

# From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2002, Volume 7, Issue 2

## From the President's Desk

Although we have experienced a winter that wasn't, it was a period of time that did not bode well for some of Branford's historic structures. (Please see related article in this issue entitled "Lost Heritage.") Since the fall newsletter, the Society was notified of the proposed demolition of over six (6) structurally sound buildings (circa early 19th to 20th centuries), one of which is situated within the proposed Canoe Brook Historic District. I am happy to report, however, that there has occurred a very positive development I would like to share with you concerning the status of this District.

On February 14, 2002, the State Historic Preservation Board for the National Register of Historic Places approved the nomination for the proposed District. This nomination has been forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register at the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. We may receive final approval by the time of our Annual Dinner Meeting on May 16, 2002.

May all of you have a pleasant summer following our annual Strawberry Festival on Saturday, June 15th.

— Bill Davis, President

## Lost Heritage

Branford's historic structures (75 years or older) are under siege by individuals, developers and corporations, all of whom have no compunction about demolishing structurally sound buildings.

The Branford Historical Society and other concerned residents have been unsuccessful in preserving these landmarks even when they have been placed on the State or National Register of Historic Places. Since this designation does not prevent a property owner from demolishing such structures, it would appear that the Town ordinance concerning the demolition of structures lacks the prescribed teeth to prevent their disappearance from the Town's historical landscape.

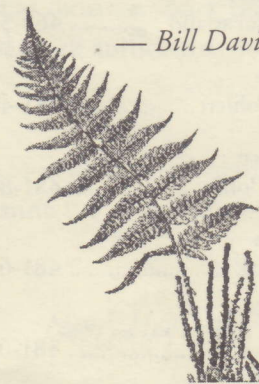
I submit that the ordinance should be rewritten to read that before any historic structure is demolished, the Town's building inspector must attest to its soundness, and professional personnel are to be contacted to verify its historic character. If the structure is found to be sound and irreplaceable, a viable alternative must be investigated, at the owner's expense, in order to preserve it. However, if the structure is found not to be sound, the owner must construct a building that either replicates the previous structure, or ensure that the new building is consistent with the architectural character of the surrounding structures.

It is interesting to note that an analogy can be drawn between the mission of the Branford Historical Society (BHS) and that of the Branford Land Trust (BLT). Both of these non-profit organizations strive to preserve what exists in Branford for future generations. As the BHS "strives to foster and develop in the residents of Branford an interest in and a knowledge of the history and antiquities of the Town by encouraging preservation of landmarks," the BLT "strives to preserve open spaces in Branford and to promote our community's appreciation of Branford's diverse natural features."

A possible means of melding the missions of these organizations would be to have property donated to the Town of Branford for the specific purpose of creating an historic village, thus preserving sound historic structures and "open space" at the same time.

(Watch for further updates on this issue in upcoming newsletters.)

— Bill Davis, President





**From the  
Harrison House**

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# Spring 2002 Programs

There are two remaining Society programs to be presented during this year's activities as follows:

**April 18th** \_\_\_\_\_

*"The Maritime History  
of New Haven"*

Jennifer White, Director of Education of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, will offer a slide presentation on the early mercantile community in the New Haven area, exploring maps, photographs, ships of the period and maritime legends. This program will be held in the meeting room of the Blackstone Library at 8 p.m., refreshments at 7:30 p.m..

**May 16th** \_\_\_\_\_

*Annual Dinner Meeting at  
Owenego Inn*

Tom Callinan, "Connecticut's First Official State Troubadour," will join us for our Annual Dinner Meeting and entertain guests with an impressive collection of sea chanteys and songs he himself has composed about the State of Connecticut. Tom has been a full-time creative and performing artist since 1977. Plan to sing along with this very entertaining folksinger and storyteller. (For more information, please see page 5.)

— Judy Myjak, Programs Chair

# Annual Strawberry Festival

The Society's 23rd Annual Strawberry Festival will be held on Saturday, June 15th, 10:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m., or as long as the berries hold out, on the Branford Green as part of the Branford Festival. In the event of rain, shortcakes will be served in the basement (undercroft) of Trinity Church. Along with our deliciously prepared shortcakes, coffee and lemonade will be included in the ticket price. A special letter, coordinated by Sandra and Richmond Browne (315-1237) with enclosed tickets for pre-sale prices of \$4.00 per person, will be mailed shortly to all members. Tickets purchased on the day of the Festival will be priced at \$4.50 per person.

