

# CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Volume 26, No. 2

Fall 2003

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, September 22, 7:30 p.m.**  
**"A Closer Look Our Gun Collection"**  
**Marshall Robinson**

Marshall Robinson, Society board member and firearms collector, will display and discuss the guns in the Society's collection and demonstrate their loading and operation. Marshall is a recognized ballistics expert and a member of the Remington Society of America, the Winchester Arms Collectors Association, and the New England Antique Arms Society.

**Monday, October 27, 7:30 p.m.**  
**"Interesting Tools from the Society's Tool Room"**  
**Robert Davis**

Robert Davis, a new Cheshire Historical Society member and an avid tool collector, will select tools from the Society's extensive collection to demonstrate and explain. Robert is not only knowledgeable about antique tools, he even attended a school in the Berkshires to learn how to build with them. With assistance of students from the school, he built a barn using the mortise and tenon method.

**Monday, November 24, 7:30 p.m.**  
**"Tales of Toys"**  
**Art Sides**

Just in time for the toy and game season, Cheshire toy collector Art Sides will entertain assembled information-seekers with tales of toys. His presentation will feature treasures from the Society's holdings as well as his own collection, including lead soldiers and toys from the turn of the century.

## Fall Calendar

September 22	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Membership Meeting
September 27	Saturday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.	Antiques & Collectibles Sale *
October 19	Sunday 1:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
October 25	Saturday 9 a.m.- 3 p.m.	Antiques & Collectibles Sale *
October 27	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Membership Meeting
November 16	Sunday 1:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
November 24	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Membership Meeting
December 21	Sunday 2—4 p.m.	Christmas Party

\*Weather permitting

## Ron Gagliardi Appointed As New Town Historian

Congratulations to Vice President and Program Chairman Ron Gagliardi, who was appointed as Cheshire's third town historian by the Cheshire Town Council on August 12. The Cheshire Historical Society Board unanimously nominated Ron for the position at its June meeting.

Town historians came into being in Connecticut in the early 1990s when the Connecticut State Legislature made it possible for towns to officially name them. The late Lillian Andrews, former Society president and curator, was Cheshire's first town historian. The second was Society member Arthur Hostage, who resigned in June. As a lover of history and author of the recent *Images of America: Cheshire*, Ron is eminently qualified for the job. We know he will be outstanding!

# Here Come the Brides

“Well did you evah!”

“What a swell party this was!”

Hoping that Cole Porter will forgive me, I'll say it again, “It was a swell party!” Five hundred twenty-five people signed the guest book during the exhibit. Most of those wonderful garden clubbers, who supplied flowers, did not; neither did some others, so I can safely say that a least 550 people came through. Many of them had never been in our

museum before and were, if not awed, very impressed with the show and the depth and breadth of our permanent collection. We made new friends, which was one of our goals.

## Three Acquisitions from Estate of Lillian Andrews

Thanks to Executrix Nora Adams, the Society received three very interesting new items last spring from the Estate of Lillian Andrews: a picture of early Cheshire settler Abel Andrews, born about 1728; a lovely, little wall mirror with a decorative upper panel, and a tea towel with cross-stitch initials “RM,” made by Rebecca Munson, who died in 1849, age 90 years. Attached to the back of the mirror is a newspaper clipping describing a very similar mirror, which is identified as a “Tabernacle Mirror—Made in New England about 1825.”

The picture and mirror fit perfectly in the upstairs front hall. The tea towel has been added to our collection of antique household linens.

One hundred fourteen families shared 165 pictures with us. Three brides loaned us their dresses; and, if space had not been an issue, many other brides would happily have done the same. The exhibit resulted in better storage of the costume collection. Curator Warren VanAlmkerk, assisted by Mary Ellen Kania, packed the wedding dresses in acid-free boxes and tissue. They are now readily accessible and much less prone to damage.

Statistics are impressive, but this exhibit was really about people—family, friends, memories, and people working together to preserve these things. The following individuals or groups were very helpful to us and deserve recognition.

Thank you to:

Cheshire Art League, Martin Gent  
Connecticut Costume in Bristol for mannequins  
Sweet Maria's Bakery in Waterbury  
Paulette Bush, Peg Boutwell, Priscilla Clark,  
and Norm and Bev Maconi for dress forms  
Sarah Hickey  
Lee Miller  
Joan Pilarczyk  
The Cheshire Garden Club  
The Suburban Garden Club of Cheshire  
*The Cheshire Herald*

Our committee was wonderful. Thank you all again!!

Sally Clark  
Ron Gagliardi  
Mary Ellen Kania  
Jo Kowalski  
Barbara Merrill  
Lee Pelz  
Warren VanAlmkerk

## New Book on Colonial Clothing

Our deep appreciation to Dick Ulbrich for his recent gift, *What Clothes Reveal - The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America*. This beautiful new book was published by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in association with Yale University Press in 2002.

