

WINCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March Program

BLACK HORSE BULLETIN

Volume 33, Number 2 April - June 2008

From the President

by Gail Sjo

March 2008 marked the second anniversary of the signing of the lease for the Sanborn House with the town. At the invitation of the Selectmen, the Historical Society gave an update on the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center to the Board of Selectmen at their weekly meeting. Bob Colt, Nancy Schrock, and I spoke about the Society's progress on stabilizing and improving the building and opening it to the community.

We described the progress made to the house: regrading the ground around the house; installing new water table boards; repairing the plumbing; rebuilding three chimneys; adding exterior lighting; repairing masonry/stucco, installing a fire alarm and security system; general electrical work, removing overgrown trees and

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The Golden Days of Radio

by Ellen Knight

Even if you don't remember the radio programs of the 1930s, you can't help but feel nostalgic for those golden days after an evening with

Mel Simons, as presented by the Winchester Historical Society on March 4 in its new home, the Sanborn House.

Simons, who has collected thousands upon thousands of old radio show, turned his hobby into a show, The Golden Days of Radio. He now has several programs on old-time radio and TV and appears on the Steve LeVeille Broadcast on WBZ radio with his Audio Clip Trivia Quiz after having been a guest on the Larry Glick Show for fourteen years and the Bob Raleigh Show for six years. He is also the author of five books (the last soon to be published) about old time TV and radio personalities and trivia.

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Mel Simons talks aobut the Golden Days of Radio. Photo courtesy of Bill Ryerson.

Inside this Issue ... Calling All Houses Celebrating the New Year Party Society Receives Local Grants New Town Day Event: Strawberry Festival and Classic Car Show Vote NO on Movies! Save the Date! Shhh..... Managing Editor (Acting): Carol Keller; Editors: Cynthia Latta, Nancy O'Herron The *Black Horse Bulletin* is published quarterly by the Winchester Historical Society. Subscription is free with membership. Winchester Historical Society www.winchesterhistoricalsociety.org www.sanbornhouse.us

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"I'm going to take you all on a wonderful trip down memory lane," Simons said as he began his show. "It's a terrific place."

The radio shows of yesteryear, he said, were wonderful because "radio was the theater of the mind. You had to use your imagination."

Many shows were on the radio for years. Each night listeners, even whole families, would gather around the radio to tune in their



Tom Michalak introducing Mel Simons at the March program. Photo courtesy of Bill Ryerson.

favorite shows. On Monday night, the Lux Radio Theater was on for 24 years. "It was like listening to a movie," Simons said and played a clip from one show introducing Cecil B. DeMille.

"Tuesday was a wonderful night to laugh," he said, especially because of Fibber McGee and Molly – whose hall closet alone brought a weekly laugh or, if it wasn't included, brought a flood of mail in protest.

The radio comedians, Simons said, brought clean and wholesome fun over the air waves. He played a clip from "Duffy's Tavern" and talked about the evolution of the George Burns and Gracie Allen team, Fred Allen, and how "Sam and Henry" became "Amos and Andy" in 1928.

"Every Sunday at 7 o'clock, the country would stop," he said. "Everybody had to stay home to listen to Jack Benny." Listening to the excerpts with Benny and Rochester (real name Eddie Anderson) and Benny with his French violin teacher Prof. LeBlanc (played by Mel Blanc), one could see why. They stand the test of time.

Unlike many comedians, Simons pointed out, Benny never made fun of other people. People made fun of him.

Jack Benny, Simons said, was one of the three best loved performers as people, the others being Jimmy Durante and Eddie Cantor. This led into a musical trip down memory lane, with taped selections from shows in which Cantor and Maurice Chevalier sang "If you knew Susie" and Al Jolson sang "Toot Tootsie."

"Nothing taxed your minds," Simons said, turning to another pop-

ular genre, "like the mystery shows." There was Inner Sanctum, Suspense, The Whistler, I Love a Mystery, and the one whose famous introduction he played "Who know what evil lurks in the hearts of men" -The Shadow.

