

# Squire's Tavern Quarterly

Barkhamsted Historical Society Newsletter

web site - barkhamstedhistory.us

September 2023

## Claire Covelli - West Hill Poet

By Paul Hart

Sometimes when we look into the life of a Barkhamsted resident, unexpected elements come to light. One such life is that of Claire Covelli. Claire lived in Barkhamsted from the 1920s to the mid-1950s, on what is now East West Hill Road. Her husband was the artist Vito Covelli, a prolific landscape painter known for his participation in the Federal Art Project during the Great Depression. The Covelli family has been very generous, sharing information, documents and the art of Vito Covelli and helped us unveil a Covelli exhibit at Squire's Tavern several years ago. Recently the Covelli family contacted us to share information on Vito's wife Claire, who had a remarkable life herself.

Claire was born in Boulogne-sur-Mar, France, in 1873. She became an opera singer in France as a young woman. Later she came to live in New York City where she met Vito. The two were married, and apparently preferring the country life they bought and moved to a small farm on West Hill in Barkhamsted in 1926.



was very apparent that Claire had a clear love of life- from farming and music to her husband's art. But a recent revelation added one more element: poetry. As the Covelli family discovered, Claire was an accomplished poet. They have in their possession pages and pages of Claire's poems, carefully transcribed on typewritten sheets of paper with Claire's name and address at the bottom. She listed her address as "R-2-Box-302, Winsted, Connecticut" because the Covelli mail came to their Barkhamsted home through the Winsted post office via a rural delivery route.

It is not apparent who typed the poems. It was probably Claire herself, because her signature appears on one of the pages, so clearly the typing was not done after her death in 1955. There are about 160 individual poems, some short, some long, virtually all with meter and rhyme. She covers a wide variety of subjects big and small: the love for her husband, life, death, nature, the seasons, the swing hanging in their old oak tree on the front lawn.

From stories and photos shared by the Covelli family, it

*Continued on page 2...*

## Meet Arba Alford of Riverton

By Mike Day

Researching family history usually involves collecting and sorting through lots of second-hand (and rather dull) reports. Town and church records document the births, marriages and deaths that form the outline for writing a family history, but that can be pretty dry stuff. The happy discovery of an already-published family history means that someone else has already done the hard work of digging through those old records. While these "official records" do provide important facts, they tend to be a bit impersonal: they lack the impact of a first-person narrative.

The Barkhamsted Historical Society recently acquired from the estate of the late Doug Roberts a small but significant "personal narrative" of one of the early settlers of this

town. An ancestor of Doug's – Arba Alford (1769-1823) – came to Riverton in 1790 and saw fit to record that fact in a small hand-made notepad. Over the next few years, he recorded other dates important to his family history. The Arba Alford document is a small, handmade booklet containing just six pieces of paper and measures approximately six inches wide by four inches tall. The basic information is today easily available to us from various official records, but to have Alford's personal statement, "*february the 17 AD 1795 I moved to barkhemsted to live in my own hous*" in his own handwriting is very special. Now we meet a real person, one who is pleased and proud to share with us an important milestone in his life.

*Continued on page 2...*

...Claire Covelli, continued from page 1.

Claire and Vito did not have children, but Vito's nephew Phil and wife Olivia came to live at the Barkhamsted farm and eventually owned it. Phil and Olivia's daughter was named Claire after her great-aunt.

Claire Covelli (the poet) died in 1955. Shortly after her death, Vito offered Claire's poems to the Hartford Times newspaper to publish, but it is not clear that this was done. Thanks to the Covelli family, Claire's poems will live on in the collection of the Historical Society as a tribute to this life-loving woman. ❧

To see several of Claire's poems  
please turn to page 4.



Photo at left: Claire Covelli shucking corn on the Barkhamsted farm. Above: a little music with her husband Vito.

... Meet Arba Alford, continued from page 1.

Arba Alford made note of various key dates in his family history, such as the birth of his first son, ("*Roman Alford was born July the 25 AD 1793 on thursday at one oclock in the morning.*"); he noted the death of his father ("*January the 13 AD 1818 my honored father Nathaniel Alford died in Canton aged 80*") and other events. The wording used suggests that most of the notes were written by Alba Alford, but clearly others in the family continued his work. One note in different handwriting reports that, "*Arba Alford Died Sept 5 1823 Aged 55*".

