On July 4th, 2019 Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center will celebrate the opening of its new Visitor Center on Main Street, Ridgefield. Following Cass Gilbert’s death in England in 1934 his wife Julia Finch Gilbert asked their son, Cass Jr. to design a memorial library in honor of his father. The building was completed, but for family reasons was used as a library for a very short time. All of Cass Gilbert’s papers and drawings were later given to the New-York Historical Society.

Some years later Emily Gilbert, Cass and Julia’s youngest daughter sold the northern acres of what was lot #2 of the original Keeler property to a dentist who used it as a professional office and residence. In the 1960’s the Keeler Tavern Museum was established and has grown over the years as have its needs. The thought of restoring the red brick library to the museum campus had only been a dream until 2016, when upon the death of the dentist his widow put the property up for sale and the Museum was able to purchase it. A reception area has been created on the first floor, offices on the upper floor and the museum will have an up-to-date archival storage area on the lower level.

On July 4th Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center celebrates the restoration of a significant part of the original property. We thank all who made this exciting event possible.
Dear friends of Keeler:

It has been my profound honor to have served as Board President for the past three years. I fell in love with this museum over 25 years ago when I was drawn to it by a love of history and a desire to support what I believe is a significant resource in our community.

My term has seen a successful capital campaign, an extensive campus expansion, partnership building with local not-for-profit friends and most important to me, I have seen an increasing fire in our board and staff to reimagine and expand our vision as we work together to create a regional history center.

This doesn’t happen in a vacuum, it takes the dedication and enthusiasm of a dedicated volunteer base. They are the lifeblood of everything that happens at Keeler, and I am deeply grateful for each and every one of you who play a role in this fine organization.

Thank you for affording me this wonderful opportunity!

Respectfully,

Hilary Micalizzi

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A VIEW FROM THE SECOND FLOOR

The month of June has a special place on our calendar. It marks the end of our school programs for thousands of school children who come to our site during the school year for an immersive, hands-on experience to learn about the larger meaning of history. It also marks the end of our fiscal year when we close the books on our past year and prepare the budget for the year ahead. This June we’ll be participating in Ridgefield’s first Make Music Day, an international celebration of free music on June 21st, the summer solstice. We’ll be using the new Visitor Center to feature five performers of all genres.

Our capital campaign is roaring full steam ahead. On June 6th, we declared victory for having surpassed our initial goal of raising $1.5 million with a well-attended cocktail party. It was a lovely evening and guests enjoyed the expanded and transformed grounds and spectacular gardens. On July 4th, we’ll be having a campus-wide celebration for the general public with the Grand Opening of the new Visitor Center and the 4th Annual Watermelon Fest. Be sure to stop by for the ribbon cutting ceremony, a tour of the new Visitor Center, including the future collections storage facility on the lower level, as well as the many other attractions – especially the dramatic reading of the Declaration of Independence - that make our annual Watermelon Fest such a fun and family-friendly July 4th event.

We are working hard on preparing for a great 3-weeks of Keeler Kids, our popular local history summer camp for boys and girls in grades 1 – 8. This year’s focus is on the 19th century and each week deals with a different theme, starting with the US Postal Service, to cabinets of curiosities as predecessors to museums, to vintage fashion design inspired by our own collection. Visit our website for details and online registration.

As always, don’t hesitate to call or email me with questions or concerns, or stop by to see our new offices and say Hi! Hope to see you on July 4th!

Hildegard Grob, Executive Director
“Red, White, and Blue!” is a colorful art show featuring the work of 30 Founders Hall artists, all students and fellow artists of local Ridgefield artist Tina Phillips, that opens with a reception on Friday, June 28, from 5 – 8 p.m. in the Carriage Barn at Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center (KTM&HC).

The 30 artists from Founders Hall celebrate their independence to paint, draw and create their own art, in their own style, and colors. Given the freedom to be themselves, this show captures the joyful expression of years of seeing through artists’ eyes.

“It is a privilege and a joy to teach art at Founders Hall,” says Ms. Phillips. “Along with KTM&HC, it is truly a treasure to the town.”

After the reception, the show will be open Saturday, June 28 through Saturday, July 7, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. There will be special hours on July 4, when the show will be open during KTM&HC’s Watermelon Fest and Grand Opening of the Visitor Center from 12 to 3 pm. Admission is free. All artwork will be available for sale. A portion of the artists’ sales will go towards the restoration of the historic Carriage Barn, which was designed and built by renowned architect and resident Cass Gilbert in 1910. Purchases by cash or check only, no credit cards will be accepted. Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Session 1: Life in Early Ridgefield
July 15 – 19, 9:30 am -1:30 pm
Grades 1-3
Before text messages and email the postal service carried news throughout the United States. Campers will join Timothy Keeler as deputy postmasters along the post road, establishing their post office and ensuring the mail reaches its destination.

Session II: Cabinet of Curiosities
July 22 - 26, 9:30 am -1:30 pm
Grades 4-6
A predecessor to museums cabinets of curiosities reached the height of their popularity in the 19th century. From natural specimens to the newest technical wonders, campers will collect and curate objects to create their own cabinets of curiosities.

