

Annual Report 2023



From the Executive Director

Dotting my office are keepsakes from my career—gifts from past colleagues, artwork created at museum programs, and all sorts of other bits and bobs collected along the way. I often look at these items, remembering what came before, but also dreaming about what lies ahead.

As a history organization it only seems natural that we also spend time reflecting on the past while looking to the future. Thinking back on 2023, it was certainly a year of excitement, change, and new beginnings at the Litchfield Historical Society (LHS). After more than three decades of service, Cathy Fields stepped away from the helm—earning a well-deserved retirement. While the impact of her efforts undoubtedly shaped the organization over her thirty plus years of work, the legacy she left will continue to feed LHS for many years going forward.

During this time of transition, the LHS board of trustees, led by President Rosie Furniss, showed unwavering support to the entire staff team. I could not have asked for a more supportive governing body during my onboarding process and as I've continued to settle into the organization and community. Likewise, I could not have asked for a warmer welcome from the community. From quick “hellos” in the post office, to more in-depth conversations, each of you have made my spouse and I feel right at home.

Looking beyond the leadership transition, 2023 was a great success for LHS due to the support of many individuals, businesses, and supporters. With your continued commitment, staff have shared new stories and perspectives of Litchfield's history. Through exhibits, programs, events, and research tools, the LHS team continues to provide many ways for our community to connect to one another and explore our shared past in all its many facets.

In the following pages you'll hear directly from team members as they share their perspective on the achievements of 2023. At the same time, you can be confident that we are looking to the future. With your support, we have great things in store for 2024 and beyond. LHS is excited for its next chapter—a chapter that you can be assured will place you, our community, at the heart of all we do.

With many thanks,



Jessica Jenkins
Executive Director



**LHS Staff recreate Lucy Sheldon's
*Hop Picking***

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April 2023 Annual Meeting

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Visitor Services Coordinator

Sean Kunic

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LHS Staff at the Opening of *To Come to a Land of Milk and Honey*

Staff Update - Linda Hocking



Linda Hocking
Archivist, C.A.

Like most of our staff, I spent the start of 2023 working on the Western Reserve exhibition, doing final research, labels, and converting an online bartering activity developed by an intern using the Boardman ledgers to an in-person hands-on activity for the gallery. Alex and I spoke about the exhibition on the *Connecticut Explored* podcast with Mary Donohue.

Early in the year, I gathered letters of support and submitted nominations to the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO) to acknowledge Catherine K. Fields for her years of service to the history community and to the Litchfield Historical Society. We were pleased that she was awarded both a 2023 Award of Merit for Individual Achievement from CLHO and a 2023 Award of Excellence for Individual Achievement from AASLH.

In April, I submitted a grant application to Connecticut Humanities to hire Erin Richardson of Frank & Glory to help us create a Collection

Development Plan. The grant was awarded in June. Erin worked to investigate and research the Society's collecting history; meet with stakeholders including those who do not yet see LHS as a place for them; meet with allied collecting organizations; and review literature. She began with a site visit and has continued to work with staff to develop the plan, which was finalized and approved in February of 2024. It will assist staff, the Collections Committee, and Board of Trustees with decisions about how to add to and remove from our collections so that they best reflect the mission and values of the Historical Society.

The Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library continues to serve both in-person and remote researchers. Many located our finding aids and requested materials to assist with their genealogy projects and house histories. Other researchers asked about a wide range of topics, including Revolutionary War Soldiers; Litchfield's population of enslaved and free African Americans; the Shepaug depot; the Litchfield Law School; the Litchfield Female Academy; Lilac Hedges; and Connecticut State Parks.

The library is also an important contributor to field trips and tours. We have seen an increase in teachers interested in using our resources to teach primary source literacy and research skills. During 2023, Kate and I worked with the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies to develop a field trip for Asian American Studies students that focuses on the Cornwall Mission School. The first group of students visited this winter.

