



Block Print by James Daugherty

# The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society Winter 1994 Volume 13, No. 1

*Newtown Turnpike:*

## Minerva Heady Recalls the Miles

by Karin Giannitti

It seems impossible that one of Weston's busiest highways was once nothing more than a narrow, dirt road, barely wide enough for two carriages to pass. Yet, the road was heavily traveled, featuring a school, hotel and camp. At one time folks even had to pay for the privilege of using it.

The highway is Route 53, also known as Newtown Turnpike. Originally, it was built to connect Norwalk with Newtown in the early 1800s. And as it wound its way through Weston, it incorporated what was known as the Gulf Road, a low-lying road running through the valley. The road motorists use today varies from the original in that rerouting by the state straightened out many of its curves.

In an interview, Minerva Heady, who grew up on Newtown Turnpike, recalled what the road was like in the early days. Mrs. Heady, 75, was born in the Wakeman Godfrey House (see *Chronicle Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4; Fall 1993) on Godfrey Road East. When she was two years old, the family moved to her grandmother's house on Newtown Turnpike. Her father, Frances Perry Morehouse, was born there and he, like his father, was a farmer. He grew tobacco, wheat, rye and corn. What the family did not grow for their own needs, they sold in Bridgeport. Mrs. Heady remembers a childhood filled with farm animals. She had a pony that she rode everywhere.

She recalled what Newtown Turnpike looked like in her youth - an unpaved road, almost impassable in rainy weather and dusty in the summer. At the northern end of the turnpike sits a small

cemetery. South of the cemetery, where Valley Forge Road intersects Newtown Turnpike, there stood a hotel. The hotel was a rest stop for north and south stagecoach travelers, who stopped for the night. There were barns for horses, meals were served, and rooms could be rented.

Somewhat south of the hotel was the Den School, an old one-room school, not in use when Mrs. Heady went to grade school. As a child, Mrs. Heady attended Upper Parish School on Godfrey Road. She was transported by school bus. She remembers her mother fighting with school officials to get the bus to come so far. She attended Upper Parish through eighth grade and went to the original Staples School on Riverside Avenue, in Westport.

Continuing south on Newtown Turnpike was the Toltec Boys Camp,

started by Wallace Green Arnold in 1928. The camp was for city boys, who came here for swimming, horse back riding, sports, and general fun in the country. The property later became known as Singing Oaks Camp, and is now a subdivision.

Newtown Turnpike was originally built as a toll road. The toll booth was located south of the intersection of Godfrey Road.

Long time residents, like Mrs. Heady, have witnessed many changes as, first, horse drawn wagons then, later, motor vehicles rolled by their windows. She hopes the state will step in to preserve this Weston byway.

Under consideration in Hartford is the town's proposal to declare part of Newtown Turnpike a scenic highway, which would protect it from development. The program has worked well in other towns, where the landscape's beauty is being preserved for future generations.





# *Your Antique House* Research on the Hanford Nichols Estate

by Judy Morgan Darby

*In the last century, Hanford Nichols was Weston's wealthiest and largest landowner. He amassed a huge estate on Lyons Plain, where he improved the land and ran an efficient dairy and mill. The property was kept in the family until 1922, but a tragic fire destroyed the estate's main house. Today, all that remains of what was once a landmark is a cottage. Through meticulous research by Society genealogist and old house expert, Judy Morgan Darby, the story of a Weston dynasty and its sad decline is revealed. Editor's Note.*

On May 21, 1797, Gould and Sarah (Treadwell) Nichols baptized their fourth child at Trinity Church, Southport. The boy's name was Hanford and he went home to join three older sisters, and a large extended family, living nearby on separate farms. Nothing is known of Hanford's early life, until his marriage to Laurinda Wakeman on October 25, 1821. Two sons came of this marriage, Lloyd W[akeman?], born 1823 and Henry, in 1824. On September 12, 1825, Hanford's wife Laurinda died. She and Lloyd, who died at the age of sixteen, are buried at West Burying Ground in Easton, near the present Blue Bird Inn. Within a short time, Hanford married his second wife, Betsey, the daughter of Phineas Chapman. A daughter, Sarah Eveline, was born on June 6, 1828.

