

Keeper of town's memory deserves support

By **Susan G. Larkin**

Thank you for recognizing the Greenwich Historical Society as "an absolute gem and an integral part of the culture of this town." In your editorial of Feb. 12, you also raised the question whether a grant to the Historical Society, as proposed in First Selectman Peter Tessei's budget, would open the door to other funding requests. Such funding, which you conceded is "hard to knock," would not set a precedent for other organizations because the valuable services the Historical Society provides to the town are not duplicated by any other organization. The Historical Society enhances the community in many ways, but it is our contributions in the areas of education and archives that make the GHS justly deserving of town financial support.

The Greenwich Historical Society brings the past to life for the future of our community, our children. Young people studying slavery visit the slave quarters in Bush-Holley House, the town's only National Historic Landmark.

In the archives, they marvel at a document recording the sale of a 3-year-old boy by Nathan Merritt of Greenwich in 1796, and another, dated 1800, in which Benjamin Lyon of this town freed a woman named Peg. When they study the Civil War, they read the ink-spattered diaries and letters of soldiers in the field. No textbook, DVD or computer program can match the power of these primary objects. We offer the thrill of the real in the age of the virtual.

More than 9,000 students benefit from such experiences each year. In 2008, the Historical Society enrolled 4,000 Greenwich students in its education programs and another 5,000 in after-school and family programs. In a successful new partnership with Hamilton Avenue School, last year we provided a history and art program that culminated in an exhibition of students' artwork and tours of Bush-Holley House led by student docents.

Our collections support Greenwich High School A.P. American History classes and the Greenwich High School/Yale University summer institute for the study of the



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Greenwich Historical Society Director of Education Marybeth Nisco leads a Feb. 17 drawing workshop utilizing collections related to Greenwich naturalist and illustrator Ernest Thompson Seton, who was a founder of the Boy Scouts of America 100 years ago.

abolition of slavery. In 2008, the Historical Society hosted, in collab-

oration with Colonial Williamsburg Teachers Institute, a conference

for 40 teachers from the Greenwich public schools.

In addition to its unique role in the public education system, GHS preserves important documents for the town of Greenwich. Our archives consolidate in one publicly accessible place field cards, tax assessor records, street cards, census listings, minutes of various committees, plot plans, survey maps, land records, probate records and personal property assessments. Our archivist assists researchers referred by the tax assessor, Planning and Zoning officers, the Parks and Recreation Department, Historic District Commission, and other town agencies.

As stated in an earlier editorial in these pages, the Greenwich Historical Society is truly the guardian of the town's sense of self. We are the keepers of the community's memories — memories that continue to this moment. Town funding would sustain our ability to provide the unique services the community has come to expect from us.

Susan G. Larkin is chairman of the Greenwich Historical Society.