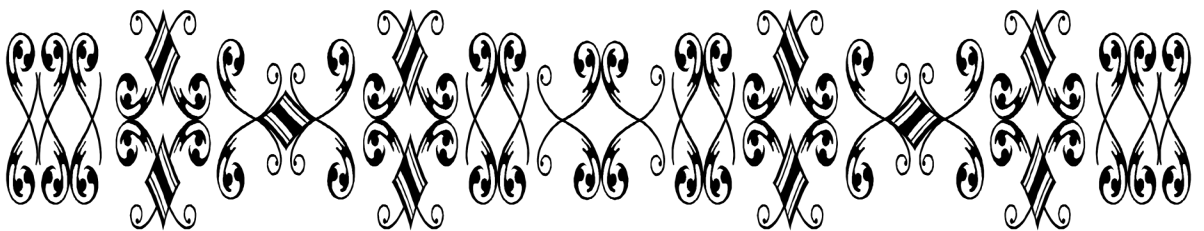


The First Fifty Years



The First Fifty Years

*A history of the
Shelton Historical Society
1969-2019*

Joyce Donnelly

Special thanks to the Valley Community Foundation
for making this publication possible.

Dedication

As I finish this 50th Anniversary Book I would like to recognize one person who has been very involved in the Society from its initial organizational meeting in September 1969 to the present date. Lin Mulford's name appears throughout the minutes over and over from several times as president, to many other positions on the Board.

She was involved in fund raising activities: Music Under the Stars, the Olde Ripton Ball, house tours, summer picnics, concerts, tag sales, and served as a member of the 50th anniversary committee. Lin has also reviewed this history with me for accuracy. As I spoke with her at the October Tea she commented on how happy she is that the society has accomplished so many things over the years and has become very well respected among historical societies for their educational programs.

Joyce Donnelly
Secretary, Shelton Historical Society

Introduction

As the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Shelton Historical Society drew near, long-time secretary Joyce Donnelly had the wonderful idea that she would write down the organization's history. After all, we strive to save the community's history; why not concisely record our own? Little did she know it would be quite the undertaking. Joyce spent months gleaning the highlights from fifty years of minutes of first the Huntington Historical Society, then after 1995, the Shelton Historical Society. Fifty years of deciphering what various secretaries thought worth mentioning, either in looping handwriting on paper torn from a school binder or carefully typed on a computer. Fifty years of fund-raising events, letter writing campaigns, maintenance problems, volunteer activities, school groups, research, more fund-raising, and the constant fixing that historic structures require. Joyce did this in addition to planning many anniversary events throughout 2019. A thank you seems meager.

This history of the Shelton Historical Society will appropriately live in the archives of the Society; it will be invaluable as a reference for future leaders and volunteers as they guide the Shelton Historical Society through the next 50 years. The entire organization is indebted to Joyce for this herculean endeavor.

Tracey Tate
Executive Director, Shelton Historical Society

The 1960s are known as the decade of change. In the United States, 1969 was a year full of historic events: The Boeing 747 airplane flew for the first time; the very first U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam were made; Apollo 11 landed on the moon where astronaut Neil Armstrong took his historic walk; there were the infamous Manson family murders; 400,000 young revelers gathered in Woodstock, N.Y. for four days of peace, love, and rock & roll; President Nixon ordered resumed bombing of North Vietnam; and the largest anti-war rally was held in November in Washington, D.C. with half a million protesters. America was in turmoil as the decade hurtled to a close. The United States population at the time was 207,599,308 and the population of Shelton, Connecticut was 27,165.

In the Huntington section of Shelton, Connecticut, many older houses and buildings were being torn down giving way to more and more new developments. Several area residents were very concerned, not that they wanted to stop progress, but that they wanted to retain things of the past to remember and treasure. Other communities nearby had historical societies; Monroe and Derby had active ones to which some Shelton residents belonged. These residents and several others believed that Shelton needed its own historical society.

The organizational meeting of the Huntington Historical Society took place in September 1969, at the home of Jeannette LaMacchia. Also present at this meeting were concerned citizens Pat Edwards, Eva Paige, Guila Hawley, Jack Caswell, Jan Bennett, Arlene Hudson, Lin and Dirck Mulford.

The second meeting was held at Elizabeth Shelton School and called to order by Jeannette LaMacchia, President Pro-tem. A slate of proposed officers for the following year was announced by nominating chair, Lin Mulford. That slate was as follows: President George Edwards, 1st Vice-President John Caswell, 2nd Vice-President Mrs. Dominic LaMacchia, Corresponding Secretary Mrs. Anthony Colonese, Recording Secretary Mrs. Richard McComb, Treasurer Dirck Mulford, and Historian/Curator Mrs. Joseph Mills. The guest speaker at the meeting was State Senator George Gunther from Stratford who had long been involved in conservation efforts and water pollution problems. Senator Gunther was pleased by the establishment of the Society and felt that Shelton and Stratford could work together to prevent the pollution of the Far Mill River. At this meeting, a building committee was established in anticipation of any upcoming restoration projects that would likely occur. A general meeting was scheduled for January 18, 1970.

