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HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 5-4 WILLINGTON

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No. 2

REGARDING THE SOCIETY: RESEARCH, PRESERVATION, AND EDUCATION (AND PROCRASTINATION?)

If you are new to the Historical Society you might wonder about our own history and progress.

Establishment of an historical society was an early goal of the Willington Conservation Commission as part of its effort to preserve the town's natural resources. Under the Commission's sponsorship, on September 30, 1968 62 people met at the Town Hall and voted to form the Society. Clyde Hall, temporary chairman, suggested that its aims might be to whet interest and promote pride in our heritage by researching, preserving, and communicating the town's history. This might be done by starting a museum, arranging displays and programs on early town life, preserving historic sites and objects, and writing a town history. He sounded a call for members who would work actively to accomplish these goals.

At the next meeting, Sept. 30, 1969 permanent officers were elected and by Jan. 1970 the Constitution and By-laws were completed, setting up the committees which continue to embody the themes of the Society: Historic Sites and Research,

Finance, Ways and Means, Gifts and Bequests, Membership, Publicity, Library, and Program.

Since then our educational aims have been promoted through four yearly public meetings at which historical programs are presented. Speakers have also gone out to other groups. We have committees writing town history (much of which is still unknown); others gather oral and photographic records directly from people and places in town. About \$1000 has been collected toward these projects as well as eventual maintenance of a building to house the Society and its collection. So far no appropriate "home" is available so our books and other artifacts may be seen at the Public Library where they are stored in boxes. The Society now has 34 paying members. Application for tax exempt, non-profit corporate status is pending.

While a structure for carrying out our purposes has been formed and some functions fulfilled, accomplishment of many important goals is frustratingly slow. If we are to write a History of Willington for our 250th Anniversary in 1977; to provide a repository for items from the town's past which townspeople may wish to have safely preserved yet avail-

for public appreciation; to record the knowledge of lifelong residents and photograph old buildings before they are destroyed, the call for active workers must be re-issued.

HISTORIC CROSSWORDS ANSWERS:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Colonel Hall | 8. Harvard |
| 2. Oyster shells | 9. Glass making |
| 3. Town | 10. Sharp |
| 4. Sand | 11. Amidon |
| 5. Wolcott | 12. Clerk |
| 6. Thread Mill | 13. Loomis |
| 7. Fenton | |

WILLINGTON WINTERS FIFTY YEARS AGO

Many of us were recently given the opportunity to live like it was in the "good old days". Mrs. Emily Burns remembers days in Willington that remind us of our recent ice storm - days before electricity. Fifty years ago most homes here did not have electricity. The first power line was put in by the Rockville and Willimantic Power Co. in 1922 and it was paid for privately by the Frank Parizek Mfg. Co. on Old Farms Road. (The company manufactured buttons and was owned by Mrs. Burns' father.) The line came from Rt. 32 running east along Rt. 44 and down Old Farms Road to the button factory. Mr. Parizek gave the homes along the route the right to tie in to his line shortly afterward, but the rest of Willington did without electricity for a number of years. A few homes had private generators, but most were lighted with kerosene and heated with wood which was plentiful or with coal purchased in Stafford Springs.

And there was not much gas then either - there were only about three automobiles in Willington in the early 20's; therefore, horses were the most common means of transportation. Of course, the roads were not paved, except for Rt. 44, making for a great deal of mud when there was a thaw.

Social life centered about the church, where young people enjoyed numerous activities, including traditional Christmas and New Year's parties. Ice skating and sledding were quite popular. Sliding down Rt. 44 was even considered safe in those days!

If you have wondered how bad the winter weather can get here, we have records of -21 degrees on February 9, 1934; snow on 21 consecutive days in March of 1916 and 83.6 inches of snow during the winter of 1922-23.

("Weather in Storrs and Willington," B.A. Brown, Milestones in Connecticut Agriculture and Home Economics, Vol. 6, Spring 1961. Courtesy Mr. Raymond Burns.)

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

February 13, 8:00 P.M. Town Hall

Historical Society members will be treated to a program of understanding intricacies of spinning and weaving - part of every early American homestead life - work shared by husband and wife and children. Sue Macko will show the technique of wool being made into yarns and Mrs. Jessie Marshall of Coventry, whose interests currently range from restoring her house with her husband, to weaving, will complete the program with the loom at work and share her collection of early woven pieces.

Those of you who have early woven examples, bring them and share their history with us.

The committee has an old fashioned griddle cookie treat planned for the coffee and conversation following the meeting Feb. 13.

Marge Brown
Chairman

WAYS AND MEANS

The Historical Society booth at the St. Jude's Bazaar was quite a success. Thanks to all who donated items for sale or their time at the booth.

The next fund raising event will be in May when we have our annual tag sale. Anything you wish to donate will be appreciated.

Barbara Shaw
Chairman

EXTENSION COURSES OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

There are two new courses offered by the Continuing Education Services at UConn this semester. One is titled "Furniture: Unravelling our English Heritage" and will meet one evening a week for six weeks beginning on March 12. The other is "New England in the 19th Century" and is a 9 week interdisciplinary series also meeting one evening a week. Anyone interested in these courses should call the Office of Continuing Education Services at 486-3235.

