



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2005, Volume 10, Issue 1

From the President's Desk...

The other day, I ran across a copy of *As We Were*. It's a reprint of a book written in 1914 by Gaillard Hunt, describing life in America in 1814. There is about as much time between our generation and Hunt as there was between Hunt and his subject. The book speaks as much of the 1914 perception of post colonial America as it does about the various topics. Not everyone has the opportunity to study something old first-hand. Usually we are looking back through someone else's eyes, relying on their interpretation. Perhaps it's not the interpretation we might have made or even an accurate representation of fact. Without a doubt, folklore and legend do communicate the color and texture needed to dress facts in something familiar. While interpretation is unavoidable, the hands-on understanding of facts is necessary to prevent the interpretive scaffold from being taken as its own reality. I'm reminded of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's quote "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly, one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts." The opportunity to experience an original source or artifact is always superior to hearing about it second hand. That's why we bother to have a Historical Society—to keep original and authentic pieces of our collective past.

That's why we get involved in demolition and planning issues, because public space is something worth preserving so that others might have the opportunity to experience it directly.

We were recently made aware of serious considerations to substantially alter the Town Green in order to accommodate surface parking. If you are waiting for a punch line, as I was, forget it. This is no joke. The implications are myriad and staggering, from the underlying message that anything is up for grabs, to the trivialization of the public space we would leave our children. If you have never gotten around to becoming involved, this should be the threat that launches you into action. Also worthy of your attention is proposed state legislation dealing with an extended notification period for demolition. Bill Horne was kind enough to forward the document to us. We hope to have full text on the web site soon.

The Holiday Open House was a tremendous success. I was unfortunately called out of town the evening before the event, but reports indicate that I was hardly missed. Thanks and credit are due Eva & Arnold Peterson, Linda Peterson, Lillian Ryan, Nancy Hendricks, Michael

Sykes Albert & Anne Paulsen, Winnifred Judge, Jeanne McParland, Debbie Vallas, Ann Collier, Carol Petrelli, and Bobbie Frink, all who generously gave their time and talent to organize, decorate, and host a very satisfying event. Noticeably missing from the Open House was our Treasurer, Peter Black who is serving his military commitment in Iraq.

We continue to look to the membership at large for individuals who would like to be more involved. There are abundant opportunities to use your talent or to find a new interest and develop it. Each committee needs help and many chairs need successors. Fresh faces and new ideas are always welcome to the Board. If you are in the neighborhood on Saturday March 5th, stop by the Barn where we will be commencing a pre-spring cleaning and inventory. You'll have a chance to handle the real deal, and get in touch with the artifacts behind the folklore.

Joe Chadwick, President

From the Harrison House

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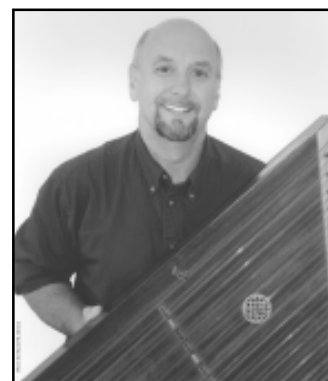
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SPRING PROGRAM “Connecticut in Song” with Mike Kachuba

Join us for our entertaining Spring Program “Connecticut in Song” presented by folk singer/songwriter Mike Kachuba on Wednesday, March 16 at 7:00 p.m. at the Blackstone Library. Mike Kachuba is a songwriter and performer of both traditional and contemporary folk music of America and the British Isles. The Connecticut Commission on the Arts honored Mike as the 1999 Connecticut State Troubadour.

With “Connecticut in Song,” Mike will introduce us to events and people from Connecticut’s past with songs. Between songs and tunes, his lively narrative will give a sense of the story that has made Connecticut such a special place. “I love Connecticut!” says Mike. “It’s a small place with a big history.... These songs are about heroes, thinkers, and special events that make up the state’s history.” The program spans from the early 1600s to the 1900s, and includes such songs as: “Goody Bassett,” “The War Between New London and Lyme,” “The Newgate Walk-Away,” “Joseph Plum Martin: A Soldier of the Revolution,” “Jack Arabas,” and “The Leatherman.”



Songs have been used since the beginning of language to express Ideas and feelings, to tell stories, and for entertainment. In modern culture, songs still serve all these purposes, although we may only think of them as a form of entertainment. Some of the old folk songs are not found in any book or written form, they have simply been passed down orally from one generation to the next. Because of this, there may be several versions of the same song. They may sound a little different, have a slightly different twist to the story, or use different words to tell the story.

