

# HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## AUGUST 2019

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### Coming Oct 11: Spirits of Harwinton

Come join us as many old spirits of Harwinton's history come alive again to tell their stories on one night only - Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup>. Meet railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington; Harwinton's doctor Andrew Abernethy; patriot and Tory antagonist Captain John Wilson; our first centenarian, Belinda Bartholomew; early clock maker Augustus Alfred and others as they stop by historic South Cemetery for a chat.

Sponsored by the Harwinton Historical Society and Hungerford Museum, this event is free to the public. A shuttle bus will run every 15 minutes from Town Hall where all visitors should park and obtain a bus ticket. No parking will be allowed at the cemetery. This night is intended to be fun and educational, not frightening. First bus is at 5:30.



#### The Barn Corner

### DUMB AS AN OX?

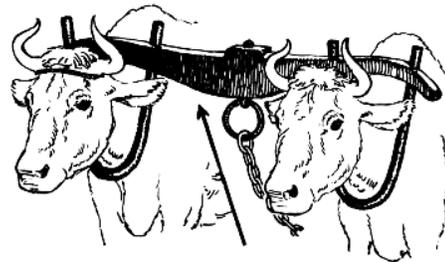
By David Ryan

One of the displays in our barn museum relates to oxen. On exhibit are some ox (plural: oxen) shoes and a large ox sling. The sling was used to help a farrier (specialist in equine hoof care) tend to the oxen's hooves.

According to "History of Harwinton" by Raymond G. Bentley, oxen were commonly used on Harwinton farms for drawing heavy wagon loads or pulling plows. An ox was usually a castrated bull (castration made the bull more docile). Oxen had many uses, including drafting or pulling heavily loaded carts or wagons, plowing sod, threshing grain by trampling it, and supplying the muscle power for grinding grain or pumping water.

Oxen are powerful enough to skid logs from out of the forest to the sawmill for lumbering. Draft

oxen were often yoked together in pairs. A very heavy load drawn over a challenging road could require as many as two pairs.



There is a story of one town using oxen teams in the winter to plow heavy snow from its roads. As they came to the next farm, another team was added, and so on until many teams were pulling the plow. When one team got tired (noted when their tongues would hang out of their mouths) that pair was uncoupled and left at that farmer's barn where it was rested and was later returned home to its owner.

See *Are Oxen Dumb*, page 3

**OFFICERS – 2019**

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**BUILDING SUPERVISOR**

Dennis Andrews

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**(non-board positions)**

**HISTORIAN**

Roger Plaskett

**AUDITOR**

Marilyn Mitchell

**LEGAL COUNSEL**

Patrick Wall

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**Harwinton Historical Society**

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**Harwinton, CT 06791**

**860-482-7978**

**LIST OF UPCOMING PROGRAMS**

**2019**

***Bob Steele's Century-*** Phil Steele: Sunday, September 15 @2 –  
Town Hall Assembly Room

***Trouble in the Land of Steady Habits: Constitution of 1818-***

Walt Woodward, CT State Historian:

Sunday, October 20 @2- Town Hall Assembly Room

***The American St. Nick-*** Peter Lion: Sunday, November 3 @2-

Town Hall Assembly Room

**Knights of Columbus Museum, New Haven CT – bus trip-**

***Crèches of Europe & 24 decorated trees***

\$7.50 fee for Transit Bus/ museum admission free

Wednesday, Dec. 11 @ 12:30- Departure from Harwinton  
Library Overflow Lot. Details TBA.

**2020**

***Mary Lincoln, From Birth to Death*** - Carol Deleppo:

Sunday, February 9 at 2- Location TBA

***The Year Without a Summer*** - Roger Plaskett, Harwinton

Historian:

Sunday, March 8 at 2- Harwinton Congregational Church

**19<sup>th</sup> Amendment** - Mariann Millard (First Ladies presenter!):

Sunday, April 5 at 2- Location TBA

Historical Society programs, such as those listed here, are free and open to the public. If you have heard a speaker that you believe should be considered by the Program Committee, please forward your idea to harwhistsoc@gmail.com

**Looking Back 25 years to August 1994**



Harwinton's senior group, The Sundowners, had been meeting monthly in the Harwinton Congregational Church for 21 years. Now they were looking for a new location and were considering the Jehovah's Witness Hall on Weingart Road or the basement of Town Hall.

