

Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter

website - barkhamstedhistory.us

March 2023

Remembering Doug Roberts... Written In Stone

By Paul Hart

Doug Roberts had a huge impact on the this town and the Barkhamsted Historical Society. Doug died last year and we will not forget his help and advice, especially his knowledge of local history that he loved to share.

Doug had a nice field stone bench in his backyard that the Roberts family thoughtfully donated to BHS last year. We recently had this bench inscribed with a memorial message honoring Doug. The bench was installed at Squire's Tavern in early January (see photos below). It is now located

facing our interpretive history signs near the Tavern.

We want to thank Rich Novak and the Barkhamsted town road crew for their able assistance and advice in moving the stone bench before it was inscribed.

Come on down and see the bench. Sit on it awhile and read our signs covering one of the things Doug loved so much: the history of our town. ☚



Photo above left: Richard Atwood of A&A Memorial Services (standing) and BHS volunteer Charlie Watson install the field stone bench in early January.



At right: Paul Hart on the bench with the inscription honoring Doug visible ("THANK YOU DOUG ROBERTS... YOUR LOVE OF HISTORY INSPIRES US STILL")

A Riverton Pastor From the Past

Recently we got an e-mail from Max Fredric (Fred) Volkmann, Vice Chancellor Emeritus of Washington University in Saint Louis. He mentioned that his father (Rev. Dr. Max F. B. Volkmann) was the pastor at the Riverton Congregational Church for a couple years in the early 1940s. Fred said he had a few of his father's belongings pertaining to Riverton and asked whether we would like them for the historical society collection.

These items included Smiley's 1934 short history of Riverton, an 1890 church manual, and a 28 page manuscript written by Rev. Volkmann: "Survey of the Riverton Congregational Parish".



Helen Rebecca and Max F. B. Volkmann with son "Fred".

We of course responded that we would very much like to receive them. Fred sent them and we very much appreciate his thoughtfulness in providing these items. The 28-page manuscript by Pastor Volkmann is especially significant with a frank assessment of the Riverton community during the early 1940s.

We asked Fred if he had any memories of Riverton. Fred was born in September 1941 and the family left Riverton a year or two later, so Fred did not have any direct recollections of the village. But he did provide us with information about his father and mother

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A Riverton Pastor- continued from page 1...

that was very interesting and informative. While in Riverton, Fred's mother and father were close friends of one of the inn owners (possibly Richard Miller of the Riverton Inn) who gave them a couple of original Hitchcock chairs which are still in the family today.

Fred's father Max left Germany for America at age 19 in 1924 with a grade-school education and journeyman papers as a wagonmaker and blacksmith. His goal was to make enough money to bring his widowed mother to America. Max's father was conscripted against his will into the German army in World War I and was killed by a Russian sniper on the Eastern Front in 1915.

After making enough money Max was able to bring his mother and two younger brothers to this country. He then decided to attend high school, then college where he earned his bachelors degree, then to Colgate-Rochester Divinity School for a divinity degree, and finally a PhD from the Hartford Seminary Foundation. He entered the pulpit ministry and came to Riverton in the early 1940s, serving as pastor of the Riverton Congregational Church for about two years.

When Max and his wife Helen got to Riverton, he began making repairs to the church parsonage (which is still standing -- the second house up School Street, almost across from the Hitchcock Chair factory). He also organized an effort to convert the church basement into a meeting and gathering area. Max was very talented with tools, as well as possessing an intellect geared toward philosophy, religion and languages. When he retired many years later, he gave Fred two beautiful wall lamps he made from

discarded large barn-door hinges he salvaged from the parsonage garage. They are still in Fred's family.

As you might imagine, being German in this area right after Pearl Harbor was not easy. Max did run up against anti-German agitation from at least one Riverton resident, who he set straight in no uncertain terms as to why he left Germany in 1924.

When Max left Riverton, he specialized in helping Congregational churches that were losing focus and lacking leadership. He worked with parishes in New York, Nebraska and Minnesota. In 1960 Max decided to apply his PhD to a career as a professor of languages and religion, retiring as a professor at Iowa Wesleyan University.

