

# CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Volume 32, No. 2

Fall 2009

## PROGRAM

**Monday, September 28, 7:30 PM**

**"History of the Cheshire Fire Department"**

**Jack Casner and Don Ferguson**

Fire Chief Jack Casner and Assistant Fire Chief Don Ferguson will bring us up to date on the nearly 100-year history of the Cheshire Fire Department. The Department was organized in 1912 after the disastrous fire that destroyed Walter Scott's original Waverly Inn (Scott's Hotel). It will be a wonderful program to start our 2009-10 speakers' series. Plan to join us—and bring a friend!

**Monday, October 26, 7:30 PM**

**"The Old Leatherman"**

**Dan W. Deluca**

Dan W. LeLuca of Meriden will talk about his new book, The Old Leather Man, Historical Accounts of a Connecticut and New York Legend (Garnet Books, 2008). It tells the story of the tramp who walked a circuit between the Connecticut and Hudson Rivers in the late 1800s. His real name is not known. He started his famous clockwise circle of travel around 1883, making a regular route of 365 miles every 34 days until he died in 1889. Dan has spent the last 20 years researching the Old Leather Man. Don't miss this opportunity to get the facts from a noted local expert.



**Monday, November 23, 7:30 PM**

**"Remembering the Vietnam War"**

**John White**

To highlight our Veterans' Day exhibit, "Cheshire Goes to War," Cheshire Historical Society member John White will recount memories of some of his involvement in the Vietnam War and antiwar activities. John is a former naval officer. From 1961 to 1965, he served as Antisubmarine

## Fall Calendar

Sept. 21	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
Sept. 28	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Membership Meeting & Speaker
Oct. 19	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
Oct. 26	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Membership Meeting & Speaker
Nov. 16	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
<sup>x</sup> Nov. 23	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Membership Meeting & Speaker
Nov. 26	Thursday	Thanksgiving Day
Dec. 20	Sunday 2—4 p.m.	Holiday Open House
Dec. 25	Friday	Christmas Day

*The Hitchcock-Phillips House will be open to the public on Sunday afternoons, 2—4 p.m., except on the Sundays after Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. To arrange to visit at another time, call curator, 203-272-8771.*

Warfare Officer aboard several destroyers on the East Coast and as Nuclear Weapons Officer on a seaplane tender on the West Coast. He also testified for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about what he knew about Gulf of Tonkin events.

## "CHESHIRE GOES TO WAR"

### Exhibit planned for November

The Society is planning to observe Veterans' Day this year with a special exhibit, "Cheshire Goes to War", highlighting military uniforms and other military memorabilia. It will include items from our archives as well as items loaned by members. If you have a military uniform or other wartime souvenir that you would be willing to display as part of the exhibit, please contact President Marshall Robinson (203-271-2378) as soon as possible. Others on the exhibit committee are Ron Gagliardi, Eleanor Herrmann, Ernest DiPietro, and John White.

## State Library Asks for Updated Info On Cheshire's Old Buildings

The Cheshire Historical Society has received a special appeal from the State Library to help update Cheshire information in the on-line *Census of Old Buildings in Connecticut*, a project begun in 1934 when a group of WPA (Works Projects Administration) workers began visiting every town in Connecticut to survey "old buildings."

The WPA workers completed forms with information about the buildings and often also took photographs. This information was deposited in the State Archives, with additions coming as late as 1942. Now, the staff at the Connecticut State Library, including our own Cheshire Historical Society member Christine Pittsley, who is employed there, have transcribed the forms and digitized the photographs. However, much of the information is out-of-date. For instance, the old forms usually gave only property locations, not actual addresses: "West side of Main Street (Route 10), about 1/4 mile south of center." Current street numbers and street names are badly needed.

There are 88 listings, covering 55 properties, on three pages. View them on the Connecticut State Library website:

<http://cslib.cdmhost.com/custom/buildings.php>

- \* Select "Cheshire" on the town search.
- \* Double click the photo for an enlarged photo and the survey data
- \* Move to a new page by clicking PREVIOUS or NEXT on the right side of the blue navigation strip at either the top or bottom of the page

In each data form there is a "Tell Us More" field where you can e-mail the State Library with more information about the building.

