

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2019

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HARWINTON NATIVE INSTRUMENTAL IN GOLDEN SPIKE ANNIVERSARY

By Joyce Peck

Two shiny black Jupiter steam engines, No. 60 and No. 119, each with bright blue cowcatchers at their front and huge red wheels, puffed into Golden Spike National Historic Park in the high desert of Promontory, Utah, the second week in May 2019 as whistles blew and thousands watched and cheered.

The hoopla was a sesquicentennial celebration and re-enactment of the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in America 150 years ago.

On May 10, 1869, two spikes cast in 17.6 karat gold and three other ceremonial spikes of gold and silver alloys were tapped into pre-drilled holes with a silver mallet to mark the occasion (shiny replicas were used in the re-enactment ceremony). Promontory Point is 66 miles northwest of Salt Lake City, Utah. The project took six and a half years to complete.

And be it known; Harwinton was well represented there -- at least in 1869 it was. **Collis Potter Huntington** was born Oct. 22, 1821 on a farm in Harwinton's Poverty Hollow. By 1869 he had grown up and gone west to become a wealthy businessman, investor and, most importantly, a builder of railroads. He was one of four western railroad barons who brought the first transcontinental railroad project to fruition; the others were Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker. Huntington is credited with building the Central Pacific Railroad, the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway.

It was at Promontory Point that the Central Pacific Railroad, started from the Missouri River, connected with the Union Pacific Railroad, which originated in Sacramento, Calif.

The Pacific Railway Act of 1862, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, granted each railroad 6,400 acres and up to \$48,000 in government bonds for each mile completed. In the midst of the Civil War, the effort extended rail service from coast to coast, opening up lines for better communication, travel and business.

Perhaps the most famous person to come out of Harwinton, Huntington provided the Congregational Church Society the funding for a granite chapel in memory of his mother and searched Europe for a special stained glass window to accompany it. He died Aug. 13, 1900 in upstate New York and is buried in Bronx, NY. Huntington left an estate of \$75 million, an exorbitant amount in its day.

Note: Lego hobbyist Jack Little of Florida created a Lego model of Utah's historic Golden Spike ceremony and has entered his creation (pictured above) into a contest called Lego Ideas.



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 of Bob Steele.

Join us as Bob's son Phil stirs our memories as he shares the powerful legacy of Bob Steele's career and life. The program is free and open to the public.

Trouble in the Land of Steady Habits: How We Got to the Constitution of 1818

Presented by Connecticut State Historian Walt Woodward

Sunday, October 20, 2019 2 p.m. Location to be announced

Connecticut in 1818 was in many ways eerily similar to Connecticut in 2019: a troubled state seeking a new direction. State historian Walt Woodward will highlight the perfect storm of crises that converged to force the state to rethink the ways it had been conducting its affairs for the previous two centuries.

THE AMERICAN ST. NICK

A heartwarming WW II true story presented by author Peter Lion who will be participating in the 75th anniversary celebration in Wiltz, Luxembourg

Sunday, November 3, 2019 at 2:00 p.m. Harwinton Town Hall Assembly Room

The American St. Nick tells the remarkable TRUE story of a handful of American World War II soldiers who during the chaos of war, help bring Christmas back to a small Luxembourg town, and unknowingly create a holiday tradition that continues to this very day!

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

**The schoolhouse and barn will be open for
Connecticut Open House Day**

**The Hungerford Museum on Route 4 and
Harwinton Heights Road will also be open to
visitors during the same hours.**

*“Do not the most moving moments of our lives find us
all without words?” — Marcel Marceau*

TRIVIA

If you toss a penny 10,000 times, it will not land heads-up 5,000 times, but more like 4,950. The head side weights more, so it ends up on the bottom more often.

2019 History Bites Lecture Series

Continues Through June 13th

Noon to 1 p.m. - Free and open to the public

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 Abbey of Regina Laudis” on **June 13** at the Church of the Nativity’s Shellman Parish Center in Bethlehem

Community-Wide Read Held in Litchfield

The Oliver Wolcott Library and the Litchfield Public Schools celebrated the 300th anniversary of Litchfield with a community-wide read April 4 to May 9. The book they selected to read was “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” by author and abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896). According to publicity, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” had a “profound effect on attitudes toward African Americans and slavery in the U.S. and is said to have helped lay the groundwork for the Civil War.”



Thank you to Mike and Cindy Orefice, above, for carrying the Historical Society banner in the Memorial Day Parade to recognize Bill Buys, Harwinton's 2019 Outstanding Citizen.

Looking Back 25 years to June 1994

Information from the Historical Society's Archives.

Fire Department Celebrates 50 Years of Service

The Harwinton Volunteer Fire Department celebrated its 50th anniversary on June 25, 1994 at the Harwinton Fair Grounds with a fire fighters muster, country style dinner, dance, and fireworks display. The department's second Fire Chief Fred Gottschall was reported to have commented, "I have no doubts that this department will carry on." The department had 35 members in 1994 including the department's first chief Norman Barber, 90, firemen Henry Camp, 67, and George Griben, chief of the fire police, who joined the department when he was 21 years old.