

SCOTT HOUSE JOURNAL

‘A House of History’



A Historic House Becomes A House of History: That was the title of a commemorative publication for the opening of the Scott House as the home of the Ridgefield Historical Society in September 2002. It was a fall of celebration as Ridgefielders came to see the building on Sunset Lane, a beautiful New England saltbox.

“None of this would have been possible without the generosity of the hundreds of townspeople who came to the aid of this special cause and made it a reality. Now the circa 1714 Scott House proudly stands as a visual reminder for Ridgefield of the value and importance of our past,” wrote David W. Scott, president, and Jeanne Timpanelli, vice-president, of the Ridgefield Preservation Trust, which undertook the huge task of saving the Scott House.

In 2021, the Ridgefield Historical Society is beginning a year of celebration: marking the 20 years since our building found its new home and the reconstruction of the carefully deconstructed building began.

The story of the Scott House and the Ridgefield Historical Society reflects the vision of a group of Ridgefield residents who saw the value of preserving an old building, built by one of the town’s first settlers. It had once stood on Main Street, but was moved west to Catoonah Street in its later years and by 1999 was facing demolition. A brochure describing the plans for a new historical society in a reconstructed Scott House called the building “A Rare Survivor.”



The Scott House, above, as it was being rebuilt at its new site on Sunset Lane, and today with its distinctive red-painted cedar siding.



“Built around 1740, the Scott House was witness to the Battle of Ridgefield fought in 1777 and survived the Great Fire of 1895, which destroyed much of the town center. Originally located on Main Street, the Scott House is a rare surviving example of an early Colonial Saltbox in its initial form. In 1922 it was moved to 5 Catoonah Street to make room for a new commercial building. By 1999 — the only building of its period and style left in the central business district — it was threatened yet again by commercial expansion.”

Saving the House

“In an effort to save the building from demolition,” the fund-raising brochure continued, “a group of concerned citizens formed the Scott House Committee under the aegis of the Ridgefield Preservation Trust. Aided by a pledge from the building’s owner, the committee raised funds to dismantle the building, label and document each piece and store it for future reconstruction.

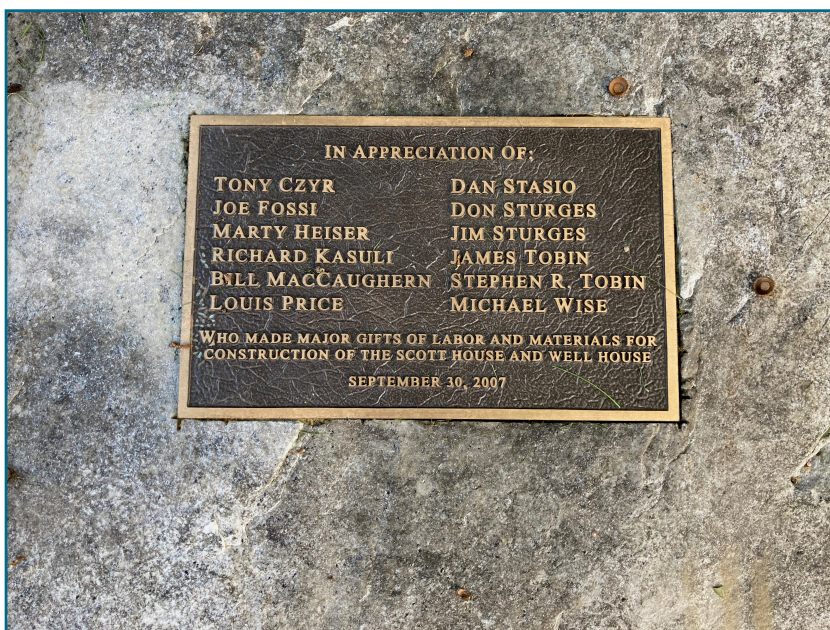
“In creating the Historical Society, Ridgefield has the opportunity to preserve the past in two ways: by saving a rare example of our early architecture and by establishing a safe and accessible repository for the wealth of materials associated with our town’s long history.”