Over the next few years Arba Alford purchased several more properties, moved a couple of times and tended to his

various businesses. He seemed to have attracted little public recognition and there are few references to him in the official record. A son, also named Arba Alford, is much better known. This son was born in Riverton in 1807 and is most remembered as being a business partner with Lambert Hitchcock. The younger Arba Alford worked in the Hitchcock factory; became a supervisor and then a manager. When Hitchcock was in financial difficulties, the younger Arba Alford provided the necessary financial support to help keep the business afloat, and many chairs produced by the company were marked, "*Hitchcock and Alford, Hitchcocksville, Conn.*"

... continued on next page.

... Meet Arba Alford, continued from page 2.

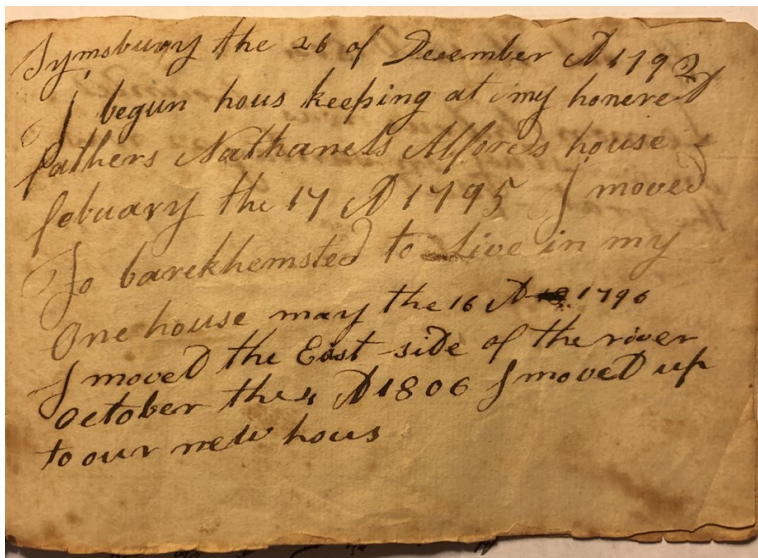
Eunice Alford, a daughter of Arba Alford, Sr. and older sister to Arba Alford, Jr. married Lambert Hitchcock in 1830. The "Hitchcock House" next to the old chair factory building was originally a two-family house with the Lambert Hitchcock family on one side and the Arba Alford, Jr. family on the other. When Lambert Hitchcock moved his business to Unionville, Arba Alford, Jr. continued to make chairs in Riverton under his own name. Another daughter of Arba Sr. was Esther Alford, who, under her married name of Esther Loomis, became a strong advocate for women's rights.

In addition to the births and deaths of family members, Arba Alford, Sr. made note of two events that seem to have been significant to him. In April of 1804, he reported that, "Leman Andrus was drowned on wednesday on Sunday 22" and "was found three weeks after he was drowned in farmintown." The 1800 census lists the two men just two lines apart suggesting that they were neighbors. Was Leman Andrews a close friend of Arba Alford? We don't know. A second "non-family" entry may suggest that Arba Alford, Sr. also had an important philanthropic side. In 1796, he records that, "Lydia Clinton came to live with me the 13 Day of April AD 1796." And, "Lydia Clinton was born the 10 day of October AD 1790." Who was this six-year-old, and why was she moving in with the Alford's? She was the daughter of Samuel and Lydia

(Alling) Clinton. Samuel Clinton died in Barkhamsted in 1795 leaving his widow with five children between the ages of 2 and 9. It is quite possible that the widow Clinton could not provide for her family and had to place one or more of her children with other families. It was a common practice in those days, and perhaps the smaller Alford family was willing to help this family in need. The Arba Alford family in 1796 consisted of the parents and two boys, Roman and Lona; by the 1800 census, the family included a new two-year-old daughter, and an unnamed ten-year-old girl. This

might well have been the first of a series of charitable acts. By 1810, the census lists the family as having a total of seven girls under the age of sixteen. The 1810 census does not list all the members of a family by name, so it is impossible to say just who the extra girls were or where they came from. But it does seem possible that in the early days of our community, the Arba Alford family was quietly doing some very noble work.

Arba Alford was born in 1769 in an area we now know as Canton, but in those days it was the western district of Simsbury. In 1792 he married Eunice Case, a daughter of Deacon Hosea Case who lived in the same area. One of the cryptic notes in Arba's little booklet suggests that the young couple may have lived for a year or so at Arba's childhood home: ("Simsbury the 26 of December AD 1792 I begun hous keeping at my honored fathers Nathaniel Alford's house").



