

Donations needed to repair Derby Summer House statues



A statue of a reaper stands inside the Derby Summer House in Danvers. The statue originally stood atop the building, but is in need of restoration. CAROLINE ENOS/Staff photos

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DANVERS — The Danvers Historical Society needs donations to match a \$24,000 grant to repair the Derby Summer House’s historic rooftop statues.

The statues of a shepherdess and reaper have stood atop the building’s roof for most of the last two centuries.

They were removed prior to a 2017 renovation of the roof and must be recast before being reinstalled — work that can’t be done until the society raises \$24,000 by next June.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission will match the funds raised to cover the rest of the \$48,000 project, so long as the Society meets that deadline.

“I’m amazed they didn’t already blow down, the condition they are in, but they didn’t,” said David McKenna, the Historical Society’s president.



A statue of a shepherdess stands inside the Derby Summer House in Danvers. The statue originally stood atop the building, but is in need of restoration. CAROLINE ENOS/Staff photos

Constructed in 1794 for merchant Elias Haskett Derby, of Salem, the small yet imposing two-story structure, often called the McIntyre Tea House in honor of its architect Samuel McIntyre, served as an intimate spot for social gatherings.

It was built on Derby's farm in a section of Danvers that is now part of Peabody. The house was moved by horsedrawn carriage from the land, which hosts the Northshore Mall and other parts of Route 114, to Glen Magna Farms in 1901.

The tea house was saved from being demolished to make way for over 200 houses in the 1960s. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1968.

The current rooftop statues are not the originals. The first shepherdess was found damaged from a fire atop an Andover mill in 1901 after being missing for two decades. A replica was carved in 1924. As was a duplicate of the reaper after the original fell during a storm in 1981.

Still, the statues play an important part in sharing the town's history.



Lisa Steigerwalt, a member of the Danvers Historical Society, poses inside the Derby Summer House in Danvers Monday. The organization is asking for donations to repair statues that once topped the building. CAROLINE ENOS/Staff photos

“If you don't have the structures to tell the story, you can't tell the story as well,” said Historical Society member Lisa Steigerwalt. “They allow people to come and visit this beautiful, inspiring space.”

Steigerwalt was dressed in a late 18th-century dress, which was inspired by Martha Washington's inauguration gown, while greeting visitors to the tea house one evening last week.

The second-story room used for entertaining is large enough to comfortably hold about 10 guests at most. She told visitors while standing in front of its inlaid cabinets that decorations from China and other stops along Haskell's trade routes would have been on display there centuries ago. Most importantly, the tea Derby brought back from China himself.

“Elias Haskett Derby was the first to take his ship, the Grand Turk, to China,” Steigerwalt said. “No other household could say something like that, so they were very invested in the tea trade.”

The house is also topped by carved urns and other ornaments like wreaths and draperies that acted as symbols of America's newfound freedom during the Federalist period of the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Steigerwalt called the building “the finest piece of federal-style architecture for a garden folly or a tea house in the nation.”



The Derby Summer House on Glen Magna Farms in Danvers. CAROLINE ENOS/Staff photos

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is also willing to give the Historical Society extra funds, which McKenna hopes to use to fix up one of the tea house’s first-floor rooms and repair more of the building’s windows.

To donate to the project, visit www.danvershistory.org or mail a check to the Society at 11 Page St. in Danvers.

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