Processing archivist Leith Johnson spent a considerable portion of the year arranging and describing the Litchfield Historical Society institutional records. Over 100 years of the Historical Society's history was spread among our offices, in archival storage, and on our servers. Leith worked to bring it all together in a logical way and create a finding aid that researchers and staff can access. Recently, we used it to locate records of our 2003 exhibition on modern architecture.

In addition to our Historical Society duties, we often participate in professional service. I continue as a member of the State Historical Records Advisory Board and served as a member of the Society of American Archivists Management Section Steering Committee. I attended the Spring meeting of New England Archivists in March and participated in the New England State Historical Advisory Boards Summit. In June, I was elected to a three-year term as a member of the ArchivesSpace Governance Board as a representative for the Very Small Level of membership. I participated in a Forum on Reparative Archival Description at the Yale Library in June, and I attended the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in August where I presented at the ArchivesSpace Forum.



Processing Archivist
Leith Johnson

Staff Update - Alex Dubois



Alex Dubois
Curator

In the curator's office, 2023 was the end of an era. I have worked at the Litchfield Historical Society for just over eight years, and for nearly half of that time, I have been working on our Western Reserve project. After years of intensive research, three different grants, and countless exhibit and advisor meetings, the Society opened *To Come to a Land of Milk and Honey: Litchfield and the Connecticut Western Reserve* in April 2023. As the show took shape in the early spring, the staff finally saw our designs, displays, and interactives fully realized and brought together into a cohesive and immersive exhibit experience. *To Come to a Land of Milk and Honey* has allowed us to create moments of relevance and meaning for visitors both in person and online, assisted by a new virtual exhibit model and a series of hybrid programs funded by a Connecticut Humanities grant.

Influenced both by the COVID-19 pandemic and our efforts to refine our collecting practices, the number of annual acquisitions to the Society's collections has been on a downward trend. While fewer in number, these

acquisitions are helping us to tell new and powerful stories. At the end of last year, we purchased two drawings by artist LaGardo Tackett at auction. Previously unrepresented in our collections, Tackett was an artist, designer, and ceramicist who moved to the village of Milton in 1971 and hung a solo exhibition of drawings at the Oliver Wolcott Library in 1976. Our newly acquired drawings were likely part of the 1976 exhibition.

Through a generous object donation by Judith and Richard Abuza, the Society acquired an 18th-century hope chest from the Peck family of Litchfield. Representing one of the oldest pieces in our museum collection, the chest was owned by Lois Peck (1732-1819) and was likely used to collect and store items before her marriage to John Osborn in 1751. Both Lois and her husband are buried in Litchfield's West Cemetery. With a simple but elegant carved front, the hope chest is one of the few objects we can use to document life in our town before the era of the American Revolution.

Another important acquisition was made through the generosity of an anonymous donor, who funded the purchase of a tall case clock by local craftsman Asa Hopkins (1779-1838). Asa Hopkins crafted clocks in the Northfield section of Litchfield alongside his nephew and shop partner, Orange Hopkins. By the 1830s, Asa swapped clocks for flutes and other woodwind instruments, laying the foundation for a village industry that became known as Fluteville. This acquisition is the Society's only complete example of an Asa Hopkins clock.

The past year also provided me with multiple opportunities to work alongside partners in the Litchfield community. As our town, the state, and the nation prepare to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, the Society joined other partners as part of Litchfield's Coordinating Committee for America's 250th. The Society held a kickoff event in September to share our available historical resources and discuss upcoming 250th exhibits in 2025 and 2026. Regular committee meetings organized by the Litchfield Patriots have allowed the Society to remain connected to these important discussions as we move closer to 2026.

As a representative of the Historical Society, I have also served on the Beecher Memorial Preservation Committee of the Litchfield Patriots. Bringing together representatives from different nonprofits and organizations in our town, the committee has spent two years planning the restoration, conservation, and relocation of the Beecher Memorial on Litchfield's East Green, which had suffered significant cosmetic and structural deterioration. The committee hopes to complete the project in 2024, when a restored memorial will once again mark the important contributions of the Beecher family.