Above: A section of Arba Alford's handmade booklet listing his move from "Simsbury" to Barkhamsted in 1795.

Several months after they wed, Eunice's father died, leaving to Eunice a substantial amount of money. Perhaps supported by these new funds, in April of 1794, Arba purchased a 43-acre parcel of land in nearby Barkhamsted (this land was on what is now West River Road, south and across the road from the current Riverton ball field). It would take some time for Arba to clear a space and build a cabin, but ten months later, Arba could write, "february the 17 AD 1795 I moved To

barkhemsted to live in my own hous." With a nineteen-month-old son and a pregnant wife, Arba Alford moved from the comfort of "West Simsbury" to the wilds of Barkhamsted. Later he purchased more land on the east side of the river and lived there.

It is a nice acquisition to have these personal notes written by the hand of Arba Alford, Sr., patriarch of one of the early and important families of Riverton and the town of Barkhamsted. ☞

## A Selection of Poems by Claire Covelli (article starts on page 1.)

## ARTIST AND POET

You and I dear love in espousal might,  
 Artist, and poet are in heaven's light;  
 Each precious day we cull sweet flowers  
 From beauty's garden for gorgeous hours.

In poetical sphere we hear, learn see  
 By help of genius, muse's degree  
 Magnificences for eager world to know;  
 We are vowed to this aim, by cupid bow.

Claire Covelli

R-2-Box-302

Winsted, Conn.

## FRIENDLY FIELD

O! friendly field, where we would love to play,  
 Please, land can we come here day by day?  
 No, my children I'm food for cow,  
 To grass here, you have to bow.

Claire Covelli

R-2-Box-302

Winsted,

Conn.

## LOVE BLIND

She was a lady fair to see,  
 Her eyes were blue, then green as sea;  
 Her cheeks were peaches ripe to eat,  
 Her lips delicious, honey-sweet.

Nature gave to her many wiles,  
 She leads me with her fleeting smiles;  
 I thought her lovely, but O! mine,  
 I was her slave when she would whine.

I fell in love with all these faults,  
 Blind was my love in its exalts;  
 I married her without review,  
 And now to peace I say adieu.

Claire Covelli

R-2-Box-302

Winsted, Connecticut

## VALUE OF POEMS

Poems worth their weight in gold,  
 are jewels safe, gems not sold;  
 The remembrance of them is for aye,  
 Valued now and ages away.

Claire Covelli-R-2-Box-302-Winsted, Connecticut

## A blast from the past...

Item from the CCC Camp White newsletter of June 1936:

*Over 1,500 members of the St. Josephs Church in Winsted attended the first in a series of annual picnics at the Camp last Sunday.*

Camp White was the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Barkhamsted, located in American Legion State Forest off West River Road between Pleasant Valley and Riverton. We do not have a photo of this picnic but a photo of the camp is at right.



CCC Camp White circa 1936.

## Historical Society News

### Progress Continues at Merrill Tavern



Thanks to a grant from the Douglas and Janet Roberts Fund of the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation, we were able to get some work done on the Merrill Tavern in Barkhamsted Center (and also the Center schoolhouse). Repairs to trim and clapboards were completed in June. During this work, some rot was discovered in the sills and framing members, and this was also repaired. Then the exterior was painted. Look at the result: before and after photos at left. This building is now looking great!



Our next step is to get shutters back on the windows. Earlier photos clearly showed that Merrill Tavern had shutters which should be no surprise for an early 1800s residence. Unfortunately, the shutters have been lost and Barkhamsted Historical Society has been on a quest to find replacements. New custom louvered shutters would cost a fortune, but we were able to find a source of old recycled shutters in Brooklyn, Connecticut. They were very reasonable, although not in the best shape. We hope to have them repaired, painted and installed at some point, maybe in the next 12 months or so.

### Third Graders Visit Squire's Tavern

Barkhamsted Historical Society volunteer Cathy Connole gave third graders visiting Squire's Tavern a history lesson in June (photo at right). The third grade class from Barkhamsted Elementary School split up into groups and visited the Tavern as well as Center Cemetery, Center Schoolhouse and the Congregational church located in Barkhamsted Center.