Hanford inherited a sizable estate when his father died in 1833. But, he was a shrewd investor and accumulated 300 acres of rich farmland on both sides of the Northfield Turnpike as well as valuable water rights on both banks of the Saugatuck River.

The 1830 census shows Nichols living between Knap Osborn and Charles Scofield. These men are believed to have lived on what is now Davis Hill Road. If this was the case, it means Nichols did not build his Lyons Plains house until 1831 or 1832. We are certain it was

built by 1832 because his neighbor, Thomas Banks, mentioned it in a deed. In March of that year, he gave Nichols permission to keep a dam but not erect a higher one. The dam was for a saw- and gristmill on the Saugatuck River.

Nichols was Weston's wealthiest farmer and largest landowner. Dr. Tom Farnham, former professor of history at Southern Connecticut State University, gives us an idea of how important Nichols was to the community. In his 1978 book, *Weston, the Forging of a Connecticut Town*, Dr. Farnham wrote:

"His farm was estimated to be worth \$10,000. Nichols produced a variety of farm goods, but he placed special emphasis on livestock and dairy production. Although he owned only fourteen dairy cows, these animals were of the best bloodlines, were especially valuable, and produced a thousand pounds of butter and 250 pounds of cheese annually. Nichols also slaughtered animals worth \$350 in 1850. To accomplish all this, he produced 400 bushels of corn and 800 bushels of oats, as well as 75 tons of hay. No other farmer in town could match his production in those areas."

Few people today know that Nichols was also responsible for bringing the Emmanuel Episcopal Church to Weston. Dr. Farnham offers the following story:

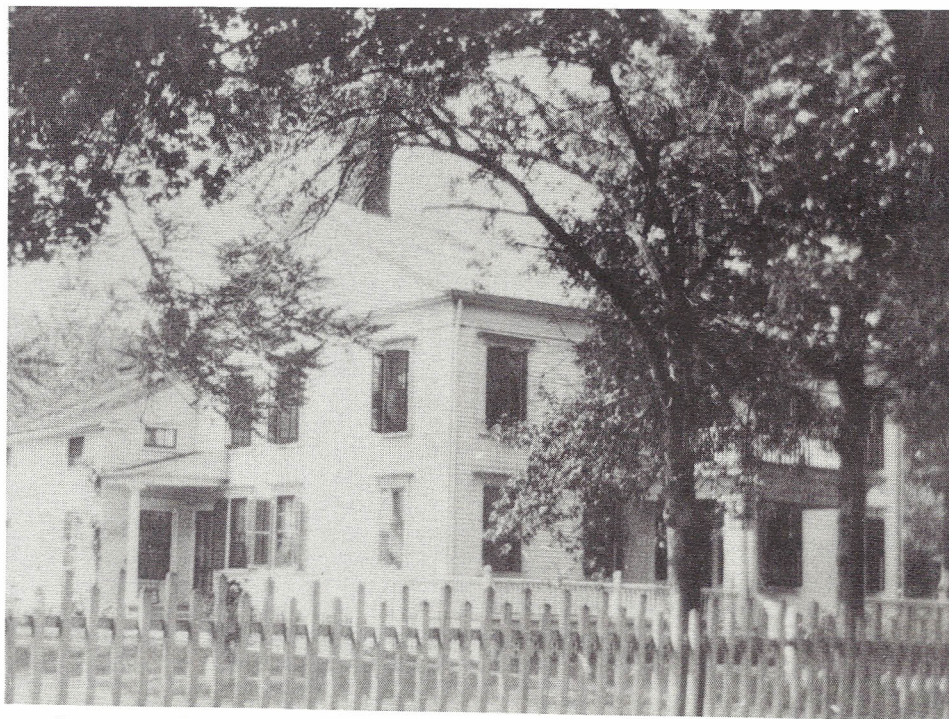
"A dispute over the location of a new church building arose.

