

From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Fall 2002, Volume 7, Issue 3

From the President's Desk

Fall is approaching and with it, the promise of many changes. The weather is cooler, colors are vibrant and a "sense of normalcy" returns as we again assume familiar routines. So too, with the Branford Historical Society.

Before looking ahead to the activities of the Society for the coming year, a look back to what has transpired since the Spring newsletter is appropriate. On April 11, the Canoe Brook Historic District in Branford became a reality when officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In May, our Annual Dinner Meeting was held at the Owenego Inn, Indian Neck with Tom Callinan, former Official State Troubadour, providing the entertainment. Many thanks to Winnifred Judge, Dinner Chair, and her committee, and to Judy Myjak, Programs Chair, for planning a most enjoyable event. Finally, in June, under the threat of heavy rain, the Society's Annual Strawberry Festival netted nearly \$2,700. Lacking a general chairperson, the conscientious efforts of the sub-committee chairs and their respective groups of volunteers enabled the Society to have a very successful fundraiser. Yes, we did sell out prior to the advertised Festival closing time. Our thanks to all who volunteered their time, talent and financial support.

Fast forward to Saturday, October 19, this year's annual Harvest Festival and Collectibles Sale, the last in the style to which everyone has been accustomed. Since the barn is now electrified, the Society plans to include the barn during the tour of the Harrison House. As a result, there will no longer be space in the barn for the pricing and storage of tag sale items. However, future thoughts are to rent tables and/or space to individuals and continue to offer tours, set up a publications table, a refreshment table and possibly a Society table for the sale of antiques, either donated or on consignment.

Judy Myjak scheduled a number of very interesting programs, and will offer another in November called "Colonial Cuisine." The series for 2003 promises to be as interesting and entertaining as the last.

I look forward to improved attendance at all of our upcoming events, including your participation and presence at our Harvest Festival, our November program, and the annual Holiday Open House on Sunday, December 8th.

In closing, may each of you and your families and friends have a bountiful, Happy Thanksgiving, and a most joyful and blessed Holiday Season.

— *Bill Davis, President*

Encroaching Development

In the Spring newsletter, I wrote an article entitled "Lost Heritage," which was enthusiastically received by a number of Branford citizens, including Jane Bouley, Town Historian. Since then, several permits have been issued to demolish sound structures of historical significance.

In an area "close to home," the partners in Sterling Ridge LLC are still planning to demolish all structures, including a circa 1820 house and circa 1870 barn, both of which are structurally sound, in order to construct a condo development situated within the Canoe Brook Historic District. A public hearing addressing this proposed development was held on August 8 for the purpose of outlining the details of site development to the Branford Inland Wetlands Commission. Mr. Robert E. Sonnichsen, P.E., acting as agent for the applicant, Sterling Ridge LLC, made a formal presentation. Since the Harrison House property abuts this site, Arnold Peterson and I attended the meeting in the absence of a representative from SPNEA (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities) which owns the property. I faxed a letter to SPNEA received in error by the Historical Society from Mr.

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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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Harvest Festival 2002

Please join us...

As noted in the President's message, the Society's annual Harvest Festival will take place on Saturday, October 19th (rain date October 26th) on the grounds of the Harrison House.

A Collectibles Sale will be held from 9:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m., the proceeds from which benefit the Society's programs and activities. High-end consignments will be accepted up until the day of the sale, with a 75%-25% split in proceeds (25% going to the Society). It should be noted that the Society takes no responsibility for damage or breakage to consigned items prior to the sale. (For further information on consignments, please call George Goeben at 481-9200.) All collectibles buffs should plan to arrive promptly at 9:30 a.m. to search out the best bargains and most interesting items. (No "early birds," please.) There will be no bake sale.

Guided Tours of the Harrison House will be conducted throughout the day for interested visitors. The barn in the rear of the property, containing a very interesting collection of antique farm tools and local period machinery, will also be available for tours.

Antiques Appraisals...

Society Museum Chair, Anton Wohlert, has located and secured the services of a professional antiques appraiser, Dr. Jay St. Mark of Newtown, Connecticut, as one of the Festival's activities during the course of the day. Appraisals will be given from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a fee of \$5 per item, or three items for \$12. Bring along those precious family heirlooms (no firearms or weapons, please) for which you have long wanted to know the monetary value, and have them professionally appraised. You may be pleasantly surprised!

Volunteers needed...