Session III: Vintage Fashion Design
July 29 - August 2, 9:30 am -1:30 pm
Grades 7 & up
Cut and construct a historic costume inspired by the 19th century fashion found in the Museum’s collection. Brooklyn based fashion designer, Corrine Huhnke will teach campers how to design elements from 19th century women’s and men’s fashion to make a creation of their own using finds from local second-hand shops.

Bettie Jane Third Memorial Scholarships

Joel Third established the Bettie Jane Third Memorial Scholarship Fund in memory of his wife several years ago. The scholarship is awarded annually by KTM&HC to a graduating senior who is planning on majoring in history, library sciences, or education, or who has volunteered at the museum. This year, the Museum awarded two $500 scholarships to Colin Mulhern (left) and Thomas Groves (right).

Both Colin and Thomas have been long-time counselors for Keeler Kids and have been involved with the Museum for many years. Colin will be pursing a degree in business at the University of Connecticut. Thomas will be pursing a degree in business at the Indiana University Bloomington.
Spring Gala 2019

The Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center’s 25th Annual Cannonball Gala was a huge success. The sold-out event was bursting with excitement as guests arrived at the Visitor Center and proceeded to the Garden House for cocktails in the spectacular sunken garden. The Ridgefield Jazz Giants provided entertainment, Ira Joe Fisher was the auctioneer extraordinaire, and Tom Devine from Ciao! Catering and Events served a delicious dinner. The highlight of the evening was honoring Ed and Gaetana McGill with the Cannonball Award. Ed and Gaetana are long-time supporters and volunteers who have demonstrated dedication not only to the site’s historic significance but also its financial sustainability. A special thank you to Mary Ann Connors, Kam Daughters, Hildi Grob, and Hilary Micalizzi for their hard work in orchestrating another wonderful event at KTM&HC.

Mary Ann Connors, Gala-Co Chairman
Photos by Lindsey Connors

The Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center is victorious. It has raised 1.5 million dollars in pledges, grants and individual gifts over the past three years for its capital campaign. Welcome donations continue to arrive. The money has enabled KTM&HC to make many improvements to the campus with more to come. Most important is the renovation of what is now the Visitor Center and also outfitting it with the latest in technology.

To thank the many donors a cocktail party was held on June 6th. Guests toured the Visitor Center where they toasted the restored facility with a special champagne cocktail. Hors d’oeuvres and drinks were enjoyed in the Garden House. The sun shone, the brick walled garden was beautiful, and all could enjoy seeing the improvements their donations have made possible.
The winners of KTM&HC History Trivia Contest was the Burr Bradley team. Marty Heiser, George Hancock, Steve Coulter, Craig Borders, Joel Weisvogel and John Frey took home the fountain award last April.

As they have for many years, KTM&HC volunteers have marched in costume in the Ridgefield Memorial Day Parade with a few lucky people riding in Cheryl Crowl’s rolling cannonball car.

Knot.com the wedding website has named the Garden House at Keeler Tavern Museum with its beautiful garden as a recipient of its 2019 The Knot Best of Weddings award.

During the summer solstice the museum is participating in Ridgefield’s first Make Music Day, held in the Visitor Center. There will be performances of Folk, Classical and even barber-shop music.

This year the Education Department ran 44 programs and taught over 1800 students. Our most attended program was “Colonial Life” which focuses on helping 4th and 5th grade students understand how life was different in the 18th century from the way we dressed to the ways we worked. Kerry Hanon, a teacher from New Fairfield, said that our “Colonial Life” program was “absolutely the best field trip I’ve ever attended. The docents were knowledgeable and friendly, the facilities were unbelievable, and I can’t believe all the materials the children were allowed to leave with.”

Melissa Houston, Education Director

New Member
Welcome to new member of the KTM&HC
Robin Duke

New members are always welcome. Many employers provide matching funds increasing the value of your membership.

Connie Fenton, Membership Chairman
“Keeler Tavern was one of the reasons we chose to move to Ridgefield,” says a donor who contributed in May to our capital campaign. “It’s an important part of the community, one that makes Ridgefield a destination.”

Evidently a lot of people agree with this donor—which is surely why, between early February and early June, Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center (KTM&HC) received more than 100 donations. These gifts, from individuals as well as local businesses, were in amounts ranging from a few dollars to thousands. The Ridgefield Chapter of the National Charity League, for example, donated $200 to help pay for period costumes.

Other generous donors responded to Fairfield County’s Giving Day, powered by Fairfield County’s Community Foundation; KTM&HC’s spring Cannonball Gala held on site May 18, and the Annual Appeal, which includes options for giving to our capital campaign, school programs, general operating needs, and the Bettie Jane Third Memorial Scholarship Fund.

KTM&HC was also the grateful recipient of several major grants to help to complete the transformation of 152 Main Street into a welcoming Visitor Center:

- The Ridgefield Thrift Shop generously donated $17,000 to fund the custom fabrication and installation of a main-floor reception desk and information display panels.
- The 1772 Foundation, in cooperation with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, gave $5,000 to defray the cost of restoring and painting the Visitor Center’s historic millwork, windows, and shutters.
- The Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Connecticut contributed $2,000 toward conversion of the building’s lower level to a state-of-the-art museum collections storage and research facility.
- The Ridgefield Woman’s Club provided $500 to help purchase A/V equipment for visitors to watch orientation and period- or theme-specific videos.

