

## Prudence Crandall Museum undergoing \$1.3 million renovation

By Tim Leininger

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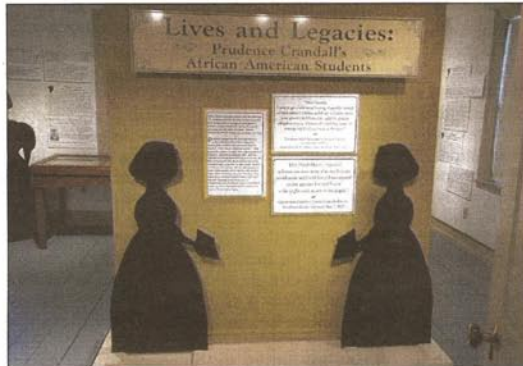
CANTERBURY — The Prudence Crandall Museum will be temporarily closing for about a year starting Oct. 20 as a \$1.3 million renovation takes place at the historic, early 19th-century home.

The museum is the home of Prudence Crandall, and features exhibits about the life of Crandall, a Quaker from Rhode Island who was a teacher at a Canterbury boarding school for girls. When black student Sarah Harris wanted to attend the school and Crandall permitted her to join, she incurred the wrath of the community, who started to pull their white children out of the school.

"Prudence decided to educate only African American females," said Joan DiMartino, the museum's curator. "The curriculum didn't change."

"It's just time," DiMartino said of the museum's need for renovation. "It's from 1805. The last time it was renovated significantly was in the 1980s."

"We've already done a complete structural assessment," said Liz Shapiro, director of arts, preservation, and museums at the State Historic



Above: The "Lives and Legacies" exhibit on the second floor of the Prudence Crandall Museum in Canterbury provides information on what the students did after the Canterbury Female Boarding School closed due to mob violence in September 1834.

Top right: The Northeast Front Room of the museum is exhibited as an 1830s classroom. This room was set on fire in January 1834. The museum will undergo a \$1.3 million renovation beginning Oct. 20.

Bottom right: Mary Harris Williams was the younger sister of Sarah Harris. Mary was 16 years old when she entered Prudence Crandall's Canterbury Female Boarding School in 1845. She married Pelleman Williams, a teacher in Norwich who was an active abolitionist and served as president of the Connecticut Convention of Colored Men in 1849.



Preservation Office.

"We are 96 percent complete with the plans of things that need to be addressed," she said. "The final issue we're working

on is how to address the issues around the foundation stability and the drainage issues. We know exactly what's going to happen going forward; rein-

forcing the structural integrity of the house. We have to be careful how we do that. It has to be done according to the Department of Interior's rules and regulations of restoring historic landmarks."

DiMartino said the house will also receive a new coat of paint, a new roof, and electrical rewiring.

The fence around the house will be repaired and replaced, she said, as well as having the ADA ramp and bathrooms redone.

To achieve all these repairs and restorations, DiMartino said, everything inside the house will need to be taken down, which gives the museum staff an opportunity to go forward with new concepts for its exhibits.

"It's going to look very different," she said. "The story won't change, but how we tell it and the voices who haven't been as prominent will be brought forward."

She said the museum will feature more about the lives of the students, both while there and what they went on to do afterward, including Mary Harris, who became a significant teacher in Louisiana teaching newly-freed African American children.

"There are schools named after (Harris') daughter-in-law in New Orleans," DiMartino said. "There's a legacy ... that Prudence helped to inspire."

Currently the museum has a

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## Museum working to widen its reach during renovation project

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re-creation of a 19th-century classroom, memorabilia detailing the lives and legacies of students at the school, portraits of Crandall and Sarah Harris, a 10-minute introductory video, and a re-creation of a boarding room, she said.

The museum will maintain its normal hours — Thursday through Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. — until it closes on Oct. 20.

DiMartino said the museum will have free admission on Oct. 20 and is hoping to have an event kicking off the renovations that day from 4 to 6 p.m.

In an effort to continue to foster interest in Prudence Crandall, the museum will offer speaking engagements while the museum is being renovated.

"We have a speakers' bureau," said Drew Crandall, president of the Friends of the Prudence Crandall Museum and distant relative of Prudence Crandall. Drew Crandall said he and Prudence are both descendants of Puritan preacher John Crandall, who landed in Boston in 1634 and is one of the founders of Rhode Island.

"We don't want to lose traction during the renovation," he said of the museum's planned outreach during the year of renovation.

"This is a story that needs to be shared with residents of Connecticut no matter where they are."

He said that the museum is looking to reach out to any organization across the state in all eight counties.

"This is a story Connecticut needs to know and get excited about."

Until its closure, though, he said it should be a priority for everyone to come and visit.

"We're delighted to have people come and visit," he said. "She's the official

heroine of Connecticut. I would extend an enthusiastic invite to come and visit before it closes and after it (re)opens."

The Prudence Crandall Museum is at 1 South Canterbury Road in Canterbury. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Thursday-Sunday. Regular admission is adults, \$6; seniors, \$5, children 12 and younger, free. Special rates for groups of 10 or more and schools.

For more information, visit: [portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/HistoricPreservation/04\\_State\\_Museums/Prudence-Crandall-Museum](http://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/HistoricPreservation/04_State_Museums/Prudence-Crandall-Museum)