

# HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## FEBRUARY 2019

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### *The Barn Corner*

## WOODEN WATER PIPES AND THE HARWINTON WATER COMPANY

By David Ryan

A clean and dependable water supply was (and still is) vital to every home in Harwinton. While an earlier article on drawing water from wells appeared in *The Barn Corner*, it did not tell the entire story. Displayed at the Historical Society's Barn Museum (on the wall behind the wagons) are various lengths of square hollowed-out wood water pipes, which were donated by three different families. This suggests that drawing water from a well was not the only way to get usable water. Although wooden pipes of all shapes and sizes are known, the ones in our barn are square, each side being about four inches wide. The length could vary from three or four feet to much longer. The hollowed-out hole in the middle is between two and three inches in diameter.



Wooden water pipes similar to these are displayed in the barn museum

There are several ways to create a water pipe from a piece of wood and the processes are interesting. One way was to have a blacksmith make an augur (drill) with a handle long enough to reach the end of the pipe. A second way was to drill a starter hole then add hot coals to burn out the inside. A spoon augur (basically a spoon-shaped drill bit), is then used to remove the charred wood. This process is repeated until the pipe has been completely hollowed out. Yet another possibility was to have the work done at a blacksmith shop, where the smith would heat a wide metal tube to red hot, insert it in the hole in the wood to char the wood, then use a spoon auger to drill out the charred wood. This leaves a relatively uniform round hole. All of these processes required time-consuming hard work.

Once the wood has been hollowed there were different ways of connecting one pipe to another. One, called the ball and spigot joint, had one end carved and rounded to fit into the rounded receiving end of the next pipe. A second way was to bevel (cut at a slant) the inside of each end, placing one end inside the other, then pounding the end to make a tight fit. The pipes in our barn have a carved round end fitted into an inner cut round end. In all cases, the pipes were pounded together, but the real sealing took place when the water running through the pipes caused the wooden joints to swell and tighten up,

Wood was used for pipes because it was inexpensive, readily available, and would last at least several decades. Hemlock, elm, or cedar were the woods of choice. but other kinds were also used, depending on what was most readily available.

*See Fireplugs and The Harwinton Water Company, page 3*

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Harwinton Historical Society

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Harwinton, CT 06791

860-482-7978

**2019 Scholarship Applications Available**

The Harwinton Historical Society will grant a \$1,000 scholarship to a Harwinton resident or an individual active in the Society. Applicants must show an interest in history and/or the social sciences through coursework and/or experiences. Graduating high school seniors and students currently pursuing post-secondary education are encouraged to apply. Applications are available from the guidance departments of the following schools: Lewis Mills, Wamogo, Oliver Wolcott Technical, St. Paul, and Northwest Catholic High; or may be requested on line at [harwhistsoc@gmail.com](mailto:harwhistsoc@gmail.com).

Applications must be postmarked by April 15, 2019.

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**TRIVIA QUESTION:**

**Question:** How did Harmony Hill Road get its name? Answer below.

**LOOKING BACK IN HISTORY**

When the game *Twister* was invented in 1965, officials at Milton-Bradley were worried that the game of physical skill might be too risqué and tarnish their corporate image.

Then, on May 3, 1966, actress Eva Gabor played the game with Johnny Carson on his *Tonight Show*. While the contortions did prove a little scandalous, the audience loved it, and three million units of the game sold in that year alone.

In 1967, *Twister* was named the game of the year. It has since been inducted in the National Toy Hall of Fame.

***“Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt.”***

Quote by John Muir (1838-1914), naturalist and early advocate for the preservation of wilderness in the United States. Muir is also known as the “Father of the National Parks.”

**TRIVIA ANSWER:** The answer depends on which story you want to believe. One states that all neighbors were so pleasant and helpful that the area was named Harmony Hill. The other story is that there was so much quarreling among neighbors that it was dubbed Harmony Hill Road in the spirit of fun, according to the late town historian Raymond G. Bentley.

## Fireplugs, continued from page 1

In some cities, wooden underground pipes aided in fighting fires. Firemen would locate the water pipe, dig a large hole around it, then drill a hole in the water pipe. The water would make a small well so that firefighters could readily fill their buckets as they formed a bucket brigade. When the fire was out, the hole in the pipe would be plugged with a piece of wood and the hole refilled with dirt. Hence, the word "fireplug" entered our vocabulary.

To make the water pipes work in a country home gravity was often a factor. In some cases, a spring or brook would be located at a level higher than the house. A pipe would be laid using a gentle slope so the water would not have too much force as it entered the home. Often the water flowed into a home cistern or other storage tank for a ready supply in the house. There was often an overflow pipe so that excess water could go back into the ground. Occasionally, the water just flowed through the sink, where the user could trap the amount needed. Either way was more convenient than the back-breaking chore of hauling water from an outside well.

### HARWINTON'S WATER COMPANY

While not part of the Barn story, another source of Harwinton water should be mentioned. In the late 1790's, Harwinton formed its own, small water company, which would be called "The Harwinton Water Company". The Reverend Joshua Williams, pastor of the Harwinton Congregational Church, built a new brick house east of the church on what is now Route 4 (or Burlington Road). Former Harwinton historian Lloyd T. Shanley Jr. explains that Pastor Williams and three other shareholders formed a company to distribute and use the water from a spring located about "18 rods northeast" of the pastor's new house, behind what is now often called the "Barber House," or later, the "Hurlbert Clark House." Water was gravity-fed through an aqueduct made of granite to homes down Center Hill from the spring. Some of the system probably still exists underground. A contractor, digging a ditch in my backyard knew of it and would not dig where he thought the aqueduct was probably located. He might have been right, for the granite-walled-in spring can still be found in good condition behind the Barber-Clark house.

The "water company" lasted at least 100 years. In the 1880's wealthy Harwinton native Collis P. Huntington purchased a share of the company to provide water for the Huntington Chapel, which was built in memory of his mother near the parking lot of the church. When the chapel was torn down, a stone marker in remembrance of the chapel was installed. It can be seen adjacent to the Congregational Church parking lot near North Road.

Today, most of Harwinton gets its water from private wells, although some homes and buildings can now purchase water from the Torrington Water Company.

*By David Ryan. Source: undated "Waterbury Republican" article by Lloyd Shanley*

**“Blizzard of ‘78” – Forty-one Years Ago This Month**

Just over four decades ago – in February 1978 – Connecticut was digging out from a catastrophic, historic nor’easter known as the Blizzard of ‘78” or ‘Storm Larry.” Snow fell mostly from Monday morning, February 6, to the evening of Tuesday, February 7. Especially hard hit were Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Snow accumulation records were broken in Boston (27.1 inches), Providence (27.6 inches), and Hartford (18 inches). Even Atlantic City, New Jersey was buried under 20.1 inches of the snow that paralyzed the East Coast from Washington, D.C. to Boston.

The storm resulted in 100 deaths and about 4,500 injuries and millions of dollars in damage. Even Connecticut Governor Ella Grasso was reported to have walked more than a mile to the storm emergency headquarters in Hartford.

----- Detach and Return -----

**2019 HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM**

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Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Providing an email address will help reduce the cost of postage*

Amount included (\$15 per member): \_\_\_\_\_ New \_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_ Life Member \_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to the Harwinton Historical Society**

**PLEASE RETURN NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 15, 2019 TO:**

**HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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