

CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Volume 31, No. 2

Fall 2008

PROGRAM

Monday, September 22, 7:30 PM

"The Waverly Inn since 1896"

Louis A. Ricciuti

Our speaker, Louis A. Ricciuti, was three years old in 1937 when his father, Louis D. Ricciuti, a New York lawyer, and his mother Edythe moved their family to Cheshire to help her brother, Rocco Diorio, manage the Waverly Inn. The move followed the death of Diorio's wife, who had been largely responsible for management of the Cheshire restaurant while Diorio managed a restaurant in Waterbury. Together, Ricciuti's parents and Diorio ran the Waverly Inn from 1937 until 1958.

The main portion of Ricciuti's talk will focus on the Waverly Inn's "glory days" from the 1940s to the early 1970s. During that time, the inn flourished. Following a disastrous fire in 1952, it was completely rebuilt and enlarged. He also will trace the history of the property from 1896, when the first inn was built by Walter Scott of Cheshire, to its present-day descendent, the Waverly Tavern, which occupies less than one-third of the original space in a building that now houses offices, shops and a bank. Ricciuti, who lives in Cheshire, is retired. He owned and operated the English Furniture Store in Hamden for more than 30 years.

Exhibit Room Display

Don't miss the fascinating display in the Exhibit Room of Waverly Inn memorabilia. Items are from the Cheshire Historical Society archives, the Ricciuti family, and Frank Nastri.

Monday, October 27, 7:30 PM

"19th Century Travel Trunks"

**Paul Norton, Furniture & Trunk Repair,
Pequabuck, CT.**

Monday, November 24, 7:30 p.m.

To be announced

Fall Calendar

<i>Sept. 15</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Board Meeting</i>
	<i>7:30 p.m.</i>	
<i>Sept. 22</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Membership Meeting</i>
	<i>7:30 p.m.</i>	<i>& Speaker</i>
<i>Oct. 20</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Board Meeting</i>
	<i>7:30 p.m.</i>	
<i>Oct. 27</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Membership Meeting</i>
	<i>7:30 p.m.</i>	<i>& Speaker</i>
<i>Nov. 17</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Board Meeting</i>
	<i>7:30 p.m.</i>	
<i>Nov. 24</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Membership Meeting</i>
	<i>7:30 p.m.</i>	<i>& Speaker</i>
<i>Dec. 21</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Christmas Party</i>
	<i>2—4 p.m.</i>	

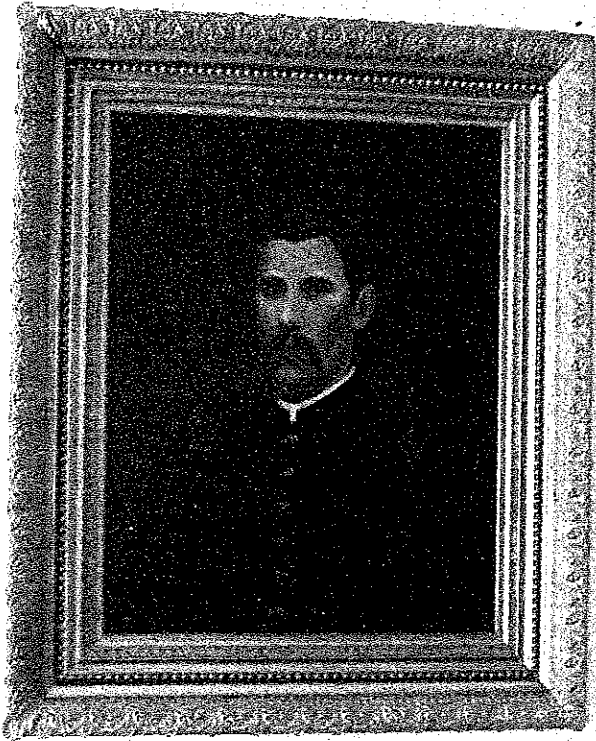
The Hitchcock-Phillips House will be open to the public every Sunday afternoon, 2—4 p.m., except the Sundays after Thanksgiving and Christmas. In the new schedule, the house will close January through March 2009 except by appointment.