Most of the songs in the “Connecticut in Song” program are new songs, written in the 1990s. The stories may be old and, in some cases, the song may “feel” old. All of the songs are written to tell a story, and that is the important part of each song. Stories, legends, tales, and songs can be used to teach. Sometimes, they simply record and teach about historic events and people. Sometimes, they include a moral or lesson beyond the story.

The “Connecticut in Song” program promises to be an enjoyable evening, and we look forward to seeing you. For more information, please contact the Branford Historical Society at (203) 481-5615 or visit our web site, www.branfordhistory.org.

Mary Boyle, Program Chair



Cenotaph Restoration & Beautification Project

The Historical Society has spearheaded a movement to find funds to restore the Cenotaph located on the rear of the Green behind Town Hall. This monument is dedicated to those men and women who served in World War I and died during the course of the war never to return home. Pro Patria (for one's country) is the only inscription on the monument with the date 1917-1918. In the Center of the memorial is a replica of the Distinguished Service Cross. Andre Smith who designed the memorial was a resident of Branford, an artist, sculpture and architect. He was commissioned by President Woodrow Wilson to design the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest military award in the country. Andre Smith's design of this monument is a legacy and an important part of Branford's past. As a town we should be proud of this historic memorial and at the same time should be ashamed of its neglect over the years.

To date we have received a \$1000 dollar grant from the New Alliance Bank and a pledge of \$2500 from the Branford Historical Society for the restoration. The Cenotaph is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. This coming spring we will be seeking additional funds for the restoration of the Cenotaph.

✍ Winnifred Judge, Program Chair
Cenotaph Restoration & Beautification
Project Steering Committee

Preservation of Historic Structures

In January, Proposed Bill No. 1292 was referred to the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Planning and Zoning by Senator Freedman of the 26th District. It reads as follows:

AN ACT CONCERNING THE WAITING PERIOD FOR A DEMOLITION PERMIT.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened: That the general statutes be amended to extend the waiting period for a demolition permit in order to provide more time for interested persons to take action to relocate or otherwise preserve buildings with historic value.

Statement of Purpose:

To provide more time to save buildings with historic value.

For current updates on the progress of this bill, visit www.cga.ct.gov. To support this measure, contact your local representatives by email, phone or mail: Ed Meyer (meyer@senatedems.ct.gov), Peter Panaroni (peter.panaroni@po.state.ct.gov), Pat Widlitz (patricia.widlitz@cga.ct.gov)

✍ Martha Bradshaw, Chair
Preservation of Historic
Structures & Landmarks

The Branford Town Green

The history of the Branford Green began more than three centuries ago when John Taintor willed his home lot to the town to erect a new meeting house. The meeting house served several purposes: as the town's meeting place for governmental and civic activities; and as the place of worship for the church, now the First Congregational Church of Branford. Taintor's will dated August 15, 1699 states "I do give to ye town of Brandford that part of my homelott...which I give to said Towne to build a publick meeting house upon, and to continue for that use so long as they shall maintain a meeting house there unless[s] ye town See cause to build elsewhere and then that land to by to ye common or what other use ye town see meet." He also bequeathed "to ye Church of Christ in Brandford five pounds to be paid out of my moveable estate." The unnamed roadway running between South Main Street and Main Street, east of the First Congregational Church, was named Taintor Drive in 1958 to honor the name of the donor "whose very generous gift of the Branford Green has preserved for the residents of Branford, a Green in the best New England tradition."

The plots of land now known as New England Greens differ in appearance when compared to the colonial period. They were then referred to as the commons and had a variety of uses among them common pasture land, drill grounds for the local militia or train band and like today as a place for the townspeople to congregate. The Branford Green differed from its present appearance



"being more rugged with steep little hollows and hillocks". The transformation of the commons into the well known New England Green began about 1790 with the planting of trees and the beautification of the land. After the Civil War there was a movement toward providing green spaces in cities and towns and as a way to celebrate national and civic pride. That transformation included the planting of grass, shade trees and other landscaping and the erection of monuments. Dozens of trees on the green in Branford were lost during the 20th century due to Dutch elm disease and to several major hurricanes.

