

SHARON ARTS CENTER

A History in Four Parts

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written in 1997

by Elizabeth F, Morison

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written in 2009

by Penny Warfield

Part I

The Sharon Arts Center was the brainchild of William Leroy Young and Ruth Crary Young. A few years after they were married in 1932, they purchased the old Saunders Farm on Temple Road in Sharon as a place to spend summers away from Boston. In 1941, they decided to live there year-round.

Ruth Young grew up in Newtonville, Massachusetts. A Vassar graduate, she was widely traveled and held jobs with the Red Cross and the Unitarian Service Committee. Her chief cultural interest was music.

Bill Young, a native of Winterport, Maine, was the son of a carriage-maker. He studied at Farmington Teachers College and then at Boston University. His career began as a teacher of shop or manual training in the Boston school system. Subsequently, he became Head of Vocational Guidance at Brookline High School. Shortly after they moved to Sharon, Bill gave up his job at the school and became a partner in an investment brokerage firm in Boston, to which he commuted a few days a week during World War II.

Early in 1946, after the war, the Youngs met David Campbell, the Director of the League of New Hampshire Arts and Crafts. It was to be a fortuitous meeting for all concerned. The Youngs, who were childless, had been casting about for a project of cultural significance to which they could devote their considerable energies and talents and, as it turned out, substantial financial means. David Campbell, for his part, had been searching since before the war for a League affiliate in the Monadnock Region. They recognized in each other the chance to fulfill their respective quests.

The Youngs gathered a group of interested and informed individuals to help them explore the possibility of forming an arts and crafts organization. The group consisted of David Campbell, Mrs. John Coolidge, the founder of the New Hampshire League in 1931, Lester B. Badger, superintendent of the local schools, Edward Ellingwood, Jr., an industrial developer, Philip Darling, the Executive Director of the Monadnock Region Administration, Russell G. Smith, head of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts Museum School, and Kenneth Jewett, a multi-talented musician and resident of Peterborough. They, in turn, enlisted the advice of a general handful of citizens interested in the arts, including Elina Crockett, Adele Clement, Maurice Blodgett and Beulah Emmet of the High Mowing School. With the Youngs, these eleven people formed what they thought of as the Council that would serve as the Governing Board of the new organization.

After several meetings, during which the establishment of the Sharon Arts Center was outlined, on October 22, 1946, incorporation documents were filed. The avowed purpose of the new Center was: "To stimulate, encourage and provide education in the theory and practice of the arts and crafts through instruction, exhibitions and marketing assistance."

The first classes were held in the Youngs' house on January 4, 1947. As the winter progressed, a curriculum containing instruction in jewelry-making, weaving and hooking, photographic developing, music, design and painting were offered and, presumably, students attended all classes.

The School was up and running, and two things became apparent almost at once. The Youngs' house was not adequate as a school building, and the operation required a dedicated person to run it. The Youngs were able to provide land with several buildings on Route 123 in Sharon. For executive leadership, the Council turned to Council member Kenneth Jewett, a boyhood friend of Bill Young's. Kenneth, a young musician, prominent baritone and President of the Monadnock Chorus, agreed to tackle the job and moved into the Laws House. This lovely small house was one of the oldest houses in Sharon, built in 1799. It was owned by The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, but the Youngs leased it for \$1.00 a year. Its use was restricted to the Center's purposes and needs.

Kenneth sent for Ashley Young (Bill's brother) and his son Bob to come from Maine and turn the barn behind the house into classrooms. He organized classes for the coming spring and summer in response to requests from hopeful students, arranged for imaginative widespread publicity and held an Open House on January 5, 1947. The Open House in the newly-remodeled barn featured craft exhibits and artworks in various media and was attended by 300 people who heard the announcement of plans for the spring. A variety of three-hour courses weekly for a ten-week period

would be offered for \$20 a series. The faculty consisted of Mrs. Albert D'Olanda, Mrs. Frank Bush, Edgar Duquesenal, Richard Johnson, Mrs. Edgar Leighton and Mrs. J. J. Bianchi. The subject matter varied slightly as he felt his way and very soon, music was dropped. Creative Design and Children's Art classes were added. In May 1947, Kenneth Jewett was elected President of the New Hampshire Federation of Music Clubs. He had performed miracles getting the Center going and making it known in the community. His colleagues gratefully but unwillingly let him go to resume his career in the music field. He did remain a member of the Center's Council for many years.

So enthusiastic was the public response to the new endeavor that it was soon apparent that it would need a permanent staff to give leadership for the daily running of the Center.

History does not relate how Ruth Young knew of Emily Day, but once again, luck intervened in the Youngs' favor and, in June 1947, "Teddy" Day was offered the job of Executive Secretary. She refused the offer because of a prior commitment. Undeterred, Ruth offered her the job again in September 1947, emphasizing the special privileges which augmented the meager salary of \$75 per month. She could come for a three-month trial and live rent-free at the Laws House. Heat, light, local telephone service, care of lawn and garden and snow removal were all to be provided by the Center.

Teddy was uniquely qualified for the job. She held a degree from the Boston University School of Art, studied at the Julian Academy in Paris and had worked in several different crafts at the Penland School in North Carolina. She was a fine craftsman and throughout her life continued to produce jewelry and other objects in metal which remain highly prized. Besides her craftwork, she designed floral patterns for antique dealers and needlepoint patterns for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in Boston.

Teddy and a friend, Helen Hazelton (known as "Hazie"), drove to Sharon from Wellesley, Massachusetts, to inspect this offer. They could not have anticipated that they were about to move to New Hampshire for the rest of their lives and what a significant place they would make for themselves at the Sharon Arts Center.

Almost as soon as Teddy Day took over, the school outgrew the one classroom and the Youngs had another barn brought over from Temple. The seemingly insatiable public appetite for courses in arts and crafts reflected a general reaction against the evils of the working conditions produced by the Industrial Revolution.