The first general meeting of the Society on January 18, 1970 attracted about 75 people. At this meeting Jack Caswell was elected president of the Huntington Historical Society, so named after the historic designation of the town. The possibility of the organization acquiring an old schoolhouse located on Bridgeport Hydraulic property was announced. The business meeting was followed by Philip Jones reading excerpts from his extensive collection of old letters dating back to 1915 and a fashion show of gowns from the past with 20 teenage Girl Scouts as models.

In the original statement, the purpose of the Society was to supply historical information to local schools and other interested groups. At the time, seventh graders in Shelton schools were studying local history and the Society offered materials for this course of study.

Membership dues for the Society were \$2.00 annually per person. An organization or firm could join for \$2.00 or one could purchase a life membership for \$100. Interested residents were invited to help compile a history of the community. They were also encouraged

to inform the Society of historical items they had and to keep them on hand until there was a place to house a permanent collection.

1970s

1970

The year 1970 was an amazing one for the newly formed historical society. The Bridgeport Hydraulic Company offered the Trap Fall one room schoolhouse which was located on its property to the Society with the provision that it be moved. The schoolhouse, built in 1872, was a wonderful acquisition for the Society and was to be used for many educational purposes.

April: The Society became a member of the Connecticut League of Historical Societies a professional development group that provided education and advocacy services for historical societies. This organization later changed their name to the Connecticut League of History Organizations and continues to work with museums across the state.

September: A historic home located at the corner of Shelton Avenue and Old Shelton Road was sold to Derby Savings Bank. The house had been owned for over 100 years by the Brownson family and most recently occupied by Harry and Gertrude Brownson, farmers and entrepreneurs. The bank had no interest in the home, only the land for development. Lin Mulford, a founding member of the Society, stated how much she had always loved the home and wanted to live there. Her wishes to save the house were shared by many in the community who had witnessed many older houses being torn down.

October 27: Derby Savings Bank offered the Brownson house to the Society for one dollar also sharing the view that the house should be saved and that the Society was the logical party to do so. The offer was made provided the house be moved to a different location. The bank needed an answer by November 15, 1970.

A search for properties available to relocate the house left little hope that this project could be accomplished; most available properties were out of reach financially for the Society. During discussions, it was mentioned that Wisner and Dorothy Wilson on Ripton Road were donating property to the City of Shelton for a library. It was hoped that a portion of the property could be deeded to the Society for the relocation of the Brownson House and the Trap Fall School. Both the City of Shelton and the Wilsons favored this plan and on November 14th the Society learned that they would be recipients of about 1¼ acres of the property.

December 1: At the first board meeting of the Society held at the Brownson House, letters were sent to as many Shelton residents as possible to inform them of the acquisition of the house and the schoolhouse, the plans to move them to Ripton Road, and appeal for funds. At that time, the treasury of the Society was \$145.00. Twelve members set up card tables and spent the night folding and stuffing envelopes.

By December 23, a total of \$1,944 had been raised. There were concerns that the Society would lose the house unless substantial additional funds were received. President Caswell sent a letter to the Shelton Board of Aldermen requesting funds from the City for the project. Plans were made for an open house at the Brownson House and 300 invitations were sent out.

Founding Society member Sandy Nesteriak remembered how cold the day was during the

Open House. "The house was cold and empty. Jeannette LaMacchia and I set up a table in the front parlor. On the table was a lethal bowl of Philadelphia Fish House Punch, a combination of apricot brandy, cognac and rum. I was the official pourer (and taster)." Sandy remembers a constant stream of visitors as a lot of folks were anxious to see the house.

The Society had an active start with many events such as shared programs with Derby and Monroe Historical Societies, guest speakers, a fashion show, and hikes. The organization was also involved in a redistricting plan for Huntington Center. By that time the Society had also acquired two buildings and the property where the history complex would be built. Quite an active first year!

1971

January 18: President Caswell sent a letter asking area residents: "What is your opinion of Historical Societies? The average person when questioned would reply that generally they are 'groups of senior citizens who band together to drink tea, collect memorabilia, and talk about the good old days'. The Huntington Society does not fit that mold. We are an active group of all ages, representing all sections of Shelton who are primarily interested in preserving that from the past which will benefit the future. No one can stop progress, and we certainly concur that progress is necessary for a more comfortable and prosperous life for all of us." His letter continued, stating that the Brownson House and the Trap Fall School were in the way of progress and needed someone to save them. The Society wanted to be that someone but could not do it alone.

While many businesses and professionals donated toward the excavation, foundation construction, heating, painting, landscaping, and legal services, additional funds were needed. To accomplish this, levels of benefactors were established: sustaining members \$1,000 or more; contributing members \$500-\$999; supporting members \$100-\$499.

