



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Summer 2005, Volume 10, Issue 2

From the President's Desk...

Two years. It's a very long time for some things, not long for others and a difficult thing to measure. As I get ready to fold up the tent that was my term as President, a number of things come to mind. First, in the errata department I owe a huge apology to Bill and Isabel Davis for omitting their names in the credits for the Winter Open House. Isabel has been a diligent supporter of this event for so long that I should not have had to rely on a reminder list in an email.

Speaking of email, not quite two years worth of email amounts to 1,943 pieces of correspondence. Some were inquiries directed from the new Web Site dealing with specific history or genealogy questions that I was able to forward to Jane Bouley's able attention. Many were strategic and tactical exchanges on Wyllys Russell and 2 Chestnut. Quite a few were simply the routine reminders, questions, and venting that could never have been done as efficiently on the phone or in person. With this abundance of communication capacity, regrettably little ever touched the membership. It was only very recently that I truly understood how isolated the Board is from the membership at large. With the exception of newsletter missives and the standard events, there is as yet no

meaningful way to involve the new members or restore the disenfranchised. We are two silos, one full of very interesting needs and another filled with talent. Two years held about a dozen opportunities to buttonhole, cajole and beg with precious little opportunity for follow through. When first I talked about the possibility of moving to Branford, a surprising number of people mentioned the spirit of volunteerism that is particularly remarkable here. We must engage it and nurture it and conjoin the silos.

A long-term project would be a worthy and invigorating endeavor - something to rally around and involve many people. In two years, the notions of an endowment fund and a property owned by the Society have persistently percolated into discussions. Either would be an extraordinary challenge. Many people do not realize that we rent the Harrison House from SPNEA, now popularly known as Historic New England. While I would not expect that we would forsake the Harrison House, it represents a number of logistical issues for large public gatherings such as parking, toilets and floor loading. The fragility of the collections and wear and tear on the historic finishes are always a consideration. Even if a suitable property were

to drop into our laps, experience as a facilities bureaucrat has taught me that a building without maintenance funding is at best, a burden. Challenging? Perhaps. Impossible? Certainly not. An older and considerably wiser friend of mine once observed that, "If it can be solved with money, then it's not a problem." Interest and coordination of talent cannot be bought nor can it be faked. It can only be inspired and developed.

I could persist with my ruminations, but there is a tent to fold and email to check. I thank you for your kind support and indulgence over the last two years and look forward to seeing you all at the annual dinner where I will have the privilege of introducing the new slate of officers.

Stay well.

Joe Chadwick, President

From the Harrison House

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Branford Historical Society
124 Main Street, P.O. Box 504
Branford, Connecticut 06405
(203) 488-4828

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Join Us for our Annual Strawberry Festival!



We look forward to seeing you at our popular Strawberry Festival on Saturday, June 18th, from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. during the Branford Festival. Enjoy traditional homemade strawberry shortcake, learn more about the Branford Historical Society, and catch up with old friends.

Tickets are sold in advance for \$4.50 per person (\$5.00 on the day of the event), and include strawberry shortcake, and your choice of coffee or lemonade. To purchase your tickets, please call Richmond Browne, 315-1237.

We often sell-out quickly, so the event lasts only as long as long as the berries hold out! The event will be held rain or shine.

Volunteer are always welcome! If you would like to help out at the event, please call one of our committee member below.

A lot of time and energy goes into preparation for this event, and we would like to extend special thanks to everyone involved. While Jacey Wyatt has resigned as Chair of the Strawberry Festival, George Goeben has offered to serve as Chairman pro tem. He can be reached at 481-9200.

Committee members include Richmond Browne (Pre-sale Tickets, 315-1237), Arnold "Pete" Peterson (Setup and Clean-up, 488-0450), Winnifred Judge (Strawberry Hulling, 488-8755), Eva Peterson (Food Preparation, 488-0450), Sandra Browne (Whippers, 315-1237), John Ifkovic (Ticket Takers, 413-572-9892), Albert Paulsen (Beverages, 481-5699), Judy Hayes (Servers, Morning, 488-3119) and Nick Lavorato (Servers, Afternoon, 488-4723).

We look forward to seeing you!



Volunteers enjoy time together while preparing for the Strawberry Festival.



