

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2018

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The Barn Corner

APPLES, CIDER, AND VINEGAR – IMPORTANT HARWINTON CROPS

By David Ryan

Apples were one of the most important crops grown on early Harwinton farms. Raymond Bentley's book states that 24,146 bushels of apples were harvested in town in 1845. Some were eaten fresh while others were stored in barrels in cool, damp cellars for use in the winter. I remember my father complaining to me that in the winter months he always had to pick out the bruised apples to eat so as not to let them spoil the rest of the supply. A bruised, or "bad" apple gives off ethylene, speeding the ripening of all the other apples in the same barrel.

Most of the apples, however, were used to make apple cider. In early days, water was not trusted as a beverage that was safe to drink. Cholera, typhoid fever, and E-coli were thought to come from drinking "raw" water. Children were given "ciderkin," a mixture of pomace or crushed apples soaked in water, which was thought to be safer than plain water. **See CIDER, page 4**

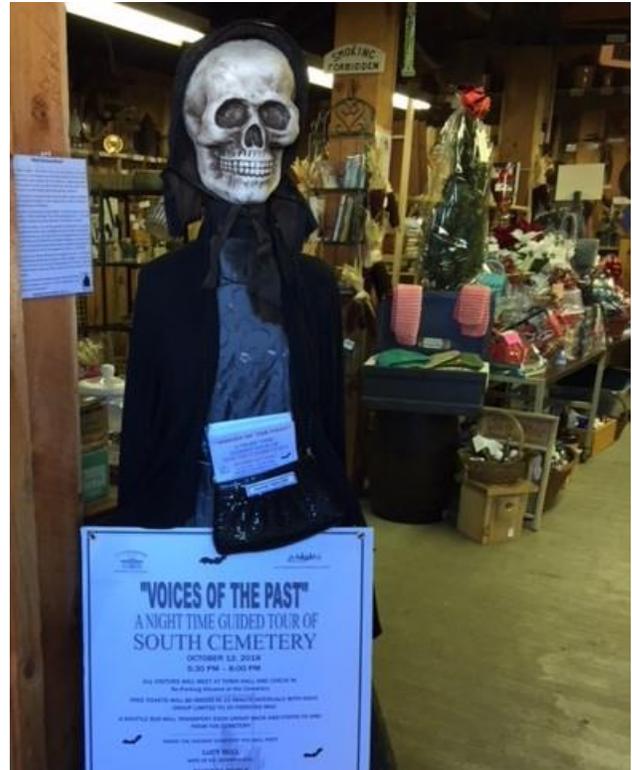
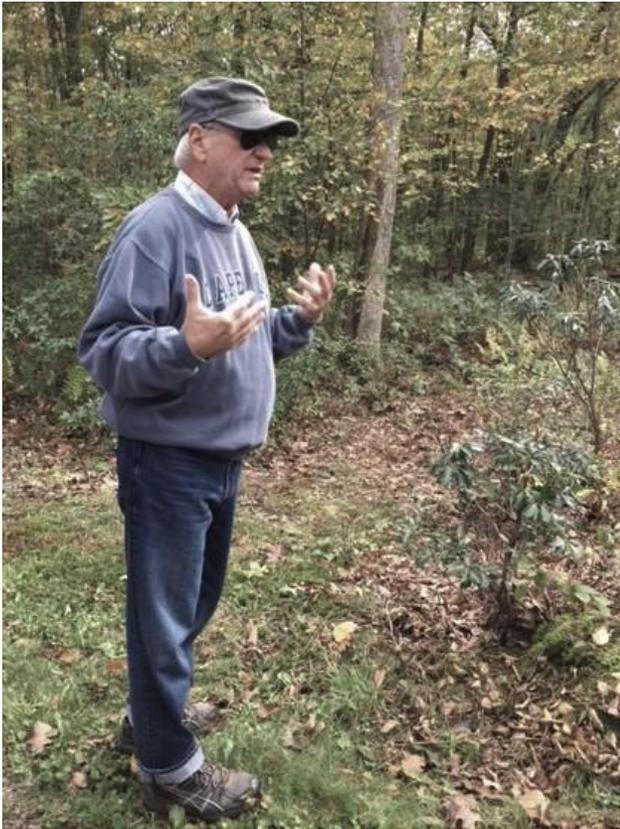


CIDER PRESS

THOMASTON SAVINGS BANK FOUNDATION AWARDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY \$1,200 GRANT

The Historical Society is the recipient of a generous \$1,200 award from the Thomaston Savings Bank Foundation. The money will be used to purchase a color laser printer, an external hard drive and to upgrade the Past Perfect software the Society uses to track its nearly 3,500 acquisitions. Many thanks to the foundation for its continued support of non-profit, local organizations.

