

HARWINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2019

Mail: PO Box 84, Harwinton, CT 06791

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The Barn Corner

LOCATING THE “NECESSARY” OUTHOUSE

By David Ryan



Located behind Harwinton's one-room schoolhouse is a non-functioning replica of a small building, usually called an outhouse. An outhouse is a small structure, separate from a main building, that covers a toilet.

When building an outhouse, a great deal of attention was given to the location. The structure needs to be close enough to the house or main building to be convenient, yet far enough away to avoid unpleasant odors. As late as 1896 there were no houses in Harwinton with indoor plumbing, so outhouses were private, common and necessary. Thus, other names for an outhouse include the “privy” or “necessary house.”

Often seen on the door of the outhouse was a half-moon cutout. While there are different stories as to why this was a common feature, it is certain that one purpose was to provide ventilation and let some light inside the building. The other purpose of a cut out was to tell the difference between the male and the female outhouses, especially for those who could not read. A crescent moon symbolized a female and a star a male. However, if families only had a single outhouse (which was usually the case), it most likely had a moon on it or a moon and star combination.

Looking through the door one sees a large wide board at seating height with one or sometimes two circular holes cut into it. Some “two-seaters” had a larger cut out for adults and a smaller one for children. Below the seat hole is a dug pit, called a latrine, often as deep as four feet. Since toilet paper as we know it was not yet in production, corn cobs, leaves, and odd bits of paper were used for cleaning. Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogues were also used after having provided reading material for the user. The arrival of toilet paper was a welcome invention! *See The Outhouse, page 4*

TWO NEW PROGRAMS! ONE NEW TIME! ONE NEW LOCATION!

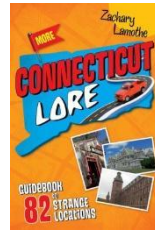
The Harwinton Historical Society is offering two new Spring programs. Both are free and open to the public. Our programs have traditionally been held on Sunday afternoons from 2 to 4. Our April program on Connecticut Lore *will* begin at 2 p.m. in the library. However, in May, our program committee has scheduled an interesting program about First Ladies that will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the main room at Town Hall. It is hoped that this will allow those attending to spend time outdoors during the day and be able to attend the meeting while there is still daylight. *See Details on page 2.*

Connecticut Lore – Strange, Off-Kilter, and Full of Surprises with author Zachary Lamothe

Sunday, April 14, 2019 - 2 p.m. - Harwinton Library Community Room

Author Zack Lamothe will take us on a virtual journey of the unique and quirky side of Connecticut that you may not know! We will journey slightly off the beaten path as we explore Connecticut using his unconventional guidebooks of odd locations, complete with strange and unusual history and folklore. Connecticut is "full of surprises" and worth investigating whether you're a local or an out-of-towner. Whether you know it as *The Nutmeg State* or *The Constitution State*, you will see the State of Connecticut in a whole different light.

Two of Lamothe's books, CT Lore: Strange, Off Kilter & Full of Surprises and More Connecticut Lore: Guidebook to 82 Strange Locations, will be available for purchase (\$17- cash or check) and signing.



First Ladies: An Adventure in Glamour, Guts, and Gumption

Sunday, May 19, 2019 - 6:30 p.m. - Harwinton Town Hall Assembly Room



Join us for a lively, humorous, and engaging program that weaves historical and modern events with facts about First Ladies (starting with Martha Washington) to help us understand and appreciate the important role they play. Learn about the personalities and adventures of the women who became the First Ladies of the United States! Who were they really? What made them tick? Did they love or loathe their role? Did they sink or swim navigating the complexities of politics, protocol and publicity? Personal anecdotes by presenter Mariann Millard, a licensed Washington D.C. Guide, will be judiciously used to enhance our *First Ladies* experience.

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2019 Scholarship Deadline April 15th

The Harwinton Historical Society is offering a \$1,000 scholarship to a Harwinton resident. Applicants must show an interest in history and/or the social sciences through coursework and/or experiences. Graduating high school seniors and students currently pursuing post-secondary education are encouraged to apply. Applications are available from the guidance departments of the following schools: Lewis Mills, Wamogo, Oliver Wolcott Technical, St. Paul, and Northwest Catholic High; or may be requested on line at harwhistsoc@gmail.com.

Applications must be postmarked by **April 15, 2019**.

“Do one thing every day that scares you.”

– Eleanor Roosevelt

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Help is needed for the following activities:

Saturday, May 11 at 10 a.m.

Members to clean the schoolhouse for visitors

Saturday, June 8 from 1 to 3 p.m.

A few members needed to greet guests to the schoolhouse and barn for Connecticut Open House Day

Saturday, June 22, 10 to 6

A few members needed to greet guests to the Country Store at the fairgrounds during the Lions Club Food Truck/Beer Fest event at the Harwinton Fairgrounds.

The Country Store will be open to those who are attending this event to introduce them to the many artifacts housed by the Historical Society. If you can help for an hour or two, please contact any member of the Board of Directors listed to the left or send an email before June 1st. Please indicate the time you can be at the fairgrounds.

The Outhouse, continued from page 1

While outhouses seem odd today, they are still common in rural and wilderness areas. I have experienced the “thrill” of using one, often called a “privy” at my in-law's farm in rural Minnesota. To my knowledge, they still use the privy in all but the coldest months. Outhouses are still in use by almost 2 billion people, mostly in underdeveloped areas of the world.

