

# Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter

web site - barkhamstedhistory.us

December 2022

## Remembering Susie-Q

By Paul Hart

Thousands of Barkhamsted students have attended Barkhamsted Elementary School over the years and one thing many of these kids (now adults) have in common is wonderful memories of Susie-Q. Susie-Q was a Cochin Bantam chicken kept by second grade teacher Mrs. Marge Miller during her tenure at the school in the 1950s and 1960s. When I say Susie-Q was kept by Mrs. Miller, I mean this chicken was actually kept in a cage IN THE CLASSROOM during school hours much to the delight of the students.

Susie-Q was a special part of Mrs. Miller's second grade class for some ten years, and is still fondly remembered by her now elderly classmates. When asked about Susie-Q, the eyes of those who recalled the chicken would light up with affectionate recollections of this part of their lives from the distant past. A chicken living in the classroom, interacting with the children, witnessing their educational development. At the time it seemed completely normal and natural. But later in life, looking back, you realize that no, this was something a little special, an added enrichment to the daily hum-drum of your education, and a shared memory

with hundreds of other students from the deep past.



*Susie-Q's class photo circa 1955.*

Marge Miller was a Pleasant Valley resident. After high school she attended one of the State Normal Schools (which trained teachers) and started teaching in Barkhamsted schools in the 1930s. This was a period of change in Barkhamsted education. The development of the school bus allowed the town to consolidate the scattered "one room" schoolhouses down to two schools: one in Pleasant Valley and one in Riverton. While additional classroom space was being constructed in Pleasant Valley about 1950-1951, Mrs. Miller taught in Riverton.

It is not known exactly when and where Susie-Q first appeared on the scene. Mrs. Miller's son Jerry seems to recall that the chicken was roaming loose around the Riverton school during the period when his mother taught there. In any event, when the new classrooms in Pleasant Valley were completed in 1952, all students were moved there and that is when Susie-Q took up residence in Mrs. Miller's second grade classroom.

*Continued on next page...*

## The Doug Roberts Doll House



Barkhamsted Historical Society was recently gifted a big doll house made by Doug Roberts many years ago for his wife Janet. Doug was of course very active in the Historical Society since the 1960s before passing on in the spring of 2022.

We are thrilled to have this magnificent doll house on display at Squire's Tavern. Doug always told us that his ancestor and early Riverton resident Judah Roberts lived in a salt box house in Riverton. The building was taken down about 100 years ago and rebuilt at the Brooklyn Museum as an example of a New England saltbox home. Since this dollhouse is a saltbox, we are fairly certain Doug designed it with the Judah Roberts house in mind.

This dollhouse is big! So big that it had to be taken apart to move it from Doug's Riverton home to the Squire's Tavern. Even dismantled, we could barely fit it through the small doors of the Tavern.

*Continued on page 3...*

*Susie-Q - continued from page 1...*

Why was this chicken put in the classroom? By all accounts, Mrs. Miller was a great teacher and held in high esteem by her former students. Most likely she viewed Susie-Q as a way to spice things up in her classroom and enrich the educational experience of her students. For most of the day, Susie-Q was kept in a wood and wire cage that had a partial lift off top. Some students were assigned various tasks in her care including watering and feeding. So along with addition and subtraction, students were learning animal husbandry 101.

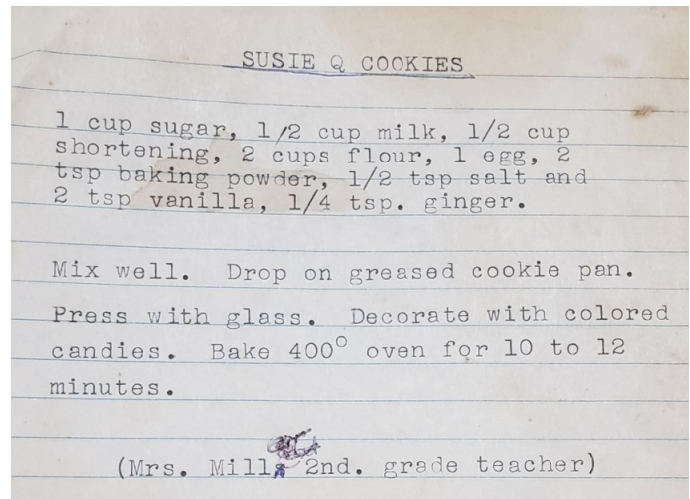


*Mrs. Marge Miller taught mostly second grade for forty years at Barkhamsted Elementary.*

were delicious. John Lavieri remembers that the class would also use Susie-Q's production to make Easter eggs. Later on, when egg production slowed somewhat, Susie-Q's eggs were used by the school's kitchen staff and to make a big batch of sugar cookies served with the school lunch.