The book has more than 300 color photographs and treats not only elegant, high-style clothing but also garments for every day and work. Author Linda Baumgarten analyzes what Americans in the 18th century considered fashionable and how they used clothing to assert status and identify occupations. The book will be on special display at all the fall meetings.

*Pat Vita, Chair*

## Doolittle Family Reunion Group Visits Society in August

Nearly 80 members of the Doolittle family from across the nation and Canada visited the Society on Saturday, August 2. The family, which reunites every two years, comes to the Cheshire-Wallingford-Meriden area every 10 years to reconnect with the places where their family first settled. This year, the reunion was at the Ramada Inn in Meriden for the August 1-3 weekend.

A three-town tour on Saturday afternoon with two tour buses brought family members to the Society at about 4:00 p.m. The visitors ranged in age from 4 to 79. They were greeted by President Ed Kania, Mary Ellen Kania, Curator Edgar Johnson, and Jean McKee, who has several Doolittle connections in her own family tree. Many were fascinated by an article Jean shared which explained the surname Doolittle implied that they would "do little for the Church of England" because they were Puritans.

### "Real Doolittle Country"

Mary Ellen gave a brief introduction before the visitors toured the house. "You're in real Doolittle country," she told them. Cemetery records from 1934 show more than 200 Doolittle graves in town. Eight Doolittles from Cheshire fought in the Revolutionary War, eight defended

the Union in the Civil War, one served in each of the World Wars, and two served in Korea and two in Vietnam. Doolittle Elementary School, built on Cornwall Avenue 1963, is named after Frederick Doolittle (1849-1922), who owned the land it was built on.

The most famous family member from Cheshire was Amos Doolittle, the engraver, who was born here in 1754. Descendents could see copies of his well known engravings of the Battles of Lexington and Concord on display in the Exhibit Room. We also showed off our 1813 map of the U.S., on which Amos Doolittle did the ship engravings, and his 1814 engraving of the Prodigal Son. Thanks to Jean, we also were able to display copies of two watercolors done by Emma C. Doolittle in the Brooksvale area in 1886.

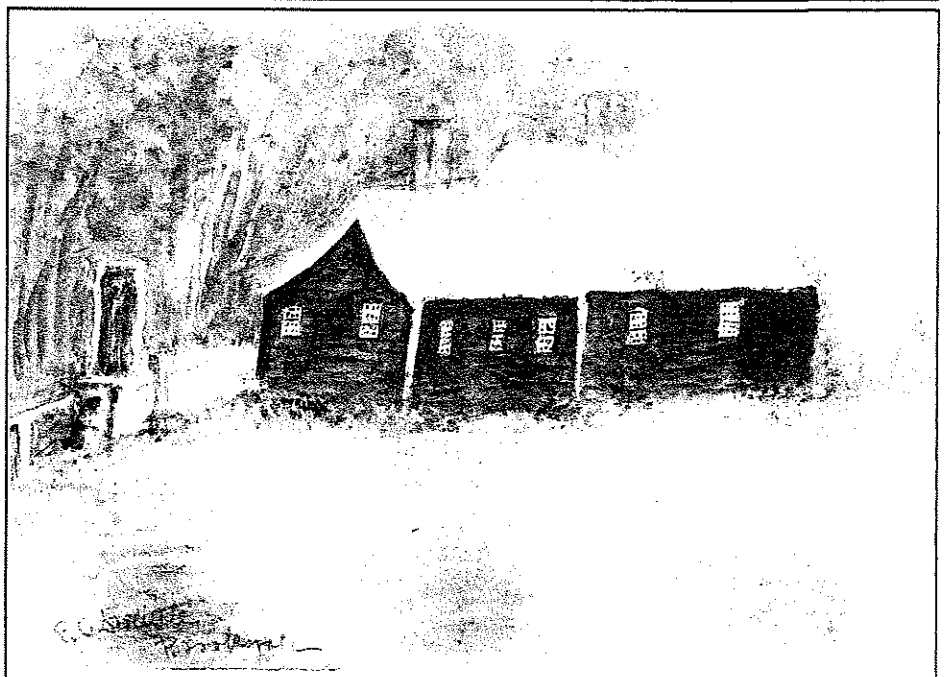
In the dining room, family members admired the pink luster tea set which was the wedding china of Hannah Doolittle, who married Henry Bristol in Cheshire in March 1831. The set was split after her death, then reunited and returned to Cheshire by a great granddaughter in 1973 after 140 years.

The group seemed to enjoy the house, and several told us that the Cheshire Historical Society was their "best stop." We look forward to a visit from the Doolittles again in 2013!

**Copy of 1886 watercolor by Emma C. Doolittle** shows a rear view of the house still standing at 840 North Brooksvale Rd.. The house was built by Merriman Cook in 1768. Amos Doolittle (not the famous engraver) acquired the house in 1790. His son, also Amos Doolittle (1796-1867) was the artist's grandfather.

