



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2008, Volume 13, Issue 1

From the President

Americans have an ambivalent relationship with history. Americans love the new: compare Obama's performance with Dodd's. The frontier spirit propels us into the unknown, to take the gamble that the unknown may be better than the known.

In Europe, old homes are preserved and protected. In America, economic interests conspire to deride the old. "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" celebrates the destruction of old homes. PBS's "This Old House" shows little respect for older homes, instead it shills for the latest building products. Thirty years ago, the Con-

necticut Supreme Court ruled that the General Assembly could not place an employees observance of his Sabbath above his employer's economic interests. Greed now seems to be our national religion.

The results of short-sighted money worship may be seen in the current economic woes our nation faces today, caused primarily by too many taking out mortgage loans they could not hope to repay from their income. Too few could remember even history from fifteen years ago, when house prices fell year-after year. Fewer still would recognize the relation to 1929, when borrowed money pro-

pelled the economy to unsustainable heights.

So how does all this relate to Branford? Well, right now our Planning and Zoning Commission is creating our Plan of Conservation and Development. So far, there has been little interest expressed in historic preservation. Should we continue to bulldoze the past in the pursuit of the almighty dollar? If you, as I do, believe that historic preservation is important, please make your views known to the Planning & Zoning Commission.

✍ Peter Black, President

A Visionary Plan for Branford

During the month of January, the Branford Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) is holding three strategy review meetings to elicit public input in the following general areas: conservation, development and infrastructure in its effort to promote the design of a 2008 Plan of Conservation and Development for Branford. Section 8.23 of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) requires that the PZC prepare, adopt, and amend a plan of Conservation and Development for Branford every ten years.

On January 16, 2008, conservation was discussed under the following topics: natural resources, open space, coastal management, community and **historic resources**. Although the topics were not listed in alphabetical order, one could assume that **historic resources** have a low priority in the mindset of the PZC.

At this meeting, I stated that the conservation of Branford's character and historic resources have changed significantly since 2000 due to the failure of the PZC to implement its vested authority to preserve historic

resources in sustaining Branford's historic character as stated in the PZC Regulation 31.54(f) - "the preservation of natural attributes and major features of the site structure such as water courses, water bodies, wetlands, high erodible areas, major trees, historic structures and scenic views both from the site and onto or over the site".

It is interesting to note this regulation is buried (pun intended) within Section 31 - Site Plans, and it has been purposely ignored by the PZC

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is a publication of the
Branford Historical Society
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A Visionary Plan, continued...

in preserving the historic character of this town (i.e. Sterling Ridge).

I further noted to over 100 residents that the PZC has failed to adhere to Connecticut General Statutes: **whereby Section 22a-15 through 22a-19 “shall be applicable to the unreasonable destruction of “historic structures” and “Landmarks” of the State of Connecticut which are defined as a those properties (i) listed or under consideration for listing as individual units on the National Register and which have been determined by the State Historic Restoration Board to contribute to the historic significance of such district.”**

To emphasize the lack of enforcement of these regulations, I cited several examples beginning with the PZC’s approval for CuraGen to dismantle the 1834 Greek Revival Bittersweet Farmhouse and demolish the remaining buildings that housed 23 shops- a State Register of Historic Places “landmark”. Since only three of the displaced businesses reopened in Branford, the result was not only an historic loss but an economic loss for the town.

In my opinion the former Knights of Columbus building on Rogers Street was a “town landmark”. The building could have been rehabilitated along with appropriate construction: whereby the site would have been ideal for affordable senior housing.

Without the intervention of the Branford Historical Society and the support of the Connecticut Historic Commission, the Wyllys Russell House (circa 1820) and barn (circa 1870) would have been demolished by the developers of Sterling Ridge. As it is, other lesser buildings will

probably be destroyed to construct an approved condominium complex within the Canoebrook Historic District that the Branford Historical Society worked so diligently to establish on the National Register of Historic places.

The action of the PZC will be detrimental to the pristine and historic character of this site. The PZC’s lack of concern for the Canoebrook Historic District is further evidenced by granting the recent demolition of the William D. Smith House (circa 1860) at 58 Bradley Street and the construction of buildings with yellow vinyl siding.

Although the statutory responsibility to adapt a Visionary Plan of Conservation and Development rests with the PZC, implementation will only occur with the diligent effort of the residents and officials of the Town of Branford. However, such a plan will be meaningless if the Commission does not say NO to individuals and corporate business whose agendas will adversely affect specific historical districts and/or the historic character of the community.

