

Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter

web site - barkhamstedhistory.us

March 2022

Remembering Colonel John Reitemeyer

Section 1 by Ted Bachman:

John R. Reitemeyer and his wife Gertrude (Schatzie) were our next door neighbors and friends from 1967 until their respective deaths in 1979 and 1982. We shared a common driveway on West River Road in Pleasant Valley. We knew little about them before moving here from Pennsylvania, but were told that New Englanders could be somewhat hard to get to know. That was far from the truth. From the day we moved in they were kind, friendly and helpful in getting to know the neighbors, tradesmen and the community.

Jack (as he was called in town) was a tall handsome man in his late sixties who loved to fish, take his dog on pheasant hunting trips, and watch 'Perry Mason' every weekday afternoon at 4 pm. He shared and completed the Sunday N.Y. Times crossword puzzle each week with my wife and was continually amused by the antics of our three young daughters. He was a source of encouragement in my business venture and encouraged me to get involved in the school board, establish a fire district and serve as an advisory board member representing the Society for Savings Bank branch that he was instrumental in bringing to Barkhamsted.

We quickly learned of his involvement with the Hartford

Courant. Jack had a newspaper tube installed on our front walk and paid for a 1 year subscription to the daily paper. He took his position as president and publisher of the paper to heart. The paper arrived at his home at 7:00 am sharp. Jack was ready with a 'red' crayon to circle any grammatical error or misspelling he found as he read the paper cover to cover. Pity the reporter or typesetter who created the error! The vintage Rambler station wagon would erupt from the garage and scatter stones as it barreled out of the driveway on its way to the Broad Street home of the crew responsible

for putting the paper together every day of the week, fifty-two weeks a year for the previous 200 years. You just knew someone would be reprimanded. There were very few errors when the "Colonel" was running the paper.

Jack demonstrated the same concern for the Town of Barkhamsted. He organized a work party of townsmen to help clean up the houses ravaged by the '55 flood. He was instrumental in organizing the now famous 4th of July parade in 1951. His nephew, two other local children, the minister and a friend marched in that 1st parade sporting a drum, fife,

pots/pans and the American flag down West River Road. Jack was a strong voice in opposition to the proposed plan in 1968 to make route 44 an interstate highway that would have included an entrance/exit ramp in the center of town.

Further insight into Col John R. Reitemeyer is provided by two friends – Dick Ahles, who worked at the Courant when Jack was president in the 60s, and Dave Dubnanski who joined the paper some sixteen years after Jack had retired.

Section 2 by Dick Ahles:

Barkhamsted, Conn. isn't a dateline you often find in The New York Times, but there it was on an April morning in 1979, reporting the death of the little town's most prominent citizen: "Barkhamsted, Conn., April 22, 1979 (UPI) – John R. Reitemeyer, the former president and publisher of The Hartford Courant, died last night at his home after a long illness. He was 81 years old."

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Above: Reitemeyer at his Hartford Courant desk. Below, cleanup party in Pleasant Valley after the 1955 flood — Jack is second from left.



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“Mr. Reitemeyer was president and publisher of The Courant for 21 years, from 1947 to 1968, longer than anyone else in the paper’s 215 year history.” Today, after 259 years, he still holds the record as the longest serving president and publisher of the nation’s oldest continuously published newspaper.



He was Colonel, not Mister Reitemeyer, to everyone since returning to the paper after achieving that rank in World War II. It was a time when there was more than one celebrated Colonel in the newspaper business.

Frank Knox, one of Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders in the Spanish American

War and a World War I veteran, became publisher of the Chicago Daily News and the defeated Republican vice presidential candidate on Alf Landon’s ticket in 1936. After that, Democrat Franklin Roosevelt put him in his wartime bipartisan Cabinet as Secretary of the Navy.

Then there was another Chicago publisher who more closely resembled and may have served as an inspiration/role model for Colonel Reitemeyer—Col. Robert R. McCormick of the Chicago Tribune. Like Hartford’s colonel, McCormick was a veteran of both world wars and, except for those wartime interruptions, both colonels devoted their entire working lives to their respective newspapers. McCormick, however, owned his.

