

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2018

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Looking Back in Harwinton History

Collis P. Huntington

Contributed by Joyce Peck

From poverty to posh and power, Collis Potter Huntington, 1821-1900, is probably the most well-known Harwinton native nationally and maybe even internationally.

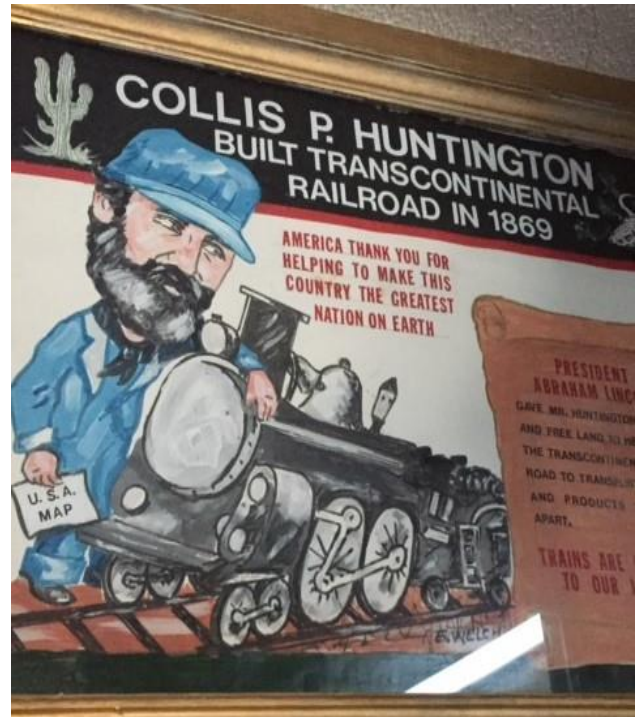
Along with his partners - Mark Hopkins, Leland Sanford and the Crocker brothers (Charles and Edwin Bryant) - Huntington incorporated the Central Pacific Railroad in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War. The rail line ran east from California to meet the Union Pacific Railroad at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869, creating the country's first transcontinental rail system.

Huntington's transportation empire eventually included the Southern Pacific Railroad (nearly 10,000 miles of track) and the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. He developed the entire California rail system along with lines in other states including Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

In conjunction with his steamship company, Huntington founded the city of Newport News, Virginia, spending more than \$7 million to build a shipyard that employed more than 4,000 people.

Roots in Harwinton

Huntington was the sixth child of nine born to William A. and Elizabeth Vincent Huntington



This framed 22 x 28-inch poster is one of two hanging in the Historical Society offices at the Jason Skinner House.

of Harwinton on Oct. 22, 1821. The Huntington's struggled to live on a 30-acre farm in Poverty Hollow, an area where Huntington Brook flows into Leadmine Brook. Not for nothing was the area named "Poverty Hollow."

The Huntingtons were so poor that in 1834 Collis and an older brother, Solon, were removed from their home by the town's selectmen and sent to work on area farms. Collis worked for Orson Barber, earning \$7 a month and later for Phineas Noble, who ran a small store.

Huntington, continued on page 3

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Harwinton Historical Society

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Scholarship Deadline April 15th

The Historical Society is offering a \$1,000 scholarship this year. The applicant must be a student who is a resident of Harwinton and/or active in the Harwinton Historical Society. The scholarship is to be used to pursue post-secondary education by a graduating senior or a student currently pursuing education beyond the high school level.

Applicants must show an interest in history/social science through course work and/or experiences. Applications are available at www.harwintonhistory.com, from area high school guidance counselors, at the Harwinton Library, or by contacting the Historical Society via email at harwhistsoc@gmail.com.

Entries must be postmarked by April 15th

Outstanding Citizen Ellie Woike

A dinner honoring Ellie Woike as the 2018 Harwinton Outstanding Citizen will be held at Fairview Farms Golf Course on Friday, April 20th. Reservations can be made now by calling 860-485-1275. There are three dinner choices. Tickets are \$40 per adult and \$10 for children under age 10. The evening will start at 6 with dinner served at 7.

Among her many accomplishments, Ellie is a retired teacher, master gardener, member of the Historical Society's Board of Directors, past president of the Harwinton Historical Society and former Town Treasurer.

TRIVIA QUESTION: Following a devastating fire that destroyed The Harwinton Congregational Church in 1949, the church was rebuilt but existed without a steeple until 1962. Where did the steeple you see on the church today come from? **Answer on page 5**

Huntington, continued from page 1

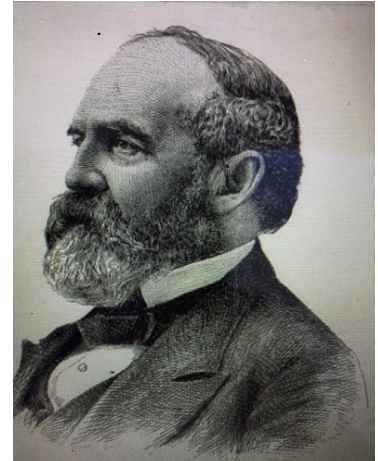
Solon left Harwinton to open a store in Oneonta, New York, where he was later joined by Collis. Their business in Oneonta - S. & C.P. Huntington - became the most successful one in Otsego County. Collis headed west in 1849 when gold was discovered in Sutter's Mill, California. He opened a mining equipment store in nearby Sacramento. From this, he amassed a fortune that led him to and helped finance his railway endeavors.