Almost a century before in England, there had been a movement for the encouragement of handwork and cottage industries. A descendant of this movement in the US produced all over the country organizations such as the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, founded in Concord in 1931. The League had established outlets for artists and craftsmen throughout the state. The Monadnock Region was one of the last. Some of the League operations were year-round in cities such as Concord, but many were seasonal. The Sharon Handcraft Shop, run by Hazie, opened in 1950 as a seasonal venture under the auspices of the League, but in just a few years, success and popularity again produced a space problem. A new permanent building to be used as a shop and display area for students' work was needed. The Youngs turned to their friend and mentor David Campbell, a graduate of the Harvard School of Design, to draw plans for the facility. The result was the building with the sharply-pointed end on Route 123. This building would open with great fanfare in May 1955.

SHARON ARTS CENTER

A History

Part II

In the early 1950's, Teddy (Emily Day) and Hazie (Helen Hazelton) were settled in the Laws House as Executive Secretary of the Sharon Arts Center and Manager of the Craft Shop, respectively. The Center took root in the Monadnock Region. Founder Ruth Young had stated early in the planning sessions that "the success of the Center is dependent on the interest of many in the programs it offers, and the Center itself plans to make every effort to teach whatever courses that the people of the region most desire." She also insisted that a small kitchen be installed where students might brew a cup of tea or heat soup. The kitchen facility would help "no end to create and preserve a friendly informal atmosphere." No one knew what sort of student would be attracted to the new school or precisely what courses would be called for. However, everyone on the Council believed that the time had come to provide professional instruction in the arts and crafts for the general public.

The League of New Hampshire Arts and Crafts (later to be known as the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen) had been providing courses since 1931 in a wide range of crafts, critiques on workmanship and aesthetics, and counseling on marketing and sales techniques. After World War II, enthusiasm for learning new hand skills and producing works of art boomed. Everyone wanted to learn, not necessarily to make money but for their own pleasure.

Few fledgling cultural institutions have had such an auspicious beginning as the Sharon Arts Center. The combination of the professionalism provided by the League, the enthusiasm of the backers, and the financial ability of the Youngs to provide for buildings, equipment and personnel came together at Sharon.

Another advantage came with Bill Young's election to the New Hampshire Legislature representing the Town of Sharon. He was able to meet people from all over the state and cultivate the encouragement of his colleagues in the Monadnock Region. All of these elements fused into an unbeatable partnership.

The courses offered at the Center required the approval of the New Hampshire Department of Education. With that approval, it was possible to obtain some support from federal funds. The George Dean Fund helped to underwrite the

Adult Education courses. The Smith-Hughes Fund, administered by the Education Department, paid half the teachers' salaries and transportation costs. Even so, the very first courses were incredibly low-priced. Rug hooking, for instance, cost \$9 for 45 hours of instruction. Weaving and jewelry courses commanded \$11.25 for 46 hours. Students paid extra for materials. Classes were three hours long, once a week. Photography courses required a minimum of six students. For most courses, the minimum was eight. Later, the cost of most of the classes was set at \$20 for a series. Four series of classes were offered each year.

As the school grew and prospered, so did the Craft Shop. Items on exhibit and for sale included students' work and a wide selection of objects made by craftsmen from all over New Hampshire which were provided by the League on consignment. All works were juried by a panel of specialists which included one artist in the medium to be judged. No objects that had not qualified under this system could be sold in any of the League shops. Throughout New Hampshire, all League shops carried exactly the same merchandise, but each shop had a few craftsmen of its own. Sharon, for instance, was the only shop to sell the furniture of Jim Dye, a resident of New Ipswich, or the bird carvings of Robert and Virginia Warfield. In each case, Sharon benefited enormously because of the popularity of their work.

During this early period in the Center's life, Teddy and Hazie inaugurated the Christmas Tea, held on Thanksgiving weekend. It is now an established tradition, and the sales on those two days are always the largest of the year.

In early 1953, Teddy and Hazie resigned, confident that the Center was firmly established. They were given a rousing farewell party, complete with a raging snowstorm that discouraged no one from attending. They remained in Sharon, however, and continued to work for the Center. Teddy's jewelry and metalwork were a mainstay of the Shop. Hazie put in hundreds of hours as a volunteer in the Shop, and her wise advice was sought constantly.

In August 1954, Bill Young died unexpectedly. He had always served as President of the Council, and had labored tirelessly in spreading the word of the school and shop. At his death, a William Young Scholarship Fund was established. In his Will, he left the Center \$365,000, forming the basis for an endowment fund which has been added to over the years. Ruth Young took over as President for a few years. She continued to support the Center throughout her life and, at her death in 1988, she left a sizable sum for the endowment. Without the Youngs, the Sharon Arts Center would not exist.

The classes under subsequent directors continued in much the same pattern through the 1960's and 70's. Weaving became one of the most popular crafts, and

a fine collection of looms were acquired and are still in use today. The weaving studio on the second floor of Young Hall had a particular charm with all the reels of different colored yarns and the looms holding works in progress in many different patterns. But the all-out favorite since its first offering in 1971 was the pottery class. An extensive studio was constructed in an addition to the remodeled barn behind the Laws House. Another building containing an up-to-date electric kiln was added in the late 80's. These classes for old and young, neophyte and advanced, have filled up first in every season, and it became necessary to have a full-time potter on staff. In addition, painting, drawing, printmaking and sculpture have been steady favorites.

Nora Unwin, an Englishwoman of many talents, became famous as a teacher at the Center from 1966 through 1980. Her courses in printmaking and painting were enormously popular. In our 50th year, some of her students are planning a special reunion in her honor with a show of some of her works. At her death in 1982, the Center received a sizeable bequest for the endowment fund, and in 1984, Nora's collection of engravings, woodblocks and other work became part of Sharon's permanent collection.

