



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2009, Volume 14, Issue 2

Civil War Monument Area Landscaping

The Soldier's Monument erected in 1885 is the most impressive monument to patriotism in Branford. The group responsible for its erection was the Mason Roger Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, hence the presence of the GAR symbol on the face of the pedestal. The monument's height is 32 feet; the figure on the top is 7 feet 4 inches. The soldier stands with the proper right foot forward. The left hand and arm support the flag as he rests his proper right hand on the hilt of his sword.

The Mason Roger Post and the town raised \$5000 to erect this lasting memorial to the Branford men who died in the Civil War. More than 200 men from Branford served in the Civil War, most were in the 27th Connecticut Volunteer Company B under Captain Calvin Ely, its first commander. Carved at the base are the major battles Branford men fought in: Antietam, Shiloh, New Berne, Vicksburg, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Chancellorville and Port Hudson. The monument is a symbol of respect shown by the com-

munity for those who died in the Civil War.

The Branford Garden Club has joined forces with the Town to create a more attractive setting for this impressive historic monument. Flowering white and pink Yoshino cherry trees will be planted to the rear of the monument. One shrub bed of blue hydrangea, red knock-out roses and inkberry will front the white wall of Town Hall to the rear of the monument. A second shrub bed will

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Town Green Alert

**Meeting to Discuss
Revised Plan for Changes
to The Green**

**On June 15th at 7 p.m.
at the Blackstone Library**

For additional information visit www.branford-ct.gov. In left hand column see [Click here for Town Green site improvement planning information.](#)

From the Harrison House

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Branford Historical Society
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www.branfordhistory.org

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Join Us for Our 30th Annual Strawberry Festival

Our largest and most popular event of the year, the Strawberry Festival, will take place on June 20th from 10:30 to 3:30, at the rear of the Academy on the Green during the Branford Festival. Our shortcakes often sell out quickly, so the event lasts as long as the berries hold out.

Topped with fresh strawberries and real whipped cream, the traditional shortcakes will be \$5.00 presale and \$6.00 the day of the event. Lemonade and coffee are included in the price. Contact Richmond Browne for additional presale tickets at 315-1237.

If you would like to volunteer to help hull the strawberries on Friday afternoon the 19th, contact Winnifred Judge at 488-8755. To help the day of the event call Jane Bouley at 488-6531.

A publication table will be set up across from the Festival tent which will have the publications, posters, CD's and DVD's listed on the last page of this Newsletter. The Society will also have on display an example of a house plaque which identifies historic landmarks and structures over 50 years old. You may place your order at the Publications table.

We hope to see all of you on June 20th. If you are a volunteer, the Society thanks you in advance for helping to make this event a success.



Civil War Monument Area Landscaping, continued

be planted behind the bench off the pathway leading to Taintor Drive from Town Hall.

The town will add soil to build up the area surrounding the base of the monument. The soil was washed out when the Town Hall put in a retaining wall near the handicapped entrance. A three quarter circular wall 1 foot above the ground will be built around the monument to prevent

any further soil erosion. Work on this project is expected to start in June.

This historic monument will add to the beauty of the Town Green and will allow the public to take note of Branford's rich heritage.

 Winnifred Judge

Annual Dinner Program A Rousing Success

The weather was beautiful, the food and the hors d'oeuvres were delicious and the program presented by Dr. Nicholas (Nick) Bellantoni was entertaining, informative and humorous. Dr. Bellantoni is Connecticut's State Archaeologist and is a professor at the University of Connecticut. Guests came from Madison, West Haven and Minnesota.

About three times a year, Dr. Bellantoni is contacted by the Connecticut Medical Examiner when skeletal remains are found. By examining the remains, he is able to tell if death was caused by trauma, the sex and age of the remains, if a female has had children, whether the person was left or right handed and many other facts.

Just recently Dr. Bellantoni was asked to travel to Russia and Germany, to help identify remains thought to be Adolph Hitler. There will be a program about the findings on the History Channel in the fall.

Dr. Bellantoni presented information about the examination and reconstruction of historic Connecticut tombs. These tombs might be found under a mound of dirt covered with grass and weeds. Caskets of family members were originally piled one on top of another on two parallel stone walls. Over the years the wood rotted and the remains fell out on the floor. Nick and his team of students and assistants work with a genealogist to identify members of the family whose remains might be in the vault.

