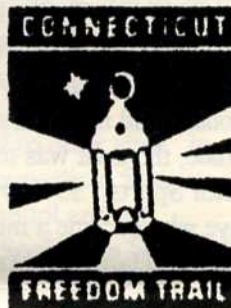


# The Farmington Historical Society

*Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve* December, 1997

## SOCIETY AUCTION : ANOTHER SUCCESS

Despite a day-long deluge and chilly temperatures, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual FHS Antique Auction October 25 brought in funds critically needed for the many projects the Society supports. Final figures have not yet been compiled by the auctioneer, but it appears we earned more than last year (about \$4000). Board members worked hard to make this possible, but the two who deserve special thanks are Jim Calciano and Ron Bernard. Jim does the macro planning and micro hands-on work. Ron assists in everything and physically moved truckloads of goods for the tag-sale. Read on to learn more about the good works such efforts make possible.



## FARMINGTON AND THE AMISTAD

Recent guests from Africa continue Farmington's involvement with the *Amistad* captives. "I can do that," Mrs. Patricia Kabbah said enthusiastically as she rose to stand by Foone's gravestone in our Riverside Cemetery last September 26. At the conclusion of a Christian/Muslim service at the grave, Peg Yung had just mentioned that the main difference between ceremonies held in 1841 and in 1997 was that in 1841 the Valley had rung with the music of the Mendi men and women of the *Amistad*, singing in their own language. Immediately Mrs. Kabbah and nine other African guests stood and sang several songs of their homeland - to the surprise and delight of all those in attendance.

During her September visit to this area, several Farmington Historical Society members had the privilege of meeting Mrs. Kabbah, wife of the elected president of Sierra Leone (now unfortunately in exile because of severe turmoil in that country), and arrangements were made for a visit to Foone's grave and a luncheon at the Porter Memorial, co-hosted by First Church of Christ, Congregational; the Historical Society, the Town of Farmington, and the New Haven *Amistad* Committee. The first woman lawyer in Sierra Leone, Mrs. Kabbah was educated in the United States and Canada and lived in this country for a number of years.

Dr. Robert Villanova, Farmington Superintendent of Schools, requested that fifth grade students from Union and Noah Wallace Schools be present at the cemetery service, as the *Amistad* story is included in the fifth grade curriculum. Impressed by their interest, Mrs. Kabbah asked to have her picture taken with the Farmington students to show to schoolchildren in Africa.

After the services, the guests from Africa, Town officials and members of the National *Amistad* Committee, Farmington's First Church and the Historical Society were given a tour of local *Amistad* and Connecticut Freedom Trail sites. Cynthia Cooper, FHS board member, welcomed the group into her home and carriage house at 127 Main Street, built by Austin F. Williams, an abolitionist and supporter of the Mendi Africans throughout their trials. The carriage house on this property was built as a dormitory to house the Mendi during their eight month stay in Farmington.

The African guests were also eager to see the pews in the Congregational Church where their countrymen sat 156 years ago.

On September 27 television news coverage of the big Freedom Trail parade in Hartford captured a view of Farmington's impressive float honoring the Rev. James W.C. Pennington. Seen standing on the float was David France, creator of the acclaimed model of First Church. Four other historic sites -the Noah Porter House, the Austin Williams Carriage House, Samuel Deming's House and the Village Store - were displayed on facades designed by local artist Norma Francini. The float was assembled in Jerry Wadsworth's barn by David France, David Andrews, Peg Yung and Carol Leonard and included shrubs loaned by Lexington Gardens. Drawn by a team of horses in the parade, the float was transported to and from Hartford by our generous friends at Farmington Motor Sports. So why James Pennington? There is a strong Farmington connection to this former slave who became a much respected educator, lecturer, author and abolitionist and, in the 1840s, pastor of Hartford's Talcott Street Church. John Hooker, who was born and raised here on High Street and maintained an office on Mill Lane, was Pennington's friend and confidant and obtained his freedom from a slave owner in Maryland. Pennington is known to have preached in Farmington's church in an exchange of pulpits with the Rev. Noah Porter.

Thanks to the appearance of the Spielberg film about the *Amistad* captives, a flood of books on the subject are appearing, according to Jan Owens, owner of Millrace Books. Although the film is flawed in that it omits any mention of Farmington's role in nurturing and helping the captives, most accounts do include it. The Millrace presented the authors of two of these books on November 9: Howard Jones who wrote the scholarly and readable *Mutiny on the Amistad* and David Pesci, author of *Amistad, A Novel*.

