



MANSFIELD HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Vol. 45, No. 3

September 2009

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Public History matters...

Whether viewing our own current exhibits on Wilbur Cross, Charles Emory Smith, and George Gurley; walking the corridors of the Nathan Hale house; crossing the Lebanon town green and visiting the Revolutionary War Office; touching gravestones in Old Storrs Cemetery; or accessing 19th century deeds, records or manuscripts from Town Halls, local archives or the Dodd Center, we are experiencing history – public history.

We open our program season on September 25 with the Annual Dinner featuring a discussion on “Public History in Connecticut: Making the Past Accessible.” Bruce Reinholdt, Public Historian for *History is Central*, will remind us of the valuable role that Connecticut historical societies, museums, libraries, and schools play in engaging us with our past.

From our presentation, I hope for a lively dialogue on Public History. Over the years, it has emerged as an important discipline that has paved the way for topics and issues previously relegated to scholarly debate in journals and conferences to a more public domain. History makes for an informed citizenry, contributes to lively conversation over dinners and coffees, and, reminds us, time and again, of recurring themes, singular events, and personalities that have contributed to the development of our communities, large and small.

I look forward with others to discussion on the role of the Internet in shaping and defining public history. With such ready access to information, photos, video, genealogical records, newspaper archives, etc., are we raising expectations for what we could know, should know?

Thinking locally, in considering public history, I also invite you to forward ideas to us on how to make Mansfield’s story of silk mills, political figures, historic barns, land-grant university, and other hidden treasures more accessible to our town and those beyond our community.

I look forward to seeing you on September 25. In the meantime, please give us a call (429-6575) or email: mansfield.historical@snet.net with your thoughts.

John Meyers, President

MARK YOUR CALENDARS! – UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, September 25, 6:00 p.m.: ANNUAL MEETING/DINNER
PROGRAM: “PUBLIC HISTORY IN CONNECTICUT: MAKING THE PAST ACCESSIBLE.”
First Church of Christ Congregational in Mansfield Center (Details on next page)

Friday, November 13, 7:00 p.m.: “NEW ENGLAND’S OTHER WITCH HUNT”
Buchanan Auditorium, Mansfield Public Library (Route 89, Mansfield Center)

At our November meeting, State Historian Walter Woodward will speak on the terrifying and deadly witch panic in Hartford that took place a generation before the Salem witch trials. Dr. Woodward will bring the events surrounding the witch hunt to life with a multimedia exploration of the context, actions, and consequences of this horrific event. (More details will follow in the next newsletter.)

ANNUAL MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 25

The Mansfield Historical Society looks forward to welcoming Bruce Reinholdt, Public Historian for History Is Central, to speak at the Annual Dinner on September 25 at the First Church of Christ Congregational in Mansfield Center. Bruce will speak on “Public History in Connecticut: Making the Past Accessible”.

In recent years there has been much discussion on the role of Public History in bringing the work of historians to the broader public. In 2007, the National Council on Public History attempted to define public history as central to making historical research and insights accessible and useable to the public.

In Connecticut, Public History is alive and well. Historical societies, museums, schools and libraries throughout the state are among the valuable organizations bringing history to life. They play an important part in the state’s efforts to attract visitors from around New England and are central to our “Staycation” promotions. Indeed, their resources enliven history teaching by connecting teachers and students with local stories bringing history more “close at hand”.

History Is Central is a Teaching American History grant project based at Central Connecticut State University (www.historyiscentral.org). In his role as public historian, Bruce’s responsibilities include discovering a wide variety of primary source materials housed in our state’s many historical societies, museums and historic sites for use by Connecticut’s middle and high school history teachers and their students.

For example for a teacher workshop on slavery in Connecticut interesting primary sources were discovered at the Connecticut Historical Society, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center and the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum. When our teachers studied industrial history in Connecticut valuable materials were contributed by the Windham Textile and History Museum, the Manchester Historical Society and the Museum of Connecticut History. The goal of this project has been to put useful primary source materials about Connecticut’s history into the hands of teachers and students. With the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War in Connecticut coming in 2011 it is very important that all of our state’s historical societies, museums, historic sites review their collections and make it widely and broadly known the wonderful resources that they

hold for the public’s use and education as we celebrate this important event in our nation’s history.

Bruce has been working in public history for more than thirty-five years, the past nine in Connecticut – first as curator at the Gunn Memorial Library and Museum in Washington, Connecticut, and for the past three years as public historian in this grant-funded project. Trained initially as a history teacher, Bruce developed an interest in using museums and their resources to teach history in real, practical and exciting ways. Throughout his career he has worked with teachers in history museums and contributed to the development of curriculum materials, educational programs and professional training.