The Shop also progressed under the direction of the League. It had moved back into the big remodeled barn where it remains. During the 1980's, however, several important changes were made. The first, which affected the whole organization, was the decision to keep the Shop open year-round. Heretofore, all the stock had to be checked, packed and sent back to the craftsmen in January. The hope was that artisans would send in their newest work for the spring reopening, but all too often, they simply sent back the unopened box. The Shop is now open year-round.

An even greater upheaval took place in 1987, when the Shop and the League terminated their long-standing relationship. In 1980, facing mounting costs to keep the whole organization with its multiple buildings in the black, Sharon had asked the League to negotiate more favorable terms for the division of the Shop's gross sales. The original arrangement was that the craftsmen were to get 65%, the League 25% and Sharon (and all other League shops) just 10% of their take. But Sharon was unique, in that the Shop was part of an Arts Center running a Gallery (which in those days made almost nothing), a Library and the School (which only rarely broke even). Consequently, there was strong pressure on the Shop manager to increase income. The League fought bitterly for seven years not to lose its share of Sharon's very successful retail sales. All sorts of alternative solutions were considered, including an Associate Membership, but the bottom line remained Sharon's financial state. With the dissolution of the agreement with the League, Sharon was free to run its own shop, which meant, among other things, that it was no longer restricted to articles made by New Hampshire craftsmen.

However, the Board of Trustees made a decision to limit its outreach to New England so as to retain the regional appeal of its offerings. It was also now possible to make arrangements with craftspeople to buy their work outright and then charge what the market would bear. Almost all of the artisans preferred this new arrangement, and the Shop manager had no trouble finding new suppliers. The Shop is and must remain a non-profit institution based on supporting craftspeople. In 1996, the Center paid out approximately \$150,000 to artists and artisans.

During this period of separating from the League, the Board also decided that a connecting link between the free-standing Gallery and the barn/shop building would provide office space for the staff. Bissell Alderman, an MIT-trained architect and, at the time, President of the Sharon Board, was chosen to draw up plans. On September 17, 1981, a ground-breaking ceremony was held. The new building provided a new entrance and foyer, a library, a redesigned main Gallery, two restrooms, a kitchen and several offices on the ground floor, with a large basement space for further offices and storage. Provisions for handicapped access with a small elevator up to the shop were included. The main entrance was moved from the front façade of the Shop, freeing up considerable area for sales display. A capital fund drive was undertaken to defray the costs. The building was opened with great fanfare on May 1, 1982.

SHARON ARTS CENTER

A History

Part III

The 1980's were years of turmoil and change for the Sharon Arts Center. The break from the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, the decision to run the operation year-round, and building the connecting link between the Gallery and the Shop building changed the nature of Sharon's routines. These major events precipitated dozens of lesser, but just as important, adjustments throughout the Center. In order to make sense of new challenges, a long-range Planning Committee was established in 1987, headed by Abram Collier. Abe put together a group from the Board of Trustees which met many times over the next ten months. An excellent 64-page report resulted. This report is as pertinent and useful today as it was ten years ago.

Everyone agreed that Sharon in its 40 years had been true to its founders' philosophy to promote education in arts and crafts through instruction by professionals, exhibitions, providing an outlet for sales, and by counseling in marketing and sales techniques. There was no doubt about the need for such a place in Southern New Hampshire, and its present situation reflected a growing demand for all it offered.

The Center's early years had been relatively painless financially with the Youngs ready to help with unexpected shortfalls. It wasn't until about 1985, when more staff was needed, salaries had to be updated and prices for upkeep and wear and tear of the plant began to soar, that reality struck. The world of 1947 had disappeared. The large corps of devoted volunteers who had manned the Shop and Gallery on a day-to-day basis dwindled as the "old guard" retired. The number of students who had time for leisurely courses one morning a week for six to eight weeks in watercolors or weaving or photography was sharply reduced. Young professionals and mothers had less time to serve on committees and found it hard to bring their children to classes.

A careful study of the financial future pointed to the need for practical procedural changes. Computers were tentatively introduced to the Shop and then the School and finally the whole operation. Computer literacy became a requirement for staff positions. Public Relations and Advertising were the new buzz words. Mailings, posters, what to serve at openings, fundraising events, dues,

membership discounts and privileges, concerts, lectures, trips and expeditions - all became important as never before, and new techniques and ways of thinking were required in choosing staff who could respond to the new demands.

Since the beginning, dedicated individuals who believed in the idea and were ready to spend time making it work formed the basis for the Sharon Arts Center. But what a diverse range of people has played a part in its evolution! It is not possible in these short histories to give credit to all of them, but a brief look at the Directors will help us to understand how we got here.

Upon Teddy Day's departure in 1953, Ken Wilkens, just 25 years old with no administrative experience, became the new Executive Secretary. He was on the job when the new shop building (now the Gallery) was constructed. When he left after only two years, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Hale were put in charge but remained just six months.

The next Executive Secretary was found in the faculty of the School - Frederick Karl, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and the Sorbonne in Paris. His wife was a potter, and the pair seemed an excellent choice. Their tenure was marked by a "tectonic rigidity," but Karl introduced a lecture series in 1957 that caught everyone's attention. The speakers were Elizabeth Yates McGreal on writing, William McCleary, a MacDowell colonist, on playwriting, Norman Vogel on composing, and Karl himself on the works of Rafael. He enlarged the scope of subjects in the next years to include music and antiques, and arranged several concerts. By the end of four years, Karl had worn himself out and retired to return to painting.

Frederick Karl was succeeded by James Montague, a painter and writer. He added more music to the summer lecture series, but apparently paid little attention to the business of running the Center. He left abruptly and Ken Wilkens returned for a seven-year run.

During the 50's there was a constant turnover of Presidents of the Council as well as frequent changes of what came to be called "Directors" in 1958. The Center suffered from this bumpy progress. One Board member, Becky Hill, seeing the dire straits, tried her best to offset the accumulating debt with imaginative fundraising activities. The strains of directing the three parts of the Center and its tottering finances, and his own family problems, proved too much for Wilkens, who resigned.