Taking out his accordion, Simons led a musical quiz on radio commercials. Which was the longest running jungle? Philip Morris.

"Wonderful songs and singers came out of radio," Simons said and quizzed the audience on the themes for Kate Smith, Rudy Vallee, Bing Crosby, and ended up leading a sing along with such signature songs as Jolson's "Mammy."

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other yard waste; cleaning all interior areas of the house; installing a gas line for conversion of the furnace; repainting the first floor; repairing several walls, windows and doors; and creating a basic, functional kitchen. In progress are major roof repairs, replacing missing windows with new ones, repairing and painting the veranda to make it usable, removing asbestos flooring, and re-connecting the house to the Internet.

We were pleased to report that significant progress had also been made toward our goal of creating a historical and cultural center for the Winchester community. Sue Clark, our Events and House Manager provides on-site assistance to those interested in using the house while expediting work by contractors and volunteers. During the start-up phase, the Sanborn House has been the site of meetings of non-profit organizations, businesses, town committees, and private parties, evening art classes, and social and charitable events.

The Outreach Committee has contacted community organizations and businesses to offer discount rental coupons for first time use. In accordance with our lease, we are pursuing educational opportunities. As part of the Collaborative for Documenting Winchester History, our curator of collections is actively working with Town Clerk, Mary Ellen Lannon, to investigate the feasibility of designing an archival vault and research space in the basement. We reiterated the Society's desire to be a good neighbor by ensuring events are well managed with containment of noise and night lighting. The Society is in ongoing discussion with Ron Haverty, Zoning Compliance Officer, to guarantee traffic and parking on the Ambrose Campus in keeping with the special zoning permit.

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We discussed two issues with the Selectmen, both of which are being addressed by the Society as described in past editions of this bulletin. The Sanborn House roof leaks, and each serious winter storm has brought more ceiling damage on the second and third floors. The Chair of our Building Committee is currently working with Gale Engineering to develop bid plans, details and specifications for competitive bidding on the roof that address the key problems so that repair work can begin. It is complicated by the need to honor the preservation restriction and coordinate the minor exterior changes (gutters) with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The second issue, which becomes a little less urgent with the arrival of warm weather, is the desire to replace the old boiler and convert to gas service for heating. This will be resolved over the summer.

The Selectmen indicated they were pleased with the progress and did not have questions. We invited each of them to visit the Sanborn House to see how the house is being used and to view the improvements. Coincidentally, Selectmen Jimmy Johnson, who said he had not been to the Sanborn for several years, participated in a Town Day Committee meeting at the house this past week. He told me he was very impressed.



Book Ends Children's Own School Hall & Sullivan, Attorneys at Law

Mary McKenna and Associates, Inc.

Frank H. Duffy, Wood Flooring Specialists

Wine Country

Winchester Art and Frame

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The show ended with a singalong of an Irving Berlin song made famous by Kate Smith, once considered for legislation to become the new national anthem, "God Bless America."

The evening was a thoroughly entertaining walk down memory lane for those who filled the program room in the Sanborn House, listened to voices of the great entertainers, laughed at the jokes which never die, guessed at the trivia questions, sang the songs, and enjoyed remembering great moments in radio.

Reprinted by permission from the *Daily Times Chronicle*, Winchester Edition, of March 5, 2008.

Calling All Houses

It's that time again!

We are planning the October 2008 Historic House Tour and are looking for six homes to feature–Greek Revival, Italianate, Mansard, Shingle, Tudor, etc.

We love them all so if your historically significant home would be a good candidate for the tour, please get in touch with Nancy O'Herron (tel: 781-729-5919; e-mail: nancyfoherron@yahoo.com).

Sanborn Alive!

by Carol K. Keller

The first floor of the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center was offered for use to the community for the first time in December. A surprising variety of organizations, businesses and individuals have since held meetings and events at the facility, even in stormy January and February, a noted slow time. This use is just what was envisioned in the planning for the Center and in the lease between the Society and the Town.



Winchester musician, Rich Greenblatt playing his vibraphone with his swinging jazz trio at the "Party for the Arts.".

