



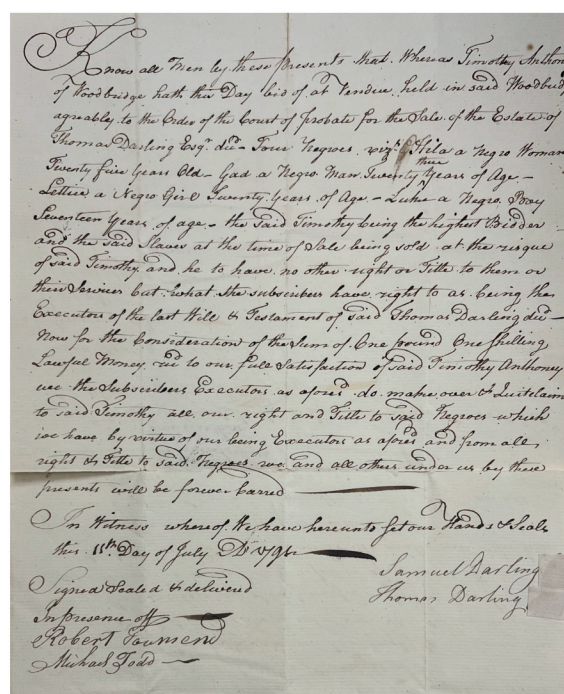
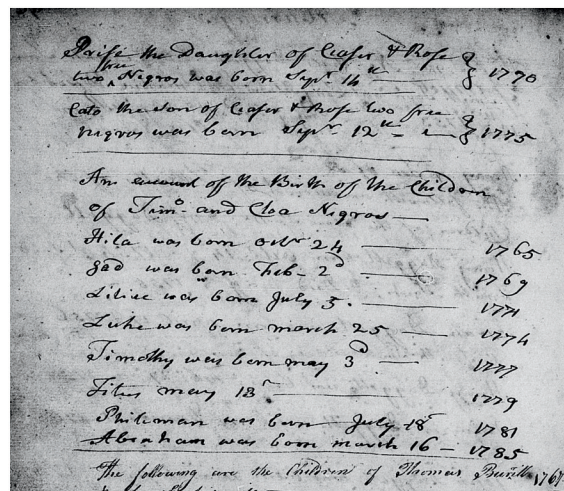
Witness Stones Project Comes to Woodbridge

For many years the Historical Society board has known there was an untold story to tell about the first inhabitants of the Darling House. In 1774, when Abigail & Thomas Darling and four of their children moved into their handsome new home in Amity, another family moved in with them - an enslaved family Timothy and Chloe Anthony and their four children. Connecticut had the highest number of slaves in all of New England in 1774. The first United States Census reveals that there were still 15 enslaved individuals living in Woodbridge in 1790; four of them were members of the Anthony family. It is difficult to reconcile this fact in today's world. As we share this painful truth, we have desire to honor the Anthony family and tell their story.

A serendipitous meeting at a lecture with Joy Burns, the Witness Stones Project Director of Outreach, provided us with the ideal project to honor the Anthonys. She was knowledgeable about both the Anthonys and the Darlings. Since that meeting Joy visited the Darling House and noted how rare it is to find so many original furnishings in a home inhabited by enslaved people in the 18th century. She returned to peruse early family record books and photograph documents with numerous references to the Anthony family as well as the research recently compiled by James Sexton, a consultant the Society is working with through a grant-funded project to update the National Register Listing. She was impressed both with our documentation and research and confirmed it was sufficient to proceed with a Witness Stones project.

The Witness Stones Project is "a non-profit, educational initiative whose mission is to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities." There are four intertwined components to the project: research, education, lectures and plaque installation. We have essentially completed the research phase. Then comes the keystone to the project: collaboration with a school. Students will study a history unit prepared by the WS Project and use their creative expression to respond to prompts. We look forward to working with the WS Project and our local schools on this important educational experience.

