



THE HOURGLASS

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

~WILLINGTON

Volume XIX

Sept. 1990 No. 1

SECOND ANNUAL EXHIBIT

Old Town Hall

September 8, 1990

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

John Blessington and Betty Robertson, coordinators for the Fall Exhibit report that everything is shaping up nicely for another excellent exhibit.

Art Exhibit

Marion Doran, Coordinator of the Arts Exhibit, has collected art works from the following:

Michael Cavar	Paul Zelanski
Sheldon Childs	William Outerson
Marion Doran	John Ray
Patricia King Eaves	Bruce Weigold
Harold Weigold	Nancy Bunnell
Catherine Guck	Ted Southwick
Frances Daley	

Photography Exhibit

Harold Weigold, Coordinator of the Photography Exhibit, will be displaying the works of:

John Blessington	Eileen Griffin
Harold Weigold	Kathy Weigold
Virginia Hipsky	William Spooner
Norman Desmarais	

Selections from the Society's Collection

Musical Instruments

Isabel Weigold, Coordinator of Musical Instruments, has collected the following:

Hammer dulcimer	Harmonicas
Mandolin	Banjo
Ukelin	Zither
Mondolin/banjo combo	
Trumpet	Music boxes

Clarinet, owned by Allen Brownlee and played in 1927 in the Willington Scout Band
Saxophone of Nicholas Marco, played in the first Hall Memorial School Band

Drum - owned by Gordon Hank's grandfather dated in the 1800's
Violin - owned by Ralph Pratt who played for dances 1920's - 80's
Edison and Victor Phonographs and records
Sheet music dating to World War I

Crafts Exhibit

Vivian Carlson and Nancy Desmarais are coordinating the crafts exhibit featuring the following:

Demonstrations and Exhibits -

Harry LaBonte - Spoon carving
Ruth Blessington - tatting and crocheting
Lynn Berg - violin construction
Peg Nagy - Spinning and knitting
Lynn Brown - chair caning
Members of the Historical Society will work on a quilt given by Margaret Ruby. The pattern is called "Delectable Mountain."
Kathy Weigold - weaving and tapestry exhibit
Nancy Desmarais - basketry exhibit
Catherine Guck and students - tole work exhibit

Live Music

Marjorie Brown, coordinator of musical presentations during the day will feature:

Czechoslovak-American Club Chorus
King Sisters and Judy Marco - folk songs
Willington Brass Quartet
Combined church choirs including members of St. Jude Church, Federated Church, and Willington Baptist Church - Marlene Carr, Conductor
Barbershop Quartet
The Three Al's on the Harmonica - Al Duhansky, Al Hunyadi and Al Kuchinski

CATHERINE GUCK'S PAINTINGS AND TOLE WORK

We have some of Catherine's paintings promised for display but we would like more of her tole work or that of her students. If you know of someone who has studied with Catherine or who has tole work of their own, please let one of the committee know.

HELPERS NEEDED

The Exhibit Committee will need help in setting up for the exhibit during the week preceding the exhibit. This entails moving all furniture out of the hall and moving in and covering tables. We will also need volunteers (2) to stay overnight Friday in order to insure security since it will not be possible to set up the morning of the exhibit.

Volunteers are also being sought to act as greeters at the door and to work at our booth at the Flea Market. If you can donate an hour to two, please contact Betty Robertson, 429-3451; or Isabel Weigold, 429-2656.

FIVE DECADES OF FASHION

Vivian Carlson and her committee deserve a round of applause for an outstanding show which was presented on May 18th at the Federated Church.

The church was decorated with bouquets of silk flowers made and arranged by Nancy Desmarais and pictures of the original owners of the wedding gowns and other outfits were placed on the window sills which attracted interest before the show began.

Five models presented fashions from 1861 to 1950. The oldest one, modeled by Scott Pallo, was Ediner Hall Jr.'s wedding suit which consisted of a frock coat, velvet plush vest and beaver top hat originally worn in 1861. Five decades of changing fashions in wedding outfits as well as other clothing were presented.

Harold Weigold, wearing his World War II army uniform, received a spontaneous round of applause when it was announced that he was one of the few who could still get into his uniform. The show ended with a grand finale and refreshments were provided for the participants.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

Sept. 21, 1990 - 6:30 PM
Center School - Potluck Supper
Program: Railroads of Northeastern Conn.
(not finalized)

Betty Robertson, program chairperson, has been unable to finalize the program plans for September's meeting since she has had difficulty contacting the speaker. The Hourglass is scheduled to go out three weeks earlier than usual in order to inform members of the Exhibit plans, so it is advised that members look for additional information in the Tolland Times or other local papers the week before the meeting.

Everyone is invited to come to the potluck supper and bring a friend.

GIFTS AND BEQUESTS

Given by Clarke and Margaret Ruby:

Pieced quilt top (handsewn), Drunkard's Path pattern, made in early 1900's probably by Alice Ruby, Clarke Ruby's mother.

