

Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter

web site - barkhamstedhistory.us

September 2022

By Mike Day

Ozias Eells: A Big Fish Comes to Barkhamsted

Ozias Eells was the first settled minister at Barkhamsted's Congregational Church located in Barkhamsted Center. Eells was a pastor schooled at Yale, and it was a bit of a surprise that a man of his status agreed to come to Barkhamsted, which at the time could be considered a small backwater Connecticut town.

He was born in "Upper Middletown" (now Cromwell) Connecticut on September 2nd, 1755, the son of Edward and Martha (Pitkin) Eells. The other children in the family were: Edward (1741-1787); James (1743-1805); Nathaniel (1747-1747); Jane (1748-1748); Pitkin (1750-1816); Jane (1752-1752); John (1753-1840); and Hannah (Eells) White (1757-1793). Ozias was named after his maternal grandfather, Judge Ozias Pitkin of East Hartford.

Ozias' father was a Harvard man, but Ozias, like brothers James and Samuel, attended Yale, graduating with the class of 1779. He studied theology and in 1778, Ezra Stiles, then

President of Yale College, noted in his diary that Ozias was in a Hebrew class that he taught. In addition to his academic work, Eells became a member of the Linonian Society, a literary and social fraternity with its own library.



Above: the original meeting house at Barkhamsted Center where Ozias Eells served as pastor from 1787-1813.

Preaching was very much the family business. Ozias' father, Edward, was the minister in Upper Middletown (now Cromwell); his grandfather, Nathaniel Eells, was minister at Scituate, Massachusetts for 46 years. His brother James was minister at Eastbury (now Glastonbury) and another brother, Samuel, was minister at North Branford. It is said that some 25 members of the extended Eells family were ministers at various places around New England.

It would have been reasonable to expect that Ozias would have followed the family tradition and easily secured a full-time preaching

position. After all, he had a Yale education, connections through the Linonian Society, as well as important family, social and clerical connections throughout New England. But just what Eells did right after graduation is a bit of a mystery.

Continued on next page...

Thank You David Leff

Dave Leff played a huge role in saving Squire's Tavern and for that we at Barkhamsted Historical Society are very grateful. We miss our friend and benefactor. Dave passed away unexpectedly on May 29, 2022.



Way back in the late 1990s, Barkhamsted Historical Society realized that the unoccupied Squire's Tavern building was at serious risk. It was slowly deteriorating and perhaps it would be demolished by the Department of Environmental Protection since it was no longer being used to house the ranger at Peoples Forest.

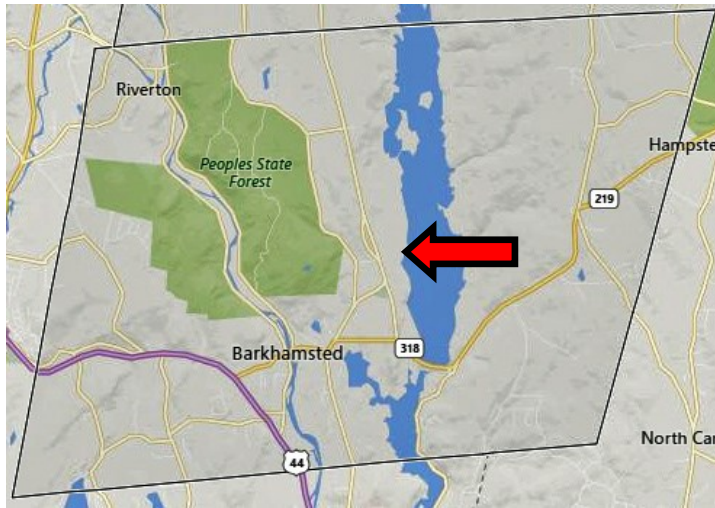
Our plan was to ask the DEP to lease Squire's Tavern to the town of Barkhamsted and allow BHS to restore the building. DEP is not known for taking chances on new and unfamiliar initiatives like this. But unbeknownst to us, we had a benefactor high up in DEP management. This benefactor was DEP deputy commissioner Dave Leff.

Dave loved history and the woods and fortunately he went on one of Walt Landgraf's many guided hikes in the late 1990s. Walt was able to have a few words directly with him about Squire's Tavern. That was all it took. Dave went to bat for us and the rest is history. Without Dave's support, we would not have been successful in this effort. So thank you, Dave Leff... we are so grateful for the crucial role you played in saving Squire's Tavern.

Ozias Eells - continued from page 1 ...

