

Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter

web site - barkhamstedhistory.us

March 2021

A Different Perspective On the Pleasant Valley Bridge

by Paul Hart

The Pleasant Valley bridge over the Farmington River is a Barkhamsted icon familiar to virtually every resident. The bridge has seen a lot of years (and water!) go by and could tell some interesting stories. It was constructed in 1939 to replace the old bridge which washed out in the flood of 1938.

So it was of interest when we happened to be reading an old newsletter story about the construction of the bridge. The newsletter happened to be one from Camp White, the Civilian Conservation Corps camp located just a couple miles upstream from Pleasant Valley. Camp White was established in 1932 and operated during the hard years of the Depression when the federal government was trying to put young men back to work. A newsletter was published monthly for the CCC workers at Camp White. The February 1939 newsletter contained the following article:

Pleasant Valley Bridge

Local interest is at present centered on the new Pleasant Valley span which is replacing the old structure that was washed out during the recent flood.

Your reporter interviewed several of the bridge workers last week and is bringing you a few facts of interest concerning this new undertaking.

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The new bridge above replaced the old bridge below.



The 2020 COVID Pandemic: Personal Reflections

Barkhamsted Historical Society works hard to preserve photos, maps, documents and other items from our town's past so that we have an understanding and appreciation for how life has changed over the centuries. But another



important effort we undertake is recording today's routines and challenges, preserving them for the benefit of future generations. In that regard, it seemed like a good idea to document personal experiences of one of the biggest challenges confronting us today: the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a way, the early 2020 arrival of the COVID pandemic was like a winter blizzard. At first we heard small news fragments of something going on in far away China, similar to the first mention in a weather forecast of a possible snow storm approaching. Some initial forecasts were alarming, calling for a huge potential impact. Other forecasts said don't worry, it might even miss us. Then as time went by the news of the storm became more focused and we realized it may actually directly impact us in a big way. When the COVID storm hit, our normal routines were disrupted and life changed dramatically.

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Pleasant Valley bridge... - continued from page 1:

The bridge, which will have a 270 ton all-steel superstructure, is being financed and supervised by the Public Works Administration, working in conjunction with the State Department of Roads and Bridges.

The main contract was awarded to the Pittsburgh DesMoines Steel Company. The A. I. Savin Construction Company of Hartford has the sub-structural contract for the bridge approaches. When these latter are completed, the two curves and part of the hill which heretofore constituted a hazard to motorists will be taken out.

The project will cost \$104,000. The span will measure 232 feet from end to end. Nine hundred yards of cement were used for the two abutments. Steel piling was used only on the west abutment as the ground structure on the east end was too bony.

Owing to the temperamental nature of cement, it is necessary to duplicate summer weather conditions by the use of steam heat. Pumps are in service day and night in order to keep the river from flooding the project.

It is interesting to note that the foundation of the old bridge was not washed out. The soil from behind was washed away and the bridge merely floated down the stream. The last time your reporter saw this bridge it was a twisted, battered hulk of steel wreckage, showing all too plainly the terrific force of the waters of the Farmington river when it went on its last rampage.

Even before the flood, the state had planned to build a new bridge but its hand was forced by nature.

According to Construction foremen progress is very satisfactory despite adverse weather conditions and it is expected that the undertaking will be completed by May first. —John Gomes

One item in this article may have caught your eye. What does it mean that “...the two curves and part of the hill which heretofore constituted a hazard to motorists will be taken out.”? For a long time before the 1938 flood, there were actually TWO bridges at the Pleasant Valley crossing. A small bridge on the east side crossed over the water in a mill raceway that ran parallel to the river. This raceway provided water power to the Doolittle wagon shop (later the Rogers rake shop). After crossing the mill race, the road turned to the south for a short distance and then turned west to cross the river on the main bridge.

These turns were no problem during most of the town's history when oxen and horse drawn wagons were plodding across the two bridges. But when au-

tomobiles arrived on the scene, speeds got faster and faster, making these hairpin turns between the two bridges another matter. In June 1916 a farmer from Pine Meadow in his Hudson touring car went off the road while negotiating these turns. He was killed and several passengers injured. Three weeks before that accident, James A. Garfield, a Yale student and grandson of the late President Garfield went off the road in the same spot.

