

AMITY & WOODBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

Fall Newsletter

November 2000 No.4

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Society Receives Largest Bequest In Decades

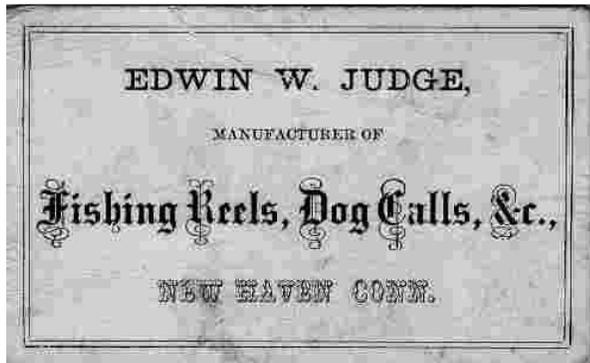
(Ed note: This article contains excerpts from a story by Don Menzies, which appeared in the Nov 8 edition of The Amity Observer)

Elsie Ford was definitely from the "old guard". You could have characterized her as determined, sometimes stern, and as honest as the day is long. She had eyes that could twinkle or pierce right through you. Fortunately, I only saw the twinkle. She lived most of her 93 years in her beloved Woodbridge. She lived in two houses over those years. The first was built about 1750 and the second one shortly after 1800. She was a pillar of the First Church of Christ on the Green. She strongly supported the work of various community service groups, though I always liked to think she had a particular fondness for the Historical Society.

When you lose someone like Elsie Ford, you can almost feel your connection with the past go slack, like a gradual losing of your grip on something you are not quite ready to let go of. You start to think of all the things you never got to ask her about. At the same time you become more grateful than ever for the things you *did* learn, and for the special items she willingly donated to the Society.

Little did we at the Historical Society know...indeed, little did any of quite a number of other organizations in Town know just how much thought Elsie put in to how she might continue to help us, long after her work in this life was done. Some years before her death, Elsie Ford constructed an intricately detailed will, naming approximately 40 benefactors. To some she left a specific dollar amount; her way of acknowledging and confirming her love for dear family and trusted friends. To others like us she left a percentage of her estate. She did this to insure a bequest that would allow the recipient the means to provide a significant contribution to the community. We were astounded to learn that our portion amounted to over \$13,000.00!

With this gift, we are converting one room in our caretaker apartment at the Darling House into a fire retardant, highly secure, and environmentally safe archival storage room, which will be named in Elsie's honor. Our poorly organized collections of documents and photographs will finally get the controlled storage conditions they deserve. In fact, the work is almost complete and the room should be open on Dec 3rd. We believe that Elsie would be very pleased, and probably had something like this in mind all along. She trusted we would figure it out in time, and then provided the means to insure success. We won't let you down, Elsie.



Mr Judge's house and factory were at the confluence of the Sargent & West River. (A&WHS archives)

One Small Step for Cyberspace, One Giant Leap for A&WHS

Well we did it. Thanks to a one thousand dollar grant from SNET/SBC, through their "Museums for the Millennium" Program, we have joined the ranks of dozens of Historical Societies around the state and gone "online."

Under the talented and competent computer skills of Gary Alexander of Hamden (who also helped design our newsletter), we have a site which rivals the best of what is out there. We encourage you to check us out and sign the "guest book". You can find out what events are coming up, or what projects are going on. For someone who doesn't know us at all, they can learn about our history, how to become a member, and how to get to the Thomas Darling House. It is an attractive site, and easy to "navigate" in. Missed one of these newsletters? You can find all the past issues at the website. We are also connected to other related sites by way of "links". You can go right to the Town of Woodbridge site, the Connecticut Historical Society, or The New Haven County CT GenWeb Project (a great place for local genealogical research). Why- for heaven's sake- you can even go right to Yankee Magazine's Community Partner's website and subscribe to Yankee without even licking a stamp (see next article)! Will wonders NEVER cease!

South School Qualifies for Yankee Magazine Fundraiser

It may almost seem like "old news", but we would be quite remiss if we did not feature an article on being accepted into Yankee's "Community Partner's" Program.

Thanks to all of you who responded to our "Newsletter Extra" this summer, and sent in your subscription. For those who didn't... it's not too late! In fact, as a special incentive, *anyone who purchases a subscription at the Holiday Open House will receive a free bonus packet of gifts from Yankee.* This will include a sun catcher ornament, a Bed & Breakfast Guide, and Yankee's 2001 Calendar of New England scenes. For \$20, you will get all that, plus a year of Yankee, and a "Church Supper" cookbook. South School will get \$10 of each subscription. This works for new subscriptions, renewals, or (Holiday) gifts. **We'd love to find a local business that would like to give them as gifts to clients or employees.** We sold 55 subscriptions in our first quarter. Because we exceeded 50, we get a \$100 bonus. According to our calculations, this means we made \$650.00 for the restoration of the schoolhouse. See how easy it is? We've said it before: "Drops of water, turn a mill--many stones can form an arch."



Mr. Clark started making matches in 1835 in Woodbridge. He was only 21. His house and other buildings connected to the business still stand. He held over a dozen patents. (A&WHS archives)

Boy Scout Troop 907: Thanks for cleaning and painting the fence at the Darling House. It looks GREAT!

