



AMITY & WOODBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

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Roger Sherman

By John Jenner of the Sherman (CT) Historical Society

The Amity and Woodbridge Historical Society hosted John Jenner, of the Sherman Historical Society, for our annual meeting on May 20th. The Sherman Historical Society's Roger Sherman Learning Center recently held a Grand Opening on June 9. They are also working to create a statewide Roger Sherman Trail. Woodbridge has two sites worthy of inclusion: the home of Thomas Darling and the Country Club of Woodbridge property which was formerly farmland owned by Sherman. Below is a portion of Mr. Jenner's talk.

Roger Sherman was born on April 19, 1721 to William and Mehetabel Sherman. As he grew up he learned farming first hand and the shoemaking trade from his father. He attended the local parish school only through the sixth grade but was early recognized as having a thirst and talent for learning and had access to the extensive library of his local pastor, the Reverend Duncan. In 1741 his father died leaving him as the head of the family with five of his siblings still living at home. His older brother, William, had already moved to the area near New Milford, Connecticut. Roger settled his father's estate and debts, leaving the family with £100 English pounds. His grasp of economics led him to make an unusual transaction. He borrowed £1200 and paid £1300 for a farm of 252 acres in New Dilloway, Connecticut, on the west bank of the Housatonic River, near where his brother was living. He moved the family, his mother and siblings to their new home in 1743.

Roger felt an obligation to provide for his younger siblings' education, and to afford these costs he became a surveyor. He taught himself surveying and was appointed surveyor for the county of New Haven in 1745. Over the next ten years he surveyed over 1000 properties in the area of Litchfield County. Surveying enabled him to understand the relative value of land and become, reportedly, the largest landholder in Litchfield County. Roger Sherman and his brother, William, opened their first general store in New Milford in 1750. William died in 1756 and Roger moved into the building on the village green. This property is now occupied by the Roger Sherman Town Hall and there is a Roger Sherman historic plaque in front.

In 1750, the same year he and William opened their New Milford store, Roger Sherman published the first of his 11 annual almanacs. Next to the Bible, the annual almanac was the most prevalent book in the family homes of the day. Nearly 95 % of all families at the time were farm families. The almanac contained the information used to tell when to plant, when to harvest etc. Roger did all of the calculations derived from celestial knowledge contained in his almanacs. A lawyer acquaintance commented to Sherman that his surveys were very well written and he should consider reading for the law. He did and was admitted to the bar in 1754. This was the sixth trade that he mastered. It led to his appointment as Justice of the Peace in New Milford, the beginning of his nearly 50 years of public service. In 1761 at the age of forty, he was wealthy enough to begin leaving the trades behind and move substantially into public life. Roger Sherman was in public service longer than any of our other Founding Fathers. His judicial career spanned nearly thirty-five years, most of it as a judge in the state courts. He was appointed Treasurer of Yale College in 1768 and served for eight years. In 1784 he ran for Mayor of New Haven, against Thomas Darling, and was elected. He served as the first Mayor of New Haven until his death on July 23, 1793.

Roger Sherman served in the Connecticut state legislature from 1755 to 1786. While engaged very actively in state affairs he began his service at the national level as a Connecticut representative to the first Continental Congress in 1774. It was at this time that the first of our founding documents, *The Articles of Association*, was drafted and signed. It was the agreement by the thirteen colonies to move forward in a unified manner to deal with the oppressive laws enacted by the British government. Before this could be accomplished there were many conflicts among the colonies that had to be resolved. For example, the land grant for the State of Connecticut extended across the northern half of the State of Pennsylvania to Lake Erie. CT gave up rights to Pennsylvania land but retained the western most part. This area was known as "The Western Reserve". Grants of land were made available to Connecticut residents who suffered losses to the British during the Revolutionary War. When the war was over many moved there to settle what became the State of Ohio.



In the Second Continental Congress *The Declaration of Independence* was drafted and signed. Thomas Jefferson is often credited with creating this important founding document. While Jefferson may have penned the draft, in fact, it was created by a committee of five consisting of Jefferson, John Adams, Robert Livingston, Benjamin Franklin and Roger Sherman. In a painting by Connecticut artist John Trumbull, this committee is shown presenting the draft to the Chairman of the Congress, John Hancock and the members of the Congress. Roger Sherman served as a representative to the Continental Congress throughout the war. They appointed George Washington to muster and lead our Continental Army and conduct the war effort. Washington is credited, deservedly, for winning the war against the world-renowned British army. We should remember, however, that the Congress played its essential part by supplying the arms, uniforms and rations and by sending Benjamin Franklin to France whom he eventually convinced to join our cause. The deci-

sive battle at Yorktown, VA was won by French General Rochambeau. Our first government as an independent nation was formed under the third of our founding documents, the *Articles of Confederation* in 1781. This system of government did not work well. The division of power between states and the nation was not right. Within six years Washington was called to preside over the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. Sherman was appointed to serve as a Connecticut representative and he played a critical role in breaking a three month deadlock by proposing that an upper house would have two representatives from each state and a lower house would have the number of representatives proportional to its state's population. This proposal is called the Great Compromise or the Connecticut Compromise.

