

Strong-Porter House
COVENTRY, CT



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Sign Post

Brick School House
COVENTRY, CT



Looking Back ... By the late Jesse A. Brainard (Written in 1993)

“WONT YOU COME WITH ME LUCILLE...IN MY MERRY OLDSMOBILE?”

We recently bought a '93 Ford Escort station wagon. Henry's famous script signature is prominently displayed in a blue enameled medallion on front.

My first awareness of that signature was on the radiator of my Uncle Tom Tisdale's new 1922 Model T touring car. He bought it from Henry Frink, as had a number of Coventry people. Henry was an authorized Ford dealer who owned the garage on the site of the old Kingsbury mill on Main Street where Sanborn's now is.

My uncle kept his car in the Henry Mason barn that was then owned by Henry Mason's son-in-law, Frank Hull, across from the Box Shop's brick boiler house on Main Street. Uncle Sam lived almost at the end of Prospect Street. To get from the garage to his home meant negotiating Mason Street hill. That presented a minor problem – a problem that that faced all owners of the Model T. Gravity fed the model T carburetor – gas flowing from the tank located beneath the drivers seat (gas would not flow into the carburetor on a steep incline). To “make” that hill, my Uncle would back along the flat stretch in front of the old cartridge shop (backing was simple; one simply pressed and held down the middle of the three floorboard pedals. When released the car was in forward). Then, pulling the throttle lever beneath the steering wheel full back, he'd get up enough speed to make the corner in front of Aggie Armstrong's and thence home. Even so, a near full tank of gas was required. Lacking that, to negotiate any steep hill required turning the vehicle about and backing up the grade!

Mr. Moody was the town's affable “fish peddler” who made his call every Friday. Well before daybreak, he'd have picked up his fish, clams and lobsters from the Noank dock and started his route very early. He had an old Model T Ford truck. It wasn't unusual to find Mr. Moody backing up Lewis Hill, Snake Hill, Monument Hill and others as he made his rounds. He and his wife used to live in what we called the Green's Homestead. It was in poor shape and subsequently burned – well back from the road about opposite the Town Hall. (This had been one of the two places where Coventry Militia men gathered under Major Brown to answer the Lexington Alarm. The other was at the home of the late Doctor and Maude Peterson).

I got to thinking of earlier cars in town and dug back into some old family diaries and scrapbooks.

William Reeves, the foreman at Dady's silk mill, owned Coventry's first automobile. It was a **Stanley Steamer**. He bought it on October 9, 1903 from C.P. Rackus in Danielson. George Phillips, the druggist, bought a **Locomobile** at the Bridgeport factory on the 29th. John Champlin, probably to celebrate the opening of his new ice cream parlor on Main Street, bought his Cadillac on June 10th 1904.

From then on people began buying cars – Lou Kingsbury, Henry Washburn, Royal Rose, Clarence Hoxie and others. I have old photographs taken during the Town's 1912 Celebration – some in front of the church in North Coventry, others on the Green in South Coventry. **The autos outnumber the wagons and carriages.**

For the fun of it, I did some recalling and was surprised at the variety of vehicles that traveled our streets – say between the early 1920's and early 1930's. I came up with the following list which is by maker, but also identifies only a few of the representative owners I remember.

BUICK – Henry Washburn, Frank Tracey
CADILLAC – Royal Rose, Geo. Jacobson
CHANDLER – Bill Loeser
CHEVROLET – Scott Cushman, Arthur Clark
DE SOTO – Albert Harmon
DODGE – Rev. Johnson, Dr. Higgins, B. Brooke
ESSEX – Byron Hall, Wolcott Ayers, R. Welles
FORD – (many) Frank Turner, Gene Latimer
GARDNER – Bill Colburn
GRAHAM-PAIGE – Hugh Christie
GRAHAM – Lou Phillips, John Champlin
JORDAN – Clarence Hoxie, Lou Kingsbury
LOCOMOBILE – Tom Welles Sr.
MOON – Albert Gilman
OVERLAND – Teddy Beebe
OLDSMOBILE – Lottie Albertine, G.G. Robertson
PACKARD – Julia Flaherty, Fred Wellwood
PONTIAC – Sam Tisdale