Tradition has it that following graduation in 1779, Eells went to Long Island to preach. It is possible that he was an itinerant preacher travelling around the area, perhaps looking for a permanent position; others had done the same. But aside from one record suggesting that during 1783-1784 he filled in occasionally at a church in Southampton, there is no record as to just what he was doing.

While no records have been located to suggest that he ever held a formal preaching position, anecdotal records suggest that he did not. In an early history of Cromwell, CT, it was noted that the various Eells brothers who were ministers typically stayed with just one parish throughout their entire careers. Ozias was specifically mentioned as doing the same, beginning his career in Barkhamsted in 1787, and ending with his death in Barkhamsted in 1813. What was Eells doing from 1779 to 1787? It does seem strange that a man with his background would choose to spend several years on Long Island without some clear purpose.



The red arrow points to the location of the old Barkhamsted Center Meetinghouse built in 1781 and torn down in 1865.

One fascinating possibility (a completely unsubstantiated theory) is that he used his part-time preaching vocation as a cover for spying. Throughout the Revolution, Long Island was a hotbed of espionage. Washington was desperate for information on British movements into and out of New York harbor. A number of local patriots on Long Island under the direction of Maj. Benjamin Tallmadge established a spy network that became known as the Culper Spy Ring. The operation of the ring was so secure and well organized that its very existence was not uncovered until well into the 20th century; its membership is still not completely known.

When looking at Eells' college and immediate post collegiate years, it is interesting to note the national events that may have influenced his thinking, and might perhaps have motivated him to participate in activities related to the Patriot cause. In the fall of 1776, when Eells was a freshman at Yale, Nathan Hale, a Yale graduate and former member of Eells' Linonian Society, was hanged by the British as a spy. In 1777, while Eells was a sophomore, the nearby town of Danbury was sacked by the British. In 1778, while Eells was a Junior, the Culper Spy Ring, headed by former Yale man and Linonian Society member Maj. Benjamin Tallmadge, began operations. Was Eells a member of Culper Spy Ring? We don't know.

Most of what has been written about Ozias Eells is based on an article by Mary Hart, published in the Winsted Herald in 1884. According to Ms. Hart, at some point in the mid 1780s, Eells left Long Island; *"the climate did not agree with him, and he found his health failing."* Ms. Hart goes on to say that, *"He came to Barkhamsted, where a church and society had been formed in 1781, and preached to the people, they having no settled minister."*

The Barkhamsted church had in fact been established in 1781, but that does not establish just when Eells came to town. As noted above, Eells was reported to have been in Southampton, Long Island, in 1783/84, so he couldn't have been in Barkhamsted until sometime thereafter. There is a suggestion in the Hart biography that when Eells did first come to the Barkhamsted area, it was not as a minister, but as a simple farmer. For a while he labored here in obscurity, but in the summer of 1786, he seems to have found himself.

In June of 1786, the name of Ozias Eells was submitted to the annual meeting of the General Association of the State of

Connecticut, the group that approved the credentials of those who would be Congregational ministers. Each county submitted a list of candidates, and the name of Ozias Eells was on the list from the "South Association," effectively Middlesex County. He was, of course, approved.

In December of that year a church meeting was held at the house of William Austin, here in Barkhamsted, at which *"The question was put whether it be the mind of this church to give Mr. Ozias Eells a call to settle with them in the work on the Gospel Ministry. And it passed unanimously in the affirmative."* Eells, it is said, was not (at least initially) very enthusiastic about the opportunity. The Barkhamsted church was scarcely six years old, with a membership that was small and poor. The church building was unfinished, planks serving as pews. No assured salary could be offered; an annual subscription would need to be taken up to pay for his services. It is said that Eells had a dream of a fruitful valley between two rivers, and that this dream may have convinced him to accept the position in Barkhamsted.

On January 24, 1787 Ozias Eells was ordained as the first "settled" minister of the Barkhamsted Church. The service of Ordination was conducted by the Rev. Nathaniel

Continued on next page...

Ozias Eells - continued from page 2 ...

Gaylord of Hartland, assisted by the Rev. Jonathan Marsh of New Hartford, Rev. Jeremiah Hallock from West Simsbury and by Ozias' brother, the Rev. Samuel Eells of Branford. Several other clergy were invited but didn't show up.

In June of 1787, Eells purchased forty acres of land, "*on Center Hill so called in the division of home lots no. 17*" from Salvanus Griswald of Windsor. The price was 90 pounds. The site of his new home was on the west side of what is now Center Hill Road, about half a mile north of Day Road (House C-96 on the Tiffany Map). Later that year when he began to build a house, many from around the community came to help.

