

The Farmington Historical Society

Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve.

Newsletter May, 1995

The Officers and Board of Directors
of the Farmington Historical Society
cordially invite members and their guests
to attend their Annual Meeting and Reception

Wednesday, June 7, 1995, at 5:30 p.m.
The Cope Farmhouse, 724 Plainville Ave.

For years we sadly watched this 1765 farmhouse, long the center of large family farms owned by the Hawley, Curtis, Peck and Cope families, sit forlorn, unoccupied and vandalized, while modern homes rose around it on its farmland. Now it is not only saved from destruction, but lovingly restored.

Dan and Donna Pompei, its new owners and restorers, have graciously invited us to hold our annual meeting at their home. What could be more appropriate as this "farming town" observes its 350th anniversary than to celebrate the rebirth of this wonderful old farmhouse?

Please plan to join us for our annual reception, brief business meeting and election of officers and directors. Enjoy refreshments and sociability and, best of all, tour the house and hear from Dan and Donna about their labor of love.

The nominating committee, Ken Olsen (Chair), Jim Calciano, Ann Reed, will present the slate for next year's officers.

Membership Renewal Time

Our fiscal and membership year is June 1 - May 31. An envelope is enclosed for your 1995-96 dues; we hope you will respond promptly.

The Historical Society is unique in this town of many historically oriented organizations in that it is the only "generalist" group, dedicated to all periods and aspects of Farmington history - including the present and future. Totally volunteer, it provides a wide range of programs and services within its objectives of education and preservation. Most are offered free to the public and supported by members' modest dues. Quite possibly the best bargain in town.

If you became a new member since March 1995, your membership is considered paid through May 1996. If you are among the hundreds of non-members who enjoy our events and services, we hope you'll join the Historical Society and help support our work.

The Old Stone Schoolhouse

May 28 through October 15: The recently restored schoolhouse on Red Oak Hill Road, our special responsibility, will be open on Sundays from 2 to 4 p.m. Arrangements can be made throughout the year for group visits or use of the building.



June 11, 2 to 4:30 p.m.: The Old Stone Schoolhouse annual season-opening party, featuring

-Spelling Bee. This year West District School spellers will challenge their neighbors from Noah Wallace School for mastery of words from Noah Webster's 1783 Blue Backed Speller.

- "The More Things Change". Observations on early education in Farmington by Board of Education Chair Mary Grace Reed.

- Opening of "Farms, Families, and Schools". A 350th Anniversary exhibit supported in part by a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

October 15: Scarecrows at the Schoolhouse. Our annual harvest festival. Why not make a scarecrow to guard your garden this summer and then bring it to the Schoolhouse in October to celebrate harvest time.

For Sale at the Schoolhouse Gift Shop: T-Shirts (all sizes), notecards, handmade beanbags, pocket dolls (special models on request) pewter plates, etc. All proceeds benefit the Schoolhouse. T-Shirts also available at Society headquarters and at the Annual Meeting.

The Schoolhouse on TV: On April 10, a television production company videotaped more than a dozen of our Schoolhouse Scholars as they ad-libbed their way through lessons and games. This production, titled "Connecticut", will appear in this area on Channel 19 in late June or early July. Time to be announced.

Ssshhh - it's sort of a secret until August - but have you seen the beautiful handmade Schoolhouse quilt, or the restored antique desk and chair? You just might be the lucky person who wins one of them in the raffle drawing at the Oct. 15 "Scarecrows" celebration. In the meantime, if you could help with the raffle - a fund raiser for the Schoolhouse Restoration - Victoria Gerent would love to hear from you. 676-9593.

Historical Happenings

May 26 - 28: Dig at Day-Lewis site. Three days of shoveling and sifting in search of more Indian artifacts. All places filled.