John Dolan, who came from a background of commercial art and printing, took up the reins in 1968. Lloyd Young, the recently-retired President of Keene State

College and no relation to the founding Youngs, was elected President of Sharon a few months later. He and his wife, both accomplished weavers, were deeply concerned about the state of affairs at Sharon and tried to help John move it to firmer ground. A severe auto accident, however, put them both out of commission.

In 1975, with John still Director, a series of related events changed the outlook for Sharon and led step by step to the era of explosive change and building which took place in the late 70's and 80's. George Kendall was elected President of the Board. George, who had retired in 1971 from the Director's position at the MacDowell Colony, knew all too well the perils of keeping an institution dedicated to artistic endeavors on a sound business footing. His reaction to the financial realities was to request the Board's personal contributions and their attention as fundraisers in the community. Mrs. Farryl Henderson joined the Board as Treasurer and Chairman of the Development Committee and, in turn, garnered the interest of Sam Spiker, a retired businessman well-versed in the skills of fundraising. Sam went on to be a most devoted and generous member of the Board until his death in 1995. His old friend and classmate, James Killian, former President of MIT, whose fundraising skills were legendary, lived in Sharon in the summers. He joined the Board at this time and succeeded George Kendall as President in 1977. John Dolan, finding himself out of step philosophically with the emphasis on fundraising, resigned in 1975. Carl Jackson took his position briefly, followed by Alan Erdossy. It was Killian who brought Bissell Alderman into the Center, first in his capacity as a well-known MIT architect to study the feasibility of a connecting link between the Gallery and the Shop building.

Bissell Alderman became President of the Board in 1979. With Ruth Young's enthusiastic approval and generous financial backing, the Laws House was repaired and remodeled so that it was a sound adequate home for an Executive Director with a family. For many years, it served as a free residence for Directors, thus making it possible for the Center to pay a modest salary. Of late, when more recent Directors have not cared to live there, it served the Center as a Members' Sales Gallery, as well as a summer lunch café, open on weekends.

Alan Erbossy's arrival in 1976 gave Sharon its longest run to date (eight years) with a single hand at the helm. He had been active in the theatre and had a wide range of interests that broadened the community enthusiasm for the Center. Alan took particular interest in the Gallery. One of his most popular shows was a fly-fishing exhibit. He also ran an art trip to Holland for two successive years. For one period, he and his family moved into the John Chase house across the street during the remodeling of the Laws House.

After Alan's departure for Vermont, Anne Lunt, a long-time Board member, took over as Executive Director for three years. Her interests led to more musical events and a particularly interesting show of children's book illustrators. After her decision to return to her first career as a free-lance editor, the Center had a series of three Directors, and one acting Director in four years. Patrick McCracken from a small gallery in Texas left his mark in a new coat of gray paint on the main building and redesigned signage throughout the Center. At his departure, Walter Jones, a retired banker and Board member, offered his services as Acting Director for a few months while he tried to untangle some of the financial problems which were again plaguing the organization. He was followed by Gail Hercher, whose personal situation caused her abrupt departure after less than a year. Her successor was Marilyn Ash, a Board member, whose professional career had been in running art galleries.

When she left in 1994, a critical decision was made by the Board that the Center would not hire a Director right away. The respective managers of the three entities - School, Shop and Gallery - plus the business staff, would, with the strong presence of the Board of Trustees, run the Center. This almost two-year period was a chance for everyone to evaluate whether it was indeed necessary to have a Director, and if one was needed, what that person's duties and responsibilities should be. At two joint Trustee/staff brainstorming sessions on June 24 and September 9, 1996, many valuable suggestions were made to identify Sharon's strengths and weaknesses and to revitalize our relationships with the public. Also, it became apparent to the staff, who had been trying to function independently, that there was a need for an overall authority. After many soul-searching sessions, they came to the conclusion that even though Sharon was a non-profit arts organization, what it sorely needed was a Director with a serious concern for the mission of the Center and a sound grasp of and experience in business matters. Armed with this new insight, a Search committee was formed. To everyone's delight, the Chairman of this Committee announced that he would like to throw his hat into the ring as a candidate for the position.

So now, in 1997, A. Marshall Lawton, or Buck, is in place as Director, and the 50th Anniversary of the Sharon Arts Center can be a true celebration. It is important to note that the Center would not have survived the last four years without its current President, David Howe, and the members of the Board, who averted financial disaster while looking forward to finding new means of accomplishing Sharon's mission.

There will have to be another chapter to this history to give proper attention to the women who have run the Shop since Hazie's time and to the dedicated members of the faculty of the School who have provided for its infinite variety

over 50 years. Their enthusiastic instruction has inspired three generations of students. A study of the shows that have graced the *Gallery* will also illustrate the scope of Sharon's desire to provide the community with enjoyment and perspective and inspiration. Lastly, it must never be forgotten that dozens of citizens throughout the *Monadnock Region* have served on Sharon's Board of Trustees. The *esprit de corps* has always been outstanding, and their contribution to the grace and charm and well-being of the *Center* is inestimable. As has been observed before, but never too frequently, it is the people - all of them, in their various ways - who have made the *Sharon Arts Center* the unique place that it is.

SHARON ARTS CENTER

A History

Part IV
written in 2009
by Penny Warfield

From 1997 to Date

Since 1997, we've had two additional Executive Directors and seven Board Chairs - although Dave Howe has been three of them. Talk about dedication! David has been involved with Sharon since the late 1980's, when he was asked by Story Wright to help write news releases and other items. He was elected to the Board soon after. So Dave's been on board and on the Board for more than 20 years. He is an inspiration to us all.

In 1996, plans had been started to replace the existing space in Sharon, which housed the entire facility (gallery, shop and school) with new buildings for the School and Administrative Offices in Sharon and to acquire new space in Peterborough for Exhibition Galleries and the store. After much research by the Site Committee and discussions with the Board, the Shop move was scheduled for July 1997. The Laws House Gallery was closed in anticipation of the Gallery move.

