



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2023

Greetings as We Start the Spring Season - Together!

Mike Russo, Membership chair, wrote an excellent update on the Society's 2022 activities and distributed it with the 2023 renewal-reminder notices – if you missed that update, please see it under the “About” tab, in the “Newsletter” subsection on our website, BranfordHistoricalSociety.org. The immediate takeaway is: If you haven't renewed your membership, please do so right away; **and**, please also recommend to non-members that they join, so that our programs can be funded! Personally, my favorite program is hosting Branford third graders for tours of Harrison House, which Mike wrote about in detail in his renewal-letter activities summary. This edition of the newsletter has some photos depicting what Mike wrote about and a few additional news items.

Over the past year or so, we've faced the 'triple-demic' of COVID-19 coronavirus, influenza(s), and RSV; with vaccines for all three now available, it appears that most people can be less concerned about masking/social distancing. Attendees of Historical Society events are always welcome to 'mask up' if they feel more comfortable doing so. And, there is an 'open-air' presentation being worked on (a tour of Main Street), which should provide some relief from most epidemiological-control measures! – *Matt Radulski, President*

Report from the Annual Meeting and Dinner

The Society held its Annual Meeting in person at Woodwinds on September 21st. Normally held in late Spring, it was moved on a month-by-month basis in 2022 as pandemic conditions dictated that the meeting be delayed while the possibility of meeting in person was evaluated in the face of the pandemic. It featured a social hour, live music, an excellent dinner, a raffle, and the appearance of Jane Bouley as the guest speaker; she spoke very entertainingly on “The Early Settlers of Branford – Revisited,” which revealed that everyday personal relations in the strict and seemingly staid New Haven Colony (later the Connecticut Colony) were not as tame as we might have thought they was. **We've scheduled the next Annual Meeting for May 18th at the Pine Orchard Yacht and Country Club.** Also, Joe Naylor (shown here with his wife Barbara; photo from the Branford Historical Society), long-time Board member, tour guide,



Society spokesman, and all-around active Society volunteer, was awarded an Honorary Lifetime Membership.

In Memoriam

In reporting on its 2022 Annual Meeting and Dinner, the Society must note that its long-time volunteer musical performer, Robert M. “Bob” Wood, USMC, passed away in early November of last year. He was a priceless gift to the Society, always refusing payment for his many hours of playing exemplary classical guitar at the Society’s Annual Meetings, Holiday Parties, and other Society events, and he is truly irreplaceable. The Society extends its condolences to Bob’s family and friends. Semper Fi, Bob. 🍷

Changes in Officer/Chair Roles

Here’s the present roster of the members of the Society’s Board (the officers and Chairs):

<i>President:</i>	Matt Radulski	<i>Membership:</i>	Mike Russo
<i>Vice President and Programs:</i>	Sue Winkel	<i>House & Grounds:</i>	Rick Nintean
<i>Treasurer and Archives & Library:</i>	Josh Russo	<i>Publicity and Ways & Means:</i>	Robin Comey
<i>Assistant Treasurer:</i>	Joe Naylor	<i>Preservation:</i>	Anthony Solomine
<i>Recording Secretary:</i>	Kaitlyn Goodwin	<i>Hospitality:</i>	Alpha Coiro
<i>Corresponding Secretary and Guides & Tours:</i>	Susan Rood	<i>Museum & Accessions:</i>	Britt Ryan
		<i>Member at Large</i>	Tony Terry

Over the past year, Sue, Kaitlyn, Mike, Britt, Alpha, and Tony have assumed these new positions or joined the Board altogether. Mike, for instance, is a long-time Board member and has now assumed the Membership chair after being Programs chair for many years.

Finances, and Ways to Support the Society

On to the Branford Historical Society’s finances: As is the case for many non-profit organizations, the Society (which is organized as a 501(c)(3) entity) suffered major losses of income in 2020 and 2021. For us, it was due to a number of factors: The cancellation of the Strawberry Shortcake sales during the Branford Festival for two years, as well as the absence of the donations which the Society usually receives during in-person talks/presentations, the Annual Dinner, the Holiday Party, and Harrison House tours.

Two financial bright spots are continuing receipts of donations made to the Society above and beyond membership dues, and 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 very soon. The Board will continue to search for 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) makes those events possible.

Branford's Witness Stones Project is Launching

As always, a primary part of the Society's mission is education. Many of us here in Connecticut believe that slavery in New England was greatly limited in extent and ended around the time of the American Revolution, and that only in the American South did slavery last longer than that. The truth was far different, with slavery in Connecticut being eliminated only slowly, and in stages, after the Revolution. The Witness Stones Project ("WSP"), per its website, "seeks to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities." As part of its mission, the WSP works with community groups (churches, school systems, and other organizations) to teach them how to use local historical documents, such as census records and churches' Parish registers, to identify those individuals, determine as much biographical information about them as possible, and document the information. Once that has been done, the work can result in the placing of a "Witness Stone" (physical marker), often right at the site where that person worked. The Society, with the support of grant money from both State and local sources, is sponsoring WSP's training of a group of Branford public-school teachers to use research themes and methods; the teachers will then conduct a standards-based educational unit with their students, with the students producing narratives of the life of one of the enslaved persons who worked here in Branford.



In December 2022, the Society presented a funding check to the Witness Stones Project's Executive Director and Co-Founder, Dennis Culliton, to support the WSP's training of a group of Branford public-school teachers. From left, Board members Britt Ryan and Robin Comey; Culliton; Board members Matt Radulski and Joe Naylor. Photo from the Branford Historical Society.

