

# CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

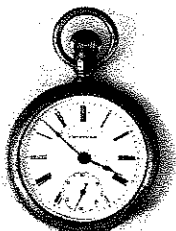
Volume 33, No. 1

Spring 2010

## PROGRAM

**Monday, April 26, 2010, 7:30 PM**

**Annual Meeting—Reception  
“A Look at Cheshire Watches”  
Brad Zambruski**



Brad Zambruski, Society membership secretary, who is a collector of Cheshire watches, will be the speaker following the annual meeting and election of officers on Monday, April 26.

Brad will display watches and memorabilia from both his and the Society collections and discuss the watches and history of the factory building (presently housing the Watch Factory Shoppes). Built in 1883, the building also served as Cheshire Academy's Seabury Hall. After his talk, everyone is invited to a reception honoring new and departing board members in the dining room.

## NEW SLATE

At the annual meeting, the Nominating Committee will present the following slate of officers (1-year term) and directors (3-year term).

President	Cara Luciani
Vice President	Joseph Robinson
Recording Secretary	Janice Yusza
Corresponding Secretary	Christine Pittsley
Membership Secretary	Brad Zambruski
Treasurer	Ed Kania

Directors for 3-year term: 2010—2013

Robert Larkin  
Marshall Robinson  
Art Sides

Cara Luciani, nominee for president, has served as corresponding secretary since 2004. A lifelong Cheshire resident, she is a technical services librarian at the Cheshire Public Library. She and her husband Chris have two sons: Connor, 6, and Colin, 3.

Vice-presidential nominee Joe Robinson is a technology specialist for the Amity Regional

## Spring Calendar

*The Hitchcock-Phillips House will be open to the public every Sunday afternoon, 2—4 PM, for remainder of year except for holiday weekends. Starting June 13, The Boutique-in-the-Shed also will be open during Sunday hours.*

April 11	Sunday 2—4 p.m.	House reopens for regular visiting hours.
April 19	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
April 26	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Annual Meeting & Speaker
May 17	Monday 7:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
May 30	Sunday	House closed for Memorial Day weekend
June 6—July 2		D.A.R. 100th anniversary exhibit
June 12	Saturday 9—3 p.m. 11 a.m.—3 p.m.	Strawberry Festival Antiques & Collectibles House open to public Connecticut Open House Day

School District and an avid, amateur genealogist. He and his wife Suzanne are parents of Paul, who turns 4 this month.

Nominee for recording secretary Janice Yusza is a 30-year resident of Cheshire and wife of Richard, who grew up here. She is currently the executive director of the Cheshire Land Trust.

Nominee for membership secretary Christine Pittsley also has lived in Cheshire all her life. She works on the digital collection at the Connecticut State Library and is the mother of Ian, 14.

Both Ed and Brad continue their positions as treasurer and membership secretary.

Nominees for directors, 2010-2013, include: outgoing president Marshall Robinson, outgoing recording secretary Art Sides, and current director Bob Larkin, who has served since 2008.

Nominating committee members were Ed Kania, chairman; Barbara Christoff and Martha Connolly.

# Miss Nettie Smith, 1862-1939, Tireless Champion for Local History, Good Causes; Founded DAR Chapter

Miss Nettie Smith must have been quite a woman! Most surviving programs or newspaper clippings about community events in Cheshire from the turn of the century until her death in 1939 include her name—as an organizer, chairman, or committee member. She was a genealogical historian, a newspaper correspondent, and a “power house” who worked tirelessly for good causes, community improvement, and preservation of local history.

Nettie was the daughter of Alonzo and Mary Smith of Cheshire. She was born in 1862, the year her father—along with some 60 other Cheshire men and boys—enlisted in Company A, 20th Connecticut Regiment Volunteers. Alonzo served throughout the Civil War and was discharged when the company disbanded in July 1865. For most of her life, Nettie lived in a neat little white house on the “town hall” side of South Main Street, two houses south of Wallingford Road. She never married. Edwin R. Brown, who compiled Old Historic Homes of Cheshire, Connecticut in 1895, lived in a large house on the corner of Wallingford Road. Next to it was his store, then the Smith house. (These three houses were demolished in 1970 for the construction of the block of stores, 116-136 South Main St.). George Keeler’s stove shop, later Cheshire Furniture Store, was just south of the Smith home. (See article on last page.)