The colonels even looked alike, had the same military bearing and military moustaches, not to mention the same Republican politics. But unlike the Chicagoan, Reitemeyer was not one to let his political views drift into the news columns.

The New Jersey born Reitemeyer’s association with the Courant began when he was a student at Trinity College and got himself hired as the paper’s campus correspondent. But his education and newspaper apprenticeship were delayed for a time when he joined the Army in 1917 at the age of 19. He didn’t get overseas, but served as an officer in one of the new tank companies at training camps in the states as tanks replaced the horse cavalry.

He became a full time Courant reporter right after his graduation from Trinity in June of 1920 and was good enough to get important news assignments almost immediately. One of the new reporter’s biggest stories exposed the poor conditions suffered by patients in one of the state’s veterans hospitals—information he obtained while working undercover for several weeks as one of the hospital’s orderlies.

He was good at his job and was quickly promoted to night

city editor in 1921, Sunday editor in 1923 and city editor, one of the top news executive positions, at the age of 27 in 1925. “He ran the city room as a general might fight a battle,” said a veteran of those days, “expecting loyalty and dispatch from his staff and giving them the same in return,” according to the Times obituary.

During those years, Reitemeyer remained in the Army Reserve, and after Pearl Harbor he was recalled to active duty. He spent the war years commanding the Eastern Defense Command’s public information activities in New York.

After the war, he returned to his city editor job until the directors of the then locally-owned paper elected him president and publisher in 1947. Reitemeyer took over just as Connecticut—and much of the nation—was undergoing a post-war population explosion and baby boom along with a population shift from the cities to the suburbs. The new publisher knew exactly how to respond to this major sociological change.

He made certain that Courant news coverage followed the moving vans to the suburban and exurban communities in roughly three quarters of Connecticut—six of the state’s eight counties.

A dozen regional bureaus were opened and staffed with full time reporters and their work was supplemented in smaller towns by part timers who were paid by the inch for whatever they got printed about their towns each day. Many of these were housewives who enjoyed the rare chance then to use their skills outside the home. The few females with full time jobs on the news side of the paper were largely assigned to the “society pages” covering “women’s news.”

One town correspondent Courant veterans still talk about is Miss Pinney—nobody dared call by her first name, Clover—who covered Avon, Farmington and Unionville for 54 years. As she grew older, Miss Pinney’s perspectives changed and I remember, as a copy editor on the paper’s state desk, being told by Miss Pinney that “a 38-year-old youth was arrested today...”

On the occasion of the newspaper’s 200th birthday in 1964, Time Magazine noted that Miss Pinney, who retired in 1963, “never missed a fire.” She and the other town correspondents never missed a selectman’s meeting either, or the school board or zoning board. They even reported the schools’ weekly lunch menus. The Colonel insisted that the correspondents cover what the suburban families cared to read about, along with harder news, and the bureaus heard from him if he found coverage of this town or that wanting.

By the time the Colonel was reaching retirement in 1968, the Courant had overtaken and passed the afternoon Hartford Times in their decades-long circulation battle. That was because the Courant saw to it that every town, no matter how small, had a bit of its news almost every day. Five editions had to be printed to accomplish this feat.

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And one of the smaller towns got extra special attention. Barkhamsted news ranked right up there with New Britain or Willimantic or Middletown in importance because of one reader and his spouse. The Reitemeyers lived on West River Road for decades and any news he may have missed, his wife, Gertrude, known as Schatzie, was likely to notice.

One Barkhamsted correspondent, sitting next to the Colonel at a town meeting, recalled being reprimanded for not reporting the 50th wedding celebration of a local farmer and his wife. "You're covering too much government," said the boss, not enough people news.

You might say—and those who worked for him did say—that the Colonel was not without his eccentricities. He was universally remembered as a devotee of the old military maxim that rank has its privileges.

Soon after becoming publisher, he acquired a large, former auto dealership building on Broad Street and converted it into a modern newspaper plant, freeing the staff from their ancient headquarters on State Street that was aging back when Mark Twain was a frequent visitor.

But the new newspaper plant did lack one modern amenity—air conditioning. The city room, with its large windows, was a summertime hothouse but the reporters and editors couldn't open the windows because that would provide entry to more heat on the wings of flocks of mosquitos. The Colonel's nearby office was one of the few with air conditioning and reporters would stroll by its sometimes open door to feel a bit of manufactured air.