LaGardo Tackett Drawing
Museum Purchase

Staff Update - Kate Zullo



Kate Zullo
Head of Education

I keep a file on my desk of ideas for educational programs. The ideas come from many sources — some are shared with me by community members, others are from conversations during a staff meeting, or seeing what other museums are doing. One thing is certain — there is no shortage of great program ideas! The hard part is deciding what programs to prioritize, and how to grow our educational mission with limited staff time and resources.

My focus for the first half of the year was the successful opening and associated programming of our new exhibit on the Connecticut Western Reserve. The Western Reserve exhibit is the most interactive exhibit I have had a part in. With seven interactive activities for visitors, our staff was really challenged to think outside the box about how we wanted to share information in non-traditional ways. The large hands-on activities went through multiple testing rounds, and I am especially proud every time I see a family playing and having fun in the gallery. A lecture series accompanied the opening of the exhibit, in which we brought

three incredible speakers to Litchfield to give contextual information about westward expansion. By hosting the lectures both in-person and on Zoom we were able to reach audiences in Ohio and beyond.

In addition to the educational programs we organize for the public, over 35% of the programs we facilitate are requested programs. Every year, senior centers, schools, affinity groups, and families contact the Historical Society to arrange programs for their group. During the pandemic, many of these groups could not visit and our requested programs dropped. Finally, we are seeing more and more organizations reach out to plan educational programs with us and streamlining the scheduling and delivery of these programs has been one of my priorities this year. These programs can vary from a lecture given at a senior center to a series of visits from a homeschool co-op, to a private tour of the museum for an office team-building outing. Lead Interpreter Sue Weston has stepped up to lead museum tours on weekends, allowing us to accommodate more requests for weekend programs.



Museum Guides Marilyn and Ailyn Tiul lead a sensory activity during summer camp

The educational programs we plan with the schools are the heart of our program development. Lately, we have been contacted by several teachers looking to incorporate more primary sources and research skills into their lesson plans. Designing new school programs is a lengthy process and takes a lot of collaboration between myself, our archivist, and our curator, but responding to changing classroom needs has allowed us to keep our school programs relevant and valued by teachers.

While this coming year's calendar is already full of school programs, Sunday lectures, tours of the Historic District, garden programs, summer camps, community events, and more, I have saved room for a little spontaneity — so if you have any great program ideas, let me know!



**Litchfield Center School
Summer Kickoff**

Staff Update - Sean Kunic



Sean Kunic
Visitor Services Coordinator

To say 2023 was a busy year would be an understatement. Opening a major exhibition, coupled with saying farewell to our longtime leader and welcoming a new addition to the team, brought exciting changes to the Historical Society.

Funding from Connecticut Humanities allowed us to expand our marketing for *To Come to a Land of Milk and Honey*. This contributed to the high level of exhibit visitation, but also the success of our corresponding lecture series. Hosted simultaneously in-person and online, we were able to engage not only local attendees, but those interested in the Connecticut Western Reserve from Ohio and beyond. You can access recordings of these lectures from anywhere on the Litchfield Historical Society YouTube channel. Now hosting several years' worth of lectures, historical crafts, and inside looks at the collection, our viewers watched nearly 550 hours of content created by the Historical Society.

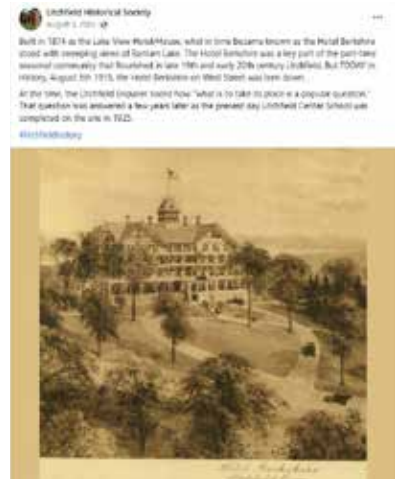
Through the efforts of many and fortunate timing around a thunderstorm, the Fall Fundraiser was a wonderful night in the Tapping Reeve Meadow. Thank you to Vernon DePauw, Clare Cullinane, Kathleen Cullinane, Kate Honan, Rosie Furniss, Ace Hardware of Litchfield, and J. McLaughlin of Litchfield for donating items for our auction and to Tom Curran for being our live auctioneer for the evening.

