Annual Report 2019-2020

History Is Here

Since its founding in 1938, the Wilton Historical Society
has preserved the legends, landmarks, and objects of more
than two centuries of town history. While the Society
has grown to include 18 period buildings across three
campuses, it has remained committed to its core mission:
to preserve and shine a light on the multilayered story of
the town of Wilton, Connecticut.
PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear members and friends,

It goes without saying that 2020 was an unprecedented and historic year and the Wilton Historical Society was touched by every aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our hard-working staff worked tirelessly to find new ways to remain relevant and keep ourselves involved in the Wilton community. Programs for children, lectures, our involvement with STAR Inc., Booked for Lunch and exhibits became virtual all the while trying to raise funds in a world devoid of in-person fundraisers. Much success was found with these different formats.

Like everyone, we struggled with this new world order but we’re proud of our Staff, our Board of Directors, our members and our friends who continued to support the Wilton Historical Society in every way including financially.

We’re moving on to 2021 with continued restrictions but also continued resiliency and creativity. Thank you to all of you for being a part of our present and our future— all so we can remember and celebrate our past.

Stay well, everyone.

Janet Foster
President
Dear members and friends,

The Wilton Historical Society’s tagline is “History is Here”. Between COVID-19, climate concerns, racial reckoning and political divides, it is abundantly clear that we are living through historic times. While the issues are national, the impact is local. It was crucial to stay connected to our community and continue the mission to “shine a light on the making and meaning of history”. It was a difficult year, but not without unexpected rewards.

The fiscal year (Oct 2019 – Sept 2020) started on a positive note. A well-attended fundraiser, the American Artisan Show was followed by the beloved train show. February saw Colonial-life school field trip programs for 850+ students, and we opened “Remembering Dave: A Brubeck Family Album”. A suffrage exhibition and the spring fundraiser, Objects of Desire, were on schedule.

But then COVID-19 struck. On March 11 the museum closed to the public: everything ground to a halt. It was time to pivot. We discovered the joys (?) of Zoom meetings. Creative staff debuted “Citizens at Last: Hannah Ambler, Grace Schenck and the Vote” our first entirely online exhibition. “History is Here” videos launched, as did the “COVID Collects” project, while programs went online. So far with PPP funds, grants, and support from our members and community, we have survived.

What have we learned? Patience and kindness are essential in keeping teams productive. The staff is small but mighty! The board and members are resilient and determined to keep the organization strong. On-line programs reach wider audiences than in-person events, and we are more confident in using technology. We will dig even deeper in the coming fiscal year, and we look forward to seeing you soon.

Be healthy and of good cheer!
Kim and Allison
BOARD, OFFICERS AND STAFF

OFFICERS 2020-2021
Janet Foster, President
Nancy Perez, First Vice President
Greg Rodiger, Vice President, Finance
Karl Dolnier, Co-Vice President, Buildings & Grounds
Leland Wilson, Co-Vice President, Buildings & Grounds, Emeritus Trustee
Catherine Romer, Co-Vice President, Collections
Sue Sherwood, Co-Vice President, Collections
Hal Higby, Vice President, Development
Meaghan Donovan, Secretary
Dottie Jankowski, Vice President, Education & Volunteers
Virginia Benin, Vice President, Historic Preservation

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Kevin Craw  Richard Dubow  Ann Duffy  William Earls
Debbie Fink  Peter Gaboriault  Michael Gordon
Virginia Gunther  Mary Gail Gristina  Martin Hamar
Donna Harakas  John Kalamarides  Chris Lavin
Andrea McLaughlin  John Reznikoff  Karen Tartell
Katy Williams

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Carol Russell  Robert Russell  Leland Wilson
Ruth Wolfe

Roger Valkenburgh, Esq., Legal Counsel

STAFF
Kim Mellin, Co-Director
Allison Gray Sanders, Co-Director
Nick Foster, Associate Curator & Museum Admin.
Katherine Karlik, Museum Educator
Rich Perrone, Property Manager
Lee Rossetter, Controller
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

FROM GREG RODIGER, VP FINANCE

In a year like no other, the Historical Society ended the FY strongly, thanks to faithful donors, flexibility with tenants, and our PPP loan (forgiven after the FY ended). Our appreciation and thanks to all involved!

WILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Statement of Financial Position
September 30, 2020

ASSETS

Current assets
Cash and cash equivalents $155,748
Accounts receivable, net of allowance for doubtful accounts 6,633
Prepaid expenses 17,797
Merchandise inventory 21,203
Total current assets 201,381

Noncurrent assets
Restricted cash 4,517
Investments 1,374,988
Property and equipment, net of accumulated depreciation 2,507,828
Total assets $4,088,714

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current liabilities
Accounts payable and accrued expenses $307
Unearned revenue 10,935
Payroll Protection Program loan payable 46,000
Total current liabilities 57,242

Noncurrent liabilities
Security deposits 30,837
Total liabilities 88,079

Net assets
Net assets without donor restrictions 3,981,803
Net assets with donor restrictions 18,832
Total net assets 4,000,635

Total liabilities and net assets $4,088,714

WILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Statement of Activities
For the Year Ended September 30, 2020

Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions

REVENUES
Museum operations $40,644
Membership Dues 18,950
Fundraising Events
Artisan Show (net of direct expenses of $4,733) 48,241
Spring Show (net of direct expenses of $6,634) 15,166
Admissions 21,639
Program fees 23,687
Gift shop sales 17,850
Other revenue 2,689
Rental properties revenue 379,132
Investment income 145,366
Net assets released from restrictions 47,783
Total revenues $761,147

EXPENSES
Program support $355,089
Museum operations
Rental properties 195,363
Management and general 69,733
Fundraising 23,725
Total expenses 643,450

Change in net assets without donor restrictions 117,697

Net Assets With Donor Restrictions

Restricted contributions 51,786
Net assets released from restrictions (47,783)
Change in net assets with donor restrictions 4,003

Total change in net assets 121,700
Net assets, beginning of year 3,878,935
Net assets, end of year $4,000,635
EDUCATION, PROGRAMS AND VOLUNTEERS

The first half of our fiscal year filled our historic buildings with the delightful sounds of in-person programs - squeals of surprise at Ghost Night, eerie conjuring of Spirits of the Past in Sharp Hill Cemetery, cries of glee at the Train Show Scavenger Hunt, the chopping of flax during the fifth grade field trip, the quiet concentration of first graders embroidering, the mmmms of children and adults making Valentine's Day chocolates, and so many more sounds of learning, fun and discovery....the 2nd half was quieter as we learned the difficulties and wonders of Zoom. We had virtual Booked for Lunch meetings with authors, STAR, Inc. art and cooking classes, lectures, discussions and more. When we reopen, we will have new programs as well as annual favorites.

All of these programs and field trips were accomplished with the help of many dedicated volunteers. To all of you who lent a hand or a mind, thank you and we look forward to welcoming you back and thanking you in person.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS
AMBLER FARM AMERICAN LEGION POST 86
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE DAR
HURLBUTT STREET SCHOOLHOUSE
KIWANIS CLUB LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
MS PRESIDENT US MUSIC ON THE HILL
UCONN MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM
WILTON GARDEN CLUB
WILTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST
WILTON LIBRARY WILTON WOMEN'S CLUB

"WILTON HISTORICAL HAS BEEN A LIFE LINE TO OUR PARTICIPANTS . . . THEIR TEACHINGS HAVE BEEN INVALUABLE. THEIR TALENT, KNOWLEDGE, HEART AND HUMOR HAS BEEN THE PERFECT MEDICINE FOR THESE TIMES."
MARTHA SPIEGEL, STAR, INC.

DaltonDiCamillo
Winner of the 2020 Walter R.T. Smith Student Historian Award
Presented to a senior at Wilton High School for outstanding achievement and interest in history and a record of community service.
BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

Preserving and maintaining nineteen historic structures across three campuses, and leasing out spaces to as many as fifteen different commercial and residential tenants is this committee’s challenging mission. Revenues generated by rentals are essential as they substantially support the organization.

This FY the committee navigated through varying levels of financial distress experienced by tenants struggling with COVID impacts. Co-VP Lee Wilson's efforts kept most rentals in place with carefully considered deferments. With an eye on the budget, maintenance focused on roof repairs and a necessary oil tank replacement.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Committee issued public statements on commercial development’s impact on historic buildings and areas, and worked on creating resources for owners of historic homes.

A NEW ROOF FOR THE C 1740 BETTS HOUSE WAS FUNDED BY THE 2019 CT NEIGHBORHOOD TAX CREDIT PROGRAM

OUR THANKS TO:
EVERSOURCE ENERGY
SANTA ENERGY
WILCO LIFE INSURANCE
AT THE MUSEUM
COMMITTEES 2019–20

American Artisan Show, 2019
Judy Higby, Chair
Heather Bower  Greg Chann  Moira Craw  Karl Dolnier  Meaghan Donovan
Janet Foster  Peter Gaboriault  Hal Higby  Dottie Jankowski  Dick Martin
Andrea McLaughlin  Catherine Romer  Karen Tartell  Katy Williams

Betts Store  Andrea McLaughlin

Buildings and Grounds
Karl Dolnier, Co-Chair and Lee Wilson, Co-Chair
Greg Chann  Kevin Craw  Bob Faesy  Peter Gaboriault  Martin Hamar
Chris Lavin  Dick Martin  Rich Perrone/Staff Property Manager

Collections
Catherine Romer, Co-Chair and Sue Sherwood, Co-Chair
Nancy Brautigam  Julie Hughes  Carol Russell  Nick Foster, Associate Curator

Development/Endowment
Hal Higby, Chair
Greg Chann  Kevin Craw  Greg Perry  Greg Rodiger  Roger Valkenburgh

Education
Dottie Jankowski, Chair
Ellen Goldman  Virginia Gunther  Sally Healy  Rebecca Lin
Katherine Karlik, Museum Educator

Finance
Greg Rodiger, Chair
Gini Benin  Greg Chann  Ann Duffy  Hal Higby  Dick Martin
Lee Rossetter, Controller