In 1910, Nettie played a leading role in organizing Cheshire’s Lady Fenwick Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), with 31 charter members. She became the chapter’s first Regent. She served four terms as Regent for a total of 14 years between 1910 and 1930. The chapter celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

## Took over unfinished manuscript

Even more important for Cheshire history, Nettie took over and completed Joseph P. Beach’s history of Cheshire manuscript that was left unfinished at his death in 1911. In 1912, the new Lady Fenwick Chapter published Beach’s History of Cheshire,



1930 photograph of Miss Nettie Smith, tireless champion for Cheshire history and community causes, and first regent of the Lady Fenwick Chapter of the DAR, Cheshire, which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

(Historical Society photo)

Connecticut, from 1694 to 1840, a book that is still the primary source for the early history of our town.

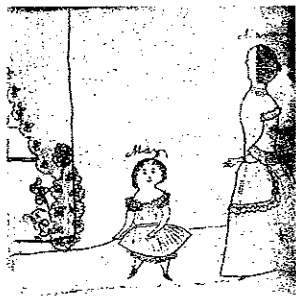
## Honorary member of 20th Conn. Regiment

After the Civil War, Alonzo Smith remained active in veteran activities for the 20th Connecticut. In 1885 he was elected Secretary for the Regiment, a post he held until his death in 1912. After his death, Nettie again picked up unfinished work. She continued to fill his position of Secretary. She was made an honorary member of the 20th Connecticut Regiment for her efforts. She kept a careful record of 20th veterans and helped plan their reunions for the rest of her life. Her collection of 20th Regiment memorabilia from Regiment reunions and numerous *carte-de-visite* photographs are now in the Cheshire Historical Society archives.

(continued on next page)

## Mary Potter's Early Pictures Preserved At Boston Library

The Society received an interesting letter from Jan Dovenitz, Cataloging Department Librarian at the Boston Public Library, in November. She wrote that she recently cataloged an old children's book, Interesting Events in the History of the United States, by John W. Barber (New Haven, 1828) for the library's Jordan Collection. On blank pages in the book, a child, who identified herself as Mary Potter of Cheshire, had drawn a number of pictures of her family and herself.



Mary and Mama



Mary's house

Ms. Dovenitz's letter included photocopies of a several of the little drawings. They are delightful! We located a Mary Potter (1841-1924) in Cheshire in the 1937 Headstone Inscriptions compiled under the auspices of the Connecticut State Library. She is buried in St. Peter's Episcopal Church cemetery. However, there was no other information available to indicate that she was actually the little artist who had added her drawings to Barber's book.

Recently, further proof that she was the correct

Mary Potter was found at St. Peter's Church, which is celebrating its 250th anniversary this year. A booklet published in 1935 for St. Peter's 175th anniversary contained a very lovely pencil drawing of the old church building by "Mary." The drawing was found in the attic of the home of Miss Mary Potter after her death in 1924 at age 83. Obviously, she had continued her artistic pursuits.



Lizzie

Anyone interested may see the Barber book with Mary Potter's childhood drawings at the Boston Public Library, Copley Square, Boston. A day's notice is required to retrieve the book from offsite storage.



Early drawing of St. Peter's Church by "Mary". Found in the attic of Mary Potter's home after her death in 1924.

### ...Miss Nettie Smith (continued from previous page)

In 1917, she organized the Cheshire Chapter of the American Red Cross and served as its chairman until 1938. She also helped organize the Cheshire Public Health Nursing Association. She was a member of the Cheshire Women's Club, the board of the Cheshire Library Association, and served on the boards of directors of numerous other civic associations. She was an active parishioner at St. Peter's Episcopal Church. In addition to her volunteer activities, she was the Cheshire reporter for the *New Haven Register* for more than two decades.

When Historical Society members were assembling the "Cheshire Goes to War" exhibit in November, we were interested to read a note from the

late Arthur Coleman. The note accompanied a certificate of appreciation from the Town of Cheshire for his service in World War I.