Non-profits have been among those using the Center. For example, the League of Women Voters held its brain-storming brunch on a Sunday in January, and the Winchester Friends of Art held its annual "Party for the Arts" to support art in the Winchester schools on a Saturday afternoon and evening in March.

The Winchester Town Day Committee. the Winchester Historical Commission, and the Winchester Cultural Council have held monthly meetings at the Center.

weekly art class held in the evening has been offered all fall and winter, and a Realty company

private

cational program at the Center.

The Historical Society is using the Center for many committee meetings, Board meetings, and

programs. The "Golden Days of

offered its Tuesday morning edu-

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Radio" program with Mel Simons filled the music room, and the popular annual pot luck dinner Classic Car Show, a new Town Day event ponsored by the Society, will use the facility and grounds on June 7.

Two private parties have been held-a gala Christmas Eve party and a birthday celebration.

Over this time inquiries have been received from more than five other Winchester non-profits, a theater group, two music groups, another private art class and other businesses.

To inquire about reserving the Sanborn

House for a community, personal or business group, or to learn more about the Center call (781) 721-0135 or visit the Winchester Historical Society Web site.



Opening of the League of Women Voters' brunch at the Sanborn House.

will be held on April 3. The May 13 Annual Meeting with the "Vote NO on Movie!" program by Ellen Knight will be held at the Sanborn House. A Strawberry Festival and



January Program

Celebrating the New Year Party

by Tom Michalak

On Sunday, January 6^{th} , more than 80 members and their friends celebrated the holiday season with a gala reception at the Armenian Cultural Foundation on Mystic Street in Arlington. Harvey Diamond of the Winchester Musical School provided musical entertainment on the piano and played show tunes from the 1930's.

Wonderful finger food was provided by members of the Board with wines and bartending provide by Steve Addezio of Wine Country. It was a clear day, so members enjoyed the view of the Mystic Lake from the windows of the Foundation's meeting room.

Curator Ara Ghazarians gave a brief talk on the work of the Foundation and led tours of the library with its collection of oriental rugs, Tiffany lamps, and rare books, all collected by the founder Vahan Topalian.

The Armenian Cultural Foundation is a private library and museum dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of Armenian history, culture and letters. Most members knew the large house with four columns on the Mystic Lake from their travels on Mystic Street but few knew what the building represented and even fewer had ever visited. Members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn and share one of the cultural treasures of our Winchester neighbor.

From the Archives: Detective Work!

by Randy Bairnsfather

Sometimes, work at the Archival Center requires the skills of a detective. I listened to a message on the Archival Center's answering machine one day in early February. It was from a woman in California calling to say she had a photograph of a house labeled on the back "Arthur's home 1899" and the stamp "E.A. Holbrook Winchester, Mass." She wondered who Holbrook was.

I was reluctant to place a long distance return call, not having any new information and knowing we need to pinch pennies at the Center. I remembered that Shirley Holbrook Parker has an ancestor Edwin A. Holbrook, so I called her first to see if he might have been a photographer. She said Edwin was a farmer who lived in Maine and died there in 1897. Therefore, there had to be another E.A. Holbrook with a Winchester connection.

The Winchester Public Library has an index to old issues of the Winchester Star and sure enough there was an obituary for E. A. Holbrook who died April 14, 1906 at age 52. Edgar Alanson Holbrook, who lived at 20 Dix St., had been a grocer in town for many years. He owned Holbrook & Adams grocery and later Richardson's Market on Mt. Vernon St. But failing health forced Holbrook to retire early, and to fill his time he raised choice breeds of pigeons and took up photography. Eureka! Now I had something positive to tell the caller from California.

Maureen Keating of San Rafael said she found the old photograph of "Arthur's" house at a local hospice thrift shop. She bought it and figured it might be of interest to a historical society, which is why she called both the Archival Center as well as the Historical Society's tele-

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phone at the Sanborn House. She said she would send the photo to us and did not want to be reimbursed.