On June 21, 1997, a pre-opening reception was held in conjunction with Crotched Mountain, and on July 18, the Depot Square Shop opened with the sale of a \$2 box of cards. During the ensuing months, sales were encouraging.

Discussions and extensive research continued regarding the new Gallery, School and Store spaces.

Sharon's 50th birthday party on August 2, 1997, was capped by a fireworks display arranged by Steve Pelkey of Atlas Fireworks in Jaffrey. In the following months, there was a series of dedicated workshops, including one taught by artist Richard Whitney and two in collaboration with the MacDowell Colony, all well-attended.

Sharon entered into a contract with the New Hampshire State Council of the Arts, an on-going relationship that promised to be of great benefit in the future.

At the Annual Meeting on September 29, 1998, the Planning Study Committee report prepared by Alan T. Popp, president of Roche & Company/Consultants, was presented. The study had gathered opinions and attitudes from potential donors and supporters about Sharon Arts, both positive and negative, and provided financial analyses and projections for the feasibility of a capital campaign.

Unfortunately, a major consideration since the opening of the Store in Depot Square had been deficiencies in the building's infrastructure - heat, water, etc. Buck Lawton headed extensive negotiations with the landlord to rectify these problems, which were ultimately taken care of.

In October 1998, we lost a great friend and long-time supporter, John Butler. He was a moving force for Sharon and his contributions were many.

Also, it was announced that Diane Callahan was stepping down as Store Manager.

At the October 26 Board meeting, it was voted to approve the Site Committee's recommendations that extensive renovation of the studio, classroom and gallery space in Sharon be undertaken with the intent that the Gallery move to a rented location in Peterborough connected to or adjacent to the Depot Square shop. A fundraising project was to be undertaken immediately. Chip Bristol, a member of the Board, promised to host the opening cocktail party for the new Gallery.

At the November Board meeting, it was reported that the "quiet" phase of the Capital Campaign had raised more than half of the \$1 million needed to build the new facility in Sharon, and that the Campaign would soon go public. Architect Dan Scully was hired by the Peterborough landlord to create a connection between the Gallery and Store spaces and plan other leasehold improvements, for a shared fee of \$100,000.

During this period, thanks to George Foote's hard work, the first Sharon website was under construction under the supervision of Fletch & Wilder, and in December 1998, the new (!) website was rolled out.

In keeping with a bequest made by the late George Kendall, the consulting firm of TDC, Inc. had been hired to hold interviews with potential new trustees. As a broader first step, they conducted an organizational assessment focusing on Board leadership, the relationship between the Board and management, the qualifications for a new Executive Director, and the materials to be furnished to new Board members. The results were submitted to the Board in a report dated February 12, 1999. A listing of orientation materials for new Trustees was also compiled. Chair

Dave Howe asked each Trustee to list their "visions" for the future of Sharon. Those individual visions were compiled by Nat Bowditch and sent to Dave on March 2, 1999.

The Members' Exhibition opened in the as yet unfinished Gallery space on April 10, 1999. Two hundred and twenty-eight artists of the 380 current members participated, coming from as far north as Concord, as far south as Fitchburg, as far east as Nashua and as far west as Brattleboro, each submitting a brief statement which was compiled into a piece of wall art. With almost double the space of the old Killian Gallery in Sharon, this new location offers tremendous flexibility for new and different types of exhibits. Curator Randy Hoel was quoted in a *Monadnock Ledger* article as saying, "Visiting the gallery requires less planning. More important, the new gallery caters to spontaneous visitors - and spontaneity is a pronounced trait of art lovers." He also observed that the exhibition included works by students of other artists as well as students of students. "It is like a third generation," noting that Sharon has been encouraging local artists for more than fifty years.

In addition to the Main Gallery, the Peterborough location would also house a Members' Gallery, where works by qualified local artists would be displayed and sold.

On April 26, 1999, the Board voted to retain Elizabeth Rank-Beauchamp as Sharon's new President to oversee the redesign and expansion of the school building. She started work two days later.

On May 8, 1999, the last event was held in the old Gallery, Virginia Warfield's 80th birthday party, a tea party hosted by her daughter, Penny, with food provided by a Dublin caterer, Nancy Johnson, flowers from Jaffrey florist Dee Pelkey and wall art by Sharon favorite Nora Unwin.

By now, the three locations had 19 employees and the School had more than 900 students enrolled in 106 classes and workshops.

By mid-May, the Capital Campaign to raise \$1 million to cover construction of the new Sharon building and to enhance the endowment went public, and the Site Committee had evolved into the Construction Committee, with a goal of tearing down the old Sharon building in September. That was postponed till the first of the next year due to concerns about rushing into incomplete plans for space and finishes and the matters of raising funds and staying within a budget. The Capital Campaign booklet, containing architectural renderings of the outside and inside

plans for Phase III, the new Sharon space, sported the title "Three Venues for Artists in the New Millennium."

A retirement party to honor outgoing President Buck Lawton was held in May.

Thanks to the support of Janet Schaeffer and the hard work and knowledge of George Foote, Y2K-compliant computerized data entry system for tracking budget, sales, inventory and revenue collection was in place by June 21, 1999.

The possibility of purchasing the Peterborough space first surfaced in July 1999, along with the availability for sale of the bank building across the street from the Gallery.

The Annual Fundraiser, held in the Morison Brick House on August 20, 1999 and featuring a performance by The Boston Brass, raised over \$20,000.

By September 1999, the Sharon Craft Store was being recognized as a cornerstone of Depot Square.

But for a *Keene Sentinel* article published in October 1999, marketing director Lajla LeBlanc made the following statement: "Most people still don't know we're a nonprofit." That remains an issue to this day. Sharon's high profile and success has, in a sense, worked against its fund-raising efforts.

Turquoise grand piano from the Gallery to be sold.

