

The Farmington Historical Society

Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve June, 1997

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MAY SOON ACQUIRE A PERMANENT HOME

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Calciano's estimates of yearly expenses reflect shared maintenance with the Farmington Police Department. Thanks to the efforts of the Whitakers and Police Chief Bangham, the town will establish a satellite police station in the building. Such a daily presence will offer additional benefits for the Society, as well as for the town.

With a permanent above-ground home, the Society can better serve its function as the keeper of Archives and guardian of a variety of historical treasures. The Society can now accept gifts of furniture which we felt compelled to decline in the past. The multi-level building containing 2500 square feet of space will afford room for larger meetings and for exhibits and displays. The location, while in some ways inconvenient from the point of view of traffic, is central and visible and will enable us to better publicize our activities. The Directors expressed confidence that a suitable headquarters will contribute to our forward momentum.

ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 18. 5:30 p.m. Society Headquarters! 768 Farmington Ave. Farmington

Although the real estate closing may not have been completed, we will open our new headquarters for refreshments, tours, and celebration. The Nominating Committee, chaired by Peter Bartucca, will present the following slate of officers:

President: Charles Leach, M.D. Vice President: Peg Yung
Secretary: David Holmes Treasurer: Steve Zarmsky

FARMINGTON AND THE AMISTAD

While rumor suggests that Farmington will not be represented in the Spielberg film about the Amistad survivors, the town's role in helping to free the captives has won wide recognition. The float entered by the Society in the September 1996 parade marking the opening of the Freedom Trail was awarded first prize. Your Society, under the guidance of Peg Yung and Carol Leonard, continues to offer tours to numerous visitors interested in Farmington's role in the Amistad affair. Moreover, two segments of a Discovery Channel documentary provisionally titled "Slave Ship" were filmed in Farmington in April. The program traces 300 years of the transatlantic slave trade through dramatic re-enactments, scholar interviews and archival material, with considerable portions devoted to the Amistad story. After months of consultation with Carol Leonard, the producers shot scenes at the following sites: the First Church, Congregational; Foone's grave with Amistad scholar Warren Marr; and at the Lidgerwoods' pond behind the Barney House, where a durable actor representing Foone was "drowned" no less than eight times in a spectacular sunset. (We could hardly drown him in the asphalt parking lot at Canal House.)

CANAL LECTURES, BUS TOURS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

Three lectures, each attended by more than 300 people, and five buses, each with 55 persons aboard! Interest in the Farmington Canal, its history and its still-visible remains brought out capacity crowds for the series presented January through early May by *Historical Sites of Connecticut's Farmington Valley*, a group of historical societies and museums formed to call attention to the area's many historic attractions. Ruth Hummel of Plainville and Carl Walter of East Granby served nobly as tour guides, repeating five times what had been planned as one tour. Volunteers from all the member organizations, including the FHS, pitched in to make this first collaborative effort an unqualified success.

The group invites suggestions for ideas for the next project, a theme that provides a connecting thread though all, or most of, the participating towns in the Valley. Call Carol Leonard or Jean Martin at the Stanley-Whitman House.

"BLACK AND WHITE IN A YANKEE TOWN"

President Charles Leach offers the following thoughts about the April meeting on the project sponsored by the FHS and directed by Barbara Donahue.

Last night a crowd of about 70 people assembled in the Community Room of the Farmington Library for the public presentation of "Black and White in a Yankee Town". I don't think I've ever seen such an attentive and excited audience. We not only attracted the "regulars" who participate in FHS presentations, we also brought in others hungry to hear what we have to tell. About a third of the audience was African-American, some of whom have helped with research.

My own part in the proceedings was to introduce the evening and read the Manumission document recently acquired by the Society. This 1816 document freed Titus Youngs who had been the slave of Joshua Youngs. Our audience was at once caught up in the importance, poignancy, and excitement of the project.

Barbara Donahue gave a spare, precise, somewhat ironic, presentation of our project - what we have learned and the tantalizing clues to the existence in Farmington of a previously undocumented black population, a population present for hundreds of years and proportionately far larger in the past than now. She included team and school photographs, shots of individuals, and pictures of underground railroad sites taken from the perspective of a refugee. The photographs presented familiar buildings from a low angle with an austere, almost threatening, quality.

Stephen Ray, an African-American historian and Consultant for the project, charmed the listeners with his qualities of curiosity, charm, friendliness, and balance. He discussed the 18th and 19th century Freeman family (Cuff, Peter, and others). He described the increase and subsequent loss of their wealth. He spoke of black families initially welded into the community, but subsequently held to a lower socio-economic status beginning about the time of Andrew Jackson. (Jackson was perhaps the first official American racist.) He recognized our numerous researchers and he talked of the search for black abolitionists, about whom a few clues have surfaced. And he addressed the thorny issues of anger and guilt. We must not look at the past through the lens of the present, Ray suggested. It is important that neither anger nor guilt dominate our present thoughts and actions towards each other. On the other hand, events which lead to anger and guilt must be remembered and their significance put to use. Ray is a Yale Divinity School graduate and a practicing preacher, but the "preacherly" part of his style was kept very low-key. Unfortunately he stopped too soon.

Lisa Johnson gave an excellent short description of our database and its availability on the computer. Over 200 names of African-American-Native American Farmington residents are entered. There will be more than 400 eventually and, no doubt, more as more information comes in. Lisa set up her equipment in the back of the room, and afterwards many people crowded around to see how the database works. Several brought in scraps of documentation. For instance, Jack Crockett brought in information on Joshua Youngs and photographs.

So we move on with the project, developing a photograph, putting together a puzzle.

OLD STONE SCHOOLHOUSE; NEW SEASON BEGINS JUNE 1.

Chair Harriet Margolis reminds members that guides are needed for two hour stints on Sunday afternoons. Please contact her at 677-0059.

Margolis reports a quiet winter at the Schoolhouse. Carol Leonard welcomed a number of West District School classes and a Brownie troop with sample lessons to enrich their

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