During an especially hot and humid spell, the newsroom petitioned the Colonel for relief and he responded like a company commander would—by issuing a supply of salt tablets for each drinking fountain.

Those of us on the state and copy desks in the rear of the city room were regularly amused as the reporters in front found reasons to retreat from their desks when they saw the Colonel, dime in hand, advancing on them most afternoons to send one of them to the cafeteria to get his coffee.

On one rare occasion, the Colonel came into the city room, not for coffee, but to go from desk to desk, chatting briefly with each reporter. Soon, word traveled back, row by row of desks, advising all of us, "When the Colonel asks your opinion, say 'Steve Canyon.'"

As those of us in the rear got that advice, we heard the Colonel explode, shouting, "Dammit, Steve Canyon's in the Hartford Times." It seems he was taking an informal poll to determine the most popular comic strip on his funny pages and

was expecting to hear about the paper's Dick Tracy, Moon Mullins or Terry and the Pirates, not one from the afternoon competitor.

Reid MacCluggage, who succeeded me on the state desk and rose to be managing editor of the Courant and publisher of the New London Day, confirmed the salt tablet story and I witnessed the coffee and Steve Canyon stories.

"Give him credit, though," MacCluggage added, "for a business plan that bolstered local news. The sophisticates laughed at the Courant" (for the school lunches and other "minor" news) "but the Colonel was way ahead of his time."

Section 3 by Dave Dubnanski:

Our Realtor had planned a county-wide house hunting tour for me while I was visiting Connecticut. The itinerary included homes in Kent, Litchfield, and Norfolk, with the last minute addition of a place in Pleasant Valley.



*Colonel Reitemeyer (at right).
This may be in Greenland.*

After a long morning, we finally made it to our last stop on West River Road. As we walked through the door we were greeted by the owner who, while expounding on the features of the house, mentioned that it had once been owned by John Rietemeyer, former owner of *The Hartford Courant*. Now while I knew that John Rietemeyer didn't own the Courant, he was certainly one of the most important and influential publishers in *Courant* and Connecticut history.

I spent my immediate post art school years as a freelance newspaper artist for a number of Connecticut newspapers with an income keeping me below the reportable level. In 1984 I landed my first full time newspaper position working nights in the *Hartford Courant* composing room. It was the beginning of my 34-year newspaper career and the job that introduced me to my future bride.

The Colonel's reign as Publisher ended 16 years prior to my arrival but his presence never left the building. Veteran production and news staffers would generally invoke his name in situations they knew would surely have him teed off, or led them to wish for the days when Retemeyer was running the show. He was a larger-than-life guy who became a mystical figure to many of the younger employees who never had the pleasure of meeting him.

So I had to make sure that the romance of owning the Reitemeyer homestead wasn't a factor, or a major factor, or let's just say a deciding factor in our home buying decision. Though writing this little remembrance in The Colonel's old den is a fortunate stroke of pure serendipity. ☘

A Walk Back in Time-The Center Schoolhouse 1929

by Cathy Connole

In July of 2021, Cindy Rudd Ellis and her cousin from California along with her two sons made a special visit to the Center Schoolhouse. They wanted the boys to step back in time to the place where their great-great-grandmother, Albertine Rice Teeter, had taught school so many years ago.



Photo above- Cindy Rudd Ellis, her cousin and two sons visit the Center Schoolhouse where Cindy's great-great-grandmother taught.

Albertine Rice was the **LAST** teacher of the Center School before it closed in 1931. At the age of 19 in 1929, Miss Rice had just graduated from Worcester Normal School in Massachusetts when she received a letter from the supervisor of the schools at the time, Mr. Lewis S. Mills, who was impressed with her resume and, therefore, offered her the position. She was to expect twelve children in grades 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8. Her salary was \$1,000 for the year.

