

CHATSWORTH BALLERINA – Heather Watts "DISTINCTION IN TEACHING"

By Virginia Watson

Word was received that CHS member Heather Watts, daughter of our Smoke Signal editor, Keith Watts and the late Sheila Watts, is being honored at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA for her outstanding work as a visiting lecturer and faculty member. Watts is married to Damian Woetzel, current New York City Ballet Principal Dancer, and last year taught an academic class at Harvard on the work of George Balanchine, founder of the NYCB. This year she is teaching the first ballet course offered for full credit at Harvard University.

A retired principal dancer with the New York City Ballet, Watts began dancing at an early age at the Rozanne Ballet Center in Chatsworth. She also studied with Natalia Claire of North Hollywood. Growing up locally, Watts attended Chatsworth Park Elementary School, Columbus Junior High and Chatsworth High School, along with her two brothers and a younger sister. At 13, Watts won a Ford Foundation scholarship to study summers with the School of American Ballet, the official school of the NYCB. When she was only 17 years old, she was invited to be a member of the New York City Ballet by Balanchine himself. She went on to dance solo many of Balanchine's creations and with most of the well-known male principal dancer. One of the outstanding events in her career was dancing with Mikail Baryshnikov at The White House at the request of President and Mrs. Carter with her parents in attendance.

She has been a contributing editor of Vanity Fair magazine covering arts and culture, and she has won awards from Dance Magazine, the New York Public Library Lions of the Performing Arts Award and various state awards for education. She also serves on the Artistic Committee for the Kennedy Center Honors. Heather resides in New York City and commutes for Harvard classes.

In our Historical Society, Heather is known for her talents and accomplishments, but especially for her love of roses. This month we received another donation from her and a characteristically cheerful note saying, "Happy Garden Festival." The money is used to keep up our roses at the Acre. As a child she lived near our Homestead Acre and her parents are founding member so four society .She and her brothers and sister attended many of our early historical society events.

Heather and brother Kevin were allowed to stay home from school the day our first project, the moving of the Pioneer Church got underway. And a picture of them watching the old frame building moving out on its way up to Oakwood Memorial Park is in our collection.

Our Centennial Quilt has a ballerina quilted into one comer. Creator of the quilt was Ruth Grant, one of our members, who led a group of II quilters in the stitching. She was working on the quilt when she was traveling in Denmark and attended the ballet in Copenhagen. To her surprise it was Heather Watts dancing there, so far from home. When Ruth returned home she made a fabric ballerina and it was placed on the commissioned quilt. Members of the society decided that it was appropriate to stand for all the young people of Chatsworth who have gone on to fame and fortune. When our docents tell the story of the quilt, they often tell the story of the Chatsworth Ballerina.