The Branford Green is considered one of the finest in Connecticut with its three churches and town hall facing Main Street. The buildings and important monuments standing on the Green are listed in chronological order by date of construction:

The Academy - Built in 1820 by private subscription. It has been moved twice, lastly in 1971 to its

present location after it was deeded to the town by the Masons.

The First Baptist Church - Built in 1840. The back was enlarged in 1908 and the educational wing added in 1957.

The First Congregational Church - This is the fourth edifice and was built in 1843 with a new facade and steeple added in 1878. The educational wing was added in 1955 and another addition in 1999.

Trinity Episcopal Church - This is the second edifice built in 1851. The Parish Hall was added in 1916 and the Parish House in 1957.

The Town Hall - Built in 1857, the front pillars and stucco were added in 1917. There have been additions in 1969 and 2001.

continued on page 5 >

The Branford Town Green, continued

Grand Army of the Republic Monument (GAR) - Erected in 1885 to honor the Branford veterans of the Civil War. It stands between the Town Hall and Congregational Church

Yale Memorial Tablet - Erected in 1900 by the DAR celebrating the 200th anniversary of Yale College and Branford's role in its founding. It stands in front of the Academy.

The Cenotaph - Dedicated in 1923 to honor the veterans of World War I. It was designed by nationally known Branford artist J. Andre Smith.

Veteran's Memorial - Built in 1956 of Stony Creek granite around the flag pole to honor all Branford veterans. The flag pole was cast by the Malleable Iron Fittings Company (MIF).

The greatest change to the New England Green came in the 20th century with the rise of the automobile and a number of Connecticut greens were bisected and nearly eliminated to provide roadways and parking. There were narrow roadways leading to the buildings on the Branford Green by the late 19th century that were widened in the early 20th century. The Branford Green has been reduced in size for the widening of Main, Montowese and South Main Streets and for the expansion of the churches and Town Hall.

The Branford Green has been placed on the State's Historic Resource Inventory which identifies

historic, architectural and cultural resources. Further, the Branford Green and its buildings are part of the Branford Center National Register Historic District which is a federal program through the Department of the Interior and National Park Service. The Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (Public Act 820-362) permits legal recourse for the unreasonable destruction of the state's natural, architectural and cultural resources as listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Route 146 through Branford and Guilford, of which South Main Street is the starting point, has received Scenic Road Designation which protects Connecticut's notable landscapes from alterations that would alter or diminish their appearance including widening and the removal of mature trees.

Indeed, when asked, most people identify the Branford Green as one of the town's most important assets, a place of beauty and history. "The Branford Green is an historic plot of ground that embodies more than three centuries of our history. It predates the Nation by almost a century and a half, and is the one, single landmark which identifies the town and makes it unique from all others."

 Jane Peterson Bouley
Town Historian

A History of the First Church and Society of Branford 1644-1919, J. Rupert Simonds, Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor Co., New Haven, 1919, page 49; New Haven Register, December 24, 1959, Rupert, pages 49 & 50; www.chc.state.ct.us; 1988 Branford Festival Booklet, by Dave Driessens, archivist, First Congregational Church

A Supportive Membership

As the cookies and punch flowed, at the Christmas Open House on December 5, 2004, fourteen guests agreed to become members of the Branford Historical Society. A very warm welcome to Suzanne Ferraiuolo, Rodney & Peter Hayes, Francis Kelly, Kay Manucci, Nichole Manucci, Betsy McMahon, Bill & Maureen Rimmer, Janne & Paul Ross, Jeffrey Stoddard, Peter Haubauer and Mary Swift.

Currently one hundred out of two hundred and forty members have renewed their membership. Please look at the label on your Newsletter to verify that it has a "C" for current. If you see an "R", your dues have not yet been renewed. If did not receive a letter with a return dues envelop in November 2004, and you are not sure if you owe dues, please contact me at 468-5433.

When speaking to your family and friends about the beautiful town of Branford, ask them to become members of our Society. Then contact me and I will mail them a letter and invite them to join the Branford Historical Society.

Thank you for your continued support of the Society.

 Jeanne McParland,
Membership Chair

Rosenthal Gardens

The *Sound Newspaper's* reporter, Ben Rayner, asked me why the Rosenthal Gardens affordable senior housing that is being developed at 63 Kirkham Street was different/better than some of the other current land use proposals that are causing concern in the town. I told him it is an unusual project for Branford because it is an example of historic restoration paired with conscientious development. The gardens date back to 1897 and restoring them makes this endeavor all the more unique.