Some of these grants have a match requirement, meaning that KTM&HC must show it has on hand a percentage of the total project cost already, from other donors. KTM&HC is able to meet these requirements because of our local donors’ generous gifts to our capital campaign. These continue to come in, both as new gifts—which we welcome through 2020—as well as payments to fulfill pledge commitments.

If you have not already given to our Annual Appeal or the capital campaign, please consider a donation to help us in our dual mission of preservation and education. You can donate online at www.keelertavernmuseum.org/donate. Please remember to submit for a corporate match, if you can—and thank you!

Angela Liptack, Associate Director, Development and Grants
WANTED SHOPKEEPERS

If you enjoy retail and like talking to people, then consider volunteering in the Keeler Tavern Museum Gift Shop, at 132 Main Street, Ridgefield. Shopkeepers have the opportunity to work in a unique building steeped in history, and surrounded by lovely merchandise. They have a chance to help customers select their purchases, as well as the opportunity to shop for themselves with a 10% discount. Shopkeepers enjoy interfacing with the Museum guides who conduct tours on the same days that the Shop is open.

All shopkeepers attend a brief training orientation to the shop and its inventory. Shopkeepers volunteer to work one afternoon a month from 1-4 pm on Wednesday, Saturday or Sunday. Duties include assisting museum visitors in the selection of their purchases and processing their sales transactions. Shopkeepers also have the satisfaction of knowing that they have helped contribute to the support of the museum’s programs and educational initiative.

For further information, call Margo McEachern, 203.431.3094.

Elizabeth Shapiro (far left), Director of Culture, Director of Operations, Preservation and Museums at the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office presented KTM&HC leaders (left to right) Joel Third, Kam Daughters, and Hildi Grob with a facsimile check for a $96,575 Good to Great Grant. The bond-funded grant, which is administered by the State of Connecticut’s Department of Economic and Community Development, will help pay for the creation of a state-of-the-art museum collections storage and research facility in the lower level of KTM&HC’s new Visitor Center. Work on the project is expected to begin this summer and be finished by year end.

Angela Liptack, Associate Director, Development and Grants

Special Tours

On April 2 forty five visitors from the Easton Senior Citizen Center enjoyed a special tour of the Keeler Tavern Museum. Another special tour for The Pound Ridge Senior Center is scheduled for August. If you know of a group interested in a special tour, please call the museum to schedule a time and date.

KTM&HC Board member Jenn Hansen is taking over the special tour scheduling from Maureen Tucker.

Thank you Maureen for all you have done.

Tavern Times is published three times yearly by the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society, Inc. Elise Haas, Editor
The Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center is open Saturday, Sunday, and Wednesday 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM (last tour begins at 3:30 PM). Museum Gift Shop is open Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Closed the Month of January.

Providing textiles for clothing, blankets and other needs was a time-consuming job in early America and around the world. Cotton, flax or wool had to first be spun into yarn and then woven on a loom. It was a cottage industry here as it had been in England where most of the New England settlers had emigrated from.

Originally strands of raw material were combed to remove sticks, seeds or other impurities. Then the strands were twisted on a stick. When spinning wheels were developed 1,000 years or more ago it greatly increased the speed of producing yarn. Young girls did most of the spinning. And unmarried women living at home often spent their time spinning. Thus the word “spinster” came to mean any unmarried adult woman.

The Industrial Revolution of the late 19th century eliminated the need for spinning wheels. Yarns were spun in large factories and fabric woven on huge looms. “Spinster” is now hopefully an obsolete word.

KTM&HC has several spinning wheels in its collection.

The Behind the Scenes Awards are given every year to volunteers who give their knowledge and time to enrich the many non-profit organizations in Ridgefield. This year Tina Phillips was nominated by KTM&HC. Tina has volunteered as manager of the Arts in the Barn exhibits enjoyed by many who visit the campus. She also holds a series of watercolor classes.

The Ridgefield Arts Council gave the awards to the nominees on May 9th at the Ridgefield Library. Congratulations Tina!

Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center 2019 Calendar

June to July 2019

28 Art Show in the Barn (Red, White and Blue) Opening Reception: Friday, June 28 – 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM (FREE) Open to the public June 28 – July 7, 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM daily

July to August 2019

4 Watermelon Fest & GRAND OPENING OF VISITOR CENTER Thursday, 12 Noon – 3 PM
15-19 Keeler Kids I Life in Early Ridgefield Monday to Friday, 9:30 AM – 1:30 PM
22-26 Keeler Kids II Cabinet of Curiosities Monday to Friday, 9:30 AM – 1:30 PM
29-2 Keeler Kids III Vintage Fashion Design Monday to Friday, 9:30 AM – 1:30 PM

September 2019

14 The Fall Party @ Keeler Saturday, 6:00 PM