



# The Bethel Lark

The quarterly newsletter of the Bethel Historical Society

History...Without it you don't exist!



Vol. 2

Summer 2013 - Bethel, CT

Issue 2 (6)

## Why the Shepaug Railroad is Not Really The Shepaug

### Presentation Explains Why We've All Been Calling the Rail by the Wrong Name



You're running through the woods with a bunch of friends - it's a Thursday afternoon after school or a Saturday when there isn't a care in the world. As you cascade down a hillside, the growth so dense you can't see the road a few hundred feet ahead, a stone and brick archway rises up out of the ground in front of you.

There's no road on either side (and besides the top of the arch and tunnel is too narrow for a roadway) but it's a sturdy bridge and one that's obviously been there a long time - especially seeing how overgrown it has become. It becomes apparent that you've discovered a long-lost train bridge built some time in the distant past.

And with that, you want to learn everything you can about the trains that ran through the area. You keep learning even thirty years later because that's what happens when, as a kid, you get out into the world and have adventures.

(As an aside... These are the things being missed out on with television and video games and the internet - the sense of adventure which leads to discoveries that have long been forgotten. It's just not the same when it is spotted in a satellite image from Google Maps, now is it?)

As you continue that learning, and discovery, and sharing your story with everybody who has an interest in trains, eventually, the local historical society asks you to share everything you know with anybody who wants to attend.

So goes a bit of the back story on how Christopher Robert Lewis began to search and research, gather and trace the history of the railway that most of us have always heard referred to as the Shepaug Railroad...but as we all came to learn at this event, while there are certainly many reasons that everybody called it the Shepaug...the Shepaug was actually a train line that ran in a different part of the state.

Using a combination of stories, experiences, research from books and other sources, photographs, old railway maps, and more, the presentation consisted of stories told with the background of a number of informative slides divided into three sections: Why was it there? What happened to it? Where did it run?

The "Why was it there?" section provided the fascinating answer as to why the Shepaug has been existing under this mis-moniker for so long. Sharing photographs of the trains that used to run from Bethel to Hawleyville there was a common thread painted on the side of each train - Shepaug. However, while they were the company that owned the trains, they were never the folks who owned



Using a photo from the 1940s, Christopher Lewis points out the train from Bethel to Hawleyville passed mere feet in front of the 1842 2nd Meeting House on Main Street where the presentation was taking place.

the tracks. In fact the owner of the tracks changed multiple times during the existence of the line.

The "What happened to it?" section is the mystery portion of the event - and while this writer will allow for the reveal of why the Shepaug isn't really the Shepaug, it wouldn't be prudent to reveal all of the secret's of Bethel's trains...for then what reason would you have to attend the next Railroading Through Bethel event when the research still being poured over and sifted through, is completed? That's the thing about history - there's always more to find.

As for the "Where did it run?" portion, this was illustrated with photos such as the one seen above, images that compared the then and now of certain locations, and of course the infamous treasure of the lone known image of the train trestle that used to run over Wooster St just north of what is now P.T. Barnum Square. Now the exploration begins to find a photograph of the trestle that ran over Milwaukee Ave.

This is but a brief report of an afternoon filled with wander and wonder, from the comic strip Calvin & Hobbes to secret locations where the Shepaug-not-Shepaug still exist (even if on

a smaller scale). Yet, while there is still much to unearth, the question still remains,...what \*should\* we name this section of fallen flag track that holds such interest and legend in our town?

article by Marc Moorash  
photos by Lynn Keeler Fisher



Christopher Lewis answers questions from the rapt and inquisitive crowd of over sixty people.

# The Bethel Lark

is published by

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## Town Historian

Patrick T. Wild

Founded in the 1950's

The Bethel Historical Society is an independent, non-profit organization made up of a group of people dedicated to preserving Bethel's history through acquisitions and conservation of property, artifacts and stories. The Society is dedicated to the education of the people of Bethel and surrounding communities.