Although Fred had little memory of Riverton, he did return here in the late 1970s to see the Hitchcock factory and the church. The church was closed the day of his visit, so he dropped by the Riverton post office to inquire if anyone remembered Rev. Max Volkmann. Fred did not identify himself, and was surprised when the postmistress looked at him and said "Yes, I do remember him... so you must be his son Freddy"! Fred was impressed that so many years later his father had not been forgotten.

We are grateful not only for the collection items passed on to us by Fred Volkmann but especially for the stories of his parents who lived in Riverton over 80 years ago. This glimpse into a portion of their lives while they were a part of this town helps us to appreciate and understand a little bit more of our history. ☚



Photo at left: the parsonage of the Riverton Congregational Church on School Street in Riverton. Fred Volkmann's parents lived here while his father Max served as pastor of the church in the early 1940s. Date of this photo is probably about 1941.

A Major Donation of History

Barkhamsted Historical Society has recently received a major donation of photos and historical notes relating to the Merrill Tavern. We want to thank Peter and Margaret (Peggy) Bakker for their generous donation. This material was given to us already organized in a notebook and with the photos and historical notes copied on high quality heavy paper. It is a wonderful addition to our collection.

The subject of this donation is NOT the George Merrill Tavern that BHS is currently in the process of preserving. It is another Merrill Tavern, the John Merrill Tavern. Same family and located very close to each other, but two separate and distinct buildings.

The John Merrill Tavern is currently Peter and Peggy's home on Boettner Road in Barkhamsted. This building has a fascinating history behind it. When the Barkhamsted Reservoir came in the 1930s, this building was moved about a half mile, off of the water company's land. Aerial photos from 1934 clearly show the track that the building took through the fields and woods when it was moved.

In its original location just down the hill from the George Merrill Tavern, near what is now the waters of the reservoir, this building was at the center of all the action. It was located on the corner of a busy intersection: one road coming east from Barkhamsted Center and down into the Hol-

low. Just across the street in the old days was the old meeting house, cemetery and militia parade grounds. The other road went north up the Hollow on the west side of the Farmington River (the East branch). Right across this intersection was the Barkhamsted Center school and the Constitution Oak. This area is one of the features of our Barkhamsted Center/Barkhamsted Hollow tour. It gets a lot of attention because so much happened here.

The Merrill clan was a prominent family in Barkhamsted. There was actually a third Merrill Tavern down in the Hollow which did not survive the coming of the reservoir.

Included in the material from the Bakker donation are photos of the John Merrill Tavern during the move. We always lamented the fact that we did not have any photos of the move, but now we have some. Also included in the photos are wall stencils from the old house. It is thought that the itinerant stenciler that did this work also did the stenciling in the Squire's Tavern and also the George Merrill Tavern.

We very much appreciate the donation of this valuable piece of history from the Bakkers and we are so happy to have this material in our collection. On your next visit to Squire's Tavern we will be thrilled to show it to you. ☘



Top left: John Merrill Tavern before the move.

Top right: The building up on cribbing during the move, about 1933.

At right: the building as Peter and Peggy Bakker's current home.

At left: a ballroom stencil above the fireplace, similar if not exactly the same as the one found at Squire's Tavern.



Susie-Q Update

In our last newsletter (December 2022) we presented the story of Susie-Q. She was a chicken that lived with students in the second grade classroom of Barkhamsted Elementary school teacher Marjorie Miller. Susie-Q delighted her classmates for about 10 years in the 1950s and early 1960s.

One hole in the story was: Where did Susie-Q come from? How did she end up in Mrs. Miller's classroom? Well after our last newsletter was distributed we received more information from Marjorie Miller's daughter Margo Miller Fenn. Margo uncovered a box of Susie-Q related items that included exactly how this chicken arrived on the scene in Barkhamsted and was beloved by hundreds of school children.