Pieced quilt top (Machine sewn) Delectable Mountain pattern an unusual pattern dating to the early 1900's.

✓ Pieced quilt top (handsewn) rectangular multicolored blocks.

✓ Two lacy valentines - one inscribed to Miss Alice Fenton (mother of Clarke Ruby).

✓ Baseball (Scout League) - 1920's
✓ Photo album dating to the late 1800's and other misc. pictures.

✓ Given by Douglas Schenk of Palmer, Mass.

✓ An enlarged photo and short biography of John Green Adams (Doug's great grandfather) who was born in Willington July 11, 1832 and married into the Battey family. He was a Civil War veteran who entered from the town of Brookfield, Mass.

COMMEMORATIVE BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD PUBLISHED IN 1903

Jack Craib of Woodstock has completed the restoration and repair of the large, much used, volume at a cost of \$100.00. Jack is an expert in his field and has extended the life of this volume for another several years.

STORY OF MUSIC IN WILLINGTON

In colonial Willington, the congregation did not know how to read music. The Bay Psalm Books contained the verses to the music but not the notes. In the old custom of "lining out," the deacon would sing a line and the church congregation would repeat it.

The first evidence of music in Willington is provided by one of the early settlers in Willington. George eale, a singing master, introduced the new practice of "singing by rule." It was also referred to as "Regular Singing".

Although a few eighteenth century residents owned musical instruments, the first known orchestra was not organized until 1834 when a six man orchestra was formed in East Willington. Concerts were played in front of John Heath's comb shop. The orchestra consisted of two violins, a violincello, a clarinet, flute and fife.

Four years later a singing school was established by B. F. Taylor on Willington Hill.

After the Civil War, Rufus Weston also established a singing school in town and in 1913 Sara Dunning organized another.

In 1915, the sale of phonographs rivaled the sale of sheet music for the first time and also displaced the piano. Phonographs brought the music of Verdi, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart to everyone fortunate enough to own an Edison victrola.

Early in the 1900's there was a South Willington Band about which we have little information except a picture which indicates that a Professor Wheeler of Willimantic was the director.

The Willington Scout Band was organized in 1927 and played it's first concert for the 200th anniversary of the founding of Willington - (see Allen Brownlee's story).

Many of those who played in the Scout Band later played in the orchestra organized and directed by Alphonse DeCicco in 1931. Al, who couldn't read music and never played

an instrument, was given advice by Du Haig who was a local musician. The 10-, band became very popular and played in ballrooms throughout the area. They remained together for five years and disbanded in 1936.

In the 1960's an orchestra was organized by the Music Director, Norman Garrett, which played for school programs and later at the Memorial Day parade which continues to the present.

Through the years other small bands were organized as well such as the D.J.'s by David Howlett and more recently a band called Spring Fever was organized and directed by James Cavar.

The first music in Willinton was heard in the Congregational Church on the Hill where the congregation learned to sing "by the rule". - in the 20th century there are several churches all of which have music as an integral part of their services and accompanied by the piano, organ or perhaps guitars.

THANK YOU

The family of Harold and Isabel Weigold wish to thank all the members of the Historical Society for their thoughtful kindness and donations in the memory of their son Bruce who died in June.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sept. 3 - 7: Set up for Exhibit in Town Hall

Sept. 8 : Exhibit - 10 AM to 4 PM

Sept. 21: Potluck Supper followed by meeting and program - 6:30 PM

"THE MUSIC MAN"
And the Willington Scout Band
by Allen Brownlee

His name was A. E. Lyman. Most folks called him Bert, and he was well known around those parts as a man who could assemble a band, and could teach anyone any instrument in it. He specialized on the trumpet, himself; quite competently, triple tonguing and all. Maybe with his help we could have a boys' band in Willington!

Well, the kids got their minister and former scoutmaster, Rev. Edwin Sundt, to contact Mr. Lyman and ask him to come and talk to them. He was, if nothing else, a salesman, and he said he could organize a band, obtain the instruments, and have it playing concerts in three months, even if no one could play, or even read music, at the start! And, just like the "Music Man", he convinced everyone that he could!

Now the big hurdle would be raising the money to pay for the instruments, which very few could afford. Rev. Sundt, who had a way of convincing, too, persuaded Rosa Hall, the town's generous benefactor, to pay half of the instrument cost, and it was "Go!" from then on!

One question remained; who was to play what? Of course because of Rudy Vallee, the saxophone was the instrument at the time, and therefore just about everyone's choice. Mr. Lyman handled that one, saying the saxophone was not a classic band instrument, and he didn't want one in the band, at least to begin with. He further made things easier by saying he himself would tell us what instruments were best for us and why, depending on such things as the shape of our lips and our fingers, our teeth, etc. No one seemed willing to play the bass tuba, however, so Ed Sundt considerably became the "oomph-pah" man. It seems incredible, but in one evening it had been pretty well decided who was to play what! So that was how the Willington Scout Band was organized in April, 1927.

