

THE FARMINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS

& Views

Preserve to Educate. Educate to Preserve January, 1999

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Ron Bernard

This will be a landmark year for the Farmington Historical Society as we begin to serve our members in our own headquarters in the heart of the village.

Our priority now is the restoration of the Gridley-Case cottages and grounds at 138-140 Main Street. Over 200 people attended the December 4th Open House at N° 138. They discovered a truly charming and unique structure—a kind of time traveler—whose original 18th c. details and early-to-mid 19th c. modifications chronicled the town's development and history. In very few places in the region are workmen's cottages of this sort preserved.

The Board's energy is focused on saving these special buildings and restoring the beautiful grounds. We are engaged in the first step, securing



advice from architectural consultants and experts in antique house preservation. Then careful renovations will begin. Our plan is to preserve as much as possible while also bringing them up to safe, modern standards. More Open Houses are planned.

In the meantime a capital campaign is under way. The Society seeks approximately \$350,000 for restoration, for the provision of a perpetual endowment to maintain the property and for a modest reserve for contingencies and improvements. We are counting on the

generosity of benefactors to make substantial gifts and on widespread support throughout the town. We already have an anonymous gift for the endowment of nearly \$40,000. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has generously approved a matching grant of \$90,000; the goal is achievable. Details of the campaign will follow.

This is the first time that the Society has asked for major financial support. Members of the Society must lead the way if we are to fulfill our commitment to restore and use this special property.

"Black & White in a Yankee Town" wins Statewide Award

by Barbara Donahue

"Black & White in a Yankee Town," the study of local African American history sponsored by the Farmington Historical Society, is a winner of the 1998 Wilbur Cross award. The award has been given annually for 15 years by the Connecticut Humanities Council to one or more "projects that have demon-

strated the value of the humanities in shaping our public and private lives." Previous institutional winners have included the Wadsworth Atheneum and the New Haven Colony Historical Society. There is one other institutional honoree this year, the Litchfield Historical Society, for its exhibit on the Tapping Reeve Law School.

The award will be presented at a luncheon Friday, April 16, 1999 at the Radisson Hotel, Cromwell. Tickets, at \$35 each, are available through the Connecticut Humanities Council. Please call Lisa Comstock at (860) 685-2260 to be put on the invitation list.

Anna Quindlen, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and author of

continues on page 2

continues from page 1

bestselling novels *One True Thing* (1994) and *Black and Blue* (1998) will be the luncheon speaker. The *Seattle Post Intelligencer* has called Quindlen "perhaps the most eloquent voice of the Baby Boomer generation" and *The New York Times* termed her column "a twice-weekly argument that public issues have an impact, both philosophical and visceral..."

"Black & White in a Yankee Town" is the Farmington Historical Society's most specialized project to date. With all research traced back to original primary sources, the study cut through layers of accumulated myth to document the African American presence in the Farmington community since the late 1600s. Research was conducted for almost two years by a team of more than 20 volunteers, many of them members of FHS, under the guidance of three scholars, Stephen Ray, curator of the Hartford Black History Project, Frank Mitchell, coauthor of the Connecticut Freedom Trail audioguide, and Christopher Bickford, author of *Farmington in Connecticut*.

The award has been given annually for 15 years by the Connecticut Humanities Council to one or more "projects that have demonstrated the value of the humanities in shaping our public and private lives."

Two historians, Ann Arcari and Barbara Beeching, shared work done for their Masters' theses. I was privileged to be Project Director, excited to work with historians - full-time and avocational - of such high caliber, and to have the support of the Farmington Historical Society.

The study resulted in an exhibit, "Speaking for Ourselves," which opened at the Farmington Library in February 1998 and has been on tour ever since. The 22-panel exhibit has so far been shown at the Connecticut Historical Society, the Ethnic Heritage Center of Southern Connecticut State University, the Windsor Library, the concourse gallery between the State Capitol and the Legislative Office Building, and five of the six Farmington Public Schools. Students from the sixth school, Farmington High School, visited the exhibit

during its stay at the Farmington Library. The exhibit is scheduled for the Plainville Historical Society in February 1999 and after that can be booked through FHS Board member Charles Leach, Jr. (677-8076). Charles Leach was FHS president throughout the project. Without his support and encouragement, and his skilled help as a researcher, the project would never have been achieved.

Other results of this project include: *Speaking for Ourselves*, a booklet which condenses the exhibit on paper (on sale through FHS at 678-1645 or PO Box 1645, Farmington, CT 06034, at \$5 each, \$4 for bulk school orders); an illustrated map-guide to Connecticut Freedom Trail and other sites in the town's African American history (*free from FHS*); research assembled especially for the project filed in the Farmington Room of the Farmington Library, Monteith Drive including a data bank on more than 200 African Americans who lived or worked in Farmington between roughly 1680 - 1920.

Consultants who worked on the project included Lisa Johnson, exhibit designer, Ted Lindquist, computer consultant, and Jeffrey Mills and Tony Fons, graphic designers. Financial support came from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Connecticut Humanities Council, the Farmington Historical Society, and Otis Elevator Co. •

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

There will be a work day
at the Cottage
on Saturday, January 30.
Please call Peter Bartucca
if you can help.

677-5305

Farmington Land Records Come Home

by Charles Leach

With the help of the Farmington Historical Society, many original volumes of the town's land records covering the years 1856 to 1975 will be coming home again soon from a basement in East Hartford. The records were microfilmed a few years ago, since the town had run out of space for them. The originals were given to the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, but have had little use and are in danger of decay. The microfilms contain almost all the original information from the records, but as with all microfilming, there are bound to be some technical glitches resulting in lost data.

For the historian there is little that compares to working with original materials. They contain nuances of penmanship, erasures, ghostly "pentimenti" and even revealing blots and stains not seen in microfilm. For the genealogist, there is information on family kinship, interactions and important dates. For the local historian, the volumes tell of land use patterns, business transactions, industrial growth and much else. The older books are truly antiques and all will be valued as part of Farmington's heritage.

Records covering even earlier times are also in preparation and are expected to come to the Society. In them, we expect to find the story of the Tunxis Indians' land dealings and land disposition prior to their final out-migration to Brotherton in the west. Since slaves were recorded in the land records along with real estate, we will find evidence of slave ownership up to the early 19th century as well as many records of land ownership of African Americans and Native Americans. We also hope to learn more of the mysterious history of the little Case cottages on Main Street, recently acquired by the Society.

We were reminded of the existence of the ancient records by Town Clerk and former Judge of Probate Ed King, who recognized their importance to the Society and the town. He and board member Charlie Leach are arranging a volunteer "booklift" for later this winter. Can you help? •

~~~~~  
For the genealogist,  
there is information on  
family kinship,  
interactions and  
important dates.  
~~~~~



Remember the Green Book

Don't miss out on the opportunity to own a copy of the 1906 *Farmington, Connecticut, the Village of Beautiful Homes*. This invaluable book has been out of print for decades. It is a wonderful source of entertainment and is filled with information about Farmington at the turn of the last century. It makes a very fine gift for anyone who lives, or who has lived, in the area. Copies are available at Society Headquarters (678-1645) and at the Millrace Book Store for \$39.95.

Farmington: A Mecca for Amistad Pilgrims

Because of the initiative and perseverance of the indomitable Peg Yung, Vice President of the Society, hundreds of people have been able to hear the story of the Amistad captives and to visit the sites associated with their 8 month sojourn here. During 1998 Peg and her docents led at least 40 tours of the Amistad sites; each tour began with Peg's vivid account at the Congregational Meeting House. She shared her records of these tours (*see below*) but was intent that the names of others who made these tours possible be presented first.

Thanks to the Coopers for opening their home, the Austin Williams house, to diplomats from foreign countries and the United Nations. In addition all of the tours visit the grounds of their house to see the dormitory built for the captives.

Thanks also to Brie Quinby and Evan Cowles for welcoming in their home diplomats from Washington, the United Nations and Sierra Leone. The Cowles home is the site where the Antislavery Society was formed in Farmington in 1835.

The First Church of Christ, Congregational, has been generous indeed in making the Meeting House available to these numerous tours. We are mindful that the resulting scheduling conflicts can be a burden.

Docents who have assisted Peg include: Ann Arcari, Victoria Gerent, Jean Johnson, Carol Leonard, Mae Nevius, and Ann Reed.

In addition, Peg and/or Carol Leonard gave presentations at the Groton Submarine Base before 1000 greater New London High School students; at the Office of Diversity, U Conn Medical School; at Tunxis Community College; for the employees of the FDIC (!) in East Hartford.

Peg's latest activities include research on Winchell Smith and efforts to make sure that Farmington is not omitted from the vessel *Amistad's* education program. •

Groups who have made the tour include:

- Diplomats, government officials, and researchers/scholars from Sierra Leone.
- Descendants of Singbe Pieh (Cinque).
- Representatives of the media: a crew from Cox Communications of R.I.; a Chicago film company who produced an Amistad documentary; a crew from Channel 10, Providence, R.I.; reporters for *CT Magazine*.
- Delegates from the World Board of Foreign Missions, the organization founded in 1810 at Noah Porter's house, 116 Main St.
- The CT chapter of the Friendship Force of America, a group which fosters international friendships.
- Three family reunions, including an African American family.
- A group from a Chicago, IL Congregational church who rode all night to get here.
- A bus load of teachers from New York City who made a weekend tour to Amistad sites.
- The Kente African American Cultural Center, New London, CT.
- A terminally ill student from CO brought to Farmington for the tour by the "Make a Wish" TV program.
- The CT Coalition of Bikers.
- Several Girl Scout troops; all fifth graders in Farmington Schools; students from EQUAL, a summer enrichment program; students from Greenwich ; students from Windsor.
- 12 tours for students from greater Hartford arranged by the Capital Region Educational Council.
- 6 tours for High School students from Bloomfield, Manchester, New Britain, Plainville, Windsor, W. Haven
- "Sister to Sister", an African American Sorority.
- A group from Duncaster; Windsor Senior Center; Farmington Deerfield Senior Day Care Center.
- Professors and their students from Norwich Technical College and Trinity College.
- The Jubilee School, Philadelphia PA; the Hamden Hall Country Day School.
- The Stanley-Whitman House docents; groups from Farmington Continuing Education.



Tales from the Past

Former FHS Board President Carol Leonard has recently perused *The Farmington Magazine* and shares with us some of her discoveries. She writes:

Advertisements in newspapers and magazines of past times often provide as clear a picture of a community, its people and their way of life as more scholarly accounts. Leafing through issues of *The Farmington Magazine*, an ambitious and highly informative publication which regrettably appeared for only two years (1900-1902), one finds familiar names but a way of life long since gone. Here are a few examples:

E.H. Deming and F.L. Scott, proprietors of E.H. Deming & Co. (opposite the church) offer "Anything from a needle to a ton of coal at lowest prices." The store also provided local and long distance telephone services. Charles S. Mason, Florist, also boasting of telephone connections, was able to supply villagers with "roses, carnations, violets and chrysanthemums, as well as palms, ferns and other plants for decoration and for sale" from his greenhouses on Garden Street. His son, C. Stanley Mason, carpenter and builder, on Maiden Lane, and Henry O. Wilcox, also a carpenter and builder, on Main Street, had side-by-side ads offering "all kinds of jobbing and repairing." When these two tradesmen had finished their work, one might call upon D.R. Hawley of 126 Main Street for "decorating, painting and artistic interior work."



Knocker", a horseshoe shape in either brass or wrought iron and in two sizes, priced from 50 cents to \$1.25. (These would certainly fetch a significant price today and be a valuable historical artifact. Does anyone have one? Or a photo?)

To further embellish one's home, Jesse Moore (who owned 141 Main Street and lived in the small house behind it—now 2 Hatters Lane) made and advertised "Ye Good Luck Door



And, illustrating the eclectic nature of village shops, the Farmington Drug Store carried banjo strings, violin strings, hot water bottles and sponges. Its greatest attraction, however, might be seen in the line "Courteous Parrot in Attendance." (This store, located in what is now Miss Porter's Leila Dilworth Jones Library on Main Street, was operated by the redoubtable Sarah Jane Adgate with the help of her faithful and loquacious parrot. Stories of this colorful pair will appear in future issues of the FHS Newsletter.)

Advertisement- June 1901:

LEDGE VIEW, FARMINGTON, CONN.

A delightful place for a few guests.

Opened May 15th. Large rooms, broad piazzas, best cuisine, pleasant grounds, walks, drives and trolley rides unsurpassed. Terms and announcements on application to Mrs. S.M.S. Warner, 3 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, Conn., or Ledge View, Farmington, Conn.

(Farmington was a popular summer resort during this period. It drew guests from Philadelphia and other East Coast cities, as well as from the Hartford area. Does anyone know where Mrs. Warner's Ledge View was located?)

From *The Farmington Magazine*, November 1900

Village Notes

In an account of the recent town meeting: the most important resolution was that providing for the employment of highway commissioners to take care of the roads for the coming year and, with it, an appropriation of \$7000 for road expenses.

The road known as Maiden Lane was accepted as a town highway.

It was suggested that the name of New Britain Avenue be changed to one better suited to its rural beauty. Suggestions for an appropriate name will be welcomed. One of our citizens has liberally offered to bear half the expense of putting in order the road up the hill to New Britain.

(After much discussion and a great many suggestions, the name finally chosen was Mountain Road.)

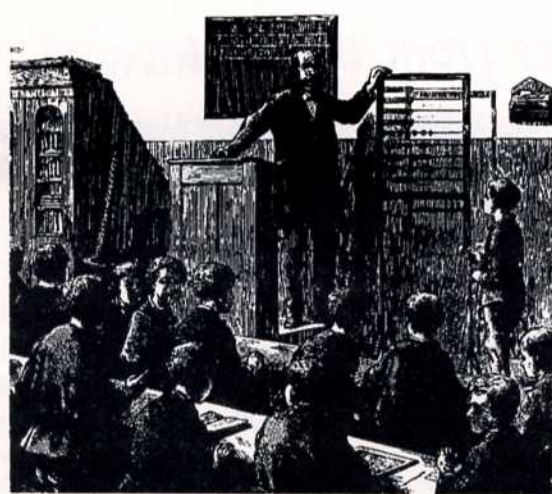
continues on page 6

continues from page 5

In late 1900, Robert Brandegee, who took an active role in Village affairs and was particularly interested in what we would now call "adaptive reuse" of historic buildings, reported on the happy fate of the old North District Schoolhouse, which then stood on what is now the Parsons car dealership. Still happily adapting, the venerable building, now at 771 Farmington Avenue in the Brickwalk Shops, has since 1956 housed Wright's Wine & Liquors. Brandegee wrote, "Our North District Schoolhouse does not seem to like to resign its position as a building for public instruction. Early in the summer Mr. Walter Griffin occupied it as a school of drawing and painting. Now it has taken another turn and has evolved into a girls' club. There are lessons in dressmaking, embroidery, singing, dramatics, sewing and drawing, as well as talks on travel, a regular social evening, and reading. This is the feast prepared for the girls over 15 years of age. No wonder there are already 55 girls on the list. And the poor men still have to sit on the cracker barrels at the store and discuss crops and politics!"

At the turn of the century the holiday season was the occasion for village gatherings, arranged by public-spirited individuals or groups, often to raise money for a worthy cause. Miss Julia Brandegee, the librarian, was always to be found in the midst of these and The Farmington Magazine printed this call for assistance:

There will again be a Grab-Bag at the Oyster Supper. The difference between Miss Brandegee's Goose and the Goose That Laid The Golden Egg is that in this case the Egg must first be presented to the Goose. Please help Miss Brandegee in getting together 400 grabs. *The villagers came through. In January it was reported:* The oyster supper and fair of December 5th yielded nearly \$200, from which some bills have yet to be deducted. The Goose dispensed its 400



golden eggs with great animation and the Grab-Bag corner was the center of attraction as long as the eggs lasted.

Ah, progress vs. tranquillity...1900: If anyone is disposed to question our rapid acquirement of the traits of city life, he needed only to see our streets during the month of November. They were torn up from end to end of the village with all the interference with personal comfort that characterizes our greatest metropolis.

Better days are at hand. New pipes are laid which are large and strong enough to carry a greater quantity and pressure of water. More frequent hydrants will permit the use of hose that will throw a stream large enough and far enough to make our protection against fire greater than ever before. *(Editor's Note: These water pipes are still in use and only this year, 99 years later, does the Unionville Water Co. begin their partial replacement.)*

November 1900 cont.: An appropriation of \$10,025 was made for the schools, an increase of \$350 over the previous year. There are 72 women in Farmington enough interested to vote on the school question. •

Welcome, New Members

From Farmington: Mrs. William G. Abbott III, Mr. & Mrs. Rolf Anderson, Craig & Debbie Andrews, Susan Austin, Stacia Balazy, Carol Breakey & Family, Jean Bozak, Martha and Martin Cadena, Barbara O. David, Katherine Emery & Stephen Silk, Herbert & Dorothy Fishman, State Rep. Demetrios Giannaros, Jann Gougeon, Malcolm & Sue Harpham, Meredith Harris, Jennifer Hill, Kathleen Hunter, Dorothy Kagan, Mark Legowski, Ira & Shelley Malis, Ruth McCarthy, Al & Sharon Mulvey, Heddy Panik, Nancy E. Sager, Sandra & Robert Villanova, Dwight Wadsworth, Morton & Pamela Weinstein, Dave & Suzanne Wogelius, Thomas & LaVonne Wontorek. Welcome also to new Board member Holly Holden.

From Unionville: Clare Kennedy; from New Hartford: Lourena Helt; from Avon: Dr. & Mrs. James Kennedy; from West Hartford: Joy Thomson, Rosemary Wall

From San Antonio, TX: Sarah E. North

All members: Check your mailing label to see if you renewed your membership in June. Use the membership form on the back page to renew. Share this form with a friend and help strengthen our membership.

Thanks to Service Providers

Craftsmen and consultants have provided invaluable help in the renovations already under way in Society headquarters, 138 Main St. Under the guidance of Board member Jim Calciano the following public spirited individuals and businesses have donated time and skill to help the Society begin this challenging task. Their in-kind contributions also help the Society meet the requirement that it match funds provided by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

- Wilber Anderson, WLA Masonry, New Britain** 224-7234
Opened fireplaces. Repaired brick foundations.
- Bob Fletcher, Fletcher Plumbing & Heating, Bristol** 582-4643
Plumbing & Heating repair.
- Tim of AAA American Exterminators, Terryville** 582-9242
Pest and mice removal.



- Rick Fitzsimmons, Diversified Engraving, Bristol** 583-2844
Street Sign.
- PM Refuse Removal & Recycling, Plainville** 747-1335
Donated dumpster needed for repairs.
- Mark Fey, Don Hammerberg, Don Hammerberg Associates** 677-9501
Architectural Services.
- Todd Clark, Blue Moon Design, Farmington** 677-1233
Architectural Services.
- Peter Janouski, Dusty Tails Chimney Sweep & Restoration Services, Plainville** 747-5151
Installed dampers and relined flues.

Officers and Board Members

At the annual meeting in June the Society elected several new officers including President and Second Vice President. Mike Cicchetti and Phil Sampson joined the board, as did Holly Holden in January. Please feel free to call on these enthusiastic leaders if you have questions or comments.

- | | | | |
|---|----------|--|----------|
| Ron Bernard, President, Executive Committee | 677-2870 | Holly Holden, Director | 677-4545 |
| Peg Yung, 1st Vice Pres. Programs and Activities | 677-2754 | Joanne Lawson, Director, Membership | 676-2762 |
| Peter Bartucca, 2nd Vice Pres. Accessioning | 677-5305 | Charlie Leach, Director (past Pres) | 677-8076 |
| Marvin Anderson, Treasurer | 673-5842 | Elsa Morse, Director | 676-1745 |
| David Holmes, Secretary | 677-1132 | Fred Mullen, Director | 676-2974 |
| Jean Johnson, Director | 677-7422 | Ann Reed Director, Newsletter | 677-0611 |
| Ann Arcari, Director | 673-2478 | Mike Cicchetti, Director, Old Schoolhouse | 677-0704 |
| Jim Calciano, Director, Bldg. & Grounds; Auction | 676-8558 | Phil Sampson, Director, New Headquarters Fund Raising | 677-6648 |
| Cynthia Cooper, Director, Publicity | 677-5464 | FHS Newsletter: | |
| Victoria Gerent, Director, Social and Hospitality | 676-9593 | Cynthia Cooper, Graphics; Ann Reed, Editor | |

FEBRUARY 5, 1999

Freedom Trail

Quilt Installation

All members of the Farmington Historical Society are invited to attend a reception marking the installation of the Connecticut Freedom Trail quilts in the Museum of Connecticut History at the Connecticut State Library (across from the state capitol) on FEBRUARY 5, 1999, 6 - 8 p.m. Please RSVP to Ms. Cora Murray 566-3005. The FHS is one of the sponsors of this reception.

Of the 20 squares in the Northwest Connecticut quilt, 12 depict sites in Farmington and were designed, color planned, embroidered and quilted by local artisans.

Membership Form

- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Contributing \$50
- Sustaining \$100
- Life \$300

Checks should be made payable to the *Farmington Historical Society* and mailed to P. O. Box 1645, Farmington, CT 06034

The fiscal year runs June 1 to May 31. New memberships received after March 1 are extended through the following fiscal year

Name: _____

Address: _____

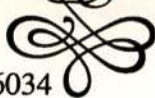
Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

- I am interested in actively supporting the Society.
Please call me to discuss how I might help.*

THE FARMINGTON
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 1645
Farmington, CT 06034



NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 12
FARMINGTON, CT 06032