

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Mail: PO Box 84, Harwinton, CT 06791

email: harwhistsoc@gmail.com

WATER POWER MOTIVATED HARWINTON INDUSTRY

By Bruce Burnett

For thousands of years prior to the widespread use of the steam engine and its application to railroad transportation, water power was the primary driving force for industry. Being a hilly, well-watered region, Litchfield County, in general, and Harwinton were ideal places for industry to develop. From its founding in 1737 to the mid-nineteenth century, Harwinton was home to a considerable variety of small-scale manufacturing businesses.

26 WATER-POWERED MILLS

In his "History of Harwinton", Raymond Bentley located twenty-six water-powered mills that had operated at various times in the past. In a northern climate such as ours, the growing season was limited, and farmers had the time, and often the necessity, of finding productive winter occupations. The products of grist mills, saw mills, and shingle mills were directly related to farmers' domestic needs and probably always accounted for the largest number of manufactures. Typical of these operations was the shingle and saw mill operated by the Catlin



C.S. Birge Saw Mill

family on Locust Road. Shingle Mill Brook is named for the mill.

Other mills that used local resources included turning mills with operating lathes and other machines that produced wooden products such as furniture, handles, wagon parts, carts, wheelbarrows and ox yokes. A chair at the Hungerford Museum was produced at Anson Johnson's turning mill located on Puddin' Brook.

WOOLEN CLOTH

A fulling mill, where woolen cloth was shrunk and thickened by moistening, heating and pressing, was established by William Huntington in Poverty Hollow below the confluence of the East Branch of Lead Mine Brook and the brook itself. William was the father of Collis

Huntington, the railroad tycoon who donated the stone chapel that once stood behind the Congregational Church on North Road. Harwinton sheep undoubtedly provided much raw material for that mill.

SADDLES AND SHOES

Tanneries operated by Deacon Sperry, John Bull, Reuben Barber, David Tyler and Elijah Gaylord, beginning as early as 1788, produced leather that was sometimes further manufactured into items such as shoes, harnesses and saddles. Shoes produced locally were often very stiff and had to be oiled and broken in to be comfortable. Interestingly, shoes could be rented in the winter and then returned during the warmer months when people often went barefoot.

BRICK KILNS

Prominent among the several brick kilns was the one operated at the Birge farm on Spring Hill Road. In 1845, 160,000 bricks were produced at that site. A Harwinton brick with the date of 1767 has been authenticated and there are

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Some Facts About The 4th of July!!

The following is a portion of an article written by Jim Headley, managing editor of the Blair, Nebraska Washington County Pilot-Tribune & Enterprise and published July 12, 2012.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

Their story:

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died.

Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.

Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured.

Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.

They signed, and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they?

Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants. Nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence, knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in rags.

Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward. Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.



At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished.

So, take a few minutes while enjoying your 4th of July holiday and silently thank these patriots. It's not much to ask for the price they paid.

CEMETERY WALK RETURNS OCTOBER 12th

After a one-year hiatus, the popular evening visit to South Cemetery will return October 12th (rain date October 13). The walk was first held in 2015 ("If Stones Could Talk") and again in 2016 ("The Graveyard Shift").

The event is currently in the planning stage. Volunteers are needed to assist with research, acting, costumes, traffic and refreshments. If you would like to help, please contact Town Historian Roger Plaskett at 860-485-9636 or by email at harwhistsoc@gmail.com

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Email:

harwhistsoc@gmail.com

Harwinton Historical Society

PO Box 84

Harwinton, CT 06791

860-482-7978



Congratulations, Daniella!

Daniella Giese, pictured above, accepts the Harwinton Historical Society's \$1,000 academic scholarship for 2018 from Bruce Burnett, board member and chairman of the scholarship committee. This is the first scholarship awarded by the society.

Daniella is the daughter of Robin and Robert Giese of Cottage Road. She has an impressive record of volunteer service to the Harwinton community including at the library, Girl Scouts and Lewis Mills High School. She expects to graduate from Keene State College in New Hampshire in May 2020 with a bachelor's degree in communications and geography. Her grades are excellent and her volunteer efforts, with an emphasis on history, have continued throughout her time at Keene.

Other members of scholarship committee were Nancy Schnyer, Ellie Woike and Marti Lecko.

AS YEARS PASSED, LOCAL INDUSTRIES ADAPTED TO CHANGE

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bricks produced locally in the collection at the Hungerford Museum.