GLASS DIGGERS IN WILLINGTON

Inspired by Jesse Brainard's talk on the Willington Glass Factory, some members of the Society braved one of the first-cold days of November to dig for bits and pieces of old Willington glass. Mrs. Russell Sauer was kind enough to let the members dig through her garden. While most of us have rocks in our gardens, Mrs. Sauer has the rubbish of the old Glass Factory to contend with. The glass found there is the characteristic color of that made at the Glass Factory and the shape is that of irregular drips or blobs or glass trimmings.

THE FOUNDING OF WILLINGTON

The area now known as Willington was settled by various families in the early 18th century, some of whom had received the land as thanks for military services. Early settlers came to the region principally, however, under the guidance of Robert Fenton and John Merrick who brought them from Springfield, Mass. Another group is said to have come with a Mr. Holt from Hampton, CT. This pioneer settlement was further enhanced when, on May 20, 1720, this area of about 16,000 acres was sold by the governor of Conn. for 510 lb. sterling to eight men: Roger Wolcott, John Burr, John Riggs, Samuel Gunn, George Clark, John Stone, Ebenezer Fitch, and Peter Pratt.

By 1727 the area had at least the requisite number of inhabitants (592) so that a town could be organized. It was part of Hartford County until Tolland County was established. There is some evidence that the name of the town was intended to be "Wellington" but the writing style of the time was often unclear and "Willington" appears on many colonial records and thus it has remained.

The next issue will include more about the life of these early Willington settlers.

CALENDAR OF LOCAL EVENTS

February 13, 8:00 P.M. Town Hall
A program by Sue Mako and Mrs. Jessie Marshall of Coventry on Spinning and Weaving.

February 16 and 17, 1974
8th Annual Antiques Show, Tolland High School Cafeteria.

March 4, 1974 8:00 P.M.
Mrs. Thomas H. Glennon will speak to the Tolland Historical Society, presenting the story of the Hitchcock chair, Congregational Church, Educational Building, Tolland Green. Interested persons are invited to attend.

GRAPE &

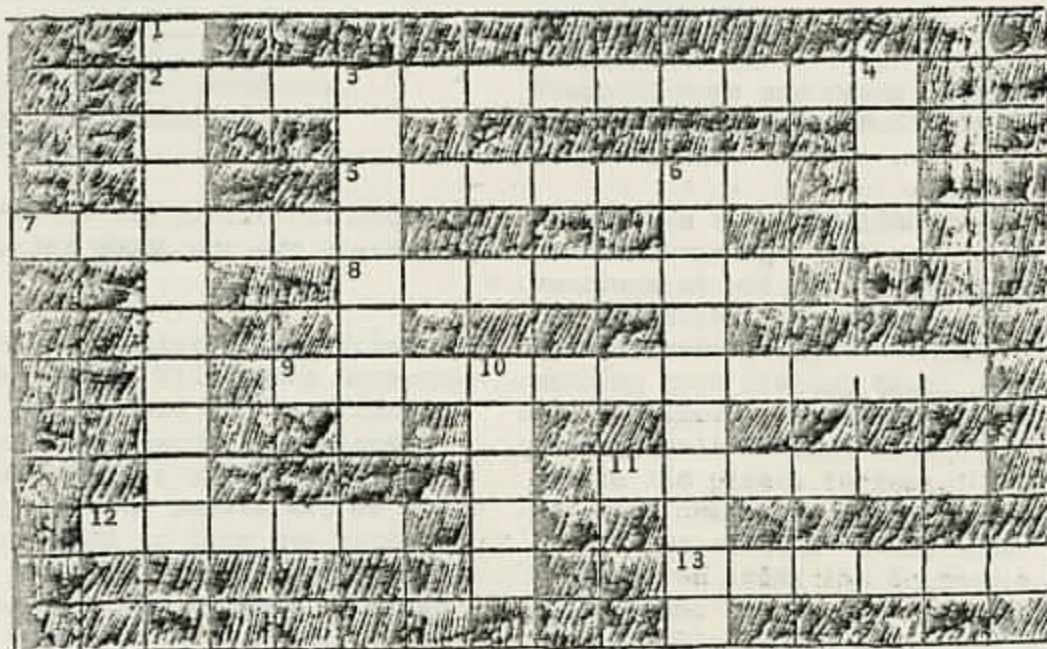


CANISTER.

"GRAPE AND CANISTER"

Have you ever seen this design before? If so, then you can probably help us. This is a facsimile of the masthead of a paper published in Willington in the late 19th century by John D. Taylor of Burma Rd., "Opposed to Rum, Tobacco, and all Evil." Most of our information comes from our one copy, published in April, 1882. We are especially interested in the significance of the paper's name, when and how it was begun, and how long it was published. If you have other issues or knowledge of this or other local publications of the past, please let us know.

HISTORIC CROSSWORDS



ACROSS

- 2. Once needed for buttons
- 5. Rt. 44's early road name
- 7. Family and river name
- 8. Jared Sparks' school
- 9. An early industry
- 11. Nettie is one of the last
- 12. Merrick, first town _____
- 13. Minister and teacher

DOWN

- 1. State senator, with military title
- 3. No longer a church, but still in use
- 4. Necessary item for early industry
- 6. A prominent family business not too long ago
- 10. Grist mill and pond owner

(Answers are on page -2-)