



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WILLINGTON

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TAG SALE COMING UP SOON

The Society's Third Annual Tag Sale is set for Saturday, May 17th, 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. at the Old Town Hall on the Green. Barb Shaw reminds us that used household articles and knick-knacks, clothes, books, records plus plants and craft items, etc., etc. are needed. Everyone will be asked to provide two baked items as well. To donate articles please take them to the Old Town Hall between 6:30 and 9:00 Friday night, May 16th or call Barb at 429-3074.

APRIL, 1775

WILLINGTON ANSWERED THE LEXINGTON ALARM

Thirty-one men from Willington are recorded on the muster rolls of those who went to the relief of Boston during the Lexington alarm of April, 1775. Major Elijah Fenton, a prominent Willington resident, led the contingent of Willington militiamen. There were several other officers on the expedition from Willington. Three men (Ebenezer Heath, Jr., Joseph Merrick, and William Johnson) were captains; there were also one sargent and one corporal among the officers. Apparently the remaining 25 soldiers were privates.

Several militiamen spent seventeen days on the journey to Lexington and back. Other men apparently never reach Lexington because they are recorded as requesting payment for only 3 days travel. The majority of the men from Willington served from 8 to 10 days during the Lexington and Concord crisis.

The Conn. General Assembly later agreed to reimburse the Willington militia with the sum of 57 pounds/19 shillings/1 penny for their services. The soldiers from Willington and other Connecticut towns, of course, reached Lexington and Concord too late to be involved in any fighting. Some soldiers remained in the vicinity of Lexington and Concord for a week and then returned home. Not until June of 1775 when Gen. Isreal Putnam from Brooklyn led a contingent of soldiers to the battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill did Conn. soldiers get a taste of actual combat.

JARED SPARKS BOOKS DONATED

Mrs. Josephine Spees has generously contributed 3 volumes by Jared Sparks to the Historical Society. These include "The Life of George Washington", "The Life of Franklin" (pub. 1850), and "The Life of John Ledyard" (pub. 1828). They will join the rest of our collection at the Willington Public Library, Hall School.

BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION PLANS

The Bicentennial Commission is working towards having the Town of Willington named an official Bicentennial community according to commission Chairman Paul McIlveine.

At the commission's last meeting May 1 Paul reported that he had investigated the requirements for this distinction and learned Willington will have to conduct bicentennial functions in four areas: heritage, horizon, festival and lasting reminder.

The commission's plans to fulfill these requirements include: a pamphlet on town history, which would fall under the heritage category — the commission's newsletter and trips to historic places for the horizon requirements — a week-end of festivities during July 4, 1976 and a Colonial costume ball sponsored by St. Jude's Guild in May 1976, for the festival step — and the renovation of the Town Hall and repairs to the Nipmuck Hiking Trail, to meet the lasting reminder requirements.

To get things rolling, Paul said the commission also plans to ask the Town for permission to conduct fund-raising activities so that the financial burden of bicentennial activities does not fall on town taxpayers too heavily.

This authorization will be sought at the next town meeting, he said. The commission hopes to raise funds through bake sales — a bicentennial brunch at a local restaurant — and the sale of bicentennial plaques.

To encourage donations, the commission has applied for the status of a non-profit organization with the Internal Revenue Service, Paul said. If it is granted, all donations would be tax deductible.

At the May 1 meeting, Mrs. Linda Standish of Old Farms Road was elected program chairman. Members of the commission will be going to various town organizations to request participation in the bicentennial activities.

If you have any ideas for the commission or would like to help them with their endeavors, residents are urged to contact Paul or attend the next commission meeting.

PROGRAM NOTES: WEDNESDAY May 14th

Historical Society members and friends will be treated to some current research concerning Civil War history. Michael Petty will report on his study entitled "The Stars and Bars of Connecticut", a study of the Presidential election of 1860. Mike is a graduate student of history at U-Conn and may also be recognized as the Willimantic Chronicle reporter of Willington news.

Members who have memorabilia of the Civil War period are asked to bring them and share their history the same evening, May 14th, 7:30 p.m. at the Town Hall on the Green.

QUILTING PATTERNS TO BE DISPLAYED

Anyone interested in joining other Society members in quilting for the Bicentennial is urged to attend the upcoming General Meeting on May 14th. Susan Macko has expended considerable effort preparing samples of 3 different patterns as possible designs for the Society's project which was discussed at the quilting workshop last October. These include a double nine square, an 8-pointed star, and a Dresden plate design.

It is hoped that quilting can get started this summer. To do so decisions on pattern and purpose of the project should be made at this meeting. Do we want to donate a "signature" or "memory" quilt to the town or to raffle it (them?) off as a Society fund raising project? Quilters come, look, and plan. If you are interested in the project but cannot attend the meeting call Sue.

CALENDAR OF AREA EVENTS

May 13th — Stafford Historical Society presents film "Resolved to be Free" on Connecticut's role in the American Revolution — Tuesday, 8:00 p.m. Warren Memorial Hall, Stafford Springs.

May 14th — Willington Historical Society presents Michael Perry "The Stars and Bars of Connecticut" — Wednesday, 7:30 p.m. Old Town Hall.