Memorial to his Mother

In 1887, Collis gave \$60,000 to have a Gothic granite chapel built behind Harwinton Congregational Church in memory of his mother. The chapel eventually fell into disrepair and was torn down in 1960. Its beautiful stained-glass windows, imported from Europe at the behest of Huntington, were salvaged and are in use still at Harwinton's Founder's Congregational Church. A stone plaque to commemorate the chapel is embedded in the grass bank on the eastern

side of the Harwinton Congregational Church parking lot.

Huntington died Aug. 13, 1900 at his camp in the Adirondacks and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York City.



Collis Huntington

Poverty Hollow - where the story all began - no longer exists. It was swallowed up in an Army Corps of Engineers' flood control project following a devastating flood in 1955.

Sources: Nancy Finlay, connecticuthistory.org; Harwinton Municipal Historian Roger Plaskett, harwintonhistory.com; *Encyclopedia of American History*, Richard B. Morris and Henry Steele Commage.

“A Sacred Place” - New Program Scheduled April 28th

Learn about a Native American ceremonial landscape on a remote hilltop - a surprise find in the Tunxis Indian Territory right here in Harwinton! The Historical Society invites you to hear more on this captivating subject from our town's own Bob DeFosses on **Saturday, April 28, 2018 at 2:00 PM** in the Harwinton Library on Bentley Drive off Route 118. There will be no fee, but donations are gratefully accepted. All are welcome.

Sunday, May 6: World War I Program – 2-4 p.m. at the Harwinton Library

As we await the 100th anniversary of the ending of World War I, many historians agree that the “Great War” was one of the most “senseless” conflicts in all of history. From 1914 to 1918, some 10 million people died in a meaningless slaughter. In its causes, its military strategies, and in its final peace treaty, the First World War did little but pave the way for the rise of Adolf Hitler and an even bloodier war. Join Dr. Karl Valois from the University of Connecticut for a discussion of the conflict that was supposed to “make the world safe for democracy” and that would be the war “to end all wars.”

The Barn Corner

The Fireplace

Contributed by David Ryan

The fireplace was important in early homes for it provided heat for warmth and for cooking. It was also a source of light. Before the advent of matches, starting a fire was often problematic. One method was to strike a piece of flint with steel. One tried to catch a spark in a readily flammable source of tinder, such as a piece of charred linen or wood shavings, then gently blowing on it until it burst into flame, then setting it on dry kindling, and finally logs. This was not easy to do. If one inhaled after blowing gently, the lungs could be filled with acrid smoke. If the flint or steel was worn, lighting a fire could take a long time. If it was dark, one's knuckles might be hit instead of the flint. One source for this article (Alice Morse Earle) said that she attempted to start a fire with flint and steel 100 times but had no success.



Another way of creating a spark was to put some powder in a flint-lock gun, pull the trigger, and hope the spark would hit the tinder, but this was wasting valuable gun powder and was not reliable.

The best thing was to not let the fire go completely out. Some families maintained a "fire watch" where someone would check the fire regularly all night. Some would keep a candle lit, but there was a risk that the candle might burn out. And candles were expensive. The best way was to "bank" the coals at night by covering the live coals with a thick blanket of ashes. In the morning one scraped away the ashes to, hopefully, find hot coals.

If all else failed, and you were lucky enough to have a close neighbor, you could send someone - usually the youngest son - with a foot warmer or other covered metal container, to borrow some hot coals.

It is easy to see that the much unheralded foot warmer played an important part in early Harwinton life.

Sources consulted: Raymond Bentley, Alice Morse Earle, the internet

NOTE: The Barn Corner is a series of articles related to artifacts on display in the Historical Society's barn museum located on the grounds of the Harwinton Consolidated School.

Answer to Trivia question on page 2:

The Harwinton Congregational Church acquired its current steeple when the Methodist Church on Main Street in Torrington was being torn down. The Methodist Church had relocated to a new site on Fern Drive, where it remains in use today.

**JUNE 9TH IS CONNECTICUT OPEN HOUSE DAY
PLAN TO VISIT OUR BARN MUSEUM AND SCHOOLHOUSE FROM 1 TO 4 P.M.**

***VISITING THE
HUNGERFORD MUSEUM***

Mike Orefice, below left, and Bill Green chat during a Historical Society field trip to the Hungerford Museum on a Sunday afternoon in March. In right photo, Sarah Urso discusses a display of books written by popular children’s author and illustrator Lois Lenski.

Sarah and her family live in the former Lenski home on Harmony Hill Road.