Monthly programs are presented on varied historical subjects. Also offered are programs geared toward the education of children such as monthly historical craft classes, Walking Tours of Bethel and a Child's Victorian Christmas Tea.



# The Bethel Lark

Text Editor.....Marc Moorash  
Photo Editor.....Ava Dawn Heydt  
Design by.....Seraphemera Books  
(www.seraphemera.org)

The Bethel Lark is always looking for contributions on historical tales and travels within the sphere of Bethel CT and her surrounds.

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# The President's Perspective



Dear Members and Future Members,

The Bethel Historical Society held its Annual Meeting on May 5th with the following people elected to the Executive Board: Patricia Rist, President; Lillian Emmons, 1st Vice President; Mary Ferri, 2nd Vice President, Jeffrey Pagelson, Treasurer; and Kitty Grant, Secretary. Board Directors include: Gary Boughton, Krista Fiorini, Marc Moorash, David Rist, Rob Sauber and Molly Rollison. Gerry Herrmann stepped down, due to health reasons, and we want to thank him for his tremendous work and support during his time on the board. His seat is currently open and if you are interested in preserving Bethel's history and would like to work with us, please contact me. Another special thank you is due to Patrick T. Wild for his support of the Society as Bethel's Town Historian.

We recently completed our 18th tour for all Bethel 2nd Graders and are honored to be asked back year-after-year. Thank you to Don Taylor, Ed Rockwell and Leroy Staib and the Plumtrees School Association for opening up the one-room school house and speaking with the children about the building's history and their own personal remembrances of their school days spent in this historic structure. This year's tour had a new addition to it, "The Bethel Little Lark". This is a newsletter, written just for children, created by Marc Moorash and Ava Heydt. Thank you both.

Christopher Lewis, a Historical Society member, presented Why the Shepaug Railroad is not the Shepaug Railroad, a fascinating history and continuing mystery of the Bethel to Hawleyville train line. It was an exciting and informative presentation with a lot of new information and

new maps with about 65 people in attendance. Thank you, Chris. I'm pleased to say Chris will be presenting this again, in the Fall, at the Danbury Railway Museum; watch for the date.

Patrick T. Wild, Bethel's Town Historian, on June 8th, completed an engaging historical walking tour of Center Cemetery located on South Street. Comments included: "Fabulous", "wonderful time", "Pat has a plethora of knowledge and is so willing to share this knowledge." "Pat brought all the bits of information together for a wonderful tour." "Pat is a fabulous story teller." Thank you, Pat.

Rededication of the Challenger Plaque. Our rededication of this plaque was postponed to a future date until we could remove it from the ground, which is now complete, and move it to a spot where it can be appreciated by everyone. I'm sure you are saying "what plaque?" which is why I'm reaching out. If you have any information about the original dedication of this plaque, I would like to hear from you.

Watch for our next event on July 5th at 5:00 p.m. in front of the Bethel Public Library - P.T. Barnum's Birthday Celebration and Crazy Hat Contest. Hope to see you there with your Crazy Hat!

I would be remiss if I did not reach out again regarding Memberships. Thank you to all who have renewed your 2013 memberships. If your mailing label shows the year 2013 it means your membership is due. I hope you will consider renewing your membership and join others who value what we can learn from the past. You can download the Membership Form at bethelhistoricalsociety.com.

Until next time,  
Patricia Rist



The Bethel Museum of the Bethel Historical Society is generally open once per month, for a few hours on a Saturday or Sunday. The schedule is on our website. Follow the elephants!

# A Walk Through one of the Center(s) of Bethel History

**Town Historian Patrick T. Wild Brings Back the Walking Tour of Center Cemetery**



The skies closed back up, the sun came out and allowed for a contingent of about thirty history lovers & story seekers to hear tales as can only wonderfully be spun by Patrick T. Wild.