When she arrived in Barkhamsted, Albertine lived in the Hollow with a German immigrant family, the Luhrs. Nearby was the Teeter dairy and tobacco farm where Miss Rice spent a good deal of time, based on letters we have from her. She mentioned sledding with Leroy on a "double ripper." After a mule hauled the sled up the Hartland Road, four or more jumped on the sled and at the sound of a gunshot, they rode down sometimes as far as the river (West Branch). Albertine also stated that folks gathered at the Teeter home for singing while Luella Teeter, the oldest daughter, played the organ which she had bought after earning money by selling blueberries. Needless to say, Leroy must have had his eye on Albertine because they were married shortly after her two-year tenure at the Center School.

Through Albertine's letters and a tape recording, we have been able to visualize what the last years at the Center School were like. When she visited the schoolhouse in 1994, she was able to clarify what the interior was really like, at least in 1929. "The stove was at the back of the



The two boys check out items at the schoolhouse.

room in the left-hand corner with a long stove pipe going across the room." (Accounts from former student Harriett Day stated that the stove was in the middle of the room. This may have been true in the earlier years.) Albertine recalled that the walls were painted gray and that there were blackboards on all four walls. She had given the room a "more home-like feel" by sewing blue and white gingham curtains for the lower window panes. She believed that they would "discourage a dreamy or inattentive pupil." Students sat at desks that were "fastened to the floor." The teacher's desk was at the front of the room and a pencil sharpener could be found behind it. Albertine had access to "no visual aids or up-to-date textbooks." But in the second year they had electricity; her fiancé, Leroy Teeter, "did the wiring."

With twelve students, Albertine Rice recalled, "We were literally a big family- and I loved it. Discipline was no problem and we worked together harmoniously." Among them were Marjorie, Charles and David Day, Elizabeth and Arlene Case, and Mary Ellen and Kathryn LeGeyt. She seemed to possess a special quality of winning over reluctant students as evidenced by her recollection of Ellsworth Tupper, who hated school when she first met him. On the first day of school, he arrived with his dog and she allowed the dog to stay.

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“He warmed a bit. I soon learned he played the guitar and the harmonica. If I bought a guitar when I went home for the Christmas vacation, would he teach me to play? That cracked the ice. I bought a guitar at a pawn shop. My eighth grade girl got a guitar. Her father was an auctioneer, and the eighth boy found one in his attic. We had quite a band and played one year at the Riverton Fair.”

Ellsworth eventually became the “janitor” and was in charge of starting the fire in the wood stove. During the noon hour, it was often used to make fudge or popcorn. If there was plenty of snow on the ground during the win-

ter, Albertine recalled making a “freezer full of delicious pineapple sherbet. Icicles and snow and a lot of churning.” Another recollection was that recess was spent under (or up in) the Constitution tree.

As the great-great-grandsons from California sat at the desks inside the Center Schoolhouse in 2021, I hope that for a few moments they could imagine their great-great-grandmother at the head of the class strumming her guitar or perhaps warning the students to not get too close to the stove. For more information about the Center Schoolhouse, please visit the Barkhamsted Historical Society on Wednesdays or Sundays. You can also visit the Center Schoolhouse the last Sunday of the month from May-September.

A Riverton Family’s Historic Coverlets

by Bonnie Boyle

An exciting benefit of belonging to the Barkhamsted Historical Society is to witness the reception of wonderful artifacts representing the town’s rich past into our archives. At a recent BHS Board meeting, a small package from Ralph Lawrence of Littleton, Colorado was opened revealing two beautiful historic coverlets. Ralph is a descendant of the Deming family who lived in Riverton in the 1800s.

The coverlets (decorative, lightweight bed covers) have a direct Barkhamsted connection. The first (photo below at left), in stunningly good condition, is white handwoven linen decorated with crewel (wool) embroidery. Navy blue stripes outline repeated flower and bird motifs which are stitched in blue, red and gold wool. At the top edge is hand-stitched “Belinda M. Deming – 1846 - Hitchcocksville - Conn - Abby B. Deming”. Attached to the back is a handwritten note by the donor’s mother, Doris Menzel Lawrence, stating “My grandmother Deming wove the linen and Aunt Abby worked it when she was married. [A Relic](#)”.

(Ralph Lawrence believes that his mother probably meant “great-grandmother”.)

The second coverlet (photo below at right), for a child’s bed, is also in excellent condition. It is made of lined white cotton with an embroidered ruffle along two edges. Stitched in red embroidery floss are images of animals, flowers, and children at play. In the center is stitched “H. L. D. 1888”. Ralph Lawrence wrote that these initials represent “almost certainly a Deming and from the Riverton area.”

