

# The Atwood Log

The Quarterly Newsletter of The Chatham Historical Society



CHATHAM LIGHTHOUSE CHALLENGE AWARDS RECEPTION



## From the Executive Director

Looking out on a winter wonderland with pristine fresh snow covering all I see, one might think it is time for a period of hibernation to set in at the Society and Museum. But no, the work – researching and filling requests for information, planning programs and exhibits for the new year, cataloguing new acquisitions, having paintings and other artifacts restored, doing year-end reports, searching for new volunteers, producing this issue of our newsletter, The Atwood Log, and more - is evidence of the year round activity at 347 Stage Harbor Road. There is always a project to do and many others waiting in line to claim attention.

The end of 2008 saw the celebration of annual holiday events at the Museum. The Annual Festival of Trees, hosted by the Society in partnership with the Chatham Garden Club, decorated the Special Exhibit Room with exquisite table-sized trees and wreaths fashioned by members of the Garden Club. The Society's own annual Hearth Warming Open House with fires on the three hearths in the Old House, hot cider and fancy homemade sweets attracted a steady, congenial stream of members and guests.

The annual historical projects created by Chatham students in elementary and middle school grades have been on display in recent weeks. The theme, Challenge of Chatham Light, is related to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chatham Lighthouse, celebrated throughout the summer and fall in Chatham. An award ceremony and reception was held for students, families and friends in January. More information on this program produced in partnership with the Chatham schools may be found on the following pages.

Recent donations to the collection of the Society include a spinning wheel from the Atwood family, three large steel toy trucks from the 1930s, dolls, doll clothes, and doll furniture from several members, and Pairpoint cup plates. Check inside for further information on these gifts.

Improving the signage that identifies and informs the viewer about items on display is another effort on which the staff and volunteers are focused. This past year the Mural Barn's Stallknecht exhibit was updated with new and corrected identification signs. The wall with biographical information was repainted and redesigned to incorporate Alice's own explanation of the murals; portraits of Alice and of benefactor Edith Seabury Nye now hang in frames matching those of the murals.

Progress is being made in the restoration of paintings and other framed works in the Society's collection needing, especially, acid free matting and backing and UV protective glass. Very few of the Society's watercolors, drawings, etc. have the protection necessary to maintain color tone and eliminate deterioration caused by use of acid materials in framing. Fortunately, the Society received a grant recently from the local Chatham Cultural Council of \$1550.00 to help continue this preservation project.

The 2008 Annual (formerly Special) Appeal has brought in over \$12,800 to date, for which we are very grateful. As the Appeal letter stated, these donations will go towards the conservation and preservation effort as well as assisting with other needs of the Society not covered by the regular budget. As are many other non-profit organizations, we are concerned about donations in this economic climate, and are especially grateful for your continuing concern, loyalty and generosity that enable the Society to strive to fulfill its mission to the people of Chatham and beyond. As you know, our membership year coincides with the calendar year. Renewal letters have been or will be mailed soon.

The new year always brings changes. We are losing some wonderful volunteers who have given so generously of their time and talents for many years: Betsey Stevens who has managed very well the whole volunteer program, Claire Kirby who with her committee has provided faithfully many a delicious reception, and Florine Myer who for twenty years has photographed and catalogued artifacts in the collections, managed the photograph and postcard collections, worked on exhibits, and graciously done whatever needed to be done. To all of these volunteers, an appreciative thank you for work well done. We are pleased to welcome Marjorie Hendel as Chairman of Volunteers and Cindy Knight as Hospitality Chairman. Won't you consider joining the volunteer cadre helping this important organization.

This is my last letter to you as, first, President and then Executive Director. It has been my pleasure to work in these capacities for the Society. Please see Spencer's letter for the good news about what happens next.

My best to you all,

*Cynthia B. McCue, Executive Director*



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## Much More Than a Store

It is hard to picture, walking down quiet Cotchpicut Road in North Chatham, that it was once a center of commerce that reached far beyond the town boundaries. In 1820, Thacher Ryder Jr. opened a store across the road from the house his father built and where he grew up (a portion of the original house remains and is currently owned by the Piscina family). He was 24 years old and recently married to Mercy Taylor. The store, which appears on the 1858 Barnstable County Atlas, is long gone; however, portions of the foundation may have been incorporated into the Victorian house and barn built on the property in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Rufus Nickerson, and now owned by Evelyn Doane.