When I saw the sepia, slightly worn photo on card stock, I recognized it as Arthur Whitney's house at 5 Mystic Avenue. Arthur Whitney was a leading industrialist in Winchester who along with his father, Joel Whitney, made machinery for the veneering and

leather tanning trades.* Though there is another old photo of his house, which was built in 1852, in our collection, this one is of a different view and a welcome addition. Take a minute for an extra glance at 5 Mystic Avenue or 20 Dix Street as you drive by, now that you know more about their history.

Do you know that the Archival Center contains a folder on each house built in Winchester before 1917? They are available for public viewing.

* From the Society's publication *Winchester Massachusetts: The Architectural Heritage of a Victorian Town*, page 136.

The Archival Center is located in Town Hall. Hours of operation are:

- 1st Tuesday of month: 7:00 9:00 P.M.
- 2nd Thursday of month: 1:00 3:00 P.M.
- 3rd Thursday of month: 3:00 5:00 P.M.

All visitors must be supervised by one of the part-time volunteers who staff the Center. Patrons who cannot visit the Archival Center during its open hours may request individual appointments (tel: 781-721-7146; e-mail: archives@winchester.us), which are set by individual volunteers at their discretion.



by Nancy Schrock

Our sincere thanks to the donors to our 2007 annual appeal: Mary Adams and Michael Oleksak Bob and Randy Bairnsfather Charlene Band Kay and Bob Bigelow (continued on page 6, Thanks)

In Memory of Sam by Nancy Schrock

We were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Sam Seidman, a member of the Board of Directors of the Winchester Historical Society since 1994. Sam was one of the early advocates of the Sanborn House as a home for the Society and its collections.

His hospitality was legendary, as was his knowledge of wines and the wine import trade. Sam first opened his home, the Governor McCall Mansion, to Society members at an annual potluck dinner in 1999. The drive for new members often took place around his grand dining room table with generous offerings of wine, sparkling water, and cheeses. In 2006, his home was included as part of our historic house tour.

At a memorial service, the friends of Sam requested that donations be made to the Society in his name and that the funds be used for a restoration project for the Sanborn House dining room. We extend our sympathy to family and friends, and our thanks to those who have given



donations to the Society in Sam's memory. They are: George and Roberta Berry, Ed Goodwin, Jean Twitchell, Dr. Stephen J. Poor, III, James Fathy, Hanne Beck, Joan and Lance Grenzeback, Dr. Harvey E. Finkel and Ariella S. Finkel, Dr. Ronald Goldenson, Nancy and Richard Schrock, John and Laura McNamara, Nicholas Zakon-Bourke, Roger E. Orman, the Lower Falls Wine Company, the Buehler Realty Trust, Lloyd F. Foster, and Sam's parents, Harold and Mimi Seidman.



Financial Support

Society Receives Local Grants

by Carol Keller

The Winchester Historical Society recently received three grants from local foundations and agencies. These grants will help the Society celebrate its 75th birthday and Winchester's history with expanded public programming and workshops for non-profit organizations in town. The Society greatly appreciates this community support.

The John and Mary Murphy Educational Foundation awarded a grant of \$3,500 to support the mission of the Society to foster the appreciation of Winchester history. A series of public programs, on life in Winchester 75 years ago (1933), the year the Society was founded, is being supported by the grant. Programs that show both adults and

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children the reality and fantasysurrounding the lives of their grandparents and great-grandparents have been planned.

The Society has sponsored two weekend programs of films of the period including cartoons and popular feature films shown at the Lincoln School auditorium, and a program on the "Golden Days of Radio" hosted by Mel Simons. In May the Society will present "Vote NO for Movies" which covers the 1930's debate on licensing movie theaters in Winchester, an issue highly contested. One of the goals of these programs is to increase the awareness of the mission of the Winchester Historical Society among younger people and residents new to our town. As always, these programs are free and open to the public.

The Winchester Cultural Council awarded the Historical Society an \$800 grant for a public program on Artists of Winchester, including a speaker fee for the fall, and for display panels which will enable the Society to show works from its collection of art from Winchester artists.