Bob DeFosses, below, describes the rock formations on his Harwinton property that he believes were placed there by native Americans thousands of years ago. About a dozen people accepted Bob's offer to see the formations he has documented and wants to protect.



Pictured above is "Silence Bisell," a mannequin who greeted visitors to the Country Store at this year's Harwinton Fair. Silence provided brochures advertising the free cemetery tour that was held on Oct. 12th.

Sponsored by the Harwinton Historical Society and T.A. Hungerford Museum, the cemetery tour drew about 225 people who came to meet "Voices of the Past" at South Cemetery. Because of this year's success, there are plans under way for a similar event again next year.



In photo left, volunteers stuff envelopes for the 2018-19 Annual Appeal which has been very successful so far with all expenses having been met.



OFFICERS – 2018

President: Bonnie Andrews
Vice President: Nancy Schnyer
Secretary: Elaine Sederquist
Treasurer: Harry Schuh

DIRECTORS

Term Ends 2018:

Carol Kearns
David Ryan

Term Ends 2019:

Bruce Burnett
Shirley Gay

Term Ends 2020:

Michael Orefice
Candace Jones-Pacholski

**IMMEDIATE PAST
PRESIDENT**

Eleanor Woike

CURATOR

Bonnie Andrews

BUILDING SUPERVISOR

Dennis Andrews

**OTHERS (non-board
positions)**

HISTORIAN

Roger Plaskett

AUDITOR

Marilyn Mitchell

LEGAL COUNSEL

Patrick Wall

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Request for Cookies Dec. 1st

The Harwinton Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary will again be serving free cookies at the eighth annual Harwinton Hometown Holiday Celebration on Saturday, December 1, 2018.

The Auxiliary has asked if the Harwinton Historical Society members and friends would be able to help again by baking for this town function.

Cookies may be dropped off at the town hall any time after 2 pm on Dec. 1st. Someone will be outside collecting them right from your car. Or they may be left in the breezeway at 306 North Road (corner of Leadmine Brook Road) anytime the week of the celebration. Please include the name of the donor.

Thank you for your support!

**General Membership Meeting and
Election of Officers for 2019**

The Board of Directors of the Historical Society has served as the nominating committee again this year and is proposing that all current board members and officers continue in 2019.

Nominations from the general membership are encouraged and welcome at a meeting to be held on Sunday, Nov. 11 from 2 to 4 at the Harwinton Senior Center, 209 Weingart Road. Newly elected officers will begin their terms at the annual meeting which is scheduled for 1 to 3 p.m. Jan. 13th (snow date Jan. 20).



Cider, continued from page 1

One of the artifacts in the Historical Society's barn museum is a small apple grinder that was probably used by a single family. This would grind the apples into pomace, which was also called "apple cheese." The pomace was then put into a cider press. Although the barn does have a press, it is a wine press, used for extracting juice from grapes. The difference is that the "basket" that holds the fruit on a wine press is made with metal parts. Any metal tools touching apples, which are acetic, would change the flavor of the apples. Some say it is incorrect to call it a "cider press" at all, for it made apple juice, and only time could turn the juice into cider. Others say the immediate squeezing produced sweet cider, which time changes to hard cider. The hard cider, if properly stored, would last through the winter.

In fall, a farmer would gather a selected mixture of apples, including some windfall and bruised apples (for more flavor), and wash and rinse them. This would help identify and sort out the rotten (or "bad apples") that would ruin the flavor. Crab apples, though they had little juice, were sometimes added to give a tartness to the flavor. The pomace was then loaded onto the press on layers of porous cloth (early on, straw was used) to a thickness of up to five inches. Depending on the press capacity, there could be up to a dozen layers of apple cheese per pressing.