Recently, in searching through museum storage, I found a box of old ledgers. One of the ledgers was from the North Chatham store covering the period July 26, 1830 through April 7, 1866. Reading the entries was an education for me, and is a fascinating look at how business was conducted in a small town of the period.

The store sold goods such as food – eggs, apples, limes, bread, meat, fish, spices, sugar, butter, coffee, wine, hard liquor, cloth, shoes, clothing, buttons, lace, thread, socks, powder and shot (guns), etc. However, there are also entries for brick, building materials (wood, nails, shovels), and large quantities of feed for livestock. Several entries refer to outfitting or repairing ships, most frequently the Schooners *Exit*, *Torch*, *Socrates* and *Thorn*.

Buying from the store and then paying back was an interesting process as hard cash was not always readily available. It was common to charge your purchases and then pay your bill later. Quite often, the bill was paid with food such as eggs, meat, fish/shellfish, honey or vegetables. Payment by large quantities of salt from nearby saltworks was often recorded. Shoemaker Abijah Crosby paid off his bill by providing shoes to sell. Dr. Elijah Carpenter paid by providing medical services to the Ryders. Comfort Eddy sewed her bill away by providing clothing. Others offered shoeing a horse, killing a cow or hog, ploughing a field, repairing a wagon, threshing wheat, scowing freight (moving goods from shore to ship), planing clapboards, or simply, as recorded for Jonathan Rogers, by doing 10 ¾ months of labor. A humorous entry was “left a boy until tomorrow.” One hopes he was a good worker!

Of interest were entries whereby an individual would pay someone else’s bill. For example, Joseph Young would work for Timothy Loveland, and Mr. Loveland then went to the store and paid a portion of Mr. Young’s bill in keeping with the amount of



*Artifacts found on the site of Ryder’s store, typical of merchandise that would have been sold there*

work he had performed. Bills were paid with deeds to pieces of land, parts of saltworks, shares of freight and shares of ships. In one entry, Clement Kendrick’s wages for his time on the Schooner *Torch* were used by his father - Clement Kendrick Sr. - to pay the family bill at the store. Bills would often run for several years before being paid in full or moved to another ledger, each



*Photo of North Chatham from early 1900s. The left of the two white structures in the background is believed to be the barn used for storage by Thacher Ryder.*

houses that he owned or rooms in his house. When Bethuel Nickerson went to sea not only did Thacher loan him \$100 for his trip to Boston but, for \$1.00 a week, Bethuel’s wife lodged with the Ryders while he was at sea. At the end of the voyage, Thacher paid Bethuel \$129.03 in wages for his work on the Brig *Chatham*, indicating in the entry that he, Thacher, owned a 3/32<sup>nd</sup> share in the ship. Such ownerships were a common entry in the ledger. Thacher appears to have owned shares of many different vessels, and often noted were payments out to people indicating that they owned some share of a particular ship. Alternatively, entries show that Thacher sold shares as he took in money for that purpose.

Intriguing and requiring further research are the entries that indicate that Thacher collected taxes – entries with “tax on woodland”, “tax for academy”, “by your share for the schoolhouse”, etc. There are also indications of land speculation and insurance that appear in the ledger. Among the entries was the Chatham Insurance Company; however, its main insurance purpose is not recorded. Land speculation was an active part of the ledger as were hand written agreements that were tucked between the pages. And the land was located in East Boston, Mass. and Milwaukee, Wis!

The Thacher Ryder store was one of the centers of the North Chatham community. It provided a place where people could not only purchase goods but also borrow cash and make investments. In an area where a bank or government assistance was not always at hand, where insurance was unavailable unless you did it yourself, where being a part of the larger economic community meant making your own speculative investments, Thacher Ryder did very well. He died in 1863 and is buried next to Mercy in People’s Cemetery. He left the store and all its goods to his son-in-law David Crowell.

*- Jean Young*

Jean Young, recently retired from secretarial work at Chatham Middle School, has been happily ensconced at the Historical Society reading ledgers. It was with great pleasure that she studied Thacher Ryder’s ledger as the Ryder House was owned by the Young family for 46 years.



*Sketch of the Thacher Ryder House in North Chatham, from Book II of the Old Chatham Houses Series, published by the Chatham Historical Society*

entry neatly kept by date and amount.