In closing, Mr. Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic *Preservation* puts preservation in today’s prospective. During an interview for the January/February 2008 issue of the Trust’s magazine, *Preservation*, he states “If you tear an older building down that investment is wasted - but if you keep the building in use, you’re saving energy and conserving resources. That’s what people mean when they call preservation the ultimate recycling.” An example is Rosenthal Gardens.

 William Davis, Past President

Awards of Excellence for Cenotaph



The Branford Garden Club was the recipient of two outstanding awards for the historic preservation and beautification of the Cenotaph. These prestigious awards were presented at the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut annual awards luncheon in October 2007.

The restoration of the World War I memorial designed by Andre Smith was sponsored by the Branford Historical Society with the support of the American Legion, the Branford Foundation, Branford Festival Commission, Branford Garden Club, New Alliance Bank, the Town of Branford, the State of Connecticut and Branford residents.

A large silver bowl for Historic Preservation was presented to Winnifred Judge, Civic Development Chair of the Branford Garden Club

by the National Garden Clubs, New England Region. The second award of excellence, a silver bowl, for Historic Memorial Public Gardens was presented by the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut.

These two awards of excellence were only possible with the support and dedication of the members of the Cenotaph Restoration and Beautification Committee. Members of this committee were: George Ahern, Peter Banca, Bill Davis, Winnifred Judge, Jeanne McParland, Bill O'Brien and Jeff Vailette.

The Cenotaph Committee wishes to express our gratitude and appreciation to all those who helped to make this project a success.

Pictured above are Jeanne McParland and Winnifred Judge.

Membership

Once again I received an overwhelming response to my letter for your 2008 dues sent out last October. To date one hundred and ninety-five families have renewed their membership.

There are seven new individuals and/or families who became new Society members. They are Jim & Janice Bohan, Leon L. Brown, Jr., Lisa Falcone, Alan & Tina Freilicher, John Giordano, Thomas & Nancy Gutowski, Lori Pitts and Frank & Barbara Shaw. All of you are very welcomed additions to the Branford Historical Society membership.

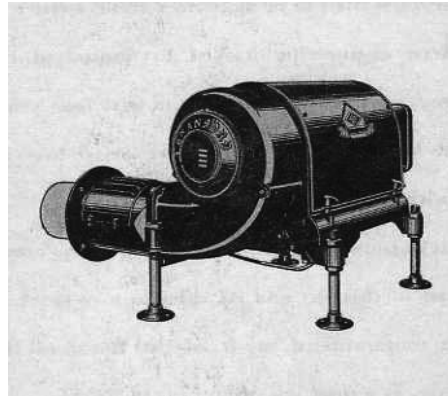
Our big event at the end of last year was our Open House on December 9th. If you drive by Harrison House you will see the Christmas tree door decoration made by our very talented member, Debbie Vallis. "Now and Then" provided vocal harmony throughout the afternoon and big Al Paulsen despite a soft cast on his foot kept the mulled punch flowing. The Open House gives members a chance to meet one another and take tours of the house built in 1724. It was an enjoyable celebration.

As you know, I am always seeking new ways to increase the membership. Your neighbors, friends and family members may be interested, as you are, in preserving the historic homes in this beautiful town of Branford. Contact me with their name and I will send them an invitation to become a member.

*Jeanne McParland,
Chair, 468-5433*

The Branford Oil Burner

The Society received two interesting items from separate donors in 2007 relating to the Branford Automatic Oil Burner. The oil burner was invented and patented in 1930 by Forrester L. Hammer of the Malleable Iron Fittings Company. The burner was easy to install and repair, low maintenance, and quieter than others on the market during the 1930s. Forrester Lundsteen Hammer (1888-1965) was the son of Alfred E. Hammer, president of the MIF Co. and an engineer graduating from the Sheffield School at Yale. He specialized in wireless radio communication. The MIF sold thousands of Branford Oil Burners across the country for domestic heating. In 1955 MIF sold the oil burner operation and all its patents.



One donation is an actual burner in excellent condition that was donated by a local heating and air conditioning school. The motor measures about 12 by 24 inches. The donor stated that many Branford Oil Burners were still used in homes in the 1970s but were replaced at that time with more efficient units because of

the energy crisis. There are probably a few still heating homes today.