It is often we hear variations and takes on the metaphor that the dead still speak long after they are living. Of course, for those of us of a certain vintage, we might counter with the fact that dead men tell no tales. Regardless of which is the more truthful of the fortunes, what is without a doubt a fact is that if those who have passed are going to continue to provide their stories to our ears, they'll need a translator and a storyteller who can paint a picture of a time that is different from our own. When Bethel's Town Historian Patrick Tierney Wild is leading a tour of a place as full of history as is Bethel's Center Cemetery, these needs are met, and oh what films are played in the mind.

Throughout the two-hour tour (undertaken in conjunction with Connecticut Open House Day - a yearly event that organizes museums, galleries, and other historical and artistic tours along with reduced admission for the afternoon - did you come visit the Bethel Museum? Did you know that the Bethel Historical Society was the only Bethel organization to take part in this celebration?), the visit covered fifty graves from the largest in the cemetery - Bethel hatter Orrin Benedict who owned some of the largest hat factories in town and lived

in a now-demolished enormous Victorian in Grassy Plain to the Gilbert Brothers (Philo, Eli & Henry) who built most of the Victorian homes that we still see around Bethel today.

For this writer, one of the more interesting tales is that of Hiram Weed who served for a period as Secretary of State for Connecticut. While one would expect that the Governor and Lieutenant Governor would attend his funeral, what seems to defy the mind's imagination when looking around the yard as the tour continues, is to think that news reports of the day (and when we think of 1850, and the available methods of travel, and the size of the population...for the 1860 census reported Bethel to have one thousand seven hundred and eleven people) estimate that between twenty-five hundred and three thousand people attended the send off. What an event that must have been!

Some of the other names that would be familiar would be the numerous members of the Seelye family who are buried there, as well as John Greenwood for which, Bethel's main street (but not Main St - which is possibly named after Mr. and Mrs. Main although we're not entirely certain) was renamed. But why settle for just the known names when there are also so many lesser-known curiosities to be uncovered?

So, to pass the time until the next tour, stop by any of our events and find yourself a copy of the little tour booklet that each traveler was given as a memento. While you won't get the stories that are passed down to each ear, you'll get a taste and a bug in the ear (how's that for a curiosity of metaphor) to make certain you keep the ear to the ground (yes, Dear Reader, your humble writer is carrying the ear metaphor too far) for the next time this tour will travel back in time.

article by Marc Moorash  
photos by Gary Boughton



Graves visited included Barnum (PT's mother, not he), Benedict, Bailey, Baird, and others whose names did not start with 'B'.



The tour stops at the interestingly shaped marker of Leonard M. Huse (1874-1899) and his wife Sarah (1873-1959).



The centerpiece of the tour is the Civil War Monument championed by Charles Bailey.

**OPEN  
HOUSE  
DAY** SAT 8  
JUNE 8  
Connecticut

# Lost Names and Memories Remembered - Part 1

## Up on a Hillside in Bethel a Third Generation Learns of a Family's History and Adventures

article and photographs by  
Paul R. Abrams Jr.

When I was a boy of around seven or eight, I used to love to listen to old stories my Grandfather, Lester Abrams, Sr. would tell. He always had plenty of interesting and fun stories to share about town, as he was born here in 1913, and lived in Bethel for his entire life of eighty six years. As I look back on his life and the many different changes that he and Bethel experienced, I realize those experiences would be enough to fill an entire book. Here is one story I would like to share.

As my Grandfather and I would drive down Plumtrees Road, I would point out to him the graffiti on the face of a rock that was set atop the mountain directly behind the Bethel Police Department. I had always called the rock Eighty Rock because that was the current year and The Bethel High School seniors proudly advertised this on the rock for all to see. Most of the kids at that time called the rock Eagle Rock, but I was informed by my Grandfather that both of those names were incorrect. He proceeded to tell me that the correct name of that large rock was Owl's Rock. He also told me that there were two other rocks up there on that mountain, one named Crow's Rock and the other Bee's Rock. I asked him how he knew that, and he said because he had been up there many times.

