

The Farmington Historical Society

Preserve to Educate, Educate to Preserve

September 1997



FREEDOM TRAIL SPOTLIGHT ON FARMINGTON THIS MONTH

During the week of September 21-28, Farmington will join the rest of the state in celebrating the first anniversary of the Connecticut Freedom Trail, commemorating significant persons and events in African American history. With so many well-preserved and documented sites connected to the Amistad Incident and the Underground Railroad, our town is expected to be of major interest to those touring the Trail, and several events have been planned for both residents and visitors. (Full schedule below)

. A new brochure and guide, *The Freedom Trail in Farmington*, just off the press this week provides a map and historical information for visitors. Developed by Historical Society members Peg Yung, Jean Johnson, Carol Leonard and Cynthia Cooper, it has been printed through the generosity of The Farmington Inn and will be available throughout town at the libraries, museums, hotels and other outlets.

. ***The plaques are all in place!*** When FHS board member Ron Bernard takes on a challenge, there's no question about its eventual outcome. His latest accomplishment took months of time, effort, dedication and a generous amount of Yankee bargaining, but handsome "salt and pepper" granite posts bearing plaques with the Freedom Trail logo now mark the dozen properties designated as stops on the Trail.

Designed and distributed by the State Historical Commission, administrative agency for the Trail, the plaques were formally presented to the property owners or caretakers last February, when David White of the Historical Commission and our Rep. Demetrios Giannaros, a sponsor of the Freedom Trail legislation, joined town officials and Historical Society representatives at a reception held in Ron and Lorie Bernard's 27 Main Street home. Location and installation of the plaques was left to the individual recipients, with a request that they be in place before this September's observances.

That proved easier said than done. Bill DiCapscio promptly installed his on the very visible front of Your Village Store on Mill Lane, but most owners had no such clear-cut options. So, hoping to achieve both visibility for the public and a reasonable amount of privacy for residents, as well as a consistent appearance, Ron came up with the idea of mounting the plaques on posts near sidewalks. Criteria were established. The posts would be secure, readily visible, permanent, dignified, standardized, affordable and as maintenance-free as possible. In May, Ron began his search for a source, while also applying for approval from the town's Historic District Commission, which holds jurisdiction over half the sites involved. The paperwork alone fills a whole notebook. But the project is now completed and Farmington can take great pride in its distinctively marked sites. Do take note of them as you walk or drive through the Village.

. The First Church of Christ, Congregational, whose meetinghouse is an important site on

(Freedom Trail - cont.)

the Trail, and the Farmington Library have scheduled events during the week.

. On **Sunday, Sept. 21**, the Church will open the observances with a 10 a.m. service dedicated to the Freedom Trail, when the Rev. Ned Edwards will preach on "Reaching Out in Love".

. The Library and the Historical Society will co-sponsor two evening programs. On **Monday, Sept. 22**, there will be a lecture and discussion with David Pesci, author of the novel Amistad, and on Tuesday, Sept. 23, Billie Anthony, a teacher at Fox Middle School, Hartford, will present a program on "Forgotten Souls: African Americans in Hartford's Old Burying Ground." Accompanied by slides, her talk is based on research done by Fox students. Both programs - free and open to the public - are at 7 p.m. in the Library's Community Room.

. **Saturday, Sept. 27**, Farmington will participate in the African American Freedom Trail Parade in Hartford with a town-sponsored float honoring the Rev. James W.C. Pennington, Hartford clergyman, educator, author and abolitionist, who on occasion exchanged pulpits with Farmington's Rev. Noah Porter. The parade route is from Bushnell Park to Keney Park.

. Finally, on **Sunday, Sept. 28**, there will be showings of the film *Amistad Revolt: All We Want Is Make Us Free* from 2 to 2:30 p.m. in First Church, 75 Main Street, and tours, beginning at 2:30 p.m., of the Farmington Freedom Trail sites. Maps and brochures will be available, and a docent will be stationed at each site to explain its significance.

*Applause and thanks to FHS Vice President Peg Yung
who has coordinated all of the Freedom Trail activities.*

HARVEST FESTIVAL AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE

A harvest festival featuring a pumpkin decorating contest has been planned as this year's season finale at the Old Stone Schoolhouse. Scheduled for **Sunday, Oct. 5 from 1 to 4 p.m.**, the event will include, as usual, apple dunking, colonial games and refreshments. The Historical Society's well-known resident scarecrows, Jacob and Elijah, will be on hand to greet visitors and expect to be joined by some of their friends who've worked in gardens and fields all summer. We encourage everyone to bring their own scarecrows along to enjoy the festivities.

