



# From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2006, Volume 11, Issue 1

## Winnifred Judge Selected as Citizen of the Year

From the landscaping of the Branford Green and Linden Shore District to the restoring of Branford's World War I monument, the signs of Winnifred Judge's benevolent and resilient spirit are evident throughout town.

Dark glasses may cover the eyes of the Branford Review's Citizen of the Year, whose optic nerves remain forever damaged from glaucoma, but that does not hinder her tireless efforts aimed at maintaining the charm and historical integrity of the community.

"I think that the town is made up of many caring people, who care for the town itself and what goes on in it. It's a lively town. It's a town where anyone can find some volunteer work of some kind to do to serve the town or to serve the people in town. You don't have that in all towns," she said.

She was born and raised in New York City and from the age of four, she spent summers in Indian Neck. In 1978, after doctors declared her legally blind, she was forced to retire from teaching and coaching at Riverdale Country School, a private school on Long Island, and returned permanently to the bungalow her mother built at 31 Pawson Road. Judge's small white cape is situated

around the corner from Long Island Sound and near a marsh looking out to the Branford River.

A self-described "go-getter," Judge had no intention of staying idle and instead she defied the meaning of the word retired.

"I've always felt that I had to get involved. I taught school and when you're teaching school, it's difficult to do volunteer work or getting involved with extracurricular activities within the town or within the community that you live in," she said. "Once I was forced to retire, I didn't want to just sit and not do anything, I wanted to be active and in order to be active you have to get involved in organizations. I think when you're in organizations you have to provide something."

Judging by her heavy participation in the Branford Green Committee, Branford Historical Society and Linden Shore District, Judge could accurately be described as a multi-tasking extraordinaire. In conversation, she humbly mentions her ability to organize as her greatest asset. A garden shovel pin shining subtly on the collar of her white button down blouse and several books lining the shelves of her living room echo her love of gardening.

"I've been chairman of civic development," she said of her participation with the Branford Garden Club. "I've put in many memorial gardens in Branford and I enjoy doing that. That's sort of fun. I got involved with the town green because I got a little upset seeing trees being taken down and then not replaced. We developed the Green Committee which deals with the maintenance of the flora of the on the Green." The committee was created by town ordinance in 2001 and has also been responsible for the replacement of diseased trees and their overall maintenance.

Also a history buff, Judge's work as the co-chair archivist for Trinity Episcopal Church marks her dedication with resuscitating old records in an attempt to persevere her parish's past. A similar endeavor that has received a great deal of recent publicity has been her co-chairmanship of the Cenotaph Restoration and Beautification Project, an undertaking that began three years ago.

"It really started with the Garden Club. My idea was to put plantings around the monument to bring people's visual eyes to it so they

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## Winnifred Judge: Citizen of the Year

would know there was something there," she said. "Right now it just sits there. No one really knows what it is."

Concerned about the deteriorating state of Branford's 83-year-old World War I monument located behind town hall, she and George Ahern of the American Legion spearheaded the committee to supervise the reparation of the Cenotaph.

During the past few years, Judge and the committee dedicated a great deal of time and effort into the ambitious undertaking. Beyond oversight duties, the group collaborated with the town to write and submit applications for grants, place out bids and research restoration projects.

She attributes her personal attachment to the restoration and revitalization of the Cenotaph to her war veteran father.

"It's probably important to me because my father fought and served in France during the first World War. I grew up in an American Legion household because that's when the Legion was founded back in those days and my father was very, very involved in that. Part of this monument has the Legion star right in front so I think I have a feeling for it from that aspect," she said.

With the restoring of the monument complete, Judge said that the

project has just entered its second phase upon receiving a state grant of \$20,000. Now, at the beginnings of this stage, she acknowledges her patriotism and motivation to spread awareness of the Cenotaph's significance.

"The Cenotaph itself is there to remember those who served our country and were never able to return because they died elsewhere in service and that's very sad. So this is all part of this monument and the reason for its being," she said.

Petting Maya, her guide dog, Judge laughs and smiles when being asked about her downtime. Although she does not have many spare moments, she said she enjoys listening to a variety of books on cassette, gardening, walking and attending to Maya and participating in the Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation's annual walk-a-thon.

Overall, with her work in town occupying most of her time, Judge enjoys it and shows no signs of slowing down.

"Sometimes you sit back and you wonder 'what am I doing?' Maybe I'd like to go off on a trip somewhere or just sit down and read and just relax, but I don't think I'm made that way," she said.

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# “Secret Soldier” The Revolution of Deborah Sampson

*SPECIAL PRESENTATION: MARCH 16*

The Branford Historical Society and The Clocktower Antiques Group are celebrating Women’s History Month on March 16 at Clocktower Antiques at 7:30 p.m. Anne Pasquale, a professional actress with “Living History”, will perform this two-person play based on the life of an extraordinary woman, Deborah Sampson, better known as the Secret Soldier, who was the only recognized female veteran of the American Revolution.