Much like a bank, Thacher Ryder also loaned people money for travelling or business. Often the reason for the loan was not given – it would read simply “cash” and give the amount. Ryder often collected money from people renting

## Recent Gifts to the Museum's Collection

Three large steel toy trucks were donated to the Society by Chatham resident Wayne Dimm in 2008: a red fire engine ladder truck, a Packard mail truck, and a cement mixer. Although the paint is worn, these trucks, similar to some you might have seen featured on the Antique Roadshow television program, are in excellent working condition. Wayne says he and his older brother played with the Buddy L trucks in the 1930s. Now transferred from the Dimms' attic, these beloved toys will become part of the 2009 Special Exhibit, "Chatham's Attic".

Many of you may recall the Pairpoint cup plates made around 1984 for the Society. The examples retained for our collection depict the Atwood House or a whelk or scallop in the center with the Society name around the rim, and are in blue, aqua, opaque white, or clear glass. The design with the Atwood House is listed in the catalog kept at the Pairpoint glass factory and show room in Bourne, and had a value of \$10.00 each about five years ago.

Just recently our collection of Pairpoint cup plates expanded by many fold and all of the donated cup plates are valued at more than \$10.00 each. Isabelle Dawson of Yarmouth, having systematically purchased the first editions of the first one hundred cup plates made by Pairpoint, has given the complete set plus eighteen additional Thornton Burgess cup plates to the Society. The colors of the glass are beautiful and, we are told, unique: subsequent productions used different colors.

As you may know, the collection of the Chatham Historical Society includes a rather limited number of items that came from the Atwood family. Two additions to this select and treasured group have been donated by Camille Ann Atwood, formerly of Chatham and now living in Norfolk, VA: a spinning wheel in excellent condition, dating to the eighteenth century, and a perfect white arrowhead, possibly made of quartz.

The arrowhead, given in memory of Camille's uncle, Sherrill Smith Atwood, is a welcome addition to the small collection of Native American artifacts owned by the Society. Of this new acquisition, Camille writes "This arrowhead was found by Sherrill Atwood sometime 1930-1940 in the bottom fields at 317 Stage Harbor Road. The home was formerly owned by Azubah Collings Atwood Mayo (1806-1886) and was originally part of the property of her grandfather Joseph Atwood (1720/21-1794) the builder of the 'Atwood House', now the location of the Chatham Historical Society".

The small oak spinning wheel probably dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a time when most households had one to spin wool

into yarn or flax into thread. It belonged to Azubah Collings Atwood Mayo, wife of Elnathan Mayo (1799-1859). It likely was also used by Azubah's mother, (also) Azubah Collings (1760-1832) who married Sears Atwood (1761-1832), son of Joseph Atwood (1720/21-1794) and Deborah Sears (1722-1796), the original occupants of the Atwood House now in the Society's care. Camille has given the spinning wheel to the Society in honor of her grandmothers, the two Azubahs who represent two generations from the past. The spinning wheel will sit on the hearth in the South Parlor of the Atwood House.



*Atwood Family Spinning Wheel  
Gift of Camille Atwood*

Recent gifts of dolls, doll clothes and doll furniture are awaiting attention from our busy Costume and Textile volunteers. The Archival center regularly receives many donations of old records, family histories, maritime papers, photographs, and more, which are sorted, organized, catalogued, and preserved in acid free boxes, then stored in climate controlled conditions. The Archives may be searched via computer. Inquiries for information about Chatham's history and past residents are welcome.

*Cynthia B. McCue*

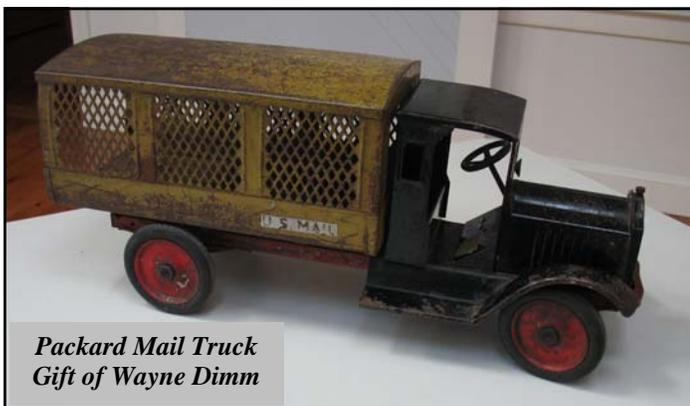
## SHOP AT HOME

Too blustery to go outside?  
You can browse our Museum Store page at  
[www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org)  
to select a great book on Chatham history.