I am always grateful for the kindness and generosity of our volunteers. Providing a friendly welcome to visitors to the Litchfield History Museum, our front desk volunteers are the face of the organization during the week. Behind the scenes, we have dedicated volunteers contributing to projects in the archives, lending a helping hand at our fundraisers, and stepping into important roles at large community events. From set up and coordination, to scanning and research, the work we do is made possible by our amazing volunteers. I want to give special appreciation to Rosie Furniss for her exceptional dedication as Board President. Rosie spearheaded the organization's efforts to celebrate Cathy's retirement in June, is instrumental in coordinating our annual Fall Fundraiser, and has invested time above and beyond into the Historical Society.

If you do not already, one of the best ways to stay up to date on the Litchfield Historical Society is to follow us on social media! More than just posts about upcoming events, you'll be the first to learn about new items to the collection, our work with the community, plus facts and gems from Litchfield history. Our social media presence has only grown over the past year, with our online reach growing dramatically. Compared to 2022, our posts reached an additional 20,000 accounts across Facebook and Instagram.

Not on social media? Our weekly Eblasts are a great way to stay in touch with upcoming events and the latest news. Or check out the Litchfield Historical Society blog with posts contributed by staff and research volunteers. Topics range widely, inspired by new research, upcoming exhibits, and items and themes found during routine work at the museum. New content is added regularly, and the blog has over a decade of posts if you're looking to dive into Litchfield history.

The opportunity to be involved in so much of what happens at the Litchfield Historical Society is the most rewarding aspect of my job. It gives me so many chances to engage with the Litchfield community and make history meaningful to all who join us at the museum. I look forward to what next year brings!



One of our most popular posts on Facebook

Exhibits on Display

Imagine taking Connecticut's northern and southern borders and extending them west to the Pacific Ocean. Under the terms of a royal charter given to the colony in 1662, Connecticut was to stretch from the "Narraganset-Bay on the East, to the South Sea on the West Part." Following the model of other states, Connecticut gave most of its claimed land over to the federal government in 1786, but it "reserved" a territory in the northeast of present-day Ohio for its continued use and settlement. This became the Connecticut Western Reserve.

To Come to a Land of Milk and Honey: Litchfield and the Connecticut Western Reserve tells the story of the Reserve's lasting legacy and the experiences of the men, women, and children affected by westward migration.



**TO COME TO
A LAND
OF MILK
AND HONEY**

**LITCHFIELD AND THE
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Scan here to take a virtual tour
of *To Come to a Land of
Milk and Honey*

Exhibits on Display

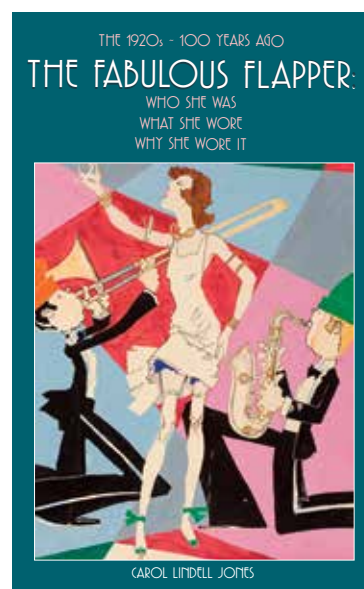
Ready for the Call: The Red Cross in Litchfield

examined the history of Red Cross activity in Litchfield through photographs, documents, uniforms, and posters. Formed in 1898 and active for over a century, the Litchfield Chapter of the American Red Cross provided valuable services to residents of our town and neighboring communities in both times of war and peace.

Ready for the Call shared the stories of the dedicated volunteers who made this work possible and acted, in the words of one volunteer, “in the best Red Cross tradition.”