Pumpkins can be entered in two categories: 1) decorated with paint and/or recycled items or 2) carved into Jack-O-Lanterns. Entries may be brought to the Schoolhouse from noon on; judging will be at 3 p.m. and prizes will be awarded.

An additional highlight of the day will be the popular "building of the teepee", a great family activity. Bill Pfau will provide us with a huge pile of cornstalks from his Tunxis Plantation Popcorn gardens to make the teepee.

As always, volunteers are needed to help out that day and to bake refreshments. Please call Harriet Margolis at 677-0059 to offer your help. The Schoolhouse Committee thanks all those who've volunteered during this busy summer. Help is still urgently needed, however, to clean up the grounds and haul away brush. Can you lend a hand, or a truck?



LET'S ALL SUPPORT OUR SECOND ANNUAL AUCTION

The Historical Society's major fund-raising event, a huge estate-level auction, will be held **Saturday, October 25**, on the grounds adjacent to the Staples House and in front of the high school. Both access and parking are excellent at this site.

See the details in the enclosed flyer. Tell your friends, neighbors and relatives. Post the flyer and tell us if you'd like more of them. We need your help to make this a truly successful effort, and we urgently need funds to support our programs and activities..

To make donations (they're tax-deductible) and/or consignments, call Jim Calciano (676-8558) or Ron Bernard (677-2870). We'll also have a white elephant tent.

Do plan to come and make this a memorable Farmington outing for the whole family.

There will be baked goods, other refreshments and Tunxis Plantation popcorn for sale.

The auction itself guarantees excitement, humor, discoveries and just plain fun.

"GREEN BOOK" TO BE REPUBLISHED !

The Society has announced plans to republish *Farmington, Connecticut, The Village of Beautiful Homes*. Originally published in 1906 and popularly known as the "Green Book" or the "Farmington book", it is described on its title page as containing

"photographic reproductions illustrating every home in the town" and information about "prominent people past and present, all of the school children, local antiques, etc." The first edition consisted of 1,000 numbered copies and was sold by subscription. A second printing was done soon after to meet demand. Any available copy now, particularly one in good condition, is rare and highly prized.

The new edition will be a complete and faithful reproduction, as close to the original as possible. Text and photographs will be re-created through digital scanning and filming of well-preserved originals. To enhance its value now and in the future, it will also contain a supplemental index of names and a page by page identification of the current addresses of the still-surviving homes. Several Society members are now at work on this index, and the book should be available in January 1998.

Copies can now be reserved at the pre-publication price of \$39.95. Send orders and checks to The Farmington Historical Society, P.O. Box 1645, Farmington, CT 06034.

PEOPLE KEEP COMING.....

A steady stream of visitors came to the Schoolhouse on summer Sundays. In June, we had a flood of fourth graders from West District School, and the *Historic Sites* group, which rotates among its member groups, came here for its August meeting.

Amistad tours continued through the summer, of course, among them the Bates College Club, three large groups from Summer in Faith and EQUAL, one with Barbara Alleyne from SAND. Peg Yung worked with Howard Motyl of MTI Teleproductions in Chicago and with Walter Dean Meyer, author of 56 books on African Americans. Both Peg and Carol have several speaking engagements scheduled this fall.

WE'RE STILL LOOKING FOR A HOME...

Jim Calciano reports that our contract to purchase the building at 768 Farmington Avenue, announced in the previous newsletter, has fallen through, due to a change in the needs of the owner and his attorneys. The conditions they insisted upon for the sale would have adversely affected our tax liability and, along with potentially larger maintenance expenses than originally anticipated, it would not have been in our interest to take on the possibility of an additional tax burden.

But we're still looking - and hoping to find a suitable home before long. If you hear of anything, please do contact a member of the board with information.

We need an accessible and visible location, ample parking space, enough indoor space to accommodate meetings, exhibits, office space and archives. We'd love to have enough area for some outdoor events. Just think about the kind of Historical Society quarters you'd like to see in Farmington scale it down a little for reality make it available at an affordable price or, better yet, find an historically-minded generous owner whose estate plan would benefit from making us a gift.

Who says historians can't dream about the future ?

AND WHILE WE'RE DREAMING....

It's been quite a while since we last published a wish list and, particularly as we do more research in connection with the Freedom Trail we've found a number of books that really should be in our collection. Here are some titles; gifts would be greatly appreciated.