We have no record as to just why Eells decided, six years after graduation, to formally enter the ministry. Perhaps he felt a need to make himself more acceptable to the family of a young lady named Phoebe Ely, the daughter of the Rev. Richard Ely of Saybrook. On September 19th, 1787, Ozias Eells and Phoebe Ely were married in Saybrook, with the bride's father, Rev. Richard Ely, officiating. Eells brought his new bride back to Barkhamsted where she was enthusiastically received and was immediately popular.

There are in Mary Hart's description of the arrival of Phoebe, suggestions that the new Mrs. Eells came from a higher social status than she found in Barkhamsted. Her "*set of light blue china ware, the cups and saucers being small in the extreme, her teaspoons of solid silver*" impressed the locals. The purpose of "*an oval salver, in the middle of which was painted some bright peaches, the edges of which were ornamented by an open worked border*" was a mystery. Nevertheless, she threw herself into the work of being a minister's wife and was accepted by the people.

In those first few years Eells received very little salary, and supported his family largely through the production of his farm. It is said he scarcely had enough money to buy pens and paper. The house on Center Hill was not completed until 1796. According to a Yale biography of Eells: "*For*

twenty-six years he continued in this remote and narrow field, keeping the sincere respect of all his parishioners, and giving himself unreservedly to their service." In addition to ministering to his own congregation, he is said to have officiated at the weddings and funerals of local Episcopalians, and served as chaplain of the local militia unit. It is reported that the militia often met for drill on the broad front yard of the Eells' home.

Ozias and Phoebe had eight children. Their first born – unnamed – was born in May of 1789 but died very early. The second child, Electra, was born February 7, 1791, but died nineteen months later. Their third child, Hannah, born April 29th, 1793 grew to adulthood in Barkhamsted and on October 1, 18, 1812, married Hezekiah Wadsworth of New Hartford. The fourth child, Ozias Sheldon Eells, born December 20, 1794, attended Williams College; graduated in 1820 and became a Presbyterian minister. The fifth child, Emilia, was born December 22, 1796. Richard, the sixth child was born February 23, 1800. He became a physician and married Jane Bester of Simsbury in 1826. The seventh child, Phoebe, born February 3, 1802, married Erastus Lattimer of Simsbury in 1828 in Barkhamsted. The eighth and last child was William Edward, born October 5, 1805.

Ozias Eells served as minister of the local Congregational Church until his death at age 58 on May 25, 1813. He was one of several victims of an epidemic – perhaps spotted fever - that swept the area in that year. He was buried in the original Center Cemetery but, as with many others, his grave was moved to the new Center Cemetery in the 1930s. Phoebe Eells died August 6, 1829.

When surveying Barkhamsted history, Ozias Eells certainly can be included on the short list of prominent Barkhamsted residents. This well-educated and popular pastor served his congregation for 26 years. He lived modestly and served his town in a variety of roles. It is fitting that we remember and celebrate the life of Ozias Eells. ☞



A blast from the past...

In 1845 Barkhamsted produced 1,238 palm leaf hats.

Farming families spent most of their time caring for the animals and crops on the farm, but also would earn extra money producing some secondary products such as palm leaf hats. Income from this type of work could be used to buy products they could not produce themselves such as salt, sugar, spices, ceramic dishes, books or fancy textiles.

Barkhamsted Recreation Campers Visit Squire's Tavern

By Kristi Napolitano

Each year, when the Barkhamsted Rec camp calls BHS for a visit, our A team happily responds YES! This year BHS's A team was Bonnie Boyle, Cathy Connole, Kristina Napolitano with a guest appearance of my three-year-old daughter, Lillian Napolitano.

The camp children are split into four age groups, and have rotating visits during the morning. Every year the Rec Camp has a theme that we incorporate into the activities we plan for the visit. This year's theme: "The Four Seasons". Of course we could have given a 40 minute dissertation to each group about what responsibilities someone their age would have traditionally had each season: cleaning the house, watching the younger kids, tending to the animals, planting crops in the summer, harvesting in the winter, firewood collection... the list goes on. But wouldn't it be more fun for our kids to see how children of that time period had their fun? The Games of Four Seasons was to be our focus. But what games did children play 150 years ago?

