

# From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2011, Volume 16, Issue 1

## Memories of Branford

*The following is a letter from John Tyler received by Jeanne McParland, Membership Chair, in response to her annual dues letter.*

Just returned from the 60th Anniversary reunion of Branford's Heavy Tank Company. In your letter of October you related how your family went to Branford in the early 1930's. It brought back memories.

My father lost his job in Pennsylvania in 1933, so the family went back to Branford to live in my grandfather's home on Pine Orchard Road. I was 7 years old. My sister loved horses and after graduating from Branford High School in 1934 she obtained a very part time job at the horse stables run by Hazel Goodwill, at the Montowese House. My grandfather, Elmer Tyler Sr., ran a party boat, the Iola, from the Montowese House and the Owenego Inn to the Thimble Islands and back. The "tour" cost 25 cents per person. It eventually went to 50 cents when my sister helped him collect fares.

The 1938 hurricane devastated the shoreline. By that time my uncle, Elmer Tyler Jr., owned Henry Opel's boat house in Summer Island. I remember getting a permit to pass

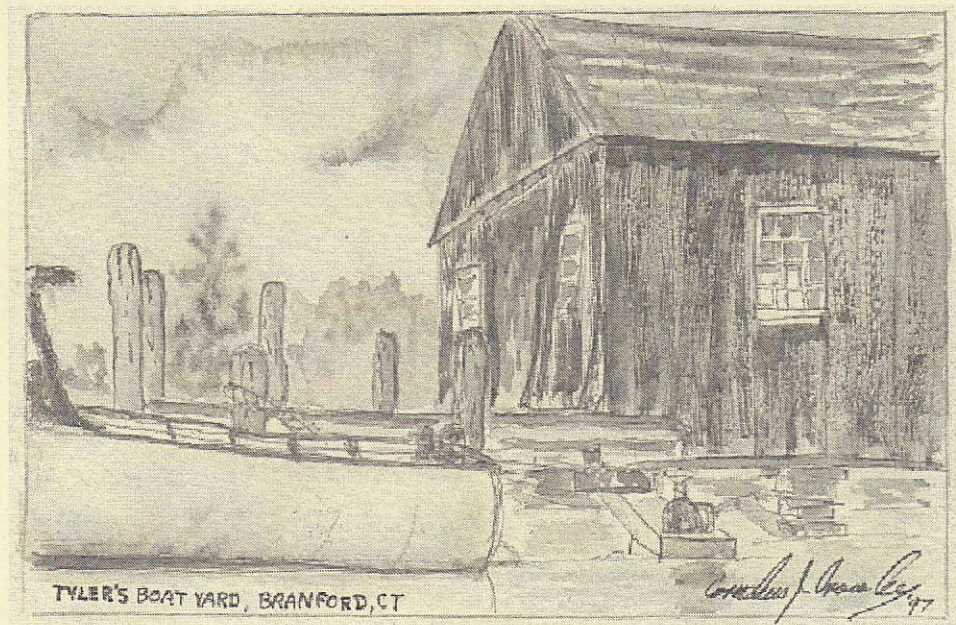
by the National Guard's post to the shore to help my uncle clean up the land and boat house.

Main Street was wonderful: Center School, the Branford Bank, Bradley Brothers Store (where we could stomp on their wooden sidewalk and they would come out very angry as we ran away), Spaulding Drug Store (at which I worked as a soda jerk for a short period for Mr. McDermott and Mr. Kelly), The Candy Store (high school kids' hangout and everyone knew Jim, the owner), Suval's Department Store, Collins and Freemans and across the street—the Post Office, the Green and the churches

and Town Hall. The "mystery" of the Cenotaph—until we found out what it stood for during a gathering after the Memorial Day parade. I remember the World War I Veterans calling the roll call and someone answering "Absent" after many of the names. We were escorted by a WWI veteran to a grave where we very carefully and seriously placed flowers.

During the summer I swam at Hotchkiss Grove. I was able to do this because my best pal, Billy Holcomb lived on Hotchkiss Grove Road. I drive through there now and

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Painting by Neil Crowley



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## Memories of Branford. continued

imagine curious eyes following an out-of-state car. Everything along the shore appears to be private. There seems to be no access to many of the old places we could go. Even the park at Branford Point has a sign "for residents only."

