

THE FARMINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS

& Views

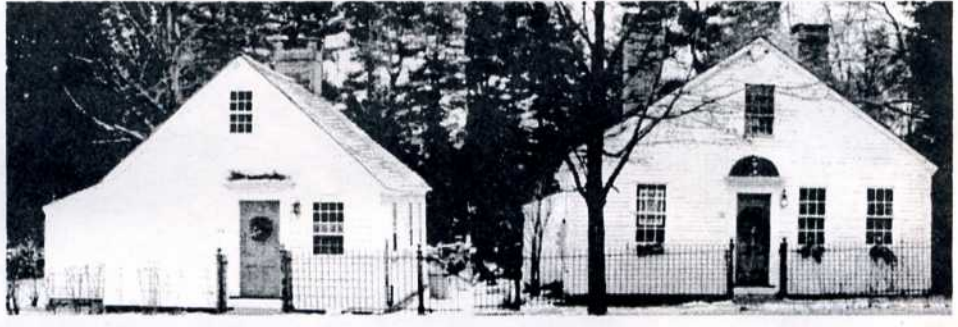
Quarterly Newsletter SPRING 1999

Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve April, 1999

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Ron Bernard

The advent of Spring will bring greatly increased activity at the Gridley-Case cottages and grounds. Painters, carpenters, masons, roofers, iron (fence) restoration experts and grounds workers will soon be at work. Meanwhile, the interior of 138 Main will receive careful review from architectural historians followed by restoration for the downstairs rooms to an appropriate period. The two unimproved attic rooms will serve as the Society's administrative center. And the basement will be cleaned and sealed and used for storage of everyday material.



We know that the results will make the Membership, the neighborhood and the whole community proud. 138 Main will be accessible for research and education while grounds beautification will enhance the streetscape. Efforts by many over the years have resulted in a Main

Street notable for its historical and architectural interest. It is our responsibility now to see that these unique workmen's cottages are properly preserved as part of that heritage.

But all this costs money. And we now turn to the membership for support. We are very encouraged by the receipt over the winter of several very generous gifts which will help to secure a \$90,000 challenge grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. So, the capital campaign starts with a good base and our goal of \$350,000 is achievable...but only with your help.

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a pamphlet which describes plans to raise and use funds for the restoration and preservation of your Society's new home. Please take a moment to read it and to consider a generous gift today. We hope that every Society member will participate and be a part of this important investment to preserve and protect for all time this unique property. Thank you very much.



May 5 • 7:00 PM FHS PROGRAM: FARMINGTON'S FAMILY PHYSICIANS & THEIR TIMES

Community Room
Farmington Library
Monteith Drive, Farmington.

CHARLES LEACH, MD
will present some of the results
of his ongoing research on
Farmington's medical history.

FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 7-9; SATURDAY, MAY 1, 10-3

House and Garden Tag Sale:

Members can also contribute to our fund-raising efforts by donating items to the Tag Sale to be held at 138 Main Street. PLEASE take a minute to think of what you might offer and bring it to the Cottage on these dates: *(Come and buy too!)*



APRIL 22, 23, 24: 1-8 PM
APRIL 28, 29: 1-8 PM
APRIL 30: 12-4 PM
138 MAIN STREET

Help Needed!

Could you assist during donation days or sale days? Have you any questions or do you need help delivering sale items? Call the Society at 678-1645, or 677-2754.

April 30-May 1 will mark a **Tag Sale Extravaganza** for Farmington. Three churches in town are also sponsoring sales. Experience suggests that more sales inspire more buyers. *Ours has a special House and Garden focus.*



ITEMS NEEDED

- Garden Supplies & Equipment
- Garden Pots & Decor Items
- Plants, Cuttings, Divisions, etc.
- Housewares
- Toys & Games
- Hobby & Craft Supplies
- Tools
- Small Furniture & Small Appliances

ITEMS NOT NEEDED

- Clothing & Shoes
- Books & Magazines

Tales from the Past

by Carol Leonard

Farmington residents have always taken a lively interest and an active role in shaping the face of the town in which they take such pride. During the latter half of this century, this has been most noticeable in our opposition to the State's eagerness to move more traffic more quickly. *(Do you know that complaints about the inadequacy of Route 4 to serve the more westerly population were first recorded in 1740? We do cherish our traditions.)*

On the happier side, however, residents have been equally vigilant in making improvements and guarding the beauty of the Village and its surrounding areas. Again drawing on the treasures in *The Farmington Magazine*, (1901-1902) there are numerous accounts of Village Improve-

ment Societies and committees at various times.