He started to tell me stories of hunting and trapping in East Swamp which is located directly below the mountain. He also told me how he would collect honey from a bee hive located somewhere on the mountain. These things were done I learned, not for sport or recreation, but to help support his family during the Great Depression. Something that seems incomprehensible to me today.

By then I knew I had to go up to the top of that mountain and see Owl's Rock for myself. I asked him if he would take me up to the top and he said yes. How exciting for an eight year old boy as I was about to go on a great adventure with my very experienced Grandfather.

At the time of my Grandfather's youth the only way to get up to Owl's Rock was to hike up from the bottom. Not a very easy undertaking. We, however, decided to take a slightly easier route. It was at this time they were just starting to build Plumtrees Condominiums, so we drove in, as far as we could, and hiked up the rest of the way. This of course was after a stop at Mister Donut for a thermos full of hot chocolate and some donuts.

As we hiked for what seemed like hours, we finally came to our first stop. It was Bee's Rock. To my amazement not only was the rock pretty cool, but there were names carved into it! Most of the names were limited to initials or a first initial and last name. The dates carved into this rock varied some, but most were from around the Civil War era. The earliest visible date is 1821 and the latest is 1901. I did not realize the true historical value of these carvings until much later on in my life.



On a hillside overlooking Bethel, the author snaps a photograph of his son, now the third generation to travel up the ledge to view the historical legacy recorded there.

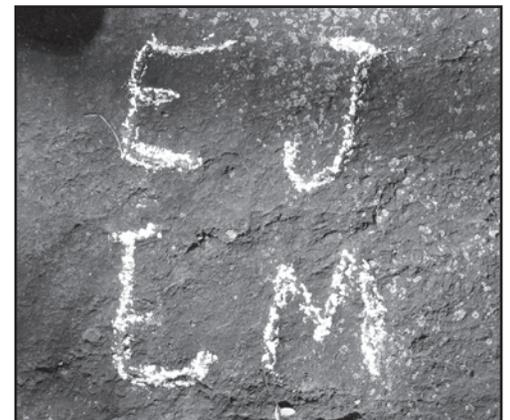
We continued our hike and eventually wound up at Owl's Rock. To say that it was and is an amazing view from Owl's Rock is an understatement! We would sit and look at different points in town with binoculars and try to figure out exactly what we were looking at. This, of course, was while we enjoyed our hot chocolate and donuts. My Grandfather would point out certain landmarks such as Ivy Island and he would share with me old legends about how people had jumped off of Owl's Rock though I still don't know why. We ended by carving our initials into a birch tree and heading back down the mountain. A great day indeed!

That would be the first of many trips I would make up to Owl's Rock both with and without my Grandfather. It also became much easier to get to, as you now could park a car at the newly built Birchwood Condominiums on top of Shelter Rock and follow a trail right to the rock. As time went on though, my trips dwindled until they eventually stopped all together.

I had all but forgotten about Owl's Rock and Bee's Rock especially the carvings, until one day while driving to work, I noticed something didn't quite look right on top of the mountain. Could it be that someone was building on the very edge of Owl's Rock? That was exactly what was happening and then it all came back to me. I thought about the names etched in those rocks and how it would be a shame to lose something of such historical importance. After all, these were people from our

community, many generations ago, that had left their mark on the landscape. Plus, the fact that many of these individuals could have been directly related to the Civil War, made them even more important. I knew that something needed to be done to prevent the loss of these historical markings.

A few months later, I talked to some people from the Historical Society who encouraged me to try and locate the markings once again. It had been all of twenty years since I had seen them last, so I wasn't sure what to expect. This time I decided to take my 7 year old son, Kyle with me who had never been up to the rocks and he was very excited. We took everything that one might need



Some of the many initials that have been traced to Civil War soldiers from Bethel.

