



“THE CRIER”

Official Newsletter of the Waterford Historical Society, Inc., of Waterford, Connecticut

Volume 57, Number 1 | Winter 2025 | Holly Anderson Camerota, Editor

Our Mission: To Collect, Protect, Preserve and Serve as Caretakers of Our Past, Present, and Future

“Men and women of steel” - Keeping the flame alive at the Waterford blacksmith shop



An article with this title appeared in The Day newspaper on December 15 following reporter Dan Drainville’s earlier visit to the Ralph Madara Blacksmith Shop. There he met with Phil Medbery, current lead blacksmith, former head blacksmith Charlie Sedell’s wife Karen Sims, and Chip Sowalski, lead blacksmith at Mystic Seaport, all who provided background on the history of the popular forge.

A focus of the piece is on the coal-fired forge that has been out of service since early November after the fire pot broke into pieces, which will require replacement and extensive masonry repair.

Quote from the article:

Medbery showed the broken fire pot which holds the hot coals. Normally, the pot nestles into a hole in the forge’s masonry, below the chimney chute. “A couple of weeks ago they were working and the bottom fell out sort of,” Sims said, pointing to the broken pot. “You can see this is multiple pieces that broke.”

The new fire pot has arrived and will be installed over the next few months by Sowalski as the weather warms for the masonry work to begin and for it to set. It is hoped that the blacksmith shop will be in operation by April.

In order to install the new pot, Sowalski said he would need to modify it and excavate some of the masonry in the forge to make it fit. It would take about four to six hours of work.

The article also captures the spirit of blacksmiths present and past, but with one important omission: the story did not include that the Ralph Madara Blacksmith Shop is a Waterford Historical Society property named for him -- the founder and original smith who revived the art of blacksmithing there.

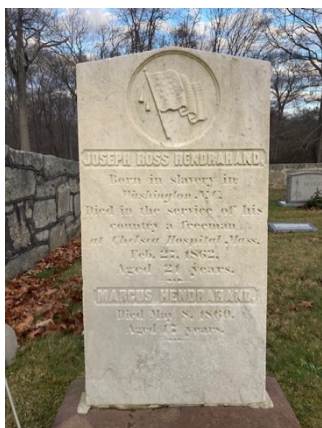
“We have highly skilled people and beginners,” he [Medbery] said. “We all kind of work together, teaching, learning from each other.”

About Charlie Sedell, *Medbery called him a "master fabricator."*
"If he couldn't build it, it couldn't be built," he said.

"Charlie was the 'make everything happen' guy," Sims said. "We need steel? Go get it. We need coal? Go get it. We need to have a table at the farmer's market? Well, let's set it up. What are we waiting for?"

Want to read more? Unfortunately, the online version of the article is only available to Day subscribers and cannot be reprinted. But we share the URL here for those who have access:
<https://theday.com/news/206160/men-and-women-of-steel/>

"Researching Great Neck's pre-Civil War Freed Slaves: A Continuation" February 20



John Morgan, a self-described Archivist/Historian/"Their-storyan" and secretary and caretaker of West Neck Cemetery on Great Neck Road in Waterford, Connecticut, has been conducting a decade-long research project into the graves of two freed slaves buried there.

Since his first presentation in February 2024, Morgan has continued his research and will report on his latest findings at 6:30 p.m. on February 20, 2025, at the Waterford Public Library Meeting Room. Co-sponsored by the Waterford Historical Society and the Waterford Public Library, the event is free and open to the public. The presentation will also be available on Zoom.

Thursday, February 20 Waterford Historical Society's Members Meeting will begin at 5 p.m. with social time, followed by the 5:30 business meeting. All members and those interested in becoming members are urged to attend to catch up on all that's new with the Society and remain for the fascinating program to follow. Refreshments will be served between these two events at 6 p.m. with Morgan's talk to commence at 6:30 p.m.

Sweet, spiced chocolate treats on Saturday, February 15!



Valentine's Day will have passed but the Waterford Community Center will still be decorated with hearts and cupids. . . and it's always time for CHOCOLATE!

Explore the fascinating history of chocolate in the 1700s and learn how it was made. Dressed in period attire, presenters from Pewter Pot Fine Spiced Chocolates will showcase the art of crafting 18th-century chocolate. Attendees will have the opportunity to sample delicious chocolate and hot cocoa. Chocolate bars and cocoa will be available for purchase.