Annual Dinner Meeting & Election of Officers

on THURSDAY, MAY 19 at 5:30 P.M.
at The Owenego Inn

Cash Bar with Selected Hors D'Oeuvres
followed by Buffet Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDED BY:
The Ragtime Ensemble of the Neighborhood
Music School from Greater New Haven

Historical Society Members and the Branford Community
are welcome to attend. Cost: \$28.00 per person.
Please make your reservations by May 14th
by calling Winnifred Judge, 488-8755.

The Ragtime Ensemble, part of the Jazz Studies Department at the Neighborhood Music School from Greater New Haven, consists of Gordon Fairclough on coronet, Paul McGuire on soprano sax, Sarah Denes Ingrahm on trombone, Archie Perkins on piano, and directing the group and playing the tuba, Art Hovey. "Ragtime," an American Jazz form, is the synthesis of a combination of European dance and salon music, Afro-Caribbean rhythms, marching band and American dance music. It became the popular craze of the early 20th century. All types of instruments are used and tapping of your feet will be encouraged.



2005 Season at the Harrison House Museum

The 2005 season at the Branford Historical Society's Harrison House will have more new exhibits than it has had in almost a decade.

- The largest new exhibit will be in the barn and will consist mostly of antique farming items.
- A very important display will be about Branford's most famous resident (1891 to 1919) Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who was best known for her poetry. This exhibit will be several times the size of the one that had been seen in previous years and will include several items that had been owned by Mrs Wilcox.
- The third display will be nautical in nature and will include an oil lamp from the famous America's Cup sailboat Shamrock V.

The season will run from June 3rd to September 30th. The hours are 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays. The location is 124 Main Street, Branford.

Anton Wohlet, Museum Chairperson

Membership Update

Peter Banca, Lucille M. Pascarella, David & Jo-Ann Pearson, Mrs. Alice Van Wie, Pamela Knapp and Robert Schwall have become new Branford Historical Society members. A warm welcome to all of you.

Currently there are 244 members in our Society. There are over 70 members who have not renewed their membership for 2005. Along with several fund raisers each year, your dues help preserve and maintain Harrison House as well as its barn and grounds. Your support also allow us 10 present interesting programs at the Blackstone Library. Please check your mailing label. A "C" stands for current, an "R" indicates that you need to renew your membership.

If there are any questions concerning your membership, please contact me at 468-5433.

*Jeanne McParland,
Membership Chair*



A Celebration of Ella Wheeler Wilcox at the Harrison House

Internationally known poetess Ella Wheeler Wilcox was born 1850 in Wisconsin and started writing poetry at the age of five. Her most famous book *Poems of Passion* was published in 1883 which brought her fame throughout the United States and Europe. She was the author of dozens of books of poetry but is best known for the poem *Solitude*: “Laugh, and the world laughs with you: Weep, and you weep alone.”

Ella Wheeler married Robert Wilcox in 1884 and made Short Beach her year round home in 1891, building two homes on the water called “Bungalow” and “Barracks.” Bungalow Court was the gathering place for literary and artistic celebrities of the period where the poet entertained with dances, musicals and plays. When not traveling, she also took an interest in local affairs, starting Illumination Day and the “White Wings,” a group of women that promoted aesthetic improvements in the neighborhood. Ella was an avid swimmer and encouraged athletics for women, holding swimming races during Illumination Day, the precursor of events still held Labor Day weekend in Short Beach.

Robert Wilcox died at the Bungalow in 1916 and the poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox died at her Short Beach home in 1919.

 Jane Peterson Bouley



“...many... wonders of God’s earth have I beheld, yet nowhere have I found any other spot which seemed to me to combine so much beauty, comfort, convenience, and charm for the enjoyment of simple and wholesome life as Short-Beach-on-the-Sound at Granite Bay.”

— Ella Wheeler Wilcox
from *The Worlds And I*

The Branford Historical Society is pleased to present an exhibit this summer celebrating the life and works of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Short Beach’s famous Victorian poet, journalist, activist and progressive thinker. Items on display will include signed personal letters, a handwritten signed poem, artifacts, photographs, books, and other memorabilia. Also included will be examples of period silver plate pieces manufactured 1867-1898 by the Wilcox Silver Plate Co. of Meriden (later known as the International Silver Co), for whom

Wilcox’s husband Robert was a salesman.

Town Historian Jane Bouley and new member Pam Knapp have compiled this presentation that includes much of their personal collections related to the popular prolific poet.

The exhibit will run from June 1 through October 1 at the Harrison House, 124 Main Street, Branford. For more info, call Museum Director Anton Wohlert at 481-4665.

