



From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2003, Volume 8, Issue 2

From the President's Desk

At our Annual Dinner Meeting on May 15th, I shall be standing down as your President. It is with mixed emotions that I write this, my last message from the President's Desk for the Branford Historical Society Newsletter. During these past four (4) years, preceded by two (2) years as Vice-President, the experience has been pleasurable and challenging, while at times frustrating. However, I will continue to serve on the Board of Directors as Past President.

A lot has been accomplished with the encouragement and support of the past and present members of the Board, as well as by many other Society members who have also volunteered their time, talent, and financial support in the various activities of the organization.

Several accomplishments are noteworthy. Over a two-year period, the BHS received grant monies from the Branford Community Foundation to upgrade the electrical system in the Harrison House, extend electricity and the existing alarm system to the barn, and improve the illumination of the frontal exterior of the House. The Society established a separate checking account as a repository for donations in support of the Dutch Fort at Totoket archaeological dig during the summer of 1999. The Society sponsored the

establishment of the Canoe Brook Historic District on the list of National Historic Places, effective April 11, 2002.

Presently, the historic integrity of this district is being threatened. The current owners of the Wyllys Russell House (c. 1820) and barn (c. 1870), located at 148-162 Main Street, propose to demolish these historic structures to make way for a condo development by Sterling Ridge, LLC. The developers have an option on the property (26 Cherry Hill Road) pending the decision of the Planning and Zoning Commission. (Note: The Inland Wetlands Commission has approved the site plan for this proposed development.)

As you read this newsletter, a petition is being circulated among the property owners within the Canoe Brook Historic District to indicate their opposition to the demolition of these historic structures. The petition will then be presented to the Connecticut Historic Commission when it meets on May 7, 2003 at 9:30 AM in the South Congregational Church, Main Street, Hartford.

In closing, I offer my heartfelt thanks for the support and the words of encouragement that you have afforded me during my tenure as your President. My fervent wish is that each of you will continue to

extend your support and encouragement to the newly-elected slate of officers in May and become more actively involved with the standing committees, some of which will have new chairpersons. Finally, there is one person to whom I owe my undying gratitude for her support (at times a bit strained) during my tenure, and that is my wife of sixty years, Isabell.

Peace and God bless...

Bill Davis, President



**From the
Harrison House**

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Annual Strawberry Festival June 14 on the Branford Green

The Society's 24th Annual Strawberry Festival will be held on the Branford Green on Saturday, June 14th, 10:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., or as long as the berries hold out. In the event of rain, shortcakes will be served in the undercroft (basement) of Trinity Episcopal Church. As in the past, coffee and lemonade will be served with our deliciously prepared shortcakes, which will be included in the ticket price. Ticket prices are \$4.50 per person pre-sale, and \$5 on the day of the Festival.

A special letter, enclosing pre-sale priced tickets, will be mailed out shortly by Richmond Browne, Tickets Chair (315-1237), to all Society members and others. Please send in your checks as soon as

possible following receipt of your letter.

Other Festival Committee Chairs are: Winnifred Judge (488-8755), Strawberry Hulling; Eva Peterson (488-0450), Kitchen; Sandra Browne (315-1237), Whippers; Judy Hayes (488-3119), Servers; Michael Sykes (488-3270), Beverages; and Pete Peterson (488-0450), Set-Up and Clean-Up.

Please plan to volunteer your time to help make this year's Strawberry Festival a successful and profitable event.



Get Online with History

FROM THIS ISSUE

Learn more about topics from this issue of our newsletter:

Branford Community Foundation

www.branfordcommunityfoundation.org

Connecticut Historical Commission

www.chc.state.ct.us

National Register of Historic Places

www.cr.nps.gov/nr

Weathervanes

www.denninger.com

OTHER SITES OF INTEREST

Connecticut's Heritage Gateway

www.ctheritage.org

Connecticut Historical Society

www.chs.org

Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

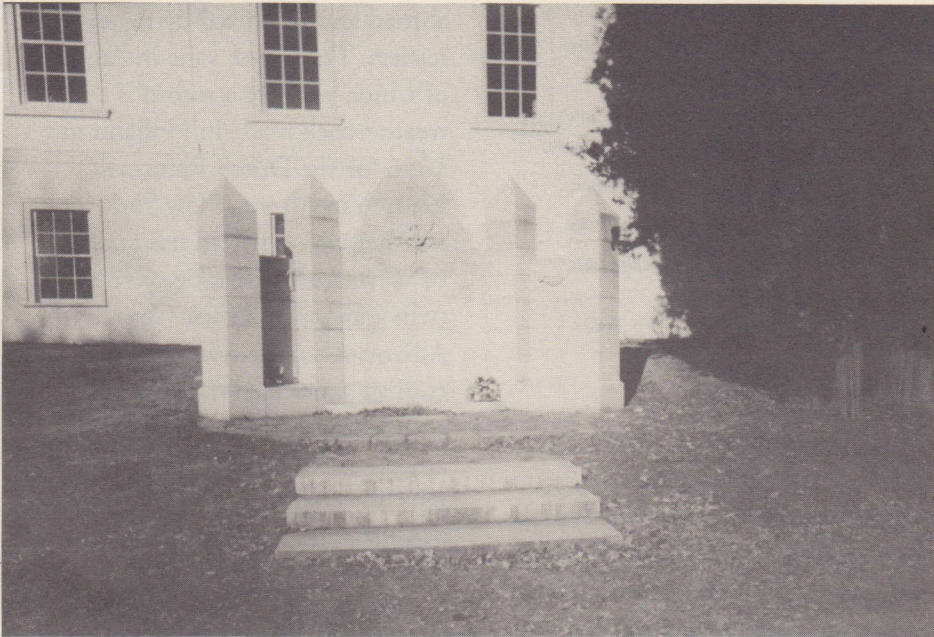
www.cttrust.org

Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame

www.cwhf.org

Jen Payne

The Cenotaph: A Significant Branford Monument



In June of 1923, a special committee was appointed at the monthly Branford Town meeting and was charged with the selection and location of an appropriate World War memorial. The committee chose a site behind Town Hall where the town jail stood. The area had become a "dumping ground" for coal, ashes and other debris. Cleaning up the site and, at the same time, erecting a beautiful setting and sheltered location would serve many purposes as well as a memorial. A proposed outdoor semi-formal amphitheater with the memorial as a back drop was envisioned. Plays, concerts, high school graduations and public events could be put on in the amphitheater. The natural location of the Green, using a system of grading, terracing and plantings, could be made into a semi-circular bowl.

Andre Smith, a World War veteran, noted artist, architect and member of the committee, was asked to design the memorial. He served as a captain of engineers, the arts and science division. Smith sketched pictures for official military intelligence records, which required him to show the type of war damage to the terrain.

In its beginning stages, the design called for a slightly raised platform backed by an ornamental wall, the central section of which would contain a monument bearing an appropriate inscription. The design was to be simple and dignified. At this time, the United States government commissioned Andre Smith to create a medal for distinguished service in times of war. The medal was called the Distinguished Service Cross, still awarded to our military

today. A replica of the Distinguished Service Cross forms the central carving on the Cenotaph. The inscription "Pro Patria (for one's country) 1917-1918" is the only other marking on the memorial. The Cenotaph itself represents a tomb for those of the military who did not return home for burial. There are three stone steps leading to a raised stone platform with a large American Legion star in the center. The ten-pointed star is the American Legion logo. All the original plans for the memorial and the amphitheater were never implemented.

Recently, a group representing the American Legion, the Branford Historical Society and the Garden Club, have been working on plans with First Selectman Unk DaRos for the restoration of the Cenotaph. The passage of time, weather and neglect have taken its toll. A professional Conservator has done a complete condition assessment and presented guidelines for restorative treatment. Original blueprints, correspondence, minutes and drawings of the Cenotaph have been found. These historic documents were of tremendous value in the assessment of the Cenotaph and its need for restoration. Funds will have to be found to do the work, or Branford will lose a beautiful and impressive memorial of historic significance.

Winnifred Judge, Board Member

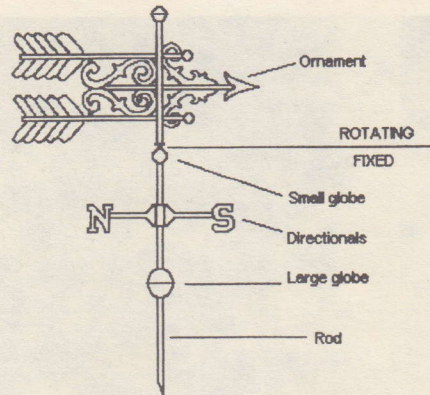
From the Archives

“Weathervanes in Colonial America”

Weather is one of the most important of all natural phenomena. It influences the planting, growing and harvesting of our crops; hence, the availability and abundance of our food supply. It controls our comfort and directly affects our safety on land, sea or in the air. Any means of predicting weather was just as useful in our civilization's early history as it is today.

During the millennia preceding the invention of the barometer, the instrument that could help man predict the weather was the weathervane. The little we know about the first use of weathervanes comes from archaeological research. The earliest vane of which we have a record was the one on the Tower of the Winds built by Andronicus in Athens during the first century, B.C. We know from contemporary descriptions that this vane took the form of Triton, a sea god of Greek mythology, who had the head and upper body of a man and the tail of a fish. A pointed wand in the sea god's hand indicated the direction from which the wind was blowing. This vane was cast in bronze.

There is also archaeological evidence of metal weathervanes having been used on the Viking ships from approximately the ninth century. This type of vane made its way from ships to the steeples of Scandinavian churches in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and some can still be seen in Norway and Sweden.