New Haven was a long way away, but riding on the trolley car was an adventure in itself. I often thought it would go off the tracks as it swayed violently side to side as the conductor let it accelerate to its highest speed—windows open and dust flying all over the interior.

I remember the huge dirigible from Germany flying over Branford, its approach announced by the low rumbling engines.

World War II—Billy and I teamed as airplane spotters at the tower at

Pawson Park. I still have the certificate awarded to us. The kids in my high school class proudly showed pictures of their older brothers in the service. Some of my classmates quit school and joined the service. We took pride in the huge pile of metal that we collected and stored for a short time on the (old) high school lawn.

In "the old days" I could walk down Main Street and say hello to many friends. I think virtually everyone in Branford knew everyone. Today I look for grey heads, but none of them are acquaintances. I am amazed at how the town has changed and yet looks the same. It is a wonderful old town and I love it.

*Sincerely, John Tyler*

## Post Card Exchange Show

Jane Bouley, our Town Historian, presented the 2nd annual mid-winter Branford Historical Society "Postcard" program to a standing-room-only crowd on the afternoon of February 20th. This program, featuring postcards of Indian Neck, was held at the Blackstone Library. It was a trip down memory lane for some of us, and a charming introduction to the history of Indian Neck for newcomers. From Tryon's Corner to Pawson Park, Jane's narrative covered scenes and anecdotes from the early 1900's. Saving the best for last, she introduced the

Montowese House as "the Queen of Indian Neck."

Last year's program introduced the publishers of local postcards. This year's presentation begins a series of programs which will feature the postcards of other early resort areas of Branford. Postcard collectors and dealers gather to share, swap and sell their wares.

— *Maryanne Hall*



## “Our Life Has Been But A Sigh”

### TALES FROM THE MILL PLAIN CEMETERY

The Branford Historical Society will sponsor a slide presentation entitled “Our Life Has Been But A Sigh,” Tales from Mill Plain Cemetery by Jane P. Bouley, Town Historian on Thursday, March 24th at 7:00 p.m. at the Blackstone Memorial Library. Bouley spent several years cataloguing, photographing, and researching the stones and burials at Mill Plain Cemetery. A book about her finding will be available for \$20.00. A donation of \$3.00 is suggested, and refreshments will be served.

The Mill Plain and Queach sections of Branford were settled in the mid 1600s by the Barker, Tyler, Beach, Hoadley, and Baldwin fami-



lies. The land for the cemetery was given by Joseph Bartholomew in 1816 to his friends and neighbors for a burial place. There are many older marble gravestones with some from the 20th century; the last burial was in 1999.

— Jane Bouley

## Upcoming Events

The Branford Historical Society has a number of interesting events coming up. On **Thursday, March 24** at the Blackstone Library at 7 PM, Jane Bouley, Town Historian will speak on “Our Life Has Been But A Sigh,” Tales from Mill Plain Cemetery. A \$3 donation is suggested.

On **Thursday, May 26**, the Society will celebrate its annual dinner at the Owenego Inn with hors d’oeuvres at 5:30 and dinner at 6:30 PM. Our speaker will be Attorney Joseph Hern from Boston, who will speak on the topic of “Churchill in New England.”

Mr. Hern is the chairman of the New England Churchillians and a graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Boston College (J.D., Order of the Coif) and Boston University (LLM).

On **Thursday, October 27**, at 7 pm at Blackstone Library, Greg Thompson, will present “Genealogical Research in Your Home Town.” Greg will cover using the library, the historical society, the town hall, the cemeteries and what documents can be found in each location.

— Mike Russo

## In Memory Of BILL DAVIS

September 1, 1927 - January 22, 2011

In 1999 Bill Davis was presented with the Branford Historical Society Award for his outstanding contribution and dedication to the historical preservation of the Town of Branford. Bill became a member in 1997 and served as Vice President for one term and as president for two terms.