As is always the case, many volunteers are needed, in every area, to make this important annual fundraiser a success. If you are willing and able to volunteer a few hours of your time to help man this event, while enjoying the festivities of the day, please call George Goeben, as soon as possible, at 481-9200. House guides available to conduct tours for the House and barn are asked to contact Guides Chair, Pattie LaBonte, at 488-6482 for scheduled times.



Encroaching Development, con't

Sonnichsen, Delta Environmental Services, Inc., 81 Schoolground Road, Branford, explaining the intentions of Sterling Ridge in this matter. I have instructed him to direct all future correspondence directly to SPNEA, c/o Roberta Lane, Stewardship Manager.

I strongly urge Society members, particularly owners of properties within the Canoe Brook Historic District, to attend Planning and Zoning meetings, and any other pertinent Town Commission meetings when Sterling Ridge is on the agenda, in order to voice objection to this proposed development.

This issue may also have prophetic implications for the State of Connecticut in that budgetary cuts by the General Assembly recently prompted the State Historical Commission to propose the closing of four museums as a result of a 44% reduction in their budget for the next fiscal year. I wrote letters to State Senator William A. Aniskovich and State Representative Peter J. Panaroni, Jr. expressing the Society's objections to any reduction that affects the Commission's budget. Both Senator Aniskovich and Representative Panaroni have acknowledged my letter and assured me that they, along with their Legislative colleagues, would do their best to restore full funding to the Connecticut Historical Commission.

These continuous efforts and attempts by commercial developers to eliminate our cultural and historical heritage locally, state wide and even nationally, require us to be vigilant in preserving centuries-old architecture for future generations.

— Bill Davis, President

A Lesson in Democracy

The State of Connecticut is currently facing very tough decisions in how to best deal with its substantial budget deficit. Many within historical circles throughout the State are aware of the recent budgetary cut of \$538,000 applied to funding for the Connecticut Historical Commission (CHC), which oversees a number of popular museums and homes of historical interest open to the public. This slash in the Commission's budget resulted in the difficult decision to close four of its museums. Indeed, Bill Davis mentions in his message on page 1 of this newsletter, his letter-writing effort to our local legislators urging them to restore the funds in question. Countless other Connecticut citizens joined Bill in protesting these cuts and sent hundreds of letters, faxes and e-mails to their respective State Senators and Representatives, reiterating the critical importance of protecting treasured remains of early New England history throughout the State.

I am now very happy to report that within the past two weeks the General Assembly voted to *reduce* the original budget cut affecting the CHC to \$188,000. This means, of

course, that \$350,000 has been *restored* to the Commission's budget, and planned museum closings have been cancelled...truly good news for the Historical Commission, the museums involved and to all who hold historical preservation near and dear!

We are fortunate indeed, to live and raise our families in a democratic form of government. Far too often, however, we take that democracy for granted, and go about our daily lives oblivious to the activities and procedures that take place in our State Capitol, as well as in the Nation's Capitol. This "happy ending" would not have occurred had it not been for the active participation of the many concerned citizens who made a conscious choice to make a difference by contacting their State Senators and Representatives regarding these cuts. Our Legislators *listened* and righted this wrong. They read and heard the pleas of their many constituents, state wide, and did the just thing. May we all learn from this lesson in the democratic process. God bless the political and historical heritage of the State of Connecticut.

— Roz Jones, Editor

Fall Program: Colonial Cuisine

November 21st

Harriet Gayle, Naturalist/Lecturer and Assistant Curator at the Stamford Museum and Nature Center, will present a delightful slide-photo essay on such topics as native foods, indigenous and introduced plants, colonial kitchen gardens, plant lore, food preparations and kitchen utensils of early New England. The program will be held in the Meeting Room of Blackstone Library at 8:00 p.m., refreshments at 7:30 p.m.

From the Archives



LORANY LINSLEY SMITH

I am sure that most of you who have visited the Harrison House are familiar with the face of the handsome old lady in her rocking chair whose picture appears in several locations in the House. The simple caption reads "Lorany Linsley Smith, Aged 100 years, born in 1815 - died in 1915 in the Harrison House", but I would like for you to remember her long life in this historic house as well. For me, she personified the strong attributes and personal qualities needed for this life as a wife, mother and neighbor in a large family in early rural Branford. Her mind traveled back to the time when the team road between Branford and New Haven was but a dream. She well remembered such early items as the warming pans, the tiny paned windows, the ornate chamber pots, the hearth trivets and the old Franklin stoves, one of the interesting inventions of Ben Franklin.

