



BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE AT THE MATHER HOMESTEAD

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Of the 65 nationally registered historic landmarks in Connecticut, only one resides in Darien—a 1778 colonial home, now known as the Mather Homestead. One of the finest examples of 18th-century architecture in Darien, and home to six generations of the Mather family, with each generation enriching the home's tapestry of stories, Executive Director Heather Raker describes the Mather Homestead as a "treasure that captures the unique history of Darien."



Famously raided by the Tories during the Revolutionary War, the Mather home has been witness to many significant historical events. The major contribution to its landmark status, however, is the legacy of Stephen Tyng Mather, a noble conservationist, who inherited the home in 1906. Stephen Mather left his mark on American history as the father of our modern national park system and the first Director of the National Park Service.

After the last Mather living in the house passed away, the property remained vacant for over a decade. The Mather Homestead Foundation was established in 2016, includes the home and acres of land donated by the family, and is now dedicated to preserving the Colonial and sharing its rich history.

Today, driven by a commitment to education, the Mather Homestead has surpassed the family's vision. A variety of engaging and distinctive events attract Darienites and the wider community to its historic grounds. During 'Mather Tavern' evenings, guests savor tavern food and wine, accompanied by tunes of fiddle music, while immersing themselves in historical lectures.

Homesteading workshops provide hands-on experiences in activities cherished by the Mathers themselves, such as embroidery, knitting, and the art of flower arranging. Continually expanding 'Kids at Mather' programs include tailored opportunities for children and student groups to tour the home, enjoy tea parties and scavenger hunts, and gain insights into conservation while embracing the role of junior rangers.

The Foundation's largest annual event, the springtime Garden Tea Luncheon, welcomes 130 local women for education and enjoyment. As Raker attests, "There is nothing else like it!" Now in its fourth year, the Garden Tea continues to grow in popularity and success—raising funds through sponsorships, ticket sales, and a raffle. In addition to traditional tea sandwiches and sweet treats, the 2024 event featured a talk by Pieter Estersohn, author of Back to the Land: A New Way of Life in the Country, about farmstead living.

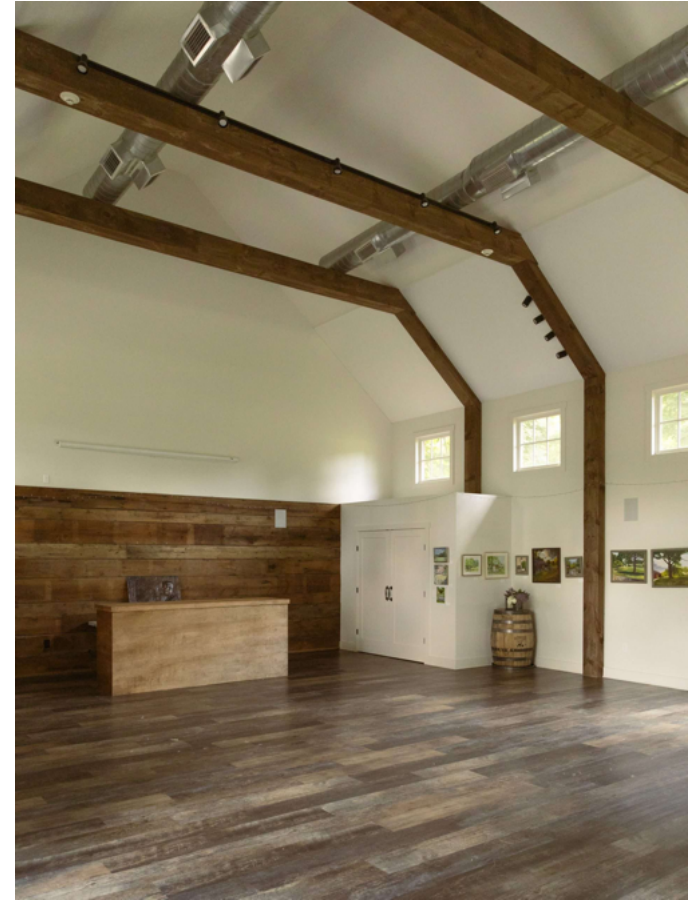
"Through our programming, we bring history to life every day on this spectacular property," Raker says.



As a non-profit sustained entirely by donations and events, support has both enabled the growth of programming and funded significant restoration and preservation projects. The generosity of donors is evident in the property's recent expansions. In 2020, a new education center was constructed to replace a dilapidated barn. Named for former New Canaan resident and historical preservationist Elizabeth Chilton, the center still resembles an 18th century dairy barn on the exterior. On the interior, its open layout now holds up to 130 people, providing necessary space for lectures, school groups, art exhibits, and other large gatherings.

"Watching the Homestead's expansion has been so exciting," Raker shares. "We started as a sleepy old house giving occasional tours and are now a vibrant place of learning bringing thousands of people to the property every year."

The Foundation is actively preparing for its future as a beacon of historical education. Recent initiatives, including a Condition Assessment of the buildings and a Cultural Landscape Report, have provided valuable insight into the property's history and informed a broader master plan. Current beautification and preservation projects aim to create a serene, park-like setting for community enjoyment. In doing so, the Foundation is ensuring that the legacy of the Mather family endures - and continuing the open invitation to surrounding communities to come experience the Mather Homestead...and step into history firsthand.



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