"Hanford Nichols and Walter Treadwell, two of Weston's most prosperous and as it turned out most determined residents, led one faction while North Fairfield church members bitterly opposed them.

"Nichols and Treadwell refused to await the outcome of long-winded debates, and on their own initiative, began the construction of a church building on Nichol's own property. By 1846, the year after North Fairfield became Easton, the church was completed. Reverend David P. Tomlinson accepted the post of minister, and the Lyons Plains group brought suit in Superior Court against the Easton group, requesting to be recognized as the legitimate descendant of the older church and to be granted the records and a share of the treasury of the Easton church.

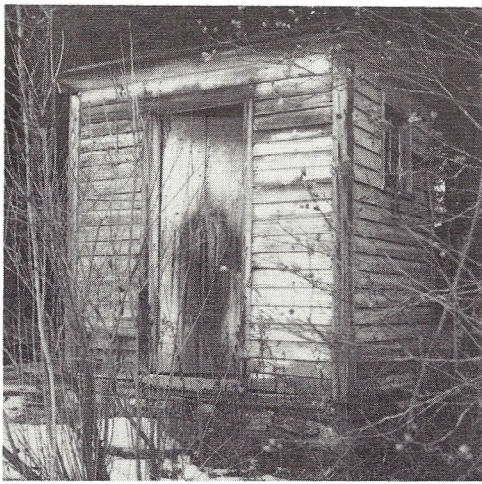
"Church members from Easton resisted Nichols, Treadwell, and their supporters, refusing to surrender without fight.

"Finally, the dispute was heard by three impartial arbiters who decided that Emmanuel Church should be recognized as a legitimate off-spring of the older congregation. They ordered that half the parish money and two-fifths of the building subscriptions be paid to the Lyons Plains group. Thus, Weston's second Episcopal church came into being, thanks in large measure to the tenacity of Hanford Nichols and Walter Treadwell."



*The Hanford Nichols Homestead as it appeared at the turn of the century.*





*A four-hole outhouse is an original feature of the former Hanford Nichols Estate.*

Weston's economy boomed during the 1850s. The saw- and gristmill was converted for the production of plaster, and several small industries established themselves in a thriving manufacturing district in Upper Lyons Plains. The Civil War era brought prosperity to most everyone. But Nichols was getting older. Betsey had died in 1842 and Laura, his third wife, died in 1867. On July 19, 1868, Nichols died at the age of 71. His son, Henry, who followed him in business, died only a year later at the age of 45.

Before his death, Hanford gave his daughter, Sarah Eveline, the wife of Alban B. Sherwood, three parcels of land, one of which included the main house. They were valued in 1892 at \$5,250.

When the estate of Sarah's daughter, Laura Sherwood Hoyt, was settled in 1907, her total estate was valued at \$14,135.65. This included the same three parcels which had fallen in value to \$5,000. A poignant note in her will admonished her sister and heir, Marietta Silliman, to "keep the homestead in the family so long as practical to do so."

As fate would have it, the Nichols dynasty would come to a tragic end. On the night of April 30, 1913, a fire started in the main house, which had become known as Laurellawn. Mrs. Silliman, who kept the house as a summer home, was not there at the time. A neighbor, Clifford Patchen, discovered the blaze about 1:10 a.m. By the time firefighters from the Vigilant and Compo Engine Companies arrived an hour later, the house was engulfed in flames.

In the effort to put out the flames, one firefighter lost his gold watch when it fell off his arm and into the well. Newspaper reports said an attempt was made to recover it.

Reporters speculated that the fire had

begun on the second floor, but others close to the family believed the front porch had been intentionally set ablaze by a disgruntled neighbor.

