

# From The Harrison House

The Branford Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2003, Volume 8, Issue 1

## From the President's Desk

On Saturday, October 19<sup>th</sup>, under threatening skies, the Harvest Festival and Collectibles Sale were a tremendous success, netting \$2,045. Several Society members warrant special acknowledgments. Many thanks to George Goeben, "Pete" Peterson, and Paul Rowan who collected and/or priced sale items, as well as Jane Bouley and Eva Peterson who also priced. Kudos to Michael Sykes and Marlene Palmquist for the wonderful and inviting refreshment table. Winnifred Judge is to be commended for again recruiting and scheduling the cashiers. Our Museum Chair, Anton Wohlert, graciously arranged to have a professional appraiser as well as a spinning demonstration during the event. Pattie LaBonte did a great job in coordinating the docents who provided tours of the Harrison House as part of the event. These individuals, along with many other volunteers, enabled the Festival to function in a smooth and efficient manner.

As stated in the fall newsletter, the format of the Festival will change, in that individuals can rent tables and/or space. The Society will set up tables for the sale of baked goods,

publications, refreshments, as well as for the sale of antiques, either donated or consigned. We will continue to have tours of the House, now including the barn. Every effort will be made to secure the services of a professional appraiser, as provided for the first time this year. You or your friends may want to be part of this "new" Festival format. Please think about this, along with what you wish to donate or place on consignment for the antiques table.

Bedecked by a recent snowfall thanks to Mother Nature, the Harrison House, resplendent with berries, fruit and greens, presented a "Currier and Ives" scene of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Christmas for the Society's Annual

Holiday Open House on Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>. Once again, Linda Peterson and her group of energetic and creative volunteers decorated the House completely with various natural materials such as berries and greens, sending a beautiful seasonal aroma wafting throughout each room. Added to these wonderful scents was the aroma of refreshments organized and specially baked by Eva Peterson (as well as the volunteer bakers), Michael Sykes and Marlene Palmquist, both of whom dressed in colonial attire as our greeters. Also greeting our guests were the door wreaths designed by Debbie Vallas. Of course, the final touch was the enthusiastic singing of the Branford

High School Music Makers under the direction of Cathy Roding. Thanks to all for a super celebration! Finally, we had a very special visitor (no, not Santa) - Sawyer Peter Bouley, the first grandchild of Jane Bouley, and first great-grandchild of Eva and "Pete" Peterson.

In closing, may 2003 bring each of you, your family and friends, a year of good health and happiness.

— Bill Davis, President





## From the Harrison House

is a publication of the  
Branford Historical Society  
124 Main Street, P.O. Box 504  
Branford, Connecticut 06405  
(203) 488-4828

### Board of the Branford Historical Society

#### President

Bill Davis ..... 481-5615

#### Vice-President

Paul Rowan ..... 488-8566

#### Treasurer

Dona Wohlert ..... 481-4665

#### Assistant Treasurer

Winnifred Judge ..... 488-8755

#### Recording Secretary

Nancy Gaylord ..... 488-1223

#### Corresponding Secretary

Priscilla Oliver ..... 488-4411

#### Past President

Bob Bescher ..... 488-0100

#### Accessions

Maureen DaRos ..... 488-8265

#### Archives

Nancy Hendricks ..... 488-7411

#### Guides

Pattie LaBonte ..... 488-6482

#### Hospitality

Helen Bescher ..... 488-0100

#### House/Grounds

George Goeben ..... 481-9200

Arnold Peterson ..... 488-0450

#### Membership

Jeanne McParland ..... 468-5433

#### Museum

Anton Wohlert ..... 481-4665

#### Newsletter

Rosalind Jones ..... 481-8436

#### Programs

Judy Myjak ..... 481-6779

#### Publicity

Jackie Ulrich ..... 481-0130

# Winter & Spring Programs

## FEBRUARY 20th: "Special Use Oil Lamps"

Society Museum Chair, **Anton Wohlert**, will lecture on oil lamps from the 1800's. Dr. Wohlert's presentation will concern unique lamps and lanterns which served a number of purposes, and will be accompanied by actual items from his collection, such as a lamp used as an image projector, another that indicated the time, and a combination night light and medicine vaporizer. Please join us and learn more about this topic from one of our Society members.

## MARCH 20th: "Native Cooking"

Madison's **Dale Carson**, an authority on Native American and Northeast Woodlands cultures, is a Native Cooking columnist, artist, lecturer and gourmet cook. A member of the Abenaki Nation, Mrs. Carson will present a program on Native cooking while discussing the customs and foods common to area Native Americans. Some entertaining story telling in this show-and-tell presentation will surely capture the interest of all attendees.

