



## HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER ~WILLINGTON

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No. 1

*Michael E. Bell, PhD.*  
*presents*  
*Vampires and*  
*Death in New England\**  
*1784-1892*



**Date: September 19, 2008**

**Place: Willington Public  
Library**

**Time: 7:00 p.m.**

**Free and open to the public**

**\*As seen on the History Channel**

### **"Vampires and Death in New England, 1784-1892"**

Close your eyes and imagine a vampire... The image that comes to mind probably is that of Bela Lugosi in the role of Dracula. Since 1897, when Bram Stoker published his novel, the Count has dominated our imaginations.

But another kind of vampire survived in outlying areas of New England more than one hundred years before Stoker put pen to paper. Michael Bell relates the stories of rural families who dug up the bodies of their loved ones and burned their hearts to save the living. These ordinary farmers, who were confronted with an illness that medicine could neither explain nor cure, blamed the dead.

Bell summarizes his quest for this authentic vampire tradition, detailed in his award-winning book *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001), that has led him into the field to conduct interviews, find cemeteries and gravestones, and even investigate archaeological digs.

He also searched published local histories, colonial records in town halls, old newspapers

on microfilm and genealogies in libraries. In *Vampires and Death in New England*, Bell takes you on a journey where folklore and medical science meet to explain New England's vampire tradition. Your image of vampires will never again be the same. **And Willington can boast of having the first documented vampire exhumation in New England!** For a preview, check out p.305 in *Modernization in a New England Town: A History of Willington*.

Michael E. Bell has a Ph.D. in Folklore from Indiana University, Bloomington; his dissertation topic was African-American voodoo beliefs and practices. He has an M.A. in Folklore and Mythology from the University of California at Los Angeles, and a B.A. in Anthropology/Archaeology, with M.A. level course work completed in Archaeology, from the University of Arizona, Tucson. Since 1980, Dr. Bell has been an independent public-sector scholar. He has also taught in departments of folklore, English, American studies, and anthropology at colleges and universities.

He has served as a scholar or consultant on numerous projects, which have taken a variety of forms, including primary research, exhibits, publications, school curricula, workshops and lectures, festivals, performances, and media productions. In addition to many state and local grants, project funding sources have included the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian Institution.

Dr. Bell has a variety of publications and media productions on topics ranging from the magical properties of the black cat bone to the occupational folklife of shellfishing on Narragansett Bay. His book, *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001), was a BookSense 76 Pick and winner of the Lord Ruthven Assembly Award for Best Nonfiction Book on Vampires.

Please join us on **Friday, September 19<sup>th</sup>** for this free presentation.

**COME AND BRING A FRIEND!!**

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## WILLINGTON HISTORICAL TRIVIA

What IS IT?

WHERE WAS IT?

WHAT DO I REMEMBER

ABOUT IT?

**VISIT US ON THE GREEN AT THE WILLINGTON FLEA MARKET ON SEPTEMBER 6th!!**

**Books, maps, notepaper, etc. for sale**

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## ANNUAL MEETING

**September 19, 2007**

The Annual meeting of the Willington Historical Society will be held on September 19, 2007 at the Willington Public Library following the Vampire presentation and a time for book signings and refreshments. The main order of business will be the election of officers. Our by-laws state that the positions of **Vice-President** and **Secretary** are to be voted on at this Annual Meeting to fill a two (2) year term. At that time nominations will be accepted and voted on by members in good standing of the Willington Historical Society. If you are unable to attend the meeting, feel free to mail in your nominations for the offices to be voted on to our PO Box 214, Willington, CT 06279.

Current Officers:

President: Bob Shabot

Vice President: vacant

Secretary: Thelma King

Treasurer: Sue Schur

Program Chairperson: Michael Emmons

Following elections, any other old or new business may be brought to the floor for consideration and discussion.

President Bob Shabot will address the membership as to the latest movement in the Society's quest to acquire the old tavern on the Green (The Williams House) as a Town History Museum and historic educational and learning centerpiece

Members of the Society are encouraged to participate in the electoral process, since the Society is only what we the members put into it.

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## HAROLD WEIGOLD SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

Received by Mary O'Neil and Lisa Pinatti at  
the Eighth Grade graduation in June

Mary O'Neil and Lisa Pinatti were selected by the Eighth Grade Social Studies Team at Hall Memorial School to share the Harold Weigold Scholarship Award based on their outstanding performance in that area. As a team in sixth, seventh and eighth grade, they earned three first place awards for History Day at the state level. Congratulations and Best Wishes to the two of them as they begin their freshman year of High School.

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## Reminder of Membership Renewal

This is a reminder that the time is here again for renewing your membership in the Historical Society. Our annual membership covers the dates from October 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year, and helps defray the cost of printing and mailing this newsletter. Dues also help in the presentation of programs of interest to the community (the Vampires and Death in New England, for instance), as well as the acquisition and maintenance of artifacts and information of historical significance.