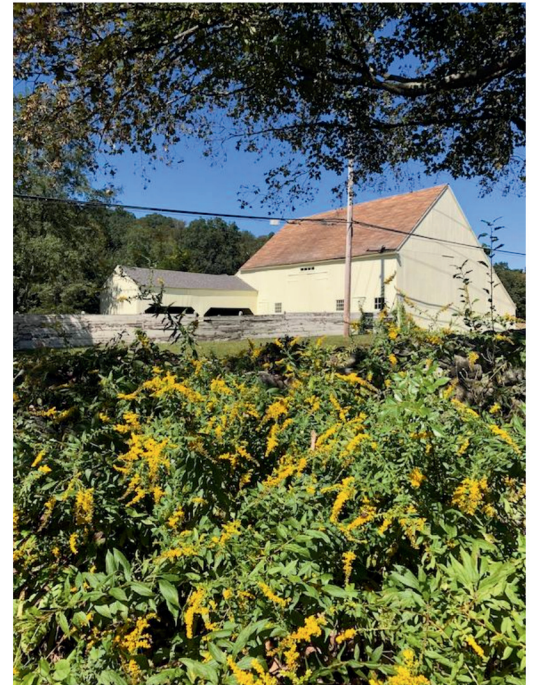
This component of the project will obviously need to be undertaken during the next school year; meanwhile, we plan to hold a series of lectures/special events to share this story with the whole town. The culmination of the project will be in early summer of 2025 with installation at the Darling property of brass plaque "witness stones" inscribed with the names of the Anthony family members. Through these memorial markers we seek to illuminate the past and give honor to the enslaved individuals who lived here.



President's Message

We are thrilled to share with you three of our state grant-supported projects that have been completed in the last year. Each undertaking serves to fulfill our mission, but we are not resting on our laurels and have even more planned. In this newsletter you will find information about the three completed projects as well as a planned Witness Stones project already in the works and a grant-supported project to create new finding aids for our collections. We hope that these transformations to the museum will pique your curiosity and enhance your experiences. These accomplishments were made possible by many organizations and people, including the State Historic Preservation Office, The Connecticut League of Museums, the CT Cultural Fund and CT Humanities, the Town of Woodbridge, all of our generous members and donors, our supportive contractors, and thousands of hours of work by our volunteers and board members.

Dr. Alexia Belperron, President



Our Mission

The mission of the Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society is to make history accessible to everyone in ways that create connection, advance knowledge, and inspire curiosity about the people, places, and events that have shaped our town. We do this by preserving the buildings, artifacts, and voices of Woodbridge and by sharing history in engaging ways.

Cow Barn Project

As you may remember from our winter newsletter and our sneak peek barn opening at our quilt event last fall, the completion of the cow barn preservation project is by far our largest preservation project to date. It was funded by a matching Historic Restoration Fund Grant from the State Historic Preservation Office, Town Funds, donations from our members and donors, and our endowment.

The barn is an English style three bay barn with a salt box roof, the earliest barn form that existed in New England. The barn also has several additions. The term “English style” refers to the location of the main doors on the eave sides. The “New England style” became more popular and has the doors on the gable ends. The term “three-bay” denotes both structural and functional features. The barn is built with “scribe rule” techniques used on all structures from antiquity up until 1820. It simply means that each connection between timbers is unique, and when you visit, you see matching roman numerals where timbers join as well as the three distinct sections.

This barn is one of the oldest, largest and original in the state, however we still have somewhat of a mystery to solve about its actual date and will happily share that story with you when you visit.

Inside you will see that the central bay is open up to where a fence-like partition with a gate that separates the lean-to from the main section. There is evidence here of the former rear wall, which was removed when the lean-to was added early in the life of the barn. A grain storage room at the second-floor level, has shoots that transferred the feed to the ground floor. Integral ladders on the central posts allow access to the second level where hay was likely stored. Empty joist mortices higher up in the roof structure may suggest that there had been a third level or that the timbers were reused, a common practice. The side bays include newer stanchions and troughs on the west side and an enclosed pen on the east. The lean-to also includes older stanchions and troughs for the feeding and milking of cows. Thus, the barn was used for cows from the late 18th through the early 20th century. We hope you enjoy discovering these features during your visit as well as the important preservation work completed during this project.



Good to Great Grant Project

“Good to Great” matching grants from CT Humanities provide funding for capital projects that link art, history and tourism in ways that enable cultural and historical sites to enhance the visitors’ experience. Our grant provided funds to create a more accessible first floor bathroom for visitors as well as a kitchen workspace to facilitate events. The matching funds for the project came from the Society including generous donations and funds from our endowment. In the 1970s, the back ell addition was substantially rebuilt to create a caretaker cottage and a museum entrance from the garden. We saw that we could while not disturbing the exterior or any historic fabric on the interior and improving the safety and accessibility of the Museum is vital to the Society.