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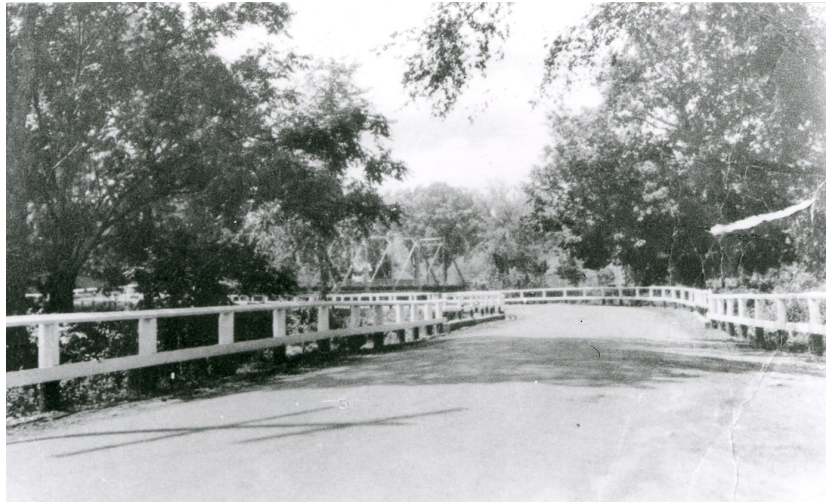


Photo above: standing at the east side and looking west across the Farmington River— this view shows the main bridge in the distance. Unseen is the small bridge over the mill race in the foreground. But very visible are the sharp turns confronting drivers up until the 1938 flood.

Phot below: Local residents view the damage from the 1938 flood which washed out the old bridge and led to a completely new design for the river crossing here.



Pleasant Valley bridge... - continued from page 2:

By 1939 the old mill site was no longer in use so the mill race supplying water power was not needed and could be filled in. The new approach on the east side now could make a straight run across the river on one bridge instead of two. The small pond currently near the bridge is actually a section of the old raceway. Improving this approach to eliminate the dangerous curves was probably why the state had plans to replace the old bridge even before it washed out in 1938.

It was nice to find this old CCC newsletter article on the Pleasant Valley bridge construction. The CCC workers

must have frequently used the bridge going from Camp White on West River Road over to Peoples Forest on the other side of the river where they did a lot of work. When the bridge washed out, this trip would have been longer going through Riverton. So the author of this article must have been very aware that news on the progress of the new bridge would be a hot topic for his readers. And regarding the construction of the new bridge, the contractors must have done a good job. The Pleasant Valley bridge survived an even worse flood in 1955, remaining in place to serve us now, 82 years later. ☿

Squire's Tavern- Looking Back 21 Years

The two photos below show some of the first work done on the Squire's Tavern during our restoration of the building. This was in December of 2000 when local contractor Ed Kostak was hired to make repairs to a section of exterior wall in what we now call the front kitchen. Somehow wa-

ter was entering this section of the wall, leading to rot of the studs, clapboards and a portion of the sill. The wall was so weak it probably could have been pushed over with modest effort by one person. ☿



A blast from the past...

From the New Hartford Tribune - April 14, 1882.:

Pleasant Valley – The old brick hotel becomes a Sunday rendezvous for a congregation not noted for piety or good behavior, but for their cider-drinking propensities. Fourteen persons there last Sabbath, and the fluid carried to them in pails, speaks loudly to the public for an abatement of the nuisance.



The 2020 COVID Pandemic... - continued from page 1:

How our lives changed is the subject of this series of articles. Starting with this newsletter and continuing on to some future issues, we will include personal experiences with the COVID pandemic. These experiences are interesting and informative to us now, but our target audience is

the reader 50 or 100 years from now. We want to share with them how the COVID pandemic impacted our lives over the last year or so. Thanks to all who contributed. The first article in our series starts below and the second starts on page 5.

COVID Series: Barkhamsted Town Hall

by Don Stein, Barkhamsted First Selectman

As we approach the 1-year mark for the Town, the State, the U.S., and the world having to fight the pandemic caused by the Coronavirus, the Town of Barkhamsted has weathered the "storm" remarkably well. We have a very dedicated group of Town Hall and school employees, and equally dedicated crews in the highway department and volunteer fire departments.