He was a staunch advocate for the preservation of historic buildings and landmarks in Branford. He attended local Planning & Zoning meetings and the Connecticut Historical Commission meetings in Hartford to fight for the preservation of the Wyllys Russell House, circa 1820, which was in danger of being demolished to build the Sterling condominiums. His work in this area with others led to the creation of the Preservations of Historic Structures & Landmark Committee as part of the Branford Historical Society’s Board.

Bill was very involved in the Strawberry Festival as coordinator and Chair for three years. Each Friday before the Festival he traveled to Pell’s Farm and picked up cases of strawberries for hulling. When the Cenotaph Restoration Committee formed under the sponsorship of the Society, Bill agreed to be the Treasurer. Bill cared about Branford, its people, its history and its buildings. He will be sorely missed.

— Jeanne McParland



## Remembering Nancy Hendricks

*July 18, 1921 - January 24, 2011*

Whenever I saw Nancy, she would say, "I have something for you" and hand me an article for the next newsletter. She loved to do research and contribute historical information to the Society, like this article on "Early American Toys." An article by Nancy appeared in nearly every Newsletter back to 2003. A member of the Society since 1988, Nancy took a keen interest in Harrison House and served on the Board of Directors as chair of the Museum and as Archivist. Donations in her memory may be made to the Branford Historical Society P.O. Box 504 Branford, CT 06405.

— *Jeanne McParland*

## Early American Toys

In 1695 a Mr. Higginson wrote his brother in England that toys were being imported to Massachusetts in small quantities where they would sell. The influence of crown and court was beginning to be felt in New England and a few "articles of luxury" such as toys were being exported to the colonies. Up until that time, playthings for children were few in number except for those that they made for themselves.

In 1712, on the list of rich goods arriving in Boston and sold there, were "Boxes of Toys." In 1743 "The Boston News Letter" had advertisements for Dutch and English toys for children and Boston had a flourishing toy shop at that date. "The Toy Shop," one of Newbery's Books, mentioned "fluffy dog," a drum, a spy glass and games such as top-spinning, hoop rolling and various games of ball. The first girl child emigrants in this solemn new world had the comfort of dolls or they certainly had something in the semblance of dolls. These dolls hardly resemble those of today. Dolls have always been symbols of maternity, and been known by all countries of all ages. In the tombs of Attica are found classic dolls of ivory or terra cotta, with jointed legs and arms. Dolls were called puppets in olden times. Dolls were sent from country to country and some of the finest came from the Netherlands and were called "Flanders babies." There are old ladies still living who recall the dolls of their youth, cloth dolls, plain and not fancy, dressed in gingham, with button eyes, yarn hair and a painted-on smile.

— *Nancy Hendricks*

## 125th Anniversary of The Civil War Monument

On a Friday afternoon in October members of the American Legion, descendants of Civil War Veterans, the Branford Garden Club and the Branford Historical Society came together to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Civil War Monument and to honor Branford's Civil War soldiers. Unk DaRos, First Selectman, paid tribute to those who fought for the Union. Jane Bouley, Town Historian, spoke about the 20th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry from Branford and gave a brief history of Connecticut's role in the Civil War. Peter Black



talked about the battles in which 1st Lt. Aaron Lanfare fought. Lanfare defended our nation's flag from capture at the battle of Sailor's Creek and subsequently captured the flag of the 11th Florida Confederate infantry. For his bravery he was awarded the

Congressional Medal of Honor. The Stony Creek Drum Corps provided music and played the National Anthem. Peter Black, Senior Chief Petty Officer, USNR, President of the Branford Historical Society and Hamlet M. Hernandez, Lt Col. USMCR, retired, Superintendent of Branford Schools, laid a wreath at the base of the monument. This was followed by a gun salute by the American Legion.

— *Jeanne McParland*

*Laying the wreath are Hamlet Hernandez, and Peter Black. Picture courtesy of Alex Palluzzi.*



## Congressional Medal Of Honor Recipient Aaron Lanfare Plaque Rededication

**A**aron Lanfare was born in 1824 in Branford, one of 15 children of Oliver Lanfare (1783-1873) and Lois Willard Lanfare of Double Beach. His grandfather served in the Revolutionary War as master of the ship "Chloe Ann." Like his ancestor, Aaron took to the sea and before the Civil War was master of the barque "Reindeer" out of New Haven. He was honored by Queen Victoria for helping to rescue the crew of one of "Her Majesty's Ships."

