

The Vine

Newsletter from the Staff of Wistariahurst Museum



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Wistariahurst's Carriage House

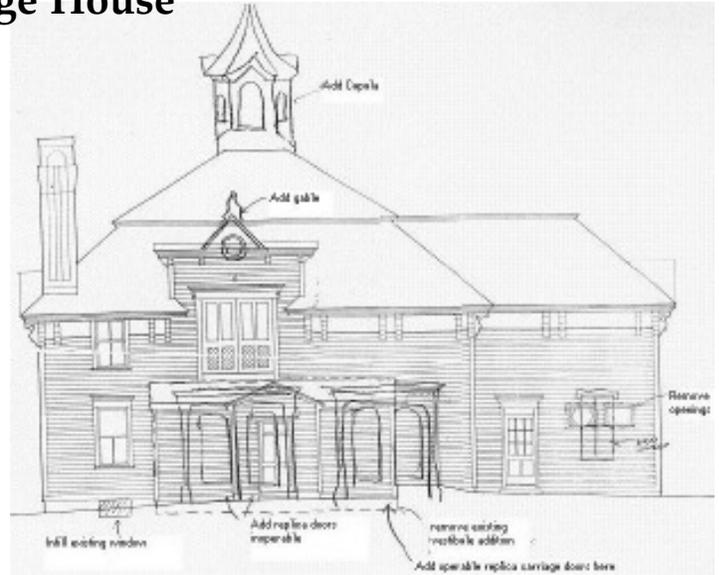
The Carriage House has always been important to life at Wistariahurst. It was designed by William Fenno Pratt, the same architect who designed Wistariahurst, and built shortly after the Skinner family moved to Holyoke in 1874. The Carriage House was built with a prominent Cupola, five horse stalls, a coachman's room and apartment, and space for several carriages including Sarah Skinner's Ladies Carriage. In 1913 an addition to the Carriage House was built to accommodate the family's automobiles.

When the Wistariahurst property was donated to the City of Holyoke in 1959, the Carriage House was adapted for the Holyoke Youth Museum and displayed a Native American exhibit and the taxidermy animals of Burlingham Schurr. Many in Holyoke fondly recall visiting the Youth Museum. The cupola was taken down in the 1960s and in 1980 an entranceway was added. These changes altered the look of the building from the elegant Carriage House to a rather ordinary barn like building.

In 2006, damaged from years of poor drainage and leaking roofs, Mayor Michael Sullivan and Museum Director Carol Constant are working to prevent further deterioration of the building, restore the exterior to the Carriage House of the 1880s and update the interior for continued Museum programming. A proposal has been sent to City Council for capital improvements to Wistariahurst including the Carriage House restoration, repairing termite damage to the main house Dining Room, and painting the exterior of the main house.

The goals of the Carriage House project are to: replace sections of rotting foundation sills, the rubble stone foundation wall and improve site drainage; relocate and upgrade electrical service that is mounted on a rubble stone section of the foundation wall; repair the damaged slate roof and restore the exterior of the carriage house to the look of a carriage house; reconstruct the cupola on the top of the carriage house; make the building first floor accessible and create a changing exhibit space and Museum Gift Shop; update the second floor Collections storage space; and continue to provide space for Wistariahurst volunteer gardeners.

The Carriage House and Museum Projects will greatly enhance the feel of the historic property; at the same time rehabilitate the interior space for current museum programming and exhibit space. Additionally, Sarah Skinner's carriage, that has been lovingly restored by William Menard of Granby and donated to Wistariahurst by Mount Holyoke College, will be prominently displayed in the exhibit area. Please call Wistariahurst 413-322-5660 if you are interested in supporting these projects and write letters or call Holyoke City Council members to tell them of your support.



Recent Acquisitions

By Kate Navarra Thibodeau

The museum recently acquired two major donations to the archives and collections. The first was a given by Joseph and Nancy Logan. They donated a large silver bowl inscribed "Presented to Joseph Allen Skinner on his seventy-fifth birthday May 20th, 1937, by his brother William Skinner." They also donated a certificate from the committee of public safety to Joseph Skinner, Joseph's diploma from Holyoke High School and other certificates, diplomas and letters to Joseph.



Another recent donation was by Timothy Mcelroy and Karen England of 90 N. Pleasant Street, Holyoke, who donated a trunk full of documents of the Hubbard family that were found in their Holyoke home. Their gift includes Yale Track & Field metals, an embroidered Skinner Silk handkerchief, and corticelli silk cocoons that belonged to the family of Elizabeth Skinner Hubbard (1859-1927).

These kinds of objects and documents help us know more about the history of people and their community. Newly discovered documents and photographs are important for historians because they add a new dimension to our understanding of events and people of the past. If you have items of historical interest related to the history of Holyoke or its families including the Skinner Family, please call Wistariahurst's Curator Kate Navarra Thibodeau.

PassportHolyoke.org
discover the city of Holyoke



Holyoke is a city with a rich and unique industrial past! In recent years a vital arts and cultural community as developed. Understanding the correlation between cultural tourism and economic growth, a collaborative group calling itself Passport Holyoke has met to promote attractions within the City. With a limited budget, and the outstanding talent of cdeVision, Passport Holyoke has developed a website and a very modest advertising campaign. Please visit the website www.passportholyoke.org to see the wonderful array of things that are happening today in Holyoke!

What's Trump?

