

Weston Historical Society's archive facility takes root

Written by Patricia Gay

Wednesday, 07 October 2009 11:58



There was a barn raising at the Coley Homestead on Weston Road this past week. But no ordinary barn is being built.

Construction workers were busy securing the foundation and erecting large wooden beams for what will eventually become a 4,000-square-foot archive facility.

From the outside, the building looks like a New England barn, but inside there will be a secure climate controlled, fireproof archive and visitor's center housing historic treasures of Weston's past.

"The new archive will store the growing collection of valuable genealogical records, photographs, publications, maps, garments, tools and household items," said Jim Jamieson, president of the Weston Historical Society, the group building the facility.

The archive was designed to fit in with other historic buildings on the Coley Homestead site, which include a Greek Revival house from 1841, horse barn, cider press shed, carriage house, smokehouse, and old-fashioned outhouse.

The Coley Homestead is a popular destination, and serves as the home of the historical society, as well as the site for the town's annual Easter Egg Hunt and farmers' market. In the fall, Weston schoolchildren take field trips there to catch a glimpse of what life was like on the farm.

With the addition of the archive facility, Mr. Jamieson hopes many others will stop by for a visit. "The Coley Homestead can become a special destination where people of all ages can participate in activities that inform, inspire, challenge, entertain and educate," he said.

The estimated cost of the facility is approximately \$1.2 million, some of which was raised

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through special events held by the historical society, including dinner with actor Christopher Plummer, a concert featuring José Feliciano, and sales of the book *The Doors of Weston* by photographer Julie O'Connor.

In addition, the project is getting a little help from the state, which in April, approved a \$250,000 STEAP (Small Town Economic Assistance Program) grant to help cover some of the project's costs.

In an effort to go green, the roof of the facility will be covered with photovoltaic solar panels that transform sunlight into energy, providing electricity for the entire building — and more.

"The panels will generate power in excess of what the building actually needs and will put electricity back into the grid," said Tom Smith, an architect for the facility.

The panels will be fully integrated and cover the roof in its entirety, so it won't look patchy or like a bandage is on it.



Town pride

Sharon Gilbert, the historical society's archivist, and Karin Giannitti, its collections manager, looked on with pride as construction workers carefully installed beams into the archive's frame.

"Isn't this great, it's going to be such a nice building," said Ms. Gilbert. She looks forward to having a secure spot that is large enough to store pieces of Weston's history.

"The memory of an organization is in its records and is a testimony to the people who lived there. The archive facility will tell us about the people who tilled the fields. It is also a tool for

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people in the community to learn about the past — a sort of DNA lab to connect us to the future,” Ms. Gilbert said.

Some of the collections that will be housed in the new facility feature some of Weston’s historical names including the Ebenezer Fitch diaries, the Oscar Budd papers, the Gallagher and Lockwood collections, and items from descendants of David Diamond Coley including tools, furniture, and a nightshirt.

“We will also be able to display some of the items from the Louise Messex estate, which is one of our most extensive collections,” Ms. Gilbert said.

In addition to a large number of tools and documents, there will also be an exhibit of textiles from the 1800s, including quilts, dresses, men’s suits, and military uniforms.

“In setting up the exhibits we are looking for things that have a Weston background or are pertinent to the time period. We plan on rotating the exhibit because we have a lot of things to display,” Ms. Gilbert said.

Ms. Giannitti said there will be something of interest at the facility for everyone. “People interested in Weston’s history will enjoy reading the Fitch diaries, while others will enjoy looking at tools. I love the Coley Homestead. It’s like my second home,” she said.

The Weston Historical Society was founded in 1961, and incorporated in 1962. Its mission is to preserve, share and celebrate Weston’s 300-plus year history. The society is guided by a 15-member board of trustees.