Belinda Moore Deming (1800-1886), married to George Gilbert Deming, was the daughter of Apollon Moore (1777-1867). She was given a brick house west of Riverton General Store (R 51, Tiffany record) by her father.

These two artifacts are an amazing part of our past and a significant addition to our collections. We hope to be able to feature them in a display at the Tavern soon. ☘



Historical Society News

Riley Family Donation

We are sad to announce the passing last year of Judy Riley, an Ullmann family descendant and good friend of the Barkhamsted Historical Society. Judy's grandmother Meta grew up at the Ullmann farmhouse we now call Squire's Tavern. Over the years Judy has shared with us photos, historic items and much information on the Ullmann family.

Last fall we were contacted by Judy's son Tom who donated a number of items that Judy wanted us to have. These included maps, a school desk and a cider press that may have been used on the Ullmann farm. There was also another historic Barkhamsted item: a bedstead made at the Rogers Rake shop in Pleasant Valley. Tom told us that Judy said the Rogers Rake shop would sometimes produce these bedsteads when their regular rake business was slow.

Rogers Rake shop was in production for over 35 years in Pleasant Valley, starting at a couple of locations on Morgan Brook and ending at the shop near the Pleasant Valley bridge—right about where the fisherman's parking lot is now.



Photo at top: the Rogers Rake bedstead donate by the Riley family. Below that is a photo of the Rogers Rake shop circa 1920. The mill pond is about where the fisherman's parking lot is now (southeast of the Pleasant Valley bridge).

Squire's Tavern Gets a New Roof

A new roof including plywood underlayment and shingles was installed on Squire's Tavern late in January 2022. The old roof had started to show some minor leaks in the spring of 2021. The wood shingles were put on 20 years ago when we started major preservation work on the building. Roofing contractors have since told us that 20 years is about the average life span for wood shingles. We are very pleased with the work by the contractor, Royal Construction.

We had just finished painting the exterior of the Tavern in the summer of 2021, a very expensive job. So being hit with another major building cost, one that was not on our radar, was daunting. Fortunately we were able to get a number of very generous grants to complete the needed work. We got some Federal funds through the town of Barkhamsted. We will be receiving \$12,000 from the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation (through the Douglas and Janet Roberts Fund). And the Farmington River Coordinating Committee also has generously donated \$10,000 toward this project.

We so appreciate these kind grants that will allow us to keep the Squire's Tavern building preserved well into the future.



Photos above: two views of the start of our new roof at Squire's Tavern (January 25, 2022). The job was finished a couple of days later—thank you to our contractor: Royal Construction (Canton, CT 860 693-2806).

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.



Our 2022 program series is scheduled every second Friday of the month from March until June at 7:00 pm at the Barkhamsted Senior Center. They are free and open to the public with light refreshments after the program. Four are scheduled for 2022:

- ① **Friday, March 11, 2022** - "Memories of the '55 Flood" with Fred Fenn and friends. 7:00 pm at the Barkhamsted Senior Center.
- ② **Friday, April 8, 2022** - "Riverton Architecture." Mike Day covers the wide variety of buildings in the village of Riverton. 7:00 pm at the Barkhamsted Senior Center.
- ③ **Friday, May 13, 2022** - Walt Woodward presents "Leaving Connecticut, Shaping America" covering the migration out of Connecticut from 1780 to 1830. 7:00 pm at the Barkhamsted Senior Center.
- ④ **Friday, June 10, 2022** - "Barkhamsted Post Offices and Postal History." How Barkhamsted post offices changed over the years is fascinating. Paul Hart shows how the postal service impacted daily life in Barkhamsted and the nation. 7:00 at Barkhamsted Senior Center.



Photos above: The Christmas Open House held at Squire's Tavern on December 11, 2021 was fun and well attended. Music was provided by Ed Kostak on the dulcimer (at right) and by the Riverton Theater's singers from the "Christmas Carol" who were dressed in period outfits.

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Telephone- (860) 738-2456

Mail- P. O. Box 94
 Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

E-mail- bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us

Web site- 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
 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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Illustration, L. Landgraf

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