



It's a good thing!

If you are driving by the Darling house these days, don't be alarmed. The house is wrapped in tarps and the windows are boarded up, but not to worry, it is only temporary. We are in the midst of a painting and window restoration project led by historical society member and town resident Leland Torrence, Executive Director of the Guild of Fine Craftsmen and Artisans which has partnered with the historical society to help preserve our wonderful museum. With funds from the town and the historical society and, we hope, grant funds for which we have applied, we are removing lead paint, priming and repainting the siding as well as restoring the wooden window sashes and replacing broken panes. This is an expensive but necessary capital project that will not only help to preserve the Darling House but also improve your experience when you visit the museum. We would welcome your donations to help us complete this extensive project.

Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society, Inc.

1907 Litchfield Turnpike
Woodbridge, CT 06525

www.woodbridgehistory.org



18th Century Printer's Device

Woodbridge, Conn: Printed and Sold by Jason Morrill & Alexia Belperron,
Printers to the Society. MMXV



Upcoming Events

July 19th, Sunday 2-4pm Open House:
"Cold Hearth Cooking" making (and
tasting) ice cream and butter

September 19th, Saturday 8-2pm Annual
Tag Sale-Look for notices about
donating items or reserving your own
table.

October 18th, Sunday 2-4pm Open
House

November, Tavern Night-stay tuned for
a specific date

December, 6th, Sunday 2-4pm Holiday
Open House



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AMITY & WOODBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

Summer Newsletter

June 2015



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Barbara Baldwin and Beryl Woodbridge-

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A Visit With Reverend Benjamin Woodbridge Descendent Beryl Woodbridge-Harmon

In a trip back into time, Beryl Woodbridge-Harmon came to Woodbridge, Connecticut on Monday, May 11, 2015 to learn more about the history of her ancestor, Reverend Benjamin Woodbridge, the namesake of the town of Woodbridge. She currently lives outside London and still has roots in Wiltshire, England and regularly visits with her long-time friend, Barbara Weinberg, who moved from England years ago and currently resides in New Jersey. She first contacted our town historian, Dr. Marvin Arons who notified the town library. Her first stop was at the Woodbridge library where Beryl and Barbara met with Barbara Baldwin from the First Church of Christ and Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society, Laura Marcella, reference librarian, Eric Werthmann, library director and Barbara Hagan-Smith, from the library and Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society.

Beryl has 2 brothers (now deceased) and one sister and received a large notebook of genealogy from her 83 year old brother before he passed on. She was still working her way through the book. She remembers a visit from Woodbridge resident, Gerald Langelier when she was a young woman and still had his letter of introduction to her family. She didn't grasp the importance of that visit at the time. Gerry is a long-time member at the First Church of Christ and was tracing Rev. Woodbridge's history while traveling in England.

She was able to take a picture of the Rev. Woodbridge headstone located in the case in the library and was presented with books on The Parish of Amity Parts I & II by Reverdy Whitlock, Historic Woodbridge, second edition and the Woodbridge Bicentennial Booklet for information regarding Rev. Woodbridge. After a tour of the library, they viewed the grounds and the sanctuary at First Church of Christ, and the stone marking the spot where the church had been in Rev. Woodbridge's day. After a lunch at Blue Check Deli, there was a tour of the Thomas Darling House on 1907 Litchfield Turnpike to see the chairs that had been used by Rev. Woodbridge at church and in his home. The tour of Woodbridge finished with a drive north on Litchfield Turnpike because Beryl had read Simon Donato's online article on "History of the Woodbridge Flats in the West River Valley" and was interested in seeing the area referenced in the article.

Everyone had a wonderful time exchanging stories and history. They were particularly interested in attending a Tavern Night at the Darling House and hope to visit again someday.

Getting to know you

Dear Members,

I am writing to introduce myself to you as the new president of the AWHs. As many of you may know, Don Menzies retired in May, after 21 years as president of our organization. Don has embodied the organization for decades and is a wealth of knowledge about our local history and architecture, so luckily he isn't going too far away. He will remain on the board, host our Tavern Night events, and continue to be an integral member of our society, but he will finally get to enjoy a much-deserved break from running all of the day-to-day operations of the society.

In stepping into the role of president, I have been torn between feeling somewhat like a small child trying to wear her parents' shoes which are way too big, and alternatively feeling like Don has made it so easy for his successor because he led by such great example.

I first volunteered with the AWHs back in 2000, when I read in the Amity Observer that they were looking for docents for the Thomas Darling House. Don, himself taught me about Thomas Darling and also about our wonderful house museum as well as the collections within. Back then we used to open the museum every Sunday afternoon, but dwindling attendance forced us to reduce our hours of operation, and also challenged us to think of new ways to make the museum more relevant for all of you. We will now have quarterly open houses (see our schedule of events) on the third Sundays of March, July, and October, in addition to our traditional holiday open house, the first Sunday in December. Our open houses will also be more interactive; we will have hearth-cooking demonstrations in the colder months, and ice creaming making in July. We will also try to highlight different items from our wonderful collections at each open house.

