



# From The Harrison House

## Note From The President



This May our Board had a few changes as Jane Bouley stepped down from the post of President, and with hesitation and fear of following her most knowledgeable footsteps, I stepped in. We want to thank Jane for the outstanding job she has done the past two years as President, being the impetus for organizing, cataloging, and getting the Harrison House Museum and Barn in optimum shape. She will continue to be a support, do her research and talks, and thankfully will be there for consult when needed. Pete Peterson also

stepped down from the board this year, after 20 plus years of service. We want to give him a big thank you for all he has contributed to the upkeep and maintenance of the Harrison House and Barn. The work he has done will be greatly appreciated for many years to come. We would then like to welcome Joe Naylor to the Board as a guide and Guide Coordinator. He is excited to be joining the Board, as he is directly linked to the original settlers of Branford from 1644, through his Swain ancestors.

If you haven't visited the Harrison House Museum, Barn and Gardens recently, I encourage you to do so. With the current inventory of the house being completed, the artifacts in the house and barn are more accessible, organized and easily identified... and along with the expertise of our guides, your tour should be a very good experience, that takes you on a walk back to Branford's past. In the Exhibit Room you will find yourself face to face with a wooden canteen from the Revolutionary War where a soldier had carved on it, "Pray send me home". If you don't get a chill from that, visit the barn and see the homemade wooden shovels and ponder the calluses our forefathers endured, from shoveling the snow laden streets. When you visit the Harrison House, try to imagine the experiences of the people of that period, how they survived and how they lived, no Stop and Shop, no light switch, no indoor plumbing... they were hardy souls who need to be honored.

I would like to thank our guides, Ted Eastwood, Karen & Jenna Fortunati, Diane Altieri, Margaret Iacobellis, and Joe Naylor, for their time, energy and shared knowledge in presenting the house to our visitors.

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## Branford Historical Society

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Virginia Page

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## Note From The President

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The Branford Historical Society while now fully appreciating and honoring the past by preserving and maintaining the antiquities of Branford, is making changes that are stepping us forward to new happenings and challenges, and it's all very exciting bridging the two and reaching out to share our magnificent past. We are working on a new website that will be more interactive and reach out to more interested individual in Branford and throughout the country through integrating with the social media such as Face book. As people born and raised in Branford have moved away, we feel that reaching out and connecting them to their hometown may be an important aspect of supporting our town's heritage.

We are looking for new members... we may find them locally or in California, Texas, or Florida, or we may find them through you... ask your friends if they would like to be a part of preserving Branford's past for future generations!

I am looking forward to seeing you at the Harrison House.

*Virginia Page, President*

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## Membership Update

The Society extends a warm welcome to new members Mary E. Davis, Richard Kennedy Nadja Cardona, Mary Nicholas, Lorie Nicholas, Pamela Smith, Kate Rodgers, Charles Beebe, Addie Raucci, Victoria Brady Bill Baskin, Judith Miller, George & Marcia Wheeler, Dr. Harold & Patricia Levy, Paula Brown, Florence Fortune, Carl S. Dawson, Miranda Shao, Pat O'Brien, Joseph and Barbara Naylor. Miranda Shao and Joseph Naylor have volunteered to be Guides at Harrison House. All membership dues are current.

I am very excited about the future of the Historical Society. Our new president Virginia Page has many new ideas about improving our visibility in Branford by updating our website and making it more user friendly. There are 233 members in the Branford Historical Society. New members always bring ideas and energy to the Society. Contact me at (203) 488-5433 if you have a friend or family member interested in becoming member.

*Jeanne McParland, Chair*



## Harrison House New Furnace Fund Raiser

The Harrison House is in need of a new furnace...  
after more than 50 years, this one needs to retire!

Any donation is greatly appreciated.  
Tax deductible forms are available.

TO CONTRIBUTE, PLEASE CONTACT US AT:

**(203) 488-4828**  
branfordhistory@gmail.com

## Coming Events



*September 12*

### **THE GREAT NEW ENGLAND HURRICANE**

On Thursday, September 12 at 7  
PM at the Blackstone Library, Jane  
Bouley will speak on the Great New  
England Hurricane, also known  
as The Long Island Express, which  
hit Branford 75 years ago in 1938.  
Considered to be the hurricane  
to measure all others against, it is  
still the greatest natural disaster in  
Connecticut's history.



*December 8*

### **ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY**

On Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, we will  
hold our annual Christmas party at  
the Harrison House from 1-3 PM.  
Refreshments will be served and  
music will be provided by Bob Wood,  
classical guitarist. Watch our website  
[www.branfordhistory.org](http://www.branfordhistory.org) for future  
events.



# Relocated Herb Garden Wins Awards

Poor drainage and lack of sun were the reason for relocating the Alta Newton Herb Garden planted in 1985. A sundial and the Alta Newton Memorial stone were also relocated in the new garden. A legacy from the Alta Newton funded the original garden in 1985.

