

# HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## MARCH 2019

Mail: PO Box 84, Harwinton, CT 06791

email: [harwhistsoc@gmail.com](mailto:harwhistsoc@gmail.com)



**Red Barn on Lake Harwinton Road**

### Today's Trivia

#### **Why are so many barns painted red?**

Red barns that dot today's New England landscape are about as "American as apple pie." There are several theories as to why barns are painted red.

Many years ago, choices for paints, sealers and other building materials did not exist, so most barns were not painted at all and simply weathered naturally with age. Farmers had to be resourceful to find ways to protect and seal the wood on their barns.

In the late 1700s farmers started sealing the barn wood with an oil, often linseed oil which is a tawny-colored oil derived from the seed of the flax plant. They would paint their barns with a linseed-oil mixture, which often included additions such as milk and lime. The combination produced a long-lasting paint that dried and hardened quickly. In historically accurate terms, "barn red" is not the bright, fire-engine red that we often see today, but more of a burnt-orange red. There are two predominant theories as to how the oil mixture became traditionally red:

1. Wealthy farmers sometimes added blood from a recent slaughter to the oil mixture. As the paint dried, it turned from a bright red to a darker, burnt red.
2. More often, farmers added ferrous oxide, otherwise known as rust, to the oil mixture. Rust was plentiful on farms and is a poison to many fungi, including mold and moss, which were known to grow on barns. These fungi would trap moisture in the wood, increasing decay.

Regardless of how the farmer tinted his paint, having a red barn became a fashionable thing. The red barns also provided a sharp contrast to the traditional white farmhouse. When paint became more available, many people continued to choose red for their barns in honor of tradition.

*Sources: Kloter Farm and "Farmers' Almanac Trivia"*

**OFFICERS – 2019**

**President:** Bonnie Andrews  
**Vice President:** Nancy Schnyer  
**Secretary:** Elaine Sederquist  
**Treasurer:** Harry Schuh

**DIRECTORS**

**Term Ends 2019**

Bruce Burnett  
Shirley Gay

**Term Ends 2020**

Michael Orefice  
Candace Jones-Pacholski

**Term Ends 2021**

Carol Kearns  
David Ryan

**IMMEDIATE PAST  
PRESIDENT**

Eleanor Woike

**CURATOR**

Bonnie Andrews

**BUILDING SUPERVISOR**

Dennis Andrews

**OTHERS  
(non-board positions)**

**HISTORIAN**  
Roger Plaskett

**AUDITOR**

Marilyn Mitchell

**LEGAL COUNSEL**

Patrick Wall

**Email:**  
harwhistsoc@gmail.com

Harwinton Historical Society  
PO Box 84  
Harwinton, CT 06791

860-482-7978

**2019 Scholarship Deadline April 15th**

The Harwinton Historical Society is offering 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**.

\*\*\*\*\*

***US ARMY FIELD BAND & SOLDIERS' CHORUS***

**On the Warner Theatre Main Stage March 21st**

The internationally acclaimed United States Army Field Band of Washington, DC will continue its long tradition of presenting free public performances when it appears at the Warner Theatre in Torrington on March 21, 2019 at 7:30 PM. The Army Field Bands' concert is sponsored by Torrington Savings Bank.

The Concert Band & Soldiers' Chorus are the oldest and largest of The US Army Field Band's performing components. These two ensembles continue to present joint concerts on their national tours. They have performed in all 50 states and 30 foreign countries for audiences totaling hundreds of millions.

**Please note this event is free, but a ticket is required.**

**Tickets for this event will be held at will-call. Tickets will not be mailed. Call the theater box office at 860-489-7180. Some tickets may be available at Torrington Savings.**



\*\*\*\*\*

***"You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take"***  
**Wayne Gretsky**



A typical rope bed, similar to the one pictured here, hangs in the Historical Society's barn museum

**The Barn Corner**

## ROPE BEDS AND BED WRENCHES

By David Ryan

There is a rope bed on display in the Historical Society's barn museum. Unlike modern beds with pillow top mattresses and box springs, the rope bed consists of four plain but short sturdy legs and plain board side rails. It is held together by a network of tightly fitted rope.



**Rope Key**

The rope is kept tight by using a piece of wood about a foot long with a notch wide enough to fit over the rope, and a cross piece handle attached through a hole drilled near the top. This device is called a "rope key" or "bed wrench." The key is inserted over the rope and twisted until the rope is taut. A wooden peg is then placed between the rope and the bed frame to ensure that it remains tight. The rope key is then removed and stored. Because real toys were often scarce and a luxury, sometimes children would use the rope key like a doll. The notch served as legs and the handle as arms. The children would make clothing for the "doll" from scraps of fabric.

Sleepers needed to tighten the ropes frequently to ensure firmer support and a better night's sleep. Thus, the expression "sleep tight" originated with these beds. Once the rope was pulled tight a blanket or "mattress" was placed on top of the rope grid. The mattress consisted of a material sack stuffed with corn husks, horse hair, leaves, straw, wool, or moss to provide some sleeping comfort. If one was fortunate, the mattress was stuffed with soft goose feathers, which provided the most comfort of all. Note: while in England I had the good fortune to sleep on a feather bed mattress for one night. I will never forget the feeling of slowly sinking into the soft feathers. I slept very well.

The bed in the historical society's barn is low and was most probably used by a hired man or servant, although it could have been used by children. It also might have been used as a birthing bed. It is small enough to be moved easily to a room close to the warmth of a kitchen fireplace. The bed played an important role in family life as it served as a place for reproduction, birthing, sickness, and death. I was told that my grandfather was born and died in the same bed in the same house.



## Looking Back 25 years to March 1994

Information from the Harwinton Historical Society's Archives

### Stolen Flag Replaced

Twenty-five years ago, in mid-March of 1994, a new POW/MIA flag was hoisted on the Harwinton town green, replacing a flag that had been stolen. The new flag was raised despite the morning cold and drizzle to which American Legion representative James Bement commented, "They don't stop wars when it rains."

### Another Snow Day

By early March of 1994, the Region 10 school district was predicting that students in Harwinton and Burlington would probably attend classes at least through June 28. The school district had built six snow days into the 1993-94 school year calendar. However, a winter storm on Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, caused school to be canceled for a seventh day.

### More Space Needed

The Harwinton Ambulance Association was actively searching for a way to expand its physical space. Ambulance Association Chief Robert Collins told selectmen in early March 1994, that the ambulance group had outgrown its current facility and needed more room.

### Diversity in Education

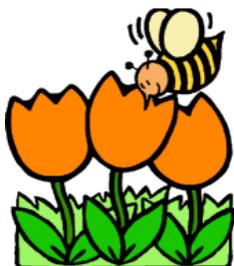
Residents of Harwinton and Burlington were encouraged to voice their opinions on providing more diversity in the education of Region 10 children. Following a hearing on the topic, the district's Quality and Diversity Committee was expected to come up with specific recommendations for a Regional Forum for Quality and Diversity.

### Scout of the Year

Benjamin Burnett, 14, was named the District Scout of the Year for the Long Rivers Council, Tunxis District. Benjamin was a member of Harwinton Boy Scout Troop 55 and is the son of Bruce and Karen Burnett. Bruce is a member of the Historical Society's Board of Directors.

### Spring Home Show

Harwinton residents were busy preparing to attend the annual Lions Club-sponsored Home Show, which was a popular event that was held each Spring at the Torrington Armory.



## First Day of Spring: Wednesday, March 20, 2019