These new spaces will allow us to increase our educational programs including the Beecher School annual field trips, support increased visitation, and create more intimate living history experiences for visitors of all ages. We believe our audiences enjoy and derive the most educational benefit from being able to participate. We want you to feel at home, to stay and explore, not just take a tour. We hope that these new facilities will enhance your visits to the museum and that you will come back often to participate in the hands-on hearth cooking events we have planned in the fall.



Department of Economic and
Community Development

The Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society received support for this project from the State Historic Preservation Office of the Department of Economic and Community Development with funds from the Good to Great Program

Museum Makeover Grant



As reported in our Spring 2023 Newsletter, the Society was awarded a "Museum Makeover" grant from the Connecticut Cultural Fund to improve the experience of our visitors. We proposed the creation of exterior signs to serve the many visitors to the site for walks and hikes to West Rock Ridge State Park, and who wonder about the buildings and grounds. *Who lived here? Who owns it now? When is the museum open? How can I take a tour?* Until now, those questions could only be answered when the Society was working and hosting events on site, but now these signs provide greater access to this well preserved historic site, welcoming the public at all times.

Through the spring and summer of 2023, a committee worked with our grant-provided curator, Stephen Bartkus, and Kathy Craughwell-Varda Project Director from Conservation ConneCTion. We created three panels: one to introduce the museum and its history, one to introduce the farm and its buildings, and one to introduce the lives of people who lived and worked here in the past. With the curators and designer, we strove to create educational, interesting, and eye-catching signs. We wish to express our thanks to the state legislature and its Cultural Fund, to Connecticut Humanities for its administrative support, and to the entire Museum Makeover team. We hope you will learn something new from the signs and that they entice you to further explore the museum.

Museum Makeover is a program of Conservation ConneCTion and is supported through a partnership with the Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO) with a grant from the CT Cultural Fund, administered by CT Humanities (CTH), with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (CPA) from the Connecticut State Legislature.

Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society

at the historic Darling House
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Collections News

Few people know that the Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society has preserved and maintains more than 30 collections of papers, maps, photographs, and records given over the course of the nearly 90 years of our existence.

To broaden the public awareness of and access to this wealth of information, AWHS applied for and has received yet another grant. This time to fund a traveling archivist to help us in facilitating online access to some of our amazing archival collections. Rebecca Harlow and Barbara Hagan-Smith, both trained archivists, have met twice with our assigned traveling archivist, Kristin Eshelman. The second meeting was at the archives in Woodbridge where we actually entered our first collection on "Connecticut Collections" - ctcollections.org. By July we will have listed at least 5 manuscript and/or archival collections. This represents a giant step forward for our organization as it requires countless hours to organize a "batch of papers" into a researchable collection with online access and this much time has never been available to our volunteers. This grant has become the impetus, however, for us to push forward and continue adding to our online information about the collections, both archival and three dimensional, held by your Historical Society. Furthermore, thanks to the incredible work done by our volunteer, Nancy Mull, assisted by others dedicated to the project, the textile collection will also soon be on Connecticut Collections as well. This collection is highlighted by our quilts and other articles including clothing worn by Thomas Darling I himself. Please note that anyone can make an appointment at anytime to research any of the collections even if they have not yet been posted online.

In addition, the Board has hired Valley Restoration - the contractors who did such a wonderful job on the barn - to repair and to replaster and paint the ceilings of two of the rooms upstairs in the house, which were damaged by ice dams sometime ago and have not been used since. As storage space is at a premium in the house, these newly repaired rooms will become a work room for properly accessioning, cataloging, and preserving our collections, and a storeroom for artifacts that are not on display. This idea was suggested by our CAP (collections assessment program) assessor two years ago and we are happy that it is finally coming to fruition. Access to the history of your town, Woodbridge, continues to expand.

Membership News

AWHS is making a change to our membership recording that we think will please everyone. As of June 2024 we will be sending renewal reminders to our members on the month that they last paid their dues. This then will become the month that your dues are payable each year. And, each year you will receive a personal reminder one month before your due date. Hereafter you will no longer need to wonder whether you have paid "this year." Nor will you be receiving envelopes in your newsletters. Of course, this not preclude a further donation any time that you wish. We are confident you will find this system will become a benefit to all. If you have any questions please contact us.

And follow us on social media!



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