Update on House

Have you seen the new sidewalks? Since August, the town crew has been hard at work on Church Drive. New, improved sidewalks have been installed all along the drive, and the front walk up to the Hitchcock-Phillips house is now wider with new cement. Church Drive itself is scheduled to be repaved any day now. In front of the house, the roadbed will be raised several inches and reestablished slightly to the east. The Society's driveway is to be repaved, including a larger apron extending onto the street. We also are expecting access to the front sidewalk directly from the street.

Arrangements for the new heating system have moved slower than we had hoped. We have our fingers crossed that we can get the new furnace in before the heavy heating season begins. The work will include converting our oil system to gas and removing the underground oil tank on the north side of the house. Attic insulation also is being considered.

Restored Portrait of Lt. Edward A Doolittle (1838-1863) In Handsome Original Frame Adds New Interest in Parlor



Newly restored oil painting hangs in parlor.

Last fall, the Cheshire Historical Society Board voted to restore the badly damaged portrait of a young Civil War soldier in a gold frame that had been stored in the 3rd floor archives for years. The oil painting was in poor condition, but the handsome frame was excellent and had always attracted special attention. Mark Bieber of Aardvark Art Studio in Kensington was selected for the restoration work, and a search began for the soldier's identity.

A three-quarter photograph of Lt. Edward A. Doolittle seated at a table provided positive identification for the painting. The photograph, taken at J. G. Steiger, Chapel Street, New Haven, was given to the Society by Elizabeth (Mrs. William) Shay of Cheshire following the death of her father, Drurie Sanford Bristol, owner of the photo. Doolittle was the older brother of Bristol's mother, Fanny Doolittle Bristol. The photograph was probably taken when the young man enlisted

in Company I, 20th Connecticut Volunteers. Later, a *carte de visite* made from the same photograph was located in the Nettie Smith collection of 20th Connecticut memorabilia.

Doolittle was born in Cheshire in 1838, the eldest son of Warren and Ann (Taylor) Doolittle. He was schooled at the Episcopal Academy of Connecticut (now Cheshire Academy) from 1848 to 1855. The 1860 census showed him living in Cheshire with his father Warren, sister Fanny, and three brothers. The household also included a domestic with a 2-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old black female. Their mother Ann had died in 1848. Edward is listed as a "merchant."

On September 8, 1862, age 24, he was mustered in as 2nd Lt., Company I, in New Haven. He was promoted to 1st Lieutenant in August 1863 and died at Stevenson, AL, in December 1863. At that time, the 20th was in Alabama guarding supplies along the railroad line from Stevenson to Cowan, TN.

The E. A. Doolittle Post No. 5, G.A.R., Cheshire, Conn. was named in Edward's memory. His family also commemorated him in St. Peter's Cemetery by a handsome, marble tombstone with the inscription "He rests from his labors." The oil painting, which shows head and shoulders only, was probably painted from the New Haven photograph sometime after his death.

The photograph from which the oil portrait was copied was given to the Society by Elizabeth (Mrs. William) Shay. The officer is her paternal grandmother's older brother, Edward A. Doolittle, who died while serving with the 20th Connecticut Volunteers in the Civil War.



Troiani Civil War Lithograph On Display in Relic & Gun Room

A large lithograph of the "Irish Brigade" (28th Mass. Vols.) at Fredericksburg, painted by Connecticut's noted Civil War artist, Don Troiani, was framed by the Society this spring and now hangs in the Relic & Gun Room.

The lithograph was a gift to the Society in 2007 from Edward and Gayle Kushner, Cheshire. Ed is a friend of the artist and received the picture because he posed for the third-from-the-left soldier, seen from the rear, in a column of blue-garbed, Union troops marching across a foot bridge. The new picture is an exciting addition to the room.