Currently, there is no general chair for the event, but as in the past,



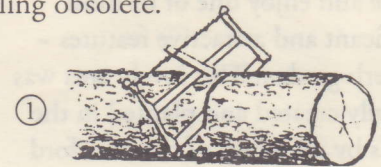
Society President, Bill Davis (481-5615) will be standing by as consultant. Sub-Committee Chairs, as of this date, are as follows: Winnifred Judge (488-8755), Strawberry Hulling; Eva Peterson (488-0450), Kitchen; Roz Jones (481-8436), Whippers; Arnold Pete Peterson (488-0450), Set-Up and Clean-Up; and Richmond and Sandra Browne, Tickets. Please plan to volunteer your time and efforts to help make the Society's largest fundraiser a major success.



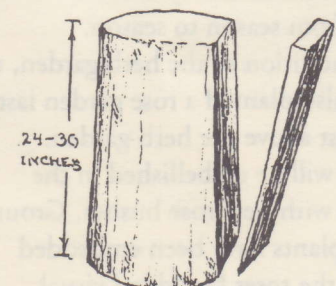
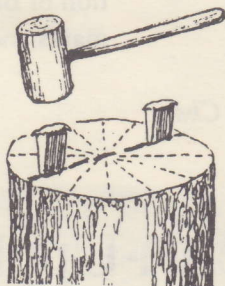
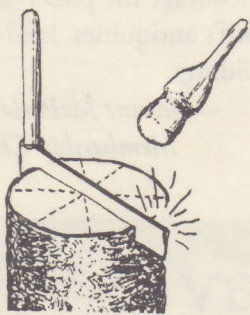
## From the Archives

Did you know that the early colonists carried on the old English tradition of thatching the roof? The topping of bound bundles of reeds and straw required a sharply pitched roof - up to sixty degrees - to hurry off soaking rains. Rows of horizontal sticks were nailed to the rafters to secure the thatching. However, well before the last quarter of the seventeenth century had begun, blustery winds and downpours on this side of the Atlantic could turn the straw bundles into overhead sponges.

Shingles split from oak, cypress, chestnut and white pine were weather-worthy answers. When laid in overlapping rows and nailed to the 2-by-3 inch thatch particles, water quickly drained down the fibrous grooves on the split surfaces. Underneath, a free circulation of air prevented rot. A more gentle rafter slope of forty-five degrees was all that was needed. This new roof would last a lifetime. Before many years, the entire framework of the house would be sheathed in sawn boards, making the thatch purling obsolete.



The wood for the shingles was worked when green and shingled when seasoned. See illustrations as follows: (1) Straight-grained, knot-free sections were cut from the log; (2) The piece was upended and split into equal sections called billets; (3) A large diameter chunk might need wedges to split out the billets; (4) The sapwood and bark were rived off the billet; (5) After each shingle was levered free, the log section was turned upside down to keep the taper.



Riving (to split apart) shingles was a good sit-down chore for youngsters, as well as oldsters. Practiced hands could turn out up to 500 shingles a day. Riven green, they would be stacked and dried sufficiently for warm weather roofing.

Note: When visiting the Harrison House, be sure to stop into the Museum and look at the fine model of the House constructed by Arnold Peterson and given to the Historical Society. Examine the roof and notice his handmade shingles in this outstanding work.

— Nancy Hendricks, Archivist



## About the Historical Society...

### PART 2 - THE HARRISON HOUSE GARDENS

When visiting the Harrison House or investigating some of its new acquisitions, be sure to step out into the grounds behind the House and enjoy one of its most significant and attractive features - the herb garden. This lovely area was carefully created and planted in the 1970's by members of the Branford Garden Club, and contains herbs that were used for cooking and medicinal purposes in the era when the House was originally constructed. Thyme, sage, oregano, rosemary and catmint (commonly called catnip) can be found in its beds, which are meticulously maintained by the Garden Club from season to season.

In addition to the herb garden, the Club also planted a rose garden last fall, just above the herb garden, which will be embellished in the spring with new rose bushes. Ground cover plants have been embedded under the roses for added visual appeal. "2002 has been designated 'The Year of the Roses' by the National Garden Club," relates Winnifred Judge, a Garden Club member, "to encourage the planting of roses across the nation, making this project especially appropriate."

So, the next time you find yourself strolling around the grounds of the House, take the time to stop and smell the roses!

— Roz Jones, Editor

## Accessions Report - 2001

The Society would like to thank the following people for donations made in 2001: Paula Anderson, Alice Batrow, Nicki Behler, Maureen Blos, Alice Brown, Antoinette Goss Brown, Wallace Burnett, Gwen Bush, Nancy Farnam, Joel Helander, Ticia Jones, Winnifred Judge, Nancy Kahl, Walter Kreske, Mary Virginia Pran, Quarry Workers Celebration, Matilda Ritzinger, Lisa Santacroce and Willits H. Sawyer.