On April 1/May 15, 2000, after plans had been completed with Peterborough architect Rick Monahan, Jr., ground was broken for the new School and Administration building in Sharon. In order not to suspend classes or hinder the administrative functions during construction, most were moved temporarily to rental space in the Guernsey Building in Peterborough.

At the Annual Meeting on September 20, 2000, the new slate of officers included: David Howe, Vice Chair; George Foote, Vice Chair; and Nancy Massey, Secretary. All three are still on the Board in 2009. Talk about dedication!

In late November 2000, Hutter Construction completed the new building in Sharon, within budget and on schedule, and the Administrative Offices and the School moved back in. On top was "Sharon the Heron of Sharon" by sculptor Charles W. Gibbs. Two grand reopening parties were held - one for Trustees, the press and VIP's on December 9 and one for the general public on December 10. The first classes started in January 2001 with Deb DeCicco as School Director.

In a departure from the visual arts, on January 18, 2001, Sharon hosted the Chamber After Hours Fete, which included chamber groups from Peterborough, Jaffrey, Rindge, Keene, Milford, Merrimack and Hillsborough.

A merchandizing specialist had been hired to analyze Store sales and logistics. Based on the recommendations formulated over the next 18 months, changes were made to maximize sales.

During these years, the Board also continued its efforts to increase Sharon's endowment, annual fundraising, sales and school tuition, and its Monadnock Region "footprint," with great success. This continues to be the Board's top priority, as with all nonprofit boards.

The Annual Fundraiser in August 2001 was reported to have been a great success.

By September 2001, the School's tuition income was the highest ever and the profits in the Store and Gallery were also at an all-time high. Diane Callahan and her staff had managed a \$6,000 profit in the Store for the 2000-01 fiscal year, and the School, under the direction of Deb DeCicco, was running over 60 classes and workshops in each session, with 763 students and tuition of \$108,000.

However, in response to a significant drop in unrestricted donations, consultant Sam Lewis was hired to formulate Sharon's first "formal" Annual Giving Campaign, with a goal to raise \$250,000 by the end of the 2001-02 fiscal year. His efforts were so successful that he was engaged for the next year.

In May 2002, plans to convert the empty pottery barn into a weaving studio were approved. In June, landscaping for the garden area in front of the Sharon building, was commenced under the supervision of Nancy Massey.

On June 8, 2002, an exhibition of Sharon's permanent collection of the works of Nora Unwin was hung in the Gallery. Margaret Howard, a member, volunteer and long-time contributor, donated frames, mattes and glass for that show.

Arts Week for Teens, a "camp" for teenagers offering courses in weaving, painting, jewelry and drawing in the comic book style started by Deb DeCicco, was received so well that it would become a summer fixture.

The Annual Fundraiser, "Red, Hot & Blue, All That Jazz II" was held at the home of Dorothy and Richard Verney on August 10. Dave Howe noted that many of the attendees were young people, promising new blood in the form of students,

volunteers and donors, not to mention word of mouth. Net income from that event was over \$20,000, putting us ahead of budget for the fiscal year to date.

A jewelry exhibit entitled "All That Glitters" opened on November 23 to take advantage of Holiday sales. Unfortunately, it turned out that high-end jewelry was not a profitable offering for the season.

In November 26, 2002, Board member Michael King suggested that a digital photography class be added to the School's curriculum, long before Sharon had the resources. However, it is to be noted that in January 2007, that idea became a reality, funded entirely with grant money.

The Board also began to consider further automating record-keeping for fundraising and membership. This discussion would continue until the new website went on-line seven years later.

2002 was a very good year. *Niche Magazine* nominated the Store as one of the top 100 craft retailers in the country, and the readers of *New Hampshire Magazine* named the Gallery as "Best Gallery" in the state.

2003 became a pivotal year for planning, hiring, restructuring and streamlining. A major Strategic Planning Session was held on February 28, 2003, led by Steven Guerriero, PhD, an experienced management educator and organization consultant. Board members, staff, faculty, artists, donors, volunteers and business leaders were invited to attend. The overriding topic was "How will the Center look in 3-5 years?" From that meeting, three major focuses for future study were identified: (1) community relations, (2) organization structure and (3) financial issues.

A gas spill in Depot Square and a kiln fire at the School were major events in early 2003. No permanent damage resulted from either problem.

The Annual Members' Exhibit ran from January 18 to March 26, 2003, and brought in \$14,000. This is significant because, for the first time, we used our website to "call for artists" to join Sharon and become eligible for the Exhibit. A Student Exhibit and the "First Ceramics Seconds" Sale was held on the first weekend in April. The "Pop-Up Books" exhibit in May coincided with Peterborough's Children and the Arts Festival. For a full listing of Gallery Exhibits, see the separate link on our new website.

In May, the Store's revised consignor pricing policy, reviewed and approved by the Board and more in line with the current economic client and more favorable to Sharon's profit margin, was furnished to contributing artists and craftspeople.

Also, from 2003 to 2004, the Search Committee, under the direction of Colleen Clark, formulated an Executive Profile, Search Strategy and Position Description for the hiring of a new Executive Director.

Two Teen Weeks, double the prior year, were held in July.

On July 19, Nancy Massey enlisted the help of "volunteer" Board members to "update" (i.e. mulch) the landscape in front of the Sharon building.

The August 9 Fundraiser, entitled "Starry, Starry Nights," was held at the home of Dorothy and Richard Verney.

Robert and Virginia Warfield had been involved in the life of Sharon for many years, selling their furniture, pottery and carvings, and even serving on the Board. In June 2004, in accordance with an agreement reached in February 1998 between Virginia and the Planning Committee for the new Sharon space, the Warfield Collection was installed by their daughter Penny Warfield and Randy Hoel, Sharon's former Curator, with a two-day dedication celebration in September. Participating in that event were Penny, Executive Director Elizabeth Smith and Chair Colleen Clark, with Fitzwilliam caterer Sunflowers Cafe. The Collection, on permanent display, consists of 26 bird and animal carvings, three miniatures, two Warfield Primitives, two award-winning pots thrown by Virginia, Robert's sculpture of dancer Martha Graham and a collection of scrapbooks, photos and articles. The Collection booklet (linked to our website) was compiled by the design firm of Teplow Cucurullo Communications in Brookline, also responsible for our new website.