May 31, 5:15 p.m.: "Smallpox, Farmington and Eli Todd M.D." University of Ct. Health Center, Keller Auditorium. Epidemic smallpox was a dreaded feature of colonial New England life, and in fact occurred on a small scale until the late 19th century. As you might expect, the disease was also a problem in Farmington. During the epidemic years of the 1790's, our town was fortunate to have Dr. Eli Todd as one of its physicians. This visionary healer (and later founder of the Hartford Retreat) displayed great personal bravery in caring for the sick during epidemic illness in the community. He also advocated and practiced the controversial "variolation", the predecessor of vaccination. The therapy required that young people be deliberately infected with pus from active lesions, and thereafter isolated during their (hopefully) mild infection. In fact, a small percentage became severely ill and the mortality was perhaps 2% or 3%. However, the risk of infection during epidemics was greater.

Farmington's young inoculees were isolated at a pest house on the Farmington/Plainville/New Britain line during the three weeks of their induced illness. Dr. Todd supervised their care. During their isolation they lived and socialized apart, and even a few romances reportedly occurred. Deep in the woods even today one can find their names carved and still faintly visible on the traprock ledge known as Hospital Rock.

The story of Farmington's smallpox epidemics, Dr. Todd and Hospital Rock will be the subject of presentations by Ralph Arcari PHD, Director of the UCONN Health Center's Stowe Library and by Charles Leach MD, of the Farmington Historical Society and Clinical Professor of Medicine at the UConn School of Medicine.

June 4, 5:30 p.m.: Riverside Cemetery Walk. Riverside Cemetery, Garden Street. Barbara Donahue and Charlie Leach will do a sequel to their Memento Mori visit of last November. This tour will introduce visitors to the beautiful Riverside Cemetery. We will visit the gravesites of some remarkable 19th century Farmington neighbors, and explore some local and family history on an informal walk. Please join us!

July: Photo Archive Expedition. Brothers Alvah Walter and George Howes travelled New England in the 1890's with a covered wagon photography studio stopping in small towns and canvassing homes, farms, businesses and roadside gatherings. For a few pennies they would do a group of family photographs and memorialize turn-of-the-century New Englanders and their favorite scenes, activities, and possessions. They evidently made several forays to Farmington, and some of their Farmington photographs have been identified. They are touching scenes: spare, evocative, beautifully composed and a little mysterious.

The Ashford, MA Historical Society has saved 23,000 of the Howes Brothers glass negatives and created a remarkable archive in their little hill town's small frame museum. They are anxious to share their materials, and particularly need help identifying many of the scenes, some of which are of Farmington. The materials are on microfilm, and will be made available to a FHS research group in July. Anyone like to join Charlie Leach, Carol Leonard, Barbara Donahue and other FHS sleuths? We'll combine a drive into the hills west of Deerfield with a picnic and a little al fresco scholarship. Call Charlie Leach at 677-8076.

July 13,14,15: New England Historical and Genealogical Society 150th anniversary meeting in Boston. If you might like to attend with FHS members, and for more information call 677-1645.

Plans for the Fall include:

--Farmington Old House Interest Group. Restoring or renovating an old house in Farmington or Unionville? Thinking about purchasing an older home (pre-1945) in town? Already done so and willing to share your experiences with others? Join fellow FHS members to share the history of your house, view current "works in progress" with site visits, and learn about local and regional building practices through the years.

We anticipate a small informal group of mostly homeowners who will meet at each other's houses. New FHS members are most welcome. This offers an opportunity to meet neighbors with common interests and to learn more of Farmington traditions.

Format and schedule will be determined by participants. Call Elsa Morse at 676-1745 before June 5. First gathering will be announced at the annual meeting on June 7. (Elsa and Doug Morse purchased their Main Street home - originally the Asa Andrews Tin Shop, built around 1790 - in 1989 and have been working on it ever since.)

--International Heritage Conference at the Farmington Marriott. Focus on CT Valley history. Oct. 4,5,6.

Volunteer!

It is YOUR Historical Society.

--A few hours as little as once a year: telephoning, mailings, providing refreshments.

--Continuing projects: research, cataloguing, fund raising, answering inquiries at the library headquarters.

--Committees: membership, programs, Schoolhouse, special events.

--Greeters and interpreters at the Schoolhouse (Sundays 2-4 p.m.) or the Day-Lewis Museum (Wednesdays, 2-4 p.m.)

Newsletter Contributors: Charlie Leach, Carol Leonard, Elsa Morse. Ann Reed, editor.