What's Trump? is an exhibit that explores the world of trump indicators, their history and their addition to the game of bridge, and it was a huge success. Joan Schepps', a resident of Holyoke, collection is on display in the exhibit until January 23, 2006. Helen Pawlowski, President of the Western Massachusetts Bridge Association, directed eleven tables of bridge players. The museum was abuzz with activity and we thank the many volunteers and staff members that made it a success. Since the opening, there has been a steady flow of visitors to the exhibit. For those of you who missed the exhibit, please join us through January 23. If not, a portion of the exhibit will be available on-line at our website, www.wistariahurst.org.



Researching your Family Genealogy – Saturday, February 4, 2006, 11:00 a.m. \$7.00

Have you put off researching your family tree because you did not know where to start? Does re-searching your family history seem overwhelming? This educational program will provide helpful hints hands on activities and research opportunities to help you get started in the right direction or continue your research. Sarah Campbell, Archivist at the Holyoke History Room, and Curator of Wistariahurst Kate Thibodeau will teach you how to find census record, marriage, birth and death records, immigration records and further research opportunities. Bring your family trees or a blank tree to start with. Please call the museum (413) 322-5660 for questions or to reserve a spot in the class.

Preserving your Heirlooms - Saturday, March 4, 2006, 11:00 a.m. \$7.00

Are you at a loss as to what to do with your mother's wedding dress? Do you fear losing your photos to light and water damage? How do you store your best china? Come experience preservation at Wistariahurst Museum with our Curator, Kate Thibodeau, who will show you examples of damage to collections and the proper way to store your objects, clothing and photographs. Bring any item you wish to preserve and you will leave with the confidence that you can do it on your own. Please call the museum (413) 322-5660 for questions or to reserve a spot in the class.

Researching your House – Saturday, April 8, 2006, 11:00 a.m. \$7.00

Do you know when your house was built? Is it historic? Do you know who lived there twenty-five or fifty years ago? Your house may have been lived in by a famous manufacturer or industrialist. Find out how to research properties using local records. Sarah Campbell from the Holyoke History Room will be assisting. Please call the museum (413) 322-5660 for questions or to reserve a spot in the class.

2006: The Year of the Museum

The American Association of Museums has declared 2006 to be The Year of the Museum. The AAM has provided leadership for museums for one hundred years and has invited all museums, service organizations, the American public, and local, state and federal governments to use this milestone to recognize and celebrate the contributions of America's museums as they serve their communities, nation and the world.

For one hundred years, museums have been nourishing minds, fostering contemplation, critical thinking and dialogue to advance knowledge, understanding and an appreciation of history, science and the arts. All types of museums continue to present exhibitions and programs for people to explore new ideas, exchange stories and discover collections from cultural and national heritage. The museums in our area continue to forge relationships with community partners such as schools, libraries, public broadcasting and neighborhood and social service organization to foster civil participation and cultural understanding.

In this Year of the Museum, we encourage you to be curious about the museums in your community and make a concerted effort to visit museums in this celebratory year.

Museum Receives a Grant to Research Immigration to Holyoke

Wistariahurst Museum received a project grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities to research, plan and develop an exhibit series on immigration to Holyoke. Kate Thibodeau will research photographs, documents and objects at Wistariahurst, Holyoke Community College, the History Room at the Holyoke Public Library, American International College and its Oral History Library, Heritage State Park and numerous published and unpublished resources on immigration in this area.

Holyoke, best known as The Paper City, was built on immigrant labor. Each immigrant group clearly had an impact on the cultural life of Holyoke with their enclave communities, ethnic churches and organizations. These traditions of the immigrants endure in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the Franco-American Club, Polish Folk Dancing, and Nueva Esperanza. The exhibit series will highlight each of these immigrant groups and encourage the public to think about how their family history fits into the history and culture of Holyoke and the region.

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Taxidermy Travel to Good Homes

Wistariahurst Museum seeks to preserve the home, landscape and material culture of the Skinner family and promote an appreciation of history and culture through educational programs, exhibits and special events. As they no longer fit the mission of our institution, the many taxidermy specimens that were once housed in the Carriage house have been deaccessioned. The over six hundred stuffed birds, raccoons, reptiles, weasels, otter and insects have found new homes at institutions who promote education of the natural environment.

Bryant Stewart, Forest and Parks Supervisor I, Department of Conservation and Recreation stated : "As environmental educational tools these mounts are priceless. They will truly be an asset to each facility they are now home to. Also in September at the Eastern States Expo, Massachusetts Building, 30 mounts were displayed in the Dept. of Conservation and Recreation and New England Gardeners booths for education and public viewing. The following centers are the recipients of the taxidermy mounts: Millers River Environmental Center, Athol, MA, Gill Historical Society Museum, Gill, MA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hadley, MA, Northfield Environmental Center, Northfield, MA, D.C.R., Watchusett Mountain State Reservation Visitor Center, Westminster, MA, D.C.R., Dunn State Park Visitor Center, Gardner, MA, D.C.R., Wendell State Forest Visitor Center, Millers Falls, MA, D.C.R., Notch Visitor Center, Hadley, MA, the Trustees of the Reservation, Westfield State College Biology Department, and the Hitchcock Center for the Environment.

As you can see, Wistariahurst has many exciting programs and events. Please help us by supporting this living treasure. All donations sent to Wistariahurst Museum are tax deductible and will go directly to pay for the historical restoration and programs you see in this newsletter. Donations can be mailed to: Wistariahurst Museum, 238 Cabot Street, Holyoke, MA 01040 . In addition we have launched a new corporate sponsorship program, please call the museum for details 413-322-5660.