

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter - September 2000

Annual Meeting and Program - September 10, 2000

Please join us at the old Center Schoolhouse on Sunday, September 10th at 2:00 for the annual meeting of the Historical Society. Following the meeting (we promise to keep it as short as possible) we will enjoy some refreshments, including a cake in honor of the 221st anniversary of the town.

Then, for our special •program•, Walt Landgraf will lead a walk down to the Barkhamsted Reservoir to view historic sites on the west shore. The walk will start from old Center Schoolhouse and will total about one and a half miles on uneven ground and will take about 2 hours.

Many historical sites are located in the area of the walk, including what is thought to be the old town animal pound, and the original locations of the Center Schoolhouse, the old meeting house and burying ground, which previously had been •the green• where militia units trained.

Don•t miss this wonderful opportunity to revisit the past. The old Center Schoolhouse is located on Route 181 about two miles north of Pleasant Valley.

Make a day of it and plan to attend the •Old Home Day• activities at the Barkhamsted Center Congregational Church. Following church services which run from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., there will be some special activities and a pot luck lunch at noon (bring a food item to share). All are welcome.

Following the lunch, both the Center Church and the old schoolhouse will be open for your inspection. As described above, the Historical Society annual meeting starts at 2:00 at the schoolhouse, followed by the walk to the Reservoir.

Annual Membership Appeal

It's that time of year again! The Historical Society membership year runs from September 1 to August 31 and we hope that you will sign on with us. We very much appreciate the support of our members. Your help is what keeps this organization going. Please use the attached membership envelope to respond. Our annual dues are:

Single \$ 7

Family \$10

Senior \$ 5

Of course we always welcome additional donations over and above the dues amount. Starting with the new year we anticipate new demands on our resources as preservation and maintenance expenses are incurred on the Squires Tavern building. This will be a big project for us and it is our hope that the generosity of our members will help see us through this work.

If you would like to become active in Historical Society work, by all means please make a note to that effect on the membership form and we will contact you. We especially need volunteers to help work on various repair and maintenance work which we hope will start in earnest during 2001. If you are willing to help us with painting, cleaning or carpentry work please let us know.

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History Student Scholarship

Again this year the Historical Society has contributed a \$250 scholarship to the Greenwoods Scholarship Fund for a high school student pursuing a history major or the study of history in college. We are happy to provide assistance of this type, and feel that this is a worthy investment.

Members Present Papers at the Iron Masters Conference

We want to congratulate Walt Landgraf and Fred Warner for their participation in the Iron Masters Conference at Saugus Massachusetts on May 6, 2000. A total of nine historians and archeologists from around the country were invited to present papers at the conference, which is held by the Iron Masters group of the Society of Industrial Archeology . The Historical Society is proud that not one but two of our members made the cut for this important conference.

Walt presented a paper documenting Richard Smith's forge at Colebrook. This has been an exciting subject as a great deal of information has only recently been uncovered showing just how important this site was. Not only was this forge a very early (1770) and very large site, information has come to light indicating that it was one of the first sites to produce steel in the colonies.

Fred presented a paper on the restoration of the Beckley Iron Furnace in Canaan. He has worked hard on this important project, and has documented the discovery of an unusual air ventilation system found in the base of the furnace.

Congratulations to Fred and Walt for their role in the Iron Masters Conference and their work in advancing the knowledge of the iron industry in northwestern Connecticut.

National Register of Historic Places

We are very pleased that the Barkhamsted Center historical area was formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 1999. This area includes six buildings: the Center Church, parsonage, former town hall (currently a private home), Merrill Tavern (currently a MDC house, the Nathaniel Collins house and our own Center Schoolhouse. Inclusion on the National Register will help focus attention on a very historic area of the town and can only enhance efforts toward preservation.

Annual Report of Historical Society Activities

September 10 represents the close of the fiscal year for the Historical Society, so we would like to take this opportunity to report to you on our work over the past year:

Squires Tavern

For several years now we have raised the topic of the Squires Tavern or Ullmann House (both names refer to the Department of Environmental Protection building at 100 East River Road in Peoples Forest). To be honest with you, not much concrete progress has been made over that period of time, however negotiations with the State

DEP have intensified during the last year and feedback from the State has been very positive. We feel confident that a long term lease will be secured on this very historic building, hopefully next year.