A photograph of the home, taken before the turn of the century, has been enlarged for detail. It shows a style typical of the second quarter of the 19th century; a transition between the earlier Federal and the "modern" Greek Revival styles. The earlier period is seen in the elegant symmetry of opposite-end chimneys, the centered doorway, and five-over-four window placement, all set into a traditional slant-roofed structure. A full pediment on the gable end, the heavily-proportioned overhang of the front entry, and corner blocks over the windows are elements identifying the Greek Revival period. What appears to be a one-and-a-half story kitchen wing is to the left rear of the house.

The Greek Revival style was developed by architects planning the city of Washington, DC, in the 1820s and it was the favorite choice of home builders in the wealthy coastal community of Southport, Conn. A man of Nichols' stature would have built nothing less than the best and most fashionable for his family.

It was customary, in the 19th century for manufacturers and large farmers to provide housing, and in some cases board, for their employees. A number of small houses in the immediate vicinity are attributed to Nichols and, undoubtedly, were for this purpose. One of these is a one-and-one-half story cottage, located southwest of the foundation of the destroyed main house. Today the cottage is owned by Miss Mary Gjuresko whose father Joseph, Sr., bought the estate in 1922. The Weston Historical Society has recently issued it a plaque inscribed, "Hanford Nichols, ca 1832."

## Mystery of the Old Watch

By Julia Studwell

The Joseph Gjuresko family purchased the fire-damaged Nichols homestead on Lyons Plains Road in 1922 for \$10,000. In addition to buildings, the price also included 100 acres.

A short time after purchasing the home, Joseph Gjuresko, Jr., 22, climbed into the well to clear debris from the bottom. While doing so, he came upon a gold pocket watch with an eagle engraved on both sides. He put it in his pocket, and when he had finished hauling out the debris, he



produced the watch and showed it to his family. Once, the watch was cleaned, it was evident it was a valuable gold time piece. The family marveled at how such a handsome watch could have been lost in the well.

Years passed, and the watch, stored in a bureau drawer, was forgotten. It was a mystery for 70 years.

Then, in December 1993, I commissioned the research and writing of this old house history as a Christmas gift for my sister, Mary Gjuresko, who lives in the family homestead, the former Nichols cottage. Research showed the watch was accidentally dropped down the well in April 1913 by a Westport fireman, who had come to help put out the fire that destroyed much of the original estate.

The watch, although destroyed internally, still shines like the day Joseph Gjuresko retrieved it from the well and polished it up.



James Daugherty:

# Through the Artist's Eye

by Kathleen Saluk Failla

*"A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature."* Ralph Waldo Emerson. (From *Sound of Trumpets*, a selection of Emerson by James Daugherty; 1971, Viking Press. New York, N.Y.)

James Daugherty helped shape the revolution of American abstract art in the early years of the 20th century. He painted innovative abstractions stressing color as the primary motif. By the time, he moved to Weston in 1923 with his Russian-born wife, Sonia, a writer, and his son, Charles, who was nine years old, Daugherty had already established himself in the art world as a pioneer in the new movement that stressed color rather than objects.

After moving here, he continued to paint. But his work took on a wider dimension, expanding to book illustrations and murals. He wrote and illustrated his first picture book for children, *Andy and the Lion*, in 1938. In 1940, he won the Newbery Medal for *Daniel Boone*.

His son, Charles, who lives in the pre-Revolutionary house his parents bought when they left Greenwich Village to become part of the famous Westport/Weston art colony, sat for an interview in his living room which is filled with his father's work. "As a mature artist myself, I have great admiration for my father as both an artist and a perceptive, compassionate human being," said Charles. He recalled his father as an inspiring, positive force, not only in his life, but in the lives of many he touched personally and through his work.