## APRIL 24th: "The Amistad"

**Jennifer White**, Director of Education for the New Haven Colony Historical Society, will offer a most informative program on the Amistad, the infamous slave ship recently cited in a popular book and film detailing its story and history. An exact replica of the Amistad was anchored in New Haven Harbor last summer, offering daily sails on Long Island Sound. Be sure to join us for what promises to be a fascinating lecture.

## MAY 15th: Annual Dinner Meeting

### "Remembering the Lone Ranger"

**Bob Schulz** of Woodbridge, voice-over artist and retired radio and TV personality, will provide Society members with a memorable link to the past, reliving the nostalgia of radio entertainment. Mr. Schulz 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 popular entertainers of what many consider a kinder, gentler era. *Note:* This program will be offered at the time of the Society's Annual Dinner Meeting.

*All programs, with the exception of the program scheduled for May 15<sup>th</sup>, will take place in the meeting room of the Blackstone Library at 8 PM, refreshments at 7:30 PM.*



## A Vigilant Watch of Historic Importance

Over a year ago (May 14, 2001), an Ad Hoc Committee (Bill Davis, Arnold Peterson, Paul Rowan and Anton Wohlert) was approved by the Board of Directors to explore the feasibility of purchasing the Harrison House property from the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA).

Before obtaining the services of an appraiser experienced in historic structures, it was necessary to obtain a formal Preservation Restriction Agreement from SPNEA to identify the restrictions and conditions that the Society would have to accept. In January 2002, we received this agreement from SPNEA. It should be noted that during this period of time, the Society had been actively involved in establishing a National Historic District that included the Harrison House property, as well as monitoring the proposed condo development (Sterling Ridge, LLC) within the designated area.

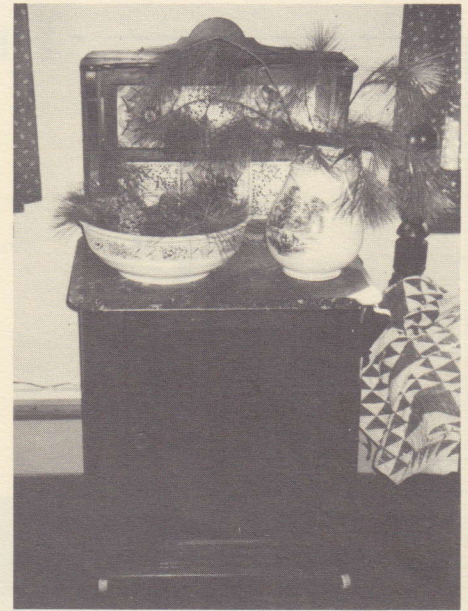
After several delays, Mr. Marc Nadeau, SRA of Nadeau, Perrelli

Associates, 35 Vineyard Avenue, Guilford, Connecticut 06437 was contacted to appraise the property on Friday, December 13, 2002.

Presently, the Sterling Ridge, LLC proposal is pending. The Connecticut Historical Commission (CHC) has been alerted as to the interest of the developer to *demolish* the Wyllys, Russell House and barn, 148-162 Main Street. Mr. John W. Shanahan, CHC Director and State Historic Preservation Officer, has written a letter to the owners of the property and the developer citing the Commission's responsibility under Connecticut General Statute, to prohibit the *unreasonable destruction* of "historic structures."

Please keep a vigilant watch for when the Sterling Ridge, LLC proposal appears on the meeting agenda of the Planning and Zoning Commission, so that your objections to this development can be heard.

— Bill Davis, President



## A Welcomed Acquisition

The handsome early 19<sup>th</sup> century wash stand pictured above was recently donated to the Society by Nancy and Bill Hendricks, in memory of their son, Dana, and can now be seen in the bedchamber of the Harrison House. Information on all other 2002 accessions will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

— Maureen DaRos, Accessions Chair

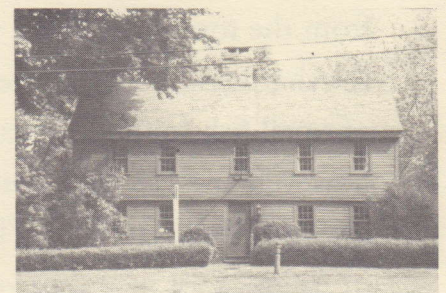


The Harrison House was built by Nathaniel Harrison about 1724. Here is how it looked around 1910, owned by Lorany Bradley Smith.

## Then & Now



In 1934, painted white. Owned by Lorany's son Willard Smith.



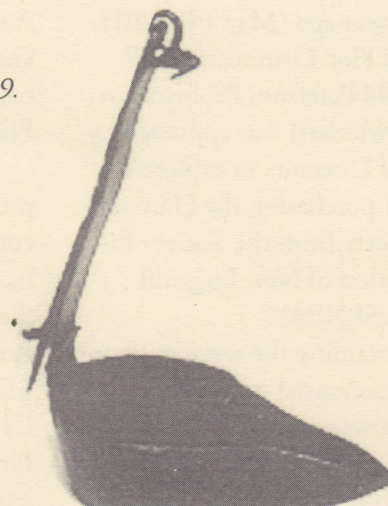
And in 1989, owned by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and leased by the Branford Historical Society.



