



Waterford Historical Society, Box 117, Waterford, Connecticut 06385

Winter 2025 – Holly Camerota, Editor

Waterford Historical Society: a review of 2025 events

‘Twas a bountiful, busy season for the Waterford Historical Society! Public events held almost monthly brought our programs and enthusiastic visitors to Jordan Green, the Waterford Public Library, and the Waterford Community Center.

February: a second lecture with archivist/historian John Morgan, caretaker of West Neck Cemetery on Great Neck Road. He continued his decade-long research project into the graves of two freed slaves buried there. Co-sponsored with the Waterford Public Library.



June: “Portraits of the Irish in Waterford” A month-long exhibit on the Waterford Public Library art wall, and a Second Saturday event with the Dirty Blue Shirts historians celebrating the Irish ancestors and descendants of the Thomas Perkins Family, who settled in

Waterford. It was a proud day for the Irish with Irish language lessons in the Schoolhouse, fine Irish handiwork on display, and Irish soda bread and caraway rye for sale by Dove Hill Farms.

July: Continued from the October 2024 “Art In Waterford” event, the **Edward A. MacDowell Concert** held at the Waterford Community Center drew 50 people to hear accomplished local pianists play selections from his repertoire. A portion of proceeds from the concert were donated to the Friends of Nevins Cottage.



May, July, October: The living historians in authentic period costume brought their talents to Jordan Green for three Second Saturday events: Common Threads, Summer at Sea, and West Farms/Waterford in the Revolution and Beyond. Visitors were enthralled with their deep knowledge of the Revolutionary War, the whaling industry, clothing, and maritime textiles, including kits offered to visitors to create miniature seagoing sailors’ ditty bags.

November: “Harvest to Hearth: Thanksgiving in 1850’s Waterford” that brought scenes and scents of autumn to Jordan Green for the third year. Young and old were drawn to Beebe-Phillips House by the aroma of chicken roasting and spiced gingerbread baking on the hearth. They turned the cider press crank at Stacy Barn and were refreshed with free local

cider. In the spirit of Thanksgiving and charity, visitors brought food

donations to support the Waterford Community Food Bank, filling an antique wash tub to overflowing! And there was an uplifting patriotic touch as well: the Nutmeg Antique Fife & Drum Corps performed on Jordan Green!



The Ralph Madara Blacksmith Shop is always “fired up!” Open most Saturday mornings from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., the fiery forge at the blacksmith shop attracts those eager to learn the craft of smithing and other visitors from near and far to observe. Head smiths Doc Kenney and Phil Medbery, Karen Sims and other smiths are invited to bring the portable forge to demonstrate at out-of-town events because of their knowledge of the craft. Chip Sowalski, head smith at the Mystic Seaport, hired by the Society to appear at events, demonstrates his skills in turning glowing steel into useful and decorative objects.



Last winter, the shop was closed for three months for repairs: a new firepot was needed. Karen researched, found and paid for the replacement; Chip and Phil installed it in February. Karen also contributes coal and steel for the smiths. See the slide show:

<https://www.waterfordcthistoricalsociety.org/blacksmith-forge-repairs-2025.html>

Those who use the shop are required to be members of our Society. Safety is a priority requiring strict adherence to the rules posted in the shop. A generous member donated safety equipment like leather aprons to protect the smiths’ clothing. Members of the Madara family and others have made monetary donations, all which helps keep the shop running as the costs of insurance, coal and steel continue to climb. Hand-forged items like fireplace tools, hooks, candlesticks, keychains, custom orders and more are sold throughout the year to help defray costs and to delight the purchasers, who value their beauty and quality.

Membership: Has your email address changed? Have you paid your 2025-2026 dues?

As with many non-profit organizations, our membership numbers have dropped somewhat. With today's busy lives, it is challenging to encourage members to renew and to attract new members. Recently, member Walt Whitesides created a new Excel spreadsheet to track membership, allowing board members to better understand membership levels and show who has renewed or not.

Want to join us or renew your membership?

<https://www.waterfordcthistoricalsociety.org/membership-.html>

Our Publicity Chair, Holly Camerota, sends out the Society's emails. Often emails change, resulting in undeliverable emails "bouncing back." Has *your* email changed? Let us know! Write to waterfordcthistoricalsociety@gmail.com from your new email account.