In 1818, it became apparent that the growing community required some modernization. George and Horace Cowles and Samuel Richards were appointed as a Village Improvement Society committee and after some months of study, they suggested that a sidewalk be made, starting at Governor Treadwell's house on Mountain Spring Road, rounding two corners to reach the main street, and then continuing down that street all the way to Ezekiel Cowles' house (now 185 Main Street, more recently known as The Lodge).

A petition was circulated at once, asking for contributions of money, teams and labor. Seventy-six residents signed

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up, many with specific offers such as: "Leonard Winship, 2 dollars in work between his house and Mr. Camp's store; George Treadwell, man and team, one day; Eli Todd, the whole extent fronting his house and lot." No bond issues nor budget wrangling there — and all work was to be completed before December 1819.

This reserving and making passable a part of the road for those who went afoot, it was noted by the writer of this account, "must have increased sociability in the community, encouraged attendance at church and better preserved the health of the young ladies, as the belles of that day wore very thin-soled shoes."

Among the signers and contributors were 14 Cowleses, 2 Hookers, 3 Wadsworths, 8 Harts, 4 Porters, 3 Roots, 2 Whitmans, 3 Lewises, 2 Demings, Gov. Treadwell, Samuel Dickinson, Erastus Gay and Deacon Bull. Mrs. Anna Smith was the one female signatory.

A second society, the *Sidewalk and Shade Tree Society*, was formed and faded out between 1860 and 1870 after accomplishing its purpose. Records show that most of the householders turned out on the two days appointed by this

group to repair sidewalks, which apparently were much in need of attention.

By 1873, another society was formed, none too soon to cope with the ravages of neglect. Burdocks had grown to bushes three and four feet high and completely filled the ditches that separated the walks from the streets all the way from Gay's Store in the middle of Route 4 to the Vorce estate at 127 Main Street. Banks had to be leveled to bring the various frontings to one grade and for a few years, people worked hard and accomplished a great deal. For many years, each resident cared for his own frontage and the adjacent roadside. In 1874 a lantern brigade was established. Each light was cared for by its owner and hung on door or gate post.

Through the 1890s, expense for such improvements was between four and five hundred dollars a year which was raised through two suppers, a fair and a play given by local talent. The town mothers made great exertions to make the suppers successful, for it meant clearing the lower room in the chapel which served as a town hall of several cords of wood, stacks of benches and dirt from the furnace and gathering tables and chairs from far and near, bringing every kitchen utensil from

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Farmington Physicians and their Times

by Charles Leach, MD

The town of Farmington was settled more than 350 years ago, and its citizens have been attended by a long succession of healthcare practitioners stretching back to Colonial times. Many are known to us today, and some are famous, while some are merely a name or have disappeared entirely from our records. Some of our practitioners were physicians trained according to the orthodox customs of their times. In addition, there were no doubt homeopaths, naturopaths, botanical and root doctors, hydropaths and spiritualists. Childbirth was often managed successfully by midwives. And the traditions of African and Native American healing were engrafted onto the practices of New England Yankees. The stories of Farmington's own practitioners have recently been eclipsed somewhat by the advent of the University of Connecticut Health Center, with its trainees, faculty practice and research activities. All of this began in the late 1960s. We wish in this short note to take you back to earlier times, and reintroduce you to some of our forebears' health problems and to the physicians who attended them.



In its earliest days, there was only one practitioner in the entire Hartford Colony. Then, in 1652, Dr. Thomas Lord of Hartford was licensed by the General Court to serve the Colony for L 15 per annum, with visits to Farmington charged at 6 shillings. We know little of Dr. Lord, but can assume that like all of the earlier physicians he was trained by apprenticeship and approved as a practitioner on recommendation of his tutor and a few respectable citizens.