President Marshall Robinson encourages all members who use computers to lend a hand with the project. Just viewing the old pictures is very interesting! Most members will be able to identify a number of the houses. Some have been demolished. E-mailing new data on a house near you is not difficult. Give it a try!

## NEW RECORDING SECRETARY

Welcome to new recording secretary Art Sides, who was elected to the Board at the annual meeting in April.

Art teaches American history at Naugatuck High School and is a well-known antique toy collector. He grew up off Cook Hill Road, just over the town line in Wallingford, and has lived in Cheshire since 1986. He and his wife, Sharon, have two sons: Arthur IV and Conor. Art succeeds Eleanor Verner, who served as recording secretary from 2007 to 2009.

## Beth Shutts Creates Indexes For 3 Books on Cheshire History

Cheers for Beth Shutts! Beth has given the Society custom indexes for three important books about Cheshire's past: Images of America: Cheshire by Ron Gagliardi; Old Historic Homes of Cheshire (1895), compiled by Edwin R. Brown; and The History of Cheshire Street and Vicinity, compiled by Edmond and Alice R. Brodeur.

The three volumes are now out-of-print and none were indexed previously. The new indexes are wonderful research tools. Beth has made single, alphabetical indexes for both Images and Cheshire Street. For Old Historic Homes she has made both a name and subject index.

Beth is known to many Society members as a reference librarian at the Cheshire Public Library. Indexing is a spare-time project for her. She uses a new software that she purchased privately and is developing her own business.

## 9 Served in "Colored" Regiment

Did you know that nine men from Cheshire served in the 29th (Colored) Regiment, CV, during the Civil War? Most enrolled in December 1863.

They were Pvts. Joseph Porter, Charles Brown, Enos Payne, Frank Henson, and Joseph Sires; Cpl. John Stevens (Stephens); Sgt. Allen Garver; 1st Sgt. Miles Jackson; and Musician Needham Grey. Pvt. Porter was killed and Cpl. Stevens was wounded at Kell House, Va., Oct. 27, 1864. Pvt. Sires was wounded in Richmond, VA, on the same day. The others served until Oct. 24, 1865.

*Research by Society Member Jeanné Chesanow*

## DOCENTS TOUR 3RD GRADERS

Many thanks to the following docents who helped conduct tours for students from Norton School, Doolittle School, and Chapman School when third-grade school classes visited the Hitchcock-Phillips house in May and June: Barbara Christoff, Marty Connolly, Joy Irish, Judy Knott, Jane Richards, and Peg Boutwell. They provided tours for nearly 200 students, 10 teachers, and 17 other adults.

### New Volunteers

We are also very pleased to welcome Shirley Brady and Pat Vita as new docents for Sunday afternoon open hours. Both completed the docent class last spring, along with Joy Irish who was a volunteer for the school visits.

## Thank You

Members who made donations to the Society in addition to their 2009 dues were acknowledged in the Spring/Summer newsletter. We also thank the following additional members who have made very welcome donations since that time:

Lawrence & Eleanor Herrmann  
John Romanik, Sr  
Balazs & Csilla Somogyi  
James & Cynthia Vibert  
Richard and Janice Yusza

Also thanks to additional **Supporting Members**: Joy Deegan, Inge Druckrey, John & Rosanne Purtil, and David & Sally Schrumm.

## BOUTIQUE-IN-THE-SHED NEEDS ADDITIONAL ITEMS

In addition to being open during the June Strawberry Festival, the Boutique-in-the-Shed has been open most Sundays this summer during Society open hours, 2—4 p.m. We plan to continue opening the shop on Sunday afternoons during the fall as long as the weather is good.

Please think of us when cleaning out your attic and basement. Your antiques and collectibles donations help defray costs at the society. Can't afford to donate your antiques? The Boutique may be able to arrange to purchase for resale. Call Assistant Curator Kathleen Connolly, Boutique committee chair, at 860-621-8786 for information.

## New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

Elsa Hotchkiss Bradford, 435 Allen Ave., Meriden

Steven and Stephanie (Leake) Davis, c/o 82 Jinny Hill Rd., Cheshire (Steven is in the military and Stephanie is staying with her mother, Clare Leake, while he is overseas.)

Reed Durand, 2007 Hullsville Rd. Owego, NY.

