



Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve December, 1999

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Ron Bernard

Another year nearly passed...not to mention a century and a millennium! It is useful to reflect on all that took place in a busy 1999 and to look ahead to 2000. Wow!

Here are some of the more notable events from this past year:

- ❖ The Connecticut Humanities Council presented the FHS the prestigious Wilbur Cross award for our traveling exhibit, "Black and White in a Yankee Town."
- * Peg Yung and her band of determined quilters contributed 12 beautiful squares, the most of any town, to the fabulous state Freedom Trail Quilt. This magnificent tapestry hangs permanently in the lobby of the State Library on Capitol Avenue. It is a "must see".
- ❖ Docents conducted more than 20 tours of the Freedom Trail for about 800 people. The most impressive tour in recent years occurred in September when a hundred-strong group from churches from the deep South made a pilgrimage to our town. American Indian descendants also visited town this summer and were warmly received by the Society.
- ◆ Fun and profit at several winter fund raisers including open houses at the cottages and receptions at local homes, a terrific tag sale in April, and the fourth annual FHS Auction at the Barney House in November all contributed to keeping the Society financially healthy. This year's fall scarecrow contest at the Old Schoolhouse was the best ever!
- ❖ Together with local Eagle Scouts and the state Archeologist, the FHS hosted and participated in digs at 138-140 Main Street and on Tunxis Street.

- ❖ Anne Arcari packed the house at 138 Main in several lectures about the life and times of Farmington's own Winchell Smith. And Charlie Leach's fascinating review of our old time doctors brought a crowd to the Farmington Library. Both lectures are evidence of original research with lasting impact conducted by Society members.
- ❖ Net membership increased from about 215 in 1998 to almost 300 now.
- ★ A very useful and comprehensive index to the "Green Book" was published in November.

Next year major Board goals include continuation of our popular historical and educational tours and programs; an increase in visits to our two museums, the Old Stone Schoolhouse and the Day-Lewis Indian Museum; a membership goal of 400; and the successful completion of our capital campaign and restorations to the cottages and grounds. We can achieve these ambitious goals *with your support and participation*. (Use the attached form to make or increase your contribution to the capital fund.) In the meantime we wish everyone a most happy and joyous holiday season.

Most notable perhaps was the Society's success in moving two-thirds of the way towards its fund-raising goal of \$350,000. Because of the generosity of its members and others, the FHS has been able to begin a responsible restoration of the cottages and grounds at 138-140 Main Street. We are especially grateful to those who made sizable gifts. Our donor base is not large and we can proceed only with such significant help. *And we need more if we are to endow the cottages properly.*

At this time, we offer our special thanks to the following donors:

'1998/99 Contributors to The Gridley—Case Cottages Restoration Campaign

\$5000 or More - Thomson Fellows

Anonymous
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RESTORATION UNDER WAY AT 138 MAIN STREET

The Historical Society has taken significant steps towards the creation of appropriate gardens at Society Headquarters and the preservation and restoration of the building at 138 Main Street. Building And Grounds Committee members Peter Bartucca, Peg Yung, Jim Calciano, Joanne Lawson, and Ann Arcari have hired, with Board approval, Sara la Cour to draw up a landscaping plan. They are interviewing restoration architects to find consultants to work on the houses.

Sara la Cour is a landscape historian with a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture. (She is also the daughter of longtime FHS member Robert Donald.) The gardens will reflect 19th century practices, with utilitarian herbs and vegetables representing the earlier period and decorative flowers and shrubs the later part of the century. Although there are remnants of older gardens discernible on the grounds at present, la Cour reports that these are probably products of the 1930s and 1940s. Work has already been completed on

part of the plan. Peter Verillo, local mason, has built a handsome brick walk between 138 and 140 Main. "Boston Paver" bricks with granite anchor stones pave the patio, and he has reset the old bluestone steps. Come take a look!

The challenge in the house is to make it useful as headquarters for the Society, as a library research center (especially for genealogy and local history), as a home for selected furniture and artifacts from the Society's collection (now housed primarily in the basement of the Village Library) while preserving the architectural integrity of this unique early 19th century building. When chosen, the architect will advise the Society on matters which include structural reinforcements, non-intrusive weatherproofing, layout, and climate control (heating, ventilation, air conditioning).

Patience and care mark the work of the Buildings and Grounds Committee.