Coleman writes that he received the certificate at an appreciation dinner for over 100 returning servicemen at the old Grange hall in 1918.

He concludes: "I remember Miss Nettie Smith was the prime mover of the tribute."

Hats off to Nettie Smith!



An early photo of Nettie Smith from the Society's 20th Connecticut Regiment collection.

## Society Receives Customer Records From Cheshire Furniture Shop

By member *Jeanne Chesanow*

Have you noticed the white wooden barn-like building at 166 South Main? You may have noted that it is looking shabby, or that it is for sale along with the white house next door. But this white building with its double doors and large display windows has had an interesting past.



166 South Main St.

During the 1860s people walked into this newly built stove shop to buy a woodstove from owner George Keeler, a Civil War veteran who lived next door. About 20 years later, people were carried out the tall double doors on the driveway side of this same building, which by this time had become an undertaker's business owned by Keeler's son, George W. Keeler.

### Sold to Edward and Caroline Zitzman

In the 1930s this same building along with the Keeler House next door, was sold to Edward and Arline Zitzman who opened The Cheshire Furniture Shop, a business they ran for many years. The Zitzmans had one child, a girl named Virginia who was educated at Cornell and Yale, and taught in Mount Vernon for many years. She married Arthur Conti and had one son Earl who now owns the house and shop. (\* See note.) Mr. Conti recently gave Cheshire Historical Society a box of file cards detailing the purchases in his grandparents' Furniture Shop from 1939 to approximately 1950 -- the years which encompass World War II and the postwar decade. The sturdy tabbed cards are indexed alphabetically by the name of the purchaser. The handwritten information also includes the name and price of the item, the date of purchase, the amount paid on the date and on subsequent dates if a "layaway" purchase.

In addition to furniture, the store carried lamps, baby strollers, and appliances such as kitchen stoves and refrigerators, which sold for \$10 or \$15 in the 40s. On the cards you will see furniture items that no longer exist, such as a "radio table" (the forerunner of today's "media cabinet") or a "studio

couch" -- a cot-sized fabric-covered mattress on an upholstered box spring with matching removable back cushions. Nice enough looking to be in a living room, these couches also could accommodate an overnight guest.

Many Cheshire residents will find the names of family members who made purchases in this store. Others, curious to know the story of this business, will find the cards a glimpse into Cheshire's civilian life during the 40s.

\* Note: Virginia later married David Eckerson. She was president of the Historical Society, 1995-97. She died in 2006.

## Hartman Gives Grinding Wheel From Amasa Hitchcock House

Richard Hartman has given the Society the old grinding wheel, mounted on a foot treadle, that was left at the Amasa Hitchcock House, 1151 South Main Street, when he bought the property from Eva Hitchcock, widow of Lester Hitchcock, in 1979. Lester Hitchcock was the 6th generation Hitchcock to occupy the house.

With the closing of the Hartman-Hulteen Real Estate office, the historic property is now for sale. The grinding wheel was once a familiar sight in the yard. Look for it now at the entrance to the rear garden at the Society.

### NEW EXHIBITS

**The Exhibit Room has two new exhibits this spring. The north display case features century-old figures from India from the Society's collection. The 23 figures, most made from clay, depict various occupations, castes and residents of specific areas of India. They are very detailed. Some of the clothing has actually been crafted and sewn to fit the foot-high figures.**

**In the south case, Town Historian and Society board member Rob Gagliardi has arranged a display of Ball and Socket Company artifacts and articles about the company and its products from his own collection. The company has a proud heritage in town, having been founded in 1850 and operating until the 1990s. Ron hopes to do a series of exhibits during 2010 featuring items and stories from Cheshire businesses that have been in town for 100 years or more.**

## New Members

Welcome to the following new members:  
John DiLeo, 441 Patton Drive, Cheshire  
Linda Lewis McCox, 171 Lakeshore Ridge Court,  
Wildwood, MO 63038  
Alice F. Santello, 254D Robin Court, Cheshire  
George Sabo, 204 Farm Meadow Lane, Cheshire

## In Memoriam

Paul J. Simisky	November 8, 2009
William W. Gager, Jr.	November 29, 2009
Eugene Gandelman	March 15, 2010
Evelyn Wallis Brodeur	April 5, 2010

We were deeply saddened by the death of these members and extend our sincere sympathy to their families.

