

Americana Workshop Created Sets for Family Film Shot in Maine

by Steve Hrehovcik

Was it coincidence, destiny or just good luck? It seemed like a typical business day in March of 2014, for Cindy Hamilton, owner of the Americana Workshop in Kennebunk. Shoppers browsed through her collection of antiques, folk

art and farm tables and chairs. Many asked about the sources of her assorted china and silverware, vintage lamps, bottles and house ware items. Some made purchases, others enjoyed hearing Hamilton tell stories about the history of her expansive collection.

About mid-day a visitor came into her shop who would have a dramatic impact on Hamilton's life. The visitor was musician Tim Janis, renowned for his popular CDs, PBS specials, sold-out concerts and fundraising programs for charities.

After glancing around the shop, Janis approached Hamilton and asked her a question that first bewildered her, then intrigued her. Janis wondered if she could build a set for a movie he had in production.

The movie, *The Button Girl*, takes place in the early 1900s, and the atmosphere of Hamilton's shop conveyed the precise period mood Janis wanted to portray in the film.

After Janis described the touching story of the young orphan who would become the "button girl," it didn't take long for Hamilton to say, "Sure. I can do that."

Although Hamilton did not have a full understanding of how much work would be involved, she always enjoys the challenge of working on a new project. She also found Janis' style friendly and engaging. She appreciated the easy-going way he presented his ideas. She had never worked on a movie before and thought it would be fun to take part in the be-

hind-the-scenes activities of a movie production.

Janis had no specific knowledge about Hamilton's abilities in design and construction before he asked her to get involved with the film. But, he had a sense he made the right decision.

He soon learned that Hamilton has an extensive knowledge of antiques. Her father and grandfather had been antique dealers. At age 18, Hamilton began to carry on their tradition. A bonus for the set-building project: She also builds furniture in a workshop beside her antiques shop.

In fact, Hamilton's Americana Workshop consists of three separate, but supporting sections. The most obvious is her two story antique shop, which expanded into a refurbished 1820 building she moved from Parsonsfield in 2001.

In addition, she builds furniture in one building and designs custom home décor in another. For the film, she called upon all of her skills.

Hamilton says, "Tim wanted me to build interiors of a country store, bakery, a millinery and toy store, plus the exterior of a village main street. Often Tim's imagination would get carried away as new possibilities presented themselves. But, once we decided what the exterior set would look like, we built it in three days. It included a store front, win-



The cast of *The Button Girl* includes, from left, Jane Seymour, Katie McGrath, Charles Shaughnessy and, in the role of the button girl, 11-year-old Alivia Clark.

dow displays, brick siding, a sidewalk and street light."

It took countless hours and hard work by a number of volunteers to get the job done. Eldridge Lumber in York provided warehouse space and lumber for construction.

Hamilton's long-time friend Joan Burnette made a major contribution; she gathered props and decorated the street scene, as well as the interior of St. Anne's Church in Kennebunkport.

Hamilton says, "I consider my connection with Tim Janis and *The Button Girl* to be a highlight of my working experience. It was a joy to work with Tim. His energy, enthusiasm and hopeful outlook became a driving force that inspired us to give our best for the movie. I'm looking forward to seeing the final results of our combined efforts."

To learn more about the Americana Workshop call 207-985-8356 or visit www.americaworkshop.com.



Cindy Hamilton, owner of Americana Workshop, rakes "snow" to help create a winter scene in August at St. Anne's Church in Kennebunkport.

Holiday Events in West Kennebunk

The West Kennebunk Village Committee will host a Thanksgiving Dinner from noon until 2 PM on November 26.

The complimentary turkey dinner will be served at the Dorothy Stevens Community Center, located at 80 Thompson Road

in West Kennebunk. All are welcome.

FMI, to make reservations (not required), make a donation or to volunteer, call Barbara at 985-2272 or Carol at 985-4571.

The Tree Lighting will take place on Saturday, December 5, at the Com-

munity Center. Festivities start at 6 PM and will include caroling, refreshments, entertainment by the Kennebunk Twirlers and a visit from Santa.

There will be an opportunity for photographs as Santa visits with the children.



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Tim Janis Applies His Creative Vision to *The Button Girl*

The Button Girl, directed by Tim Janis, is an uplifting family musical narrated by Academy Award-winner Kate Winslet. It stars Dick Van Dyke, Jane Seymour, Ioan Gruffudd, Katie McGrath and Charles Shaughnessy, and introduces 11-year-old Alivia Clark in the role of Annabelle, the button girl. The film also features more than 200 extras, including several from the local area.

The story takes place in a fictional New England mill town in the 1900s. From a young age, Annabelle has a close connection to her parents, especially her mother who teaches her to believe in angels and miracles.

After the sudden death of her parents, Annabelle is alone and brokenhearted. But the appearance of a mysterious angel, played by Dick Van Dyke, leads her story to a triumphant and inspiring ending.

Janis also wrote seven original songs for the film, which he designed in the style of popular MGM musicals. He says, "Three songs I'm especially proud of are sung by one of my heroes, Dick Van Dyke. He just makes you happy when you watch him sing and dance. He's got an infectious spirit, and being able to work him has been a dream come true for me."

Production started two years ago. Through Janis' enthusiasm and persistence he was able to arrange filming throughout Maine, plus in locations in Los Angeles and on the Disney backstage lot.

Maine locales included St. Anne's Church in Kennebunkport, York historical buildings, Laudholm



Actors Dick Van Dyke and Ioan Gruffudd with director Tim Janis on the set of *The Button Girl*.

Farm in Wells and the Victoria Mansion in Portland. He also filmed critical scenes in a mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, and with a steam train in Essex, Connecticut.

Janis says, "I feel very fortunate to have the luxury of doing work that involves my passion and enthusiasm for creativity. With my musical background, I've always loved working on musicals, so the transition to film was exciting to me."

Janis says his creative passion served him well in his role as director. "Probably the most important thing I've discovered about

directing is you have to have a strong passion to tell a story. Then the challenge becomes how do you take that story and translate it to the screen so it moves viewers emotionally and in a truthful way. After people watch the film, I want them to feel uplifted and inspired. That's always very important to me."

Sharing Janis' vision and passion for the film is his fiancé Elizabeth Demmer. Janis adds, "As a former dancer, Elizabeth loves MGM musicals as much as I do. We've tried to design the film to capture the excitement and entertainment value of those memorable

movies. We balance each other's strength and have fun working together."

Janis was born in New York City and attended a military academy in New Jersey. While at the academy he discovered his love of music. People who hear his music describe it as peaceful and healing. He has produced more than 30 CDs, performed in Carnegie Hall and been featured in five PBS specials.

The Button Girl will appear as a PBS special to benefit Kate Winslet's Golden Hat Foundation to help children with autism. FMI visit www.timjanis.com.

Winter Solstice Celebration
Monday, December 21, 7 PM
 First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, Main St., Kennebunk
 Drumming, singing and dancing. Percussion instruments welcome!
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