

# The Farmington Historical Society

Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve.

March, 1996

## TRACING YOUR FAMILY'S GENEALOGY

On Wednesday, March 27 at 7:00 p.m. in the Society's Hdqtrs at the Village Library, the Farmington Historical Society will present David Lyle Brown PhD in a program titled "How to Start Tracing Your Family's Roots." Mr. Brown is the president of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists and will bring to Farmington a timely message for the growing numbers of those investigating their family ancestry. Requests for genealogical information from all over the country come to our Society now at an increasing rate. Perhaps genealogists were once in search of family glory, of coats-of-arms etc.; modern detective work seeks more to illuminate the past, to understand general historical trends through the experience of the individual. Those with no thought of "doing" their own genealogy report that Mr. Brown's presentation offers new insights into how history is made. (Note: Coming July 12-13. The New Eng. Genealog. Society will hold its regional meeting in Farmington. More information next issue.)



## SCANDINAVIAN RESEARCH MEETING

On April 20, 1996 the Connecticut Society of Genealogists will sponsor a Scandinavian research meeting starting at 1:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the Farmington Library. Rick Larson, librarian from the Family History Center, Bloomfield, CT, will speak. His topic: "Getting Started in Scandinavian Research/Further Adventures in Swedish Records."

## THE CHINA TRADE

Local historian Jean Johnson and guest presenter Elizabeth Fox (from the CT Historical Society) enthralled a standing-room only audience at the Stanley-Whitman Museum in January. Johnson's account of the extraordinary development of the early 19th c. China trade financed by Farmington merchants was based on research that yielded evidence including bills of lading, letters, account ledgers, and port records. With illustrations drawn from photographs, woodcuts, maps etc. she traced the voyages from CT to the West Indies, to Patagonia (for seal skins) and on to Canton, China. Ms Fox drew from her slide collection to show examples of the trade goods bought from China to Ct. The Stanley-Whitman collection of Chinese Export Ware - some handed down from these merchants; some a recent gift from the estate of Jim Thomson - was exhibited.

## THE ACADIANS: TOPIC OF FEBRUARY MEETING

After France ceded its holdings in North America to the British in the Treaty of Utrecht, there followed an episode of ethnic cleansing which offered a chilling foretaste of this phenomenon. After 1755, the British forcibly removed the French population of "Acadie" to make way for English and Scottish settlers. Acadie consisted of coastal sections of the maritime provinces and Maine as well as Nova Scotia. Stripped of their land and possessions, the French were transported all over the world, especially to the eastern seaboard of North America. Some, shipped to France, later migrated to Louisiana where they inspired a romanticized account in Longfellow's "Evangeline" and are still known as Cajuns (in Acadian dialect the "d" often became a "j"). Approximately six thousand were herded onto ships and transported to Boston, to New London, to New York and to ports further south. The majority of those shipped to New England in the 18th century made their way back to Canada. But they maintained their identity as Acadians and brought that proud heritage with them in the 19th and 20th century migrations. Thousands were drawn to the textile mills of New England in the 19th century and thousands more journeyed south for jobs in war industries and the building trades in the mid 20th.

On February 22, cultural historian and genealogist Ed Barrieau retold for our Society the remarkable and touching story of the Acadian emigres. We learned that they were distinguished from the settlers of French Canada by lifestyle and language, and that Acadian families and names can be identified by genealogists. We also learned from Ed, who is "98% Acadian", that those who identify themselves as Acadian descendants are intensely proud of their heritage. These resilient people were not only among the earliest pioneers of Canada, but in their diaspora became part of the fabric of our own country.

In the 20th century, French Canadians have built a strong presence in the Farmington Valley. For example, Mr. Barrieu estimated that the congregation of Farmington's St. Patrick's Church is made up of roughly equal parts of those of Irish (or English) descent, of Italian (whose presence was celebrated in an October program), of Polish, and French Canadian.

### News From the Society

Vice-President Peg Yung and volunteers can be found at Society Headquarters every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. to Noon. More volunteers are needed to help with the following projects:

- March 12 and 19: organization of slide collections
- March 26 and April 2: organization of picture, school house, and Amistad files
- April 9 and April 16: new accessions
- April 23: respond to requests for genealogy information

## The Day-Lewis Museum

Many heartfelt thanks to Evan Cowles for his years of leadership , as creator and then co-chair, with Peg Yung, of the Day-Lewis Museum. With Yale University, Cowles was responsible for organizing the Day-Lewis collection of Pre-Columbian Indian artifacts. He was also the moving force in the successful archeological dig held on the Lewis property last Spring. Yung carries on as Co-chair.

The Day-Lewis Museum opens this month and will be open every Wednesday from 2 to 4 p.m. A training session for new and experienced docents will begin March 20 at the Museum, 154 Main St. Instructional material will include cassettes of Dr. David Starbuck, Yale archeologist, and of Nick Bellantoni, Connecticut State Archeologist. Call Peg Yung at 677-2754 for more information.