In the early years, Susie-Q was of course producing eggs. Mrs. Miller would spread the egg production across the entire class, giving each student at least one egg to take home along with a recipe for sugar cookies. It was a recipe that called for just one egg. Pleasant Valley resident Fred Fenn did not have Mrs. Miller for his second grade teacher, but he does remember one day walking home from school with his brother Jim who was carefully holding one of Susie-Q's eggs along with the recipe. Fred recalls that they did make the cookies and they

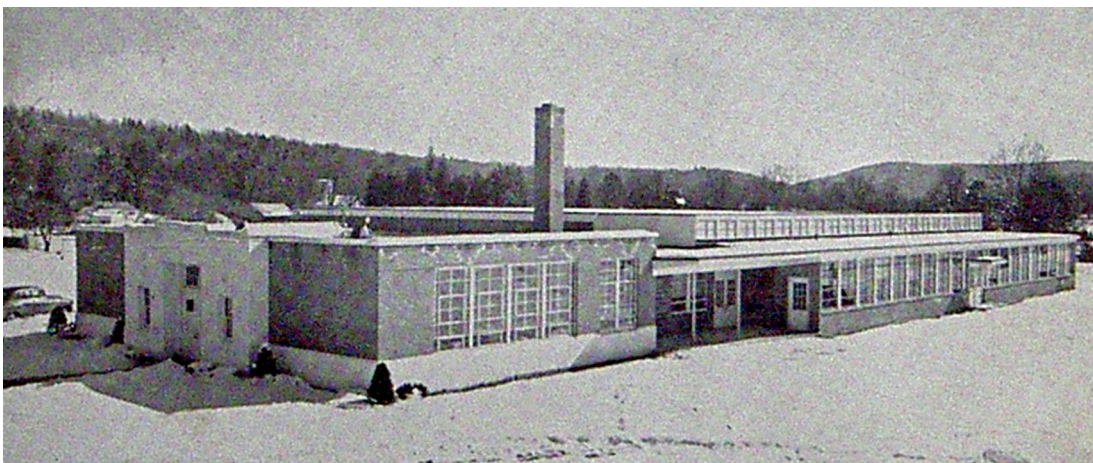
Susie-Q was a breed of chicken known as a Cochin Bantam. Margo Miller Fenn, daughter of Marge Miller, recalls that Susie-Q was "round and puffy, but quite small." Cochin Bantam was a perfect breed for the classroom situation: they are a calm and friendly chicken. Referring to this breed, one source says "among all chicken breeds I know of, Cochin chickens are the friendliest of them all. They are very calm and docile making them easy to tame." They are not known for prolific egg production, typically laying one or two a week.



*Above- the "Susie-Q" sugar cookie recipe using one egg.*

Susie-Q was frequently let outside and would peck away on a small grassy spot just outside Mrs. Miller's classroom. She would stay put and not wander away. On weekends either someone in the Miller family or the school janitor would keep Susie-Q fed and watered. During summer vacations the bird would be moved to the Miller family home on West River Road in Pleasant Valley.

It is not known how Susie-Q got her name. There was a famous pop song by Dale Hawkins released in 1957 called "Susie-Q" but that was well after the arrival of our Susie-Q. There was also a Hostess snack cake called a "Suzy-Q" but again the timing was wrong since it was first produced in 1961 (this snack was similar to a Drake's Devil Dog). The name was not unheard of in earlier times.



*Photo above- the "new" Barkhamsted Elementary School building circa 1952. Mrs. Miller's classroom is on the left side with the four large windows.*

*Continued on next page...*

*Susie-Q, continued from page 2...*



*Above- second grade teacher Mrs. Marge Miller and student Jack Grant looking at Susie-Q perched on the corner of the desk.*

Maybe Marge Miller picked it up from a dance step from the 1930s known as the "Susie-Q". In any event the name is catchy, distinctive and easy to remember. When you mention "Susie-Q" to a person who attended Barkhamsted Elementary School during this period, they know instantly who you are talking about.