Curatorial Volunteer Carol Jones prepares a dress with Curator Alex Dubois



Five *Fabulous Flapper* dresses brought a bit of the Roaring Twenties to the Liggett Gallery. Former LHS Board Member and Curatorial Volunteer Carol Jones and Curator Alex Dubois showed off examples of the Jazz Age from our textile collection.

Student Programs

Our school programs are designed for students to develop the skills to research and understand history, specifically how their town fits into larger national and global stories. Last year, nearly 1000 students took part in school programs ranging from play-based programs for pre-school students to moot court cases for high school students. As the Litchfield Public schools consolidate into Region 20, the Litchfield Historical Society is excited to continue to provide the highest quality of experiential learning for all the students in our community.



In the Spring, Litchfield's first graders are introduced to the role of museums in their community and spend time exploring and getting to know the Litchfield History Museum.



We hire local high school students for paid positions as Museum Guides. The face of the museum, they gain valuable experience while becoming experts in their town's history.



All Litchfield Center School students visit in October to see Scarecrows in the Meadow.



After-school *Cursive Club* made possible by a grant from the Litchfield Education Foundation.



Litchfield 6th grade class visits for a day-long program about westward expansion organized by Social Studies Teacher Shelly Hill.



The Society is grateful for the generosity of Northwest Community Bank for sponsoring Litchfield Public School programs.

New to the Museum and Archives

The Litchfield Historical Society occasionally purchases items from auctions, antique dealers, and private donors, but the majority of the collections are given to us through the generous donations of local patrons. It is through this continued patronage that the collections are able to grow. With each donation the Litchfield Historical Society is able to improve its interpretation of Litchfield's past and present through exhibits, programs, and research.

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**Litchfield Law School
Student Notebook kept
by Thomas Flournoy,
1797-98
Museum Purchase**



***Fish Story* by Austin Purves
Acrylic on Canvas Board
Donated by Lis Tamarkin**



**Stereograph Photo of Litchfield Train Station
Museum Purchase**



**Hope chest (18th-century) from
the Peck family
Donated by Judith and Richard Abuza**

Our Donors

Your support provides us with the resources to fulfill our mission of illuminating the rich and nationally-significant history of Litchfield. These contributions, given through the Annual Appeal, Give Local Campaign, and Membership Dues, help support our day-to-day operations and provide so much for our community.

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Knit Nights: Social Knitting Group with Alexandra Herst

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Love in Litchfield Lantern Tour

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**Lead Interpreter
 Sue Weston**

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Litchfield Prevention Council



The Clothes Tree

Fall Fundraiser

Live music, hors d'oeuvres, a signature cocktail, and good company came together in the Tapping Reeve Meadow in September. Despite a rainy forecast, the weather held for the event and it was well attended. Guests stayed dry under the tent while the Meadow provided the perfect backdrop when the weather cleared. Highlights from the evening include a signature cocktail by the Litchfield Distillery and a live auction of items donated for the event.



Hand-Carved Lincoln Campaign Eagle donated by Vernon DePauw



Four-Night Stay in Jackson Hole, WY, with donated travel accessories

Our Sponsors and Donors



**LITCHFIELD
DISTILLERY.**
— BATCHERS! —



J. McLaughlin



J. McLaughlin Sale

J. McLaughlin on West Street in Litchfield hosted special sale days in June and December to benefit the Litchfield Historical Society. Shoppers picked up new summer trends and holiday gifts while 15% of sales were donated to the museum.



J. McLaughlin Litchfield Store Manager Troy Brown with LHS Director Jessica Jenkins

Annual Community Events

In July, the Pet Parade brought patriotic pets for a celebration of Independence Day. Venerable judges Bette and Jerry Geci were joined by volunteers Karen DePauw and Rosie Furniss to bestow awards to over 80 pets. Even a mid-event downpour could not dampen the festivities!



Annual Fourth of July Pet Parade

In four short years, Scarecrows in the Meadow has become a much-anticipated annual tradition in our community. Despite a rainy fall, over 5,600 people came to visit the display during the last two weeks of October and voted on their favorite scarecrows.