## Thank you!

Special thanks to the following contributors who made donations to the Society in addition to their 2010 dues and to our valued Business/Professional and Supporting Members.

### Major Contributors

Apple Valley Bank	Lawrence & Eleanor Herrman
Sally Bowman	Ray & Eleanor Verner
Mary B. Hobler-Hyson	

### Business/Professional Members

Apple Valley Bank	O. J. Mann Electric
Bristol Insurance	Spadola & Vincent
Valerie Joyce	

### Supporting

Donald Baillie	Thom & Kristin Peters
Martha Connolly	Lori-Ann Rusnack
Jay & Carole Cunningham	Mike & Sandra Zambruski
Addie Marx	

### Other Contributors

Margaret Barth	Alfred Mitlehner
Sally M. Blakely	Ray & Mary Ellen Morgan
Margaret Boutwell	Virginia & Ernest Oberst
Bristol Insurance	Jane Richards
Robert & Noreen Cawood	Joe & Suzanne Robinson
Barbara Christoff	Ralph & Bernice Rowland
John DiLeo	John Romanik, Sr.
Robert & Ann Fennelly	Arlla Simisky
Tom & Georgette Hyman	Inge Venus
John & Judy Knott	Donald Walesky
Andrew & Brandi Martelli	D. Evelyn Watkins
Ann Massimino	Marcia Yorke

## New Books at Society

**A Quest for Glory, a Biography of Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, Robert J. Schneller, Jr.** (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD., 1996), purchased with funds from the J. Edgar B. Johnson Book Fund. The Society has new interest in Rear Admiral Dahlgren because of the game table Marianne Dahlgren Pattyson donated to the Society in 2008. Her great grandfather gave the table, now in the Society parlor, to President Abraham Lincoln for use in the family quarters at the White House.

The book gives interesting details about the Lincoln-Dahlgren friendship. Dahlgren, who became known as the "father of Naval ordnance", was in command of the Washington Navy Yard at the start of the Civil War, and Lincoln became an almost-daily visitor. Also of special interest is Dahlgren's long friendship with Cheshire hero. Admiral Andrew Hull Foote. The friendship began when they served together as young lieutenants on the *Cumberland*, 1843-44. Dahlgren supported Foote's temperance crusade during the voyage. They continued to correspond throughout their careers. Dahlgren was one of Foote's last visitors during his final illness at the Astor House, New York City, in 1863 and continued the journey with the body to New Haven for burial.

**The Old Leatherman, Historical Accounts of a Connecticut and New York Legend, Dan W. DeLuca** (Garnet Books, 2008), also purchased with funds from the Johnson Book Fund. DeLuca was the speaker at the October 2009 membership meeting.

**Connie Mack's First Pro Game, Roger W. King**, (Bayberry Hill Press, Meriden, 1978), gift from his wife, Jean King, who is now at Elim Park. Mack was manager of the Philadelphia A's, 1901-1950. He played his first pro game as Meriden's catcher and team captain against Hartford on opening day of the new Connecticut Base Ball League, April 1884.

**Noah's Desktonary and Allmanack, Ron Gagliardi** for the New Haven Museum and Historical Society. Gift from the author, a Cheshire Historical Society board member and town historian. Self-published collection of newly-invented words combined with information about the New Haven Museum. The Society has additional copies for sale on consignment, price \$15.

# CHESHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS



A dues envelope is enclosed if your membership is still unpaid for 2010. Please remit.

## Spring 2010

Cheshire Historical Society  
PO Box 281, 43 Church Drive  
Cheshire, CT 06410  
[www.cheshirehistory.org](http://www.cheshirehistory.org)

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### *Society Officers*

#### **President**

Marshall Robinson

#### **Vice President**

Gerald Devine

#### **Secretaries**

Art Sides

Cara Luciani

Brad Zambruski

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Ed Kania

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Robert Cawood

Ron Gagliardi

Eleanor Herrmann

Robert Larkin

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Ray Verner

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Warren VanAlmkerk, *asst.*

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Mary Ellen Kania



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