One annual ritual of elementary school was having your official class photo taken. Susie-Q was many times included in this. The photo used in this article is thought to be a "class photo" of Susie-Q. Often each student photo was

printed on a one page record of the entire class and it is said that Susie-Q was also included in some of these. Barkhamsted Historical Society would appreciate a copy if you have one.

Margo Fenn remembers that her mother made up a Susie-Q song that her students would sing. She believes this song was:

Susie-Q is our pet hen,  
She lays eggs the best she can,  
One by one we eat them,  
Good for Susie-Q our pet hen.

Margo also recalls that students would write little stories and drawings that would be compiled into a book for Susie-Q. She believes she has a copy of one of these and when she finds it, will donate it to the Historical Society.

How long was Susie-Q present in Mrs. Miller's second grade classroom? She seems to have lasted from 1952 through to the early 1960s. It is not known how old she was when the Miller family gave her a home, but about 10 years of second graders came to appreciate this chicken in their classroom.

Susie-Q is just one tiny piece of the cultural history of our town, but to hundreds of students whose lives she touched, she is a trigger of fond memories- not only of this little chicken, but also of a beloved teacher, school friends, classroom experiences, sugar cookies and songs. Thank you Susie-Q for being a part of our lives. ☘

*Dollhouse, continued from page 1...*

In the process of moving it, the furniture and other small items inside were hopelessly jumbled up and disrupted from their carefully positioned location. It would be a

daunting project to reposition every tiny item, but, fortunately, volunteer Bonnie Reynolds came to our rescue. She, assisted by her husband Dean, was able to completely



*Photo above- Bonnie Reynolds restoring the Doug Roberts dollhouse.*

restore the contents to their original positions in each room of the dollhouse. Not only that, Bonnie meticulously dusted each piece of furniture and accessory.

We are so grateful to Bonnie and Dean for their assistance on this project. Bonnie was the right person for this job since she is a dollhouse aficionado with a lot of experience. She turned a chaotic mess into a wonderful display. This intricate dollhouse with its ties to an early Riverton home is now on display at Squire's Tavern... come down and see it! ☘



The carriage advertisement at right appeared in several issues of the Winsted Herald in 1870. The carriage shop (pictured above circa 1910 when it was the Rogers Rake shop) was located in Pleasant Valley very near what is now the fisherman's parking lot near the Pleasant Valley bridge.

Imagine how many people cross the bridge each day, or park in the fisherman's parking lot to try their luck in the river. Probably few of them are aware of the long history of the businesses located right there on the Farmington River going back to the 1820s.

At first there was a sawmill here, then the Doolittle brothers came in the 1830s to start the Doolittle carriage shop. This business continued under the Doolittles until they sold out to J. H. Markham in 1869. Markham placed this ad shown here. He did not succeed with the carriage business and eventually the Rogers Rake shop was located in these buildings. ☚



**CARRIAGES!**

The undersigned having purchased the Carriage Works lately occupied by H. & C. Doolittle,

**AT PLEASANT VALLEY,**

Will keep constantly on hand a Complete Stock of

**Top and Open Buggies,**  
**Business Wagons, &c.,**  
**Carriages and Wagons of all kinds,**

Made to order and warranted from the best of stock. I have on hand a few second-hand Buggies for sale cheap.  
 Pleasant Valley, Conn., Sept. 16, 1870. J. H. MARKHAM. 221f



**A blast from the past...**

Item in the January 25, 1878 Winsted Herald newspaper:

Barkhamsted - New Schoolhouse. - The "boss" schoolhouse of the town is now at the Center. The Building Committee - Messrs. Howd, Tiffany and Wheeler- deserve much credit for the very satisfactory manner in which everything has been done. The outside presents a good appearance, and the inside is *complete*. The desks are from the Sherwood Co., Springfield, and are a marvel of strength and beauty. The floor is of Georgia pine, smooth as glass; the sides of matched stuff, clear up to the ceiling, which is arched and plastered. Mr. Hubert Case is the general and efficient teacher, and the number of scholars is unusually large.

