



Ellington Historical Society

P.O. Box 73

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February 2015 Newsletter



The Ellington Historical Society will meet on **Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 7:00 p.m.** at the Hall Memorial Library at 93 Main Street. After a short business meeting, there will be a program presented by Mathew Duman.

What facet of a building is most effective at making you smile? Is it expert craftsmanship? Handsome materials? Pleasing proportions? For Mathew M. Duman, the answer is: gargoyles and grotesques. Five years ago, Duman, a photographer and graphic designer at the Knights of Columbus headquarters in New Haven, became fascinated with creatures that had been carved into walls, arches, cornices and towers of Yale University buildings. The program is free, and the public is invited. New members are always welcome. Refreshments will be provided by Hilary Brady, Dave Lehmann and Dave Danforth.

News from the President-Tim Fahy

The Ellington Historical Society has received a large anonymous donation, which will allow extra time for us to decide the future direction of the society and the museum.

News from the Curator-Nancy Long

We were recently contacted by a member of the Charles Batz family, asking about help with family genealogy and locating some items donated to our museum. Charles Batz and his sisters Jennie and Emma were lifelong residents of Ellington. Charles was a World War I veteran, dairy farmer and one of the organizers of the fire department and American Legion Hatheway-Miller Post 62. Emma was a secretary for the Board of Education in the 1940s and 1950s and active in the Better Age Club. Upon her death in 1996, Emma left her 45-acre property on Shenipsit Street to the town to be used as a passive recreation area. Charles and Emma are listed on the Wall of Honor in Arbor Park.

The genealogy questions were referred to Shirley Hayden. My part came in the form of locating the many items donated to the museum by the Batz family. We had previously used Charles' World War I Army uniform, mess kit and gas mask in an exhibit at Hall Memorial Library. Research revealed more World War I uniform items and German souvenirs from the Argonne Forest in France. Old accession lists included museum donations of a radio, cobbler tools, several small toy pieces and a collection of hats from Jennie and Emma Batz.

Work will continue to locate, photograph and formally accession these many items both for the Batz family records as well as making this collection available to the public on our web page. Plans are in the works to display the World War I items in the museum this summer.

News from Shirley Hayden

How the Rockville High School Yearbook Project came about

Years ago, I got interested in studying my family's genealogy, which meant learning about relatives who lived in Ellington, Rockville, and East Windsor. The more I got into it, the more I found relatives that I never knew about, especially on my paternal grandmother's side. She died 17 years before I was born and I seldom heard anything about her. I was surprised to learn I had relatives that had lived all over Ellington, Rockville, and Tolland. At some point, I visited the Vernon Historical Society (VHS) and saw their yearbook collection -- and pictures of many relatives I'd never seen pictures of before. One treat was a picture of my Aunt Mildred as a high school student. I knew her well as a child, but she was 40 years older than I and I'd never seen a picture of her as a young person.

A few years ago I got involved with the Ellington Historical Society after visiting the museum and discovering that the curator was my old school classmate, Nancy Long. Since I live in Massachusetts, I couldn't be that involved in day-to-day activities, so I decided to do projects I could do on line or at home.

I had inherited my aunt's Rockville High School (RHS) yearbooks and realized that some of her classmates had lived in Ellington, so I scanned her yearbooks and then looked up her classmates in the census to find out which ones had lived in Ellington. Next I started searching for students in other years, besides the years Aunt Katy was at RHS. I looked in the online Hartford Courant Archives and found articles announcing graduates from many of the early years. I remembered seeing the yearbooks at the Vernon Historical Society way back when and returned to see what yearbooks were available. To my delight, they had a near complete collection of yearbooks from 1927 on. Over many months, I returned to VHS to scan more yearbooks -- and returned home to divide the scanned pages into individual portraits and then to look up each student in the census to find out which town he or she came from. Of course I often found out the students were from other towns and it seemed silly to throw away that information. So I kept track of all RHS students, whatever town they were from. I think this work took about three years.

I chose to end my study with the year 1950 even though Ellington students continued to go to RHS until 1959 because census records are only available up to 1940 (the 1950 census will be released in 2022). With all the moving around people do, the further you get from a census

year, the less likely you are to find an accurate address for a person. For the 1959 graduates, they might not even have been born at the time of the 1940 census. In spite of this, I would like to continue the project to 1959 at some point, but the later classes are much larger and take a long time to process, so I'm not making any promises!

Some interesting things I have learned from doing this project are: it was common for many more women than men to graduate in the early years; towns that sent students to RHS varied over the years and included Somers, Enfield, East Windsor, Tolland, and even Willington; the age of graduates varied widely—many students were as young as 16 and others were as old as 28.

It was not uncommon for families who had two children close in age to have them start school the same year so they could travel to school together. Our own Mildred Dimock started school a year early so she could go with her sister Winifred. The first two graduates (class of 1873) were brothers, who were four years apart! Both of them went on to have very successful careers, one as a Greek scholar at Yale and the other as a lawyer who practiced in New Jersey. Rockville High got off to a good start!

I thank the Vernon Historical Society for having such a great yearbook collection and the VHS staff for their assistance throughout the project. Volunteer Jim Ashe went way out of his way to help me find graduates names in old Rockville newspapers for the very early years when the Hartford Courant did not yet list graduates. The project was really a joint project between the Ellington and Vernon historical societies.

Upcoming meetings

Thursday, April 23, 7:00 p.m. at the Hall Memorial Library



Arnie Pritchard performs "*This Business of Fighting*," a live performance story, based on Tony Pritchard's letters to his parents in Rhode Island between his sailing for Europe in February 1944 and Germany's surrender about fifteen months later. You will hear him describe crawling through the freezing, snow-covered woods of the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge. You will hear about crowds of released forced laborers wandering the roads of Germany as the Nazi regime was collapsing. You will hear about women desperately trying to preserve their homes as the tide of battle washes over them.

Thursday, June 25, 6:30 p.m. at the Hall Memorial Library--Potluck supper and annual elections (Members Only). Visit our web site at <http://www.ellingtonhistsoc.org>