James Madison, who became our fourth President, is credited as the leading figure in forming of the *United States Constitution*. Sherman, in fact addressed the convention more than any of the other representatives. *The Constitution* was drafted, signed and sent to the states for ratification. Sherman was the only person to sign all four of our founding documents and also played an important role in creating all of them. He was also instrumental in Connecticut becoming the second state to ratify the Constitution.

The government was formed and Sherman was elected to the first Congress as a Representative from Connecticut. When William Johnson resigned as a Senator from Connecticut Sherman fulfilled his term of office. He served as a Senator from Connecticut until his death on July 23, 1793. At the time of his death, he was the oldest serving member in the Congress.

You might be interested to know that Roger Sherman invented the penny, that is, he suggested the decimal structure of our currency. He was a substantial family man. In 1750 he married Elizabeth Hartwell. They had seven children. She died in 1760, and in 1763 he married Rebecca Preston with whom he had eight more children. Three of his sons were officers commissioned by Washington and served in the war. His son John Sherman and grandson Roger Sherman Baldwin studied at our first law school, Tapping Reeve in Litchfield, Connecticut. Roger Sherman Baldwin represented the Amistad mutineers before the Supreme Court and won that landmark case. Roger himself never had slaves and was opposed to slavery. When our constitution was created he did not hold out for its abolishment, arguing that to do so would divide the nation and prevent it from being formed. Nearly one hundred years later he was proven correct. He was a very devout man who some considered stiff in his beliefs. He was a humble man who attained great wealth but was not given to fancy dress or manners. He was wise and well respected. The younger members of Congress would wait until they had heard from Sherman before making up their minds on the important issues of the day. Now doesn't it seem that Roger Sherman ought to be remembered as an important "Founding Father"?



Eamon and Emily Sax play "graces"

Senator Logan tries stilts



Librarians from Beecher Road School lead the Pledge of Allegiance

Old South School House

On a recent Sunday afternoon about 100 people stopped by the Old South School House on Johnson Road for a long awaited open house held by the members of the Amity and Woodbridge Historical Society. Young and old got to see what school life was like back when the school house was built in 1877. One of 5 original schoolhouses in town, the Old South Schoolhouse is the only remaining fully restored one room schoolhouse in Woodbridge. Librarians from Beecher Road School were there to welcome students and run them through a brief lesson. Children, and adults alike, played games in the school yard, watched calligraphy demonstrations, wrote on old fashioned slates and even rang the old school house bell.



Members of the AWHS

"Honey Cakes" from Tavern Night

This honey cake recipe is from Amelia Simmons' 1796 cookbook, American Cookery. It's what we would think of as gingerbread today.

- 3 ½ cups Flour
- 1 tbsp. Ginger
- 1 tbsp. Cinnamon
- 3 tbsp. Diced Candied Orange Peel
- 1/3 cup White Sugar
- 1 Egg well beaten
- 2/3 cup Honey
- 1 ¼ cups Sour Milk (If you don't have sour milk, you can add 1 tbsp. lemon juice or vinegar to milk)
- ½ tsp. Pearl Ash (or Baking Soda)

This recipe is different because it is leavened, originally calling for pearl ash, which is not typical of early gingerbread recipes. As most of us do not have access to pearl ash, you can replace it with baking soda. The leavening will give these a fluffy texture, unlike most early gingerbreads that were a very hard cake.

First mix all the dry ingredients together including the sugar and orange peel. In a separate bowl add the honey to the beaten egg. Next, add the baking soda to the milk and let it dissolve before you combine the milk with the honey/egg mixture. Finally mix the wet and dry ingredients together, knead and roll out to ½ inch or ¾ inch thick. You can use cutters or knife to cut into any shape. Bake at 325 degrees for approximately 25 minutes (time depends on size so watch and remove from oven when they are still light golden brown).

Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society, Inc.

At the Historic Thomas Darling House

1907 Litchfield Turnpike

Woodbridge, CT 06525

www.woodbridgehistory.org

Open House at the Darling House
Sunday, July 15 — 2 to 4 PM
Ice Cream Social

***Come and taste our home-made,
hand-churned creations!***

Free and open to the public
1907 Litchfield Turnpike
Woodbridge CT

