



NOVEMBER PROGRAM

On Friday, November 13, we will show a videotape of the "History of the Willington Flea Market". This should be interesting to those of us who have been enthusiastic supporters of the Flea Market for many years.

Following the videotape, Isabel Weigold will give a talk "How to Research Old Houses". This should be enlightening to us and may encourage us to do some research on our own.

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Center School

DATE: November 13, 1987

WILLINGTON INDUSTRIES (cont.): Taken from a thesis written in 1976 by John Goodrich, a graduate of Yale University who lived in Willington during his childhood and early school years.

COTTON THREAD INDUSTRY

For all practical purposes, the cotton thread industry in Willington may be said to have started in 1842. In this year, Origen Hall erected on what was called the "lower privilege", near the Willimantic River, a fulling and cloth dressing mill. Shortly afterward, it was merged into a mill for the manufacture of cotton waddings, and a little later for the manufacture of cotton thread. During the course of these early changes

the business changed its form from a proprietorship consisting of Origen Hall, Otis Dimock and Elisha Johnson. These men operated their plant until 1848 when it was washed away by the flooding of the Willimantic River.

In this same year, Gardiner Hall, the brother of Origen came from Rockville, Connecticut where he had gained a knowledge of cotton spinning.

From 1843 to 1854 no thread mill existed in South Willington. During this time, Gardiner Hall went to work for what was then the Willimantic Linen Company (the recent American Thread Company). In 1854, he formed a partnership with Timothy Merrick and Elisha Johnson and built a new thread mill in the same location as the present one. These men operated their mill until the depression of 1857 at which time they were forced to close.

Gardiner Hall returned to the Willimantic Linen Company and for three years no thread was produced. In 1860, Gardiner Hall's son Gardiner Hall Jr. began operations for himself with a total capital of \$430.00

Shortly after, he took in a partner, Mr. Manning, whose departure for war in 1861 caused a reorganization of the business. Mr. John Champlin and Mr. M. Johnson were taken into partnership at this time, but subsequently both these partners were bought out.

The Gardiner Hall Thread Mill was one of

the first in the country to wind cotton thread on wooden spools. Prior to the use of the wooden spool, nearly all thread (silk, linen, cotton) was wound on skeins which were very practical for hand sewing, but not for the sewing machines which were being developed.

This innovation confronted the company with the problem of obtaining the spools. Since there were no available producers of wooden spools, the company undertook to produce them in the basement of the mill.

An important technological development appeared somewhat earlier in 1835, in the form of a spool making machine introduced by an Englishman named William Parker. Later on a rougher was invented by a Rockville, Connecticut mechanic named Jonas Parker. These and other technological developments along with efficient management greatly facilitated the rapid expansion the enterprise was to experience in the ensuing fifty years.

Around 1875, new additions were built on to the mills, and the "new village," consisting of tenement houses for the workers was constructed. This period of expansion terminated in 1916 with the addition of the bleach house to the mill.

(Next installment - the Ocean Pearl Button industry).

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

Traveling Coat Hangar given by Mrs. Dorothy Rogers, September 1987, dated about 1898.

Mrs. Minnie Cobb donated the following articles: September 1987 -

Miscellaneous papers pertaining to Glass Factory District No. 3 which were mostly receipts for supplies and for teachers' wages from 1901 to 1911. These records were kept by Dr. Frank Converse, father of Minnie, as a member of the School District Committee (30 pieces).

Report of School Committee, Willington Glass Factory District No. 3 - 1904-08.

Photograph of 15 people standing in front of the Gardiner Hall Jr. Thread Co. - probably taken in the early 1900's.

6 postcards - views of South Willington.

4 postcards - showing the ice cutting operation on Hall's Pond with the conveyor system sending the ice to the icehouse.

Margaret and Clarke Ruby donated the following articles:

Official Sesquicentennial Program - 150th Anniversary of Vernon-Rockville. Two hundred Fiftieth Anniversary Tolland Connecticut, Official program.

Arnold's Essay - by Albert Wordsworth by Benjamin Ward published 1925.

New Handbook of Composition by Wooley - 1926.

3 miscellaneous books.

An old tool (yet to be identified) having to do with shoe repair possibly.

Raymond Pike, former schoolteacher in Willington, gave a calendar dated 1965 which he received from one of the pupils - Joe Vesely - depicting his new gas station. Received August 1987.

