

From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Fall 2003, Volume 8, Issue 3

From the President's Desk

It's quite a heady feeling to be filling this space in the newsletter – one that Bill Davis has so ably filled during his tenure as President. I hope that this edition of the newsletter finds you well.

Since this is my first real opportunity to have everyone's attention, it might be useful to introduce myself. I'm relatively new to Branford, at least as a bona fide taxpayer and volunteer fire fighter, although I've been in and around the area since graduate school in '79. I am an Architect by license, a builder by habit, and a recreational blacksmith. I'm very active in ASTM standards committees on building economics, preservation technology and sustainability. I'm hoping to contribute a preservation tech-notes section to up coming newsletters.

This was my first opportunity to participate behind the scenes in the Annual Strawberry Festival. A staggering amount of work was accomplished in a relatively short time through careful planning, a lot of experience, and a lot of help. If you have any opportunity to volunteer next year, I urge you to do so, just for the fun of it.

When I stepped into the presidency, I found an organization that had come a long way and has done very well through the efforts of a core

of extraordinarily competent individuals. As is the custom when things work well, there is a disinclination to do anything to jinx it. Unfortunately, we as a society have never sought out successor talent to bring up through the ranks to assure continuity in the myriad activities that have been put in place with so much effort. You may have noticed that we have open committee positions due to attrition. While this is not exactly a crisis today, it is a clear and urgent signal; we need to develop younger members and plan for continuity. Needless to say, if you have any inclination to participate in the vacant positions, do let us know.

It's difficult to draw in new talent if they don't know that we're here, don't know what we do, or don't know what they can do for us. Personally, I like history. Whether it's the sequence of events, the gadgets, the use of language, the manners and customs, or the buildings, there is always something interesting and something important in history that informs me about life today. I realize that I'm preaching to the choir, but it's done to frame the problem; we need to develop a better awareness of the Society in the community, identify popular interests, and wherever possible, engage the imaginations of a wider audience. While

the Society performs very important functions, there is a large need in the community we could address.

Finally, we need to project a reputation of being serious and deliberate thinkers who take worthwhile actions to benefit Branford through the preservation of historic structures. Preservationists tend to be dismissed out-of-hand, lumped into the generic mob of tree-huggers, hand-wringers and the hysterically ineffectual. We have seen how our response to the Sterling Ridge Condominiums project was all but disregarded by the Planning and Zoning Board. Through an *ad hoc* committee formed under Bill Davis' term, we are presently investigating the mechanics of forming a Historic Commission that would have administrative authority on par with the Zoning and Wetlands.

Thanks for your attention so far, and I look forward to meeting all of you.

✍ Joe Chadwick, President

From the Harrison House

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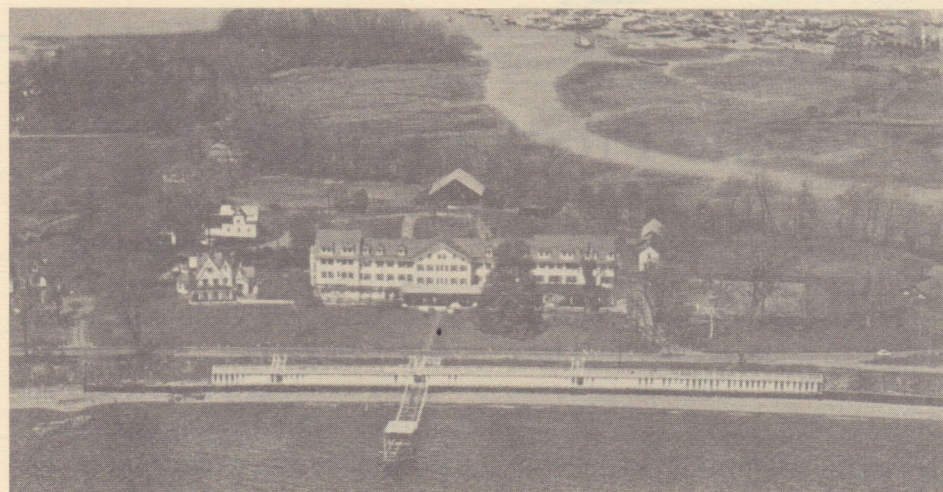
Publicity

Jackie Ulrich 481-0130

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Fall/Winter Program

Joins us on November 20th for "The Montowese Hotel"
8:00 p.m. in the Blackstone Library



Nancy Bryan Noble Coykendall will offer an illustrated program on "The Montowese Hotel" on Thursday, November 20, including a large screen showing of films taken at the Montowese Hotel.