March 8: While the general meeting of the Society was being held, Phil Jones was attending a meeting of the Shelton Board of Aldermen. At that meeting, the Board of Aldermen considered the approval of \$10,000 to be donated to the Society for the relocation of the Brownson House. This donation was approved; the vote was tied among the aldermen but Mayor Vincent Tisi broke the tie in favor of the appropriation. The Society still had to raise more money.

The whole community was not in favor of this proposal. The Voters Action Party wanted Brownson Country Club to provide a site on their property for the house. Founding member Lin Mulford called that suggestion "impractical" in an article in the February 23 issue of *The Evening Sentinel*. She stated that the property donated by the Wilson family should be the site for the house, the Trap Fall School, and the barn that was already on the property. At this cultural complex, classes could be held for Shelton children and farm implements and tools from a bygone era could be displayed. If the house was located at a different site these plans could not be implemented.

The money appropriated by the alderman for the Society was not the only thing that upset many citizens--the name itself caused some dismay. Why was it called the Huntington Historical Society? Did it represent just the area of Huntington which was officially incorporated in 1789? Did the Society represent only this small area and period of time? If the Society wished to represent the entire community, shouldn't it be called the Shelton Historical Society? This question first appeared in the newspaper in 1971 and was to be repeated many times.

Fund raising continued in earnest with the first March Winds Antique Sale and the first

Olde Ripton Ball. Music programs and numerous concerts were held. Some members even had dinner parties in their own homes soliciting donations for the Society.

The price to move the house was estimated at \$16,000. If the attic could be removed, the United Illuminating costs for moving the wires could be reduced to around \$2,000. However, the Southern New England Telephone Company stated that it could not lower their price of \$12,000 because their wires were lower than the U.I. wires and removing the attic would not solve the problem for the telephone company.

April 1: *The Evening Sentinel* wrote an article about the planned history complex. "When completed, the history center will be an educational exhibit that Huntington, the entire city of Shelton, and the whole Valley can be proud of." The article continued to emphasize the value of historical items and the need for all to know our history. It concluded by stating, "In the deepest sense, history is educational and we all need education, adults and children alike."

April 17: Wonderful news! The Connecticut Historical Commission, a statewide agency tasked with the preservation of historic sites and resources, approved a \$5,000 grant to the Society to move the house. All that awaited was the signature of the Attorney General. A tentative date was set for early summer for the relocation of the Brownson House.

A headline from *The Evening Sentinel*, Friday, July 29, 1971 read, "Brownson House Move Faces Final Obstacle." After all the controversy about moving the house to a new location, there was yet another obstacle to overcome. The Society needed a special zoning exception so that the history complex could be established on the site donated by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. The special zoning approval was received and the saga to move the house continued.

September: 1971 was a very active season in the Atlantic Ocean. By the end of the year there had been thirteen tropical storms, of which six became hurricanes. Several of these storms, while not unleashing their full force on Connecticut, negatively impacted the move by delaying the pouring of the new foundation at the Ripton Road site and washing away the temporary bridge over Means Brook that was necessary to move the house.

By September 9, Evans Brothers of Glastonbury had raised the house up from its original stone foundation and jacked it up onto wooden cribs. The bump out on the back of the house that led to the basement was also removed, and the chimneys were taken down to the roofline. The weight of the structure was estimated around forty tons.

On Monday, September 27, the Brownson House was moved over Means Brook across a temporary bridge and into the parking lot behind the Huntington Shopping Center. On Tuesday, the house was towed onto Shelton Avenue and got as far as the Huntington Green, where it was decided to leave it for the night. The move was slowed down by the need to trim tree limbs, remove electrical and telephone wires, and navigate around telephone poles. According to *The Evening Sentinel* "A crowd of 'sidewalk superintendents' offered suggestions. Movie cameras whirred. Students from the Huntington School milled at the Green all morning."

The house arrived at 70 Ripton Road at 4:45 on Wednesday, September 29. The move was the culmination of years of work and cost over \$30,000.

In the fall of 1971 an Eagle Scout cleaned out the greenhouse on the property so that it could be used to grow flowers for the grounds.

January 17: Next to arrive at the new history complex was the Trap Fall School, taking less than two hours on the back of a flatbed truck. There had been some discussion about moving the schoolhouse with a Sikorsky helicopter but it was decided that this was not feasible. It now sits on a permanent foundation behind the Brownson House.

Society President Jack Caswell wrote in his annual letter to members and residents about all of the recent accomplishments. The Trap Fall School move had been completed and some of the restoration work had already been done on the house. A new shingle roof was finished.

Masons rebuilt the chimney bases and closed the foundation. The former kitchen of the house was completely gutted and was made into an apartment for a caretaker.

Plans for the spring included landscaping and grading to improve and beautify the property. Next, the long process of restoring the interior of the front portion of the house began. It was anticipated that it would be a very expensive project and would require substantial financial support.

The focus for the following years included restoration of the house and the school, as well as paying off the large debt incurred from moving the buildings. Many fundraising activities were planned which included house tours, music programs, auctions, and the annual March Winds Antique Sale and the Olde Ripton Ball.

