

The Farmington Historical Society

Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve. March 1998

This has been a remarkable year for your Society. The FHS has republished "Farmington Connecticut, Village of Beautiful Homes"; numerous activities have highlighted Farmington's role in the protection of the *Amistad* captives; the 12 Freedom Trail sites in town have been identified with permanent markers; and the innovative exhibit "Speaking for Ourselves: African American Life in Farmington, Connecticut" has been mounted and acclaimed. There is more to come. Read on!



"All We Want Is Make Us Free"
Sengbe Pieh (Joseph Cinque)

"Robert Brandegee and His Contemporaries". April 1, 7:00 pm, Village Library.

Farmington resident Charles Ferguson, Director Emeritus of the New Britain Museum of American Art, will discuss the work of Farmington painter Robert Brandegee and other Farmington Impressionists who worked in the area at the beginning of the 20th c. The talk will be held at the Village Branch Library, in the Fireplace Room, where paintings included in the talk will be on view. A painter himself, Ferguson has won numerous awards for his paintings, has served as a juror for many exhibits, and as an officer of various Art Associations. His teaching positions have included the Hill School, Loomis Chaffee, and Trinity College. Ferguson and his wife Alice are co-owners of the Red Barn Studio and Gallery, Fisher's Island, New York. Those who attend this lecture can also view a selection of his paintings now hanging upstairs in the Village Library's Hoppin Gallery. This exhibit will be held over through April 1.

April 17, 7 pm. Black History Makers Reception. University of Hartford, Lincoln Center.

The Dr. John E. Rogers African American Cultural Center will honor the Farmington Historical Society for its contributions to African American History at its first Black History Makers Reception. In addition to representatives of the FHS and other honorees, special guests for the evening will be Samuel, Patrick and Solomon Pieh, great grandsons of Sengbeh "Cinque" Pieh, the African who led the fight for the freedom of the Mendi. Members of the Society are invited to attend. If interested, call Ms Andrews 548-1926.

Canal Tour. April 18.

Past president Carol Leonard serves as the Society's liaison to the Historic Sites in Farmington Valley. She announces that demand for tours of the Farmington Canal continues (in spite of four sold-out tours last Spring) and that group will sponsor another tour on April 18 with a possible later date.. Those interested should make reservations

with Jean Hunt at Massacoh Plantation (658 - 2500). The HSCFV received the Wilbur Cross Award from the Humanities Council for its planning and execution of those tours.

"The Pest House" . May 5, 7:00 pm. Farmington Library Community Room.

Ralph Arcari, FHS member and librarian at the University Health Center, will give an account of Farmington physician Dr. Eli Todd and his early efforts to prevent smallpox epidemics. In 1798 he inoculated townspeople with live virus. His patients waited out the three week inoculation period -- or recovered, if they were unlucky enough to develop a case, at Hospital Rock, as the pest house on Pinnacle Mountain was called. Arcari's talk will include slides to show the 200 year old carvings left behind by patients at the hospital. The possibility of a hike to the rock on May 17 at 2 pm will be discussed at the meeting.

April-May.

The popular tours of the Old Burying Ground and of Riverside Cemetery will be offered again this year. If you are interested and want more information leave a message at Society Headquarters (678-1645).

Summer-Fall: A Freedom Trail Celebration.

Peg Yung, Society Vice-President and liaison to the state Freedom Trail Committee , reports that Farmington will play a major role in Freedom Trail activities planned for the summer. A Freedom Trail quilt will be pieced, a Freedom Trail Bicycle tour will travel from the four corners of the state through the participating towns, and the bikers and quilt pieces will - somehow - arrive together on September 20 at the state capitol. The patches will then be brought to the Old State House for a giant quilting bee . At a major event on September 27, the quilt will be presented to the State of Connecticut.

Farmington has the most Freedom Trail sites of any town in the state - twelve. So we must make twelve 15" x 15" squares. Can you sew? Volunteers are really needed! Previous quilting experience helpful but not necessary. Can you ride a bike? Bicyclists are needed to escort the core bicyclists for a short distance. Perhaps you sew and ride! If you can help with the quilt squares, please call Peg Yung (677-2754). If you can help the town show support by escorting the core bikers, please call Preston Reed (677-0611).

As Farmington's Freedom Trail representative, Peg has given talks and appeared on panels throughout the state. Last week, for example, she spoke before 800 High School students and shared a panel with "Amistad" actors at Electric Boat in Groton. Our fame spreads! Both an abbreviated version of "Speaking for Ourselves" and an exhibit of Farmington Freedom Trail sites were hung, by invitation, in the State Capitol for the opening of the Legislature. (Thanks to Rep. Giannaros for his help.) She and Carol Leonard have also mounted an exhibit at Bradley Airport. They have led over a dozen tours of Trail sites recently. Demand for tours here remains high. Classes to train tour leaders will be organized shortly. If interested please leave a message with Peg or at Society Headquarters.