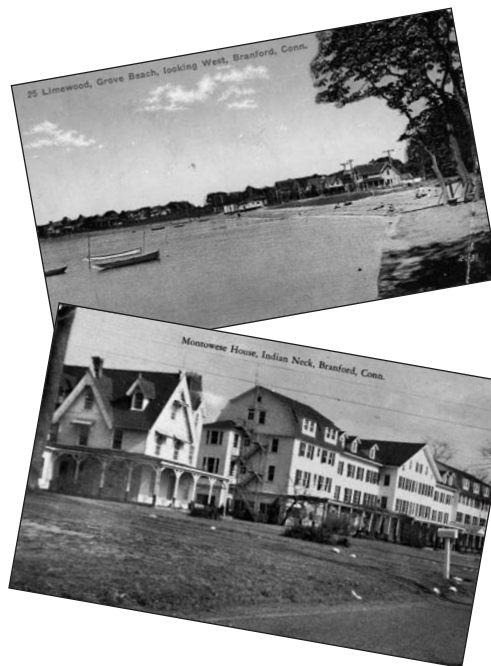
The second item is a booklet that is a take off on the verse "This is the House that Jack Built". It begins "This is the furnace fed with coal that stood in the house that Jack built". It ends "This is the family that found such delight in the Branford Automatic Oil Burner installed in the house that Jack built". On the last page is a nice Malleable Iron Fittings Company ad. The Society also has an original wood crate that a burner was packed in and several other advertising brochures.

Jane P. Bouley

Vintage Postcards of Indian Neck Available

One hundred and twenty vintage postcards of the Indian Neck area of Branford have been reproduced on a CD-Rom by Jane Bouley, Town Historian. These postcards show scenes of several shoreline communities well known as summer resorts during the 19th & 20th centuries.

The Montowese, the largest hotel between New York and New London, cottages at Lime-wood Beach, Linden Avenue, Pawson Park, Haycock Point, Hotchkiss Grove and Summer Island are part of this collection. Today Indian Neck is a year



round neighborhood with beautiful views and unique character.

These very special vintage postcards can be downloaded on your computer. All proceeds from the sale of the CD-Rom go to the Branford Historical Society for its programs of restoration, education, Town Archives, and the upkeep of Harrison House. The price is \$15.00. These vintage postcards on a CD-Rom make a great gift for any occasion. They are available at the Blackstone Library or by contacting Winnifred Judge at 488-8755.

Accessions Report: Powder Horns

Hearing shots outside my window from some duck hunters in early January, I was reminded about the article I wanted to write about the powder horn donated to the Branford Historical Society in 2007. It is hard to imagine that guns once figured so prominently in everyday lives for serious purposes like killing game and warding off potential invaders. Today there is no musket or rifle hanging above the hearth even at Harrison House, but, as two small powder horns suggest, this was probably not always the case. As necessary accessories to firearms, powder horns were produced in great numbers and survive because of the durability of the horn and because of their value as decorative objects and historical documents.

Our new acquisition, a gift from a former Branford resident, is a relatively simple piece with its decoration limited to the narrow -or spout- end of the horn. The wide end of the horn is sealed by a wooden plug held tightly in place by pegs. The neck is cut into an octagonal section providing flat segments, upon one of which the initials “SM” and the year “1798” have been carved. Despite the brevity of the inscription, the tall and narrow letters, which seem to have been formed by an earnest, but inexpe-



rienced hand, convey the power of literacy in the early industrial society.

Most of the powder horns in the Historical Society’s collection are plain containers with no form of personalization, but two are exceptional pieces of American history with highly detailed carving by skilled engravers. The inscription dominates the design of the first horn with four lines of large letters: “BENJAMIN SMITH HIS / HORN BROOKLINE FORT 1775 / MADE BY MATTHEW SMITH / AUGUST THE 7 DAY”. Three small vignettes with depictions of increasingly heavy weaponry at the ends of the lines confirm that this was a Revolution-

ary soldier’s horn. The first is a small canon labeled as “A Field Pece” (sic), the second is a larger canon labeled as “A Mortar Pece” (sic), and the last is a fortified vessel labeled “A Ship of Wor” (sic). Fort Brookline (once found west of what is now the Boston University campus) was the largest fortification erected to defend the basin of the Charles River from the British navy. On July 31, 1775, in the early stages of its construction it was attacked by two floating batteries, but the British were unable to intimidate the American forces. Matthew Smith completed the horn just a week later with this event fresh in his mind.