REO – Will Armstrong
 RUGGLES – Capt. William Wolfe
 STUDEBAKER – Dr. Higgins, Burt Carpenter
 WHIPPET – Dorothy Crickmore
 WINTON – Homer Wood
 WYLLYS-KNIGHT – Al Forester

Many townspeople bought their Ford from Frink. Others patronized dealers in Willimantic, Manchester and even Hartford. A number of Coventry men (John Champlin and Walter Washburn come to mind) would travel to Detroit and pick up their new cars at the factory – and at the factory price! Liz Champlin and Edith Washburn enjoyed train rides out but loved “motoring” back home.

I must add that for those interested in restoring old cars, there’s a fine black, boxy Essex sitting on the bottom of Lake Wamgumbaug’s Cove. It went through the ice in the late 1920’s and has never been recovered as far as I know.

There were four gas pumps in the village. My great Uncle, William Uncles, sold Texaco. Frink had Gulf. John Champlin had Tydol and Will Wellwood, Secony. Arthur Vinton had a pump in North Coventry. I think he sold Gulf.

Gas would be hand pumped into a five gallon glass container marked in quarts and gallons atop the pump. A squeeze valve on the hose governed the amount flowing by gravity into the car’s tank.

Members of the Coventry Historical Society might be intrigued to know that Ludwig Nelson, an eccentric former occupant of the Sprague House (now owned by the Historical Society) had an early brass radiator Model T Ford, which of course is not remarkable. However, Ludwig became obsessed with the belief that someone was going to meddle with his Model T Ford and felt the only way he could prevent this would be to move his beloved car in the kitchen of the Sprague House. So, he disassembled the vehicle, piece by piece, and reassembled it ... in the kitchen! There it remained until well after he died, leaving the estate’s administrators in an awful quandary.

A Plan for Our Future

Ginney Dilk
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About five years ago the Coventry Historical Society, under the guidance of Sally Whipple, a strategic planning specialist, developed a five-year Strategic Plan. The plan was something that was to be worked on throughout the year and updated annually. This was done, but as more time passed it became apparent that we were just like most others who had developed a strategic plan. Life and crises came and went and the plan was not adjusted in a timely manner.

I recently became aware of an effort to promote ‘real-time strategic planning.’ It is known as the La Piana (Group) method. As I read the book I evolved from a terrified ‘what do they mean we have to write a business plan’ to someone who thinks this really can be done, by lay people, using the worksheets provided. I proposed to the Executive Board that a group of volunteers use the existing strategic plan as a basis for developing a real-time strategic plan. The real-time strategic plan will be much easier for new board members to understand and for all of the board to use in making decisions.

The original strategic plan was put together over several months of weekly meetings. I think the real-time strategic plan can be primarily accomplished through email. Worksheets would be emailed to the volunteers with a two week deadline to complete and return the form. The forms would then be tabulated and sent out again for review and comments. Life can get in the way so we would have to be flexible.

Please consider volunteering for this task. You will learn how we got to where we are as well as determine the direction we will take. House museums across the nation are under the gun economically and in order for us to survive we need to plan for our future.

Help Wanted: Volunteers -

Can you spare us an hour or two on Sundays? We desperately need help parking cars in our lot for the Farmers Market. The people that park in our lot have been visiting the Strong Porter Museum and leaving donations! Bill cannot be in two places at once. We could use your help from about 10:45 until 12:30.

Volunteers to clean the museum once a week or every other week. We have had so many people going through the museum that we could use someone to dust and vacuum the two rooms downstairs on a regular basis.

Volunteers to work in the archives – we have been fortunate to have some new collections donated to the museum. BUT we need help sorting and cataloging.

Volunteers are the backbone of every organization. Without your help the society could wither and die. Please call and volunteer today. Call 860-742-7474.