Monitoring Changes in Branford's Historic Districts

As always, an important part of the Society's mission is historic preservation. That includes monitoring such items as houses being demolished, the progress of the Sterling Ridge development around the corner from Harrison House in the Canoe Brook National Historic District, 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). While the Society is notified by the Town of any upcoming demolitions, please let us know if you see any properties under threat, either by calling us at the number listed below or emailing us at Info@BranfordHistoricalSociety.org – thank you!

Public Engagement and Looking Toward the Future

Over the past few years, especially because inside activities have been curtailed, the Society has participated in more public events than ever before; these have ranged from promoting the Society's activities with information tables (including at the Friends of the Blackstone's book sales, the Branford Garden Club's Spring plant sales, Earth Day celebrations, the Branford Arts and Cultural Alliance art show, and 2022's International Muster of Fife and Drum Corps), displays for Scarecrows on the Green for the past two years, and marching in Town parades such as the Holiday Tree Lighting, also for the past two years (2022 parade photo below, courtesy of member Bill O'Brien). The marchers have included officers and Board members, members of the Society at large, and many of our friends and family. If you'd like to join us in any of these outreach efforts, whether it's to help at an info booth or to march in a parade, please email Info@BranfordHistoricalSociety.org to let us know; you'll be contacted to get you involved. And, thanks to our intrepid Recording Secretary, Kaitlyn, you can now find us on Facebook and Instagram! Just search for "Branford Historical Society" on either platform – **please follow us and have your friends do so, too!**



Presentations – Still Going Strong!

Presentations organized by the Society have continued, hosted by the excellent staff at Blackstone Library. In 2022, the presentations covered everything from the Dutch Fort (c. 1610!) in Indian Neck, to "Secret Connecticut: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure," to "The Bicycle Craze to the Auto Age: Connecticut Leads the Way." Stay tuned for announcements of new presentations; in the works are tours of Main Street to highlight its history and changes, information about genealogical resources in Branford, and other topics.

Special Thanks to Our Partners & Business Sponsors

The mission of the Branford Historical Society is to discover and preserve the history of Branford by the acquisition and preservation of artifacts, documents, and records of Branford provenance, and to actively promote Branford's history to the community. To do that work, the Society needs both financial support and ties with other community organizations. Financially, our work is supported **primarily** through the support of you, the Society's dues-paying member; however, our business sponsors and several Branford non-profit organizations have pitched in to assist us greatly, whether by contributing money or services, or helping us fulfill our mission. Here's a quick list and summary of those partners – please support them in any way that you can, so that they can continue to support the Society! First, those organizations/businesses which have contributed financially:

- The **Branford Community Foundation**, “a public, non-profit, tax-exempt charitable trust. It provides an administrative, philanthropic service – a means by which public-spirited citizens may make gifts or bequests, the income from which is distributed for educational, cultural, health, social, and civic needs.”
 - **Terry Architecture**: “We welcome the particular challenges and rewards of each new relationship, each program of needs and aspirations, each new site.”
 - **Richard Squeri Insurance**: “Local, independent, and here for you!” – they “marry experience, choice, and convenience.”
 - **W.S. Clancy Memorial Funeral Home**: “Serving Branford area families for over 100 years. We are honored to be a part of the rich history of this community.”
 - **The Branford Rotary Club**: “Our members give their time and expertise to improve lives in Branford, across the shoreline, and around the world.”
 - **Shelley's Garden Center**: “Our love of gardening is only rivaled by the love we have in helping our customers and welcoming you to the Shelley's Family!”
 - **Gracious Gifts and Home**, a fairly new business; located at 116 Montowese, they are “A unique gift shop featuring items from local artisans” – including Society items!
 - Continuing thanks to Chris Hauman of webbersaur.us for the work on our new website.
- Our partners in the non-profit world include the following:
- The **James Blackstone Memorial Library** not only houses many of the Society's written and photographic archives but also hosts the vast majority of our programs. It also very kindly allows us to have an information booth at its book sales. In 2022, it permanently transferred a large number of its historic artifacts to the Society for display at Harrison House. These items were formerly on loan to the Society, and the transfer allows the Society to plan to keep these items on display for the long term.
 - The **Shore Line Trolley Museum** and the **Stony Creek Museum**, both of which are important destinations in and of themselves; this past year, they worked with the Society to produce a postcard urging residents and visitors alike to “Follow the History Trail” in Branford, and those postcards have been widely distributed around town.
 - The **Branford Garden Club** not only invited the Society to have an information table at its Spring Plant Sale, but also, as always, donated greens for decorating Harrison House for the Holiday Party and furnished helpers in that decoration effort.

→ The **Branford Festival Committee**, which was as gracious as ever in affording the Society its traditional high-visibility location for the Strawberry Shortcake sales on the Saturday of the Festival; **Trinity Episcopal Church on the Green** again offered its kitchen and workspaces to the Society for the preparations and storage for the event.

→ Not least, the **Town of Branford**, for coordinating many of the events on the Green.

We hope you are having a Healthy and Happy 2023 and hope to see you at our future events!



Where Was This?

We came across this image while researching Branford history and artifacts but couldn't immediately pinpoint where it was located. If you know, please call 203-488-4828 and leave your name & your answer.



The Branford Historical Society
PO Box 504
Branford, CT 06405

**RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED**

We've scheduled the next Annual Meeting for **May 18th at the Pine Orchard Yacht and Country Club – sign up now if you haven't already!**

To check out past issues of the newsletter as well as all of our other resources, including news about upcoming presentations and other activities, visit www.BranfordHistoricalSociety.org