What was Mark Twain's favorite summer resort? To what hotel did the Episcopal Bishop of Connecticut, father of the then Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, return year after year? History buffs familiar with local history will recognize the Montowese Hotel as the answer. Located on a magnificent site with broad sweeping lawn and beautiful trees, the Montowese faced Long Island Sound in Indian Neck. The hotel attracted young people as well as older guests, becoming known as a family hotel. Guest books disclose names of many prominent families of New Haven, Hartford, Springfield, New York City and Albany. Currently, this site is called Linden Shores.

William Alden Bryan built the original structure in 1866. Extended twice, it reputedly became the oldest

resort hotel on Long Island Sound and the second largest with more than 140 rooms. Following the death of William Bryan Jr. in 1932, his widow managed the hotel for several years. In 1937, Lydia Bryan Noble became manager. She and her husband, Kenneth, died in a tragic automobile accident in 1949. Management of the hotel was then passed to the fourth and final generation, ending with Nancy Noble Coykendall.

Even though she was born in Hartford and lived there for a time, Nancy remembers her years at the Montowese as some of her best. Although during her lifetime she has had several careers, she recalls the years living full time at the Montowese, and ultimately managing the hotel herself, as some of the most rewarding.

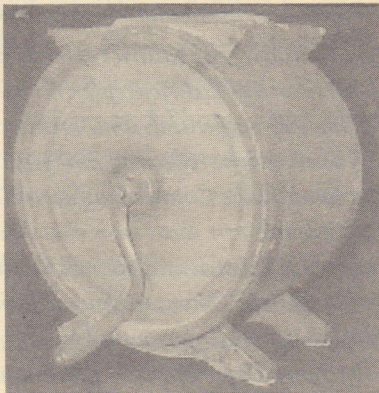
Do plan to join Nancy Coykendall for what promises to be a most informative program.

by David Buttolph

From the Archives

"The Butter Churn"

Butter is as old as history. We have records of its use as early as 2,000 years before Christ. The bible is interspersed with references to butter, the product of milk from the cow. Naturally it is presumed that in four thousand years, there has been considerable improvement in the manufacture of butter. The earliest details of the manufacture are derived from the Arabs and Syrians and their methods have been unchanged over the centuries. Their method, as far as we know, was to use a vessel made from goatskin for a churn. The animal was skinned, the skin tied up tight, leaving an opening only on the left foreleg, where the cream was poured in. The "churn" was then suspended from the tent poles and swung "until the butter comes." In the fourteenth century, butter formed an article of export from Sweden. It may be fairly inferred that butter making in north and middle Europe, if not indeed in all Europe, was introduced from Scandinavia.



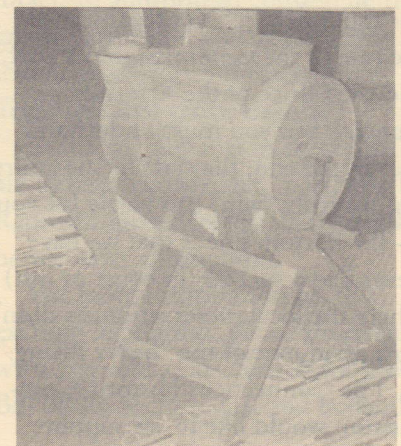
Churns were designed to do just that – churn milk – moving it around forcefully until the butterfat separates into a solid. The machines manufactured for that simple task in colonial times were generally of two types. The first was the pound churn, which typically resembled a covered barrel with a hole in the top, through which an up-and-down plunger was fitted. The second category was the agitation or tumble churn using the motion of the container to do the job. Making butter was still a lot of work, even with a good churn. Then the butter would be worked to squeeze out the moisture, which was buttermilk. The traditional means of working the butter was with a wooden hand paddle. It was then put in butter molds, packed in tight and put in a cool place – perhaps in a cool basement or deep well.

The very early known churns of ancient times were agitation churns of sorts. Some butter makers shook milk in simple containers, while others learned to let animals do the

work. A "swing churn", resembling an elongated canteen, hung from the saddle of the pack animal and would move around enough when the animal worked or walked to get the butter making done. The same concept was applied to a swing churn of the 1800's, a type that was attached to a rocking chair.

The use of churns continued as long as there was a substantial percentage of the population living on farms, as was the case in Branford. By the end of the 1930's, however, the age-old task of butter making was over for most of American households. We are fortunate to have an example of one of these antique churns, similar to the illustration below, on display at the Harrison House.