The 2002 commemorative booklet described the beginnings of the effort to save the Scott House:

“By 1999, as plans for commercial expansion of the Main Street businesses developed, it became obvious that it was not economically feasible to renovate the Scott House for any further use. When James Tobin

approached the Addressi family about the possibility of preserving the structure, the family encouraged the idea, offered the first \$10,000 gift to save the house and subsequently gifted the structure itself.

“James Tobin, a descendant of the original Rockwell proprietor, joined forces with several other interested citizens. The group reactivated the



A plaque on the large stone slab under the Scott House’s huge old oak tree honors the Ridgefielders who donated time and talent to the rebuilding.

Ridgefield Preservation Trust, an organization long identified with preservation advocate Madeleine Corbin. With the first pledge of financial help from the Addressis, organizers Jeanne Timpanelli and David W. Scott (no relation to the original) began a three-year project that generated over \$700,000 needed to reconstruct the Scott House.

“The final question of a site for the building was answered by the Town of Ridgefield. Having recognized the need for a historical society in its 1999 Plan of Conservation and Development, the town, when approached by the Ridgefield Preservation Trust, agreed that the Scott House be reconstructed on town-owned land at the corner of Grove Street and Sunset Lane. By 2001, the funds were in place, the land was readied and the rebuilding began.”

In the years since 2002 and the opening of the Scott House, the Ridgefield Historical Society has established its place in the Ridgefield community. As the founders anticipated, “Encouraging historic preservation, collecting and cataloguing documentary materials, providing a data base, creating publications and exhibits, recording and transcribing oral histories,

Our Founders

The committee that envisioned saving the Scott House to become the home of a new Ridgefield Historical Society had its beginnings in the Ridgefield Archives Committee, formed by Jeanne Timpanelli and a small group of concerned people, who first met on May 12, 1990. Their goal at the time was to coordinate with organizations that wanted to collect and preserve written materials and photographs related to the history of Ridgefield. Kay Ables, now our Town Historian, became chairman in 1995.

When the Ridgefield Preservation Trust became inactive in 1996, its assets were turned over to the Archives Committee. When the threat of the Scott House demolition arose in 1999, the Trust reactivated and a committee formed to save the building. During the three and a half years it took to save and then reconstruct the building as the home of the Ridgefield Historical Society, the officers and board of the Ridgefield Preservation Trust were:

President: David W. Scott

Vice-President: Jeanne Timpanelli

Secretary: Wendy Erich

Treasurers: Georgianne Kasuli, Patricia Kearney

Board Members:

Kay Ables

Andrea Jabara

Lee Dickinson

Keith Jones

Walter Goodman

James Roberts

Linda Hannah

Kathryn Rosa

Leslie Ide

Patricia Stephens

Town Historian: Richard E. Venus

The first officers of the Ridgefield Historical Society (2002-2003) were:

President: Keith Jones

Vice President: Jeanne Timpanelli

Vice President: Kay Ables

Treasurer: Georgianne Kasuli

Recording Secretary: Michele Mahland

Corresponding Secretary: Lee Dickinson

and offering workshops and assistance to those interested in local history will keep volunteers at the Ridgefield Historical Society busy in the years to come. The dedicated work of the Archives Committee, Graveyard Committee and Town Historian will continue, along with individual research projects, all with the luxury of a new centralized home. The public will have easy access to history materials via modern technology. Genealogists or those interested in the story of their Ridgefield home will find the Ridgefield Historical Society an exciting place to start their research.”