## **Are Oxen Dumb? Continued from page 1**

“Dumb as an ox” or “dumb ox” are idioms that originated in farming and animal husbandry. Some phrases come from the reputation of animals as related in legends and travelers’ stories. Among them in the English language: stubborn as a mule, dumb / strong as an ox, sly as a fox, timid as a rabbit, brave as a lion, (lion-hearted ), whale of a tale, slippery as an eel, blind as a bat, busy as a bee.

Perhaps because they are big and slow moving, oxen got the reputation of being dumb animals, but in fact, the opposite is true. The training of an ox by an ox driver (called a teamster) included the teaching of verbal commands. The commands included "gee" (turn right), "haw" (turn left), "back" to back up, "getup" meaning go, and "whoa" meaning stop. The commands were reinforced with body language, a whip, or a long pole often called a rod (which was also used as a measure of length).

### **Training begins early**

Training an ox began at an early age. The teamster made as many as a dozen yokes, increasing in size as the animal grew. While the animals are young and developing, they are called “working steer.” When they are fully trained, they have "graduated" to being referred to as oxen.

Why were oxen used instead of horses? Each had advantages under certain circumstances. Oxen could pull heavier loads for longer time periods, and well-trained oxen were less excitable than a team of horses. Oxen were better at breaking sod or plowing in wet, heavy soil.

Horses were faster and could transport a light load more quickly. The invention of the horse collar gave a horse more power by allowing it to use the strength of its hind quarters to move a load.

### **Animals that have cloven hooves have feet that are divided into two parts. Cows, oxen, sheep, and goats have cloven hooves**

Shoeing an ox is different from shoeing a horse. Both are shod with metal shoes to protect the hoofs from excessive wear. A look at our barn display shows that there is a big difference in the shoes. Since an ox has a cloven hoof, the shoe must consist of two separate pieces. Each piece is made so that when it is nailed to the foot of the ox, the shoe conforms to the shape of the hoof. Unlike a horse, an ox cannot balance on three legs. Nor can a farrier hold the ox's foot while he applies the shoe. Although this problem has been solved in different ways, the ox sling seems to work the best. A frame of heavy timber is constructed to which a very wide leather belt is fastened to a windlass. The belt is placed under the ox while in a standing position. Then the belt is raised to support the ox. A rope is fastened to each corner, so that the hoof of the ox can be held in place while the farrier does his job. When all is done, the belt is lowered, and the ox is released, ready to work again.

### **The Farrier**

A farrier is a specialist in equine hoof care, including the trimming and balancing of horse and ox hooves and attaching shoes on their hooves, if necessary. A farrier combines some blacksmith's skills with some veterinarian's skills to care for horse and ox feet.

Sources: “History of Harwinton” by Raymond G. Bentley; Wikipedia

*A Bit of Trivia*

## In 1931 Children Selected the National Anthem

On March 3, 1931, The Star-Spangled Banner was officially designated as the legal national anthem of the United States. Helping to promote the choice were schoolchildren who voted for their choice of anthem from three options: “America the Beautiful,” “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “America.”

The organization that polled children across the United States opposed “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the choice for the national anthem. Some people said the words were too militant, the notes were too high, and it was difficult to sing. The polling group used the popular children’s magazine “Current Events” to conduct the poll.

The Star-Spangled banner was played often for military drills during the Mexican American and Civil wars. President Woodrow Wilson recognized it as the national anthem in 1916 but it wasn’t made law until 15 years later.



Despite the opposition, the children in 1931 selected “The Star-Spangled Banner” 2-1 as their choice saying it was the most patriotic of the three options. Congress approved a 15-year-old bill favoring The Star-Spangled Banner as the national anthem and President Herbert Hoover signed the bill in 1931.

The anthem’s history began the morning of September 14, 1814, when an attorney and amateur poet named Francis Scott Key watched U.S. soldiers (who were under bombardment from British naval forces during the War of 1812) raise a large American flag over Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland.



### ***GETTING A FRESH LOOK***

*Dennis Andrews, Historical Society Buildings Supervisor, applies a fresh coat of gray stain to the barn museum on the grounds of the Consolidated School. Andrews said the last time the barn was painted was 2014.*