Music Under the Stars, a program sponsored by the Society, was presented at Jones Tree Farm in August. Sandy Nesteriak recalled that it was a wonderful project that she and Lin Mulford organized. It featured 20 different performing groups including a country and western band and a Russian balalaika band from Ansonia. It ended with a steam calliope performance. Sandy fondly remembered, "The night was beautiful with everyone seated on the hillside facing the stage."

1974-1979

1974: The Olde Ripton Fife and Drum Corps was founded and performed at various programs for the Society. The Society did not play a part in organizing the group but was a big supporter.

1975: The annual March Winds Antique Sale included a gun raffle as well as the usual booths rented by antique dealers. The Society sold tag sale items. In previous years, homemade items had been raffled.

Several pot luck dinners were held. These were not fund raisers but pleasant social events where residents brought dishes to share, their own chairs and utensils, and enjoyed each other's company. Often music was provided and sometimes hot dogs were available.



1976: The Olde Ripton Garden Club was founded and to this day has a close association with the Society.

1977: Permission was given for the garden club to use the greenhouse on the grounds to grow flowers for the site and city gardens. Each year hundreds of plants were grown for the community's gardens. During the late 1970's the garden club members assisted in decorating for the Olde Ripton Balls, served as hostesses, and made flower arrangements for house tours.

1978: The Olde Ripton Garden Club members established a small herb and fragrance garden at the rear of the Brownson House.

Problems were reported with water in the basement. This occurred again in 1979 and continued to be a problem for many years.

1979: The Huntington Historical Society was 10 years old and a celebration was planned, including a concert by the Easton Brass Band, a cocktail party, and a catered dinner held at the Huntington Congregational Church. The cost for all three was to be \$12.00 but unfortunately, the event was cancelled because of a scheduling conflict.

Instead, the Olde Ripton Ball became the anniversary celebration. It took place on November 11 at the St. Lawrence Church hall. The theme was 'harvest' and any period costume was acceptable. There was square dancing and during the band breaks, an old fashioned Virginia Reel was enjoyed.

1980s

Throughout the 1980's work progressed on various projects while continuing to maintain the property as well as making repairs and improvements. Fundraising continued with house tours, raffles, the annual March Winds Antique Show, and the Olde Ripton Ball. School groups visited the complex annually and by 1982 the number of school visitors was 560. The docents were a very active group and did many tours and hosted the annual Christmas party. They were paid to help cover babysitting costs.

1981: Water issues were once again addressed. Foundation pipes and toilet pipes in the house were sealed hoping to solve the problem. It was thought that a new floor might have to be placed above the cement floor in the basement to allow the water to flow harmlessly under it. It was determined that a usable basement area could be realized. A leak in the tenant's entrance and the apartment porch was repaired.

1982: More work was done with cement blocks and downspouts to lead water away from the foundation of the Brownson House.



1983: A meeting room was planned for the basement. A gas furnace was installed to provide

minimal heat all winter. It was thought that other groups could use the basement as a meeting room and donate toward the cost of heating. Plans were also made to prepare an upstairs bedroom for use as a display area.

Funds were donated in memory of Dominic LaMacchia, husband of founding member Jeanette.

1988: More water problems occurred in the basement. The decision was made not to spend more money on this but to get carpeting for the floors and add more dehumidifiers.

1989: The Historical Society was invited to participate in the Huntington United Methodist Church Christmas House Tour, which was a fund raiser for the church for several years. Private homes decorated for the holiday were open to ticket holders.

1990s

Guila Hawley, long time Shelton resident and a founding member of the Society, died in 1989 and an auction of her estate was set for June 15, 1991. The Society received one quarter of her estate. The Society could buy any of the items from the estate and the money was deducted from the inheritance. A motion was made and carried to authorize Lin Mulford to represent the Society as well as Ed Coffey of the Monroe Historical Society to spend up to \$5,000. The Society purchased an 18th century cherry secretary as well as family memorabilia, records, and textiles from the Hawley estate.

1991: In January, discussion evolved around the possibility of having Chris Nevins, curator of the Fairfield Historical Society, speak at the March meeting and conduct a tour of the house through the eyes of a curator.

The Rosa Rio concert was a great success and raised \$1,588.80. Rosa Rio, a longtime Shelton resident, was a TV and radio concert recording artist who played the organ in theaters, early soap operas, and silent movies. The March Winds fund-raiser was held at the Community Center which was a less than ideal location: the parking was poor, the area was small and the kitchen was not close to the show area. The 5th Connecticut Regiment re-enactment and encampment was a highlight of the year. The Olde Ripton Fife and Drum Corps performed at the event which was repeated in 1992.

The greenhouse on the property was in poor condition and was disassembled and removed.

The Society had a very successful auction of garden and lawn tractors which earned more than \$6,500 for the development fund.

A quote from the August 1991 issue of *Huntington Hills*, the Society's newsletter, stated, "Another area of historic preservation must include our close liaison with the Shelton Land Trust and their efforts to preserve open space. Please be alert for further developments with this important group so that we can work together for Shelton's historic legacy."