To answer this question, we pulled from two resources: personal knowledge of old school games and the *FoxFire* series. *FoxFire* is a valuable collection of books located in our archive library at BHS. *FoxFire* began as a school project started by teacher Eliot Wigginton in the Appalachian Mountains. Eliot was seeing "old ways" disappear from collective memories and had his students begin interviewing, recording and documenting every aspect of people's way of life. *FoxFire* series 6 had numerous games listed. One gem absolutely worth mentioning was Fireball (spoiler alert: we opted out of this one):

Edd Hodgins: you tie a bunch of old toe sacks up good. Soak one in kerosene oil and set it on fire. Then you can whack it or throw it. Boy, it's dangerous. It'd take it half the night to burn out, and it could set something afire, but it used to be nothing never got fire much. We'd get a bunch out in a field Christmas or something as fireballing. Throw 'em just as far as you can throw 'em. Couldn't burn your hand because you'd grab 'em quick and throw 'em quick. Never got burnt. Play with 'em all night. That ball of fire goin' through the air bigger than anything was something.

Bonnie had to pause reading this to us several times laugh-

ing as tears streamed down her face. I cannot tell you how many times I have thought of this game afterwards, pondering just how many government agencies would be called if kids today attempted it, but mostly how fondly Edd recalled this game of his childhood. Although the image fills me with some anxiety, it also fills me with the simple awe that spectacle must have been on a cold dark snowy Christmas night with fireballs flying through the air.

The lineup of reasonably safe games to play was: Imaginary sledding on the Ripper, Spoon & Egg Race, Button-Button Who has the Button (also very similar to Hide the Thimble), Milk Bottle Clothespin, Ring Ross, and Frog Trouncing. As each group came, we took a moment to set them back 150 years ago: close your eyes and imagine it. There is no electricity, running water, no cars, no internet, Playstation, X box or smart phone. Even books and newspapers were potentially hard to come by. Your means of travel to a friend's house is very limited, mostly walking.

When it got dark, you saw by candle light and you had to make fun out of what was available to you. Each group's first stop was THE RIPPER. The Ripper is a VERY long sled about the length of a VW beetle. It was generously donated to BHS and is housed in the barn. Cathy transported each group of children back not only 150 years ago, but from July heat, to a cold chilly, snowy winter day... with the Ripper sitting atop Ripley Hill road. Yes, back then roads were used for sledding. The person who sat in the front had the important job of directing everyone else how to steer, which was essentially leaning in the direction the sled should go. Each group piled on, filling the Ripper, and we were ready for takeoff. Down the hill they went! Snow blowing up, narrowly missing trees and JUST making corners until safely arriving at the bottom to the relief of all. After catching our breath, we would change seasons



A ride on the "Ripper".

moving on to our next game, which was dependent on the age group.

Continued on next page...

Rec Campers Visit - continued from page 4 ...



Campers visit Squire's Tavern for old time games.

Button Button Who Has the Button can be played with just about anything. The children stand in a circle with their hands together, concealing the object; in this case it was a button. One child has the object and goes around the circle pretending to drop it into each child's hands, but only drops it in one person's hand. The group has to guess who has the button. Each group begged for just one more round as the game came to an end. In each round I heard the same squeals of delight from children that modern day toys produce when the "keeper of the button" was revealed. Although disappointed the game was ending, we excitedly moved onto another season and a different game.

Frog Trouncing was another piece of magic pulled from FoxFire that certainly brought shock and laughter when reading its instructions:

M.S. York: Place a flat board on a block or stump or something of that nature (in a seesaw position). Put a frog on one end of the board, the end that is touching the ground. Take a mallet or sledge hammer and hit the end opposite that the frog is on. The object of the game is to see who can get the frog the highest.

We obviously used rubber frogs in place of real frogs, but again squeals of delight were heard as our frogs reached into the branches of the maple tree shading the game area. I have found myself telling anyone who would listen about this game, and having so many follow-up questions as I pondered it further: why didn't the frog just hop off the board? Or would it constantly do this and that was part of the fun? How often were kids doing this that it got an official name? Did they ever use anything else? How often was the frog injured? All questions that most likely are lost to time, but the recording of this game gives us another unexpected window into the past that we can share with future generations.

Clothespin in a milk bottle was a big hit and became quite

competitive with some groups, particularly those divided girls versus boys, which always seems to up the stakes no matter what game is being played or what time period we live in (for the record, the girls won). The clothespin in a milk bottle allowed us to point out several things to our audience: First and foremost, what a clothespin was and why it was needed (you mean there were no dryers??). Second, what a milk bottle was, and how one came to obtain milk 150 years ago (Hint... not at Stop and Shop or your nearest "Cumbies.") The object was simple -- attempt to drop the clothes pin into the milk bottle. Whoever gets the most clothespins in wins. Simple, right? Wrong. It was an incredible challenge to get even one clothespin in. Even after Bonnie declared a "legs first" technique which seemed to produce a higher rate of success, clothespin after clothespin ricocheted off the edge of the milk bottle, landing defeated in the grass.

