



Martha McLane "Patty" Rotch

Chairman of the Town Hall Restoration Corporation

When the National Trust for Historic Preservation presented Milford with its prestigious Achievement Award, Patty Rotch responded, "It's a community award. It's their town hall, their auditorium." It was typical for Patty to share the credit, but behind that statement were years of hard work on behalf of the Milford Town Hall. "The award is a very big honor. It makes you feel really proud that everyone's hard work has been recognized. It really is a beautiful building."

Patty was always passionate about preserving history, especially the history of Milford. When the state's fire marshal threatened to close the town hall in 1987 if Milford did not come up with a plan, Patty sprang into action. She was influential on the committee that worked to convince the town that the town hall was vital to the downtown.

At a special town meeting in 1988, voters approved renovating the town hall building, but the renovation did not include the town hall auditorium. Patty became chairman of THARC, the Town Hall Restoration Corporation, a non-profit organization set up to raise \$260,000 for the project. The committee began the Milford Pumpkin Festival as a community effort to raise money for the auditorium. Renovation began at town hall in March 1989, and most of the work was finished by the following year.

The restoration included restoring the auditorium, refinishing the two-level front hall and double staircase, providing and installing period lighting, painting walls and ceilings, and installing heating and air conditioning. The hall and its Victorian atmosphere with original gas fixtures (now electrified), were restored. Most of the original frescoed walls and ceilings had been painted over, but enough evidence was recovered to provide guidance for painting and stenciling.

Today the Town of Milford has a town hall building listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, and an auditorium that reflects both the history and the vitality of the town.

Story submitted by Martha Rotch Manley, with assistance from the archives of The Milford Cabinet.