The sunnier location right behind the house also made the garden more accessible to the public. Herbs from the garden are dried and displayed in the house. Using the original octagonal shape and edging the perimeter with field stones, has given the herb garden a new look. Stony Creek granite dust was used for the pathways around the herb garden and path leading to the house. A variety of 84 perennials herbs were planted. A drip line irrigation system was also installed. A diagram of the herb names and their location will be placed near the garden.

The Branford Garden Club submitted the relocation of the herb garden to the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut awards chairman for a state award. It won two prestigious awards, the Civic Development and



President's award. Janet Jackson, Civic maintenance Committee Chair oversees the maintenance and planting of the Harrison House colonial and herb garden.

The Society members give a shout out and thank you to Janet Jackson for her outstanding work along with the Branford Garden Club members for their "labor of love" caring

for and maintaining the gardens in back of the Harrison House. A walk around the back yard is just a relaxing and peaceful experience, enhanced by the outstanding floral gardens and the harmony of the herb garden.

*Jeanne McParland*



## The Harrison House Gardens

A shout out and thank you to the Branford Garden Club for their time and energies caring for and maintaining the gardens in the back yard of the Harrison House. A walk around the back yard is just a relaxing and peaceful experience, enhanced by the outstanding floral gardens and the harmony of the herb garden.

## An Outstanding Guiding Star

Jenna Fortunati of Branford, who volunteers as a guide at the Harrison House with her mother, Karen Fortunati, was a winner of the Connecticut History Day, Competition in April. She and her partner, Margaret Minabella, a classmate at Sacred Heart Academy, won the Senior Group division and then went on to place eighth in that division at the National Competition which drew 300 participants from as far away as South Korea, China, the Philippines to College Park Maryland.

The theme of the contest, sponsored by the Old Gate House (now a museum) and Connecticut Humanities, was “turning point in history.” Jenna and her copartner chose to focus the documentary on Martha Matilda Harper, and indentured servant from Canada who moved to

Rochester, New York where she established the first modern hair salon in 1888 and then the first franchise. By the 1920s she franchised 100 salons around the world. All the owners were women proving that women could own a business.

Jenna, daughter of Frank and Karen Fortunati, is a rising junior at Sacred Heart Academy where she has earned high honors for two years and is on the tennis team. She and her willing partner now are starting a history club at the school. Jenna and her mother first toured the Harrison House the summer of 2011. The following spring she became a volunteer guide. Jenna likes “all old houses and museums” because she has an interest in history. She also volunteers at the New Haven Museum, the Parde-Morris House and once a week at the



hospital at Yale New Haven Hospital Saint Raphael Campus.

She was so fortunate this summer to have spent a family vacation in Williamsburg Virginia.

*Jackie Ulrich*

*In June, Jenna met author Jane Plitt, author of a biography on Martha Matilda Harper, the subject of Jenna's National History Day documentary. The two are pictured above.*

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## Edgar Ortiz: Winner of Scholarship

Edgar Ortiz, son of Edgar and Susan Ortiz of Branford, is the recipient of a \$500 scholarship from the Branford Historical Society. The award is given to a graduating senior at Branford High School.

The recipient will attend the University of Connecticut at Storrs where he plans to major history in political science as a pre-law student. He has watched TV shows on the history channel since he was 5 years old. Because he likes languages he studied Latin for three years, is fluent

in Spanish and this summer he began studying orthodox Hebrew which he will continue doing in college.

At Branford High, Ortiz was member of the National Honor Society, President of the Model Congress and Vice President of his South Class. He also played varsity soccer and was a member of the tennis team.

This summer he was a camp counselor in San Diego, California, “in the middle of the wilderness”. Last year he worked in a research lab at Yale.

*Jackie Ulrich.*





# Queen Anne's Lace

Summer wouldn't be summer in Branford without the ubiquitous Queen Ann's Lace. Queen Anne's Lace is most likely named after the wife of James I of England. James I was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots and became King at the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. Jamestown, Virginia is named after him. The colonist saw the lacey, summer flower and honored the queen whose lacey collars were all the rage at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



## The Sheldon House

In the summer of 1958 my husband and I were transferred from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania to New Haven. After a few weeks of house hunting, we finally decided to settle in Branford. We fell in love with this charming little New England town and its harbor (we were sailors). A few days later, a hospitality visitor, a Mrs. Boyer, as I recall, was at our door with a hand full of small gifts and information and I had a friend. She told me that she lived in the historic Mill Pond House on "Water Street dating back to the 17th century. At that point I became a "History Buff" on the history of Branford.

One hotel stands out in my mind as one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen was the Sheldon House in Pine Orchard. The Sheldon House complex was run by three generations of the Sheldon family. The property included five acres of 500 ft of waterfront overlooking the Pine Orchard Yacht Club. The hotel was famous for its dinners and French cuisine, informal dining, and beautiful gardens. The Sheldon House also catered to families who rented the bungalow or could watch a movie in the "What Not Cottage." After 120 years of continuous operation, the property sold in 1960 and never opened again. One bungalow remained a private residence.