Cheshire Garden Club Members Make Improvements in Rear Garden

Special thanks to Cheshire Garden Club Civic & Parks Committee members for recent improvements in the Lucille Williams Memorial Colonial Garden behind the house.

Susan Vining has prepared an herb list, including uses, of all the plants in the garden herb wheel. It is available at the back door.

Robert Polito added a white picket fence to the rear of the shed to hide unsightly brush and has upgraded the club's garden window box.

Both projects were under the direction of the Civic and Parks Committee's hard-working chair **Inge Venus**.

In Memoriam

Walter O. Vogt	April 22, 2007
Jean M. May	April 26, 2008
Elizabeth "Betty" Floyd	May 31, 2008

We were deeply saddened by the deaths of these long-time members and extend our sincere sympathy to their families.

Note: We did not learn of the 2007 death of Walter Vogt, who lived in Falmouth, ME, until this summer. He was a grandson of Congregational minister, the Rev. Von Ogden Vogt, who built the parsonage at 85 Church Dr. in 1912. Walter House on the Cheshire Academy campus was named after his maternal grandfather, Jacob D. Walter.

WELCOME to new members
Peter and Judith Case, Hinman
Street.



Recent Acquisitions

Twenty-one people have made donations, large and small, to the Society from January through August. Major items include:

- **Silver-plated teapot with warmer**, c. 1900.
Gift from Connie Field, Cheshire
- **Collection of Town Reports** (many not already owned by the Society), belonging to the late Lucille Norton, former town treasurer.
Gift from her daughter Phyllis Perry, Cheshire
- **Beethoven Golden-Toned Parlor Organ**, c. 1900, now in the Meeting Room. A dowel on each side of the keyboard shows where a candle stand was attached originally.
Gift from Robert Sansonetti, Cheshire, in memory of his wife Dorothy (1930-2007)
- **Tole tray, hand-painted by Lucille D. Williams**, 1959.
Gift from Ray and Eleanor Verner, Cheshire
- **Wrapped package of 6" files**, probably early 1800s.
Gift from Marshall Robinson, Cheshire
- **Moss Family Genealogy** by L. J. Moss, 1976
Gift from Edwin Moss Aderer, Pomeroy, OH
- **Waverly Inn memorabilia**
Gift from Frank Nastri, Cheshire
- **Capturing Nursing History, A Guide to Historical Methods in Research**, 2008, by Sandra Lewenson and Eleanor Herrmann
Gift from Eleanor Herrmann, Cheshire

New Investment

In May, the Cheshire Historical Society Board approved an investment of \$20,000 in a designated, investment fund at the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. An experienced staff at the Foundation maintains these funds as a way for non-profit organizations to build income. The Board plans to make further investments in the fund as other certificates of deposit mature. The Foundation has had a very favorable trade record and, hopefully, it will continue

Contributions to Meteoric Science of Cheshire's Rev. Dr. Tillotson Bronson (1762-1826)

by *Monty Robson*
McCarthy Observatory, New Milford, CT

Mr. Robson visited the Society this summer while doing research on Dr. Bronson. He has graciously shared some of his findings below. He also has given the Society a binder with a more complete account of the event for our Meeting Room library.

Two hundred years ago an event occurred that surprised hundreds in the northeastern United States and terrified scores of people in western Connecticut. A dazzling meteor, appearing almost as large as the full Moon, streaked southeastward over New York and Connecticut, exploded, and showered central Fairfield County with strange looking stones. Shock waves rattled homes forty miles from ground zero, where fragments landed on a populace that had never considered that stones could fall from the sky. This event is known as the Weston meteorite fall and it happened early in morning twilight on December 14, 1807. Weston was the first documented meteorite fall in the New World and it took place in the decade in which science accepted that stones do indeed fall from above. The Weston event is historically and scientifically significant.