When all the work is done, the vault is repaired or rebuilt and the remains are placed in new caskets with a name plate identifying the person. Then the family comes together for a burial ceremony and Dr. Bellantoni shares the information that he has discovered from his examination of the skeletal remains.

Named to the state post in 1988, Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni was elected president of the National Association

of State Archaeologists in 2007. He is affiliated with the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and the Connecticut Archaeology Center. He also is a professor of anthropology at the University of Connecticut where he earned his doctorate in 1987.

At the Annual Dinner meeting at the Owenego Inn, there was an election of the officers of the Branford Historical Society. All Board members agreed to stay on for another two years until May of 2011.

A special thanks to Martha Bradshaw who designed and printed the posters for the program on "Historic Connecticut Tombs".

Dr. Bellantoni's presentation was so well received that members and guests hope that he will return in the future with more of his exciting findings from archeological digs.



Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni

Membership Report

As this Newsletter goes to press, preparations are being made for the 30th annual Strawberry Festival. It is the time of year when new members are asked to help out with the hulling and serving the strawberry short-cakes. Also it is a time when members are able to get to know one another.

Welcome to Josh Russo, and Lee and Richard Bauerfeld who joined the Society this spring. Your membership is valued.

Instead of just driving by on a Saturday afternoon between 2 and 5 when Harrison House is open this summer, drop in and let a docent give you a tour. When you enter Harrison House, you will see the old wood of the walls, the hand hewn oak corner posts, the chamfered summer beams and exposed joists which create an atmosphere of antiquity. The huge hall fireplace and unique corner cupboard were produced over two hundred and eighty-five years ago

Membership is always fluctuating and as new members join other members move, pass away or do not renew their membership. So please think about acquaintances who might be interested in becoming members and mention our organization to them. I will send letters inviting them to join.

Thank you all for your support.

Jeanne McParland, Chair

The Newgate Prison



Postcard from early 1910s, early 1920s.

Newgate prison is at the corner of Newgate St. and Old Baley which is inside the city of London. It was located at the site of a gate in the Roman London Wall in the 12th century and later destroyed in 1777.

In Colonial America, Newgate Prison was established in what is now East Granby, Connecticut. The prison was originally a copper mine opened in 1705 and is believed to be the oldest copper mine in America. After mining operations proved to be unprofitable, the colony converted it to a prison. At one time, the prison held British prisoners from the Revolutionary War incarcerated deep underground in the tunnels of the Copper Hill Mines.

The first prisoner, John Hinson, was committed for burglary in 1773. Later Tories and Loyalists were held during the Revolutionary War. After the prison closed in 1827 some mining operations continued for a while, but since 1860 it has become a tourist attraction. In 1972 Newgate Prison was declared a National Historic Landmark.

Nancy Hendricks

Sagal Lou

The history of Cherry Hill, a section of Branford Hills in the western part of Branford is particularly interesting. For two hundred years it was a large farm established by Capt. Daniel Morris who planted 300 cherry trees imported from England. Before the Revolution, Ralph Isaacs purchased the farm. He was a merchant from New Haven and a loyalist and was confined to his farm during the war. Alexander Hamilton's grandson, General Schuyler Hamilton of New York purchased the farm and built a new summer house for his family.

During the late 1800s, Cherry Hill was a large gentleman's farm owned by John W. Nichols. The buildings and grounds were beautifully landscaped. Strawberries were the most important farm crop at that time.

In 1926 Louis M. Sagal of New Haven established Sagal Lou Farm, Inc. atop Cherry Hill in Branford. Sagal was associated with the moving picture industry and the Poli Theaters. Sagal Lou became one of the largest producers of milk, ice cream, chickens and eggs in the east. Also involved with Sagal Lou was his son-in-law Eugene Rodney, a Hollywood producer and a friend of the actor Robert Young who landed his private airplane at Cherry Hill for visits. Rodney and Young were partners in the production of the television show "Father Knows Best".