We have lost many historic structures in Branford to developers who have torn them down for no other reason than to create easier building conditions for themselves, with no consideration of the loss of our town's history. I hope the preservation effort on the part of those who

have designed the Rosenthal Gardens serve as a positive example for future projects.

Of personal interest to me, is that the legacy of the gardens wind their way back to Bittersweet Farms. The property where the garden is now was part of a larger estate that extended to 92 Rogers Street. The house and property originally belonged to the Rogers' Family.

Valdemar Hammer married Elizabeth Rogers Mabbot, and in 1897 set about enlarging the Rogers house that he acquired on 92 Rogers Street. Valdemar, among his other credits, was tree warden of Branford, also created an elaborate garden on the property. His wife Elizabeth was the daughter of Samuel Russell Mabbot and Emily Norton Rogers. Emily's father was Abraham Rogers III.

It was his father, Abraham Rogers II who built the farmhouse in 1836 on the land that became Bittersweet Farm. It is an understatement when I say that the Rogers family contributed greatly to Branford in local government, church, and industry.

In 1960 the Rogers family divided the property, selling the house to the Knights of Columbus, and the land on Kirkham to Jane Driscoll Rosenthal who built the lovely brick house that stands today. It is this part of the old Rogers estate, that still retains elements of Valdemar Hammer's garden, that is to find new life as Rosenthal senior housing.

*Martha Bradshaw, Chair
Preservation of Historic
Structures & Landmarks*

Get Online with History

The snowdrops in the front yard tell me that spring is just around the corner, despite the ongoing need for snow boots and parkas. While we wait for those glorious days to come, consider some vicarious gardening online...

Connecticut Historical Gardens
www.flogris.org/cthistoricgardens

Historic Gardens Foundation
www.historicgardens.org

**Thomas Jefferson Center for
Historic Plants**
monticello.org/chp

Victory Gardens
[www.oldhouseweb.com/gardening/
Detailed/757.shtml](http://www.oldhouseweb.com/gardening/Detailed/757.shtml)

Learn more about topics featured in
this issue of our newsletter...

Connecticut General Assembly
www.cga.ct.gov

Connecticut in Song
www.mikekachuba.com

Connecticut Town Greens
www.towngreens.com



**National Registry
of Historic Places**
www.cr.nps.gov/nr/

Jen Payne

A Message from Iraq



Dear Friends,

Thank you for your many packages, kind notes and prayers. I hear it is 10° and snowing in Branford today. Here it is cool with a light rain...the light rain has turned into a heavy, driving rain. It's hard to believe it was 150° here in the summer. I am on a concrete berthing building, but the seams leak between the wall and the floor, and the sidewalk alongside the outside is not pitched away from the building, so it is flooding around my bed. Getting up in the middle of the night will be an adventure.

Otherwise, we are looking to the end of our time here. We are writing awards for those who deserve them, and end of tour evaluations for everyone. Exactly when we will leave is still uncertain, but we need to be ready to go. I should be home in April.

Warm regards, Peter Black

Branford Historical Society Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

- ☐ Contributing \$50.00
- ☐ Sustaining \$25.00
- ☐ Family \$15.00
- ☐ Individual \$10.00
- ☐ Student \$5.00

Additional donations, or contributions to our Memorial Fund are also appreciated. Please make checks payable to Branford Historical Society and return this form to us at:

Branford Historical Society
P.O. Box 504
Branford, CT 06405

TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

Thank you for your support.

Please indicate the areas in which you would like to volunteer:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harvest Festival | <input type="checkbox"/> House & Grounds | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum Guides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holiday Open House | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Programs/Publicity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum/Acquisitions | <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberry Festival |

Historical Society News & Notes

Thank You...

The Harrison House was decorated beautifully for our Holiday Open House in December. Many thanks to Van Wilgens who donated the tree. Refreshments were wonderful. The punch was very good made by Michael Sykes and many people made wonderful cookies. Thank you all for your help in making it a success.

- Ann Collier, Hospitality Chair

Connecticut in Song

Don't miss our exciting spring program "Connecticut in Song" with Mike Kachuba on Wednesday, March 16. See page 2 for details.

From the Attic

This 1743 Pewter Tankard was given to the Society by Nancy Hendricks in memory of her son William C. Hendricks III and also in honor of her friend, Winnifred Judge. (BHS2004.057)

✍ Maureen DaRos



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