At the outbreak of the Civil War, at the age of 37, Aaron enlisted in Company B First Connecticut Cavalry. The cavalry saw action in Virginia at Cedar Creek, Winchester, Sailor's Creek and Appomattox. Dur-



ing the battle at Sailor's Creek, Aaron Lanfare captured the flag of the 11th Florida Confederate Infantry on April 6, 1865. On the day he was mustered out, 1st Lt. Aaron S. Lanfare was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, our country's highest military

award for gallantry at the risk of one's own life above and beyond the call of duty.

After the war he went back to sea and was lost at sea in 1875.

Aaron S. Lanfare is the only native son of Branford to receive the Congressional Medal Honor. To honor his memory, a plaque was placed at the flag pole at the old Post Office on Montowese Street in 1961. The plaque was rededicated at the new Post Office on Park Street in 1984. Plans are being made to place this plaque in a more prominent location to the right of Town Hall under the blue Branford History sign. There will be a brief rededication ceremony this spring.

— Jane Bouley

## Membership Report

**T**he Society welcomes new members Eric & Carol Carlson, Mr. & Mrs. John Evenwel, Linda Sinatra, Geraldine Reider, Elliot R. Hastings Sr., Molly Visnic, Warren Gould, Valerie Vishno, Wayne N. Cooke, Caddo Publications USA, Dave Peterson & Gabrielle Firth, Marilyn Romans, Lisa Peccini & Chris Willems, Joseph P. Iwanczuk, Susan & David Rood, Donald & Muriel Russell, Alana Joli Abbott, Mary McCarthy, Patricia Fidler and Robert Barnett.

There has been a wonderful response to my annual letter requesting

dues. It sparked memories of members. Several wrote little notes to me when they sent in their dues or told me their remembrances of Branford back in the 1930's and 1940's. John Tyler wrote a letter with his story which is part of this Newsletter

Speaking of memories, Jane Bouley's two programs featuring Earl Coulter's collection of Branford photographs brought out record crowds. The Society is very blessed to have a Town Historian like Jane who has scanned and catalogued pictures depicting the history of Branford.

Despite the rain, there was a very

supportive audience of our membership as well as Garden Club members at the 125th anniversary celebration of the Civil War Monument.

Even though there is a long list of new members above, membership has not increased significantly; it is currently 229 members. I encourage you all to help me increase membership by recommending your friends or family members who have a keen interest in keeping Branford's history alive by joining the Branford Historical Society.

— Jeanne McParland, Chair



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## Scholarship Recipient

**E**lana Kaufman is the recipient of the 2010 annual scholarship from the Branford Historical Society. The award is given to a graduating senior at Branford High School.

Elana is the daughter of Helen and Jeff Kaufman. She plans to major in English Literature at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

While in Branford High, she was a member of the National Honor Society and National Language Honor Society. She also was named a CAPT Scholar. For the senior exhibition, she wrote a children's book about Branford and Branford History.

Elana was a member of the Music Makers, section leader for the

Concert Choir, captain of the girl's varsity soccer team and was cast in the school's spring musicals for four years. She also was a mentor at Camp Totoket.

Because of her interest in history, she became a member of the Branford Historical Society and volunteered last year at the society's holiday party and the Strawberry Festival.

— Jackie Ulrich

## Publications

Contact Winnifred Judge,  
488-8755 for details.

- Vintage Postcards  
on CD..... \$15 ea.
- The History of Damascus  
Cemetery*.....\$25
- Malachi Linsley's Diary*.....\$25
- Early History of Branford*.....\$5
- Thimble Islands Book*.....\$7
- Post Card Prints of  
Early Branford..... \$3 ea.
- Montowese Program  
DVD.....\$15
- Reproduction of 1868 Map  
of Branford (laminated).....\$8