In October 2004, after extensive redesign and renovations led by Jeanne Duval, the Store reopened and in January 2005, the Store, under the new direction of Melanie McDonald, opened an art supply section, which has become increasingly profitable. Additional improvements included a new jewelry case and a walled-in area to display prints for sale.

In December 2004, it was determined that the Weaving Barn was no longer structurally sound and the current tenants, Kris Calnan and Lulu Fichter, were asked to vacate their studios. Estimates for structural and roof repairs were invited, and it was determined that major renovation and partial demolition would be necessary to make the building safe.

The widow of a private collector in Pennsylvania donated a large number of Warfield birds, which were put up for auction at Cobb's. However, a snowstorm on the day, plus an emphasis on hunting items and decoys, resulted in disappointing sales. The remaining items went back to Sharon and, on March 4, 2005, "Wooden

Wings, Painted Feathers," an exhibition featuring those birds opened in the Exhibition Gallery. This show also included watercolors by Jing-Hua Gao Dalia, woodcarvings by William Schnute and sculptures in cardboard by James Grashow, destined to be a continuing artist with Sharon.

In April 2005, three movable walls were built for the School building lobby to house exhibits by faculty, students and members. These exhibits will be designed and hung by the artists themselves with only advertising to be handled by Sharon. Already, a Tsunami Installation created by the Mixed Media class under the tutelage of Kris Calnan, has been a success.

Governance issues were addressed with a change in the Bylaws from a Nominating Committee to a Governance Committee to oversee procedures and policies and not just search for new Board members.

The School has continued to generate adequate tuition income while also hosting events, including a Faculty Appreciation Dinner and the End of the Term Brown Bag Lunch and Student Show, both well-attended.

In October 2005, the juried craftspeople were informed that they would now be required to become members.

During 2005, the Trustees and staff had worked tirelessly to increase efficiency in all areas - fundraising, financial accountability, Board committee reporting, Trustee participation, school administration and publicity, store advertising and sales, gallery corporate membership, volunteer participation, and collaboration with our community friends and neighbors. By December 2005, membership increased (including all juried craftspeople), class enrollment and tuition was up, store inventory had been cleaned out and organized, art supply sales had increased and sales of consigned inventory were up 26%, and our auditors were accurately reporting our current financial condition.

In December, Sharon welcomed Rick Fitzgerald as the new Gallery Director.

From their inception in 2003 to date, the Digital Photography workshops have continued to increase in popularity. The new Lab was ready for operation in the spring of 2006.

A "Memorial Garden," designed by Kristian Fenderson and implemented by Parker Garden Design, incorporated into the existing garden space in front of the School under the direction of the Memorial Garden Committee, was dedicated on June 23, 2006. Memorial pavers, trees, benches, and flower beds mark the memory of

friends of Sharon Arts. The Garden is tended throughout the year by SAC volunteers and also serves as an outdoor drawing, painting, and lunch spot for the school's students. A more detailed history of the Garden is available on our website.

The "Aquarium of the Imagination" exhibit in the spring on 2006, inspired and created by James Grashow, was enormously successful and well-attended, with the added interactive community involvement of art teachers, students and parents. The show received excellent above-the-fold press coverage.

At the May 2006 Board meeting, retreats for both Trustees and staff were planned to discuss how best to implement our new mission, inspired by the Grashow success - from Gallery to exploring, experiencing, learning.

The new "openness" envisioned by Sharon included School Open Houses to sample different classes for just \$20 and rescheduling regular courses and Summer Camps to accommodate parents' schedules, which led to a 26% increase in enrollment. This openness also translated into a greater breadth of artists (both geographically and by field of expertise) clamoring to have their work shown and sold by Sharon. The Store started to carry wholesale goods and gift cards to increase revenue. The Grashow show brought in over 350 local school children. New School initiatives included an after-school teen art program, the long-awaited digital photography lab and low-cost workshops for teachers.

In this period of slowing economy, it was becoming evident that it was vital for each Trustee to become more personally involved in the grant process, identifying and contacting new individual prospects. The Board was encouraged to review the roster of existing and potential donors, sign up for a certain number of contacts and add to the list if they could. Also, since Sharon "means different things to different people," Dave Howe created a new marketing tool, "Sharon Arts by the Numbers," that could be tailored to the specific interests of prospective donors. Educating the public is one of our top priorities, since the perception seems to be that money is not an issue.

Board discussions started in early 2007 regarding ownership versus continued lease of the Peterborough Exhibition Gallery. Newly-formed Events (Cindy Burgess, Chair) and Capital Committees (Dave Howe, Chair) started putting together their respective fundraising events/initiatives to raise money to buy the space. A \$1 million Capital Campaign was planned to raise \$650,000 for the purchase and \$350,000 to add to the endowment, projected to last two years. Discussions would continue with landlord Cy Gregg over the next several years.

In March 2007, volunteer Marie Cassady started a formal Volunteer Program, finding volunteers to work in the Store, the Gallery and the Administrative Offices. That program had grown to 90 volunteers by 2009.

"June in Bloom" with a focus on floral and botanical art, involved local garden clubs and included flower arrangement demonstrations, a floral display in the front window and lectures on teas by Danielle Beaudette, whose mother had cherished Sharon.

The existing Mission and Vision Statements, in place for many years, were re-envisioned by the staff, led by Board member Terry Heinzmann, and adopted by the Board on June 19, 2007. They are available on the website.

In October 2007, Ann Wilkens was contracted to be our Development/PR Director for the upcoming Annual Fund Campaign.

Artini Night was such a success that it became the model for a quarterly fundraising event.