After a year or two as a docent, Don encouraged me to join the board of directors. I was happy to do so, as I wanted to play a more integral role in preserving our local history and sharing it with others. Since then I have enjoyed working with all of our board members, and getting to know some of you at our events. I am looking forward to meeting more of you at our open houses and other events. We would love to see you not only at our events but if you are interested, to become more involved by volunteering with us.

Although Don's shoes might be too big for any of us to fill, he has set the historical society on a very sound footing, has established wonderful programs such as Tavern Night and the third grader fieldtrip, and has taught us all how to lead. So in that sense, he has made my job "easy". I was taught by the best, and plan to continue all the initiatives he started and to work with the board and all of you to find new ways to make history and our museum relevant, interesting, and fun for all, as well as working to ensure that our local history is preserved. I won't try to fill his shoes (no one can), but I will follow in his footsteps.

Thank you for supporting the AWHs
Alexia Belperron

Transformations and Confrontations Continued from page 3: The persistence of the idea of the typical New England village represented an effort to fabricate a culturally and coherent idea of America. The tradition of the New England town like Woodbridge was made in America. Americans created it and still cling to it; but can the myth continue to re-invigorate a suburban cultural landscape in transformation? Although many colonial homes were lost to fire or development, Woodbridge still boasts over 100 historic houses as described in the Historic Woodbridge, An Historic and Architectural Survey book. How will the current 9,000 residents continue transformation while preserving these unique buildings and vestiges of rural landscape?

Woodbridge Transformations and Confrontations

In 1911 a brochure published by the Woodbridge Civic Association described our town as "colonial, quaint, unassuming and beautiful". This was the period of the "Colonial Revival" when Americans looked retrospectively and perceived a simple lifestyle with traditional family values and a homogeneous population. It was a vision of social stabilization and non-diversity. What was the actuality of our town's history?

In 1708, the Congregational Church of Connecticut adopted the Saybrook Platform that guaranteed orthodox Puritanism in Connecticut, which created an ecclesiastical constitution that restricted religious freedom and negated religious toleration. It was not until 1730 that there was partial acceptance of Baptists, Presbyterians, Anglicans and Quakers. Creating the original Amity Parish was no easy task. Multiple petitions were sent over many years to the New Haven Ecclesiastical Society before they created the Fifth Parish in 1738 for Chestnut Hill (Woodbridge). It encompassed present day Woodbridge, Bethany and parts of Beacon Falls, Naugatuck and Milford. More controversy followed as Bethany area residents demanded their own parish which was granted in 1755. It took until 1923 for the first Catholic church to be built in Woodbridge 1923 and the first synagogue in 1961.

Another area of transformation and confrontation centered on slavery. In 1790 there were 2,648 slaves in Connecticut, but by 1840, only 54 slaves were documented. Slavery was abolished in Connecticut in 1848. This major step forward did not mean immediate harmonious "co-existence". In Woodbridge in 1840, the black free men held a meeting in Hotchkiss Tavern on Amity Road followed by a parade. Not only were they pelted with stones and fruit, but also tormented with racial epithets and some were knocked off their horses. In contrast, 20 years later two Afro-Americans from Woodbridge, Junius Payne and Henry Williams, served in the Union Army in the Civil War.

Like much of New England, the economic backbone of our town was agriculture. Vegetables and grain were grown, and dairy farming and milk production remained the chief commodity into the early 1900's. By this time, most of Woodbridge was deforested. The multiple stone walls on our land not only were farm boundaries, but also testified to the glacial age here and our sparse soil. After the Civil War, many Woodbridge farmers were drawn to the 30 inch deep soil in Connecticut's "Western Reserve" in Ohio, causing our population to drop from a high of 2,124 in 1790 to 829 in 1880. This trend reversed in the early 20th Century when Woodbridge became a convenient location for large summer homes. Then in the 1920's and 1930's came sub-divisions for single-family homes. Those developed by Leroy Fraser were encumbered with covenants and restrictions against certain religious and ethnic groups. Only after World War II did diversity creep into Woodbridge. That's when Jews could purchase land from some, but not all real estate agents. Italians also experienced selective discrimination. In the early 1900's, many Italian immigrants settled in the Flats where the soil was rich and conducive to market gardens. In 1931, the Woodbridge board of selectmen attempted to have the Flats and all its inhabitants annexed to New Haven! Since then the market gardens of the Flats have yielded to development, but Shepherd Farm, Merry Mountain Farm, Massaro Community Farm and the farm at the Darling house carry on the town's agricultural heritage and offer fresh produce.

Our open space, or concept of public land, commenced in 1907 when Sperry Falls was donated to the town. Newton Street's 1928 donation of 92 acres created Alice Newton Street Memorial Park, maintained by the Woodbridge Park Association, one of the three oldest not-for-profit land trusts in the state of Connecticut. Since then the Park has grown to over 100 acres. The Woodbridge Land Trust was formed in 1964 for conservation, preservation and protection of the town's natural resources. *Continued at the end of page 2.*