Nancy Hendricks, Archivist



Preservation of Historic Branford Structures and Landmarks

There is a lot of news concerning preservation in Branford. The Wyllys Russell House (circa 1820) 148-162 Main Street, and 26 Cherry Hill Road (circa 1928) and their barns and outbuildings are in danger of being demolished. Both of these buildings are in the National Register Canoe Brook District.

Sterling Ridge LLC has gotten approval from Planning and Zoning to build a condominium development on the land that combines the Wyllys Russell House and 26 Cherry Hill Road properties. The current plan would mean the demolition or removal of all the buildings.

A group of us brought our case to Hartford to meet before the Connecticut Historic Commission (CHC). If we can show evidence that the destruction of these National Register properties is unreasonable the CHC can file a lawsuit under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act and seek the assistance of the Attorney General to prevent the destruction of the structures. Susan Chandler, one of our liaisons there, has made it clear in this e-mail correspondence. "Not to diminish the role of the Commission, its staff, and the Office of the Attorney General, but you must understand that in the end, the state or the court cannot truly "win" this battle for you — the bottom line is that we have never had a success (in court or out) where the local preservationists didn't do a good part of the "heavy lifting."

The Connecticut Historic Commission would like to see support from the Branford community. The

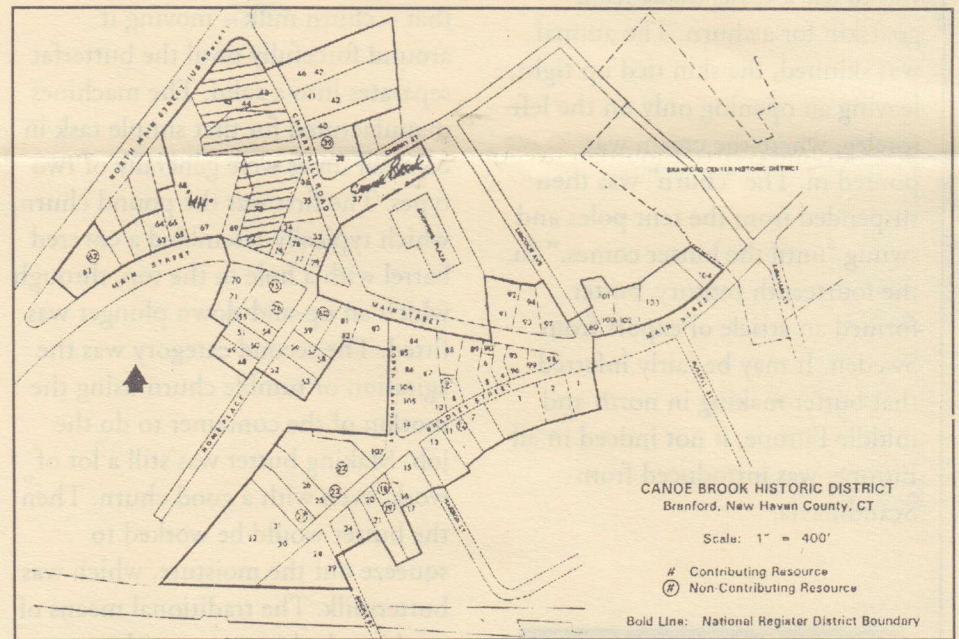
BHS has 235 members, that's a lot of letters that could be sent!

There is more information that I would like to share with you than can be covered in this one article. For those of you who would like to be kept informed about preservation issues, send me your e-mail addresses and I will put you on a group mailing list: Opie@Portone.com. Please title your subject heading "BHS listserve".

The next hearing in Hartford was scheduled for September 3. To write

to the CHC supporting the preservation of the two houses in the Canoe Brook Historic District, please send your letters or emails to: Susan Chandler, Conn. Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106; susan.chandler@po.state.ct.us, or by fax (860) 566-5078.

Martha Bradshaw, chairperson, Preservation of Historic Structures and Landmarks ad hoc committee.



The Canoe Brook Historic District was established in 2001. The District extends from Kirkham Street west to the "Pretzel". Canoe Brook Historical District represents a neighborhood of 18th and 19th century houses, primarily residential, with architectural styles ranging from Colonial to Queen Anne and Tudor design, reflecting 200 years of history. Historical districts are recognized and approved by the Connecticut Historic Commission, a federal program managed at the state level.

Branford is fortunate enough to have five (5) historical districts; Branford Center, Branford Point/Harbor Street, Stony Creek/Thimble Islands, Colonial House Thematic District and most recently, the Canoe Brook Historic District. Information on all Branford Historic Districts can be found in the Reference Department of Blackstone Memorial Library.