Photo above: Barkhamsted Town Hall

None of us knew what to expect when the virus first hit, so we pretty much shut down all in-person work and activities. The town hall and the schools went virtual (only conducted business via computer) and the highway department procedures were modified to establish safe distancing and to minimize person-to-person contact. The town hall staff was given the option of working from home and most opted to do so at least for the first several weeks. The elementary school and Regional 7 stayed virtual through the rest of the school year and did not return to in-person learning until late August, when the new school year began. Even the high school graduation was done outdoors as a drive-up and was held with very positive reviews. Town Hall has been closed to the public since April, but we are continuing to serve the public in the two foyers and on-line and have not received

any complaints about lack of service.

One of the biggest challenges that faced the Town was the summertime election primaries and the Presidential election in November. Our Registrars of Voters and the Town Clerk, as well as the folks who worked at the polls, did an incredible job with the election that was unlike any other in our memory. The number of mail-in ballots, the social distancing protocols and the number of people who voted in total, were all managed in an exceptional manner and the elections went very smoothly.

One of the side effects of the pandemic and the inability of folks to take advantage of indoor activities like restaurants and movie theaters, was that our outdoor recreation areas were overwhelmed, starting in April and through the summer and fall. The MDC had to close the parking areas on the Saville Dam and there were many days when the lots near the State parks were filled to overflowing. Obviously, we are very fortunate to live in this area, where you can hike, bike, fish, go to Stanclift Cove to swim and not be housebound like many in the cities.

The tougher story is that from the start of the pandemic in early 2020 through mid-October, there were only 33 Barkhamsted cases reported to the State. However, from that point until January 2021, we have had an additional 85 cases, or almost one a day. We only have 1 reported death in town due to the virus, but there have been others who passed away in nursing homes and are reported as a death in that community, not their hometown. To the credit of our residents, social distancing, staying at home, wearing masks, avoiding large gatherings and all of the other recommended practices seem to be a way of life for our residents, despite everyone's yearnings for a return to normalcy.

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COVID Series: A View Through Autism

by Georgia Nash

When COVID hit, my son, Mark Delinski, a 46 year old man with non-verbal Autism, was excitingly upbeat and showed tremendous appreciation for the smallest of favors. I am his caregiver and am under the impression that he was trying to make sure that I got through this well. His enthusiasm and support made life quite a bit easier. Mark willingly wore a mask and gleefully sang Happy Birthday to ensure that 20 seconds had elapsed while hand-washing. To keep busy during this time period, he even reunited with jigsaw puzzles after having lost interest long ago. He appeared to enjoy our new lifestyle and seemed to relish sequestering.



Mark Delinski at the tiller of a sail boat.

Since many people with Autism have infinitely acute senses, they tend to be extremely aloof and shy. Dealing with the onslaught on their senses, they need to make their world tiny. Many overpowering distractions block the information that would normally be used as a guide through regular life. So sheltering-in-place was probably quite soothing for Mark.

Trying to follow healthy guidelines by coughing into his elbow, Mark happily put his elbow up AFTER the cough, instead of before. This was endearing to me since he was trying so hard, but I kept hoping no-one would notice the breach in hygiene etiquette. Mark had continually cleared his throat throughout his life, and it was hard for him to refrain from doing it in public where everyone cringed at the thought of a cough or sneeze.

Mark had had a rocky and out-of-control beginning during his first several years, but the second half of Mark's life showed much more participation. He engaged in many activities, including using a scroll saw, taking a course at the Woodworkers' Club in Norwalk on making a ukulele, and learning to sail, skate, ski, shoot basketball hoops, hit balls with a bat, go on hikes, and accomplish rollerblading,

skateboarding, and bike riding (until he developed a phobia about loose dogs in the vicinity). Mark wanted to do what everybody else did. So, several years ago, when my husband was in a 10 year cancer battle, Mark joined us in the fight. Most of our time was spent at doctor appointments and in waiting rooms. Mark never complained and spent hours doing iPad jigsaw puzzles. As time went on, Mark began to relate to people more. He showed exuberance at his new progress. He would shake their hands or do high 5's. He seemed to be able to read when people felt fond of him. Mark would even find details that friends enjoyed and he would employ them as a way to relate to them. If they were amused, Mark would do it more.

