



AMITY & WOODBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

Fall Newsletter

September 2016

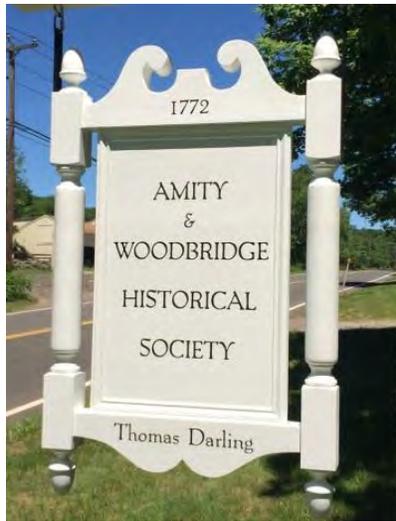


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A Quilt Tells a Story By Nancy Mull

You may have heard the phrase, “old quilters never die, they just go to pieces.”

This is just wordplay about those who are quilters, but also what can happen to old quilts. The Amity and Woodbridge Historical Society is blessed with some delightful old donated quilts that have not yet, “gone to pieces.” In archiving a beautiful signature quilt housed in the larger upstairs bedroom of the Thomas Darling House, we can discover an amazing story of life in 19th century Woodbridge.

Signature quilts became popular in the 1840 to 1850 era. Indelible ink either purchased or made by a recipe was available at that time. The signature quilts had open spaces in each block for an individual to write a message or their name and date. This type of quilt was an object of friendship, a memorial or a hope chest item. Later some quilts were made as a means of raising money for soldiers during the Civil War. The Martha Ann Peck Quilt, the subject of this story, was started in 1850 and the last signature was printed in 1852. Martha Ann turned sixteen in 1850 and the signatures and sentiments are all from persons of her family and acquaintance. As she was married in 1852 it seems probable that it was dedicated for a hope chest.

The quilt is predominantly in red calicos using eight octagons in each block. The backing is of fine linen and the signatures and sentiments are easily read. Martha Ann was the daughter of Silas J. Peck and Mary Adeline Baldwin Peck. Her grandparents, Phineas and Ann Peck and many cousins, aunts, uncles and friends are represented on one of the fifty blocks. Familiar names found on the quilt are the entire Daniel Augur family, the daughters of Lewis Camp Newton, Almeda who marries Henry Todd and Mary Lucinda who marries Milo David Sperry both of whom are married with in twelve months of Martha Ann. Her friend Mary Jane Fairchild marries William Wales Peck in 1853 and Mary Jane Lyon marries William Chauncey Russell in 1855.



The language of the sentiments is very romantic and has a religious overtone. Two examples are: “Maiden, remember that youth is the time to secure a treasure for heavens climb,” by her friend Noyes Clark. And, “When you find a friend that’s true, never change it for one that’s new” from Sarah Hotchkiss, a neighbor. It is interesting to note that Noyes Clark marries Sarah Hotchkiss.

Using Census records for 1850, 1860 and beyond and other ancestry documents of the Peck and Baldwin families we can learn that Martha Ann Peck married Marcus Earl Baldwin (name found on the quilt on September 2, 1852.) His father, Capt. James Judson Baldwin built them a house at the intersection of Center Road and “Road to Milford”. (Actually present day Racebrook Road.) By 1860 Marcus, listed as a farmer has a personal worth of \$1,750 and holds real estate worth \$8,000. The family includes three children; Eliza Adeline named for her grandmothers, Silas James for his grandfathers and Henry Earl for his uncles.

Looking at the 1850 Census we can see Woodbridge is a farming community of 922 persons living in 187 dwellings. There are 213 families and 102 farms. The census tells us about the occupations of the male residents. Most of the population was made up of farmers (one hundred eighteen) and laborers (sixty five). Many of the laborers were from Ireland. In order to keep a small town equipped we find five blacksmiths, thirteen joiners, one carpenter, four masons, twenty-six mechanics, eight manufacturers, one carriage maker, a spring grinder and a gunsmith. Other occupations that dealt with serving other needs included: one minister, two school teachers, two physicians, three butchers, four shoemakers, two gardeners, three clerks, an artist, a musician, a milkman, and a comb maker. There are two sailors and one seaman. Listed are also four paupers living together. As no occupations are listed for the females, we can assume that they all had multi-functional skills or “keeping house” as the later census would read.

Although Martha doesn’t have any of the Darling family on the quilt she has 18% of the local population invested in her quilt. As people depended on each other it seems likely that they all knew each other well. How could we ever guess that a simple quilt would lead to so much information about our town? We are led to wonder what the fabric of our living will leave as a story to be explored in 150 years?