This Old House

Wyllys Russell House (148-162 Main Street)

McCabe House (26 Cherry Hill Road)

Caroline (Carrie) Jourdan lived most her life in the Russell House and its 2 acres until her death in 1989 at the age of 102. Carrie was one of the Branford Historical Society's past presidents and very concerned with preservation.

Her sister Mae Jourdan McCabe lived at 26 Cherry Hill on 1.13 acres until her death in 1985. While the two sisters were alive, the land between their homes was maintained as a single property. They kept a wide path mowed between the houses that they and neighborhood children traveled often.

Mae McCabe was a master judge for the National Federation of Garden Clubs and developed several new types of daylilies. Mae McCabe was generous with her daylilies and shared them with others including Mr. Keenan whom I met on a recent walk through Carrie and Mae's neighborhood. Mr. Keenan showed me his collection of Mae's daylily hybrids and offered to divide them for my own garden. The generosity of the sister's neighborhood continues.

Barbara and Thomas McCabe inherited the properties, and rented out both houses. Although 26 Cherry Hill Road is still occupied, two years ago the tenant's lease at the Wyllys Russell house was not renewed because of the pending condominium project. Both houses are sound, and in good condition.



Historic Preservation Legislation


We are happy to report that the General Assembly passed an implementer bill on August 16th, impacting several historic museums in the State. Funding for these museums had previously been cut from the budget, forcing their closings. The passage of this bill has restored funds to the Connecticut Historical Commission's operating capital, enabling the re-opening of all four sites, among them the Henry Whitfield House of Guilford. The Historic Preservation Council, the only specific council named in the new Connecticut Commission on Arts, Tourism, Culture, History and Film, will be the successor to the present Historical Commission.

The new Historic Preservation Council will have authority to request the assistance of the Attorney General regarding unreasonable demolitions, as stated in the Environmental Protection Act.

The Connecticut Humanities Council's \$1,000,000 Cultural Heritage Development Fund remains intact. In addition to cultural heritage grants, this Fund will again be the source of Historical Preservation Technical Assistance Grants.

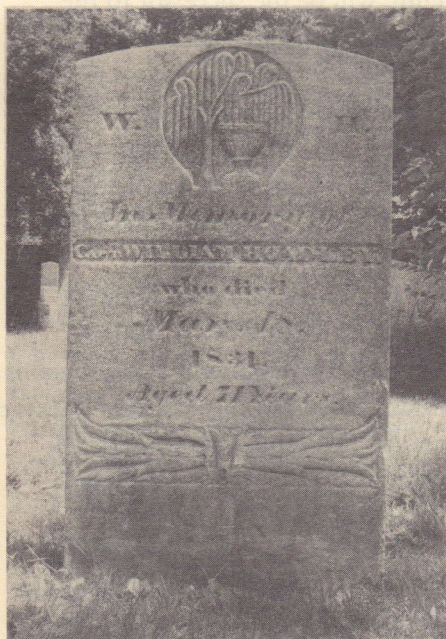
Many participants in this effort are to be acknowledged, particularly Representative Melody Curry, for her heroic work throughout.

For more information on this exciting legislation, please investigate www.cga.state.ct.us. Search for House Bill 6806, Section 210 and beyond.

 Martha Bradshaw

Survey of Damascus Cemetery

Martha Bradshaw and I began a survey of Damascus Cemetery about one year ago. All the gravestones have been measured, photographed, transcribed and compared to other existing records. The largest survey of Connecticut cemeteries was done in the 1930s as a WPA (Works Progress Administration) project, transcribing the headstones of all Connecticut cemeteries. This body of work, known as the Hale Collection, is housed at the Connecticut State Library. We have found that seven stones at Damascus that existed in 1934 are now missing. However, three gravestones have been found that were not included in the Hale transcription. Since 1934 there have been 32 burials at Damascus Cem-



*In Memory of
CAPT. WILLIAM HOADLEY
who died
Mar. 18.
1831.
Aged 71 Years*

etery. The last person buried there was Frances Ives Whitman in 1986.

Damascus Cemetery was deeded by Abraham Hoadley and his widowed mother Elizabeth in 1814 to a group of 52 subscribers for a period of 999 years. One of the first burials at the cemetery was a beautifully carved stone for Lucretia Day the twenty year old daughter of Abraham Hoadley. Her stone is signed by the carver Fecit D. Ritter, New Haven. We have found four other stones with signatures.

