



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

February 2021

Greetings as We Start the New Year Together!

I'm sitting down to write this on New Year's Day 2021. While thoughts of the events of 2020 are still whirling in my head – from the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, to national political events perhaps unequaled since 1876^{Note}, to all of the other upheavals (hurricanes and 'mere' windstorms and all of the resulting power outages) – the thought foremost in my mind is about the kindness of friends. That's because, earlier this afternoon, some friends brought me and my wife the New Year's Day staple foods of Hoppin' John, boiled greens, and other savory markers of hope for good fortune in the new year. These friends have held a January 1st party every year since as far back as I can remember, but very wisely cancelled it this year; that they could summon the energy to cook and deliver their traditional culinary good-luck charms was just SO reflective of the sense of community that we see here every day in Branford – Matt Radulski, President

[Note: Update: "in many ways, surpassing any events in our nation's political history"!]

News Flash: Joe Naylor, the Society's House and Grounds Chair, will offer an online presentation about the founding of Branford, "Branford Beginnings", on Wednesday, February 17th at 7 PM, through the James Blackstone Memorial Library. See BranfordHistoricalSociety.org/events for details

Report from the Annual Meeting

This year, the Society conducted its Annual Meeting online. Normally held in late Spring and accompanied by a social hour, dinner, and the appearance of a guest speaker, the Meeting was delayed month by month this year while the Society's Board and officers gauged the possibility of meeting in person in the face of the pandemic. It soon became obvious that no in-person meeting would be safe for the attendees, so the meeting was held online on December 2. The Society was able to secure Walt Woodward, Connecticut's State Historian, to speak about his new book, Creating Connecticut, and he presented some highlights from it during his presentation. Many of us have heard him present some of the book's topics on the Connecticut Historical Society's podcast, *Grating the Nutmeg* (a joint production of the magazine *Connecticut Explored* and the office of the State Historian). We recommend subscribing to both the podcast and the magazine, and also buying subscriptions to the magazine and copies of the book for members of our families who have relocated out of state – just to make them miss Connecticut even more.

Changes in Officer/Board Roles

First off, in reviewing the activities of the Society, we have to start on a somber note. As some of you may have read in the paper or in our January 2020 newsletter, Jane Fortune,

our Publicity Chair and an all-around wonderful, warm person, died suddenly last Winter. On a happier note, Robin Comey has stepped in to handle Publicity and is doing a great job. And, thanks go out to Lexie Klarman for joining the Society's officer ranks by assuming the role of Recording Secretary.

Another thank you goes to Susan Rood, who, besides already being the Guide and Tour Management Chair and the Corresponding Secretary, is also working with Jane Bouley to learn about cataloging accessions, with Mary Hitchcock recently having stepped down from her long and very fruitful tenure as Accessions Chair.

Special recognition goes to John Ifkovic, past President, presently our longest-serving Board member, retired History professor, and, above all, a real treasure when it comes to remembering past Society activities and practices. John will be especially valuable to the Society as it moves forward into this new normal that we're all facing.

A Special "Thank You" to Jane Bouley

Aside from officers and Board members, we have to mention the Society's gratitude to Jane Bouley, Branford's Town Historian and past Branford Historical Society President. She coordinates filling the online orders for publications, even delivering them in person or getting them to the Post Office. And there are so many other things that she does for the Society, such as responding to public & member requests for information and cataloging donated items (what we call "accessions"). Additionally, when you see those house plaques around town listing the original owner's name and the year of construction – please know that Jane does the research for those and coordinates the production of the plaques. Through Jane's efforts, we've just caught up with any backlog on plaques, and to give ourselves a little breather, we've put plaque sales on hold temporarily until the Spring. Check back then if you'd like a plaque for your house.

Finances, and Ways to Support the Society

On to the Branford Historical Society's business and finances: As is the case for many non-profit organizations, the Society (which is organized as a 501(c)(3) entity) suffered a major loss of income in 2020. For us, it's due to a number of reasons: The cancellation of the Strawberry Shortcake Festival sales during the Branford Festival this past year, as well as to the absence of the donations which the Society usually receives during in-person talks/presentations, the Annual Dinner, the Holiday Open House, and Harrison House tours. The shortfall ended up being a few dollars short of \$8,000.