The event couldn't have happened without the hundreds of people who created the 60 scarecrows. Thank you to all the local businesses, non-profits, community organizations, friend groups and families who contributed their time and creativity to this event!



**Scarecrows in the Meadow
Opening Celebration**



Pet Parade Judges Jerry and Bette Geci



**WFSB Channel 3 *Great Day @9a* went
live from Scarecrows in the Meadow**

**Thank you to our Scarecrows
in the Meadow Sponsors!**



**William
Pitt**

Sotheby's
INTERNATIONAL REALTY

**Litchfield Prevention Council
The Clothes Tree**

In the Tapping Reeve Meadow

The Tapping Reeve Meadow has become a valued gathering space for the Historical Society and community. In addition to being a place for the Society's community events and education programs, the Meadow is a great place to meet a friend for a cup of coffee or stop on your evening walk. All visitors to the Meadow can appreciate the work of Garden Educator Olivia Delaney. Throughout the year, she works hard to plan, plant, and maintain the teaching garden. If you see Olivia working in the Garden, be sure to say hello!



**Garden Educator Olivia leads
S.T.E.A.M. Powered History
summer camp**



**Pre-schoolers from Litchfield
School House visit the Meadow**



**Bilingual Story Time in the Meadow with
KidsPlay Children's Museum**



**Scarecrows by (clockwise from top left):
NW Community Bank; Girl Scout Troop
40027; the Rhyne Family; Mrs. Sage's 2nd
Grade Class**



**Yoga in the Meadow led by
the Kula Collective**

Budget

2023 Income and Expense Summary

Support and Revenue

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Contributed Income | \$152,319.81 |
| Grant Income | \$36,919.01 |
| Investment Income | \$419,020.48 |
| Admissions / Program Fees / Shop | \$9,009.27 |
| Total Support and Revenue | \$617,268.57 |

Expenses

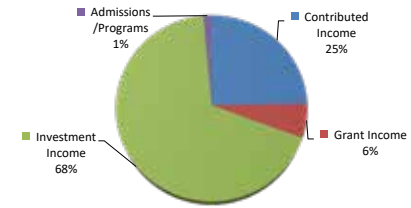
| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Salaries and Taxes | \$405,791.54 |
| Benefits | \$29,339.64 |
| Exhibits / Programs / Research | \$10,187.83 |
| Utilities | \$46,384.82 |
| Maintenance / Repairs | \$54,248.50 |
| Operating Expenses | \$143,979.92 |
| Total Expenses | \$689,932 |

Net Deficit (\$72,663.68)

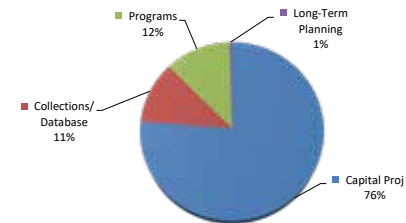
Grant Income - Restricted 2010-2023

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Capital Projects | \$1,337,776.00 |
| Collections / Database | \$198,784.00 |
| Programs | \$200,679.00 |
| Long-Term Planning | \$8,000.00 |
| Total Grant / Restricted Income | \$1,755,239.00 |

