



Volume XV

Willington, Connecticut September 1985

No. 1

### SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

Pot Luck supper at 6:30 P.M.

Professor David M. Philips of UCSU will give an illustrated talk, "Graveyard Legends of Eastern Connecticut." A Professor of English, Philips has been teaching courses in folklore and Connecticut studies since 1966. From his students' collections of oral traditions, as well as other sources, he has directed the growth of the Connecticut Folklore Archive, now part of the Center for Connecticut Studies of UCSU.

A graduate of Haverford College and the Johns Hopkins University, Professor Philips is a contributing editor of *Down East*, the magazine of Maine, and an associate editor of *Connecticut History*. He is the author of *Legendary Connecticut*, a collection of folk legends from all over Connecticut, which was published on April 27, 1985.

### COME AND BRING A FRIEND

TIME: 6:30 P.M.

PLACE: Center School Cafeteria

DATE: September 20, 1985

### Our Modernization in a New England Town:

A History of Willington, Connecticut has been very favorably reviewed by John F. Sutherland of Manchester Community College and Jack Larkin of the

Research Department at Old Sturbridge Village. Sutherland states, "Demers' style is both graceful and sympathetic; yet his sympathy is tempered by the objectivity of the outsider. Much of the research for this book was conducted by Isabelle B. Jeigold, but that potentially divisive of labor does not seem to have caused any difficulty....this volume will serve Willington residents admirably. It also deserves attention from scholars of local history. *Modernization in a New England Town* can serve as a model of its genre." John Larkin "...yet if Demers has not written a book on modernization, he has written a local history that has successfully combined traditional compendiousness, a clear and readable style, excellent documentation, and a good dose of the new social history. Researched and written with the variegated needs and interests of its audience in mind, this hybrid town history 'touches all the bases' while avoiding sentimentality and filio pietism. Ordinary people, the poor, later arriving ethnic groups, dissent, and conflict figure a bit more prominently, and more realistically in Demers' Willington than in the traditional town history.

The residents of Willington have been well served by this book; their community is in no danger of losing its past and Willingtonians will find

It frequently illuminated by modern scholarship. Social histories concerned with both scholarship and its popular dissemination will be encouraged by it and will hope for other equally ambitious local histories.

#### OLD TOWN HALL

As noted in the Hour Glass last spring, the Historical Society was invited to become involved in decisions to be made in making the Old Town Hall accessible to the handicapped. Since that time, several members of the society, the Historic District Commission and town officials have been appointed to the CC 350 Task Force - Celebrate Connecticut's 350th Birthday. The main project for this Task Force is construction of a ramp to permit the Old Town Hall to continue as voting place for the town. The Historical Society, in executive session, agreed to act as the collecting and distributing agent for the project with Harold Weigold as Treasurer. The project will be expanded to include repairing windows, etc. as the generosity of the townspeople permits. The construction of the ramp is to begin in September and it will be completed in October.

To show the interest and support of the Historical Society, a donation of \$100 has been made to the CC 350 Millington Task Force in memory of all those members of the society who have died: John Blessington, Paul Bugbee, Mary Edwards, Jr. and Mrs. Neil Goodrich, Charles Kramer, Doris McFee, Jean McDowell, Sylvia Rogers, Mary Svejik, Jessie Tyler, Billie Wallace, Charles Weigold and Alice Woodworth. Individual donations may be made at any time to Harold Weigold or Linda Malach. Frances Daley is offering flowers in exchange for a donation to the fund, and has already collected a sizeable sum.

#### IT PAYS TO READ THE FINE PRINT

The new tape recorder ordered by the Historical Society for use in collecting oral histories flunked its first trial run when it was discovered that the machine is a tape player and will not record! The machine was returned for exchange with no problem, so the tape will soon be rolling with

Georgiana Booth in charge.

Isabel Weigold has been busy researching to determine the oldest house in Millington. This house is to receive a plaque stating the fact from the CC 350 State Headquarters. In the course of her research, Isabel came across an article in an old Stafford Press which stated, under Millington news,

"One of the oldest houses in town was erected in colonial days by Mr. Cyrus Topliff, father of Reverend Stephen Topliff, a Congregational minister, who died in Cromwell, Connecticut a decade ago."

A following issue of the paper contained a letter:

"Editor of the Press: Your Millington correspondent, who is usually correct, and always interesting, is slightly mistaken in stating that the oldest house in that town was built in colonial times by Cyrus Topliff. It was built by Clement Topliff, the father of Cyrus. His son Jerome, the first graduate of Yale college from that section of the state, lost his life in the Revolutionary War. Cyrus was the father of fifteen children, none of whom are now living. He was a man of strong convictions, quite sure to be right, firm and unyielding even in obstinacy. It is related of him that one day, bridle in hand, he proceeded to the pasture in search of his horse. He saw in the distance what he supposed to be the animal, but which, on a nearer approach, proved to be the stump of a tree. But he bridled the stump. It is said that some of his descendants, inheriting his peculiarity, will 'bridle the stump'. The numerous scions of the race are scattered throughout the states and territories. One of them, Mark Colburn, formerly of Stafford, Cal. John Storrs, one of the solid men of Ware, Mass., is well known to many readers of The Press. George Topliff, a native of Monson, who as a boy, worked faithfully in Reynold's mill at six dollars a month, is now a bank president and leading business man in Jamestown, Dakota, and is said to be worth two millions. His brother

rus, holds an important position in the Scientific American office, New York. George L. Topliff, more recently of Monson, has settled in Southern California with his family to "grow up with the country". G. D. Topliff still clings to the native hills, unmindful of richer soils or warmer climes.

It was my privilege last summer to visit the old homestead. Time had dealt gently with it. Fifty years had wrought few marked changes. The well sweep, with the "Old oaken bucket that hung in the well" a half century ago, had been superceded by a modern pump. That was a piece of vandalism not readily forgiven.

#### POT LUCK SUPPER

The September 20 meeting will open with a Pot Luck Supper at 6:30 P.M. Come prepared with a favorite main dish, salad, dessert or rolls. Bring your friends and make this a special meeting to open a new and exciting year. The talk by Professor Phillips of ECSU will follow the supper. If you cannot make the supper, come later and enjoy an interesting and informative evening.

#### COMING EVENTS

- September 20 Pot Luck Supper  
Center School Cafeteria  
Extended Legends of  
Eastern Connecticut  
by: Professor Phillips
- November 15 Wild Flowers of Will-  
ington  
by Harold Weigold
- November 21 22 St. Jude Bazaar

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A special thank you to all who helped in the Historical Society Booth at the Willington Flea Market on September 7, 1965.