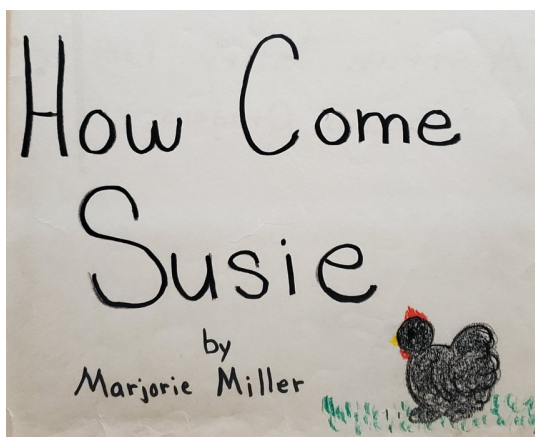
The box found by Margo contained a treasure trove of Susie-Q history including five scrap books apparently made by students and Marjorie Miller. One of these scrap books had the story of Susie-Q's origin.

In Pleasant Valley, not far from the elementary school lived Mr. and Mrs. Brown and their two young two children, Steve and Susie. One Easter weekend, the children's grand-

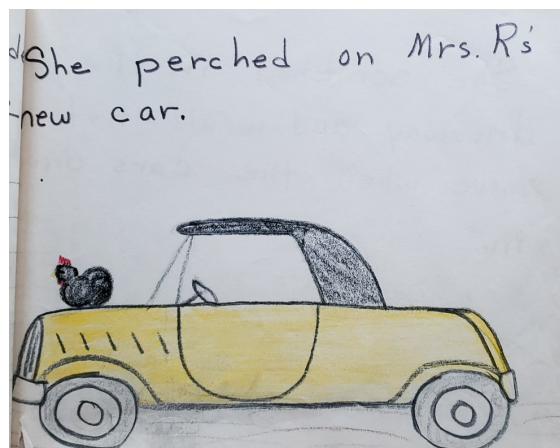
parents visited and on their way to Pleasant Valley they decided to bring an Easter gift for the grandchildren. They saw a road sign that said "Cochin Bantams For Sale". They bought a rooster and a hen and on their arrival in Pleasant Valley, presented them to the children. Steve wanted the rooster and named it "Pecky". Susie got the hen and it was named "Susie-Q".

The two chickens lived with the Browns on West River Road. Unfortunately Pecky got roughed up by a dog and died soon after. And Susie-Q kept getting into trouble with the next door neighbors, who happened to be the Reitmeyers (Colonel John Reitmeyer was the president and publisher of the Hartford Courant). Susie-Q cackled loudly early in the morning just outside the Reitmeyers' bedroom window, raided their garden and worst of all, frequently perched on Mrs. Reitmeyer's brand new car.

Susie-Q had to go, and Marjorie Miller, who lived nearby, agreed to take Susie-Q. She brought the chicken to her second grade classroom thinking perhaps one of the students would want to take it. But all the students were so delighted with Suzie-Q that Mrs. Miller decided to keep the bird as a class mascot. And the rest is history! ☘



Images at left and right: a couple of pages from Mrs. Miller's scrap book that provided the solution to the mystery of Susie-Q's origin.... and also where the name "Susie-Q" came from.



A blast from the past...

Diary entry January 1, 1919 of Ellen Payne Birden who lived in Barkhamsted Hollow south of the Hollow store (Birden home shown at right):

Wed Jan 1st - Cloudy, damp day. Made squash pies. Washed white clothes. Heard Arnold Johnson had shot himself at Fred Church's on his 86th birthday. Helped Harold make out his registration card for his car. Am reading a book, "Capt. Dieppe" by Anthony Hope.



Historical Society News



Painting at Squire's Tavern

Georgia Nash (photo at left) has been meticulously painting the trim boards in the little upstairs hallway at Squire's Tavern. The work is slow because she is using methods that make the paint look like it has aged after being applied by Bela Squire himself about 200 years ago.

We are so lucky to have Georgia as a volunteer, with all her skills as an artist and her willingness to put in long hours.

Merrill Tavern Plans

Speaking of painting, we have big plans to get the exterior of both Merrill Tavern and the Center Schoolhouse painted in 2023 (photo at right).

Before the paint goes on, Merrill Tavern will need some trim and clapboard repairs. We are seeking a grant to help cover this costly project.