The En Ka Society awarded a grant of \$2,560 to fund two workshops for Winchester non-profit organizations focused on organizing and preserving their records and archives. These funds will also enable the Society to purchase dataloggers to track temperature and relative humidity in the Sanborn House basement as part of long-term planning for storage of collections, archives and records.

Thank you!

New Town Day Event: Strawberry Festival and Classic Car Show

The Winchester Historical Society will host a Strawberry Festival and Classic Car Show on Town Day, June 7th. This new event for Town Day will be held on the grounds of the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center from 1:00 - 4:00 PM.

Classic cars will be on display, strawberry shortcake, coffee and lemonade will be served, and tours of the Sanborn House will be offered. The Society is looking for owners of classic cars who would be willing to put them on display for the show. We need volunteers to help with this event. Please contact Nancy Kilker (tel: 781-729-8773, e-mail: hadas@comcast.net) or Sue Clark (tel: 781-721-0135) if you are interested.



At the Movies

Films of 1933

by Tom Michalak

The 1930's film programs honoring the 75th Anniversary of the Society went off without a hitch. The Marx Brother's Duck Soup held on the weekends of January 26 and 27 was well attended with more than 30 guests, while Lady for a Day on February 9 was the best attended with more than 40 guests. The showing of *The Invisible Man* on February 10, the best film of the group, was unfortunately impacted by inclement weather.

These films were chosen for two reasons. They represent some of the most popular films of 1933 and they have stood the test of time as they still appeal to today's audiences. The Marx Brothers'

Duck Soup is their greatest and funniest masterpiece - this classic comedy is a short but brilliant satire lampooning the blundering dictatorial leaders. Fascism and

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(continued from page 5, Thanks),

Bud and Barbara Bing The Birds Ann Blackham Judy and Jerry Blaine Kyle Carney and Christopher Gregory Children's Own School Lal C. Chugh Marion Crandall Diane and Jim Donovan Marjorie Estridge Allan Eyden Alice Fitzgerald and David C. **Bayer** The Fryklunds Karen and Denis Fullerton Phalia M. Ghikas Jane Graham Hall and Sullivan John M. and Patricia Harrington Jr. Greta Hawley Martha and George. Hebb The Hoyt Family The Iovine Family Richard and Linda Johnson Bruce F. Jones Josh Kapp and Carol Backs Carol Keller and Peter G. Engeldrum Carol and Jim Kent Julie and Charles Khuen Nancy and Wayne Kilker Emilianne Koehnlein Philippe Koenig Dan and Martha Ladd Cynthia Latta Alexander and Barbara Leaf Michael and Judy Manzo John and Amy Mariani Lane McGovern The McPhee Family Maureen Meister and David Feigenbaum Laurie and John Minniti Al and Judie Muggia Mildred Newell Diana and Jim Obbard In memory of Ed O'Connell Bill O'Connor Deirdre O'Connor Nancy O'Herron George and Barbara Pacetti Karl Packard, Red Hawk Studio Stephen and Cecily Parkhurst Jeff Ranahan Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Raphael Allan Rodgers

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Peggy and Jack Roll Jane Rutherford and Steve **Poulos** Priscilla Samoiloff Nancy and Richard Schrock Margot B. Semonian Mr. and Mrs. Ronald L. Skates Mr. and Mrs. Roger Smith Jim Stansfield and Janet Snover Louise Stebbins Robert and Beverly Stone Paula Swartz Ian and Jennifer Swope Judy and Noel Thyson **Evelyn Trageser** Mark and Wellner Tremallo **Dorothea Twomey** Candace and Peter Van Aken Theodore Voelkel **Dinah Voorhies** Susan and George Vrotsos Carol Watson-Phillips Peter and Betsy Wild Lynda Wills Susan Williams

Thank You

George and Holly Wood

The Society would like to thank Dave Smith of Winchester Art and Frames for framing three of the Society's maps with attractive period frames which highlight the historic pieces. The maps are on display in the Sanborn House.