1992: Membership dwindled substantially. The Society needed to go to businesses for memberships and matching funds.

A history camp for children took place for one week in August and was a success.

On October 14, the Board met to discuss the future of the Society and decided that powerful steps were necessary to continue. The need to provide more programs and to have an aggressive membership campaign to rejuvenate the Society was discussed. The possibility of hiring a part time director for one year to get the Society back on track was also discussed.

In November, Chris Nevins from the Fairfield Historical Society met with the Board and discussed what he could do for the Society. It was decided that he write a proposal for the Board to review at their next meeting.

In December, Chris Nevins was hired as the first director of the Society. He worked three days per week for \$15,000 per year.

1993: At the annual meeting in January, the need was stressed for a big membership drive. The membership list had 231 names, however, a least half of them had not paid. Dues were raised from \$7 per year to \$10, sustaining memberships from \$10 to \$15, and Life Memberships kept at \$100.

Chris worked every Wednesday, Thursday and alternate Fridays/Saturdays. He planned to schedule more times for the house to be open to the public.

The March Winds Antique Sale was cancelled after 19 years.

On April 15, the Wilson Barn had to be closed for safety reasons. Part of the roof had collapsed during a storm. The barn, built in the 1860s, was donated with the land by the Wilsons. It had deteriorated over the years and was in dire need of repair.

In July, a proposal was received through Philip Jones from Woodford Brothers, a company from Central New York specializing in the repair of timber frame structures, to stabilize the barn at a cost of \$25,000. Heavy duty cables pulled the barn into an upright position. This prepared the building for the next phase of work. Volunteers installed new flooring, siding, and roofing. Lumber was cut, milled, and donated by Phil Jones who oversaw the restoration work. During the project Phil fell through a floor and broke several ribs.

Docent training began with fifteen docents, seven of them new.

A summer bus tour of Shelton was a success. Twenty-two children attended history camp.

“Victorian Festivities” were held at the Brownson House, November 19-20. On Friday, night a \$10 ticket included Victorian entertainment by a harpist, hors d’oeuvres, and creative cuisine. Rooms were decorated by local florists and merchants. A \$7 donation was suggested for the Saturday Open House. Funds from this event went toward the barn restoration. It was planned that the restored barn would feature a new educational program, “From Farm to Factory” illustrating Shelton’s agricultural and industrial past.

1994: An afternoon tea was planned for May.

A 5th Connecticut Regiment Continental Army encampment, a reenactment of everyday life during the Revolutionary War, was held on June 9 on the grounds and was a big success and crowd pleaser.

In recognition of the Society’s first 25 years, Lin Mulford, founding member and then president, wrote a letter dated December 13 in which she stated: “In 1969 a small group of 20 enthusiastic residents dreamed of acquiring a building in need of restoration in which to preserve remnants of the city’s history.”

The letter listed some of the things accomplished in the past 25 years and continued, “Today we have embarked on a series of exciting projects to better serve our community ...the Barn Again restoration project...expanded educational and outreach programming...improved organization and care of our growing museum and archival collections...enjoyable volunteer op-



portunities for our 150+ member families ...and so much more.”

The Long Range Plan for 1995-2000 stated, “By the year 2000 we would like to see the buildings of the Shelton History Center in pristine condition and a showplace for our community history. Maintenance and redecoration of the Brownson House to a determined period of time is a top priority. Based on preliminary estimates it would cost \$100,000 to accomplish this work.”

1995: Extensive renovation of the Brownson House and work on the barn restoration project began.

1995/1996: The name changed from the Huntington Historical Society to the Shelton Historical Society to better reflect the Society’s mission to preserve and educate about the entire community’s history across time.

Chris Nevins resigned from his position as Executive Director and Mary Solomon was hired. She was director for one year and during this time was responsible, with President Margaret Coughlin, for procuring funding through grants and requests from the City of Shelton, the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and the Connecticut Humanities Council. With these funds, the Society planned to research, develop, and install a permanent exhibit in the Wilson Barn and to develop an educational program for schoolchildren to compliment it. Chris White Design Incorporated of Maryland was hired to design the exhibit and Amanda Rivera-

Lopez, educator at the Barnum Museum, researched and wrote the curriculum to be used with students.

1997: Discussions continued on choosing the correct period in which to display the house. Mary Solomon resigned and the search was on for a new director.

September: The Shelton Historical Society had two paid employees. Tracey Tate accepted the position of director and Deborah G. Rossi was hired as the curator, both working part-time.

Renovations were completed in the school and it was repainted in its original colors based on a visual inspection of paint layers: white walls and ceiling with a medium brown tone for the wainscoting.

1998: Work continued on the barn exhibit until it opened in September. The exhibit, *3 Centuries of Shelton: From Farming to Industry and Beyond* was the culmination of many years of hard work and dedication by members of the society and was the first exhibit to cover the entire history of Shelton in a comprehensive, professional manner. The accompanying catalog was the first reliable publication concerning Shelton's history in many years and the educational program was designed to mesh with the needs of local schools. The exhibit opened September 19 and two hundred fifty people attended the festivities.