Please join us for our annual dinner and a thought-provoking program.

Reservations are required for the dinner. Please send in the enclosed reservation form or call the museum (429-6575) by September __ to reserve your spot. Those who wish to attend the program only should arrive at 7:30 p.m.



Storyteller Carolyn Stearns spins tales – and wool – at the museum opening on May 31

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

The museum officially opened for the season on May 31, with over 100 in attendance. In connection with the new textile exhibit in our kitchen area, there were textile-related activities throughout the afternoon. In the Old Town Hall, Carolyn Stearns entertained visitors with her new program, “Spinning Tales.” She told a variety of stories, all with a spinning wheel in the tale, while

she spun and carded wool. In addition, Jody Wynn Rodiger of the Nutmeg Spinners Guild brought along her two adorable lambs and set up a textile display and children's activity on the front lawn. Many members of the First Baptist Church came to see the special exhibit prepared in celebration of their church's 200th anniversary.

If you have not already done so, we urge you to visit the museum before it closes for the season on Sunday, September 27. We have some wonderful new exhibits this year, including "The First Baptist Church of Mansfield: Celebrating 200 Years," "The Village of Gurleyville" with a related display on the Gurley Family and "Textiles in the Home, 1800 & 1900." Last year's barn exhibit and the photography contest entries also remain on view in the Old Town Hall building.

We especially want to recognize the following people who helped prepare this year's exhibits. Rudy Favretti, John Meyers and Fred Cazal worked with Ann Galonska on the Gurleyville and Gurley family exhibits. Our student interns, Stacie Minervino, Amelia Trial and Amanda Sullivan, assisted with all of the exhibits and their help was truly invaluable. As a special project, they took responsibility for the research and preparation of the textile exhibit in the 1800 and 1900 kitchens. When time ran short at the end of the semester, Cathy Wright stepped in and wrote the text for the 1900 part of that display.

The extensive exhibit on the history of the First Baptist Church of Mansfield was researched and prepared by members of the Church's Heritage Committee, including Meradith and Bill McMunn, Nancy Flynn and Church Historian, Ethel Larkin. Be sure to pick up a copy of the free exhibit guide, written by the McMunns, that includes a history of the church and information on all of the items in the display.

We truly appreciate the contributions of everyone who helped to make this year's exhibits and opening day event happen. **THANK YOU TO ALL ON A JOB WELL DONE!**

COMPLETION OF BARN SURVEY PROJECT

Last year the Historical Society and the Town's Agriculture Committee undertook a survey of local barns as part of a statewide project coordinated by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. Many volunteers completed survey forms and photographed barns throughout the town.

During the spring semester, student intern Carolyn Barry completed our barn survey project. She photographed the Mansfield barns that hadn't

been previously documented, filled out the survey forms for them and then uploaded the information onto the CTHP's Web site for the project (www.connecticutbarns.org). She also organized all the information and photographs gathered by herself and the other volunteers into files arranged by street address.

The towns of Ashford, Eastford, Chaplin, Stafford, Union and Willington are about to embark on their own barn survey projects. In a recent *Hartford Courant* article about the launching of their projects, Mansfield was credited with having documented the most barns in the state – 206!* This would not have been possible without the efforts of our many volunteers. Many thanks again to Carolyn Barry and our barn survey volunteers: Kay Holt, Benjamin Sachs, Rene Lizee and James Raynor, Holly Izard, Don Miner, Isabelle Atwood, Lucy Booth, Patty Brady, Robert Thiesfield and Joanne Sousa, Carolyn and Tim Stearns, and Charles Galgowski.

* Peter Marteka, "Preservation Group Seeks To Document State's Barns," *The Hartford Courant*, August 6, 2009.

LOCAL RESIDENTS RECEIVE BARN PRESERVATION GRANT

Denise Abercrombie and Jonathan Andersen of Storrs received a 2009 Barns Grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation in June. The \$5,000 grant will go toward stabilization of the Mason-Knowlton Place barn on Old Turnpike Road. The stabilization will include reroofing the barn, foundation repair, and adding collar ties to all rafter pairs. The English barn dates back to the early 1800's and has a unique history as a miller's barn associated with the Mason Mill. Barcon Improvements, Inc., restoration carpenters/contractors, will be working on the project this fall. Among their noteworthy projects are the barn at the Church Farm in Ashford, the Gurleyville Gristmill, and the house and farm building complex owned by Isabelle Atwood in Mansfield.