Historic Preservation
Gini Benin, Chair
Dick Dubow  Colleen Fawcett  Janet Foster  Donna Harakas  Hal Higby
John Kalamarides  Rebecca Lin
COMMITTEES 2019–20

Library-Lecture Series
Michael Bellacosa, Co-Chair and Kim Mellin, Co-Chair
Max Gabrielson  Mary Gail Gristina Virginia Gunther Steven Hudspeth
Elaine Tai-Lauria

Membership
Bill Brennan, Co-Chair and Karen Tartell, Co-Chair
Dick Dubow  John Kalamarides  Katy Williams

Mission/Vision: Name Change Exploration
Janet Foster  Dick Dubow  Mary Gail Gristina Martin Hamar  Hal Higby
John Kalamarides

Nominating Committee
Greg Chann, Chair
Kevin Craw  Judy Higby  Tierney O'Hearn  Greg Rodiger  Katy Williams

Objects of Desire, 2020
Greg Chann, Co-Chair and  Katy Williams, Co-Chair
Janet Foster  Mary Gail Gristina Hal Higby  Dottie Jankowski

Train Show
Richie Furman, Chair
Brian Dobson  Bart Goldberg  Martin Hamar  Jon Perelman  Roger Smith

Volunteers
Dottie Jankowski, Chair
Donna Harakas
AMERICAN ARTISAN SHOW NOV. 2019
EXHIBITIONS

As a pianist, bandleader and composer, Dave Brubeck (1920-2012) is widely acknowledged as one of America’s most significant post-swing era jazz musicians, creating a body of music that was bold and accessible. The exhibition also highlights his impact as a composer, a performer, a family man and civil rights activist. Remembering Dave: A Brubeck Family Album presents additional materials that speak to Dave’s life in Wilton with his wife Iola, and kids Darius, Matt, Chris, Dan and Cathy.

The suffrage movement didn’t just happen in Hartford and Washington, D.C., it happened here in Wilton, too. Citizens at Last: Hannah Ambler, Grace Schenck, and the Vote is a digital exhibition documenting the role of Wilton women in the fight to win the vote. Available online 24/7, learn about these strong women and the different aspects of the suffrage movement – methods, achievements, opponents, and even their shortcomings. Viewed by 1100+!

This project was made possible by a generous grant from the Elizabeth Raymond Ambler Trust.
COLLECTIONS

History Now: COVID-19, is a three-part project in which the museum is practicing “rapid-response collecting” an active process in which contemporary objects are acquired in response to major moments in recent history. Part one is a survey which captures information about experiences during this historic event. Part two is COVID Collecting, during which the Society will seek unique donated objects related to the pandemic. Accepted items will become part of the museum’s permanent collection. Part three is a collaboration with the public schools, which includes artwork from the middle school and a documentary from Wilton High School student Dalton DiCamillo capturing the opinions and insights of fellow high school students.

"GRANDMA'S KITCHEN" AWARD WINNING EXHIBITION

JUST LIKE GRANDMA USED TO MAKE: A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE OF 300 YEARS OF KITCHEN HISTORY

Associate Curator Nick Foster’s reinstallation of the Betts turn of the century kitchen was a 2020 Winner of an Award of Merit for Individual Achievement in Exhibition Design from the Connecticut League of History Organizations.

The "Please Touch!” installation is popular with adults and kids alike.
HISTORY IS HERE

We developed new on-line programs during the pandemic to safely connect with members and the community. Associate Curator Nick Foster launched a series called History is Here on social media and the website. The five-minute videos – accurate, pithy and entertaining – capture an aspect of Wilton history which he writes, presents, records and edits. Since the first episode debuted in April 2020, topics have ranged from Wilton’s blue-stocking post as a dry town to the role of the Electoral College. The response has been gratifying, with 3500+views to date.

What’s It Wednesdays, featuring an arcane object from the past, made a return to social media, and was another way to promote the collections and connect the public with our shared past.
GRANTS/BEQUESTS

Elizabeth Raymond Ambler Trust
Funding Citizens at Last: Hannah Ambler, Grace Schenck and the Vote Online Exhibition
$9,500

Connecticut Humanities:
CARES Act/COVID 19 Relief $15,000

Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office
Stewardship Relief Grant $1,000

Connecticut 2019 Neighborhood Assistance Act
Tax Credit Program - Reroof c 1740 Betts House
Santa Energy Corporation $5,000
Yankee Gas Services/Eversource Energy $7,285.71
Wilco Life Insurance $10,000

Bequests: Mrs. Terry Goodwin
GIVING/MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to all our generous donors who contributed during the 2019-2020 FY.

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Abrahamson Family Foundation
Wilco Life Insurance

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Santa Energy
Yankee Gas/Eversource Energy

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Glengate
Donna Harakas/Wild Roses and Blooms
Michael Hess
Judy and Hal Higby
Skip Kern
Jarrett Liotta
Little Pub
Andrea McLaughlin
Nod Hill Brewery
Oak and Almond Restaurant
Parlor Pizza and Bar
Pat Scully Design
Zelie Pforzheimer
Red Rooster Pub
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Stamford Tent
Tusk and Cup
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