Marcia Yorke, 65 Autumn Court, Cheshire  
Michael Kopman-Fried, 425 James Drive, Cheshire



SUBURBAN GARDEN CLUB president Mary Ellen Morgan (right) and Civics Committee Chair Rita Giannotti pose with Luke Williams (left) and Mike Kennedy of Total Tree Care. This photo was taken early last spring when Total Tree Care donated their tree trimming services to shape up the star magnolia planted near the Society's front door by the Suburban Garden Club 19 years ago.

The magnolia bloomed at the time of the annual meeting and was magnificent.

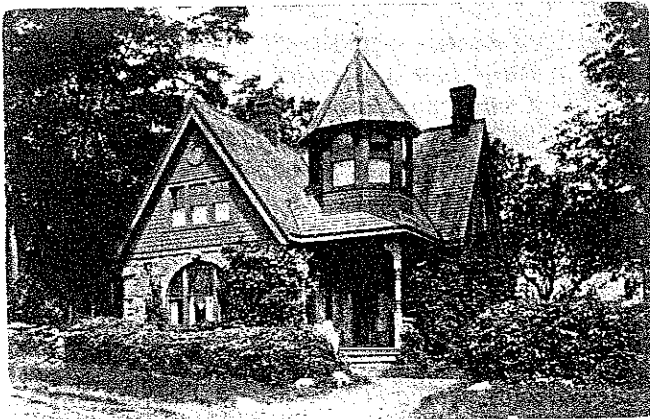
# Brooks Vale Summer Memories

*Excerpts from a memoir by Jean McKee, South Brooksvale Road historic district. While growing up, she spent summers and holidays at the Stone Cottage, 594 So. Brooksvale Rd., then at the Homestead, 532 So. Brooksvale, her present Cheshire home. Uncle Gordon Thayer, Aunt Connie and their two children were summer residents next door at 500 So. Brooksvale.*

I grew up in the Stone Cottage at the corner of South Brooksvale Road. We lived there until the summer of 1941 as my grandparents died the winter of 1940-41 — Grandpa in December and Grandma in January. The Homestead was left to my mother and her bachelor brother, Uncle Thornton Thayer, so we moved in that summer.

I have fond memories of living in the Stone Cottage...There is a front room with arched windows that we used as the living room...Directly behind it was a small room that was a maid's room in our time, a stair case went up to the second floor, and to the right of the staircase was the dining room. The furniture in that room was made by the boys in the Cheshire Reformatory. The table was a light wood with black trim around the edge and the chairs had black wood with light caning. Behind the dining room was what must have first been a rear porch as it had a railing and steps down. We had an old ice-box on that level, along with the new one. Down the steps were the stove, sink, etc. of the kitchen...

The cellar was just dirt and kept very cool thanks to the stone exterior. I recall my parents sitting down there on a very hot day before dressing when



STONE COTTAGE, the author's first Cheshire home.

they were going to a wedding. They got to the wedding, but my grandmother did not make an appearance. After the ceremony, mother rushed to grandpa, and he told her grandma could not come because her legs were so swollen she could not get her silk stocking on ...

The men in the family came every Friday night by train (from Brooklyn, NY) to New Haven or Wallingford. They also came for their vacations, and they all worked on projects around the house or grounds. Dad was great at painting and taught us how to hold a brush. Betty (Jean's sister) would say if we got good at the back porch, then we were allowed to help on the front porch. Uncle Thornton seemed always to be working on a car or piece of machinery, and I can still see Uncle Gordon working in their garden of two long rows between the tennis court and his house.

The roads were all dirt and bumpy with stones. The driveways and paths were all gravel. We always went bare foot so, on arriving each summer, you tried to pretend the stones did not hurt. The point was to get your feet callused so you did not feel the stones.

There was a one-car garage at the rear of the house as well as a small outhouse. Down the lawn, bordering the Glebe property ( 568 So. Brooksvale), there was a small building in which the gardening supplies were kept. The property had a number of very large stones that we could climb. Beside the outhouse was a very large rock that, as the youngest, I found hard to climb. But my family recounts how I would say "Let me go first as I am the *wittlelist*" ... One morning after Halloween we found the outhouse knocked over. The neighborhood kids were watching expecting a difficult job to place it upright. Dad just got the farm truck, attached a block and tackle to the outhouse and righted it with no trouble...