We have met with DEP officials three times in the last year and have negotiated a proposed lease agreement which has received preliminary approval by senior DEP management. Currently the proposed lease is being reviewed by a State contract unit and will also need to be blessed by the State Attorney General office. We have secured the support of two State representatives (Prelli and Ferrari) and our State senator (Herlihy), all of whom have already helped during negotiations with the State, and who we hope will continue to assist us in speeding things along.

In anticipation of securing a formal lease, we have commenced a series of special planning meetings to develop a long term strategy for the operation and preservation of the building and to formulate a plan of restoration. The Squires Tavern is a very significant building in the history of the town. It was built in the late 1700•s (probably 1777 which is 2 years before the town was incorporated) and occupied a prominent position on the old Wolcott Road which later became the Farmington River Turnpike. Given the fact that this road was a busy one, it was inevitable that the building was used as a hotel and tavern. Bela Squires continued the business for forty years until his death in 1861. For about 35 years, the Ullmann family operated a farm here.

The State DEP has scaled back maintenance of the building and its future in State hands is uncertain. Our goal is to gain control of the building through a long term lease and to maintain and preserve the structure and to use it for the Historical Society headquarters. The scope of the project is daunting, however we feel the risk in taking it on is justified. Of course we will keep you informed of progress and hope to have concrete developments to report soon.

Barkhamsted Center Schoolhouse

Maintenance work on the schoolhouse continued during the last 12 months, including a fresh coat of paint on the clapboards and preservative applied to the wood shingle roof. We are thrilled that the 5th grade from the Barkhamsted Elementary School continues to visit the old schoolhouse each June during their annual History Day outing. If you would like to see the schoolhouse yourself, what better time than the annual meeting which will be held at the venerable building at 2:00 on Sunday, September 10, 2000.

Historical Society Web Page

We continue to develop the Historical Society•s web page, which can be found at www.barkhamstedhistory.org

We like to think of the web page as a big glass bucket that has the potential to accomplish two goals: hold the accumulated knowledge of Barkhamsted history and make that information accessible to a wide audience. Well anyway, that is the vision. Right now there seems to be a bit of a gap between the vision and reality, but we are making progress! During the year we have added a quick tour of historical sites in town, an introduction to our artifacts collection, some initial genealogical information (a very hot topic based on the inquires we receive) and a •Town Diary• section which each month records some item of current Barkhamsted culture from the mundane to the significant. If you haven•t visited the web page, give it a try. If you don•t have a computer, here•s an idea: many public libraries have public Internet access and may even help you access our site.

Flea Market

Our main fund raising event continues to be the flea market held on three Sundays in May at the Pleasant Valley

Drive-In. This year we again worked hard to make it a success, and one of these years we will be blessed with good weather on all three days! We raise money at the flea market by charging a fee to vendors and a parking fee of \$1 per car. We anticipate repeating the event again in May 2001, so please watch for it and support our effort by dropping by.

Program Series

We successfully completed our third annual program series which is held on the first Friday of each month from February to May. We enjoyed four excellent presentations this year: Bud Sanders talked about wildlife on the MDC watershed, Walt Landgraf gave an overview of 75 years of history at Peoples Forest, Fred Warner covered his work and discoveries at the Beckley Iron Furnace and David Gidman recounted his experiences in China when the Red Chinese came to power. We look forward to repeating the series in the year 2001 and will let you know the schedule as soon as it is finalized.

Historical Society Collection

We continued work on the collection of artifacts. Additional shelving has been purchased and installed so that the collection items are better organized and more accessible. We received many donated items throughout the year including photos, genealogical material and school related items. If you have historical items that you would like to donate and have preserved for the enjoyment and education of future generations please contact us. Whether they are old or new, big or small, magnificent or ordinary we are interested!

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