We'll send it right out to you.  
Order from your Museum shop by website,  
by phone (508) 945-2493, or e-mail us at  
[chathamhistoricalsociety@verizon.net](mailto:chathamhistoricalsociety@verizon.net).

Supporting your Museum Shop is a  
smart thing to do, and it  
benefits the work of the Society!

Snuggle up to a great book!



*Packard Mail Truck  
Gift of Wayne Dimm*

## 2009 Special Exhibit

*June 2 - October 31*



Treasures long-packed away come to light in our 2009 exhibit, entitled "Chatham's Attic." The title is borrowed from an article by Margot Russell in the 2004 summer edition of the magazine Inside Cape Cod.

Since the winter's day in 1923 when six members of the Chatham Ladies Reading Club decided to preserve Chatham's history, founding the Chatham Historical Society, and acquiring the old Atwood house for a museum, members, residents and friends have generously donated to the Society (and continue to donate!) all manner of objects and print material relating to our town's history.

Many of these items have not been exhibited for years, if ever. The retro-fitting of the basement area has provided much needed museum-quality storage space and, thanks to volunteers Dwight and Florine Myer and members of the Costume and Textile and Archives Committees, artifacts, clothing and print materials have been unpacked, sorted, catalogued and stored, waiting to be displayed!

The objects of this eclectic collection have many tales to tell. We look forward to sharing them with the public.

*Mary Ann Fritsch, Galleries & Display*

## *The Challenge of Chatham Light: A History Project for Chatham Students*

For the third successive year, the Society has offered a packaged history project to classes in the elementary and middle schools. Our Education Chair, Richard Curcio, has taken a theme from a Museum exhibit or event of the year and developed an adaptable curriculum with choices of projects related to that theme for each grade level. In the process of planning, choosing and executing the projects, the students are exposed to historical times, events, and figures from Chatham's past. The completed projects are brought to the museum where they are exhibited in the Special Exhibit Gallery during December and January. At a January reception at the Museum for the students, families, and friends, certificates of participation designed by Margaret Martin, Society Administrator, are awarded to the elementary students. The upper grades receive certificates along with prizes for First, Second, Third and Honorable Mention. The prizes are gift certificates to local bookstores.

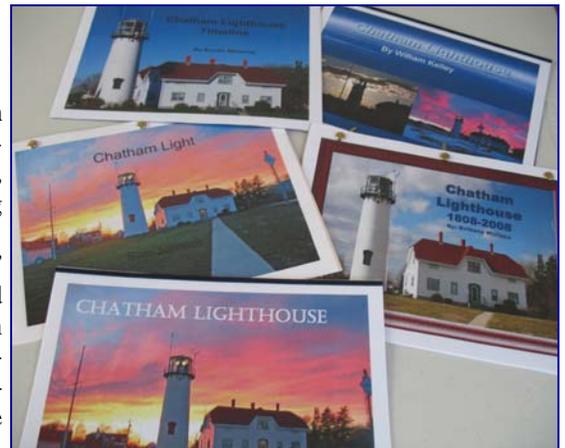
This year a logical choice for the theme was the celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chatham Light. It was a voluntary program with the teachers choosing whether to participate as a class or encourage individual students to do the work at home. More than one hundred students from grades two through eight submitted projects including lighthouse models, poems, time lines, and booklets. The awards ceremony was held Friday, January 23 from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm, with delicious goodies provided by our new Hospitality Chairman, Cindy Knight.

Richard Curcio, former principal of Cape Cod Regional Technical High School, already is thinking about the theme for next fall's student history project. One source of ideas is the annual Special Exhibit. Opening in June, "Chatham's Attic" will have a children's section that might suggest challenging possibilities.

Also during the summer, the Society offers a "Mondays at the Museum" eight week program for children. This year Richard has promised to devise and present the programs with the help of Stephanie Hamilton, former kindergarten teacher. Loaded with the enthusiasm and teaching skills that these Society volunteers possess, the programs teach while offering activities and fun at the Museum. More information will follow in the Spring issue of this newsletter, The Atwood Log.



*Second grade projects - lighthouse models made from recycled water bottles*



*Power Point entries for the Challenge of the Chatham Light history projects*

*Cynthia B. McCue*

*Cover photographs taken at the Awards ceremony*

## *Class on Organizing and Preserving your Family's Historical Papers* Offered again by request



*Organizing and preserving family papers with appropriate care*

**T**his single session class was well received last year and is again available at two different times. Sign up for the date that fits your schedule.