Your mailing label will help remind you of your status. The symbol \*L\* indicates you are a life member, and you need not send in anything except change of address information as necessary. Numerals that follow your name indicate the month and year that your membership expires (i.e. 9/08, indicates you are in good standing this year.) In the case that you have prepaid several years in advance the date on the label reflects when the membership expires. Please make checks payable to Willington Historical Society, and mail them to Box 214, Willington, CT 06279

A membership form is included with this newsletter.

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## "From the President's Desk"

Perhaps you became a member of the Willington Historical Society because you appreciate the uniqueness of our small New England town and its history. As an organization we are interested in preserving our history and offering education to others interested in it. However, we need ideas and inspiration and even more importantly we need the involvement of people like **you**. We welcome people to contribute their time and energy in areas of program development, archival organization, acquisition of a permanent home, or as a volunteer to be an officer of the organization.

We'd like to remind you that our website is at: <http://www.geocities.com/willingtoncthistory/>. We would welcome someone who has the expertise to help maintain this website in order to promote the Society and its activities. This quarterly newsletter would also benefit from writers, contributors and editors. On a continuing basis, the state of CT is sponsoring a barn survey that asks volunteers to photograph and identify barns in the community. We have additional information concerning this important project.

As you can see there are a lot of areas that need OUR attention on an ongoing basis. Please consider helping in whatever capacity interests you. It is our town and our history and it's wonderful to celebrate it and preserve it for future generations.

You will notice on the membership renewal form, a check list of a number of activities that would help the Society. Please, won't you consider donating your time and talents to an "historic cause?"

See you at our next meeting.

Bob Shabot, President

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## Acquisitions

### Paper Treasure Trove Donated To Society

Many thanks to Jane Foxall of Wethersfield, CT for her thoughtful donation of personal letters, business records and other documents pertaining to Mr. William Shaffer of Willington.

At first glance the accumulation of old paper from the 1820's-1872 is much like other collections from



the period until you realize that William Shaffer was one of the owners of the Willington Glass Company. The accumulated papers give an interesting glimpse of life experiences from a Willington family and business man of the 19th century.

The following are a few selected examples:

\* Letters of Aug. 31st 1839 and March 14th 1844, asking Mr. and Mrs. Shaffer for their daughter(s?) hand in marriage.

\* Letter dated march 9, 1840.....Gilbert Turner & William Shaffer purchase one eighth of all real & personal property that belongs to the glass Mfg. Co. ....as two glass factories, a number of dwelling houses, one store, sheds and a number of other out houses .....agree to pay the company the sum of 1,880 dollars....

\* For the first time we have a stock certificate issued by the Willington Glass Co. It accounts for 40 shares in the company that were assigned to Mr. Shaffer, with a value of 25 dollars per share, issued in 1847. The certificate is signed by Elijah W. Carpenter (secretary) and Harry Merrick (president).

\* Bill from W. G. Formen, N. York, for south Brooklyn lime, 90% Soda, Morris River sand and marl for bottle green.

\* Some documents are accountings of the various work done for the company, from wagon repairs to shoeing oxen for 34 to 92 cents.

\* 1825 Paid rent of 30 dollars for... dwelling house, 26 months, to the Coventry Glass Co.

\*March 25th 1833, No. 11 Highway Survey, a list of town (Willington) highway tax "of five cents on the dollar" granted in town meeting, the purpose of repairing the highway. Work to be done at eight cents an hour for man and team.

\* 1843 billing for extracting a tooth, 17 cents, and other medical visits, advice & medications for family members. The total bill of \$8.08 was reduced by 34 cents for receiving 1/2 bushel of buckwheat from W. Shaffer.

\* Oct. 1846 Wm. Shaffer to R. Sharp, Saw 32 ft. timber, 32 cents, split 3 logs into posts, 15 cents.

\* 1872 for transporting furniture from Hartford, \$2.85 C.O.D. (Vermont Central Railroad) on railroad letterhead.

\* His list of taxable property for the year 1850, totals \$3,880.

\* Land Deeds to him dated from 1825 - 1872.

\* Sept. 23 1863, Elisha Shaffer exempt from military duty after paying \$300.00 for the term of the present draft.

.....the Shaffer papers came to Ms. Foxall in a tin box she had purchased at auction in Wethersfield 20 or so years ago.

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## COMING EVENTS

September 6 –Willington Flea Market, 9:00 a.m – 3:00 p.m.

September 19 – **Vampire and Death in New England, 1784-1892** – Community Room, Willington Public Library, 7:00 p.m.

September 19 – **Annual Meeting** of the Willington Historical Society - Community Room Willington Public Library, immediately following the Vampire presentation. Please stay, vote and hear the latest status of museum acquisition and other pertinent information.

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