## Historical Society News

### Work at Merrill Tavern



Photo at left: BHS volunteer Charlie Watson makes repairs to the Merrill Tavern cellar stairway. The stairway was rickety and in poor condition to the point of being dangerous. Charlie added some new treads and fixed it up well. Also visible in this photo is the crushed stone floor (which covers a plastic vapor barrier) installed earlier in the year at Merrill Tavern.



Also at Merrill Tavern we had the concrete and brick portico floor removed. The portico itself was a structure from the mid-1900s and it was removed last year. Thanks to Jim Hart for donating the use of his front end loader for this work.

### Hitchcock Exhibit at Squire's Tavern

Work on the new Lambert Hitchcock exhibit at Squire's Tavern is progressing. Paul Hart is shown (photo at right) adding an element to the exhibit which includes a time line and brief history of Hitchcock and his chairs.

As the exhibit sign indicates, Hitchcock was probably Barkhamsted's most famous resident. His name is stenciled on the back of thousands of chairs he produced in Hitchcocks-ville (now Riverton) where his old brick factory still stands. Hitchcock employed a hundred or so workers in his shop. He served in the state legislature for several years. We are excited to have this new exhibit nearing completion.





## Collection Corner - *highlighting some historic items from our archives.*



The photo above is a new one that Barkhamsted Historical Society recently acquired... one we have not seen before. This is most likely an “Old Home Day” gathering at the Center Church on or near September 10. We are just not sure of the year, although judging from the clothing and the bikes, a fair estimate would be circa 1895.

Old Home Day is an annual event commemorating the anniversary of the town of Barkhamsted. In 1879, the centennial of the town’s incorporation, a huge celebration was held here at the Center Church in Barkhamsted Center on September 10. Many people who had moved out of town to other locations came back to their “old home” to take part in the festivities. After that, smaller celebrations were held on or close to September 10, continuing to the present day.

We are not sure why September 10th date was selected as the target date. Records indicate that the town of Barkhamsted was “born” on October 14, 1779. Perhaps the earlier date was considered better for a big outdoor event due to weather concerns.

Please let us know if you have any information on this photo - for example the date of this gathering or names of anyone shown.

At right is a photo of the Center Church circa 1925. ☼



## Historical Society Calendar



Squire's Tavern is open for our regular hours:

Sundays from 1:00 to 4:00 pm and  
Wednesdays from 9:00 am to noon.



① **Sunday, December 11** - Old-fashioned Christmas at Squire's Tavern from 1:00 to 4:00. Special feature: the madrigal singing group "Greenwoods Consort" performing from 2:00 to 3:00. See the Tavern decked out for the holidays and enjoy hot mulled cider and other refreshments. (Also see notice below.)

② **March, April May and June 2023** – Our program series for 2023 will be held on the second Friday of each of these months at the Barkhamsted Senior Center. Programs start at 7:00 pm. Program topics to be announced so please stay tuned.






**An  
Old Fashioned Christmas  
at Squire's Tavern**

**Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>  
1:00 PM to 4:00 PM**

*The madrigal singers, "Greenwoods Consort"  
will perform from 2:00 to 3:00 PM.*

*Come see the decorations, enjoy the music and  
share some hot mulled cider and cookies.*

*The Barkhamsted Historical Society  
100 East River Road*

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Web site- [barkhamstedhistory.us](http://barkhamstedhistory.us)

Squire's Tavern is located at 100 East River Road in Barkhamsted, one mile north of the Pleasant Valley bridge.

Squire's Tavern is open to the public on  
Wednesdays 9:00 am to noon and  
Sundays 1:00 to 4:00 pm

Barkhamsted Historical Society Membership:  
Seniors \$12, Individuals \$15, Family \$25

Mail to Sharon Lynes, BHS Membership,  
P.O. Box 94, Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

The Barkhamsted Historical Society is dedicated to preserving Barkhamsted history, helping people connect with past traditions and inspiring appreciation for our heritage to enrich lives and strengthen community.

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Barkhamsted Historical Society  
P.O. Box 94  
Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

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*Illustration, L. Landgraf*

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Newsletter of the Barkhamsted Historical Society



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