Miss Sampson, descendant of William Bradford and Miles Standish, was born into an impoverished family of eight and left fatherless by the age of five. The excessive taxation by England on the colonies force her mother to sell her into a ten-year term of indentured servitude.

At the age of twenty-one, she wished to fight for her own independence. She wove her own military uniform and journeyed on foot from her home in Plymouth, Massachusetts to West Point, New York, where she was outfitted and enlisted in the Continental Army in May of 1782.

She served as a male soldier, taking the name of her deceased brother Robert Shurtleiff. For eighteen months she fought honorably. When she was wounded, she fell ill and was



examined by a surgeon, whereupon her secret was discovered.

On October 25th, 1783, she was given an honorable discharge. Nine years later, she received payment and official recognition as a veteran of the Revolutionary War.

“The Revolution of Deborah Sampson”, a play of high energy that employs the art of quick-change, join-in reenactments, and a touch of stage combat, is not just another tale of female heroism. It is an extraordinary story that epitomizes the need and actions of the early Americans and their reasons of revolution. In short, it is a lesson in early American history.

Anne Pasquale is a performing artist with Young Audiences of CT. Families are welcome to come to help young people gain a deeper understanding of the Pilgrims’ original relationship to Great Britain and the New World. You will see the lifestyle of the colonists and the events that led to the Revolutionary War, while highlighting the role of a woman in our society that was the only Revolutionary Woman Veteran.

There is a suggested donation of \$2.00 and everyone will be free to browse in the antique booths and displays. The Clocktower Antiques Group is located at 840 East Main Street in Branford between exit 56 and 57 off I-95. Please join us on Thursday, March 16, 2006 at 7:30 p.m.

For Information call 203-488-1919 or 203-481-2996.

*Mary Boyle, Programs Chair*

## From the Archives

### AMERICAN COLONIAL SAMPLINGS

by Nancy Hendricks



In the early colonial days, when needlework was considered an essential accomplishment for those young girls of refinement and education, there was an increase in the production of these pieces of embroidery. These early examples illustrated the young ladies' skill and knowledge of the stitched form. The sampler was usually a picture consisting of letters and numbers in rows. These young ladies had indulged their artistic sense and this had provided their work with great charm and exuberance. The simplest form of the " sampler consisted of straight stitches worked over from horizontal threads of canvas, each stitch rising and falling two threads below the last. These samplers were often worked in beautifully muted shades, typical of the early vegetable dyes.

Please note: When mounting your valuable sampler be sure to clean it with a vacuum process. Mount by means of hand-sewing onto acid-free museum board that has been slip-cased with fabric appropriate with the piece itself.

The sampler shown above was made by Hannah Plummer when she was only eleven years old and was dated August 18, 1774. Hannah was a resident of our nearby neighbors in Newport, Rhode Island. We also have a similar sampler on display in the Harrison House. Ours is a fine example of a Family sampler of the colonial era. ❧



## Cenotaph Restoration & Beautification Project

Since our last report on the progress of the Cenotaph Restoration and Beautification Project, the committee has received a \$20,000 state historic preservation and restoration grant under the sponsorship of Senator Donald Williams and Senator Ed Meyer. This money should enable us to landscape the area, provide security lighting and erect a marker explaining the history of the Cenotaph..

The Branford Historical Society, for the first time, has sponsored the preservation of an historic structure in the Town of Branford. This is a proud moment!

❧ Winnifred Judge, Chair

# Polly Humiston Palmer

*by Jane Peterson Bouley*

One of my favorite stories associated with Damascus Cemetery is that of Polly Palmer. Polly Humiston was born 1793 in North Haven a daughter of James & Phebe (Bassett) Humiston. She was living in West Springfield, Massachusetts when she married Daniel Palmer of Branford in 1808. The Palmer family lived on Paved Street (now part of Leetes Island Road toward East Main Street). Daniel was a farmer and died in 1854 at the age of 72.

Polly maintained the home on Paved Street raising nine children, most living to adulthood. Two unmarried daughters lived home and she also raised a granddaugh-

ter. One son Daniel died in 1902 and was called the “East Haven hermit”. Another son Julius died in 1899 and his obituary states “that he was an eccentric living on the Guilford turnpike”. Polly made her living as the village weaver and in 1874 wove 459 yards of cloth.

This year a friend alerted me to a listing on ebay of three tintypes of a Palmer family from Branford from a seller in North Carolina. Hoping that no one else knew who these people were, I was the only bidder for the tintypes. They are photographs of Polly, her son James Francis (1811-1888) and grandson Edward Seaver Palmer (1846-1930). These are a wonder-

ful addition to the Branford Historical Society’s photograph archives.