In May 2008, Carol Laughner was hired as Sharon's new Marketing/Development Associate and Kendra McGhee joined the Gallery staff.

The 3rd Annual Paint Out Week, a reception for artists with a wet painting show and sale was very successful.

In August 2008, the decision was made to temporarily "darken the Gallery" over the upcoming winter to save money. Then a major ice storm shut down the entire New England area in December. Those two events resulted in a substantial loss of revenue for all three locations - the Gallery, the Store and the School.

A new student docent program reached reaching out to interested local teens.

In November 2008, a "private" link from Sharon's website was created for Board documents to be accessed online. This eliminated copying and mailing costs and staff time spent emailing materials prior to each meeting.

Penny Warfield, a Board member since the Warfield Collection dedication in 2004, had recognized a void in the fundraising efforts being pursued by the Board and staff. After much research and consideration, on March 19, 2009, the newly-formed Grant Committee, consisting of Penny Warfield, Carol Laughner and Melanie McDonald, met for the first time to articulate the Committee's goals, identify

possible targets and allocate responsibility among Committee members (with the participation of Elizabeth Smith).

In March, it was discovered that Sharon's written history, compiled in 1997 by Elizabeth Morison, had not been updated since then, and did not exist online. Penny Warfield undertook to type the existing version into the computer and gather relevant information from Board members, minutes and other documents to bring it current. This "internal" version is part of the permanent record of Sharon Arts Center and is for the edification and amusement of the Board and staff and other interested parties. A much shorter "external" version, hitting the highlights only, was also created to be used in fundraising efforts. Both versions are available on the new website.

It had been evident for some time that Sharon's website was not serving the good of the organization, so in early 2009, spearheaded by Penny Warfield, a Request For Proposal for a complete overhaul was sent to several design firms and, in a symmetry worthy of Sharon's history, the winning bid for the new website was submitted by the same Teplow firm that had created the Warfield Collection booklet in 2004. Funded by a gift from Penny, the new website, still a work in progress, was launched in October 2009, enhancing immeasurably Sharon's public image and accessibility.

In April 2009, all the Board Committees were asked to adopt Charters to clarify their respective missions and responsibilities to the Board and the community.

The "Water - Mystery and Plight" exhibit opened on July 3, 2009 in the Peterborough Exhibition Gallery. At that gala reopening, a drawing was held to pick the winner of a fireworks raffle donated by Steve Pelkey of Atlas Pyrovision. The winner was St. James Episcopal Church in Keene, which had received its raffle ticket as a gift from purchaser (and long-time Board member) Dave Howe.

At the Annual Meeting in October, a successful and very well attended event, the new website was demonstrated by Sharon's Arts Administrator and new Webmaster, Alexandra Wall. Other features included pottery-throwing and weaving, in which attendees were invited to participate. A faculty member's son played Bach on viola. This format - fast, entertaining and interactive - is a template for future Annual Meetings.

In the fall of 2009, Sharon reinvigorated its Board with new members and commenced both its Annual Fund drive to support operations and a \$1 million Capital Campaign to raise funds to purchase the Peterborough space and revitalize the endowment. Effective January 4, 2010, we enlisted the services of an Interim

Executive Director, Robert Pettegrew (a former Board Chair) to take us into the future.

After a year of dedicated work by Alex Wall and our web designer, Teplow Cucurullo Communications, Sharon's new website launched on March 17, 2010. It supports and serves artists and craftspeople and cultivates relationships between artists and the community. This site better reflects our new vision and invites those interested in our organization to explore and connect with our resources with ease. Navigation is user-friendly for both knowledgeable and first-time visitors. We believe the site will create an emotional connection and foster a sense of community.

We finally did it! With the help of several generous supporters, we purchased our Exhibition and Store space in Peterborough in August. We celebrated with "An Artists' Circle," which highlighted several accomplished local artists, including James Aponovich, who generously donated an original painting to be raffled off by selling prints of the painting. The publicity surrounding this exhibition was very gratifying, and we followed it with "Art with Feeling" in conjunction with the New Hampshire Association for the Blind, a hands-on (literally) exhibition for the visually impaired, which brought in a new and very enthusiastic constituency.

In October, Carolyn Howard, a long-time Board member, succeeded George Foote as Board Chair, and a search was launched for a permanent Executive Director.

On New Year's Eve 2010, Elizabeth Morison, former President of the Board, passed away at the age of 91. She was instrumental in keeping a living written record of Sharon through 1997 as the author of the original versions of Parts I, II and III of this History.

In June 2011, our new Executive Director, Keri Wiederspahn, took the reins. We look forward to a new and exciting time under her guidance.

Also, on June 2, former Governor Walter Peterson, who sat on our Board for more than ten years, succumbed to cancer. He was a friend and advocate, and a great statesman, and he will be missed.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

"We are the only organization that does all the things we do with the school and the galleries." (Director of Education Melanie McDonald - Board minutes November 18, 2008)

Few cultural institutions have had as auspicious a beginning as the Sharon Arts Center. The combination of the New Hampshire League's professional assistance, the enthusiasm of the backers and the finances of the Youngs came together at Sharon in an unbeatable partnership.

There is no doubt about the need for such a place in Southern New Hampshire.

Since the beginning, dedicated individuals who believe in the idea and are ready to spend time making it work have formed the basis for the Sharon Arts Center. The faculty's expert instruction has inspired three generations of students. Dozens of citizens throughout the Monadnock Region have served on the Board, volunteered in the Gallery and Shop and run the organization. Their contributions to the well-being of the Center are inestimable. (A complete list of Executive Directors, Board Chairs and recent Staff is attached.) As has been observed before, but never too frequently, it is the people - all of them, in their various ways - who have made the Sharon Arts Center the unique place that it is.

The short version of this History is also linked to our website.

A detailed history of the Memorial Garden is also linked to our website.

A list of Gallery Exhibits since our inception in 1946 is also linked to our website.

A list of Board Chairs and Staff since our inception in 1946 is also linked to our website.