## Party Line Phone

We had a party line phone that included our grandparents, our aunt and uncle, and various others. We only had three local numbers to push to

make a call, such as 741 for our grandparents and 851 for Auntie Con and Uncle Gordon. Otherwise, you asked the operator to connect you to the party. One had to pick up the receiver before making a call to make sure no one else was already using the line. I do recall hearing a conversation that was “How’s the cow?” so I hung up quickly.

Our mothers ordered food by telephone from Platt’s grocery. If Platt’s didn’t have something that was ordered, they substituted something they thought would work instead, infuriating the Moms. The Dugan’s truck came to the houses to peddle corn muffins, etc., and there was a man who had eliminated the back seat of his car to fill it with canned goods to sell. Milk was delivered by Wordens. The Good Humor truck came around, probably daily. The big event was finding the words “lucky stick” when you had finished devouring the ice cream, meaning you would get a free one when you handed it in. Our favorite dessert was angel-food cake filled with peppermint ice cream and covered with chocolate sauce. Otherwise, it was the so-called “radio bars” from a pastry shop in Whitneyville. We had two women, Mrs. Potter and Mrs. Cullen, who came to pick up and do the laundry.

Then there was lovely Miss Carey who was somewhat of a baby sitter to us. She lived with her two brothers and she could tell you about the blizzard of 1888 when the snow was so high she had to climb out the second story window of her bedroom to go to school. She taught us to sew. We had a child-size sewing machine, and I recall making white aprons with red rickrack trim...

We had a farmer, I think he was Peter Brooks (no relation), who grew vegetables for the three households in the field behind the Homestead...During the summer, the produce seemed to come in batches so we ate a lot of corn when it was ready. All the men worked on cutting the hay on the back fields and pitch-forking it on to the wagon. The Brook Meadow across the street was also in hay. When we no longer had animals and World War II made it harder to get farm help, Uncle Thornton arranged for Mr. Galco, a local farmer, to use the back fields and take the hay. Uncle Thornton was a master of



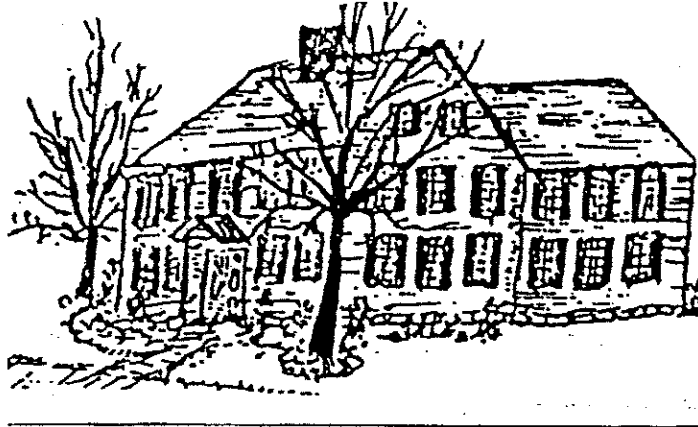
“Grandpa” John VanBuren Thayer on the front porch of the Homestead.

the scythe, and it was a wonder to watch him swing it attacking thick overgrowth. On the other hand, you could be walking across the lawn with him when he would suddenly reach down and then hand you a four-leaf clover. I never understood how he could do that—”I just see the pattern change” was what he said...

There was hardly anything except a few small houses between the tracks (Canal Line RR) and the corner of Route 10. Avon Boulevard was a lovely wooded hillside. At the corner was Elmer Ives, who sat on his porch in a rocking chair checking out where everyone was going. Uncle Thornton would later tell how, during prohibition, Elmer would invite him and Uncle Gordon to see his cellar. That was a ruse as he made dandelion wine and stored it down there. At the corner on the other side was the “Why Not Rest” small store that served as a stopping place for the bus between New Haven and Waterbury... In the other direction on Brooksvale Road (past the Bradley families), there was the one house (no. 708) where the Carrolls lived and then just countryside until Bethany Mountain Road except for one house (no. 755) up a hill...

*Jean has given the Historical Society a copy of the complete “Brooks Vale Summer Memories,” illustrated with many old family pictures. It can be seen in the Cheshire Collection, Diaries & Memoirs shelf, Meeting Room Library.*

# CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS



## FALL 2009

Cheshire Historical Society  
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