- . John Hooker, *Reminiscences*, Belknap & Warfield, Hartford, 1899
- . Arna Bontemps, *Great Slave Narratives*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969
- . H.T. Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, Wesleyan Press, 1962
- . New Haven Colony Historical Society *Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1, May-June 1971
- . Karen Zeinert, *The Amistad Slave Revolt and American Abolition*, Linnet Books, North Haven, CT, 1997
- . David Pesci, *The Amistad (a novel)*, Marlowe & Co., New York, 1997

We would also like to add to our collection of pictures and postcards of Farmington homes, scenes and people. These are extremely valuable both for exhibits and research. Please keep the Historical Society in mind when you open those old boxes and trunks.

STILL TRAVELING THE CANAL

The Canal Lectures and Tours, sponsored last spring by *Historic Sites of Connecticut's Farmington Valley*, proved so popular that a substantial waiting list remained, even after five busloads toured the Canal route. In response, the committee has now arranged for one additional lecture and two bus tours.

The revised and expanded lecture will be given in Simsbury; the tours will follow the same route as previously. Details are given in a flyer enclosed in this newsletter.

Charles N. Leach Jr., M.D., president of the Society, reports on research in which he has taken an active role over the past year.

MORE TRACES OF FARMINGTON'S AFRICAN AMERICANS

We've searched for traces of them - the African American families who once lived in Farmington. The means of our search - the project "Black and White in a Yankee Town" - is now well underway and has produced a 450-name database, genealogies, information on migration and economic insights. Engaging stories of individual people are beginning to come to light as well. These and other findings will be presented in a comprehensive traveling exhibit beginning in February 1998.

Certain research questions are just beginning to find answers, however. It appears the families we have gotten to know on a "first name" basis are no longer represented in the town. The Lewises, Manases, Kelleys, Hills, Princes, Manuels, Halsteads. Warrens, Livingstones and others are gone. The last signs of them are found in old documents from the turn of the century. Why they left and where they went are mysteries to us still.

* * * * *

The search for these lost neighbors brought us to Riverside Cemetery on Garden Street. There, along with Sarah Porter, Lambert Hitchcock and the abolitionists Austin Williams, John Treadwell Norton and Samuel Deming is buried Foone, the Mendi African from the Amistad, who drowned in the canal basin. A look around reveals nearby gravestones with familiar names: Charles Manuel and George Livingstone (two of our 12 black Civil War veterans); Henry Davis and his wife, Rebecca Deming Davis, who worked for Austin Williams; and Eliza Jane Kelley Lewis, ancestress of two large families well known to us. These African American gravesites are quite near one another in the central area of the cemetery, close to the burials of their white neighbors, but also near large areas of unmarked turf. Could there, we asked, have been more ?

With the help of Jim Collins, caretaker of Riverside, we have begun to find them. Jim provided a worn but carefully kept document locating burials back to the beginnings of this cemetery in 1838. It diagrams the stones we found. But more important, it shows the ownership of family plots - 17 of them by black families in our database - and the locations of nearly 30 other graves, now unmarked.

In these "empty" areas, we have found the burial places of African Americans whose names are known from our research. Some are clustered near Foone. Some are in plots marked "colored" on the document, and some are among the graves of whites. There are a few unknown names: children, for example, and one Posey - a name later adopted by a Mendi on his return to Sierra Leone. And on one grave, flowers had been placed by an unknown hand.

So we have, under the stimulus of the Society's study, come up with new knowledge which engages both minds and hearts. We are solving a puzzle, weaving a pattern, developing an image. The facts - proximities of graves, ownership of plots, names for the database - will provide the raw material for the science of our study. But when the exciting mystery-solving is done, the facts are not the whole story. We have had a major "aha!" experience and, as historians, we are thrilled. We hope we may, in a sense, give back some of their lost identity to the families we now know so well.

WHO LEADS THIS GROUP ?

Officers and directors of the Farmington Historical Society, elected at the annual meeting last June, are as follows:

President: Dr. Charles N. Leach, M.D.

Vice-President: Marguerite Yung

Secretary: David Holmes

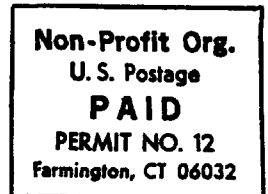
Treasurer: Steve Zarmsky

(The post of Membership Secretary is currently vacant. Nominations are welcome.)

Currently serving as directors are: Frederick Mullen, James Calciano, Peter Bartucca, Marvin Anderson, Cynthia Cooper, Ann Reed, Ronald Bernard, Victoria Gerent, Harriet Margolis, Elsa Morse, David Andrews, Ann Arcari and Joanne Lawson.

The board meets at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month in the Society's headquarters in the Village Library. Society members who wish to bring any matter to attention or make suggestions are invited to contact any board member or to make arrangements to address the board at its regular meeting. We encourage and gratefully welcome volunteers in all aspects of Historical Society undertakings.

THE FARMINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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