Recent Events: "Speaking for Ourselves: African American Life in Farmington, Connecticut."

The Feb. 1 opening of the exhibit on the history of African Americans in Farmington was an outstanding event for our society. Under the guidance of Project Director Barbara Donahue, Exhibit Designer Lisa Johnson and Historian Stephen Ray, the project was funded by the Farmington Historical Society, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Connecticut Humanities Council and Otis Elevator. Approximately 250 people attended the opening; another 150 toured the exhibit while visiting with author Myers, (see below) middle and secondary school students visited on class assignments; and the Library reception desk reported steady traffic throughout the month.

The exhibit is now at Noah Wallace School. Later it will hang at Central Connecticut State University, in the concourse between the State Capitol and the Legislative Office Building, and at the Connecticut Historical Society. Other bookings can be arranged. "Speaking for Ourselves," the illustrated catalog of the exhibit reproduces the text and pictures of the large posters and is on sale at Society Headquarters and Millrace Books.

On Saturday, February 28 the Society sponsored a workshop on "Discovering Your Town's African American History," at which FHS President Charles Leach, Board member Ann Arcari, researcher Norma Munroe, and consultant Stephen Ray appeared with Donahue and Johnson to present research and lead discussion on ways to evaluate it. 21 people attended, including museum directors and volunteers from Windsor, Washington, West Hartford, Brookfield and Suffield, as well as Farmington. One participant said, on leaving, "I've paid a lot more for these things before -- and gotten a lot less."

Ann Arcari, FHS board member and curator of the Farmington Room at the Farmington Library, gave a talk on Feb. 15 titled "Amistad in Farmington." Using letters, diaries and other local history sources, her program detailed the lives of the freed Africans during the eight months they lived in Farmington in 1841. It was during this time that Farmington residents got to know Sengbeh, Grabbeau and Foone as real people.

Walter Dean Myers, author of books with an African-American focus for young people, visited the Farmington Library on Feb. 24. He spoke with students from Farmington schools - whose presence was arranged by Superintendent Robert Villanova - and autographed books at a reception sponsored by the Farmington Historical Society, Millrace Books and the Farmington Library. Author Myers, wrote "Amistad, A Long Road to Freedom" which was commissioned by Steven Spielberg as a non-fiction account to accompany the film. But unlike the film, Myers took pains to visit Farmington and to include a carefully researched account of the Mendi's sojourn here. Myers believes that the *Amistad* was in fact headed towards the southern United States, and that the captives were destined to be victims in the widespread illegal importation of slaves. He bases this conclusion on the fact that the Spaniards brought with them the name of a New York

agent associated with that practice and contacted him after their arrival in New London. The book is available at the Millrace Book Store.

"Green Book" Published

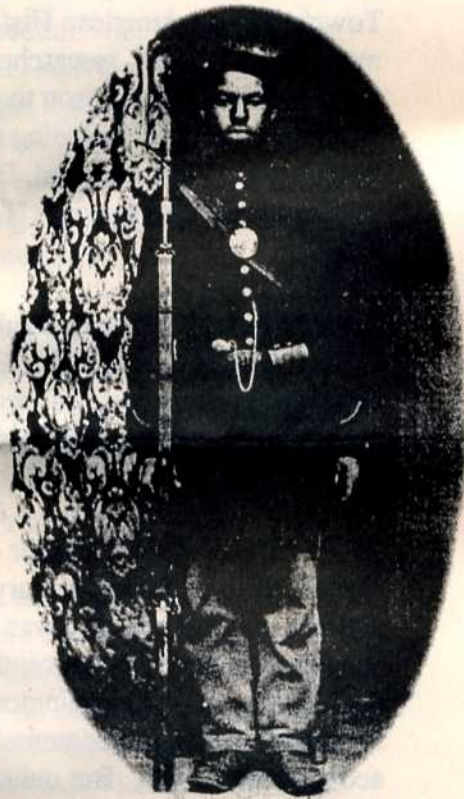
The prized 1906 history, "Farmington, Connecticut, the Village of Beautiful Homes" is once again available. This beautiful book offers over 500 photographs and illustrations including every dwelling in the town at the turn of the century and earlier. Generous sections are devoted to Miss Porter's School, the Hill-Stead, the Country Club, cemeteries, schools and churches. In addition there are fascinating accounts, some in the first person, of events in the town's history. These include the stories of the fate of the Tunxis Indians and the visit of the *Amistad* captives. This book is a must for anyone interested in Farmington's bountiful heritage, especially its architecture and institutions. It is a wonderful gift for newcomers and family or for friends who have moved away. The book is available for \$39.95 at Society Headquarters, at both libraries, at the Hill-Stead and Stanley-Whitman museums, and at Millrace Books. Proceeds will help the Society offer more programs to the community and to preserve and protect important historical materials.