A wreath auction was held in December. Local retailers donated the wreaths which were auctioned off and combined with the gift shop sales raised about \$2,000 for the society.

1999: Big news! The Shelton Historical Society received an Award of Merit from the CLHO for the *3 Centuries of Shelton: From Farming to Industry and Beyond* exhibit. CLHO recommended that we submit an application for a national award from the professional organization, American Association for State and Local History. A Certificate of Commendation was awarded and presented at the AASLH annual conference in Baltimore, MD on October 1st.

On February 16, President Paula Anthony asked that Fred Anthony, a local attorney, complete the legal paperwork to change the name of the Society from the Huntington Historical Society to the Shelton Historical Society. This had not been officially done and was quite overdue.

The Curtiss Memorial Fountain on the Huntington Green was badly in need of repair and the Society offered to coordinate with the City to oversee the restoration. Funds were raised and some were provided by the City. The conservator for the project was Linda Merck Gould, who also worked on the Statue of Liberty.

New fencing was approved for the society. The mix of fencing was based on historic photographs of the Brownson House in its original location and period appropriate styles.

In June, a motion passed for the restoration of the corncrib and the outhouse. Further research is necessary to determine exactly when these buildings arrived on site but it is known that the corncrib was from Nichols Avenue and the outhouse from Mohegan Road.

2000s

2000: Fund-raising for the restoration of the Curtiss Memorial Fountain on the Huntington Green continued.

The Brownson House was now open every other Sunday with increased visitation.

In April, the Society was visited by the United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, who was photographed in Trap Fall School. His security squad visited and interviewed the staff prior to his arrival.

A position for an Education Coordinator was approved in July due to the large number of school visitors. There was a total of 628 students in 2000. Patricia Sweeney served in this position until Kathleen Samela was hired.

A total of \$17,324.05 was raised for the restoration of the Curtiss Memorial Fountain on the Huntington Green, a portion of the total necessary funds, thanks to the hard work of many members. The remainder was provided by the City through various grants and state funding opportunities. There was a brief ceremony for the unveiling of a reproduction statue and restored base. Due to the extensive damage the original statue suffered, it was stored indoors on display in the Wilson Barn.

2001: In June, the original herb garden was relocated by a Boy Scout and reestablished by the Olde Ripton Garden Club.

In October, Bernard Brownson and his wife Rita, who had both lived in the house, arrived for a visit from Colorado where their branch of the Brownson family had relocated. Bernard, grandson of Harry and Gertrude, discussed their memories of living in the house and said that they would send additional information including photographs and genealogical information.

2002: The official dedication of the Curtiss Memorial Fountain took place on Sunday, May 5. After the dedication a reception, "Tea for Two," was held at Shelton History Center.

Ellen Rollinson Kolesk was hired as a part-time librarian. Within the year, she resurrected the Shelton Reading Circle as a monthly book discussion group, based on an original club that read aloud while doing handwork in the late 1800s. Eventually, it became the longest running continuous program of the Society to date.

In May, the Society was asked to look into the restoration of the statue of a boy holding a fish atop the fountain at Riverview Park. It was felt that the Society was not doing enough to preserve the downtown area. Overseeing this project would build on our success with the fountain and statue on the Green. The Board of Alderman approved our moving ahead on the restoration plan and the mayor asked that we move quickly.

By August, a historic structures report done on the house revealed that the house dated to the 1820s not 1803 as was once thought. The phone number of 929-1803 continues to reflect the earlier date.

Reconstruction of a carry-all, a horse drawn school bus, was initiated by a group of interested individuals, some of whom remembered riding in it to Huntington School in the 1920-30s. They contacted us to see if we would be interested in housing the vehicle once it was reconstructed.

The Society published *Images of Shelton*. The book brought together over two hundred photographs and maps from the Society's collection as well as those privately owned and in the collections of other museums.

2003: Water problems in the basement of the house continued to be a recurring problem.

Discussions continued on choosing the right date for the interpretation of the house. Suggestions included: depicting the early 1900s throughout the house or showing each room as a different era of the Brownson's residence.

Future projects for which money was needed included raising funds for the restoration of the statue in Riverview Park and the construction of a shed for the carry-all, sleds, and buggies.

Bernie Brownson felt that the plate rail that had been in the dining room should be reinstalled. This trim had been stored in the attic and was quickly put in place with the help of a volunteer.

2004: Our first Father's Day Antique Car Show was scheduled and a success. This event resulted from an attempt to attract more members and visitors to stop by the house for a Sunday afternoon tour. Several members and friends brought their antique cars and parked on the lawn. This attracted many visitors and led to planning an antique car show. This has become a very popular event and our 16th annual Father's Day Vintage Vehicles Antique & Classic Car Show was held in 2019.