Please Join Us – Upcoming Events 2016

October 1: 8 to 2 PM - **Tag Sale at the Darling House.** We are accepting your donations of items to sell or you can reserve your own spot for \$15. Please email info@woodbridgehistory.org

October 16: 2 to 4 PM - **Open House** at the Darling House with Hearth Cooking

November 6: 5 to 8 PM - **Tavern Night** – Now accepting reservations at info@woodbridgehistory.org

December 4: 2 to 4 PM - **Holiday Open House** – If you are interested in helping us decorate on Saturday December 3 in the morning please e-mail info@woodbridgehistory.org

Elections!... a piece of cake... by Alexia Belperron

As Election Day is just around the corner, I thought it would be appropriate to make an “election cake” on the hearth at our next open house on October 16th.

Today we may associate many things with Election Day, but cake isn't usually one of them. However, if we travel back in time to colonial New England, Election Cakes or Muster Cakes as they were first called, represented the importance of and the celebration of muster and election days. Even before our Independence, elections were held for colonial assemblies and farmers were also called to “muster” and complete some military training in order to be able to serve in militias when the need arose. Many residents had to travel for days to reach the towns designated for voting and mustering and then spent several days voting, training and socializing. In Puritan New England, where religious holidays such as Christmas were frowned upon, these occasions were some of the most important social events of the time. The cakes were an important part of the celebrations, but fell out of favor in the mid-1800's when roads improved, travel times shortened, and Election Day ceased to be an important social event. There was a resurgence in interest in the cakes themselves at least, around 1900, and recipes were often “reinvented” at that time.

Election Cakes were sometimes referred to as “Hartford Election Cakes.” Not only was Hartford known for its bakeries and wealthy residents (who could afford to have such a cake made), but also the Connecticut Colony was one of a few that elected its own governor (not appointed by the king); so as a result, Election Day celebrations were important in the state. The “cake” is somewhere between a modern day cake and bread, and as leavening agents were not yet in use during the 18th century, yeast or sourdoughs provided the leavening for it. It is evident from historical recipes that very large versions of these cakes were made, requiring brick ovens for baking. Yet they are also cakes that keep well and are easily cut into small pieces, and thus were thought to be made for the individual farmers to carry with them as they travelled to the designated election/muster towns. The recipes all contain sugar, fruits, and spices, the most expensive ingredients at the time, again demonstrating the importance of the cakes. At our open house on October 16th, we will be making a modern version of Amelia Simmon's (Her cookbook from 1796 is considered the first American cookbook) election cake, however *not* in the quantity she described (30 quarts of flour, 10 pounds of butter, 14 pounds of sugar.....). We will also be preparing some other fall foods available during the harvest season.

Election Cake Receipt (with some modern adaptations)

Flour 4-5 cups white whole-wheat flour
1¼ cups sour milk (or buttermilk)
Sourdough starter or dry yeast
½ lb. Butter
1½ cups of sugar (or replace ¼ cup with molasses)
2 eggs
1 oz. of wine
2 oz. brandy
2 tsp cinnamon
2 tsp coriander
1 tsp allspice
½ tsp nutmeg
2 cups fruit (raisins, currants, prunes...)

1. Combine the warm milk and yeast (or starter) and add enough flour to achieve the consistency of bread dough, and then let rest overnight.
2. Beat butter and sugar until light. Beat in the wine, brandy and eggs, then add the starter dough and spices, and finally fold in the dried fruit.
3. Bake at 375 for 45-60 minutes.

AWHS Historical House Plaque Program

Are you interested in getting an official historical society plaque for your home? AWHS is rolling out a new program for homeowners of historic homes. For more information and an application form please visit

www.woodbridgehistory.org

Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society, Inc.

At the historic Thomas Darling House

1907 Litchfield Turnpike

Woodbridge, CT 06525

www.woodbridgehistory.org



Get your reservations now for

Tavern Night ~ Sunday

November 6th!

info@woodbridgehistory.org



Envelope Project Update

Don't be concerned if you see scaffoldings and construction work going on this fall at the Thomas Darling House; "it's a good thing". We are planning to complete two important envelope projects this fall. By the time you are all reading this newsletter, we expect that the Darling House will be sporting a brand new wood shingle roof. Last year during our painting projects we had the opportunity to get a closer look at the roof and found many worn, broken and missing shingles! We worked with Leland Torrence and the town to get the funds needed to replace the roof approved. Wood shingle roofs should last about half a century so we expect the Darling House to be protected for years to come.

In our June letter we mentioned that we were awarded a 1772 Foundation grant to help complete the painting and lead remediation project we began last summer. With the grant, matching funds from the town and the historical society, and a generous \$5000 donation from one of our board members, we will be completing the lead remediation and painting on the east and north sides of the main house and also the kitchen ell (now the caretakers' apartment), as well as restoring the Benjamin Franklin lightning rod we have on the house.



These projects ensure the integrity of the house and our collections and the safety of our visitors, thus we are very thankful to the town and Leland, the 1772 Foundation, our board members and all of you for making them possible. Thank you!!! We hope that you will attend our events this fall so that you can see the progress.