## Farmington and the Freedom Trail

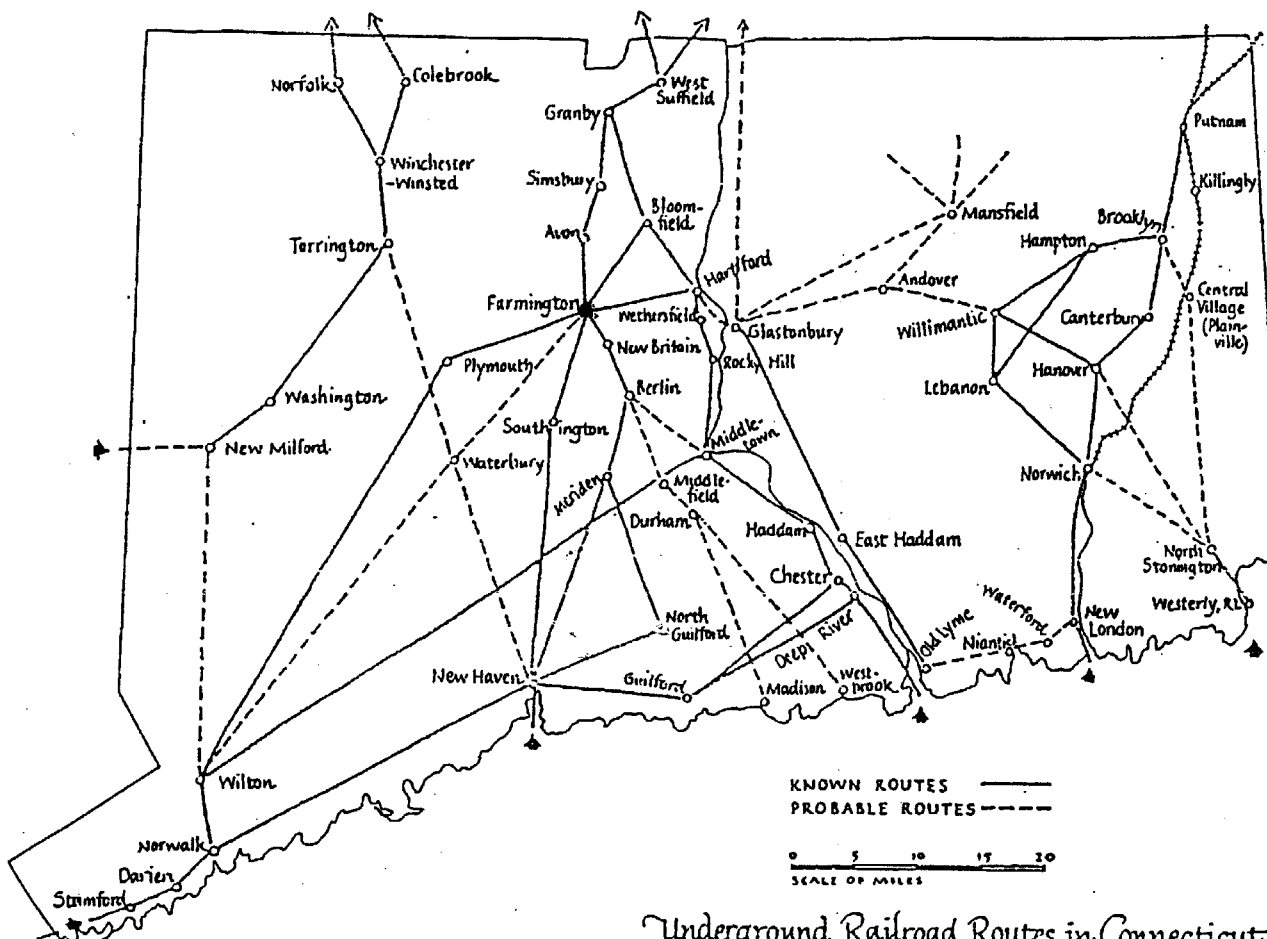
The establishment of the Freedom Trail in Connecticut marks a legislative recognition of the role African-Americans have played in our history. Farmington's significance in that history was high-lighted by Vice-President Marguerite Yung's participation in a recent program presented by the University of Connecticut's African-American Cultural Center, "The Freedom Trail: Connecticut and the Underground Railroad." Yung presented handouts describing Farmington's involvement with the Underground Railroad and the Amistad story. Many had never heard the story of the First Civil Right's Case, or realized Farmington's contribution. Farmington was Connecticut's Grand Central Station for the railroad since roads, canals, and nearby trains led to central Farmington. (see map). Here slaves were housed, fed, and clothed before continuing their journey north to Canada by way of Avon, Bloomfield, and Simsbury. Inspired by the slaves who first found these escape routes, local Abolitionists created a well organized system. Locally, Austin Williams, Samuel Deming, and John Norton were active in this movement. Their support of abolition had been demonstrated in the 1840's by their efforts on behalf of the Amistad survivors during their eight months stay in Farmington.

## New Resources Available at Society Headquarters

Borrow the 33 minute video "The Amistad Revolt" available for members at FHS headquarters.

Also available are two slide shows of Farmington history researched and produced by Ann Arcari, Jean Johnson, Harrison Simonds, and Marguerite Yung. "Vanishing Landmarks Program, Part I" consists of 121 slides and text arranged by subject, beginning with the purchase of the Indian deed in 1650 and concluding with a more recent view of the valley from Root's Ledge. "Vanishing Landmarks, Part II: Schools" consists of 118 slides and text. Early school houses, philosophy, schoolmasters' punishments, Indian schools, district schools, Western Reserve resources, School for the Blind etc. offer revealing glimpses of the town's history.

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Underground Railroad Routes in Connecticut

Contributors to the newsletter include Charlie Leach and Peg Yung.  
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