## From the Archives

### *The Iron "Betty" Lamps*

*The First Pilgrim Lamps  
made in New England about 1639.*



Captain John Carver, first Governor of Plymouth Colony, purchased in Holland just before he sailed, a Dutch iron "Betty" lamp. It was undoubtedly this feeble light which helped to make less gloomy that crowded cabin from which dates so much of our history.

Such small iron lamps were very similar in shape to the old Greek, Roman and Assyrian ones and are precisely the same in principal. The body was usually cast or wrought in one solid piece, with the nose or spout for the wick to lie in one end, and a short, curved upright handle. To this handle was often attached a short linked chain with an iron spindle and hooked end, and a slender iron pick to free the wick when it became crusted with soot or carbon. The spindle was used either to hang up the lamp from the top of the chair, where the reader sat, or to fasten it to position by sticking the sharp end between the stones of the fireplace. Oil was obtained from the swarms of small fish found in great abundance all along the coast. The light was very feeble, however, and the wick constantly crusted over. The odor of the burning fish was anything but agreeable. This lamp, or some variations of it, were soon made and used in America for over 200 years. I am quite certain that the Betty Lamp was used in the Harrison House for a period of time.

— Nancy Hendricks, Archivist



# Membership Reminder

Our Society membership has consistently remained a little over 230 for the past year. As yet, some members have not renewed their membership. Your dues, along with our fundraisers, help to preserve and maintain the Harrison House, as well as its grounds and barn. Your support allows us to present interesting programs at the Blackstone Library during the year and train our Guides. Please check your mailing label. A "C" stands for current, and an "R" indicates it is time to renew. There are also "L" Life and "H" Honorary members. Should you have any questions concerning your membership, please contact me at 468-5433. Thank you for your support.

— Jeanne McParland, Membership

## A Timely Poem by a National Treasure

### Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
 His house is in the village though;  
 He will not see me stopping here  
 To watch his woods fill up with snow.  
 My little horse must think it queer  
 To stop without a farmhouse near  
 Between the woods and frozen lake  
 The darkest evening of the year.  
 He gives his harness bells a shake  
 To ask if there is some mistake.\*  
 The only other sound's the sweep  
 Of easy wind and downy flake.  
 The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
 But I have promises to keep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep.



Robert Frost

## Branford Historical Society Membership Application

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

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

Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

- Contributing \$50.00
- Sustaining \$25.00
- Family \$15.00
- Individual \$10.00
- Student \$5.00

Additional donations, or contributions to our Memorial Fund are also appreciated. Please make checks payable to Branford Historical Society and return this form to us at:

Branford Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 504  
 Branford, CT 06405

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your support.*

### Please indicate the areas in which you would like to volunteer:

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harvest Festival   | <input type="checkbox"/> House & Grounds     | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum Guides       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holiday Open House | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership          | <input type="checkbox"/> Programs/Publicity  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality        | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum/Acquisitions | <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberry Festival |

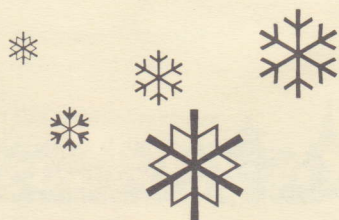


# Historical Society News & Notes

## Blackstone Library

### Oil Lamp Display

A collection of 19<sup>th</sup> Century oil lamps (approximately 20 in number) owned by Anton Wohlert is currently on display at the Blackstone Library, and will remain in place through the month of January. Anton will present a program on these lamps, sponsored by the Historical Society, on February 20<sup>th</sup> at the Blackstone. (See Program information.)



## House Guides

As we begin a new year, I would like to take this opportunity to again thank all those who volunteered their time to serve as Harrison House Guides during the previous year. Your commitment and valuable contribution to the Society throughout the year is very much appreciated and I look forward to working with you once again during 2003.

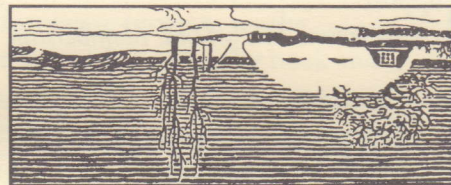
My best wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year to all!

— *Pattie LaBonte, Guides Chair*

## Historical 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  
(Stony Creek/Pine Orchard,  
Pawson Park/Indian Neck,  
Short Beach, Downtown  
Branford) each \$3.00



JEANNE MCPARLAND  
226 LAUREL STREET, UNIT 8  
EAST HAVEN, CT 06512

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 24  
BRANFORD, CT

Branford Historical Society  
Post Office Box 504  
Branford, Connecticut 06405