The other richly decorated horn was conceived as a map, but the area it represents has never been identified because its landmarks are vague in appearance and not named. A large fortified settlement on the bank of a river is rendered at the base of the horn. As the river winds inland, one encounters palisaded forts and Native American-occupied areas, canoes and



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Accessions Report, continued

sailing vessels in almost equal numbers until the farthest point where a large fortification is set in wilderness. The tip of the adjacent territory at the very top bears the date of 1763. Of course, looking at the horn, which tapers and twists from bottom to top, one cannot easily follow the meandering path of the river and its tributaries, and instead of a map, it appears to be a labyrinth interspersed with depictions of monsters: "savage" hunters, wild animals and mythological creatures. Anyone about to embark on a journey into this place must have had second thoughts with this frightening document as a guide. The powder horn belonged to Samuel Holmes, the great grandfather of the late Mrs. Thomas Bracken of Branford, whose name and the year "1770" are engraved at the lower edge of the base. The presence of two dates may indicate that Samuel Holmes acquired this horn, perhaps as a souvenir of a particular expedition, and had it personalized. It also may have been desirable as a work of art, because its maker was clearly a professional engraver of refined talent. The initials "JIB" on the neck may refer to this artist or the original owner.

 Amy Prescher, *Accessions*

SOURCES:

Anthony D. Darling, "An 18th Century Map Horn," *Canadian Journal of Arms Collecting* 10:1 (1972), 7-14.

William Marchione, "Defending the Charles," *Brighton Allston Historical Society* 12 Jan 2008 <www.bahistory.org/History/DefendCharles.html>.

A Delightful Holiday Party



Members and friends gathered at the Harrison House on December 9th for our annual holiday party.

The house was beautifully decorated with the help of Nancy Lynch, Winnifred Judge, Jeanne McParland, Eva Peterson, Lillian Ryan, Amy Prescher and Laura Zabawa. Wreaths were made by Debbie Vallas and cen-

ter pieces by Martha Bradshaw. The tree was donated again this year by Shelleys Garden Center. Volunteers during the party to keep the punch bowl and cookie trays filled were Marjorene Ainley, Pat Black, Jane Bouley, Al Paulsen, Eva Peterson, and Amy Prescher. Joan Kreider was on hand to show guests the upstairs parlor and hall chambers. Many members responded to our request for cookies- Marjorene Ainley, Marilyn Anderson, Joyce Black, Pat Black, Martha Bradshaw, Jane Bouley, Ann Collier, Maureen DaRos, Nancy Gaylord, George Goebin, Rodney Hayes, Pam Knapp, Nancy Lynch, Kendra Martin, Nancy Morse, Priscilla Oliver, Eva Peterson, Amy Prescher and Jean Wood. A raffle was held for some of the decorations, the tree was won by Peter Halbauer and center pieces went to Jeff Clark, Priscilla Oliver and Jane Bouley. Many thanks also to those who dropped off greens. Music by "Now and Then" with three piece harmony was enjoyed by all.



Publications & Prints

Contact Winnifred Judge, 488-8755 for details.

Indian Neck CD-Rom, 120 Vintage Postcards.....	\$15.00
<i>The History of Damascus Cemetery</i> , by Jane Bouley and Martha Bradshaw	\$25.00
Reprint of <i>Malachi Linsley's Diary</i> , by Betty Linsley and Elizabeth Radulski	\$25.00
<i>Early History of Branford</i>	\$5.00
<i>Thimble Islands Book</i> , by Archie Hanna.....	\$7.00
Bird's Eye View of Branford (Print).....	\$5.00
Post Card Prints of Early Branford (Downtown, Stony Creek/Pine Orchard, Short Beach, Indian Neck/Pawson Park).....	\$3.00 Each
Montowese Program DVD	\$20.00

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: _____

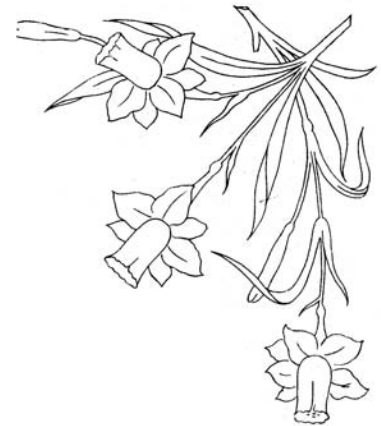
News & Notes

DOCENTS DESPERATELY NEEDED

Harrison House is open Saturdays from 2-5 PM during June, July, August and September. Guides are needed in order to keep this historic home built by Nathaniel Harrison in 1724 open to the public. A new guide is given training and works with another docent. You only need to give three hours of your time once a month when the house is open. Please contact Anton Wilbert @ 481-4665 if you can volunteer for this important service to the community.

POSITION OPEN ON THE BOARD

The very important position of Program Chairman on the Board of Directors is presently open. Any member may contact Peter Black at 483-6470 or Jane Bouley at 488-6531 if they would be interested in filling this vacancy.



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