Dr. Lord was followed as a Farmington family doctor by several members of prominent local families: two Doctors Porter, a Thomson, Lee, Mather, two Wadsworths, two Harts, a Stanley, and a Yale. In several of these families, there were multiple physicians, educators and ministers. The healing arts were closely associated with religion and teaching, and the professions of minister and physician were frequently

combined in one person of intelligence, piety and industry. Harvard graduate Thomas Mather, who died young and is buried in our ancient *Memento Mori* cemetery, was cousin twice removed of the great divine Cotton Mather and came of a family replete with clerics and physicians.

As the 19th century began, our physicians came of more academic backgrounds. Yale began granting the M.D. degree in the late 18th century, and later physicians came from Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons and other schools. Yet their scientific training

was at most rudimentary, and the therapies available to them quite primitive.

The health problems of early Farmington included plagues unknown to today's medicine. There were smallpox epidemics, diphtheria, tuberculosis in abundance, severe respiratory illness, yellow fever, measles, and in 1808 through 1810, a savage and seemingly interminable episode of "spotted fever" (meningococcal meningitis). With little science, and much reliance on the drastic therapies of the times, these were treated by our Farmington physicians. Whole families died of tuberculosis, and in our two village cemeteries are rows of little headstones.

There were some efforts at preventive medicine. Of particular note were the efforts of Eli Todd, Adna Hart, Theodore Wadsworth and others to inoculate against smallpox. Youngsters of the town were deliberately but lightly infected with the variola virus, then isolated until immunity developed. One of these isolation sites was the famous "smallpox hospital" at Hospital Rock, on Rattlesnake Mountain. Smallpox inoculation of this sort was practiced until the advent of vaccination with the cowpox virus in the early 1800s. Even then, emergency vaccination programs had to be carried out at times of epidemics. Unfortunately, understanding of other contagions was minimal, and immunization nonexistent. There was no specific treatment for tuberculosis, and the need for isolation

of "consumption" cases was not known.

Farmington physicians had other enterprises as well. Timothy Hosmer was a supplier of victuals to the Continental Army. Eli Todd was a founder and first head of the Institute of Living. Franklin Wheeler was president of the Farmington Savings Bank. Michael Morrissey was an important supporter and Board Member of the Connecticut Institute for the Blind. And in addition to his research on mononucleosis, Dr. Walls Bunnell raised rare chickens and orchids, and established the Brickwalk Shops.

Finally, several especially beloved physicians should be remembered here. Eli Todd was a humanist, musician, and active intellectual. He was cherished by his patients, and noted for his bravery in caring for those ill with spotted fever in

1808. Dr. Bunnell, who practised in Farmington from 1922 to his death in 1965 was a brilliant physician and dear to his patients. Dr. Michael Morrissey, who practiced in town from 1899 - 1911, was a man of great charm and energy, with a strong sense of social purpose. And Dr. Dunne was a mainstay of healthcare in Unionville for many years, remembered with affection by many and respected for his service in the terrible flood of 1955.

This is a sampling of our Farmington family doctors and their times. There are many more names, and many more tales to tell of them. For a more complete presentation, the Historical Society is offering a lecture on May 5th.

(Ed. note: our own historian-physician will be the presenter. See announcement above.)

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private houses, unearthing two kitchen ranges from the cellar of the Methodist Church and actually building a plank base on which to cook. And, after it was all over, taking everything back!

As in so much else that affected the town for the better, Sarah Porter (1813-1900) was largely responsible for the widespread interest in these projects and, indeed, for their very completion. It is she we have to thank for our Green, for example. For some years she had contemplated a plan for a real Village Green — a piece of grassland set apart for useful and ornamental purposes to be enjoyed by all the townspeople. With the cooperation of some of her former pupils, she bought more than two acres opposite the Elm Tree Inn and proceeded to remove a number of ugly and dilapidated structures. Located on the main road and the trolley line from Hartford and in close view of the Elm Tree and the Country Club, this had offered a distressingly unfavorable view to anyone entering the Village.