James Daugherty was as comfortable in front of an audience, as he was in front of his easel. He enjoyed public speaking, and expressed his views on art and literature with enthusiasm and good humor. At one point, he even ran for the state legislature. But only half-heartedly. Charles recalled how the family set out for a cross-country car trip just as his father's friends were placing the artist's name on the ballot as a Democratic candidate. "We stopped some place in Missouri, so he could call. Just to make sure he hadn't won," Charles laughed.

But, no where was he more inspiring than in his work. In addition to painting, he illustrated more than 100 children's books and created giant murals for public buildings. He loved words, particularly the works of the great writers, and the Daugherty's home today is a testimony to that. Walls are lined with shelves, containing not only the artist's books, but that of the literary masters, who influenced him.

In a handwritten autobiography, provided to the *Chronicle Quarterly* by his son, the artist writes of his childhood, noting that books were a source of adventure and comfort. Born in Asheville, N.C., in 1887, he lived first in the Midwest before the family moved to Washington, D.C., where he attended the Corcoran Art School.

His autobiography includes a collec-

tion of free associations through the eye of an artist looking back at his boyhood.

James Daugherty wrote: "Early recollections of an Indiana farm and the rigors of country winters and the little red school house and my dad's saw mill and his singing 'The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze' and other American song boy stuff - also his reading out loud to me Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales.' All this on the banks of the Wabash."

When the Daughertys moved to Weston, it was to a wood frame house on a dirt road with no name. Much later it became known as Broad Street, located on the Westport/Weston line. The Daughertys could look across a meadow, now Crystal Lake to the manorial home of artist John Held, Jr. (see *Chronicle Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4; Fall 1993)



*James Daugherty with son Charles in his studio in 1924.*

*Jazz Musicians, watercolor and pencil, 29½" x 20" (Detail from painting). →*



# Annabelle Remembers . . .

## 1924, The Winter



Weston's winter social scene is a busy one, with the Norfield Grange the center of town activity. The Grange recently initiated the largest class in its history - 22 people. After the degrees were conferred, members were treated to refreshments of sandwiches, cake and coffee. Dancing was enjoyed during the balance of the evening. This is the Grange's largest class, since the local group was started in 1896.

Weston lost one of its oldest residents recently, Lydia Sanford, who would have been 100 years of age on April 15.

Artist John Held Jr. has just hung a new sign at the entrance to the Manor House on the Post Road, in Westport. It is a colorful sign of wrought iron, showing coaching days and taverns of old. As a result of his sign making business at Grindstone Hill Forge in Weston, Held is receiving much national attention. Held creates the design, we are told, and Mrs. Held is in charge of the forge.

Prohibition is here. Mrs. Giuseppe Gorine of Weston was arrested by state police, who claim she was selling hooch from her home. A week ago she gave birth to her 14th child and was too ill to stand trial. So Justice of the peace Edith Fanton gave her a break, ordering her husband to stand in for her as proxy. He admitted the making and selling of booze in the home. He said his wife did not realize what she was doing, and he pleaded for leniency. After giving the proxy-prisoner a severe reprimand, Mrs. Fanton dismissed the case.

On a lighter note, the Fine Arts Theatre in Westport is showing two new comedies, sure to amuse the winter weary. Jackie Coogan is starring in "Daddy" and Hoot Gibson in "Ramblin' Kid."

Get well notes may be sent to Danbury Hospital, where William Samuelson is suffering from a broken jaw sustained in an accident in the woods Thursday last. Apparently, his team was carting a load, when the neck

yoke broke and the load hit the animals, causing them to run away. His wagon struck a tree and Mr. Samuelson was thrown to the ground.

James Coley visited with his sister, Mrs. Ida Coleburn of Norwalk, who came to Weston for the weekend before departing on a world tour with her children, Helen and John. They are sailing today from New York on the "Laconia" for a five month tour that will take them to Havana, Los Angeles, the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, Egypt, Paris and London. . . In Paris, they will have a chance to view the latest fashion which is creating quite a sensation. Shorter skirts, shorter than ever before, cut just below the knee, are in fact being worn on the streets of Paris. Cables received by New York dress manufacturers confirm the fashion of "ultimate daring." The consensus of American fashion designers is that while Americans usually follow Paris styles, this time they will not go to the extreme.