Rev. Dr. Tillotson Bronson

Tillotson Bronson was born, the sixth child of Capt. Amos and Anner Bronson, in Plymouth, Connecticut on January 8, 1762. He graduated from Yale College in 1786. He was ordained as a Priest in the Episcopal Church on February 24, 1788. Brown College awarded his Doctor of Divinity degree. Bronson served in several New England parishes and settled in Waterbury in 1795. In 1797 he married Hannah Thompson of Woodbury. In 1805 he was picked to become the third principal of the struggling Episcopal Academy of Connecticut (now Cheshire Academy). He kept this position until his death in 1826. Under Bronson's leadership the Academy flourished. At the same time he was also

the editor of *The Churchman's Magazine*.

Bronson was tall and thin and often described as appearing disheveled. He was active, helpful, and did much good work wherever he went. Two passages from The Cheshire Bicentennial Committee's 1976 book *Landmarks of Old Cheshire* illustrate Bronson nicely:

Dr. Tillotson Bronson was esteemed in town as an eminent scholar and writer, although according to tradition his sermons were deadly dull.

Dr. Tillotson Bronson was truly an absent-minded professor. He was perennially "lost in thought." Deacon Brown reported that on one occasion, in a driving rain, Dr. Bronson went from his home to his office in the Academy with his umbrella high over his head—unopened all the way!

The Meteor

In 1807 news traveled slowly and Connecticut newspapers were published weekly. The earliest published report on Weston, yet found, is the unsigned "Remarkable Phenomenon" piece from the December 22, 1807 edition of the New Haven *Connecticut Herald*. The last paragraph of this article appealed to the public for further observations of the meteor.

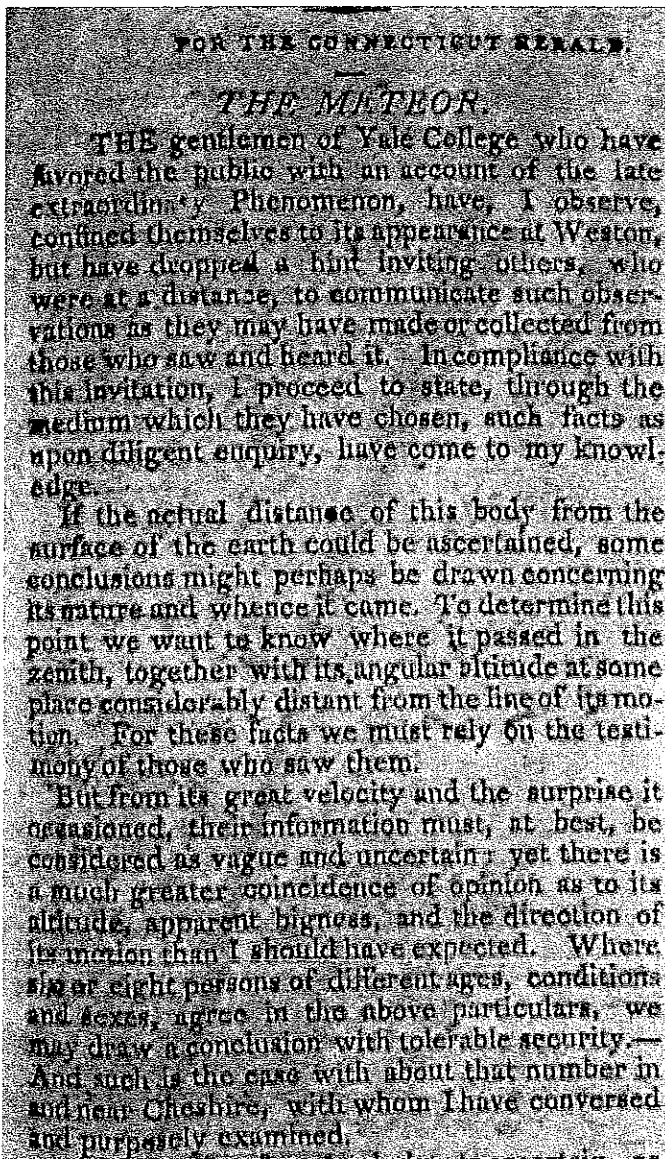
Tillotson Bronson sprang into action. Only three weeks later, on January 12, 1808, his findings are published in the *Connecticut Herald*. He published a reprint of this paper, along with a sermon-like afterword in the January, 1808 issue of *The Churchman's Magazine*. It seems remarkable that, in the days when the fastest communication and fastest transportation were limited to horse speed, Tillotson Bronson was able to publish this important Weston paper so quickly.