Finally, our new Freedom Trail brochures, containing a map of *Amistad* and Underground Railroad sites, are now available at the Town Hall, Historical Society office, libraries, school and the Farmington Inn. Developed by Historical Society members Cynthia Cooper, Jean Johnson, Peg Yung and Carol Leonard to facilitate walking tours by visitors, the brochure was printed through the generosity of the Farmington Inn, 827 Farmington Avenue. Barbara Donahue, director of the research project on African-Americans in Farmington, reports that the Connecticut Humanities Council will coordinate publicity about *Amistad*-related events and exhibits throughout the state.

**\*\*\*NEWS FLASH\*\*\*** The producer of the documentary "Slave Ship", some of which was filmed in Farmington last summer, called Carol Leonard today to say that the film will appear on the Discovery Channel December 11, at 9:00 p.m. A history of the slave trade, the documentary will include an account of the *Amistad* captives and show a few scenes from Farmington.

#### FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT: THE VILLAGE OF BEAUTIFUL HOMES

Thanks to Board member Peter Bartucca, the Historical Society's efforts to republish this treasured book will culminate in its first distribution at the Village Library Open House on December 5 at 7:30 p.m. First published in 1906, the book features photographs and descriptions of Farmington's domestic architecture, but it also chronicles significant events in the town's history. The stories of the Tunxis Indians, of Will Warren's den, of town cemeteries, of Japanese visitors and, of course, of the *Amistad* captives are among those included. Those who have ordered the book in advance can receive their copies at the library that night. The book will be for sale, as well, for \$39.95 that evening and will be available thereafter at Society Headquarters and at the Millrace Book Store.

"Speaking for Ourselves: African Americans in Farmington, Connecticut," the exhibit created from research done for the Society's "Black and White in a Yankee Town" project, will open Sunday, February 1, 1998 in the Community Room of the Farmington Library, and will be on display at the Library through the month of February 1998. The Society will host a public reception from 1 - 5 PM on the opening day.

Following the appearance in Farmington, "Speaking for Ourselves" will travel to other sites. In April it will hang at the Ethnic Heritage Center on the campus of Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven; in June it will be in the corridor between the State Capitol and the Legislative Office Building. It will also appear at the Connecticut Historical Society, in Hartford, but the date is not yet set. It is available for other bookings as well.

The exhibit traces the stories of African Americans who have lived, worked, or studied in Farmington from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century until the 1970s. Included are people like Israel Freeman, who owned a resplendent house on Farmington's Main Street in the 1770s; Addie Brown, who refused to attend segregated church services in Farmington; and Henry Davis, an escaped slave who is believed to have risked his own freedom in helping others to escape. The town's crucial role in the *Amistad* drama is a centerpiece of the exhibit.

An illustrated exhibit catalog accompanies the exhibit and will be for sale after February 1 at Millrace Bookshop.

The FHS Board has been supportively involved in the project since it was launched last fall. President Charlie Leach, Vice President Peg Yung, and Board members Ann Arcari, Peter Bartucca, and Ann Reed have been hardworking members of the research team, while Treasurer Steve Zarmsky and Assistant Treasurer Marvin Anderson have supervised project finances. These and other board members previewed a rough draft of the exhibit in late October, and have provided thoughtful guidance throughout. Seldom has a non-profit board been so enthusiastic and generous to a project.

On Saturday, February 28, from 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM, the project staff will conduct a workshop for Connecticut educators, librarians, and local historians, detailing ways in which other communities can research and present their own multicultural history. The workshop will be held at the Farmington Library and is open, by reservation, to the public. Lisa Johnson, designer of "Speaking for Ourselves", will tour participants through the exhibit. Historical consultant Stephen Ray, Farmington Room curator Ann Arcari, and project director Barbara Donahue will discuss sources of information and how to evaluate them. Formal announcements will be sent later, but anyone wishing to reserve now for the workshop should call Barbara Donahue (677-0864).

Later in the spring, Barbara and Peg Yung will train docents for Freedom Trail walking and bus tours. Publicity surrounding the Steven Spielberg movie, *Amistad*, is expected to create great demand for these tours. Anyone interested in becoming a docent is urged to call Peg or Barbara.

In addition to support from the Farmington Historical Society, the project is funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Connecticut Humanities Council, and Otis Elevator.

Note: The special showing of the film *Amistad*, scheduled for December 13 at 8:30 AM has been canceled by the theater.

Contributors to the newsletter include Barbara Donahue, Carol Leonard, and Peg Yung. Ann Reed, editor.

**THE FARMINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
P.O. BOX 1645  
FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06034

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