BHS Receives Grant From CT Humanities



Barkhamsted Historical Society received a \$5,900 CT Cultural Fund Operating Support Grant from CT Humanities (CTH) in December. These grants assist organizations as they recover from the pandemic to maintain and grow their ability to serve their community and the public.

As the grant name implies, these funds are intended for operational expenses, so we will cover costs associated with our new website and also operational expenses at Squire's Tavern including heat and utilities. This is a big benefit because it allows us to devote more of our own funds toward work in preserving Merrill Tavern, including the repairs and painting mentioned above.

This is the second grant of this type from CT Humanities. We are very appreciative of this support. It comes at a critical time for us as we have faced several major repairs and maintenance costs at Squire's Tavern which has drawn down our resources.

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

Featured here from the Historical Society collection are two Phoenix Company wood planes. If you were a carpenter in the old days you would undoubtedly have planes to shape and size wood. Pictured below are two different planes: one with a curved blade and one with a straight blade. Each has been stamped with a die, leaving the mark of the manufacturer:

“Phoenix Company
Hitchcocksville
Warranted”

The Phoenix Company was located in what is now Riverton (called Hitchcocksville until 1865) in the old Hitchcock factory. After Lambert Hitchcock left Riverton in 1842, several owners continued to produce chairs at the factory until the factory burned in 1848. The building was rebuilt shortly after by Alford brothers (Arba and Alfred). Chairs continued to be produced there until the end of 1852. The Phoenix Company was formed in 1853 and produced wood planes until Alfred Alford sold the factory to D. H. Stevens & Co which manufactured rulers and levels. While we associate chairs with the Hitchcock factory, there were actually a number of different businesses in this building over the years, including the Phoenix Company. ⌘



Photo at left: two Phoenix Company wood planes.

Photo at right: the makers mark: “Phoenix Company, Hitchcocksville, Warranted.” Both planes have this mark.



Photo at left: the old Hitchcock Chair factory in Riverton. This photo is probably from circa 1870 when the D. H. Stevens & Co occupied the building, making rulers and levels.

Some of these 46 workers (including 5 women) were probably former Phoenix Company employees. It is hard to spot in this small photo but one of the workers has two crutches.

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.



The Historical Society's annual program series is set for the second Friday in March, April, May and June. All programs are at the Senior Center **EXCEPT for the first one on March 10**. This program will be at Squire's Tavern

① **Friday, March 10 at 7:00 pm** - First of our winter/spring program series, this one exploring many aspects of the popular hobby of making dollhouses and miniatures. A centerpiece of the program is the spectacular dollhouse recently donated to the Society by the family of the late Doug Roberts. Doug made the dollhouse for his wife Janet. Mike Day will present facts about doll house construction as well as making miniatures and their many uses. **This program is at Squire's Tavern, 100 East River Rd. NOT THE SENIOR CENTER.**

② **Friday, April 14 at 7:00 pm** – At the Barkhamsted Senior Center on West River Road. Former State Historian Walt Woodward will speak on **“Leaving Connecticut, Shaping America”**. Between 1780 and 1830 many Connecticut residents left our state and settled in places like Pennsylvania, Vermont and especially the part of our country that is now Ohio. We have references in the BHS collection of people from Barkhamsted settling there.

③ **Friday, May 12 at 7:00 pm** – At the Senior Center. The state of Connecticut operates the Poison Control center to handle calls relating to exposure to toxic substances. Learn about the history of the Poison Control Center operation and some examples of situations that they deal with.

④ **Friday, June 9 at 7:00 pm** – At the Senior Center. “The 90th Anniversary of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Its History and Work in CT” with author and historian Marty Podskoch. Marty will give a slide show presentation on the CCCs and its work in CT. The CCC was part of President Roosevelt's “New Deal” to relieve the poverty and unemployment of the Depression. Many CCC camps were set up in Connecticut towns including Camp White right here in our town.

Barkhamsted Historical Society

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Newsletter - Paul Hart

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Cathy Connole (1 yr)
Harriet Winchenbaugh (3 yrs)

Telephone- (860) 738-2456

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

E-mail- bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us

Website- 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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