Josh Russo is our Treasurer, as well as our Membership Chair, and we thank him for his very well-organized, if sometimes sobering, financial statements. We also thank John Daley, our Vice President and former Treasurer, for his work with Josh and with Joe Naylor, our Assistant Treasurer, in bringing them up to speed on the budget/accounting duties back when John turned over those duties. We have to mention that Josh is also the editor's goad to keep things moving, and we thank him for that.

Two financial bright spots are our continuing donations, made to the Society above and beyond membership dues, and also the continuing sales of publications online – those

include both books and DVDs. Gift memberships and Society publications make great presents as we begin the new year!

We enjoy a third financial bright spot: **You!** Both in renewing your membership and in encouraging others to become new members, the Society can be prepared to meet its regular expenses for maintaining Harrison House and also set aside some money for anticipated expenses, such as replacing the roof of Harrison House, which will need to be done within the next few years. Once the dust has settled on this year's finances period, the Board and officers will be looking at other possible income sources such as grants, but you (**and anyone you can get to sign up as a new member**) really are (**will be**) the bedrock of our finances, far greater than income from the Strawberry Shortcake sales. Aside from the financial aspect of you renewing your membership, the Society runs on the efforts of its members, and your eagerness, year in and year out, to help with important tasks (such as preparing for the Strawberry Shortcake Festival and decorating Harrison House for the Holiday Open House) make those events possible.

Presentations – Now Online, and Still Going Strong!

As noted above, Joe Naylor, the Society's House and Grounds Chair, will offer an online presentation about the founding of Branford titled "Branford Beginnings", on Wednesday, February 17th at 7 PM, through the James Blackstone Memorial Library.

Presentations are continuing to be offered, with Mike Russo as the Programs Chair, and those are now happening virtually, with the Blackstone Library's assistance. In 2020, the Society offered presentations on everything from Lafayette's 1820s return tour to the United States (and the present-day Lafayette Trail commemoration effort), to educational programs for tax credits for the renovation of historic homes, to hyper-local presentations such as Jane Bouley's about Indian Neck postcards, Bob Barnett's about Branford Public Schools, and Alex Palluzzi's about the Branford Community Houses (yes, "Houses," plural – there have been several Community Houses in Branford over the years).

Monitoring Changes in Branford's Historic Districts

As always, an important part of the Society's mission of historical preservation is involvement in public issues – even "monitoring", you could call it – of such items as houses being demolished (with Preservation Chair Anthony Solomine reviewing those), and the now-permitted Sterling Ridge development around the corner from Harrison House, and the planned changes to Route 146, which runs from Branford Center all the way to Guilford and touches on three separate National Historic Districts.

Harrison House Maintenance

With regard to maintenance of Harrison House, the barn, and the grounds, we'll be restarting work parties for volunteers in not too long, under Joe Naylor's guidance as House and Grounds Chair – socially distanced and wearing masks, for now.

Looking Toward the Future

And, on a happy note of what we can look forward to in the future: Rick Nintean, our Hospitality Chair, pointed out that we should mention that the Society marched in several parades in Branford in 2019. We can continue that as soon as it's safe to have public

gatherings again. It may have been a number of years since we'd participated in parades, and the officers and Board had a lot of fun with it in 2019. Joe Naylor and Rick have helped drive that involvement, and the marchers have included officers and Board members, members of the Historical Society at large, and many of our friends and family.

Hopes for the New Year

Please remember to follow the CDC's guidelines for safe practices! We look forward to restarting Harrison House tours, our Strawberry Shortcake Festival, the December Holiday Open House at Harrison House, involvement in Town parades, Annual Meetings in person, talks/lectures in person, and so many other events which have been put on hold over the past year. We wish you a Healthy and Happy New Year!



Where was This? For Extra Credit: What Was Its Name?

Send in your answer for recognition in the next newsletter! Call 203-488-4828 and leave your name & your answer.



The Branford Historical Society
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**RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED**

To check out past issues of the newsletter as well as all of our other resources, including news about upcoming presentations and other activities, go to www.BranfordHistoricalSociety.org – brought to you by Branford's own Webbersaur.us web-development agency (led by Chris Hauman) and the Society's Treasurer and all-around "get it done" volunteer, Josh Russo!