Thank You

The Society would like to thank Cyndey and Mark Ambrose for the donation of the oriental carpet now residing in the Music Room of the Sanborn House. (continued from page 6, Films)

authoritarian governments. Lady for a Day is a Cinderella fairy tale set in the early 1930's. It is a delightful and charming mix of drama and comedy that earned four Academy Award nominations and propelled Frank Capra to the ranks of popular filmmakers. The Invisible Man is from an 1897 science fiction novella by H.G. Wells. One of the classic old horror/scifi movies from Universal Studios, The Invisible Man is among the original mad scientist films. It features special effects that still hold up surprisingly well. Each program also featured a Popeye cartoon and a cartoon advertisement In My Merry Oldsmobile.

This was the Society's first experiment with film and we learned that the Lincoln School Auditorium is a great venue for film and other events, and probably the finest auditorium in Winchester. The sound and presentation equipment is first class, while the facility itself has good sound, a sloped floor, and seats up to 300.

The Education and Program Committee is considering additional films for the fall programs using the Lincoln School Auditorium, or perhaps a "members only" film series in the Sanborn House.

Save the Date! Shhh...

by Sue Clark

Shhh...May 3, 2008. Save the date. Join us at a 1930's Speakeasy. Come to 15 High Street at 7:30 PM.

Take a trip back in time to when men were dapper, and women were dames. Slip on your swankiest glad rags. Cut the rug to the ultra-smooth jazz of the Louise Grasmere band. Indulge in exceptional hors d'oeuvres, desserts and a Martini bar. Wine, spirits and beer selection by Wine Country. Plan to mingle with some real characters. Enjoy an evening of surprises and suspense.

A great time in support of a great cause–the Sanborn House renovation project. Mum's the word–a donation of \$100 per person will get you in the door. For more information call 781-721-0135.

Vote NO on Movies!

Vote NO on Movies: How Winchester was protected from the ruination of its children, minds, morals, health, and safety, is the highlight of the May 13, 2008 Annual Meeting and Program. Ellen Knight will present a program on the great theater controversy in Winchester, which lasted from 1917 until the first theater opened in 1937.

"The Great Movie Fight would stand out in the minds of many townspeople as the single most bitter confrontation of the generation—and in a community well-known for not suffering in silence. It was a long hard battle that raised tempers, ruined dispositions, and ruptured friendships of many years' standing. When it was all over the town's first and only motion picture theater was established in a handsome structure on Main Street."*

The program will be preceded by the annual meeting and election of officers and directors.

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^{*} Bruce Winchester Stone, The History of Winchester, Massachusetts, Vol. II, p. 80

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Notices and Upcoming Events

Meetings Board Meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month (April 15, 2008, May 20, 2008, June 17, 2008),

7:30 P.M., in the Music Room, Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center.

Programs April 6, 2008, 5:00-8:00 P.M.: "Spring Pot Luck Dinner", Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center;

(Revised members and their guests only.

Schedule) May 3, 2008, 7:30-11:00 P.M., "1930's Speakeasy Party" for the benefit of the Sanborn House renovation project; Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center.

May 13, 2008, 7:30 P.M.: Annual Meeting and "Vote NO on Movies!" Program, Ellen Knight, Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center.

June 7, 2008; Town Day:

☐ Historical Trolley Tours (all day).

☐ Winchester Historical Society Booth (all day).

□ Strawberry Festival and Classic Car Show, 1:00-4:00 P.M., grounds of the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center.

Help Wanted The Winchester Historical Society has many volunteer opportunities, including:

☐ Managing Editor, *Black Horse Bulletin*

☐ Publisher, *Black Horse Bulletin*

Volunteers for the Education and Programs Committee

☐ Volunteers to help transcribe Archival Center handwritten inventories

□ Volunteers to help scan and catalog Archival Center collections

For more information, see the Society Web site (www.winchesterhistoricalsociety.org) or call the Winchester Historical Society (tel: 781-721-0135); for information about opportunities at the Archival Center, you can also contact the Center directly (tel: 781-721-7146; e-mail: archives@winchester.us).

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