**Dates:**

March 11, 2008 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM

March 25, 2008 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM

**Cost:** \$40.00 per person (non members)

\$35.00 per person (members)

This is an introductory class to explain the steps required in developing a family history. Most of the class time will be dedicated to methods of sorting, arranging, and preserving the paper/manuscript portion of the items collected to develop a family history. Participants will receive a kit containing basic preservation materials to be used in starting this process. It is suggested that each person bring to class some of the family papers that he/she has collected in order to begin arrangement

and documentation of those papers.

At the conclusion of either program, the participant will understand basic steps for

creating a family history, and be able to sort and arrange documents etc. for creating a family history. Participants also will know the various methods for storing and preserving paper documents/manuscripts used in creating a family history.

The instructor is Mary Ann Gray, Volunteer Archivist, Chatham Historical Society. Mary Ann holds a Masters degree in Library Science and a Certificate in Museum Studies.

Because class size is limited to twelve participants, pre-registration is required.

**To register for either session, please call the museum at 508 945-2493 between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm Monday through Friday.**

## *Archival Volunteers*

**A**s they have done in the past, members of the American Heritage Department of the Chatham Woman's Club have been volunteering in the Archives during the months of January and February. This year their major project has been to photocopy onto archival paper, the newspaper clippings in our archival files. Newspaper clippings,

with their very high acidic level, can cause damage to any papers with which they come in contact. For this reason, we are embarking on a project to copy all of our clippings stored in manuscript boxes to prevent that damage from occurring.

Other members of the group have spent their time filing catalogued folders into the correct boxes, so that others may use them in their research about Chatham. We greatly appreciate the time that has been donated by the American Heritage Department

## *Our Library*

**D**o you know where the Society's library is? Have you visited this pleasant room filled with books, old and new, pamphlets, reports, and comfortable chairs and a table? The collection of more than 1400 volumes feature titles relating to Chatham, such as history, biography, architecture, flora and fauna, maritime events and activities, and way of life. Also on the shelves are volumes of descriptive information relating to artifacts found in the museum collections, family histories and memoirs, publications by Chatham authors, and more. A recent addition to the collection written by William Sargent, speaker at the January lecture at the museum, is a book about horseshoe crabs, Crab Wars. Two other titles by Sargent, The Storm Surge, and Shallow Waters: A Year on Cape Cod's Pleasant Bay are also in the library. Other recent additions include titles on wicker furniture and Jennifer Stello's stunning book of photographs of Chatham.

Books are arranged by subject alphabetically, on the wall next to the door, with a helpful index in a red binder. On the opposite wall are located family genealogies, Town Reports, pamphlets, and a collection of Bibles.

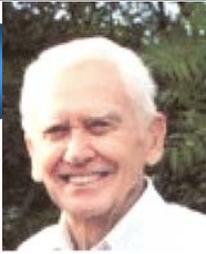
The Chatham Town Reports are missing the years 1941 and 2006. If you have a copy from either of these years to donate and help us complete our coverage, it would be most appreciated. Copies can be dropped off at the office any time Monday through Friday between the hours of nine and one.

Members of the Society may use the library on site during regular office hours. Non-members may have access to the library with permission. Many books do not circulate and nothing may be removed from the shelves without permission of museum staff.

*Cynthia B. McCue*



*Volunteers from Chatham Woman's Club American Heritage Department, left to right, Winnie Everett, Betsey Stevens, Peg Flynn, and Edee Crowell, making photocopies from the newspaper clipping files and filing catalogued folders.*



## *From the Chairman*

# *Introducing our New Executive Director*

In October of 2007 our Governance and Nominating Committee was directed by the Executive Board to seek candidates for the position of full-time executive director of the Society and its museum. Between then and June of 2008, the Committee considered applications from 18 applicants and interviewed three, but while qualified to varying degrees, no one of them seemed to conform fully to our needs.

Consequently in July of 2008 we suspended our search and appointed our then President, Cynthia McCue, as a part-time paid Executive Director to continue her fine work of administering the Society and the Museum until such time as we were able to hire a full-time Director. Even though she feared that being Executive Director might require more time than being President, Cynthia nevertheless accepted the position and approached it with her characteristic efficiency, enthusiasm, and effectiveness. Because of her fine spirit, hard work, and total dedication, the Society and the Museum have flourished under her leadership.