Suggested Readings:

Poems of Passion - Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1883. The book of verse that made Wilcox a national figure due to what was considered “controversial” poem themes for the times. Cited “immoral” by one New York newspaper journalist, the book had to go into several reprints to keep up with the demand.

The Collected Poems of Ella Wheeler Wilcox - London: Gay & Hancock, 1917. Volume One: Poems of Passion, Poems of Pleasure, Poems of Cheer and Poems of Sentiment. Volume Two: Poems of Power, Poems of Progress, Poems of Experience and Maurine. Volume Three: Kingdom of Love, The Englishman, Three Women and Yesterdays.

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A Celebration of Ella Wheeler Wilcox at the Harrison House

continued...

Heart of the New Thought - Chicago: The Psychic Research Society, 1902. Wilcox's essays on the New Thought Movement, a spiritual philosophy and practice based on "the power right thought," a "self-help" approach toward finding happiness and fulfillment.

The Worlds and I - New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918 Autobiography that includes much information about Wilcox's life in Short Beach.

Period Piece: Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Her Times - Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940- by Jenny Ballou, who acknowledges thanks to "friends in Short Beach...for the material they so generously contributed" to this biography.

Looking for a first edition? Try abebooks.com, antiqubook.co.uk, or eBay.com, where Wilcox's books can always be discovered.

Several of Wilcox's books are now available in reprint from Kessinger Publishing (kessinger-publishing.com), a testament to the continuation of her popularity to this day. Publications include many of Wilcox's most popular poetry tomes, essays, and novels.

 Pam Knapp


Preserving Branford's Historic Structures

As you are probably aware, there are a number of critical issues facing the Town and its Historic Structures. Recent preservation efforts have included the Sterling Ridge Development, the Dr. Hall House, and the Town Green.

Often, community support is needed to help in our efforts; more often than our quarterly newsletter allows. While our email correspondence has been successful to a point, we are pleased to announce that a

new "Preservation of Historic Structures & Landmarks" section will be added to our web site this spring.

Look for updates on current efforts, historical information about Branford's historic buildings, information on the Cenotaph project and more!

 Martha Bradshaw,
*Preservation of Historic
Structures & Landmarks*

Get Online with History

www.branfordhistory.org

One of the best ways to learn about history is to pick something you enjoy doing and take time to explore its roots, its history. This year, for example, our Annual Dinner Meeting features Ragtime music, an incredibly historical form of American music. Want to learn more? Check out:

**Scott Joplin International
Ragtime Foundation**
www.scottjoplin.org

Red Hot Jazz Archive
www.redhotjazz.com

Explore Jazz History
www.harlem.org

Connecticut Jazz Festival
July 29, 30, 31, 2005
www.ctjazz.org

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

Historic New England
www.historicnewengland.org

**Neighborhood Music School,
Greater New Haven**
www.nmsmusicschool.org

Branford Festival
www.nmsmusicschool.org

Ella Wheeler Wilcox
www.ellawheelerwilcox.org

Ella Wheeler Wilcox Quotes
www.brainyquote.com

 Jen Payne,
Newsletter Co-Chair

From the Archives

Many Visitors to the Harrison House during our Guided Tours from June to October, have commented on the tiles adorning either side of the fireplace in the leanto section at the downstairs rear of the House. These tiles were installed by J. Frederick Kelley at the time of his restoration of the Harrison House in the 1930's. They are Delft tiles of the type made in Rotterdam, Antwerp, Utrecht and other Dutch cities, as well as in Liverpool and Bristol, England in the 18th century. Delft tile has been associated with American life for several centuries. Indeed, many old houses still retain Delft fireplaces and

the demolition of such houses is one means of bringing the tiles to the market. This was probably Frederick Kelley's source of supply.

The 18th century tiles in the Harrison House measure 5-1/4" square x 1/4" thick. The scenes are enclosed in a circle, color is purple-brown, and designs are crude without borders. Biblical subjects were popular designs in the 18th century and, by that time, corner motifs had dwindled to volutes, rosettes or naturalistic carnations. At times, it was a broken meander of fretwork with manganese purple coloring, showing a Chinese influence.

One set of Biblical tiles in manganese and white, bears inscriptions giving references to the books of the Bible with illustrated verse. Such a set of tiles is in a fireplace in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.

 Nancy Hendricks, Archives

Branford Historical Society Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contributing | \$50.00 | 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: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | \$25.00 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$15.00 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$10.00 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$5.00 | |

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 |



Branford Historical Society
Post Office Box 504
Branford, Connecticut 06405

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