Mr. Lyman, who lived in Columbia, came up every Tuesday afternoon, and gave individual lessons to each of the band members. (They were of course expected to practice faithfully all week.) After supper (that's what the evening meal was called in those days), the band assembled for practice, which lasted for several hours. It was fun, partly because of Mr. Lyman's inability to maintain strict discipline. And in spite of all the reasons against it, the band was able to give its first concert on Saturday, July 2, 1927, at the Hall Memorial School. The occasion was the Bi-Centennial Celebration of the Town of Willington, which was a grand event, taking place over two full days, ending with fireworks at 9 P.M. at South Willington. The program was listed as an "Old Folks" Concert, and it didn't matter what the band played, or how well it played. The important thing was, it did play, just three months after the band was formed!

Rehearsals took place on the stage of the "Sunday School" room in the basement of the Hall Memorial Church. In the summer, if the weather was good, the girls would gather on the church lawn outside the open windows, and listen. Mr. Lyman didn't want them inside; they were disruptive enough as it was. All the band members enjoyed the rehearsals, but they also enjoyed the thought of joining the girls afterward!

Well, the summer went by, and then the fall and winter, and the band got better and better. As spring neared, it was decided to give a first anniversary concert, to demonstrate progress. Programs were printed up, with all the band members names on it, as follows: - Charles Todd, Sylvio DiCicco, Gordon Hanks, George Mathews, John Kalas, Herman Usher, Raymond Korner, Stanley Todd, Edwin Sundt, Allen Brownlee, Edward Tomasko, Harry Pospisil, Raymond Kenfield. The concert, which was held on

April 20, 1928, was free, but as noted on the program, during intermission an opportunity was given to those attending to contribute to the band fund. The music was great, featuring marches, medleys, serenades and waltzes, as well as popular songs of the day, like "My Blue Heaven", "Honolulu Moon", and "Among my Souvenirs". Oh yes, and "Ice Cream, You Scream", in which Charlie and Stanley Todd sang a duet. Even Mr. Lyman admitted the performance was, in his words, "Pretty fairly good!"

The band gave lots of concerts that summer, as well as some during the winter, playing in the pine grove, at lake side, in the school, and at church suppers. The following spring, among others was a typical concert in Somersville. The first clarinetist, Allen Brownlee, reported in his diary, "There weren't many there. We got \$15 (split 15 ways)". The band's capabilities continued to improve, and it was asked to take part in the grammar schools graduation that June, and had its picture taken about that time on the front steps of the Hall Memorial Church.

Band practice sessions continued on Tuesday nights, with many amusing incidents taking place. One in particular happened in June, 1929. It was a hot night, and it was decided to have practice outside, on the church lawn. But a thunder shower came up, and it was necessary to retreat to the usual place; the stage of the church meeting room. Soon after playing resumed, the lights went out, due of course to a lightning bolt nearby. They didn't play very well in the dark, but what was really funny was that Mr. Lyman became quite upset, and was certain a trick was being played on him!

One time what appeared to be a dog dropping showed up on one of the seats. It turned out to be only a very life-like plastic replica, and was the work of Harry Pospisil, third clarinet. Leave it to Harry, he wasn't afraid to go all the way; he put it on the bass tuba player's seat, so that when its occupant, who was late, came in, he would see it. The Rev. Mr. Sundt, however, was not to be fooled - he calmly picked it up and asked, "Who does this belong to?"

Well, the Willington Scout Band finally broke up. Original members left for school or out of town jobs, but most of them got together on occasion, as for the "Fourth", or Memorial Day. Some became members of a dance orchestra, called the Blue Blazes, organized by a local man, Al DeCicco, (the older brother of Silvio, a band member), which played professionally for a number of years.

One of the last times the band, or what was left of it, played, was on Memorial Day on Willington Hill, in May, 1938, eleven years after it had been born. Movies were taken on the occasion. They start on the Common, with a close up of the bass drum with its original inscription, "Willington Scout Band - Org. 1927," where a few numbers were played, and continue with the parade to the cemetery, where it played some more. The only old band members that could be rounded up were Charlie Todd, trumpet; Allen Brownlee, clarinet; Stanley Todd, baritone horn; George Mathews, trombone; and Ed Tomasko, who had his saxophone. Mr. Alec Todd played the bass drum. It can't be demonstrated how it sounded, since the movie was a "silent" one, but a picture is worth a thousand words, and at least it looked "pretty fairly good". Perhaps, if he had been there, this description would have been used by Mr. Lyman, the Music Man.

Editor's Note: There have been some interesting stories uncovered as we have been working on the exhibit. Allen Brownlee, who kept a diary when he was growing up in this town, has written the above story which helps to show the importance of individual effort in working with young people.