Denise and Jon appreciate the community support and encouragement they received from neighbors Greg and Emine Cichowski and Rudy and Joy Favretti. They are also grateful for important historical documents passed down by former owners of the property Ronald and Martha Kelly, and the expertise and helpful barn survey compiled by Holly Izard. Also important to the grant were letters of support for the Mason-Knowlton Place barn. John Meyers of the Mansfield Historical Society, Representative Denise Merrill (also a previous

owner of the property), Warren Church of Joshua's Trust, and Rudy Favretti all contributed letters in support of the preservation of the Mason-Knowlton Place barn.



Denise Abercrombie, State Representative Denise Merrill and Jane Montanaro of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation in front of the Mason-Knowlton Place barn

Denise and Jon are especially grateful to Rudy Favretti for dropping off a housewarming present three years ago--a copy of his wonderful book *Mansfield Four Corners: What It Used To Be & George Washington Didn't See*. Rudy's compelling book and the stories he shared about the Mason-Knowlton Place at their kitchen table inspired Denise and Jon to apply for the Barn Grant. Denise and Jon are thrilled to have received the Barn Grant (only 15 out of 70 applicants were awarded). They are also very moved by the community spirit and support they received throughout the application process.

KUDOS TO OUR SUMMER INTERN

Louisa Owen Sonstroem worked at the museum as a summer intern from late May through the end of July. She arrived on the scene at a most opportune time – just as we were in the final throes of preparing the new exhibits. She jumped right in, helping to mount dozens of photographs and participating in the final cleanup before the opening. She made an impact right away!

For the rest of her internship, Louisa worked on our Hibbard/Parker diary project. As you may recall, in December of 2007, the historical society received a wonderful gift from the family of E. Elizabeth Parker Avery of seventy diaries written by Almira Hibbard Parker and her husband, Martin Parker. The diaries span from 1862 to 1907,

providing a remarkable record of one family's life and the times in which they lived. Lisa Ferriere, Jane Seeber, Nancy Kline and Ann Galonska have been transcribing the diaries.

To further our understanding of the diaries, Louisa researched the Hibbard and Parker families in census records and in the vital, land and probate records of Mansfield and Coventry. She prepared genealogy charts for both families, clarifying the relationships between the many family members mentioned in the diaries. She also compiled a listing of all property transactions and identified the location of the family properties. On the 1869 maps of Mansfield and Coventry, she marked the locations of family homesteads and various other sites noted in the diaries. She even transcribed a diary!

We thank Louisa for her diligent work on this project. A transfer from Amherst College, Louisa will be a sophomore at the University of Connecticut this fall.

OUR VOLUNTEERS HELP IN SO MANY WAYS. SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Joyce Passmore, Cathy Wright, Jim and Kathy Stebbins and E.O. Smith students Laura Slowik and Devon Thacher who helped clean prior to our opening.
- Joan DeBella who coordinated the refreshments for our opening and programs; also the many people who baked.
- Isabelle Atwood who has spent countless hours recruiting our hosts and hostesses. Thanks also to all those who volunteered to host.
- Nancy Rucker and Jill Coghlan of the Garden Gate Club who have beautified our grounds with plantings and maintained our gardens throughout the summer.

THE EARLY SILK DYEING INDUSTRY

*The following article is an excerpt from L. P. Brockett's, **The Silk Industry in America**, published by The Silk Association of America in 1876. It describes the beginnings of America's silk dyeing industry in which Gurleyville played a role.*

During the period when, in many parts of the United States, the nurture and care of the silk-worm, and the production of silk, constituted a household industry, the dyeing of the silk thus obtained, was embraced among the processes carried on in the household. A good wife was expected in a general way to understand something of the dyer's art; its application to silk yarns presented few new difficulties. The same kinds of dyes and dyestuffs were used that had given tint to homespun garments or to half worn dresses a new lease of service. The chief dyes were the yellow and red oak, chestnut, butternut, logwood, Brazil wood, redwood, nutgalls, madder, indigo, annatto, and sometimes, though rarely, small quantities of cochineal. The mordants most in use were alum, copperas (sulphate of iron), bluestone (sulphate of copper), and occasionally, muriate of tin....