The hardest part of COVID for Mark has been the mandated change in greeting people, keeping the 6' distance and avoiding touching them. Exceptions are almost impossible for Mark. Suddenly, during COVID, handshakes and high 5's were not allowed. He tried to learn elbow-bumps, but got them confused with coughing into his elbow! His fun antics no longer appealed to people when Mark tried to relate to them, since they were trying to stay away from each other. (Their aloofness almost sounded like Autism!) Since his progress in reaching out to people was blocked, Mark appeared devastated.

His fun and interactive times eventually were replaced by a sense of duty. The only interest Mark showed was in helping me! But resilience crept in and he began pouring a lot of delight into it! Little bits of fun were showing up.

Continued on page 6...



Ukulele and scroll saw item made by Mark.

Historical Society News



Squire's Tavern Visitation Takes a Hit—Like everyone else, the COVID pandemic has impacted the Barkhamsted Historical Society. For several months the Squire's Tavern was closed in the spring of 2020. Of course this hurt our visitation and programming. Visitors to Squire's Tavern totaled just 97 in 2020, compared to an average of 720 per year over the prior five years. We are off to a bad start for 2021 as well, having closed the Tavern on Sundays during January and February. So thus far in 2021 we have not had a single visitor. When we get

past the COVID pandemic, it will be nice to see people again at Squire's Tavern. We hope you are one of them!



Merrill Tavern Update— Not much news on the Merrill Tavern restoration effort as work there has slowed during the winter months. We are still working with the MDC to finalize a plan for reducing the moisture in the basement. And we are pursuing grants from several sources to cover this basement work and other needed tasks such as exterior painting, electrical and chimney repairs. One huge impact Merrill Tavern has had thus far is our use of the two outbuildings there, which have done wonders for our past storage problems.

(Circa 1930s photo of Merrill Tavern at left.)

A View Through Autism: continued from page 4:

The first indication of this was in the fact that Mark began to look forward to going out in the car and singing to oldies on the radio.

Mark gets a kick out of the way I sing - I bounce back and forth between harmonies. I love appealing to his sense of

humor! Mark has also become willing to try to deal with dogs on leashes during hikes. I've been trying to come up with interesting activities that would still meet the COVID safety precautions. Hopefully there will be more fun around the corner for us to explore! ☘

Barkhamsted Town Hall: continued from page 4:

The good news is that the vaccination process is starting; our most senior citizens are getting vaccinated now and our first responders (firefighters and health care workers) were offered the chance to get vaccinated earlier. Hopefully, the combination of people building immunity through the vaccines and the warmer weather that will come in the spring will allow a more normal lifestyle.

But just to demonstrate the type of people in Barkhamsted, a group of volunteers, which included town hall, school

personnel and other citizens, reached out to Town residents over 75 to see if they needed help signing up for vaccinations. Over 200 phone calls were made and 30 seniors who were unable to navigate the system were registered by Town Hall folks.

The bottom line is that the Town and its residents have shown their ability to respond to a previously unheard of challenge and we all feel fortunate to live here. ☘

Historical Society Calendar



COVID Impact

Due to COVID issues plus the usual slow down during the winter months, we have precious little here on our calendar.

Squire's Tavern hours were scaled back in January and February 2021, but we now are open with our regular hours:

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

Stop in and see us.

Program Series Kaput

In a normal year we would now be telling you about our program series lineup. Every year going back a couple of decades we have done one program a month during the winter and spring. Right now we have no such plans for 2021. Unless things change quickly in the next few months, we will not be bringing back the program series until next year.

Seems like just a short while ago, but really one whole year has passed since we had our last program: Friday, March 13, 2020 the hall at the Senior Center was full for Scott Johnstone's great presentation on the Central New England railroad in Barkhamsted (photo below). The very next day the Senior Center was closed and COVID restrictions hit big time.



Photo above- Central New England Railroad incident of 1892 in Barkhamsted when a rail car carrying dynamite blew up.

Barkhamsted Historical Society

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Docents -	Cathy Connole
Newsletter -	Paul Hart

Trustees

Bill Day (3 years)
Cathy Connole (3 yrs)
Harriet Winchenbaugh
(2 yrs)

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Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

E-mail- bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us

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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
or sign up and pay through our web site.

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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