

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

MAY 2019

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DATE PLAQUES ON HOUSES MAKE HISTORY AND CREATE INTEREST

By Joyce Peck

In New England, it's a custom for people to place date plaques on their houses to indicate the year the structure was built. Many of the signs on older buildings use the word "circa" because the date is approximate. On newer homes, the date plaques are more likely to be accurate since they were placed there by the original owners. These signs are informative, interesting and, no doubt, a source of pride.

Dating the old structures can sometimes be "iffy." In his book "History of Harwinton" the late Raymond G. Bentley, Harwinton's first official town historian, discussed the difficulties of dating buildings. Published in 1970, the book is now out of print but still available by loan from the Harwinton Public Library.

Although it is relatively easy to trace back the ownership of land, Bentley said deeds may read "land and buildings thereon." He noted there is often no way of knowing if the buildings standing today are the original structures.

Since Harwinton was not settled until the 1730s, Bentley believed it is unlikely that any of the houses standing when he wrote his book were built prior to 1750. "It is my belief that most of the houses were built after 1800," he said. However, information related to the town's historic district states that Lieutenant Jonathan Brace, of Hartford, built his house on Harmony Hill Road between 1733 and 1737. He acquired title in 1732 from Captain Daniel Messenger, regarded as Harwinton's first resident, and married Messenger's daughter in 1738. So, although the hand-made wood plaque on the house says "circa 1730" it is probable the house was built a few years later.



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First Ladies: An Adventure in Glamour, Guts, and Gumption

Sunday, May 19, 2019 6:30 p.m. Harwinton Town Hall Assembly Room



Join us for a lively, humorous, and engaging program that weaves historical and modern events with facts about First Ladies (starting with Martha Washington) to help us understand and appreciate the important role they play. Learn about the personalities and adventures of the women who became the First Ladies of the United States! Who were they really? What made them tick? Did they love or loathe their role? Did they sink or swim navigating the complexities of politics, protocol and publicity? Personal anecdotes by presenter Mariann Millard, a licensed Washington D.C. Guide, will be judiciously used to enhance our *First Ladies* experience.

Note: Refreshments will include samples of some former First Ladies' favorite recipes.

Bob Steele's Century

Sunday, September 15, 2019 at 2 p.m.

Harwinton Town Hall Assembly Room

Radio Hall of Fame broadcaster Bob Steele was well known to millions in Southern New England as the morning voice of WTIC for half a century. His fans developed a unique attachment to him, almost as if he were a member of the family!

His son, Phil Steele, has published Bob Steele's Century, a collection of Bob's own archive- a kind of autobiography from Bob's own files of photos, articles about him, scripts he authored for his radio programs, his jokes, letters from listeners,

cartoons he loved to draw, his diaries recording details of his personal life and the epic century into which he broadcast with his unique sense of humor. Phil will draw from this collection as he uses audio and visual images to transport us back to those wonderful mornings with Bob Steele.

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Sunday, October 20, 2019

With State Historian Walt Woodward

Sunday, November 3, 2019

"American Saint Nick"

with Peter Lyon



HOUSES continued from page 1



Bentley referred back to R. Manning Chipman's book "The History of Harwinton, Connecticut," This book is dated 1860, and noted nearly all the structures in the Village of Harwinton at that time were built in the present century, meaning, of course, the 1800's. Chipman noted the oldest houses in Harwinton were those of Loren Barber, Allen Birge, Ellis Burwell, Ephraim S. Cleveland, Wakeman G. Cook, Enos Frisbie, James Mather, Sheldon Pond and Addison Webster. Bentley remembered that only four of these houses were still standing in his time, but they were gone by the time he wrote his book.

Still, Bentley was able to find information on a few houses that were built in the late 18th century and still standing. He pointed to the house on the northwest corner of Harmony Hill and Burlington roads, which descendants of the Catlin family said was built in 1760 and the house across the road at the southwest corner of Locust and Burlington roads which was built in 1799. Bentley found that an old newspaper clipping noted the parsonage at Harwinton Center was built in 1798 by Dr. Timothy Clark.

Another early house, according to information Bentley was able to gather, was one built by Anson Hungerford in 1813. Bentley said he learned about this house from Newman Hungerford, whose ancestors were among the town's early settlers. Located at the southwest corner of South Road and Litchfield Road, it is shown in a picture at the Hungerford Library, now the T.A. Hungerford Memorial Museum, Bentley pointed out.

Among other early houses described by Bentley are two on the south side of the road in Harwinton Center where the town Green is now located. They were owned by the Balch family and built by Jonathan Balch along with another on Terryville Road known as High Fields built by Balch in 1846. Bentley was told this by Walter Balch, a direct descendant of Daniel Messenger, one of the early Harwinton settlers.

Cornelius Colt was born in 1833 and died in the same house on the east side of Plymouth Road just south of Shingle Mill Road. The next house to the south was built by Cyrus Wilson in 1878, all according to Bentley.

And of course, there is the Harwinton House, its components now in storage in the hopes of rebuilding it in Harwinton sometime in the future. Originally built by Stephen Graves in 1795 in the southeastern section of Harwinton, it has had several owners over the years. The house was dismantled and moved to New Canaan in 1931. There it was reconstructed under the direction of Richard Henry Dana, a well-known expert in Colonial Revival architecture. Now owned by the town it awaits enough funding for reconstruction.

Sources: "History of Harwinton" by Raymond G. Bentley; "More Memories of Harwinton," published by the Harwinton Historical Society, and "The History of Harwinton, Connecticut" by R. Manning Chipman.