FARMINGTON, THE AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, AND THE MENDI: AN INTRIGUING CONNECTION

David Halberg, Curator of the Museum of the American School for the Deaf, has presented a copy of "The Cogswell Letters" to the Farmington Historical Society. This collection of Cogswell family letters and diaries was published in 1924 in a limited edition. Peg Yung has filled out the story with the following information.

John Treadwell Norton, a Farmington abolitionist, was married to Elizabeth Cogswell. Elizabeth's sister Alice became deaf at age two; consequently her father Dr. Mason F. Cogswell helped found the American School For the Deaf.

Norton and other Farmington abolitionists, Samuel Deming and Austin Williams, also supported the school. They

supplied food to the school from their farms and entertained students at harvest time. All three, as well, were responsible for the sojourn of the Mendi captives in Farmington in 1841. Norton's house was a favorite place for Singbe Pieh and other Mendi to visit. Author and illustrator Kim Silva is writing a book for deaf children about the Amistad. Perhaps, she suggests, there is a particular reason why the Mendi seemed partial to visiting the Nortons. The Mendi men had a secret society where they spoke only in sign. The Nortons, because of their Cogswell connection, were familiar with sign language as well. Was sign language an aid to communication between the Africans, who struggled to learn English, and the Nortons?

LIDGERWOODS HONORED

In June the Society joined with the Farmington Library and the Stanley Whitman Museum to honor long time benefactors Bill and Harriet Lidgerwood at a ceremony at the Barney House. Bill is past president of the Society and has continued as a supporter and friend for many years. The FHS established the "Lidgerwood Award" which will be given periodically to others who provide support and leadership to the Society in the manner and spirit of the Lidgerwoods. Major donors to the capital fund drive are also honored as Lidgerwood Fellows.

SCARECROW TRADITION FLOURISHES AT OLD STONE SCHOOL HOUSE

Marvin Anderson, FHS Treasurer and Board member, suggests that a bright sunny day and the work of many volunteers were responsible for the record turnout at the Scarecrow Festival at the Old Stone School on October 24. Other observers might attribute its success to Marvin's energetic work as a facilitator. Following the tradition so long fostered by Carol Leonard, past president and long-time Board member, Marvin saw to it that children could enjoy a variety of activities, from pumpkin painting to wig-wam construction (from corn stalks) to doughnut nibbling (like dunking for apples, with the doughnut hanging on a string, an inspiration of Mike and Lisa Cicchetti) with the proper supplies in place and with volunteers in charge. Jim and Regina Madigan helped children make Colonial lanterns (with parts supplied by Orca Products of New Britain). There



were Colonial games (researched by Nancy Sager) and ample refreshments. Bill Pfau popped his homegrown pop corn while Larson and Wollenberg and Smith farms supplied pumpkins and apples. Highland Park Market (helpful, as always) donated cider. Ruth McCarthy and other Board members made cookies. About a hundred people participated.

A group of children from Devonwood, inspired by Board member Sue Austen, won the prize for best scarecrow. The Judges for this contest included Mr. Robert Dube, who was himself a farmer in the West District for many years and who recently donated land abutting the School House to the FHS. Carol Leonard and Kathy Wadsworth were judges as well. Other volunteers included Joe Hawkins, Pia Hart, Peg Yung, Harriet Margolis, Lee Ann Barrieau, Joanne Lawson, and Marilyn Cohen.

EARLY FARMINGTON: PROSPERITY FROM THE LAND

by Jean Johnson

In 1640, when the first Farmington proprietors from Hartford purchased land from the Tunxis Indians, "the whole country (as far as) the Mohaks, they launched the town on its voyage to prosperity. Indeed, many of the original buyers were Hartford businessmen speculating in the land's promise.

Farmington's expansive and fertile acreage spawned its future mercantile ventures, as well as its more immediate agricultural wealth. Its 114,000 acres, or 225 square miles, ranked it as the largest town in the Connecticut colony. In 1734, Farmington's proprietor system assigned all the common, undivided land from this vast acreage among 84 descendants of the original buyers. This created a hierarchy of land ownership. Newcomers could only lease or buy from the proprietors, who profited from all transactions.

With prudent eyes to the future, however, most proprietor families maintained their large tracts for their heirs over several generations. This allowed the extended families to pool their energies, products, and capital for commercial ventures. Altogether, the town's total acreage was great enough to support a swelling population, which, in turn, provided

eager customers for the first artisans and businessmen.

Eventually, the land that comprised colonial Farmington yielded seven new towns and parts of five others, as distant outlanders petitioned for their own churches and village centers. These daughter communities, however, maintained kinship and business ties with the mother town, forging a commercial network radiating from Farmington. When it was time to shop, all roads from offspring towns led back to the parent town.

By the second half of the 18th century, Farmington was a prosperous agricultural center, generously nurtured by its geography. The Farmington River and its tributary, the Pequabuck, had carved extensive flood plains, covered with hundreds of acres of meadows. This land produced abundant grain in the summer and lush grass grazed by livestock in the Spring and Fall. John Treadwell, later Governor of Connecticut, summarized Farmington's agricultural fertility for an official town report, crediting the rich soil as well as native industry, for the "prolific crops of Indian corn, wheat, and rye."

Treadwell's report also cited the acres of pasture which sustained herds of cattle, horses, and sheep. *Continues on page 7*

MORE TALES OF THE PAST

by Carol Leonard

Of All the year's holidays, no other brings so many remembrances of bygone days as does Christmas, and the farther back our memories go, the more romantic and festive those celebrations are likely to seem. Surely Farmington's oldest hearths have glowed for centuries as happy families and their guests took a welcome break from winter's hard chores.

A lovely thought - but far from the truth!

Our intrepid chronicler of Village life, Julius Gay, burst that bubble for readers of *The Farmington Magazine* 99 years ago in the December issue and, never being able to improve on his accounts, I quote:

"When we think of the old-fashioned Christmas, our mind is straightway filled with visions of blazing hearths, with savory odors of roast pig and flaming Christmas pudding, with the sweet sound of Christmas carols. We long for the days of Yule logs and the merry masque. We sigh for the heartiness and simplicity of the old festivities, the gifts that were only a sign of good will, the family gatherings, and old-fashioned charity."

He goes on to explain that none of this would have been found in Farmington until well after the middle of the 19th Century.

"Because of their wish to separate from all they had left behind, many customs were entirely changed by our

Puritan ancestors. The marriage ceremony was performed by a civil authority and all that had to do with the English Christmas was abolished. Christmas carols must not be sung and the dear old Saint Niklaus was unknown.

"Thanksgiving had become the festal time when families gathered together and good cheer prevailed, and the children and grandchildren of the first Separatists knew nothing of that earlier festival. In New York state, however, English and Dutch customs were kept up and the story is told of children from Albany who came to visit Connecticut cousins in the 1840s. They hung up their stockings on Christmas Eve before the huge fireplace. The next morning the stockings still hung there empty — no one had understood — and the disappointed children wondered why St. Nick did not come to Farmington.

"It is strange to think that not so long ago in our village such familiar customs were unknown and the spirit of good cheer that rules now on that day was uninvited and unwelcome."

What do you suppose those dour villagers would think of our carol sing at the brightly lit tree on the Green — of our festively decorated homes — of our rounds of Christmas parties? There are obviously *some* changes for which we're all grateful.

"GREEN BOOK" INDEX HAS ARRIVED

Peter Bartucca, chair of the Green Book Index Committee, reports as follows:

The long awaited index to *Farmington, Connecticut, The Village of Beautiful Homes*, more commonly known as the "Green Book" is now available. An earlier index had been prepared by Dudley Prentice in 1967 and was revised by Prentice in 1971. Although it contained inaccuracies and inconsistencies, it served as an important means of accessing the rich material contained in the book. Even before the 1997 "Green Book" publishing project had been completed, members of the Historical Society began planning an exhaustive evaluation of the Prentice index. The goal was to produce an accurate and reliable key to the "Green Book" by verifying each entry and adding additional information. In addition to Committee members Ann Arcari, James King, Joanne Lawson, and Peg Yung a large number of Society members participated in the project.

Each took a portion of the index to work on and the separate pieces were assembled and formatted for easy use. Proofreading and rechecking entries consumed additional time, but the efforts of the board paid dividends in a product that we hope will have enduring value.

The index is divided into three parts. The first section, a standard alphabetical index, is the largest. It references all the people, places, buildings, and objects that are discussed in the book. The second is a page-by-page listing of the location of each building appearing in the photographs in the book. Care was taken to identify buildings that have been moved or demolished since 1906. The final section is an alphabetical address index, which provides a page reference to photographs of the building located at specific addresses.

Copies of the index are available for \$5.00 from the Farmington Historical Society, the Millrace Bookstore, local museums, and both branches of the Farmington Public Library.

ISRAEL FREEMAN: THE SOLDIER AND HIS SERVICE

by Ann Arcari

In the last newsletter, I introduced you to Israel Freeman, one of Farmington's persons of color in the 18th century. Israel was called "mulattoe" by the minister of the West Avon Church when he married Israel and his bride, the "half-Indian," Mary Mausank. In this issue we will take a look at another aspect of Israel's life, his service as a soldier in the French and Indian War of 1757.

Israel Freeman's service in the Connecticut troops is well documented. He served for two years, along with other men from Farmington, officers and privates, blacks as well as whites. In 1757, he was in the First Company of the First Connecticut Regiment, under Colonel Phineas Lyman. In the records of privates for this year, Freeman appears in the "Fs". All of the other men of color were alphabetized in the "Ns", as "Walpole Negro" and "William Negro." These were men who had no surname, who may have been slaves, so were categorized by clerks in the most convenient way. Wonks Nobikin, an Indian from Southington, also appeared in the "Ns". Israel served in the militia from April to November of 1757. In the militia, along with the other men of color, Israel was placed in a unit called "Pioneers." The Pioneers' jobs were menial. As in civilian life, they were expected to serve others. They broke trails, set up camp, built huts, dug latrines etc. Israel's pay was 12 pounds, 15 shillings, although he may also have received a bounty when he enlisted.

In 1758, Israel enlisted again, and served under Capt. Josiah Lee and Lt. Judah Woodruff, both Farmington officers. In this year's records, Israel is lumped together with other minorities — Cesar Negro, Isaac Whisk and Sepoos, both Indians. Was Israel listed this way because his Farmington officers and townsmen knew him to be a "mulatto?" In 1758,

Israel and the other privates earned about 13 pounds in pay, calculated at about nine shillings per week. Judah Woodruff, in civilian life Farmington's master builder, earned in the military about 20 shillings per week and received thirty pounds at year's end.

Was a soldier's pay really worth the hard life, risk, and loss of income as a farmer or artisan? Did men enlist because they wanted to help the English cause against the French, did they see it as a necessary duty? The French were England's hated enemies, vying for territory that England and her colonists thought they should own. And these colonials had had to live with "the Indian problem" for a century and more. So the answer is "yes" to those questions. But were there other reasons for enlisting? The answer here is also "yes".

If you look at account books of the time, you will see that most business was conducted by barter. In John Thomson's account book for the 1760s, Israel often plowed for him in exchange for cider or barrels. Housewives bartered yarn they had spun for finished products or food. Some of the Indians made brooms and baskets in return for shoes. Very little cash changed hands, and indeed, there was very little coinage in circulation. Barter was the way of life. How then did a man, particularly a young man just starting out in life, obtain cash to buy tools for his trade, or land to start farming? Military service was one of those ways, probably the chief one at the time. So although 12 pounds, or even 30 pounds, doesn't sound like much, it was real money. The buying power of 12 pounds is a complicated issue, as English currency was undergoing many changes at the time. Let's just say that it was *real money!* Perhaps, then, Israel Freeman's willingness to risk his life in the military for a nest egg is understandable.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

From Joanne Lawson, Chair, the following message:

Are your neighbors and friends members? Please ask them to join. We've been mailing invitations to join to new residents. If you've recently moved and received this mailing in error, my apologies. But if you've recently moved, did you tell us your new address?

If you can help out with mailings, research, office work etc. please give us a call at 678-1645 and leave a message.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS!

Farmington West Hartford

Alice Bagdigian Jan and Curtiss B. Hickcox, Jr.

Joseph P. Hawkins

Michael Kubeck

Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Reynolds

Beverly Lonero and family

Christina R. Nixdorf

Mary Wadsworth

Belated thanks to Marvin Anderson and his son-in-law, David Pearson, a wine producer in France, who supplied the excellent wine by Mondavi, Vichon Mediterranean, enjoyed at the annual meeting in June. *Contributors to this newsletter included Peg Yung and Marvin Anderson. Ann Reed, editor; Cynthia Cooper, graphics*

TUNXIS STREET ARCHEOLOGY

by Charles Leach, M.D.

Tunxis Street is a quiet little byway, at the southern edge of the Historic District and adjacent to Post Office Square. It has 15 homes, mostly of modest size. It ends at the old Farmington Canal, the contours of which are still clearly visible. And, it borders the vastly productive Lewis-Walpole Paleoindian archeological site. Now, after more than 20 years of litigation, the western end of Tunxis Street is to be developed by Steven Barberino Realty with the addition of sixteen more houses.

Generations of amateur collectors have dug Native American artifacts from the site under development. Some of these are still used by Peg Yung as a traveling exhibit. There have been arrowheads, axes, pottery fragments and cherts (flint chippings). Years ago, a child's gravesite was opened, bones removed and presumed lost. Tall trees lined the old Canal and thick brush and poison ivy covered the ground.

Recognizing that development and destruction of the site were imminent, board member Charlie Leach contacted State Archeologist Nick Bellantoni. Nick has been instrumental in exploring the Lewis-Walpole site, and recently guided our excavations at the Gridley-Case cottages.

Nick was kindly granted permission by the developer to conduct digs at the site. Supported by the enthusiastic Friends of the Office of State Archeology and by members of our Board of Directors, he has carried out six digs, and retrieved a modest number of artifacts. These include implements, pottery fragments, points, cherts and hearths. Their presence confirms that the site is similar in content and significance to that at Lewis-Walpole. Nick interprets the finds as evidence that it was used by itinerant bands of Native Americans approximately 4000 to 6000 years ago. The child gravesite remains uninterpreted, but is thought to have been an isolated burial. Nevertheless, we do not know (and now may never know) what else lies buried beneath the disturbed earth of the development.

Now, the big trees are gone, and the terrain is scarred by the first cuts of earth-moving behemoths. We are losing another piece of Farmington's Native American history. However, with the guidance of Dr. Bellantoni and the enthusiastic help of your Historical Society, we have salvaged what we could, and lovingly preserved a small portion of our buried past.

Continues from page 4.

The tax lists of 1752 divulge the success of stock raising in Farmington's First Society. Around this village of 267 landowners grazed 361 oxen, 660 cows, 817 horses, and 514 swine.

Yet landowners' labor alone didn't produce these bountiful harvests; vigilance against crop and stock enemies was needed and extra workers required. A community war was waged against predators, such as crows, foxes, wildcats, bears, raccoons, and even wolves. Townspeople earned bounties for killing animals, and they dug pits to trap wolves. (Hence the names Wolf Pit Road and Rattlesnake Mountain.)

The fertile land and grassy hillsides soon demanded extra hands to keep pace with the land's beckoning profits. Landowners recruited tenant farmers for their large tracts, they contracted for indentured servants, and even bought slaves. The minister Samuel Hooker who, by custom, was granted twice the acreage of other farmers, owned a slave as did other large-tract farmers and businessmen.

All this well-organized husbandry soon produced substantial farm surpluses. Samuel Gridley, a blacksmith, accepted some of these surpluses in payment for his work and soon found himself running a store. When he died, his estate revealed, assorted home and artisanal products, as well as a huge store of

grain: 50 bushels of wheat, 80 bushels of rye, and 100 bushels of Indian corn. With this variety of surplus community goods, where could his family sell the articles? In a farming town, who would buy the many barrels of grain: Farmers had to look outside the town for markets.

Other Farmington businessmen shared Gridley's need for wider markets. The town possessed a high ratio of artisans and doctors compared with other Connecticut towns. Also, Farmington sat at the crossroads of highways leading to and from Hartford and other river towns and the many new communities south, north, and west. Since travel took hours and days, inns were needed and were also sources of extra income. Solomon Cowles' inn was one of sixteen in town in 1750. Farmington's growing population thus supported many businesses, as the map shows. With such surpluses available and a steady demand for English metal goods and cloth, Farmington entrepreneurs sought outside market exchanges. They themselves undertook the middleman roles of exporters and importers. In these challenging roles, they ventured far beyond the town and state to launch extraordinary enterprises for an inland town.

Sources for this article: "Farmington: Village of Beautiful Homes," J. Gay, editor and "The Merchants of Farmington." by Jean Johnson.