Our time with each group was an absolute joy and flew by much too quickly. My heart was warmed that every single group eagerly requested a tour of the Tavern. Although we had to give short tours, I hope many of them might return for a longer version during visiting hours and perhaps even grab a clothespin and a milk bottle sometime. We are always so pleased to be a part of the Barkhamsted Rec Camp each year and hope that for many many years to come we can transport our children back in time for a few brief moments. ☘



The "frog" goes flying!

Historical Society News



Our Annual Meeting September 10 at the Riverton Inn

Members and friends, join us at the historic Riverton Inn at 2:00 pm on Saturday, September 10 for our annual meeting. Following a VERY short business meeting we will enjoy a slide show program on “Lost Hamlets of Barkhamsted” with Anne Hall and Paul Hart. We will “visit” some of the named areas of town that have receded into the background and may have been forgotten over the years.

Enjoy some of the best Riverton Inn appetizers/light refreshments. Space may be limited... please RSVP (email: bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us).

Saville Dam and Barkhamsted Hollow Tour

On Saturday, October 8, we again offer the very popular Saville Dam and Barkhamsted Hollow tour. Board the bus at the Peoples Forest parking lot right across from Squire’s Tavern. The bus will leave at 10:00 a.m.

Stops on the tour include an inside visit at the lower Saville Dam gatehouse and a short walking tour of Barkhamsted Center where there is so much history hiding under the trees. The east side of the Barkhamsted Reservoir will not be open to us... instead we will travel further up the west side to the Hart’s Island area where the view is great and learn about the families who lived here.

Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at Squire’s Tavern during our regular hours (Sunday 1:00 to 4:00 and Wed 9:00 to noon).



Photo above: thanks so much to Fran and Elizabeth Zygmunt for donating an original Hitchcock rocking chair. This is a great addition to our collection.



Photo above: laying down stone over a plastic vapor barrier in the basement of Merrill Tavern in late July. Partially visible is a large new dehumidifier that was just installed. This machine also filters the air. We are hopeful that this work virtually eliminates the basement moisture problem that can impact the whole building. This was a key priority of our preservation efforts at Merrill Tavern, a circa 1816 residence and tavern in Barkhamsted Center.

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 **Saturday, September 10, 2022** – 2:00 pm. Barkhamsted Historical Society members: join us at our annual meeting at the Riverton Inn. Come enjoy appetizers/light refreshments and a special program on “Lost Hamlets of Barkhamsted” by Anne Hall and Paul Hart. A very short business meeting will start things off. Space may be limited... please RSVP (email: bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us).

② **Sunday, September 25** - Center School House open from 1:00 to 4:00. Exhibits, photos and a restored one room school classroom to bring you back to another era.

③ **Saturday, October 8** – 10:00 am. Barkhamsted Hollow and Reservoir tour. A bus trip into our past: see and hear the history in areas now covered by the Barkhamsted Reservoir. Includes a visit inside the Saville Dam. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at Squire's Tavern during our regular hours. Board the bus at the Peoples Forest Mathies area right across from Squire's Tavern.

④ **Saturday, November 5** – You may have heard that we wanted to do another Tavern Night at Squire's Tavern on this date. We regretfully announce that Tavern Night has been cancelled again this year. We were unable to line up musicians and a contra-dance caller due to COVID concerns. Maybe next year!



Membership Renewal Time

Our membership year starts September 1, so we are enclosing a handy membership envelope. We do hope you will send it in. Your support is the engine that keeps this organization going. We so appreciate our members!

Barkhamsted Historical Society

President - Noreen Watson
Vice President - Paul Hart
Secretary - Kristina Napolitano
Treasurer - Ted Bachman
Town Historian - Doug Roberts

Committee Chairs

Building & Grounds - Charles Watson
Grounds Planning - Georgia Nash
Collections - Jim Lussier
Publicity - Ginny Apple
Education & Research - Mike Day
Finance - Ted Bachman
Membership - Sharon Lynes
Exhibits - Bonnie Boyle
Docents - Cathy Connole
Newsletter - Paul Hart

Trustees

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

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.

Squire's Tavern Quarterly
Barkhamsted Historical Society
P.O. Box 94
Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

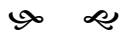
NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
WINSTED, CT
PERMIT No. 11



Illustration, L. Landgraf

Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Newsletter of the Barkhamsted Historical Society



September 2022

Ozias Eells	1
Thank You Dave Leff	1
A Blast from the Past	3
Barkhamsted Rec Campers Visit	4
Historical Society News	6
Calendar	7