About a thousand years ago, a papal direct declared that the symbol of a rooster be installed at the top of every church in Christendom. The rooster was to serve to recall Peter's betrayal of Christ in which Jesus said: "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shall thrice deny that thou knowest me." (Luke 22:34.) The cock on the steeple was an admonition to the faithful to come to services so as not to deny Christ as Peter had done. It is not known exactly when these roosters on the churches were converted to weathercocks or vanes. Literary allusions in Chaucer suggest that cocks were turning with the wind at least by the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries in England. Curiously, the Roman Catholic churches are no longer capped by weathercocks, and those ecclesiastical roosters that are found today adorn various Protestant houses of worship.

The better-made weathervanes, or at least the few remaining examples of vanes dating from the seventeenth century in this country, were made

abroad and imported by the early settlers. The oldest vane in America of which we have a record is the weathercock made in Holland in 1656 for the Dutch Reformed Church in Albany, New York. The weathercock is still in use and can be viewed on a peak between the twin spires of the First Church in Albany. Also, there is a wooden codfish vane that was originally studded with copper nails (to appear as scales) that once topped Paul Revere's shop and is now on exhibit at the Paul Revere House in Boston.

The making of less sophisticated weathervanes flourished in early rural America. Dependent upon the knowledge of which way the wind was blowing, and living too far from the church or town hall to see those vanes, most farmers made their own or hired a local blacksmith to do it for them. In addition to making the traditional rooster, arrow, or banner weathervanes, these workers began fashioning vanes of subjects that were part of their everyday lives, such as Indians, horses, wild animals and angels. Along the seacoast, vanes expressed their builder's concern with nautical matters in the motifs sailing ships, fish and sea gulls.

Nancy Hendricks, Archivist

2003 Annual Dinner Meeting

Join us on Thursday, May 15th for our Annual Dinner Meeting, including a special presentation:

"Remembering the Lone Ranger"

Voice-over artist and retired radio and TV personality, Bob Schultz, will reminisce about Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Kate Smith, Fibber McGee and Molly and others, as he recalls the "good old days of radio."

Don't miss this trip down memory lane, as "Voice-Over Bob" muses about the golden age of radio entertainment, following the buffet and business meeting to be held at the Owenego Inn.

2002 Acquisitions Report

The Society would like to thank the following donors for recent gifts given during 2002: Suzanne Bosek, The Branford Review, Christopher Earle, East Haven Historical Society, John Elliott, John Gambardella, George Goeben, Guilford Free Library, Guilford Keeping Society, Peg Hampton, Nancy and Bill Hendricks, Barbara Jackson, Natica Jones, Nancy Judd, Mabel Kerrigan, Barbara Lyons, Eunice Medlyn, Neita Montague, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Otten, William Thompson and Faith Tingley.

Many items were donated for our archival collection such as family histories, books, maps and 19th century photos. We also received many nice things for display in the Harrison House and barn. We have

an early 19th century wash stand in the parlor chamber and many pieces of farm equipment that will be put on display in the barn this coming season. Along with our donations, we also purchased an 1855 whale oil lamp to add to our inventory of historical lighting.

Maureen DaRos, Acquisitions



2003 Annual Dinner Reservation Form

MAY 15, 2003

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

Cost: \$26.00 per person
Guests & Public Welcome

Cash Bar will be open at
5:30 p.m. with selected hors
d'oeuvres. Buffet will feature:
carved turkey, ham, seafood
newburgh with rice, pasta
selection with meatballs,
a seasonal vegetable, salad bar,
dessert and coffee.

RESERVATIONS MUST
BE IN BY MAY 9TH

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone #: _____

Number Attending: _____ @ \$26.00 per person

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____

RETURN RESERVATION FORM WITH CHECK TO:

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

Phone: (203) 488-8755

Historical Society News & Notes

Membership

A warm welcome to new Society Members Frederik and Heather Zetterberg, Earle Christopher, Bob and Ann Hadley, Ann and Albert Paulson, Mary and Joseph Sokolosky, Ann Rutherford and Brice Lively, Mary Clark and Jacey Wyatt. We also welcome Honorary Members Timothy Munson and Peter Dougherty.

I would like to thank each and every member for his/her continuing support of the Society's mission to educate and foster interest in the history of Branford, as well as to encourage preservation of antiquities, landmarks and buildings. Should you know of a family member or friend who might be interested in joining

our Society, please contact me at 468-5433. Continue to check the label on your newsletter to make sure your membership is current (C) or needs to be renewed (R).

✍ Jeanne McParland, Membership

Volunteers Needed!

Museum Chair, Anton Wohlert, is in need of volunteers to help restore various antiques made completely or partially of metal in the Harrison House. The work would involve cleaning the metal with steel wool and removing any rust. Anton will then apply a protective coating to the items involved. If you have some

spare time, and would like to volunteer for this important project, please give Anton a call at 481-4665. (Don't forget your work gloves!)

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 Cards of Early Branford \$3.00



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