FHS Rewrites Civil War History

Society President, Charlie Leach, has led the effort to discover more about African Americans from Farmington who served in the Civil War. He prepared the following account.

At first there were ten. Then twelve, and now fifteen. These are the Civil War soldiers from Farmington who are identified by the U.S. Census as "black" or "mulatto". Like so much of the history uncovered in the African-American history project information about Farmington's black volunteer soldiers has come to us in fragments. Vivid, touching, sometimes heroic: it waits to be turned into narrative.

Sometimes what we find disappoints. That was the case with John L. King who enlisted in the famous Massachusetts 54th infantry. The 54th was the unit immortalized in the movie *Glory*. They led the suicidal charge on Fort Wagner near Charleston, S.C. and there Pvt. King was severely wounded. At first, sources seemed to indicate that, after a stay in the hospital, King deserted. The record ended and we were left sad and disappointed to find a deserter among our Farmington volunteers. But persistence paid off. We sent for his pension records from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and eight weeks later received a heavy packet of photocopies. These newly acquired records tell us that King did indeed "desert". However, he at once re-enlisted in the U. S.



James Halstead

(Courtesy of Gary O'Neil)

Navy under the alias John Lewis and served throughout the War. He saw duty on a supply ship, then on a gunboat. He was discharged in 1866, but re-enlisted and served 27 more years until 1893 when he retired in Velasco, Texas.

We have already received exciting new information in the records of four other soldiers. We will now add to our database by retrieving records of all our black Civil War volunteers. So, your Historical Society is indeed rewriting history; sources may be found in our own attics or in distant archives. Read the FHS newsletter for the latest revisions.

Recent Acquisitions

Gifts to the Farmington Historical Society include:

From Dr. Richard Stockwell, Framed Pictures of Farmington Medical Doctors

Eli Todd	1789 - 1833	M.J. Morrisey	1899 - 1911
Asahel Thomson	1815 - 1860	J. B. Newton	1900 - 1905
Edw. W. Carrington	1826 - 1852	R.S. Hayes	1905 - 1909
Chauncey Brown	1835 - 1878	Stuart E. Phelps	1911 - 1927
Franklin Wheeler	1885 - 1900	John A.O. Davies	1927 - 1933
Charles Carrington	1890 - 1905	Walls W. Bunnell	1933 - 1965

From Arthur H. Stack, East Berlin, CT, Audio tape of Farmington early history

From Mrs. Virginia Howard, Montpelier, VT, Deed of Property dated Nov. 25, 1751

From Betty Cady, formerly of Farmington,

More notes from Underledge, 1904

Diaries of Julia Cowles, 1797 - 1803 (Printed 1931)

Historical Discourse by Noah Porter titled "History of Original Settlement and Ancient Town, 1841

11 Copies of The Farmington Magazine 1901

Historical Address by Julius Gay, 1904 (2 copies)

New England Magazine, 1897 (one copy)

Account of Capital Stock for Litchfield and Harwinton Turnpike Road, 1836

2 letters sent to Mr. Ernest H. Cady, Jr. dated 1917 about World War I from L. Porritt

44 books and magazines dealing with Farmington history

From Country Club of Farmington, a History, 1892 - 1995, by James Frost

From I. Victor Sperry, A history of "Town Farm", Farmington, CT 1911 - 1923

Includes maps, pictures, history, dialogue, letters, genealogy

From Lewis Walpole Library, maps of Farmington; picture from Harry Simonds of Gay's Corner, Farmington.

Photographs Needed: For a TV documentary, photographs of John Treadwell Norton, Charles Ledyard Norton, John Pitkin Norton.

Have you other photographs or memorabilia that should be preserved in our archives?

Volunteers! We Need You! Leading tours or escorting dignitaries, manning the Schoolhouse or Day-Lewis Museums, organizing and researching our archives and fielding questions (in the recent past we've helped Spielberg, the Discovery Channel, A&E TV Network, and other TV stations throughout New England), building floats and participating in parades (we won first prize for our float last year), raising money (our annual auction is fun), planning programs (from archeology to ethnic history) - there are activities for every interest. Spend as much time as you can, or as little as an hour a month. You will gain a richer understanding of the history of our town and the camaraderie of new friends!

Contributors to the newsletter include Ann Arcari, Ron Bernard, Cynthia Cooper, Barbara Donahue, Charles Leach, Carol Leonard and Peg Yung. Ann Reed, editor.

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