OFFICERS – 2019

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

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Term Ends 2019

Bruce Burnett
Shirley Gay

Term Ends 2020

Michael Orefice
Candace Jones-Pacholski

Term Ends 2021

Carol Kearns
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Bonnie Andrews

BUILDING SUPERVISOR

Dennis Andrews

OTHERS

(non-board positions)

HISTORIAN

Roger Plaskett

AUDITOR

Marilyn Mitchell

LEGAL COUNSEL

Patrick Wall

Email:

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Harwinton Historical Society

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Harwinton, CT 06791

860-482-7978

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Help is needed for the following activities:

Saturday, May 11th 10-11 a.m.

Clean the schoolhouse for visitors

Saturday, June 8 from 1 to 3 p.m.

**A few members needed to greet guests to
the schoolhouse and barn for Connecticut
Open House Day**

**If you can help, please call Bonnie
Andrews at 860-482-7978 or send an
email to harwhistsoc@gmail.com**

Local Teen Is Museum Intern

Harwinton resident Riley Delaney, 17, is interning at the Stanley-Whitman House in Farmington. He is currently learning about the articles on display in the house as well as the families that called it home through the years. Riley has a goal of becoming a tour guide in the future. He is also learning the daily workings of the museum. (greeting, gift shop, cleaning etc). The Stanley-Whitman house, built ca 1720, is one of the oldest houses in Farmington. It has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Located at 37 High Street, Farmington, the museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday.

“If a man does not keep pace with his
companions, perhaps it is because he hears a
different drummer. Let him step to the music
which he hears, however measured or far
away.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Looking Back 25 years to May 1994

Information from the Historical Society's Archives

Fifth Grade Student Gave Principal a Plane Ride

Joshua Zucker, a 10-year-old fifth grade student at Harwinton Consolidated School took his school principal Maureen Villar on a plane ride from Plainville's Robertson Airport to Bradley International Airport and back. Joshua had logged 30 flights with the Cloud Chasers program and had been a student pilot for a year. A flight instructor was in the plane. Villar admitted she was "a little nervous" but added that was because of flying in such a small plane. By teaching kids to pilot aircraft, you are freeing them to literally soar to new heights, Consolidated School art teacher and flight instructor Joe Tortorici said.

Dancer, Melinda Green, Home from U.S. Tour

Melinda Green, 27, visited her hometown of Harwinton following a three-month long tour of the United States and Canada with National Touring Musicals of New York City. She was scheduled to leave on a tour of the Far East at the end of May 1994. Green trained with Sharon Dante and Donna Bonasera at Nutmeg Ballet in Torrington and attended the Hartford Academy of Performing Arts. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Boston Conservatory of Music.

NOTE: Melinda is the daughter of Bill and Pat Green. Today (2019) Melinda lives in London.

First Junior Prom Held at Lewis Mills

Lewis S. Mills High School held its first junior class prom in May 1994. Organizers were hopeful that the event would become a tradition. There were 155 students in the junior class.

State Plans Improvements at Intersection

The state of Connecticut announced plans to correct a dangerous intersection at Route 4 and Route 72. The project was expected to take six or seven years to complete with state funds and state labor.

TRIVIA

Question: Question: When did Connecticut officially abolish slavery?

Answer: Slavery was legal in Connecticut until 1848. There had been attempts to end slavery sooner (in 1784 and 1795) and by 1818, when Connecticut adopted a constitution, slavery was all but abolished in most of the rest of New England.

In Memory of Ellie

It is with sadness that we announce the April 9th passing of Eleanor Woike. "Ellie," served as president of the Historical Society three times. She held several financial and education positions at Trinity Lutheran Church in Terryville and taught at Terryville High School. She was treasurer for the town of Harwinton for 30 years. Following her full retirement, she earned a Master Gardener certification. Ellie was active in several local organizations including many years with the Harwinton Garden Club and Harwinton Agricultural Society. She was currently serving on the Historical Society's Board of Directors in the role of past president. She will be missed.

**2019 History Bites Lecture Series Continues Through June 13th
Noon to 1 p.m. - Free and open to the public**

Each spring History Bites presents a series of weekly lunchtime programs that shares topics of local history with the community. Contact the hosting organization for more information. Reservations are requested, but not required.

Bring lunch. Beverages and dessert provided.

**May 2: Glebe House Museum & Gertrude Jekyll Garden
Our Secret Garden: The Women of Glebe House**

49 Hollow Road, Woodbury
203-263-2855 / www.glebehousemuseum.org

**May 9: Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust
The Woodbury Path: A Historic Roadway**

Natalie's Studio@ Flanders Nature Center
5 Church Hill Road, Woodbury
201-263-3711 / flandersnaturecenter.org

**May 16: Gunn Historical Museum
Unsung Heroes of The Gunnery**

Speaker: Michael Kassis, Gunn Scholar, 2019
Wykeham Room Gunn Library
5 Wykeham Road, Washington, CT
860-868-7756, gunnmuseum.org

**May 23: Torrington Historical Society
Behind the Lines in World War I**

Speaker: Mark McEachern, Executive Director
Torrington Historical Society
192 Main St., Torrington
860-482-8260, torringtonhistoricalsociety.org

**May 30: Litchfield Historical Society
Biltmore to Bomber Seats: The History of Warren McArthur**

Litchfield Historical Society
6 South Street, Litchfield, CT
860-567-4501, www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org

The last two History Bites lectures for 2019 will be "The Houses Built by Brass" on **June 6** at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury and "Robert Leather and the Abbe of Regina Laudis" on **June 13** at the Church of the Nativity's Shellman Parish Center in Bethlehem