Most of the 19th century stones are made of marble and are rather plain in appearance. Others are more ornate and have interesting epitaphs:

Timothy Baldwin- *"Like a shock of corn fully ripe"*

Ella Baldwin- *"Little Ella"*

Lucinda Hoadley *"Blessed are the dead who died in His hand"*

Mrs. Lucretia Day- *"... Cropt like a flower she withered in her bloom"*

George L. Palmer- *"Was killed by the bursting of a Cannon"*

And perhaps our favorite:

Polly Palmer- *"She hath done what she could"*

We welcome anyone's help for the surveys of Mill Plain and Center Cemeteries.

✿ Jane Peterson Bouley



*Join the
Branford Historical Society
at the Harrison House
for our
ANNUAL HOLIDAY
OPEN HOUSE*

on Sunday, December 7

from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Come...

*see the House in
yuletide decorations,*

*enjoy delicious
punch and sweets,*

listen to oldtime music

in the parlor

and visit with

friends and neighbors

as we welcome in

the holiday season!

Membership Renewal Change

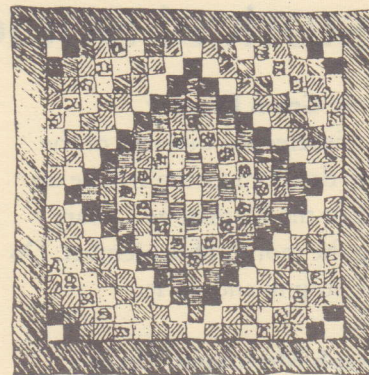
There will be a new method of notifying you that it is time to renew your membership. A separate mailing will be sent out shortly after you receive this issue of the newsletter.

This past year, members of the Branford Historical Society have been hard at work attending various state and local meetings in an effort to preserve historical houses and buildings in Branford. Your support of the Society through participation in fundraising activities and your dues gives us a strong voice in the community of Branford. Presently, we have over 230 members. Many of you participated in our very successful Strawberry Festival, as well as other fundraising events. We continue, of course, to seek new

members. Please invite your neighbors, friends and family to join our Society in order to help educate and foster interest in the history of Branford and to encourage the preservation of antiquities, landmarks and buildings.

You may contact me at 468-5433, or jeannemcp@msn.com, with prospective member's names. Thank you all for your continued support of the Branford Historical Society.

*Jeanne McParland,
Membership Chair*



Quilt Show

The Branford Historical Society, in cooperation with Trinity Episcopal Church, is sponsoring a quilt show in May 2004. Please begin to look in your attics, trunks and cupboards for old and perhaps forgotten quilts to display. Your neighbors and family members may have a few treasured family quilts to include in the show, as well, so please invite all concerned to participate. Watch for more details of this special event, and thanks for your help! *J*

Get Online with History

FROM THIS ISSUE

Learn more about topics from this issue of our newsletter:

Connecticut Historical Commission

www.chc.state.ct.us

Connecticut General Assembly

www.cga.state.ct.us

Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

www.cttrust.org

Hale Collection at the Connecticut State Library

www.cslib.org/halecol.htm

National Register of Historic Places

www.cr.nps.gov/nr

LIBRARIES

Blackstone Memorial Library

www.blackstone.lioninc.org

Connecticut State Library

www.cslib.org

Willoughby Wallace Memorial Library

www.willoughby.lioninc.org

OTHER SITES OF INTEREST

Connecticut History Online

www.cthistoryonline.org

Connecticut Roads

www.kurumi.com/roads/ct

Heritage Preservation

www.heritagepreservation

Historic New England Driving Tours

www.historicnewenglanddrivingtours.com/site/index.htm

Jen Payne

Historical Society News & Notes

Historic Green Display

A very interesting diorama of the historic Branford Green will be on display at the Blackstone Library during the month of September. Do plan to stop in and see it.

Cenotaph Monument Update

It has been determined that the central carving on the Cenotaph of the Distinguished Service Cross must be redone, as the deterioration of this carving is beyond repair. Estimates for the work are now being received. The cost of all necessary work will be determined before the repair of the Cenotaph moves forward.

— Winnifred Judge, Board Member

Preserving Our Past License Plates

The Connecticut Trust has received all approvals from the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue a license plate with the phrase: "Preserving our Past." For more information, please call (203) 562-6312 or visit www.cttrust.org.

Oops!

In the spring issue of the newsletter, we erred in typing that Bill Davis, then President, thanked his wife of "sixty years" for her support during his tenure. The length of their marriage is actually *fifty plus* years. We are all very aware that Bill and Isabell, a very attractive and youthful

couple, appear to be married for far less than fifty years, making the faux pas even more glaring!

Publications and Prints

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

- 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 Card Posters of
Early Branford \$3.00



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