May 17th — Willington Historical Society Tag Sale — Saturday, 9:00 - 2:00, Old Town Hall.

GREEK REVIVAL IN WILLINGTON
THE "BALDWIN" HOUSE

(What follows is the first in a series of portraits of sites in Willington which appear in the Connecticut Historical Commission's survey of buildings in Connecticut which are worth protection and preservation for historic or architectural reasons. Willington has nine such "architecturally distinctive" sites dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.)

"By the way, Mrs. Sorg, did you know that your pillars are at the dump!" And indeed, a trip to the dump verified the fact that the 4 missing Doric columns belonging to the side portics of the high Greek Revival residence on Route 44, East Willington, were there. What an introduction for the Sorgs to living in Willington in a new-old home!

Unfortunately the history of the old house is largely unknown. While it is now called the J.E. Baldwin house from an 1869 town map, it may have originally been in the Parker Family as that family's home is across the street. However, the present owner speculates that it might have been built by one of its owners who manufactured leather goods in Willington in the early 1800's. He sold his wares in the South where the Greek Revival style was very popular and may have been so taken with the style that he had it recreated here.

The house is what Ms. Sorg calls "country" Greek Revival, a poor relation to the many fine examples of the style she has seen all over the South. While the facade at first appears to be ornate, especially for this region, the house is quite stark inside. There are none of the earmarks of wealth that can be seen in its southern cousins such as hand carved wood door and window frames or imported mantels.

The house is one of two classic examples of this style built in Willington and has been described by an authority as the purer of the two; a true manifestation of a Greek temple. The date of construction has been set as somewhere between 1820 and 1840 when this style of architecture was popular in New England, casting some doubt on Ms. Sorg's theory.

The house was built with stringent geometric principles in mind. It is made up entirely of square rooms all measuring approximately 15 by 15 feet. The wings on each side of the house are exactly the same size and have chimneys in exactly the same place as seen from the outside. However, it is interesting to note that the chimney on the left wing appears to be there more for architectural completeness than for function. It does not go through to the cellar and shows few signs of use. If it were used at all, it functioned only as a flue for a coal or wood burning stove. Since it does not go through to the cellar, it is no wonder that the floor sags considerably since that is its only means of support!

The same care for geometric detail applied to the central fireplace. The chimney must be placed at the back and peak of the roof line. However, the fireplace is not on center inside so the chimney was built with a zig and a zag in the attic in order to have it come through the roof at the right spot. When the Sorgs acquired the house they inspected the chimney from the roof and it literally fell to pieces in their hands. They had the fireplace rebuilt but not in the original style.

As you enter the house from the front and center door, the only door now functional, you enter a hallway. To the right stairs leading to the second floor, in front of you the hallway leads back to the kitchen, and to the left you enter the parlor which extends back the entire depth of the house but which may be half closed off by large sliding doors. Ms. Sorg explained that the doors would have probably been closed when family business affairs were being conducted or for courting, leaving the room in the back, which has the fireplace, for the rest of the family. This room next to the kitchen was used as the dining room.

The kitchen is large. It has the original fireplace in it with cast iron hooks embedded in the mortar for hanging pots over the fire. To the right of the fireplace is a functional bee hive oven. Below it is a woodbox and above a small dry cupboard for storing herbs and gunpowder.

In the right wing there is a small room off the bathroom which must have been a storage room. It was shelved on all four walls and the meat hooks are still in the ceiling. When the Sorgs acquired the house, most of the shelves had collapsed and much of the plaster was off the walls. In order to make the room useful they stripped the rest of the plaster off the walls down to the lathe. In doing so they not only exposed an excellent sample of this type of construction, but they also uncovered some intriguing articles which have yet to be explained.

In each of the four corners behind the walls they found three rolls of birch bark. Elsewhere within the walls they found 3 wooden plate-like discs which were smooth except for primitively carved fluting on the borders. And then they found a book, too mouse eaten for much page turning, a dictionary sort of thing on the occult. It contains detailed information on how to interpret dreams depending on what sort of things appear in the dream, how to make a cupid's nosegay, telling fortunes by cards (tarot). Ms. Sorg still has the book if anyone is interested in seeing it. What is the significance of the rolls of birch bark carefully placed in the corner wall? The upstairs of the house is very straightforward. The bedrooms are directly above and the same size as the rooms below.

In the attics above each section the construction of the house can be clearly seen. Huge oak beams pegged together form the upright supports, floorboards with rough, ripped ends evidently sawed almost through and then hurriedly ripped apart as they were not to be used for visible flooring and of course you can see the support structure for the roof made of hickory wood. Throughout the house the floors are of wide chestnut boards, mostly painted, which according to Ms. Sorg was common then. The original first coat of paint can still be seen on some of the less used areas upstairs a dull battleship gray on floors and also on the simple, unpretentious bannister railing.

Ms. Sorg has a small piece of the original wallpaper in the hall with a beautiful black and gold Greek design. It must have been a very elegant hall and stairway.

Throughout the house the original door latches and other hardware are intact lending a feeling of originality to the house often missing in old homes needing repair and restoration. Ms. Sorg has recently sold the home to people who do seem interested in its restoration. Perhaps a revival of the revival is at hand.