2005: The restoration committee met and recommended that the house be interpreted to the year 1913. We have a complete account of the Brownson family finances from 1913 on which to base an interpretation. This provides the Society a unique opportunity to present the life of a middle-class New England farm family during this time period. There are no other historical society houses in this region that present this story. Choosing this date was based upon years of work by staff, volunteers, and consultants who examined our collections, buildings, site as a whole and oral histories. This motion was presented to the board and approved.

In September, after an environmental assessment, a very detailed plan for tackling the water problem was presented – this plan would cost about \$100,000 and was not approved. The plan was modified by staff, in consultation with the environmental engineers and conservators, with more affordable solutions and implemented over several years.

Tasks completed this year included painting the exterior of the house as it was in 1913 based on a paint analysis, restoring the fanlight and two sidelights surrounding the front door, and painting the schoolhouse.

2006: A quilt exhibit, *Stitches in Time*, was mounted on display in the house and a lecture was presented by quilt historian Sue Reich. Funds were raised to conserve four quilts as a result of this exhibit. After the exhibit closed in Shelton, several of the quilts were displayed at the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

Car show continued to be a success with a profit of \$2,000.

The CLHO invited the staff of the Society to discuss our education programs with other organizations and the program received excellent evaluations. Our Society has become known around the state as offering high quality programs for students.

Bernie Brownson mentioned that he would like to have a wrap-around porch restored to the house as it appeared in 1913.

2007: A new carriage barn to house the horse drawn vehicles was completed. While the excavation was being done during construction, an entire Model T car was found that had been

buried! After taking photos, it was reburied—too rusty to do anything else with it. The Society was finally able to accept the carry-all because there was a place to put it.



Phil Jones on the carryall he used to ride to school.

2008: In January, the Society sent a letter to Mayor Lauretti stating that the Shelton Historical Society recommend that the City take any action necessary to prevent the canal from being filled in. Also, that the locks and open space along the river be maintained and not developed, continuing our advocacy for Shelton’s historic sites across the city.

The Society received several awards from professional organizations. The *Stitches in Time* exhibit received an Award of Merit from CLHO and Certificate of Commendation from AASLH. The publication *Over the Hills, The Brownsons and Their Community in 1910* also received a Certificate of Commendation from AASLH.

The Shelton Historical Society was asked again to participate in the Huntington United Methodist Church Christmas House Tour. Decorations were a joint effort with the Olde Ripton Garden Club and the theme for the house was White Christmas.

2010s

2011-12: During this year damage from blizzards, tornadoes, flooding, hurricanes and an earthquake were all experienced at or near the Shelton History Center. Because of these weather events, it was decided that it was necessary to review and update our Emergency and Disaster Plans. A series of disaster planning and recovery workshops were attended by the curator. As part of this training program, we received an on-site assessment by a disaster coordinator from Northeast Document Conservation Center who evaluated our disaster readiness. This training would prove to be very valuable in the future.

2013: Hundreds of students continue to visit the Shelton History Center including second graders and eighth graders, as well as Scouts. On several occasions throughout the years Boy Scouts chose the site to do their Eagle projects. In 2013, we had over 2,600 visitors at the Complex, including 984 students.

2014: The director started a teen group with six children 12 and older who wanted to “learn, teach, and raise awareness of the Shelton Historical Society” (their words). Most had attended the summer history camp in previous years. They chose the name Teen Time Travelers and the

group continues to date.

2015: A formal afternoon tea was planned for September and was a great success. It was held in the Huntington Congregational Church hall with tables decorated by individuals according to a theme. Gourmet savories and sweets, homemade by volunteers, were served. This became a yearly tradition.

During a heavy rainstorm on October 28 it actually rained in the house while the roof was undergoing scheduled maintenance. The protective tarp somehow failed and the ceilings and walls of four rooms across two floors were heavily damaged along with the main collection storeroom in the basement. Volunteer firemen from the Huntington and White Hills Fire Departments responded quickly to divert water out of the house and move collections out of the waterfall to prevent further damage. For the next 48 hours staff, members, and professionals from other museums across the state arrived to help. The newly formed Teen Time Travelers, whose scheduled meeting had to be cancelled, arrived anyway to help. Disaster recovery superseded all other projects. A disaster recovery service assisted for many weeks with drying out the plaster in the house. The electric bill alone was over \$800 that month! Considering the magnitude of the disaster, only one banker's box of documents, photos, and books needed to be sent to Texas to be freeze dried. These items returned and all were reincorporated into the collection. Thankfully, having learned from previous events and with protective protocols put in place during disaster planning, no historical materials were lost.

2016: Though insurance refused to cover the disaster, donations from the community, individuals, and foundations, as well as reparations from the roofing contractor were generous, though the house had to be closed for over a year. After repairs, work continued on the reinterpretation of the house to reflect 1913. Work continued throughout the year with the focus on searching for period appropriate wallpaper for the front parlor to complete the interpretation. In May, the decision was made to have wallpaper for the front parlor custom made. This idea had been discussed more than a decade before but at an estimated cost of \$25,000, it was not possible. With the improvements in graphic design and on-demand printing services, custom wall paper was now within reach of the Society.