1 p.m., Saturday, February 15, in the Waterford Community Center Dining Room, 24 Rope Ferry Road, Waterford. \$10 per person. Space is limited to 15 people so sign up quickly!

- Go to waterfordcthistoricalsociety.org and select DONATE from the left navigation bar.
- In the form that opens, enter the amount of \$10 per person total (for example: two people = \$20) into the box that says "OTHER."
- Where it says "Write a Note," write that your donation is for "Chocolate Tasting on February 15" and then pay with PayPal or a credit card.

You'll get an email confirmation of your payment and we'll follow up with an acknowledgement email.

“Art in Waterford 2024: Musical works and works of art” a success



Focusing on the cultural history of Waterford for the sixth year, “Art In Waterford” was staged at the Rufus and Margo Rose Barn at the O’Neill Theater Center over the October 25-27 weekend. The Society expanded its artistic perspective to feature music and two artists connected with Waterford’s historic past: Edward A. MacDowell, a famous composer, and his wife Marian Nevins MacDowell, herself an accomplished pianist.

Visitors from near and far enjoyed the juried art show on the second-floor gallery where twenty-one artists displayed artwork depicting marine and land aspects of southeastern Connecticut. Budding future artists from Waterford High School, Clark Lane Middle School and Saint Bernard School displayed their artwork in a variety of media. Ten paintings were sold from which our Society reaped a 25% benefit. On Sunday afternoon, the winning tickets for two donated pieces of artwork, each

valued at \$1,000, were announced. Throughout the weekend, orchestral music composed by Edward MacDowell played, lending a wonderful ambiance to the venue. Large posters of the MacDowells graced the upper rafters of the barn. (*Pictured: “New London Light” quilled art by Waterford artist Jennifer Avallone.*)

Enjoy a Facebook “reel” of the exhibit featuring MacDowell’s music:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/18UU5gHSLZ/>



The 2024 “Art In Waterford” booklet honors Marian Nevins, who grew up in the stately house on Rope Ferry Road across from the Waterford Public Library. A fine pianist herself, she married the internationally acclaimed composer Edward MacDowell there in 1884. Local historian and musician Peter J. Emanuel, Jr. researched and wrote of the MacDowells’ personal lives and their outstanding accomplishments in music and the arts and as founders of MacDowell artists’ colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. The booklet is available for a \$5 donation. Email us at waterfordcthistoricalsociety@gmail.com with your request.

Summer 2025: come to hear MacDowell's works in a fundraising piano concert!

The Society will hold a special MacDowell piano concert this summer, at a time and place to be determined, featuring three accomplished local pianists. Tickets will be limited! To be among the first to be informed of ticket sales, email waterfordcthistoricalsociety@gmail.com to be added to the list. Proceeds will benefit our Society and the Friends of Nevins Cottage.

Giving thanks for a bountiful “Harvest to Hearth” event on November 9



On a beautiful, sunny fall Second Saturday, the Dirty Blue Shirts living historians returned to our Jordan Green historic buildings with a focus on the Thanksgiving holiday and what it meant for our mid-19th-century Waterford ancestors: food, family, gratitude for what they had, remembering those who were gone, and “charity baskets” for those who had less. Over a hundred visitors, young and old, witnessed hearth cooking in the Beebe-Phillips House, peeked

into charity baskets on display, played games on the green, cranked the handle of the antique cider press, and sipped fresh cider from a local farm.

The popular blacksmith shop was open for observation though not in operation due to a broken fire pot. But visitors could tour the shop and purchase hand-forged items, and blacksmiths were on hand to answer questions. See the slideshow:

<https://www.waterfordcthistoricalsociety.org/2024-harvest-to-hearth.html>

Become a Member of the Waterford Historical Society!

We appreciate your support to help us fulfill our mission: "To collect, protect, preserve and serve as caretakers of our past, present and future."

As a paid annual member of the Waterford Historical Society, you will receive the Society’s newsletter, “The Crier,” periodic emails with news and events, advance notice of public events, discounts to special events, guided tours of our historical buildings at historic Jordan Green (with advance appointment and always when open during public events) and more.

Member Meetings are usually held on the second Thursday of the month, but not in all months, and members are informed of the dates by email.

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

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