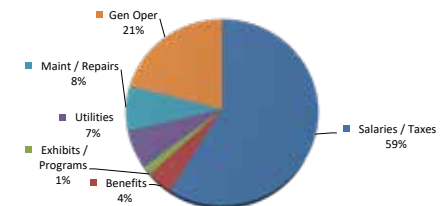
Operating Revenue - 2023



Restricted Grants - 2010-2023



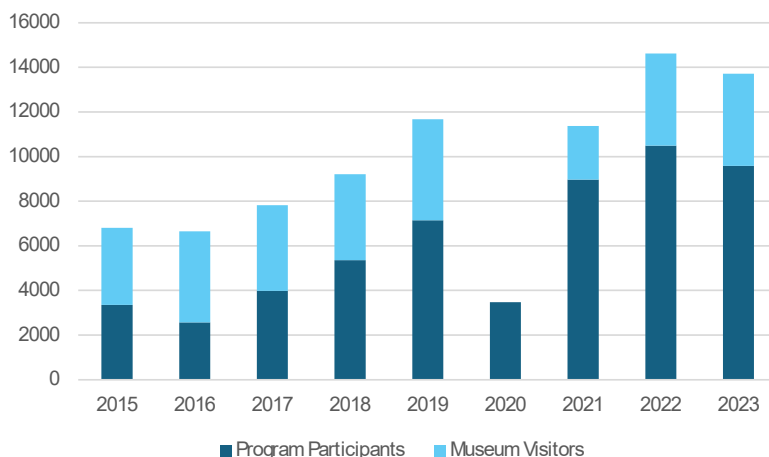
Operating Expenses - 2023



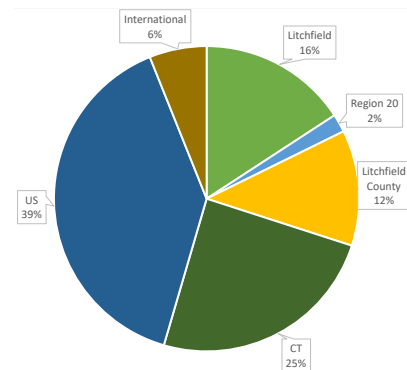
Museum Visitation

Museum visitation has remained strong since the pandemic as new exhibitions continue to bring visitors from the Litchfield area and beyond.

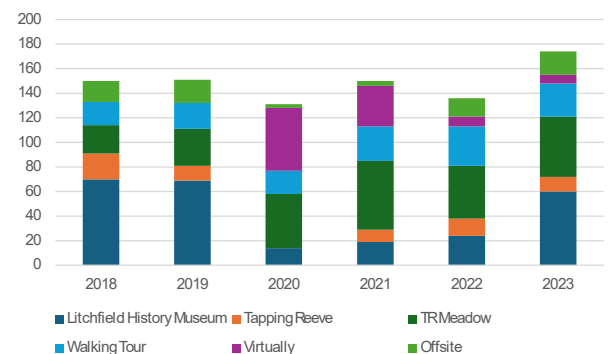
Program and Museum Visitation



Where are Visitors From?



Program Locations



Congratulations Cathy

After 35 years of leading the Litchfield Historical Society, Executive Director Catherine Keene Fields retired at the end of June.

After accepting the position of Executive Director at the Litchfield Historical Society in 1987, Cathy strengthened the Historical Society's connections to the community through exhibitions, school and family programs, and special projects. She directed the renovation and re-interpretation of the Litchfield History Museum, as well as the Tapping Reeve House and Litchfield Law School. She also guided the Society through accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums.

Cathy was a successful fundraiser with grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and the Connecticut Humanities Council, among many others. She contributed to the museum profession on a national scale, having served on the National Council of the American Association for State and Local History; the National Advisory Council of the Reynolda House Museum in Winston Salem, NC; the Connecticut Humanities Council; the Association for the Study of Connecticut History; and the Connecticut League of History Organizations.

To celebrate her career, Cathy received local, state, and national recognition. The Connecticut League of History Organizations bestowed on Cathy its Award of Merit for Individual Achievement. Cathy also received the Award of Excellence of Individual Achievement by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

The Historical Society is indebted to the Cathy for years of hard work and dedication to sharing Litchfield history. She will be dearly missed by her staff who are forever grateful for the opportunities she gave and the office environment she cultivated. We wish the very best to Cathy and Jay on their post retirement life and travels.



Cathy and husband Jay Fields



Cathy (center) receiving the Award of Merit from CLHO Executive Director Amrys Williams and State Representative Karen Reddington-Hughes



Cathy's Retirement Picnic



Cathy leading the Annual 4th of July Pet Parade in 2022



P.O. Box 385
Litchfield, CT 06759

www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org