SOCIETY PURCHASES BOOK BY LOCAL AUTHOR

"The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them" by James A. Slater was purchased and given to the Mary D. Edwards Library in memory of those members of the Society who have died since the establishment of the Society in 1969. They are: Paul Bugbee, Doris Hall McBee, Mary Kline, John Blessington, Albina Blessington, Hazel Sundt, Floyd Callward, Fern Callward, Evelyn Hartley, Emily Zemek. Note: If there is someone we have overlooked, please let us know and we will include them.

The book includes information on Willington's oldest cemeteries, is beautifully illustrated and an excellent resource for our project of photographing and mapping our oldest cemeteries.

SYMPATHY

We extend our sympathy to the family of Marcella Borkowski whose husband, Anthony, died in October.

REUNION PLANS

Ann Amidon is planning a reunion of those who ever attended Potter School. She is interested in learning more about the history of this school but the Historical Society has not been able to find anything to help her. Do any of you know of any interesting anecdotes or have any information, pictures etc.? If so, please get in touch with Ann at Phil's in Storrs.

WILLINGTON'S RESPONSE TO THE RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

In view of our nation's celebration of the writing of the Constitution it is interesting to see how Willington reacted to its ratification. The following quote is from a letter written to Eleanor DuPilka, Town Clerk, by Gaspare J. Saladino, Associate Editor of the "Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution on 24 November 1976.

"Thank you warmly for these invaluable records; they are unique. Probably no town changed its mind on the Constitution as often as Willington. Furthermore, no town considered the Constitution at so late a date as 1 January 1788. The state Convention began meeting on 3 January. Surprisingly, despite the town's disapproval of the Constitution, both of its delegates voted for the Constitution in the state convention. Such an action makes the records you sent all the more remarkable. Our volume including Connecticut will appear by the fall of next year. Again, please accept our sincere thanks for all that you have done. Your efforts are appreciated."

LETTER WRITTEN BY ALICE WALTER WHEN SHE WAS 94 (UNDATED).

Our great grandmother, Persis Robbins, of Eastford, Connecticut who had an intimate Indian friend, a "Neetup", was born in 1734. She married Nathaniel Morse, and set up house-keeping in Willington, Connecticut where father Amasa was born. As a boy he saw the first stove of the area set up. Passersby would stop at the Morse house, to warm up at the roaring fire place, scorning the little fire in an iron box at the last house. At early bed time, the coals were carefully covered in ashes, to be rekindled next morning. If they burned out it meant a trip to the neighbors to borrow coals. Their roaring fire played the Morses false, burning up their house - only one little pine table, rush seated ladder back chair, and a bed were saved.

Grandmother Persis was a robust and capable woman. She bathed in the brook when she had to break the ice; a little shed was built outside a back room window so she could have a shower bath.

Besides the usual duties of a farm wife, washing, cleaning, gardening, cooking at a fireplace, and tending the fire, the only means of heating, she reared two daughters and six sons. Aside from these duties, Mrs. Persis

was a skillful spinner of silk, and flax, and wool. In the attic at Stafford we still have squeezed in a flax wheel, two huge wool wheels, reel, swifts, and hetchel, but the huge beams of her loom have disappeared. She grew mulberry leaves for her silk worms. We have a small lacy purse she made of the uncolored silk, sheets and shirts of linen she wove, and many yards of woolen cloth to be dyed indigo and madder, and butternut brown. Her indigo dye pot stood by the fireplace with the spindle-legged candle stand for the hand dipped candle in its iron hog scraper candle stick.

Carpets too she wove on that loom of strips of worn clothing, sewed end to end for the woof. Odd moments she used knitting the stout family stockings.

Fat from cooking shortened cookies, or made candles, or if too old made soft soap, combing with lye, dripped from a barrel of wood ashes from the fire place. Once a year, Persis sat in her chair on the floor of the big hay barn to shear sheep, or pick down for feather beds from the white geese.

At ninety-four, smoking her pipe of dried mullein leaves, a country cure for asthma, holding me, a baby of four months on her knees, she sat in mother's parlor, waiting to hear the clock strike twelve. On the hour she put me in the cradle, started for her room across the hall and fell dead on the threshold, her pipe unbroken. My life then touches three centuries 1700, 1800, 1900.

This letter was given to the Society by Doris Hall McBee in February 1971.

COMING EVENTS

- Nov. 13 - 7:30 PM Center School, Willington Flea Market videotape How to Research Old Houses
- Nov. 14 - Senior Citizen's Tag Sale at the Senior Center
- Nov. 14 - Hall School Craft Show sponsored by the P.T.A.
- Nov. 14 - Roast Beef Supper at the Federated Church 5:00 - 7:00
- Nov. 20 & 21 - St. Jude Country Christmas Crafts (Bazaar)