds and the other donations and membership dues that we receive on improvements to our buildings and grounds, as well as our collections. Despite the generous Home Depot grant and hands-on assistance with the Shed, we still have some important additions to make. For example, an HVAC system that will allow it to become a truly year-round exhibit area and shop! We have already used some funds to properly frame the full-size reproduction color Doolittle prints of Lexington and Concord, which are currently on temporary display in our Meeting Room. Future Newsletters will provide additional updates regarding these improvements and acquisitions, and you are always welcome to stop by the Society and check them out for yourself!



We have opportunities for you!

- Are you looking for something new to do?
- Do you need “volunteer hours” for work or school?
- Do you need “community service hours” for Church or Scouts?
- Do we have opportunities for you? Yes, we do!

The Cheshire Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

The Eagle Scout program in Town is well aware of the opportunities we have, but other groups and individuals may not be.

You do not need to know anything about Cheshire’s history –

- We will teach you, if you would like to become a “docent” and provide House tours.
- We will give you the opportunity to learn on your own, if you would like to do research to create Displays or in response to public inquiries or for Newsletter articles.
- We will give you the opportunity to learn by osmosis by scanning photos and papers or cataloguing our collections.

And you do not need to be a member to volunteer. In fact, you can become a member (and get early access to Historical Society events, such as Spirits Alive) simply by volunteering!

If you would like to take advantage of the opportunities we have to offer, please send us an email at cheshirehistory@che.necoxmail.com or leave a voicemail at (203) 272-2574.

CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY – Board of Directors

Officers:

President	Diane Calabro
Vice President	Cara Luciani
Treasurer (Appointed)	Shirley Brady
Recording Secretary	Mitzi Romano
Corresponding Secretary	Pat Vita

Directors:

José Rodriguez	2017-2020
Lois Van Almkerk	2017-2020, Charter Member
Pat Vita	2017-2020
Tracy Ajello	2018-2021
Reneé Barley	2018-2021
Colleen Fitzgerald	2018-2021
Clare Leake	2019-2022
Jaime Grant	2019-2022
Marshall Robinson	2019-2022

Appointed Positions:

Audience Engagement Manager – Ana Arellano
 Curator - *OPEN*
 Curator, Assistant – Collections Manager – Judy Kollias
 Curator, Assistant – Historic Costume Consultant – Ilona Somogyi
 Development Secretary – Justin Navarro
 Historic Structures Manager – David Calabro
 Spirits Alive Cemetery Tour Manager – Joyce Mulholland
 Student Representative – Logan Liu, Cheshire Academy, Class of 2020
 Website/Webmaster – Justin Navarro



MAKING HISTORY

A look at upcoming events involving the Historical Society for the remainder of 2019.

August 24 & 25 -- 10:00 am – 5:00 pm – Grange Fair

Come check out the Historical Society's booth/table/tent at this year's Grange Fair (we are usually strategically placed adjacent to the food tent!). The Fair is free and it's fun for all ages!

September 14 – 10:00 am – 4:00 pm -- Fall Festival

To help celebrate the 325th Anniversary of Cheshire's settlement, we will have a booth at this year's Fall Festival. We will have publications for sale, along with a display, and other surprises.

September 21 – A Day at Ives Farm

If you have never visited Ives Farm, come on down! We will have a table set up inside the Barn and are planning to bring our dollhouse and its "fixins" to provide a vintage entertainment experience.

October 11 & 12 – 5:00 pm – 9:00 pm – Spirits Alive Historic Hillside Cemetery Lantern Tour

Tours depart every 15-20 minutes, and the complete experience lasts about 2 hours.

Tickets are \$16.00 each plus Eventbrite fee of \$2.87, available online only

Tickets go on sale to Historical Society Members beginning August 15

Tickets go on sale to the General Public beginning September 1

October 21 – 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm – Conversations from the Grave

The Spirit's Alive actors talk about their experiences playing historic Cheshire residents. If you went on the Tour, this will give you a deep dive into the people portrayed, providing more background information and more historical context. If you were unable to obtain tickets, this would be a good opportunity to hear from the actors and learn about Cheshire history. Come early as this free talk fills the Hitchcock-Phillips House Meeting Room to capacity

October 27 – Time TBD – Cheshire Horse Council Presentation and Pony Rides

On the grounds of the Hitchcock-Phillips House, the Cheshire Horse Council will provide a presentation about horse riding and the history of horses in Cheshire, followed by the ever-popular pony rides. Check our Facebook page for additional information, when it becomes available.

December 1 – 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm – Gingerbread House Workshop

Free, but Reservations Required. Call (203) 250-9350.

Our annual "friend-raising" event, held at the Hitchcock-Phillips House.

Participants should bring candy to decorate gingerbread houses (to share with everyone, as we do every year).

Diane & Dave Calabro facilitators. *This is the only announcement being made for this event.*

December 22 – Noon – 4:30 pm – Open House and Christmas Party

Refreshments, entertainment, and general good cheer at the Hitchcock-Phillips House.



**THE CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER**