



THE HULL-CLASE

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER WILLINGTON

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CHRISTMAS IN ENGLAND: FOODS AND OTHER FESTIVE TRADITIONS.

The Willington Historical Society's Christmas meeting will be Tuesday, December 13th at 7:30 P.M. at the Town Hall. The topic will be English Christmas traditions - with an emphasis on holiday foods. Ann Gray, an English native and gourmet cook, will present a program which includes demonstrations of techniques for preparing holiday pastries, and a chance to sample a variety of delights such as short breads, mincemeat pie, and Christmas pudding which she will prepare for the occasion.

Mrs. Gray, who has both studied and taught foreign and gourmet cooking for many years, uses recipes which she herself painstakingly adapted and which she generously plans to share with those who attend the meeting. Her knowledge of English customs derives largely from her own family's holiday traditions, both as experienced directly by her and as remembered by relatives of earlier generations. As one side of her family comes from the

the north of England where New Year's is the focal holiday of the season and the other side comes from the south where Christmas itself is more important, her experience has breadth as well as depth. Fortunately for us, one such family tradition was an abiding interest in excellent food. Do plan to join us on December 13th for this interesting and delicious program!

WORKS OF 19th CENTURY ARTIST SOUGHT IN WILLINGTON.

Mrs. Weigold has recently been in touch with a Mrs. Elizabeth Horton of Prairie Village, Kansas who is researching the life of her great grandmother. Mrs. Horton came to Willington this fall looking for information about Mary Pillsbury Weston, a young artist who stayed and painted here, and married into a local family in the years 1839-1840. The following article is from a letter received by Mrs. Weigold in November.

"Quite by chance, in 1839, the people of Willington had a female artist in their midst. She was Mary Pillsbury, New Hampshire born, who, by the time she was fourteen, had determined to pursue a career in painting. Eight years passed before she dared take the bold steps which would launch her toward her goal. Late in 1833, she left her menial employment in Boston, travelled alone to New York City where she spent a week, then proceeded to Hartford, Connecticut, with a letter of introduction to the Rev. Henry Jackson. She paid for her board and room on this perilous journey by sketching the faces of persons she met.

By watching an artist work, she quickly learned how to prepare a canvas and to grind paints on a plate with a case knife. Before long, she had executed an "astonishing likeness" of a small boy in the Jackson household. A short time later, Squire Rider and his wife, of Willington, visited Mr. Jackson, and upon seeing Mary Pillsbury's portrait of the child, they invited her to accompany them to Willington to paint the Rider family at "five dollars a head". She was to prepare the canvases while her hosts would supply the paints. It was said that during 1839, thirty other Willington residents sat for the young artist. Among them were members of the Jonathan Weston (Jr.) family and the missionary to Burma, Miranda Vinton. Mary boarded at the home of H. Wicseby and was a frequent guest of the Westons.

During the summer of 1839, Mary met Jonathan Weston's widowed brother Valentine, of New York City, and early in 1840 they were married. Mr. Weston encouraged his young wife by providing her with a teacher. Twice she exhibited in New York's National Academy of Design, and later, under the patronage of Mrs. Coventry Maddell, she achieved a degree of fame. From time to time, she and Valentine visited Willington and, in 1854, she stayed at the Jonathan Weston home where her second child was born.

A letter written in 1840 from Willington Hill by Jonathan Weston's daughter, Susan, to the new bride reveals the names of numerous mutual friends. Surely some of these were among the number who had sat for the former Mary Pillsbury. Persons mentioned include Mary Silsbee, Alathia Carpenter who had just married Caleb Burnham, and several of their wedding guests - Charley Rider and Adeline Turner, Franklin and Cornelia (surnames are not given), and Grad Edwards and Emily Merick. The correspondent added that Dr. Carpenter had purchased the Tavern and was living there; Jeremiah Harrison had died in Middleton; and, Moses Dixock had married Bethania Shafer.

Mary Pillsbury Weston was my great grandmother. I have spent years researching the story of her life. Although a few of her paintings are in the family, I always wonder if there are not others which may have survived. They would be difficult to positively identify since they would not have been signed. But, if any of the old families of Willington know the whereabouts of ancestral portraits done about 1839, I would be delighted to know about them."

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NOTE: The Jonathan Weston house is now owned by Mr. Kline and Mrs. Horton has a sketch of it done by her great grandmother about 1841. She is going to send us a copy. The Dr. Carpenter who had purchased a tavern lived in and ran the tavern that is now the house owned by the Edward Williams family next to the Kline's (on the corner).

The Hiram Rider Family (painted by Miss Pillsbury) lived in the house now owned by the Floyd Callwards.

A CHRISTMAS SUGGESTION.

Why not give a Chronology of Willington for Christmas? Any Willington resident or member of a family with roots in the area would be delighted to receive this outline of the town's first 200 years. Since more than half of the copies printed have now been sold, the price of \$6.00 a copy will now go to help the Society to carry out its numerous preservation research and education projects.

Chronologies may be obtained from Isabel Weigold, Telephone: 429 2656.