Two Properties Added to The National Register

April 7th was a very good day. Late that morning, a small crowd of people gathered on the front lawn at 555 Amity Rd. for a very special event. Congressman Jim Maloney was among the honored guests. He was there to officially proclaim that the Castle/Russell House had been named to the National Register of Historic Places. This wonderfully restored Greek Revival farmhouse, built about 1840, is the home of Richard and Eleanor Jones. It is only the second property in Woodbridge to be so listed. The Darling House was named in 1973. John Shannahan, head of the State Historic Commission was on hand, as was Roger Harrison, our First Selectman. Ellie is past President of the Society, and currently our Corresponding Secretary.

With much less pomp & circumstance, the Cement Kiln at the corner of Rt.69 and Dillon Rd. became the third property to be listed, this happening in early October. We will start looking for ways to stabilize the structure before it “all falls down”. Built about 1876, it is still a major landmark in town. You can find pictures and information about this rare example of 19th century industry and intrigue at our website.

The Parish of Amity II by Reverdy Whitlock

In 1982 Reverdy Whitlock published a history of the First Church of Christ that chronicled the life of the Town from it's earliest years, all the way up through the 19th century pastorate of Sylvanus Pratt Marvin. The Marvin years ended in 1904, leaving a whole century of stories untold. Until now. At long last the circle is complete. The symphony is finished. In his own inimitable and eloquent style, Mr. Whitlock has finished the task he started in the 1980's, and brought the story of the Church up to the present day. To be published in 2001 as a joint venture between the Historical Society and the Church History Committee, you can reserve your copy now (if you haven't already). The price of this nicely designed hardcover is just \$30. Ownership of Reverdy's hard-to-find first book on Amity Parish is not required. (Ed. note: I did see 2 nice copies of it up at The Book Barn in Bethany a few short days ago). Amity Parish II quite easily stands on it's own. Call Barbara Bradley (387-3213) or Grif Bedworth (389-9974) for more information.

We welcome LISA FLAHERTY of Beecher Rd. to our Board of Directors. From day one, Lisa rolled up her sleeves and has worked on several projects, including development of our new website. We're glad she's here!

Marginalia, (or, fragments of thought)

I can't recall a busier time in my life. There is so much going on at the Society that I don't know whether “to fish or cut bait” as the expression goes. We've gone through some changes this year, some good and some I'd just as soon forget about, but we've survived (so far). I don't know what I'd do without Polly Schulz. You may think I'm runnin' the show but believe me, it just wouldn't happen without Polly. Combined with a superlative Board of Directors, we continue to make a difference in Woodbridge. We bring history to life for all ages, and now we bring it right into their homes through the Internet. We have started a fledgling Docent Training Program, allowing members of the community to learn about their local history and impart that knowledge to others during tours of the Darling House. We hope to expand that program to include the bringing to life of our new Archival Conservation Plan, utilizing the skills of local residents in a variety of ways. We need to organize and catalog our expansive collection of photographs and documents so that they can be more easily accessed. With your help, it will happen.

A few more individual “thank-you's” are in order. Thanks to Elaine Allen for her YEARS of service as Recording Secretary, and also to Muffy German for stepping up to the plate and taking the job (again). Muffy was Secretary years ago, and her “leave nothing out” approach makes for meticulous minutes.

For as far back as any of us can remember, a Peck (actually, a Stuart Peck), has been Treasurer of this Society. After untold years, Stuart Peck, Jr. has stepped down and so ended a great dynasty. Stu has faithfully controlled the purse strings, and as a result our reserves are rock solid. We owe him a debt that is impossible to repay. He has confidently handed the bankbook over to Barbara Baldwin, and so begins the next era. SEE YOU ALL ON DECEMBER 3RD!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, December 3, 2000 2-4 p.m.

Thomas Darling House

1907 Litchfield Turnpike

Music, Food, and Frivolity in abundance,
all in a genuine 18th century atmosphere!

Each year, something new...

SPRING MEETING

Time, place and subject to be announced.

THE ELSIE FORD ROOM DEDICATION

(Our new Archival Research Room)

Spring: 2001

ANNUAL SPRING TAG SALE

(Sylvia's Attic)

Tentative date: May 5, 2001

On the grounds of the Darling House.

Public invited to rent space (\$10)

A good chance to clean out your attic and
make some moo-lah!

Great food for sale too!

SOUTH SCHOOL KEEPS GOING, AND GOING...

Most of us are familiar with the progress we've made on the Old South School this year, mostly through the excellent coverage from The Amity Observer. The building now beams brightly white, thanks to Chris Dickerson and the girls of the Amity High School Girls Cross-Country Team. They have scraped, primed and painted 95% of the paintable exterior surfaces. We have thanked them and thanked them, and we thank them again! They have committed to seeing the painting portion of the project through to the end, inside and out. They are just The Best! As mentioned in the last newsletter, Siperstein's Paint donated all the materials.

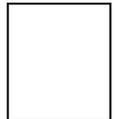
The Women's Auxillary of the Volunteer Fire Dept. has donated six pairs of wooden shutters (formerly from the Heller residence), which with a little work will replace the original ones, now long gone.

Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse in Orange has donated some pressure treated lumber for the front porch project, headed up by architect Duncan Milne. Walden Dillaway gets a Purple Heart for his help in hauling that material to the site. We are trying now to negotiate with Home Depot for some more lumber, so that Duncan can get started on that important part of the restoration.

Jim Urbano has had three windows made for the east side of the building, to match the three on the front (west) side, and will be installing them shortly.

We have topped the \$20,000 mark, and will be using that money to restore the schoolroom. Lisa Flaherty and Steve Sax of Beecher Rd. have discovered some period school desks in their barn. We are nearly certain they came out of South School. The bell, the desks, what next?!

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www.woodbridgehistory.org



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