Many Weston residents had very unpleasant experiences this week in securing their license plates from the Bridgeport motor vehicle office. Long lines and waits of four to five hours were not unusual.

Friday was the 48th wedding anniversary of Town Clerk and Mrs. Arthur C. Bradley. Mr. and Mrs. Eli Wakeman entertained them Friday afternoon and they spent the evening with Mrs. Oscar Budd.

This being Leap Year, a dance was held for singles at the Weston Hall. More than 150 people from surrounding towns attended.

### Annabelle Pierreux



While Daugherty frequently traveled to New York to visit galleries and meet with publishers, his heart was in Weston. He took solace in the tranquility of country life. He started a hiking club, whose membership included other famous artists, like Ralph L. Boyer, a friend from early days on St. Mark's Place, in New York.

He was very happy here, his son recalled. "He and his artist friends used to go up to Valley Forge and Devil's Den and paint and picnic," he said. During the summer, they would head to Compo.

But, during those long cold, winter nights the artist took comfort in the memories of his boyhood. Sitting by the



tall, fieldstone fireplace, located at the center of the Daugherty home, the artist would spend hours reading to his son. "He read the complete *Ivanhoe* and the works of James Fenimore Cooper. That's how we passed the winter evenings," said Charles, looking out at a snowy landscape.

In the 1920s, the landscape looked quite different. "This corner of Connecticut was quite rural until 30 years ago or so," he said. For example, Crystal Lake, which today, is ringed by expensive homes, was not a lake at all, but a meadow, with a swamp that froze in winter. "We used to ice skate there," Charles said.

Whether it was summer or winter, Daugherty always found time to explore the countryside. But, he couldn't wait to get back to his easel. "His work was for the most part his recreation," said Charles. His two studios are in use today by Charles, a successful painter, and his wife, Lisa, an accomplished sculptor.

"His career was somewhat split - he was always a painter," Charles said. "But after he moved here in 1923, he got more and more into book illustration." When the Great Depression hit, Daugherty was recruited to paint murals, a number of which still survive. Before his death in February 1974, he was working hard as an abstract painter. His works are in the collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of American Art, Yale University, and other major U.S. museums. His son carries on the tradition, not only as a painter, but in encouraging others. For several years, Charles and Lisa have been actively involved in the Weston Cultural Events Committee, which attempts to bring the works of local artists to the attention of their fellow Westonites.

Annual dues are now payable. Reminders will be sent by mail. Please respond promptly. Your participation is important.

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## Bible Records Published

Vital records transcribed from three Bibles owned by the Weston Historical Society were published by the Connecticut Society of Genealogists in their quarterly bulletin, "The Connecticut Nutmegger." Weston Historical Society wishes to thank First Selectman George Guidera and his wife, Linda, who gave the Bibles to the Society from the estate of Anson Morton.

Mr. Morton, a Weston native, died in 1993. His ancestors were among the founders of Weston and its parent town, Fairfield. He lived in the home his father purchased on Valley Forge Road across from the present Devil's Glen.

The records, carefully kept by a series of writers, include the births, deaths, and marriages of members of the Platt, Squire, Banks, and Crofut families. The earliest record is the marriage of Samuel Squire to Abigail Platt of Wilton dated 1805. The latest is the death of Mary Banks in 1903. Family historians and genealogists will find the transcriptions in the December 1993 issue, Volume 26, Number 3. Copies can

be ordered from The Connecticut Society of Genealogists, Inc., P.O. Box 435  
Glastonbury, CT 06033-0435.

## Dear Editor:

I have recently seen a copy of *The Chronicle Quarterly*, published by the Weston Historical Society. It is a delightful little journal!