Lorany (also known as Lorana), the daughter of Joseph Linsley and Lorany Bradley Linsley, was born on Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1815, the 7th child of the 9 children born into the family. She attended Canoe Brook School near her home, and later married Captain Thomas Merwin Smith on March 18, 1835. Thomas was listed as a farmer in some accounts, but was also described as a seafaring man, as many of the young men of Branford were at that time. He also served in the Civil War. He had nearly drowned on several trips at sea and yet, on one occasion, Lorany and their children joined him on a sea voyage to Cape Cod. Thomas and Lorany had six children so it follows that much of her life was involved in her many domestic duties and in raising her children. Thomas died in 1895 at the age of 86.

Last year, in going through old clippings in our archives, I ran across a news account in a Branford paper dated March 18, 1911, covering a party given by Lorany's many friends on her 95th birthday. It was a revealing account of this remarkable woman, as described to the reporter by her friends and neighbors at that time. She was deemed progressive and modern in spirit; they remarked that she liked to talk of life in the present, not the past. She was considered to be a fine looking woman, wonderfully preserved, physically and mentally, as well as keen of mind and action. Her friends also described her as a delightful hostess who loved to entertain. On that happy occasion, her home was brightened by the many plants and gifts showered upon her.

Lorany and her brother, Samuel Linsley, inherited the Harrison House from their father on his death in 1859. Lorany purchased Samuel's share from him in 1862. After the death of her daughter, Sara Jennette, in 1908, Lorany lived with her son, Willard, and his wife until her death in 1915. Lorany was survived by three sons. After her death, the house passed to Willard who lived there until his death in 1933, when the Harrison House passed out of the family.

— Nancy Hendricks, Archivist

Society Membership Renewal

Your support of the Branford Historical Society is needed today more than ever. All too often, we read in the newspaper that historic buildings and landmarks are to be demolished because of new construction projects. The stronger our voice in the community, the more likely our historic edifices can be preserved. Our membership still stands at over two hundred strong and members' participation in recent fund raising events has been heart warming. Please, help our membership grow by suggesting to family and friends that they join the Society and take part in its many activities.

A membership renewal envelope is enclosed with this newsletter. Please verify the area in which you'd like to volunteer by checking the appropriate boxes. Many volunteer areas require only a few hours of your time

each year. Participation in these volunteer activities is a way of meeting other members while having a good time, as well as helping to raise additional funds for our organization. If you are able to, please consider becoming a sustaining member at \$25 or a contributing member at \$50.

The mailing label has been simplified. "C" means current and "R" means it's time to renew. We also have Life "L" members and Honorary "H" members. If you have any questions about membership, please contact me at 468-5433. Thanks for your support.

— *Jeanne McParland,*
Membership Chair



Branford Garden Club Show & Tour

The Branford Garden Club will host its annual Flower Show & House Tour, "Private Worlds," on Saturday, September 14, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors will tour five Pine Orchard area homes, and enjoy a horticulture display with special exhibits in the Pine Orchard Chapel. A silent auction for original paintings by local artists will also be offered. Tickets are \$18, pre-sale, or \$20 the day of the event. Call Katie Gehner, 481-9720, for tickets. The Garden Club donates many volunteer hours to the Historical Society, maintaining the herb and rose gardens on the Harrison House grounds, both of which were planted by its members.

Remember when...

Particularly hard hit during the hurricane of September 21, 1938 were Summer Island and Sunset Beach. Thousands of trees were uprooted in town, with 200 falling on the Montowese House property alone. Only one, however, nicked the corner of the roof.





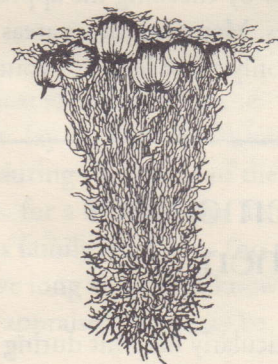
Historical Society News & Notes

Historical Publications and Prints

The following publications and prints are available for purchase through the Historical Society...

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|---|--------|
| Early History of Branford | \$5.00 |
| Thimble Islands Book by Archie Hanna | \$7.00 |
| Bird's Eye View of Branford with Historic Buildings (Print) | \$5.00 |
| Post Cards of Early Branford, each | \$3.00 |
| Stony Creek/Pine Orchard | |
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Branford Historical Society
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