On December 19 about 30 people from a production company associated with the History Channel filmed segments of *American Ripper* at our site. They were on site for about 13 hours and offered one of the Teen Time Travelers an opportunity to play the role of a corpse! Initially, they were only interested in using the schoolhouse, but ended up filming in three other areas. We received \$1,000 for this opportunity.

2017: In March, custom wallpaper was approved for the front parlor. Arranged and coordinated by Beth Santa, a restoration committee member and interior designer, it was truly an international project: custom designed by a graphic designer in Ukraine, printed in California, and delivered to Shelton. It was installed at the end of the month. The restoration of the house was almost complete and a grand reopening celebration was scheduled to take place in May. With the house closed for a full year, staff was able to focus on cleaning the house from top to bottom, cleaning and waxing all the furniture and putting the finishing details on the interpretation.

A reopening celebration was held on May 21 with 150 people in attendance. Members of the Teen Time Travelers did a wonderful job as guides in the house. Positive feedback was received on the house and the event.

In September, an architect was hired with grant funds to design plans for the porch based on historic photographs of the Brownson House in order to obtain an estimate for reconstruction.

2018: April records show that an estimate of \$80,000 was received to build a porch similar to

the one that was on the house in 1913. Landscaping plans for the grounds were also reviewed and these combined with the porch estimate were used to apply for grant funding for the project.

During a bad storm in May, it rained in the office as water was forced horizontally through the exterior shingles. It was later confirmed that tornadoes touched down in nearby towns.

Once again, during a heavy rainstorm on September 25, the entire office and hallway floors were flooded with an inch of water. The sump pump was working at the time but the volume of water coming in overwhelmed the system. Extensive damage was done to the office but no collections were harmed. Water wicked up the walls which resulted in the wallboard having to be replaced. Collections had to be removed and housed upstairs. The office was once again in disarray and had to be closed for the remainder of the year. For October, November and December, all scheduled activities had to be cancelled including school visits and a holiday celebration. All told there were six water events in 2018.

2019: A special 50th anniversary committee was formed and began planning events for the year. The purpose was to raise the awareness of the Society in the community by offering more programs and, hopefully, increasing membership. The year started out with the annual meeting featuring Carolyn Ivanoff's program about the Hull family of Derby and Shelton.

In February, *Perspectives on Slavery in Connecticut & Shelton*, was presented by Martin Coughlin.

In March, a presentation for Woman's History, *This Old Hat, Patriots of Liberty*, was held with light luncheon and featured speaker, Patty Carver.

President Martin Coughlin stated at the Board meeting on May 21 that our endowment fund was quite low and that a committee was being set up to work on a plan and to seek more corporate and business memberships as well as sponsorships. The long term goal was to get our endowment to the level where our earnings would enable us to reclaim the apartment space.

A peony sale was held on June 1 and 2. The initial thought was to plant a fiftieth anniversary peony garden as it was one of Harry Brownson's favorite flowers to raise; there are a few of his plants in our gardens even now. This idea grew into a very successful peony sale with many visitors to the property. We had enough peonies left which we purchased for our own memorial garden on site. This garden was planted at the end of June.

The following week, an exhibit *Buried Treasure – Shelton's Heritage Unearthed* opened. This exhibit featured rarely seen items from the collection which represent interesting moments in the history of Shelton and was the perfect exhibit for our fiftieth anniversary year.

Next on the agenda was the annual Father's Day Vintage Vehicles Antique & Classic Car Show which had to be postponed until July because of rainy weather.

In August, Shelton Historical Society held an old-fashioned picnic. We invited our members as well as Echo Hose Ambulance Corps which was celebrating their seventieth anniversary, Shelton Land Conservation Trust which was celebrating their fiftieth anniversary, and Huntington Fire Company which was celebrating their hundredth anniversary. Guests enjoyed hotdogs, salads and an ice cream bar. All buildings on the site were open. A time capsule containing objects and information reflecting our current times was buried on the grounds to be opened in 50 years.

October featured our annual fall tea with an Autumn Splendor theme, where we had a special 50th anniversary table and introduced our charter member Lin Mulford. At the tea, Lin mentioned how proud she was of all that the Society had accomplished over the years and how well respected the Shelton Historical Society is among other historic organizations for their educational programs. Featured at the luncheon was Carolyn Ivanoff who portrayed Dolley Madison.

As our anniversary year comes to an end, we are happy to say that the water infiltration issues have been addressed with professional help. These improvements include a new entrance to the basement office which eliminated exterior steps and a clogged drain. Drywells and additional drainage were installed and soil around the foundation was regraded. The granite steps to the side entrance were reset and a rusted bulkhead door was replaced. The driveway, parking, and walkways were improved. In the future, we are still hoping that the porch will be restored and that we will be able to reclaim the apartment area and have a kitchen once again.

We look forward to our next fifty years of serving the Shelton community through the preservation of its history for the past, present and future.



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