In Mansfield, Conn., between 1829 and 1838, a woman who had developed peculiar skill in dyeing, monopolized the business furnished by the [local] silk manufacturers... [Unfortunately her identity is unknown.] The chief complaint against American sewing-silk was that its dye was inferior to the Italian; and a prejudice in favor of the foreign sewing-silk, based chiefly on supposed superiority of color, survived long after the American silks surpassed all others in lustre, brilliance and permanence of hue, as they unquestionably did in strength of material....

When, in August, 1838, Edward Vallentine and Lewis Leigh came to this country and started the business of silk dyeing, at Gurleyville, Conn., they had both these obstacles to meet: a woman had the local trade, and a high reputation as a dyer; and at

best it was not popularly believed that American sewing-silk could be the equal, especially in color, of the Italian. With foreign black sewing-silks, the contest at that period seemed almost hopeless; but in the lighter colors the field was more promising. Mr. Vallentine brought with him his own experience as a silk dyer at Spitalfields, England, where he had succeeded to the business of his father...The younger Vallentine well understood his trade and was ambitious in the use of brilliant colors; he was also remarkably successful in making a permanent black dye...

Northampton, in 1839, under the prodigal management of Samuel Whitmarsh, seemed to be fast becoming the focus of the silk industry, and thither Mr. Vallentine removed. [Joseph Conant of the Mansfield Silk Company in Gurleyville and his son-in-law, Orwell S. Chaffee also relocated to Northampton about this time. Both returned to Mansfield within a few years to establish their own silk mills here.] The products of the mills at Florence [MA] and at South Manchester [CT] were sent to [Vallentine's] dye-house; and in 1844 he was joined by Wm. Skinner, who had been a dyer in England. The amount of dyeing required about this period by the Nonotuck Silk Co., was possibly 50 pounds of silk per week; by Cheney Brothers, perhaps twice that quantity. Each of these concerns at last resolved to do its own dyeing. The Nonotuck Silk Co. bargained with Mr. Vallentine to have its own dyer, Mr. Atkins, taught the art; applying the threat, in case of refusal, of bringing out from England another dyer to supplant Mr. Vallentine. (continued on next page)

**RESERVATION FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER
Friday, September 25, 2009**

Please reserve _____ places for dinner. Enclosed is a check made out to the Mansfield Historical Society in the amount of \$_____ at \$13.00 per person.

_____ Baked Salmon meal

_____ Vegetarian meal

Name(s): _____

Phone #: _____

Please send to:
Mansfield Historical Society
P. O. Box 145
Storrs, CT 06268

RESERVATION DEADLINE is September 18, 2009

Ward Cheney followed up this entering wedge, and himself spent some months in Northampton, acquiring "all the secrets of the art" from Mr. Vallentine for the sum of three hundred dollars. In Mr. Cheney's case Mr. Vallentine afterwards occasionally boasted that he kept some of his knowledge in reserve; but at all events, the Cheney Brothers never appeared conscious of the deficiency. The subsequent withdrawal of these two largest customers, probably brought about Mr. Vallentine's failure in business in 1848. He died in 1851.

*Before 1856 when the first aniline dye was discovered, dyes were extracted from flowers, berries, herbs, tree bark, roots and other natural products. Colorfastness was often a problem. In F. G. Comstock's **A Practical Treatise on the Culture of Silk** published in Hartford in 1839, the author includes a section on dyeing silk. Here is a sample recipe for "Best Blue" dye from Comstock's guide:*

"Take filings of copper, free from alloy of other metals, and put them into a glass vessel, and then pour upon them muriatic acid, sufficient to cover them twice as deep as the space they occupy. Let them stand for the space of twenty-four hours, or as long as necessary, for the muriatic acid to attain a blue or deep green color. Then pour off the clear part of the colored muriatic acid into another glass vessel, and add fresh muriatic acid to the copper filings, and continue this process until the whole of the copper filings have been dissolved, when nothing but the earthy and impure parts will remain.

"Mix all these several blue or deep green colored solutions of copper, and add thereto as much spirits of ammonia, as will saturate the mixture. The silk is then to be moistened with warm water, care being taken that all parts be completely and equally soaked in the water, and wrung out. It is then to be steeped in the blue tincture, prepared as above directed, and occasionally stirred, until it takes a handsome ultra-marine color. It must then be wrung, rinsed in a running stream, and dried in the shade. This makes a beautiful blue, but cannot be called a fast color, as exposure to the sun will give it a greenish tint."

Mansfield Historical Society
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DATES TO REMEMBER:	Sept. 25 – Annual Dinner/Meeting	Nov. 13 – Meeting/Program
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