The house, now painted white, has had side and rear wings added. The well is still there. The present owner is Benedict Komisarjevsky.

*This is one of three copies of 19<sup>th</sup> century Brooksvale watercolors given to the Society in August by Jean McKee.*



## Edgar Johnson is "The Guardian at the (Cheshire Academy) Gate"

Curator Edgar Johnson was the subject of a wonderful feature article, "The Guardian at the Gate," in the Spring issue of the Cheshire Academy's alumni magazine, *Cheshire Academy Today*. The magazine pointed out that Edgar, Class of 1938, and his family have been part of Cheshire Academy history since 1822. From his home across the street, Edgar has seen generations of Academy students come and go.

The article reports on an interview by Joe Hanrahan, Advancement Officer for Major Giving, with Edgar and Bevan Dupre, Class of 1969. A few excerpts from Edgar's recollections follow:

**"Johnson:** My mother's family name was Beadle. My great grandfather, Major Benajah Beadle, was at the Academy in 1822 and his brother, Philander Beadle, was here in 1823. My grandfather, Edgar Hitchcock Beadle, came here in 1861. His brothers, William and Henry started in 1850 and 1858. In those days, you generally came for only one or two years. There was a four-year course, but students seldom stayed that long. On my father's side, my grandfather, George Ransom Johnson, was at the Academy from 1863 to 1866. My father, Joseph Ransom Johnson, was here from 1906 to 1909, following his brothers, George Welles Johnson, who started in 1900, and Robert James Johnson in 1903.

**"Johnson:** While I was at the Academy, there were about fifty day students. The ones that lived in town were told by (Headmaster Arthur N) Sheriff that they could work off some of their tuition by doing chores. Tuition then was \$1,000 for a day student. I would go over to the office before 8 a.m., get the attendance reports, deliver them to all the Masters, and have the job done before 8:30. I had that job for the whole time I was here. Sheriff had another job for local guys. A roster was set up and during the week, from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., you had to be in the office. On Saturday, it was 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. School was in session for half day on Saturday. Sheriff got a lot of work out of the

guys and there were quite a number of us doing it.

**"Johnson:** (The food was) pretty good. They served it family style. If boarding students were on scholarship, they would have to bring the food out to these great, long tables. A Master would sit at one end of the table and his wife would sit at the other, with the kids in the middle. The food would come out on big platters and keep on coming until the guys were filled up."

*In response to a question about "the greatest changes you've seen at the Academy:"*

***Edgar Johnson, Class of '38, and his family have been part of Cheshire Academy history since 1822.***

**"Johnson:** Back then, the school was more integrated with the town. The Masters lived in homes located around town. A lot of them were members of the fire department. When their workday was over, they

went back to their homes just like other residents of the town. On Saturdays, the school would have movies in the gym for the students, and all the town kids would come down and wait for Sheriff to let them in to take up the vacant seats."

*On how the Academy prepared him for entering the world:*

**"Johnson:** The study habits and small classes where the students got plenty of attention helped. In some classes, like Mr. (Bernard M.) Allen's Latin class, there would only be two or three students. In bigger classes, like Mr. (Clear C.) Golden's or Mr. (Carlton E.) Borden's, there would be at least fifteen students. The boys used to characterize the Academy as 'the Monastery' because there were no girls at the school at that time. You couldn't leave the campus except to go down to the center of town for ice cream or something like that. No fraternizing with the local girls."

*About the new "Edgar Johnson Fund" in support of operations:*

**"Johnson:** I just wanted to do something good for the school, to leave a legacy."

**Financial Report  
April 1, 2002—March 31, 2003**

If you require  
specific information  
about our financial statement  
please contact our Treasurer,  
Ed Kania, available at e-mail:  
edwinkania@cox.net

**In Memoriam**

**Jean P. Jewett—May 1, 2003**

**Laraine M. Smith—June 5,, 2003**

**Arthur J. Frechette—June 26, 2003**

**Raymond J. Metzler—July 31, 2003**

*We are saddened by the loss of these members  
and extend our deep sympathy to their families.*

**Thank you**

We gratefully acknowledge a gift of \$100 from Alice Metzler, Richard Metzler, and Margaret M. Clendenin in memory of Raymond J. Metzler, their brother-in-law and uncle.

**Cheshire Historical Society Officers**

President	Ed Kania
Vice President	Ron Gagliardi
Recording Secretary	Barbara Christoff
Membership Secretary	Sally Clark
Treasurer	Connie Field
1st Curator	Edgar Johnson
2nd Curator	Warren Van Almkerk
Assistant Curator	Eric Anderson

**Board Members:** Eric Anderson, Stephanie Casner, Mary Ellen Kania, Ann Massimino, Barbara Merrill, Marshall Robinson, Marian Sweeney, Lois VanAlmkerk, Pat Vita  
**Newsletter Editor:** Mary Ellen Kania

**CHESHIRE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
NEWS**



**FALL 2003**

Cheshire Historical Society  
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