Buildings and Grounds: Upkeep and Keeping Up. Can you help?

The Society's buildings and grounds committee has been challenged with maintenance and upkeep of our properties this year. We lost long-time, beloved volunteer Paul Grover last summer, and his successor Phil Medbery had to scale back his activities. But Paul left behind an invaluable notebook kept through his years of caring for the buildings and grounds. The Society now has a man of many talents to help: Stan LeBlanc, the owner of Any Reason Any Season handyman services. Stan is working with Phil and using that precious notebook to learn the tasks and scheduled maintenance required to keep our properties in good shape.

But we still need more helping hands for all sorts of projects. Do you have handyman skills? Repairs are needed to Beebe-Phillips House exterior doors, sills and thresholds, as well as the 1740's Schoolhouse. Let us know if you can help! Email waterfordcthistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Savings on insurance costs

Society treasurer Jeff Shrallow researched and reviewed our insurance needs. He sought and successfully found competitive pricing through our current insurance firm. As a result, we received a \$1000 discount and even better coverage for all four buildings: Beebe-Phillips House, Jordan District Schoolhouse, Stacy Barn/Miner Education Center, and the Ralph Madara Blacksmith Shop. Good thing, because the recent discovery and eradication of powder post beetles in the schoolhouse cost us \$1400. Next year, we must eradicate the beetles at Beebe-Phillips House also. In one door, out the other!

Growing the Endowment Fund

Our endowment fund was opened during COVID. Since we require an annual investment return of at least \$10K to fund expenses and maintenance of our buildings and their contents, our Society truly needs more than \$200K in its endowment. We have not even reached one-half of that amount to date. Please consider the tax advantages of donating significantly to the Society's endowment in 2025 before the tax-deductible regulations change. You can donate online through the "Donate" button on our website or send a check by mail. Thank you in advance for your generosity!

Our current Board Members and our open slots. We need you!

President	Kristen Widham
1 st VP	Holly Camerota
Treasurer	Jeffry Shrallow
Assistant Treasurer	Mary Ann Richard
Corresponding Secretary	_____
Recording Secretary	_____

Committee Chairs:

Publicity	Holly Camerota
Programs	Kristen Widham (interim)
Ways & Means	Kristen Widham (interim)
Membership	Holly Camerota (interim)
Education	_____
Archives	_____
Blacksmith	Karen Sims
Buildings/Grounds	_____

There's lots of Waterford history yet to be uncovered, discovered and shared. Won't you join us? Call 860-608-1904 or email waterfordchistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Announcing the Society's Public Events for 2026: "We, the People..."

In keeping with the wording of the Declaration of Independence signed in 1776, our theme in the country's 250th year will be "We, the People..." Some exciting programs for the public are planned, including "Art In Waterford 2026: *"We, the artists... celebrate America's 250th year!*

Second Saturday events and member meetings will be announced at a later date.

See the 2026 calendar: <https://www.waterfordchistoricalsociety.org/calendar-of-events.html>

In Memoriam



Over the past two years, we've lost some valuable members who held important roles in the Waterford Historical Society. We miss them immensely and are ever grateful for their contributions and the impact they made.

This photo taken at the Town of Waterford Harvest Fair in 2021 includes those three members. Charles Sedell, head blacksmith, (fourth from left) responsible for the resurgence of blacksmithing at the Ralph Madara Blacksmith shop, taught many an apprentice the art of smithing. He led a group of smiths to create the Society's beautiful permanent hand-forged sign on Jordan Green that stands as a testament to his dedication to sharing his skills.

Dolores "Buji" Reiff, (second from left) served on the program committee. Her artistic sense and indomitable, effusive spirit made her instrumental in bringing new ideas and programming to the Society. She introduced the Society to the Dirty Blue Shirts living historians, who have brought their knowledge and talents to our buildings and Jordan Green.

Paul Grover, (third from left) buildings and grounds, jack of all trades, master of most, kept a maintenance notebook to help those who followed him keep things running smoothly. He saw that things were repaired and maintained regularly, and we're still catching up.