# AMITY & WOODBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

Late Fall

November 2018

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www.woodbridgehistory.org
info@woodbridgehistory.org
203-768-1029

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## Time Travel

Written by Mary Vincitorio's Third Grade Class at Beecher Road School

Have you ever wanted to travel back in time? The grade 3 students at Beecher Road School went back in time to the 1800s to the Old South one-room school house and to the Thomas Darling House! There was so much to learn! Here are some of our learning experiences.

Ding dong! went the bell. Time to go to school! In the one-room school students enter by gender in height order, shortest to tallest. After you enter, kids from all grades sit together in all different sized desks. In fact, the teacher stands on a stage-like platform. During the trip, actors dressed in old school uniforms, (our very own Mrs. Patrick and Ms. Crocco), teach others about what school used to be like back in the old days. We had to recite a poem, like they used to often do at school long ago. Outside of the schoolhouse people taught you old-fashioned recess games that kids used to play during their free time, such as the sack race pictured above.

If you hop on the bus and ride for a few minutes, you can go to the Thomas Darling House. And now we will tell you about our experiences there. After the 3rd grade arrived, everybody split up into groups. One of the groups got to make apple cider the way people used to in the old days. Crank, crank went the apple cider mill. Other groups went into the house and learned about the kitchen, bedrooms, playrooms, and workspaces. In the kitchen, you learn about how people cooked back in the old days. In the kids' bedroom, we saw how beds were made and how people stayed warm without burning the building down. Now THAT would be hot! In Thomas Darling's bedroom we learned about one of his jobs, making rope. We also learned about the costs of the closets and windows and other appliances and furniture. In the workspace, we learned about his and his son's desks. In the end of the trip everybody enjoyed buttered crackers and apple cider.

So if you ever want to travel back in time, be sure to visit the Old South one-room schoolhouse and the Thomas Darling House.

## Have You Seen This?

A big thank you to AWHS Board Member **Dr. Marvin Arons and State Senator George Logan and his staff** for helping us remember Thomas Darling! Not only did he build our wonderful house museum in 1772 in what was then Amity Parish, (and just up the road from this photo, one of two installed on Litchfield Turnpike) but Thomas Darling was a well-respected citizen and political figure, an advocate of religious freedom, a supporter of the United States Constitution, and was described by a contemporary as "...a man of large stature... calm and judicious... of integrity and uprightness."

## NEW SOCIETY ACCESSIONS

1. Copies of papers regarding the Peck Family, Benjamin and his descendants (1600s - 1900s) - donor: David Peck

2. Records of Daniel Augur (1835 - 1880) - donor: David Platt

3. Scythe from the Morris Tyler home - donor: Paul and Judy DeCoster

4. A broadside about the sale of property ( "Holly Hill" on Amity Road ) - donor: Don Menzies

5. Two photographs of an early Amity High School basketball team - donor: North Haven Historical Society

6. Student registration books and photographs of activities and construction of parts of Beecher Road School - donor: Beecher Road School

7. A sampler stitched in the early 1800s by Sarah Clark, the daughter of Elioenai and Abigail Clark (whose portraits all hang at the Darling House) - donor: Estate of Alice Cowles.

Thank you to all our donors.

## The President's Message

As 2018 draws to a close I want send my heartfelt thanks to all of you. I have been very gratified this year to see so many newcomers at our events and also so many of our longtime supporters. We have had another busy year at AWHS including acquisition of important new items for our collection (see list above) and through a partnership with the town, a new home for our archives at a climate-controlled vault at the town hall. We also completed the envelope project for the main house. Please join me in thanking the Town of Woodbridge and our advisors and contractors that have made these projects possible. We are not done, however, the next phase of our restoration will include the kitchen ell (caretaker apartment) and the barns on both sides of the street. There is an urgent need for stabilization of one of the barns and restoration of all of the out buildings.