Once in place, pomace was pressed to squeeze out and collect the juice until no more could be extracted. On average, one could expect to make three gallons of cider from one bushel of

apples. The thoroughly dried pomace was then spread on the farm's fields to decompose. Although most home presses could not get all the juice from the apples, I have seen pomace squeezed so dry that it was hard to believe that it had ever contained any juice at all. This was at Hogan's Cider Mill in Burlington.

Sweet cider can be drunk immediately after pressing, but to keep the cider sweet, one had to use clean containers and know how to forestall the fermentation process. Most of the cider produced in the past was stored in barrels as hard cider, with the alcohol content reaching about 11 per cent. A typical family might use two or three barrels during a winter. Cider was used as a beverage, for cooking, and as medicine.

Allowing cider to ferment further would result in vinegar, which had several important uses. Vinegar allowed families to eat vegetables throughout the year by pickling them in a vinegar brine. Vinegar was also used to treat sunburn and it worked well to clean copper pots and kettles. Some say that without the miracle of vinegar, family survival in early America would have been much more difficult. New uses for vinegar are being found even today.

The onset of Prohibition resulted in a great decline in cider production. Prohibitionists burned many orchards completely to the ground. Many farmers, who needed every bit of income they could get, planted sweet non-cider apple varieties to take their place. With the end of Prohibition, cider apples began to rise again in popularity, as farmers found them profitable.

See Cider, page 5

Cider, continued from page 4

Here are a few interesting facts about cider:

- John Adams, our second president, drank a glass of hard cider every morning. He claimed it settled his stomach.
- One Harwinton family had a rule that no hard cider would be served at meal time. One day, mom was sick so dad served it at a meal. Mom found out from the children and poured Epsom Salts into the cider supply, ruining the whole barrel. Some neighbors thought that loss was a great tragedy.
- One grandfather, himself a teetotaler, would always have barrels of hard cider on hand. The winter supply was "for medicinal purposes only - one hot toddy at night before bed."
- Even though cider today has a lot of competition from wine, beer, and other alcoholic beverages, it has maintained its popularity as a beverage choice, either sweet or hard.
- If someone in a group is referred to as a "bad apple" be aware that this could be the downfall of the whole group. In other words, the negative influence of one in a group could prove to be the undoing of the entire group that would otherwise — without the negative influence — remain good.
- Apple wine has a higher alcohol content than hard cider and applejack has an even higher alcohol content. Applejack is made by storing apple wine at below freezing temperatures. The lower the freezing temperature, the higher the resulting alcohol content.
- Applejack was very popular among the New England colonies. Barrels of apple wine would be set out in sheds during January and February when the temperatures were low. By first thaw the applejack was ready to drink.



Sources cited: Raymond Bentley, "History of Harwinton", Romily Cochrane Cofrancesco "Campville Chronicles", Lar Hothem "Collecting Farm Antiques", Richard M. Bacon "The Forgotten Arts" (from Yankee Magazine), Alice Morse Earle "Home Life in Colonial Days", Eric Sloane "A Museum of Early American Tools", the Internet.

TRIVIA QUESTION

How many apples does it take to make a cup of cider?

Answer on page 6

**CALENDAR OF UPCOMING
HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS**

DATE	EVENT	COMMENT
November 4 (Sunday)	Program topic: Religion	2 to 4 PM Harwinton Library Bentley Drive Speaker Peter Vermilyea
November 11 (Sunday)	HHS Election of Officers and general members meeting	2 to 4 p.m. Harwinton Senior Center 209 Weingart Road
November 18 (Sunday)	Program topic: The Beecher Family of Litchfield	2 to 4 p.m. Harwinton Library Bentley Drive Speaker Dr. Karl Valois
November 29 (Thursday)	Board of Directors * Monthly Meeting	3 PM Skinner House Bentley Drive
December 27 (Thursday)	Board of Directors * Monthly Meeting	3 PM Skinner House Bentley Drive
January 13 (Sunday) with a snow date of January 20	Annual Meeting	1 to 3 p.m. Harwinton Senior Center 209 Weingart Road

** Historical Society members are always welcome to attend Board of Directors meetings which are held the last Thursday of each month at 3 p.m. at the Skinner House on Wintergreen Circle off Bentley Drive.*

Answer to page 5 Trivia Question: To make about 8 ounces of cider or vinegar, it can take anywhere between **three** and **six apples**, depending on the size and type of apples. Orchards that produce cider by the gallon can use as much as 20 pounds to press a single gallon.