From time to time local historical societies get out similar works - some good, some not so good. But all of them reflect the enthusiasm of Connecticut people for learning and telling the history of their towns.

*The Chronicle Quarterly* is among the most professionally done works of this genre that I have seen. It is interesting, well written, and attractive to look at. In addition, the broad range of historical topics it carries reflects both a highly informed staff and a very imaginative one. I do hope you will not let this project die as have so many others before you.

Please keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Christopher Collier, State Historian  
University of Conn., Storrs



Scene from a slide and sound production of "Spoon River Anthology" to be shown at the Annual Meeting, Weston Library, Thursday March 24, 7:30 p.m. Public is invited. Produced and photographed by Roger Core and Gordon Smith with dramatic narrations recorded by actors Frank Converse and Maureen Anderman. Judy Darby will introduce the program with a historical commentary on the Norfield/Coley Cemetery.



# Coley House Improvements

Much is in store for Coley House, the Society's headquarters and museum. It is being spruced up, with plans for exterior painting and a fence out front. Then, so residents can appreciate it - night and day - floodlights may be installed.

Society trustees are discussing these and other plans to upgrade the museum's appearance.

The signal that work was underway came last fall. A hedge, which had become overgrown, hiding the house from the public traveling on Weston Road, was cut down. It revealed a handsome farmhouse, but one in need of a facelift. At recent meetings, trustees discussed giving the house a fresh look with a new coat of paint and erecting a cast iron fence.

Also, the property was cleared of overgrown trees and brush, further improving its appearance. Gene O'Hare is meeting with arborists to find the right ornamental trees for the grounds. Behind the house, towers a huge elm tree, one of

the few to survive Dutch Elm Disease, which wiped out the area's elm population. Steps are being taken to inoculate the tree against the disease.

Under discussion by the trustees, is a plan to create a path leading visitors from the parking lot to the front of Coley House.

## Connecticut Preservation Awards

Applications are being accepted until April 1, 1994, by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation for their annual Preservation Awards. Property owners, professionals, and municipalities are eligible to enter projects which have been completed since January 1, 1989, and meet requirements established by the Trust having to do with the restoration or preservation of a Connecticut cultural resource. Among the kinds of projects which may be entered are the rehabilitation of a house; a sensitive

addition to an historic building; an adaptation of a historic building for a use different than that for which it was originally designed; re-creation of an historic landscape design; recreating period detailing in an historic building; sensitive alterations to an historic building for handicap access.

To be considered eligible an entry must be described before and after work began. Photographs before and after in both black and white prints and color slides must show before and after views from at least four perspectives, in addition to a sketch plan of the project showing any alteration or additions. A \$15.00 processing fee, payable to the Trust is also required.

Winners will be announced at the Trust's annual meeting in May. Award winning entries in the past have included a barn in Southbury, an outhouse in Ashford, New Haven's Union Railroad Station, studies of Connecticut's historic highway bridges, and a study of Mashantucket Pequot burial grounds, plus a variety of historic houses. Application forms and further details can be obtained by calling Judy Darby at 222-1727.



*Members of the Kellogg family gathered on their front lawn, ca 1895*

The Society wishes to thank Mr. Irving Patchen of Lyons Plains Road for allowing it to copy this ca 1895 photograph. In a recent interview with board member Lou Bregy, Mr. Patchen said the house, though drastically remodelled, is located on Kellogg Hill Road. From the left are Mr. Patchen's grandfather, John Kellogg; Jessie Kellogg (rear), his grandmother, Mary Jane (Fanton) Kellogg; friend, Ed Gerhardt of Norwalk; and Gilvia Kellogg. According to Mr. Patchen, the horse on the left, Prince, was killed in an accident while taking Mrs. Mary Jane Kellogg to visit a friend down Kellogg Hill Road on a foggy evening. The other horse, Eli, was stolen by a hired man. Neither Eli nor the hired man was ever seen again.



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