In his paper Bronson compiles meteor observations from New Durham and near Hudson in New York and from Washington, Cheshire, Meriden, and Wallingford in Connecticut. These are useful observations that contain both azimuth

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and elevation information; they are the most important part of his paper and the most important set of Weston observations ever published.



The opening paragraphs of Rev. Dr. Bronson's paper on Weston are from the author's image of the January 12, 1808 issue of the *Connecticut Herald*. "The gentlemen of Yale College" refers to Professors Benjamin Silliman and James Kingsley. From the collection of the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

Bronson not only collected the observations of Weston, he also figured the first trajectory for the meteor. He determined that the meteor first appeared 58 miles above a point 10 miles west of Hudson, New York. This is very close to the truth. If this point were connected to a point somewhat north and west of where Judge Nathan Wheeler of Weston observed the meteor, Bronson would have

calculated the actual trajectory. But then there is an unexplained error in his paper. He, for whatever reason, doubles the distance, to sixty miles, to the point where the meteor disappears as seen from Cheshire. He knew that the meteorites landed in Weston (now Easton), but he uses 60 miles instead of 30 miles for the rest of his calculations. This would have put the meteorite fall very near Yonkers, New York. Bronson was correct until a simple error fouled his figuring. This must be considered an amazing work for its day; a time without computers, calculators, or even readily available writing materials. If Rev. Bronson had used 30 miles, his trajectory would have been very accurate.

Bronson then does some very good mathematics to determine that if the meteor appeared $\frac{2}{3}$ as big as the Moon ("twenty minutes of a degree") to an observer 20 miles away, its size would have been $37\frac{1}{2}$ rods in diameter. The math is correct and the answer is in keeping with Yale Professor Jeremiah Day's 1810 estimate of several hundreds of feet and Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch's 1811 minimum diameter of 491 feet. Then Bronson speculates, brilliantly:

Should it be admitted that not more than one tenth of what actually fell has been found, yet if so, it could not have composed a sphere of more than 4 or 5 feet in diameter, being the same density and weight: And could so small a body have emitted light enough to have illuminated the whole horizon at the distance of a hundred miles or more: Or can we imagine that such a body moving through the air should have caused a roaring to be heard at the same distance: Could its explosion have shaken the earth 60 or 70 miles distant, as was sensibly the case?

"4 or 5 feet in diameter" is the right answer for the actual diameter of the meteoroid.

It is unfortunate that Bronson's valuable Weston paper is virtually unknown to modern science. In the 1860s the greatest of Yale's meteoric scientists, Prof. H. A. Newton used Dr. Bronson's observations to produce an accurate trajectory for Weston, which also seems lost to modern science.

This author has forthcoming publications that will expand the knowledge of the fascinating Weston event and welcomes correspondence regarding it. He can be reached at mcrobson@charter.net

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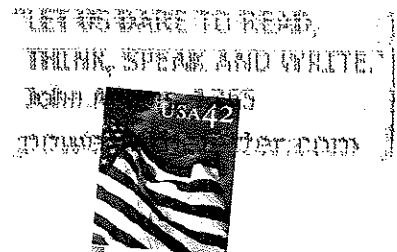


FALL 2008

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NEXT MEETING: MONDAY, SEPT. 22, 7:30 PM

“Cheshire’s Waverly Inn” — Louis Ricciuti

06410+1275