To secure the continuance of this little park, Miss Porter, by her will, devised the land to seven trustees, all residents of the Village "to hold and maintain the same for the use of the people of Farmington as a public park, to be called the Village Green". The purchase price was about \$10,400 and she bequeathed the income from \$3000 for maintenance. During the last summer of her life, some progress was made in grading and draining under her direction. The following spring, one of those former pupils who had helped to buy the land contacted the trustees to urge prompt completion of the planting plans and offered to furnish all necessary funds. *(Now you know the origin of our Farmington Village Green and Library Association - FVGLA.)*

There was still one great eyesore to mar the Village, one that present-day residents may find hard to imagine. The

original green — Meetinghouse Green — was in sad shape indeed. The Farmington Magazine laments: "So little solicitude for its preservation for fit public uses has heretofore been shown that its precise boundaries, except as indicated by the highway, are difficult to determine, if indeed anyone has ever thought it worthwhile to attempt. As a consequence, it is more than suspected that the east boundary has been seriously encroached on by buildings of adjacent owners; along the south side a wagon road and another parallel with it through the middle of the plot have for many years been used as "cuts", but without any known authority of law. Nothing but the noble church edifice which has adorned the ground since 1771 is calculated to remind us of the beneficent design of the founders. The eye and mind of the beholder painfully turns from the church and all suggestions of past generations to contemplation of the huddle of ugly structures which repose under the shadow of its venerable walls — the horse sheds, the so-called Chapel, the Town Record Office, the blackened ruins of a fire engine house and, lastly, the village lockup!

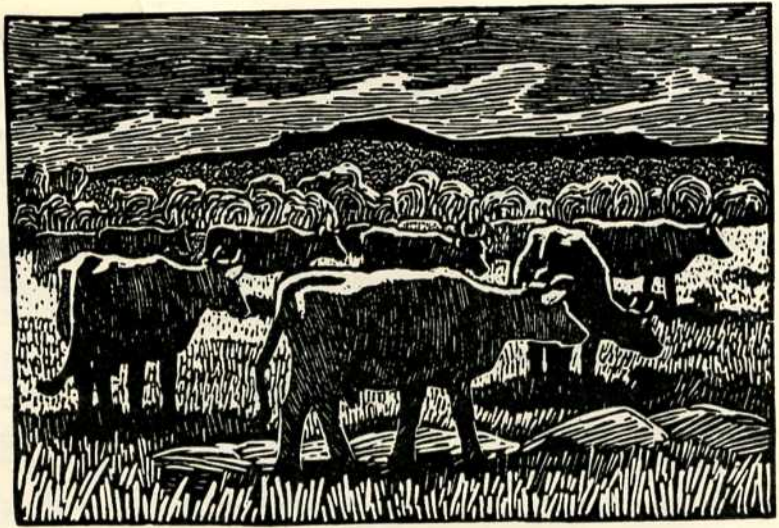
No one should be surprised if a stranger should look about him to see whether the public Pound might be nearby. Manifestly this bit of public ground thus neglected and encumbered lacks every essential feature of the traditional green, except for its small compass of grass". *Thank goodness for Village Improvement Societies!*



FARMINGTON HISTORY QUIZ

(Answers in the summer newsletter.)

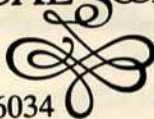
1. Who were the seven pillars?
2. Can you name 5 founding families of Farmington?
3. Where did the Tunxis Indians move to from Farmington?
4. Who was Sarah Porter's father and what did he do? And her brother?
5. What famous furniture maker is buried in Riverside Cemetery? What playwright?
6. Can you name 3 manufacturing industries in Unionville?
7. What distinguished restaurant is located in a former streetcar barn? In an ancient mill?
8. What was the original name of Unionville?
9. Name 3 Underground Railroad hiding places in Farmington Village.
10. What park is named for a hero of the 1955 flood, and what did he do?
11. Where can you find traces of the Farmington Canal? (3 places)



FHS Newsletter:
Ann Reed, Editor
Cynthia Cooper, Graphics

THE FARMINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 1645
Farmington, CT 06034



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Dr. & Mrs. Charles Leach Jr.
174 Main Street
Farmington, CT 06032-3605

*Spring is membership renewal time!
Please return the enclosed renewal envelope.*