Old outhouse pits can be a treasure trove for archeological digging (called privy digging or privy diving). The pit was sometimes also used for garbage disposal. Items that were accidentally dropped into the pit were rarely retrieved. Old bottles are often found, as people could secretly drink alcohol, then drop the empty bottle into the pit, thus hiding the evidence and avoiding detection.

Pranks and Jokes

There are many stories of pranks related to the outhouse. One outhouse joke comes to mind. One Halloween, a boy tipped over the outhouse as a holiday prank. When he admitted to his father that he had done this, the father took him behind the woodshed and beat him. “Why?” the boy sobbed. “When George Washington cut down the cherry tree, his father praised him for his honesty.” “Yes,” the father said, “but George wasn't sitting in the tree when he cut it down.”



Modern-day outhouses



This replica of a double outhouse is located behind the First District Schoolhouse on the grounds of the Harwinton Consolidated School on Route 118.

Did You Know?

There's an outhouse capital of the world: It's a curious claim to fame, but American town Elk Falls calls itself the outhouse capital of Kansas (and even the world). On the Friday and Saturday before American Thanksgiving, Elk Falls holds outhouse tours that promise “an outrageously ‘moving’ experience,” as people wander through wacky homemade outhouses and vote for their favorites. A recent winner was the very pink “pretty privy” with lace curtains and a frilly table lamp.

There's an outhouse museum in Nova Scotia: The tiny **Museum of the Outhouse** is tucked inside Liverpool, Nova Scotia's Rossignol Cultural Centre and is filled with collectables, photos, artifacts, and more. “It's one room and there is an actual outhouse in it. We have little tiny outhouse key chains, outhouse posters, outhouse coffee mugs—literally a whole room dedicate to outhouses,” says John Siriopoulos, manager at the Rossignol Museum. *Source: Wikipedia*



Looking Back 25 years to April 1994

Information from the Historical Society's Archives

Cliff Anderson Honored

In April of 1994, Clifford Anderson, 80, of Harmony Hill Road was named recipient of the Arthur B. Poole Award (since renamed the Harwinton Outstanding Citizen award – SEE INFORMATION BELOW RE: THE 2019 AWARD). A retired machinist, Anderson was active in the Harwinton Ambulance Association and was assistant chief at the Harwinton Volunteer Fire Department. A dinner in his honor was held at Eastwood Restaurant in Torrington.

Senior Center

Harwinton senior citizens were attempting to establish a senior center. They have been meeting in the basement of the Harwinton Congregational Church for nearly 20 years.

Dog Pound Problems

The Harwinton Dog Pound was reported to be in such poor condition that the state animal control officer told town officials that dogs could no longer be housed there. Significant water problems were causing unsanitary conditions. Town selectmen were considering several options including housing the dogs at the town garage or sharing a kennel with the town of Plymouth.

Big Band Bash Expands

An increase in the number of band members combined with a lack of adequate seating in the Lewis Mills gymnasium resulted in expansion of the Big Band Bash concert to two days. Led by Band Director John Deeb, the concerts featured 600 students from the Region 10 instrumental music program.

2019 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR – BILL BUYS SR.

The 2019 Citizen of the Year Award will be presented to William “Bill” Buys Sr. on Friday, April 26, 2019 at Fairview Farm Golf Course. The evening will begin with hors d'oeuvres at 6 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$40 per person and may be reserved by calling 860-485-6120 or by mail to 21 Rock Brook Road, Harwinton, CT 06791. Checks payable to the Harwinton Award Committee.

TRIVIA

Question: Why did children collect peach pits during World War I?

Answer: In 1915 American chemist James Bert Garner discovered that a mask with activated charcoal as a filter could subdue the effects of chemical warfare, which had been actively introduced during World War One. The activated charcoal was made from natural fibers such as those found in peach pits. In September 1918, the U.S. government launched a peach pit campaign to gather as many pits as possible to be used in the manufacturing of gas masks. School children collected the pits to help with the war effort.

2019 History Bites Lecture Series

April 11th through June 13th

Noon to 1 p.m.

Free and open to the public

Each spring History Bites presents a series of weekly lunchtime programs that shares topics of local history with the community. Contact the hosting organization for more information. Reservations are requested, but not required.

April 11: Topsmead State Forest From Private Estate to Public Land

Litchfield Community Center, 421 Bantam Road, Litchfield
860-567-5694 / deep.state.ct.us/rec/parks/ctforests.htm

April 18: An Insiders Look at South Britain

Old Town Hall Museum
624 South Britain Road, Southbury
203-405-3124 / www.southburyhistory.org

April 25: Bellamy-Ferriday House & Garden

The Stories Behind The Story...Lilac Girls

Bellamy-Ferriday House & Garden
9 Main Street N., Bethlehem
203-266-7596

May 2: Glebe House Museum & Gertrude Jekyll Garden

Our Secret Garden: The Women of Glebe House

49 Hollow Road, Woodbury
203-263-2855 / www.glebehousemuseum.org

May 9: Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust

The Woodbury Path: A Historic Roadway

Natalie's Studio@ Flanders Nature Center
5 Church Hill Road, Woodbury
201-263-3711 / flandersnaturecenter.org

Additional programs will be listed in the May Newsletter