Society Events

September

September 16 - Annual membership meeting and budget approval. More details to be announced.

October

Halloween Party at the Brick School will be 1-4 PM, Sunday Oct 3rd. There will be games, crafts, stories, food and prizes. Price is \$2/child.

Saturday, October 9th from 1 to 2:30 p.m. at the Hickory Ridge Christmas Tree Farm, South River Road (Rain date: October 10th)

Coventry Historical Society and Visny's Hickory Ridge Christmas Tree Farm present, "**A Leisurely Walk through Hickory Ridge**" as part of the Last Green Valley's Walktober.

Come and climb the hill at Hickory Ridge. Learn about Growing Christmas Trees and the history of the area. Climb the hill for a spectacular fall view of the University of Connecticut and the surrounding area. You will see a historic carriage shed, the North Coventry Hearse, and the **Armstrong wagon** that has very recently been re-furbished.

A Hauntingly Enchanted Evening (AHEE)

By Ginney Dilk

This October our Halloween event, AHEE, will be held on the 15th, 16th, 22nd and 23rd with a rain date of the 29th. This event raises money for our big renovation projects. Last year we grossed over \$5,000 in three nights. We need all types of volunteers to make this event happen. Notes and names from previous year's events are available. Please call (860-742-9656) or email gdilk@aol.com me if you can help out in any way or would like more information about a task. We have some costumes to loan.

-Set-up/Tear down: Oct 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24 maybe Oct 28, 29

-Bakers (breads/cookies): to be delivered on Oct 15, 16, 22, 23 maybe Oct 29

-Lantern Carrier: interacts with guests, need to know the event theme and info provided. Gives 3 or 4 tours/night

-Vignette Actors: most need to memorize script, others need to only moan.

-Wenches: serve food in tavern, interact with tavern keeper and guests, lead guests to dance, must be outgoing, being able to wisecrack is a plus.

-Fortune Teller: info on palm reading, numerology provided.

-Luminary Lighters: light the luminaries at the beginning of the evening, put them out at the end of the evening, and make sure all luminaries remain lit. Wear dark clothes.

-Food Prep: slices the cheese & bread and puts it in basket and pours cider into pitchers for the wenches to serve in the tavern.

-Sandwich maker: Oct 15 & 22 maybe 29. Make approximately 100 sandwiches for each Friday night. Sandwich contents provided.

-Tavern Chairperson: responsible for set-up/tear-down of tables/chairs etc in barn, table set-up, seeing that glasses and napkins are washed, and that we have enough food for the tavern. I will forward all of the bakers' names to the chairperson so that they can contact them to arrange deliveries.

-Donation Chairperson: contact local supermarkets for gift cards, Cabot Cheese for a cheese donation and other local businesses for needed donations. Coordinates with tavern chairperson on deliveries. Writes thank-you letters to donors. (I have letterhead, envelopes and stamps for you)

-Set-up/Tear down Chairperson: I have names of people who have helped in the past but I need someone to contact and organize the people.

-Pumpkin Coordinator: contacts Pumpkin Paul for donation and arranges pick up of the pumpkins. Writes thank-you note to Paul Peters.

-Check in/greeter: 2 to 4 people to work in the check-in tent each night signing people in, explaining where to go, interacting with the guest while they wait for their tour to begin.

Coventry Historical Society

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The Coventry Historical Society Web Site is located at:

www.coventrycthistoricalsociety.org

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Board Meetings are the second Thursday of the month at the Strong-Porter house.

Wanted: Articles for Publication in THE SIGN POST.

Send or email your article to the Society email address. Articles in Word or PDF form preferred.

Send to:

Sign Post Editor

Jim Murphy

Irishbrit0471@att.net

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Become a Member

If you aren't already a member of the Coventry Historical Society, please consider joining now!

Single Membership \$10.00

Family Membership \$15.00

Send us your name, address and contact information using one of the methods listed on the left of this page.

Telephone number and **email address** would be appreciated.

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