THE WORCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Worcester Historical Society, Inc. was constituted on January 17, 1970, when a public meeting at the Worcester Inn chose Milton V. Wright as the first president. Wright, known universally as “Flash,” was a prominent civic figure and the editor of *The Worcester Times*, the local weekly newspaper. On June 29, 1973, the New York State Board of Regents granted the Society a permanent charter as an educational corporation. The historical group met at various churches, the school, Grange, Woman's Club rooms and other places while maintaining a fledgling museum in rented space on the first floor of the Knapp Building, the former site of the post office at 144 Main Street in the Worcester commercial district. On June 17, 1977, it purchased the whole building with the intent of developing it into a full-service facility serving the entire region where Otsego, Schoharie and Delaware Counties meet with a museum, library and research facility, meeting room, agricultural exhibit and genealogical service, as its charter required.

The Society has grown to more than 300 members. Its rooms have come to contain all of the facilities envisioned upon their purchase. In 1978, 1980 and 2009 it sponsored tours of local houses and landmarks. In 1983 the Society microfilmed existing copies of *The Worcester Times* dating from 1875. In 1985 it purchased the Hall District No. 10 rural schoolhouse for preservation, and restored it following a road accident in which an automobile drove through it.

On May 2, 1994, an arson fire in the Worcester business section, which is also a National Historic District, destroyed the top floor of the Historical Society building, whose space contained a recreated Victorian sitting room and several storage areas for artifacts. The street-level museum, library, meeting room and kitchen sustained severe damage from fire and water, but thanks to outer brick walls, a fire-resistant walk-in safe and the valiant and hazardous rescue work of firefighters, bystanders and Society members while the fire was raging, much of the historical materials themselves were salvaged. Most importantly, the water-stained original life's work of the eminent local historian William Fern Ferguson, in 17 volumes, was rescued in its entirety.

In November, 1993, the Society committed to co-sponsor with the Worcester Town Board the writing of a formal history of the Town, to be published on the bicentennial year of its establishment. Town Historian Howson Hartley directed the project at its inception, with substantial assistance from researchers, writers and editors from the Society. After three years of restoration work, the Society hosted a grand re-opening of its building on December 6, 1997, featuring the first public sale of *A Bicentennial History of the Town of Worcester*, and a book signing ceremony.

The Society is governed by five officers and nine trustees, all elected by the membership. In recent times it has prospered under the leadership of Virginia C. (“Gynger”) O'Connor, who has been President for more than four decades of its existence. Its rooms and museum are open to the public on a scheduled basis, and it holds public programs and lectures during the warm months. It has continuous window displays on seasonal or timely themes. It provides speakers and hosts for school groups and bus tours of historic sites. It has a basement area devoted to an exhibit of agricultural and mechanical equipment and tools. It has three large and modern storage areas on its top floor. It also hosts the office of the Worcester Town Historian, Marilyn Dufresne. Its full range of historical and genealogical services is available to the public, including:

* *The Worcester Times* on microfilm, as well as a microfilm reader;
* a full library of Worcester and Otsego County resource materials;
* a card file of Worcester cemetery burials;
* genealogical files for many local families;
* scrapbooks and clippings gathered and donated by local persons;
* internet connection to historical and genealogical sources;
* highly fire-resistant storage for rare materials and significant storage space for display items;
* a local historical museum;
* a sales area for historical books, maps, post cards, posters, philatelic cachets and other memorabilia; and
* availability of the Town of Worcester historical collection through the office of the Town Historian.

Much of the Society's energy and resources over the past decade has been dedicated to the creation of a “vest-pocket” community park on adjacent property to the east of its rooms. This facility, named the Worcester Heritage Park in honor of local historical and cultural figures and institutions, is constructed on land previously occupied by stores that burned in the Great Fire of 1994 and which was acquired by gift and purchase. It is now complete and was dedicated in a large public observance on August 28, 2010, at which State Senator James L. Seward was the main speaker. Its central feature is a prominent gazebo surrounded by a walkway, landscaping, benches, and an antique wrought iron fence. There is also a 40-foot flagpole honoring American veterans, a gift of the local D.A.R. chapter. The Society anticipates that this resource will continue to be a community focal point, enabling the conduct of concerts and other civic events, enhancing the Worcester business section and Historic District, promoting economic development, disseminating historical and cultural information through its signs and plaques, and providing residents with comfortable and relaxing benches and tables from which to enjoy the local scenery.