Cathy gave the students a complete tour of Squire's Tavern and compared daily life of 200 years ago to today.





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

### Ethel Tiffany Speaks Again

Ethel Tiffany grew up on a farm on what is now Park Road in Barkhamsted. She was born in 1884 and had a long life, passing away in 1988. For some years she was one of the oldest residents in town and had a first hand account of a lot of Barkhamsted history. For this reason she drew the attention of the Barkhamsted Historical Society. Barkhamsted resident and BHS board member David Gidman interviewed Ethel in 1976.

The cassette tape recording (photo at right) never made it into the BHS collection until now. It was “discovered” about a year ago. Because of the age of the tape, we were hesitant to play it. We needed some expert advice on how to recover the interview. What we wanted to do was have this old cassette recording digitized. A company named EverPresent specializes in this type of challenge: handling an obsolete format that is decades old and converting it into a digital audio file.

We had them do this with the Ethel Tiffany interview and nine other old cassettes, at a cost of about \$30 each. Some of the other recordings apparently were in poor shape and came out a little garbled but thankfully Ethel came through very clear.

Ethel Tiffany grew up in the home now owned by Alan Griswold about one mile up Park Road from Route 181. Her father, Burton Tiffany, built the home in 1870. She lived there until 1919 and in the interview, she talks about her father's dairy farm of about 50 cows. That is a big herd by local standards. Besides their own land the Tiffanys also rented hayfields and pasture nearby. Ethel stated that they had the first hay mowing machine in the area. Before that hay was cut with a scythe. For many years the family made about 100 pounds of butter every week. Her father would take the butter to Winsted in a horse and buggy where he sold it directly to regular customers. If he had butter left over, it was sold to Winsted grocery stores.

Ethel was only about three years old when the blizzard of 1888 hit. She was too young to remember this great snow storm, but she said her sister, who was about six years old at the time, did remember it. The snow was so bad, it took their father a day to get to the barn to water the cows. The barn was only a few hundred feet from the house!

Ethel attended the Center School and would walk just over a mile to the school. But if there was bad weather, her father would give her a ride in the horse-drawn buggy. She attended the Congrega-



tional church at Barkhamsted Center and remembers the church would have dinners to raise money, charging 10 cents for the meal. These dinners and other church social events were not held in the church. The church basement currently used now for these activities was not constructed until the mid 1970s. In Ethel's day they were held in the town hall building located right next to the church. The town let the church use the building when it was not in use for town purposes. Currently the old town hall building is a private residence.

We are so happy to have recovered this interview with Ethel's memories going back 100 years and more. It gives us a window on the past of her life in Barkhamsted. ☘



Photo above- A current photo of the old Tiffany farm at the top of the hill on Park Road, now the Griswold family home. In the middle of the photo at the far left are remains of the old barn.

## 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 9 2:00 pm** – BHS members: join us at our annual meeting at the Riverton Inn. Come enjoy appetizers/light refreshments and (after a very short business meeting) a special program looking at the Merrill family in Barkhamsted and our efforts to preserve the Merrill Tavern in Barkhamsted Center. Space may be limited... please RSVP (email: [bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us](mailto:bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us)).
- ② **Saturday, November 4** - Tavern Night at Squire's Tavern starting at 7:00 p.m. Enjoy good old fashioned food, drinks, games, music. We hope to have live music and contra dancing in the ballroom at 8:00 pm after the dinner. No experience needed! Tickets are free (donations encouraged). Space is very limited so we encourage you to pick up tickets at Squire's Tavern BEFORE the event as we may "sell out".
- ③ **Sunday, December 10** - Christmas Open House at Squire's Tavern from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. The very popular Greenwoods Consort will entertain us for a portion of this time.



### 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

#### Committee Chairs

Building & Grounds - Charles Watson and Tom Andersen  
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 (1 year more)  
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](mailto:bhs@barkhamstedhistory.us)

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.

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

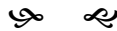
NON-PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
WINSTED, CT  
PERMIT No. 11



*Illustration, L. Landgraf*

# **Squire's Tavern Quarterly**

Newsletter of the Barkhamsted Historical Society



**September 2023**

Claire Covelli, West Hill Poet .....	1
Meet Arba Alford of Riverton .....	1
A Selection of Poems by Claire Covelli .....	4
A Blast from the Past .....	4
Historical Society News .....	5
Collection Corner .....	6
Calendar .....	7