Polly (Humiston) Palmer, the village weaver, died in 1883 at the age of 95 years. She is the oldest person buried at Damascus Cemetery. Her gravestone, next to that of her husband Daniel, was made by the Philips Monument Works of New Haven. It reads:

*POLLY.*

*Wife of Daniel Palmer*

*Died*

*April 4, 1883*

*AE. 95 yrs. & 6 mos.*

*“She hath done all she could”*



# Historical Society Membership Report

Again in response to the membership renewal letter mailed to you in October, I am proud to report that renewals are at their highest for this time of the year. All but 36 members have sent in their dues.

William Boyd Harrison, Tania Stetin, Allen Christopher and George Ahern have become new members. Welcome to all of you.

If you have referred a friend or relative to me for membership and you do not see their name on the list as a new member, you might remind them of the Society's constant vigilance for the preservation of historic buildings and monuments, especially the Cenotaph.

Thank you to all members who support the Branford Historical Society. Your membership supports a number of important efforts coordinated throughout the year, including:

## PROGRAMS

During the winter months a series of lectures are offered with refreshments served during a social hour.

## TRAINED GUIDES

The House is open from 2-5 Friday and Saturday, June to October and knowledgeable guides are on duty.

## SCHOOL

Groups from the schools come by appointment and background information is offered to the schools.

## EXHIBITS

Changing exhibits are featured in the museum room and the leanto.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

A large photograph collection is maintained. Copies of pictures are available.

## GENEALOGIES

Genealogical work is encouraged and a file is maintained of Branford families at The Blackstone Library.

## PUBLICATIONS

Books on the Branford, its early history and the Thimble Islands, as well as postcards, posters of local areas, maps and notecards are offered for sale.

## MEMORIAL GIFTS

Gifts of remembrance on birthdays, anniversaries or in memory of loved ones are most welcome and are added to the Endowment Fund.


## HISTORIC HOUSE PLAQUES AND RESEARCH SERVICE

The Society provides research and house plaques to identify historic Branford structures and landmarks.

## FUND RAISING

A strawberry shortcake festival in June has become traditional with the Society. Other fund raising may occur from time to time.

If there is an "R" on your label, your membership needs to be renewed. Please contact me if you have any questions, (203) 468-5433.

 *Jeanne McParland, Chair*



## Think Strawberries!

The Branford Historical Society Strawberry Festival is scheduled for JUNE 17 during the Branford Festival weekend.

This is the major fundraiser for the Society and, as always, it requires roughly 80 volunteers to have this day culminate and provide the financial support we need.

We are searching for a member to take the overall Chair position by April 1, and also members to volunteer for subchair positions: whippers, hullers, servers, kitchen (Friday and Saturday), barn, and set-up and knock-down crew (Friday and Saturday). We also need drivers for pick-ups (berries, biscuits, cream and ice), biscuit splitting, runners, ticket collection and cash sales.

Coordination and organization meetings will begin in April. Please call Strawberry Festival committee member George Goeben for more information, 481-9200 (please speak slowly when leaving a message).

 *George Goeben,  
Festival Committee*

## Accessions Report

**M**y first term as Accessions Chair got off to an exciting start with a donation of an heirloom which has been handed down in the family of one of Branford's first settlers.

Unfortunately I am going to keep the readers in suspense about this gift until our next newsletter, when it will be announced as part of an exhibition organized by Anton Wohlert.


A number of objects documenting the agricultural heritage of Branford entered our collection last year. A harvesting bag, cider skimmer and pie cooler recall the apple-picking and processing days of Hilltop Orchard, which closed its doors late last year. Nancy and Bill Hendricks also donated a large sign from the store which attracted shoppers with its claim to be the cheddar cheese

capital of New England. We also received milk bottles from the dairies at Seven Brooks Farms and Medlyn's. Many thanks to George Goeben, Nancy and Bill Hendricks, Jay Medlyn and Anton Wohlert for these items.

In honor of the Ella Wheeler Wilcox, exhibition I would like to mention a number of donations which represent the material culture of Victorian women, and Mrs. Wilcox herself. Richard Edwards of Tumwater, WA, who generously supplied several items for the exhibition, presented us with three books of her poetry. Anton Wohlert acquired a boudoir oil lamp on behalf of the Historical Society, which was manufactured by her husband's factory, Wilcox Silver Company. The Bradley

Prann family donated a lovely Victorian costume complete with a hoop. It would be interesting to know if its owner met Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Warmest thanks are extended to these donors as well.

At this time I would like to thank Maureen DaRos for her assistance during my first months as Accessions Chair. She has been an invaluable resource to the Historical Society for her expertise in the care of museum collections.

 Amy Prescher, Accessions Chair

### 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 |  |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Student      | \$5.00  |  |

Branford Historical Society  
P.O. Box 504  
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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       |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality        | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum/Acquisitions | <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberry Festival |

# Historical Society Publications & Prints

The following publications and prints are available through the Society. Contact Winnifred Judge, 488-8755 for details.

- 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
- Bird's Eye View of Branford w/Historic Buildings (Print) ..... \$5.00
- Post Card Prints of Early Branford  
(Downtown, Stony Creek/Pine Orchard, Short Beach,  
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