

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2018

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The Barn Corner

Corn: A Valuable Crop

By David Ryan

One of the most noticed and popular artifacts in our barn is the corn sheller. Factory built, it made the task of separating the corn kernels from the cob much faster and simpler than the task could be done by hand. In early times this chore often fell to the boys, who removed the kernels from the cob by scraping the dried corn against the rim of a wooden snow shovel or the edge of an iron oven peel (a peel is a shovel-like tool used by bakers to slide loaves of bread and other baked goods into and out of an oven).

Corn was one of the most important crops grown in Harwinton. Wheat did not grow well here because of the thin, rocky soil and short growing season. Corn production, however, was generally very successful and the corn had many uses. The corn crop even provided a form of social entertainment for neighbors who would gather together at local barns for "husking bees" as soon as the corn was ready for harvest.

Sometimes the empty corn husks were used to fill cloth sacks to make sleeping on a rope bed softer and more comfortable. The corn stalks were also chopped and used for animal fodder. Children would build toy corn cob houses or make corn-cob and corn-husk dolls.

Dried cobs also made good kindling to help bring a fire back to life. Cobs were also used to smoke ham and other meat. In many an outhouse, cobs (along with leaves) were used because there was no toilet paper at that time. Commercially produced toilet paper didn't begin circulating until 1857 and it wasn't until around the 1930s that toilet paper gained mass appeal.

In early times a samp mortar was used to grind the corn. This is a tool composed of a hollowed-out log (the samp) and a heavy piece of wood shaped to fit in the mortar as a pestle to pound or grind the corn. The word "samp" is an Indian word meaning coarse ground corn. There is a samp mortar on display in our barn.



Corn meal is the coarse flour ground from the dried corn. It is a common staple food, and is ground to fine, medium, and coarse consistencies, but none as fine as wheat flour. The corn meal was often mixed with water or milk and a sweetener and served as porridge. Johnnycake, a flatbread made of corn - while not as pleasing as wheat-made bread - was generally deemed acceptable to eat.

It should be noted that most of the knowledge about planting, raising, and using corn (also called maize) was learned from the American Indians. As time went on, more sophisticated factory-made grinders were available to make the jobs associated with the corn harvest easier and more efficient.

There is more that can be learned about corn by visiting our barn during the warm months. You might even be able to shell corn for yourself.

Sources: "History of Harwinton" by Raymond George Bentley" and "Home Life in Early Days" by Alice Morse Earle

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Treasurer: Harry Schuh

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David Ryan

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Dennis Andrews

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Roger Plaskett

AUDITOR
Marilyn Mitchell

LEGAL COUNSEL
Patrick Wall

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**PLEASE HELP SUPPORT
THE 2018-19 ANNUAL APPEAL
LETTERS ARE IN THE MAIL**

The Historical Society's annual appeal is under way. Appeal requests were mailed the last week of August. Last year's contributions supported a scholarship awarded to a local student with an active interest in history.

The Historical Society also rents office space in the Wintergreen Housing's Jason Skinner House off Bentley Drive. We maintain the First District one-room schoolhouse and barn museum on the grounds of the Consolidated School on Route 118. In addition, the Society preserves and maintains artifacts in three buildings at the Harwinton Fairgrounds on Locust Road. There are maintenance costs associated with the upkeep of all of these ventures. Gifts to the annual appeal help with expenses while supporting the Society's mission of preserving Harwinton's history.



**Reminder to Harwinton Historical
Society Members**

Members of the Harwinton Historical Society have been invited to a Member Appreciation Open House on Sunday, September 16th from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Jason Skinner House on Bentley Drive. Appetizers and beverages will be served. Come and meet other members, visit the second-floor office space, and learn how you can continue to help preserve the history of Harwinton.

This event is by invitation only

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HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION SEEKING TWO VOLUNTEERS

The Harwinton Historic District Commission is seeking two alternate members who currently reside in either of the two historic districts to fill vacant positions. If you know of anyone who has an interest in contributing to the preservation effort in Harwinton, please have them contact Historic District Commission Chairman, Carole Romano at caromano@snet.net

Many thanks!

The Harwinton Historic District and Historic Properties Commission



Waiting for Visitors to the Barn Museum

Bruce Burnett, Dennis Andrews, Everett Lyons and Mike Orefice (left to right) are ready to greet visitors to the barn museum at this year's annual ice cream social, which was held on August 5th. In addition to having ice cream available and entertainment by Matica Arts circus performers, the barn museum and one-room schoolhouse were open to the public. Burnett, Orefice and Andrews are on the Historical Society's Board of Directors. Lyons is a member of the Historical Society.

The barn and schoolhouse can be seen by appointment by calling 860-482-7978.



“VOICES OF THE PAST”

NIGHT-TIME GUIDED TOUR OF SOUTH CEMETERY

COMING FRIDAY- OCTOBER 12TH - 5:30 TO 8:00 PM

All visitors must meet at Town Hall and check in to receive a free ticket. A shuttle bus will transport groups of up to 25 people back and forth from the Town Hall to the cemetery. This is a non-frightening adventure - come and meet some interesting people from the past.

SPONSORED BY THE HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY & T.A. HUNGERFORD MUSEUM

Bring a flashlight, dress for the weather, and have fun!

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	COMMENT
September 16 (Sunday)	Members Appreciation Open House 2 to 4 p.m.	Details by Invitation Held in the Skinner House off Bentley Drive at the Wintergreen Housing
October 5, 6, 7 (Fri, Sat, Sun)	Harwinton Fair	Volunteers Needed to work and bake items for sale call Nancy at 860-482-7978 !!
October 12th (Friday)	“Voices of the Past” night time guided tour of South Cemetery 5:30 to 8 p.m.	Rain date Saturday, Oct. 13
October 25 (Thursday)	Board of Directors Meeting and appointment of nominating committee	3 PM Skinner House
November 29 (Thursday)	Board of Directors Meeting and Nomination officers for 2019	3 PM Skinner House