Though Sagal Lou lasted only about fourteen years, succumbing to the Depression and other factors, the



Photo courtesy of Alice Sayer.

farm employed about 30 local men. Among them were Harry Taconis, Walter Williams, Marcel Altermatt, Louis Bassett, Jerry Massey, Percival Swift, Earle Ferguson, and Albert Whitteman.

The Branford Historical Society has a large collection of photographs donated by the Nichols family but none during the Sagal Lou period. The Society does have a collection of milk bottles, including several from Sagal Lou. Recently, the Society received a donation of original drawings of the all the buildings associated with Sagal Lou.

Jane Bouley



The Story of Captain John Spencer

Some years ago while doing research on the “Jenny Lind,” a sloop that was built in Madison and later became part of the Branford Fleet in 1862, I became interested in the owner, Captain John Spencer. The Spencer family of Rhode Island, comprised of the progeny of John Spencer could trace a continuous history in this colony for two and a half centuries, and forms one of the foremost and influential families in East Greenwich.

The identity of the founder, John Spencer, has been more or less shrouded in mystery for generations. Genealogists of the family now are inclined to the theory that he was the nephew of Captain John Spencer of Newbury, Massachusetts. He is identical with the John Spencer who in 1637 inherited the estate of Captain Spencer and in 1650 erected a stone house after the fashion of English country houses of the period in old Newbury. The consensus of opinion seems to be that while not of noble birth; John Spencer was an English gentleman of the upper class, well educated and a representative of the finest type of English emigrant to America. His descendants have produced a superior stock, well fitted to take a leading part in the affairs of the communities in which they settled.

The “Jenny Lind” became part of the Branford Fleet in 1862 when she was purchased by Captain John Spencer and Henry H. Fowler as joint owners. The next document,

however, in 1894 showed the “Jenny Lind” as a schooner under the sole ownership of Captain John Spencer as Master. There are many shipping documents showing him as trading in grain, sand and as importing clay for Branford Lock Works.

Captain Spencer retired from sailing in 1894 and opened a grain business on Main Street. The New Haven Register, dated May 11, 1909 carried an account of the celebration of the 60th wedding anniversary of Captain and Mrs. Spencer in the historical Congregational Church in Branford. The Comfortable Society which gave a reception for the couple, made it possible by invitation for all the Branford people and friends of the family from all over New England and New York to attend. They were the first couple to be married in the Historic Congregational Church of Branford.

After 44 years of trade at sea, the “Jenny Lind” had outlived her usefulness and was abandoned near the Montowese Bridge to rot away in the changing tides of the Branford River.

Nancy Hendricks



New Exhibits At Harrison House

There are two new exhibits at the Harrison House this summer. One is a display of six items owned by different members of the Blackstone family, some of which date back to the 1700s. The other exhibit is a pictorial display of unusual spinning wheels for wool and flax.

We also have a replica of a very unusual candle holder called a Wax Jack. A taper type candle is wound around a column and led up to a clamp. How long the candle will burn is determined by how much is above the clamp. This type of candle holder dates back to the 1700s.

The Harrison House is open Saturdays from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM starting Saturday, June 6th and ending Saturday, September 26th.

*Anton Wohlert, Director,
Harrison House Museum*

Publications & Prints

Contact Winnifred Judge, 488-8755 for details.

Indian Neck, Short Beach, Thimble Islands & Double Beach:

CD-Rom Vintage Postcards..... \$15.00 each

The History of Damascus Cemetery, by Jane Bouley and Martha Bradshaw \$25.00

Reprint of *Malachi Linsley's Diary*, by Betty Linsley and Elizabeth Radulski..... \$25.00

Early History of Branford \$5.00

Thimble Islands Book, by Archie Hanna..... \$7.00

Post Card Prints of Early Branford (Downtown, Stony Creek/Pine Orchard,
Short Beach, Indian Neck/Pawson Park).....\$3.00 Each

Montowese Program DVD \$15.00

Branford Historical Society Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

- Business \$50.00
- 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

Thank you for your support.

TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

Important Dates To Remember

MONDAY, JUNE 15TH AT 7 P.M.

Revised Green Plan Meeting
at Blackstone Library

SATURDAY JUNE 20TH

Strawberry Festival
10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

HARRISON HOUSE

Open for Tours
Saturdays 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.
June 6th to September 26th

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Branford Historical Society
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