2018 has also been a tough year for AWHS and many non-profits due to changing tax laws affecting donations. We have experienced a decrease in donations and membership renewals so your support now is more important than ever. We want to be able to continue to bring you free events such as our hearth cooking and ice cream making, to continue our work to properly care for and store our collections, and to continue to preserve the Darling Property for future generations. We hope you will renew your memberships if you haven't already done so and will also consider making a donation to one of our projects. If you would like your donation to go to a specific project (such as the barns or the purchase of archival storage materials) please let us know.

I wish you a healthy and happy holiday season and look forward to seeing you at our holiday open house on December 2nd, and throughout 2019.

***Alexia Belperron, AWHS President***

P.S. Our textile committee tells me we are in need of old sheets, pillow cases and quilt batting to preserve our amazing collection. If you have any to donate, please bring them to our open house. Thank you!

# *Christmas Past* by Mickie Sistrand

At our annual Holiday Open House, visitors often ask if the decorations reflect how Thomas Darling and his family would have celebrated Christmas. The answer is no. We present the house as inhabitants of the Victorian Era (1837 - 1901) might have decked the halls. During Thomas Darling's residence (1774 - 89) Christmas was not recognized as a holiday in New England. Even after 1776, Dec. 25th was treated as an ordinary workday.

In fact, the first English settlers, mostly Puritans, considered Christmas celebrations pagan and counter to the austere spirit of the Protestant reformation. But before we unfairly criticize the Puritans, we need to understand how an English "Old Christmas" looked: like a darker version of our Halloween Doorbell Night. English Old Christmas, or Yule, was a continuation of the pagan, Romano-British Saturnalia, marking the winter solstice. It was a public, outdoor festival for adults, mostly men, featuring noisy, drunken revels, begging, demands of food and drink from townsfolk and other mischief. It often resulted in personal injuries, theft and damage to property. In Colonial America, where keeping order was always a challenge and everyone's daily labor was necessary for survival, we can understand why authorities frowned on Christmas and enforced anti-celebration rules.

Yet we know that Christmas revels persisted, especially in rural areas, simply because there were laws to suppress them. In 1621, only one year after the establishment of Plymouth Colony, Governor William Bradford noted that he happened upon a group of young men playing ball in the street on Christmas Day. Bradford sent them back to their work with a scolding. Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law banning the observance of Christmas in 1659, punishable by a five-shilling fine.

But during the 1800's, Christmas gained momentum as a popular holiday in America. Increased immigration from other European countries, with different customs and religious traditions, changed the character of Christmas celebration. It gradually transformed into a quiet, private, indoor holiday, centered on the home, family and children. "Christmas" became socially acceptable.

About this time, American writer Washington Irving, founder of the literary Knickerbocker group, decried the rapid pace of modernization in the 19th Century and the "loss of Old Dutch customs" - whether real or invented. But it was another Knickerbocker who left an indelible mark on Christmas. Clement Clarke Moore (1779 - 1863) wrote a poem called "A Visit from St. Nicholas" - known to us as "Twas the Night Before Christmas." More than any other one influence, Moore's poem established a picture of Christmas we recognize today: Santa Claus with his reindeer sleigh, arriving on Christmas Eve to place gifts in children's stockings "hung by the chimney with care."

Other familiar holiday features didn't commonly appear in American homes until the 1840's. For example, the first Christmas trees, introduced by German-Americans, were small and sat on tabletops, their branches tied with sweetmeats and little toys for children. In 1840, after it was learned that Queen Victoria's German husband installed a large Christmas tree at Windsor, a fad for Christmas trees swept both England and America.

As our young nation settled down, diversified and prospered, Christmas was more widely and openly celebrated. In 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant officially declared Dec. 25th as a National Federal Holiday, the only religious holiday to be so honored. Like so much of American culture, the Christmas we enjoy today is blend of traditions from many time periods and lands.

**Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society, Inc.**

**At the Historic Thomas Darling House**

1907 Litchfield Turnpike

Woodbridge, CT 06525

www.woodbridgehistory.org

# Holiday Open House at the Darling House

**Sunday, December 2nd**

2 to 4 PM

Period decorations, live music, singing and delicious refreshments—Free!

1907 Litchfield Turnpike, Woodbridge CT