In recent years, the Peter Parley Schoolhouse, a museum of Ridgefield's district schools that was developed by the Ridgefield Garden Club, has passed to the purview of the Historical Society, which now hosts Sundays at the Schoolhouse open houses seasonally,

New, historic challenges have arisen. The Covid-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 upended programming and use of the Scott House and the Schoolhouse, but led to a greatly expanded online presence and development of new skills by staff and volunteers as they met by Zoom and created a stream of YouTube videos and social media posts that captured townspeople's reactions to the suddenly changed Covid world. Simultaneously, a committee was gathering artifacts and documents and images of how the town dealt with the pandemic, part of a continuing approach to preserving town history as it happens. Programs that would have been offered in-person moved online, drawing participants from far beyond Ridgefield's borders.

In late 2019, before the pandemic took hold, the Ridgefield Historical Society was called upon to assist after the amazing discovery of ancient skeletons in the center of town. Staff and board members provided information to the state archaeologist as recovery of the remains occurred; early indications suggest these may be Battle of Ridgefield casualties. Laboratory studies were delayed by the pandemic, but have resumed and answers are expected in the coming year.

With interest in the Battle of Ridgefield heightened by the discovery, the Ridgefield Historical Society, encouraged by the State Historian and State Archaeologist and others, took on the major project of applying for a National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program grant. The proposal was approved in 2020 and lays the groundwork for continuing research into the April 27, 1777 fighting, which was the only major inland battle in Connecticut during the American Revolution. A team of professional researchers has been hired and has been working with volunteers from the Ridgefield Historical Society to establish the extent and effects of the battle.

The Ridgefield Historical Society relies on its dedicated staff and volunteers as it prepares for the next decades in service to exploring, preserving and sharing the story of Ridgefield. We invite fellow Ridgefielders and friends of Ridgefield to join us.



Town Historian Kay Ables and the late David Scott at a presentation at Scott House in October, 2019.

President's Message

Greetings,

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of the Scott House Journal and want to especially thank Sally Sanders for the wonderful summary of our organization's unique history.

As you know, we are celebrating our 20th anniversary this year by offering a robust schedule of events and programs. These programs will serve to not only commemorate our founders who had the foresight to officially establish the Historical Society in Ridgefield, but to also highlight the important work we continue to do today to further our mission to preserve our Town's history.

I want to also thank the 20th Anniversary Committee who have been working tirelessly prepping for our kickoff open house as well as many other upcoming events. It has been a delight to have so much activity and collaboration between staff, volunteers, and interns at the Scott House. We are lucky to have such a talented and dedicated team!

We invite you will join us in this year-long celebration and help us to pave the way for the next 20 years! Please check out our newly redesigned website for upcoming events.

TRACY SEEM

President, Ridgefield Historical Society



20th Anniversary Events

The Ridgefield Historical Society's year-long 20th anniversary celebration has started with our annual membership campaign in September and the kick-off afternoon celebration on Oct. 2 at the Scott House.

Historian Ed Hynes will present a webinar on Thursday, Oct. 28, at 7 p.m.: his topic will be The War on Long Island Sound During the American Revolution. (This program is co-presented with the Ridgefield Library.)

A series of craft-making programs will take place at the Peter Parley Schoolhouse on Sunday afternoons Nov. 7, 14, and 21, 1 to 3 p.m.

The popular Silhouettes program with artist Deborah O'Connor will return Saturday, Dec. 4, at the Scott House.

New this year, Holiday Traditions of the Scott House will be offered on Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 11 and 12.

The new LEGO Sculpture Contest will get underway in November, with entries due in January. Our subjects this year are the Scott House and the Peter Parley Schoolhouse on West Lane.

Save the Date: April 3 will bring a special fund-raising event for the Historical Society.

Many more community events are being planned for 2022. To be sure to receive information, please make sure you are signed up for our email list; visit ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org.

Ridgefield Historical Society

The Scott House, 4 Sunset Lane

203-438-5821

ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org

We are open by appointment only, Tuesday through Thursday, 1-5 pm.

Scott House COVID-19 policy: We ask that you wear a mask to enter and throughout your visit.

Find us on Facebook and Instagram: [#RidgefieldHistoricalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/RidgefieldHistoricalSociety)
and on YouTube: Ridgefield Historical Society