*By the late Nancy Hendricks  
Ref. Jane Bouley*

*Editor's Note: Nancy loved to write articles for the Newsletter and would give me articles she researched during the year. This article had never been published. Jeanne McParland*

# Strawberries Hold a Special Place in History

As recently as the 1940s schoolchildren were dismissed early from school in June to help their farming families gather strawberries. This year marked the 34<sup>th</sup> year of the Branford Historical Society's annual strawberry shortcake celebration. It was first held at Harrison House on Main Street, and the profits amounted to \$700, a large amount for those "good-old days!"

This year, through the efforts of about 60 volunteers, the Society netted \$3,437. Think of the organization, cooperation and plain hard work represented by this figure: mailing out announcements and

tickets, ordering the strawberries and other supplies, driving trucks to North Haven to pick up the ripe berries, delivering them to the "hullers," organized by Winnifred Judge, setting up the equipment and tables near the Academy building, whipping the cream to the perfect consistency, serving and cleaning up! And there's that one "secret ingredient" in the person of Eva Peterson, who has been involved in this project since nearly the beginning. By tasting the strawberries, she knows exactly how much sugar needs to be added. Yes, because of climate and soil conditions, strawberries taste differently from year to

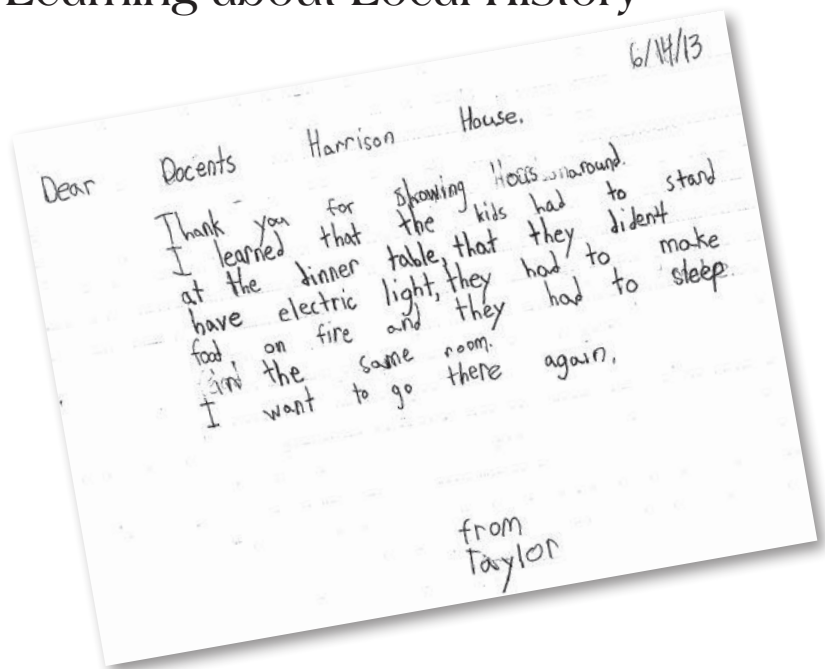


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## Branford Schoolchildren Learning about Local History

This past year the Branford Historical Society reached out to the local elementary schools to implement a program where 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> graders are taught the history of Branford. Teachers and personnel were invited and met at the Harrison House for a luncheon and to tour the house. It was agreed that it would be a benefit to teach local history in the classroom, and to provide a field trip and tour of the Harrison House. Materials were provided from the Historical Society to be used as a teaching tool in the classroom before and after the visit. Students from Sliney and Mary Murphy Schools visited the house, interested, wide eyed and inquisitive, and hopefully left with a better understanding of their hometown history.



The Society received thank you notes from the children that reflected what had impressed them the most: the outhouse, the fireplace, and the fact that children were not allow to

speak at the dinner table! We are hoping this program will become a recurrent part of the curriculum and instill an interest in history, and a sense of hometown pride.

**Branford Historical Society**  
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## Strawberries

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year! The Petersons and their daughter, our Town Historian Jane Bouley, have been involved in the Strawberry Festival for nearly thirty years!

The money realized from this annual event goes toward the maintenance of Harrison House and the preservation of historic artifacts from Branford. The Society has recently been responsible for major tree removal, maintenance of grounds and having the building painted. The next big expense will be for replacement of the old furnace. The Society is grateful to its members (and to all of those who enjoyed their strawberry short-cakes) for their continuing support!

*Maryanne Hall, Publicity*

## Branford Historical Society Publications

Available at the Harrison House, the Blackstone Library or contacting the Branford Historical Society.

*Early History of Branford* \$4.00

*A Brief History of the Thimble Islands in Branford, CT* \$10.00

*The Diary of Malachi Linsley 1821-1834* \$10.00

**1868 Map of Branford**  
12"x20" (laminated, add \$4) \$4.00

**1938 Hurricane, DVD Narrative** \$15.00

### **Vintage Postcards on CD**

Thimble Islands, 100 postcards (\$5.00); Indian Neck – 120 postcards (\$5.00); Short Beach – 120 postcards (\$5.00); Pine Orchard – 120 postcards (\$5.00); Double Beach – 120 postcards (\$5.00); Stony Creek (new CD) - 120 postcards (\$10.00)