FORKS AND HATS

In addition to producers using local raw materials, there were tin shops, a fork factory, coopers, a cutlery factory, a hat shop and clock factories. The Hungerford Museum has a hat mold used at the shop operated by Abijah Catlin on Burlington Road west of Harmony Hill Road. One of the Hopkins and Alfred clocks, produced in the early 1800's in Campville, can be seen in the Hungerford Museum and another was a recent gift of the Thierry family to the Harwinton Historical Society. Part of that shop was moved to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D. C. Percussion cap rifles were also produced by Hopkins and Alfred, one of which is in the Hungerford collection. Clock parts were produced at several sites in Harwinton. In 1831, clock faces were produced by Isaac Hinman for David Catlin for \$2.75 each and in 1848 Curtis Sperry produced 19,724 stenciled clock faces at a WildCat Hill and Hayden Road site.

ADJUSTING TO CHANGE

The most recent venture recorded by Bentley was a co-operative creamery located "at the foot of the hill" below the

center of town. The creamery operated between 1889 and 1901 and apparently was often in financial difficulty. I suspect that the demise of that operation says much about the "deindustrialization" of Harwinton and Litchfield County. With the advent of efficient steam engines to power large-scale factories and railroads to transport raw materials, fuel and finished products, small-scale producers could no longer compete.

"CHANGE IS THE ECONOMIC REALITY IN ALL AGES. IN THIS AGE OF GLOBALIZATION, THE GREAT CHALLENGE IS TO ADJUST AND ADAPT TO THAT CHANGE."

Even though we can be impressed by the scale of production often achieved by Harwinton entrepreneurs, the concentration of resources and immigrant manpower in the larger cities ensured that Harwinton would return to its more bucolic roots by the end of the nineteenth century. The fact that the rural character of Litchfield County is a highly prized environment for many of us provides some consolation, perhaps. The larger lesson, I think, is that change is the



VILLAGE BLACKSMITH 1916

economic reality in all ages. In this age of globalization, the great challenge is to adjust and adapt to that change.

For more information on Harwinton industries, see Raymond Bentley's "History of Harwinton". There is also a map of mill sites and other points of interest produced by Bentley and Peter Thierry in the Hungerford Museum.

Bruce Burnett, a retired teacher of history, is a member of the Harwinton Historical Society Board of Directors, the T.A. Hungerford Memorial Museum and a resident of Harwinton.



ANNUAL ICE CREAM SOCIAL



Sunday, August 5 from 2 to 4 PM

IN FRONT OF THE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL - PLEASE BRING A LAWN CHAIR !

Ice Cream from A & J's Ice Cream Parlor at \$1 per scoop

Entertainment for young and old by Matica Circus Arts

Come see juggling, stilt walking and more !

Harwinton native Heidi Kirchofer is co-founder and managing director of Matica Arts whose focus is on Circus, World Music and the Moving Arts. You may have seen members of Matica Arts in this year's Harwinton Memorial Day parade.

The Schoolhouse and Barn Museum will be open during the social



Consolidated School third graders learn about milk production and the process of making butter from Mike Orefice, pictured left. During a June 5th field trip to the barn and schoolhouse, the students tried laundry techniques, sizing eggs, whipping cream, using a food grinder and drilling a hole with a hand auger. They also guessed the use of several "old fashioned" items displayed in the schoolhouse.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	COMMENT
July 26 (Thursday)	Board of Directors Meeting	3 PM at Skinner House
August 5 (Sunday)	Ice Cream Social – please bring your own lawn chair	2-4 PM at Schoolhouse and Barn in front of Consolidated School, Route 118. Ice Cream (\$1/scoop) and entertainment for all ages by Matica Arts.
August (date to be determined)	Annual Appeal Kick Off	Volunteers meet to prepare envelopes for mailing
August 30 (Thursday)	Board of Directors Meeting	3 PM Skinner House
September 16 (Sunday)	Member Appreciation Event	Details by Invitation
October 5, 6, 7 (Fri, Sat, Sun)	Harwinton Fair	Volunteers Needed !!
October 12 (raindate Oct. 13)	Cemetery Walk	Volunteers Needed !
October 25 (Thursday)	Board of Directors meeting and appointment of nominating committee	3 PM Skinner House
November 29 (Thursday)	Board of Directors meeting and nomination of officers for 2019	3 PM Skinner House