In late September of 2008, however, Mark Wilkins, Executive Director and Curator of the Cape Cod Maritime Museum, asked me if we still were looking for an Executive Director, as he was interested in finding another position. Having seen Mark's work at that museum over the past several years, I believed he was a candidate that the Committee would wish to investigate, and they concurred. The committee invited Mark to submit his CV, and consequently during the next two months they had three lengthy interviews with him. In early December the members of the Committee agreed unanimously that he fully meets our requirements and consequently proposed to the Executive Board at their January meeting that we hire Mark to become our Executive Director and Curator beginning on March 1, 2009.



**Mark Wilkins, incoming Executive Director of the Chatham Historical Society**

After graduating in 1986 from Washington University in St. Louis, MO, with a BFA in Painting/Art History, Mark worked for three years as an Exhibits Specialist at the National Museum of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution, during which period he mounted six major exhibits. Following that he was employed by Archeo-Tech, Commercial Archeology Consultants. From 1996 to 2000 he was the Department Head for Furniture Design and Boat Building at Peters Valley Craft Education Center in New Jersey. For the next four years he operated M.C. Wilkins Studios at which he fabricated museum-quality ship models on commission from many Museums on the East Coast.

In 2004 he was hired to develop the newly established Cape Cod Maritime Museum in Hyannis, MA. Within a few years he created an outstanding small maritime museum featuring professional and engaging exhibits dealing with maritime history on Cape Cod. During most of those years, Mark and I were on the Board of the Cape & Islands Historical Association, enabling me to become familiar with his skills as a museum director.

Mark has established a professional relationship with the New England Museum Association and is familiar with many of the historical societies and museums in our area. In his previous position he developed valuable contacts with museums throughout New England. In addition, he has published journal articles and books in his field and has become a well-known lecturer. He also has had experience seeking grant opportunities and writing grant applications. Currently he is enrolled in Graduate Studies in American History at Harvard University as a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts.

With his experience and skills, we are convinced that as our full-time Executive Director and Curator, Mark Wilkins will take the Chatham Historical Society and its Atwood House Museum to the next level of excellence and prominence, and we are pleased to welcome him to Chatham.

*Spencer Y. Grey*

### Board of Overseers

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Compton Allyn  
Edward C. Collins, II  
Bernard Cornwell  
Carolyn Yeaw Coursen  
Robert C. Eldred  
William G. Litchfield  
Joshua A. Nickerson, Jr.  
David R. Oakley  
Norman S. Portenoy  
Eugene M. Schott

## *Watch for our change of mailing address.*

We have been noticing that pieces of incoming mail are frequently too large to fit in our post office box without bending or folding. Sometimes the box contents are so packed in that it is difficult to remove the items. The solution appears to be a larger box. This will entail a change of box number. We will use up most of the stationary on hand before making the change, but we expect it to happen some time in the next few months. The post office will forward mail to the new box for at least six months. We will provide members with the new box number when the change takes place.



**Remains of the Sparrow Hawk, shipwrecked off Cape Cod in 1626. Mark Wilkins, incoming Executive Director, presented a lecture about this ship wreck at the Society on February 8, 2009.**

### Mission Statement

*The mission of the Chatham Historical Society is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, decorative arts, artifacts, archives, and places of historical interest relating to the history of Chatham and vicinity; and in so doing provide a record of the cultures and the people of our past and thereby inform and educate succeeding generations.*

347 Stage Harbor Road  
PO Box 381  
Chatham, MA 02633

On the Web: [www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org)

## Mark Your Calendars

Coming up at The Chatham Historical Society & Atwood House Museum

### Afternoons at the Atwood Lecture Series

All lectures take place at 2 pm at The Atwood House Museum, 347 Stage Harbor Road.

Donations appreciated.

#### Sunday February 8, 2009

**Mark Wilkins:** *The Wreck of the Sparrow Hawk*

#### Sunday March 8, 2009

**Elizabeth Friend-Coogan:** *History of American Folk Art*

#### Sunday April 26, 2009

**Bob Zaremba:** *Mapping and Charting Cape Cod*

### Single Session Preservation Class Offered

Wednesday March 11, 2009 or Wednesday March 25, 2009,

6:30 to 8:30 pm

*Organizing and Preserving Your Family Papers*

A fee will be charged and will include a kit of beginning supplies. See article inside.

### Coming in May: National Preservation Month

Program to be announced.

House Tour Saturday, May 16, 2009