During the year, many items were added to our archives, as well as to our exhibits. A William and Mary style highboy chest, donated by the Goss family, is now on display in the Museum room on the second floor. Other items donated include a WW II first aid kit, diaries, hotel brochures, postcards and books for our reference library at the Harrison House.

— Maureen DaRos, Accessions Chair

## Membership Update

As this publication goes to press, 191 membership renewals have been received. Welcome to new members Diane Altieri, Martha Bradshaw, Ewa and David Buttolph, Richard Coyle, Sharon and Richard Hosley, Carol S. Jones, Ed and Sue Kelsey, Timothy Munson, Mrs. Helen Mulvey, Eleanor Powell and Ann Polk. Continue to check the mailing label to make sure your membership status is current. A "C" indicates current, "R" means it is time to renew, and "L" is for a Life member. If there is a number after the "R," this indicates the year you last paid. Please reach out to other members in our community and invite them to join the Branford Historical Society, so that we may continue to encourage the preservation of Branford's antiquities, landmarks and buildings.

— Jeanne McParland,  
Membership Chair

## Spring Clean-Up Day

Historical Society members are invited and encouraged to take part in the 14th Annual Spring Clean-Up and River Project Day on Saturday, April 20th from 9 AM to 12 Noon, rain or shine. The event is sponsored by the Branford Litter Committee and the Branford River Project Committee. Participants are to gather on the Town Green at 9 a.m. and will enjoy refreshments provided by local merchants. Please help keep Branford clean and beautiful! To volunteer or for further information, call Bill Brody, Chairman, at 488-8987 or Barbara Rascati at 481-7398. Thanks!



# Annual Dinner Meeting

The Society's Annual Dinner Meeting will be held on Thursday, May 16th at the Owenego Inn. Ticket price is \$24 per person. A cash bar will open at 5:30 PM, with dinner at 6:30 PM. Dinner will be preceded by hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, and followed by a unique performance by Tom Callinan, Official State Troubadour.

Please see the tear-off response/reservation form below, to be filled out and returned with your check no later than May 10th to Winnifred Judge, 31 Pawson Park Road, Branford, CT 06405

— Winnifred Judge, Dinner Chair



## Remember when...

In 1920, Memorial Day services were held at the Civil War monument next to the Town Hall.

## 2002 Annual Dinner Reservation Form

**MAY 16, 2002**

**6:30 p.m. at the Owenego Inn, Indian Neck.**

**Cost; \$24.00 per person**

**Guests & Public Are Welcome**

Cash Bar will be open at 5:30 p.m. with selected hors d'oeuvres. Buffet will feature: seafood newburgh, chicken dish, hot pasta, sliced ham, a seasonal vegetable, salad bar and fresh fruit medley, dessert and coffee.

**RESERVATIONS MUST BE IN BY MAY 10TH**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Number Attending: \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$24.00 per person

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

**RETURN RESERVATION FORM WITH CHECK TO:**

**Winnifred Judge,  
31 Pawson Park Rd.  
Branford, CT 06405**



# Historical Society News & Notes

## Harvest Festival

Spring's many buds are just beginning to poke their gentle heads back into our every day lives, but fall will be here long before we expect to see the leaves floating to the ground again. Our annual Harvest Festival will be held in the month of October, so please start thinking now about putting aside appropriate items for the Harrison House tag sale. Donations will be accepted anytime between now and the date of the Festival. More information will appear in the September newsletter.

## Harrison House Guides

Are you interested in becoming a Harrison House docent and conducting tours through the House when open to the public from June through September? Pattie LaBonte, House Guides Chair, is in need of volunteers to acquaint visitors with the history of the House, while offering anecdotes and vignettes concerning its past residents and information about its lovely contents and furnishings. If you have three hours each month to devote to this valuable public relations opportunity for the Society, please call the Harrison House at 488-4828.

## Chamber Award

Jen Payne, Society member and owner/operator of "Words by Jen," who is responsible for producing the graphics and general professional presentation of each BHS Newsletter, was recently honored by the Chamber of Commerce as the recipient of its "Company of the Year" award. Jen was cited for her outstanding business skills, as well as for her active involvement in the community. In addition to her contributions to the Society Newsletter, Jen produces the Branford Land Trust News, along with a number of other professional accounts, and is proficient in designing web sites for local organizations. Congratulations, Jen.



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