# Lost Names and Memories Remembered - Part 2

## In Which We Learn the Stories and Legends of Crow's Rock, Bee's Rock, and Owl Rock

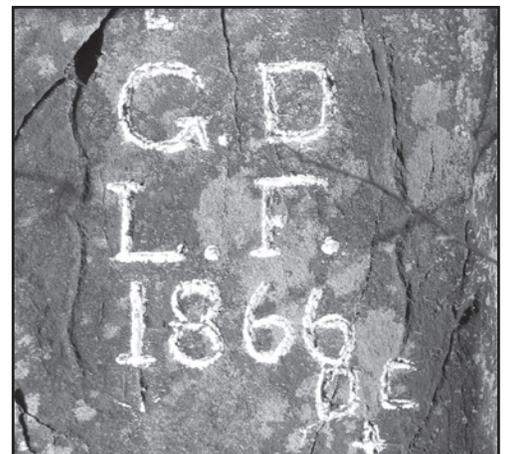
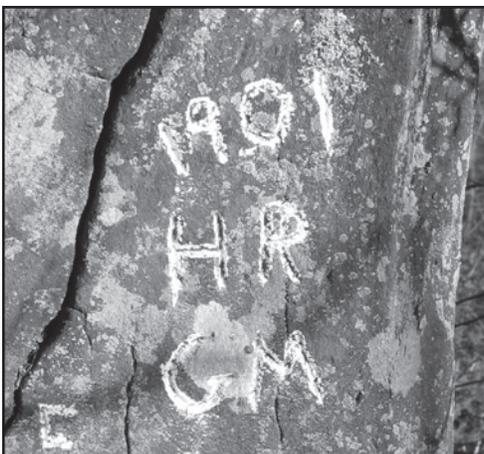
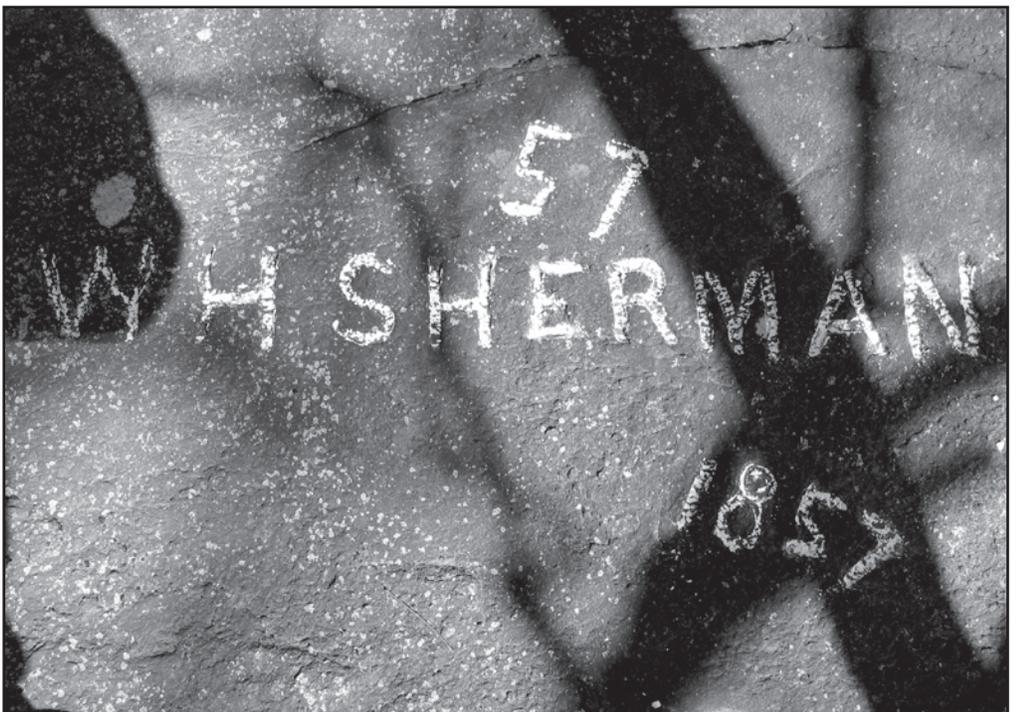
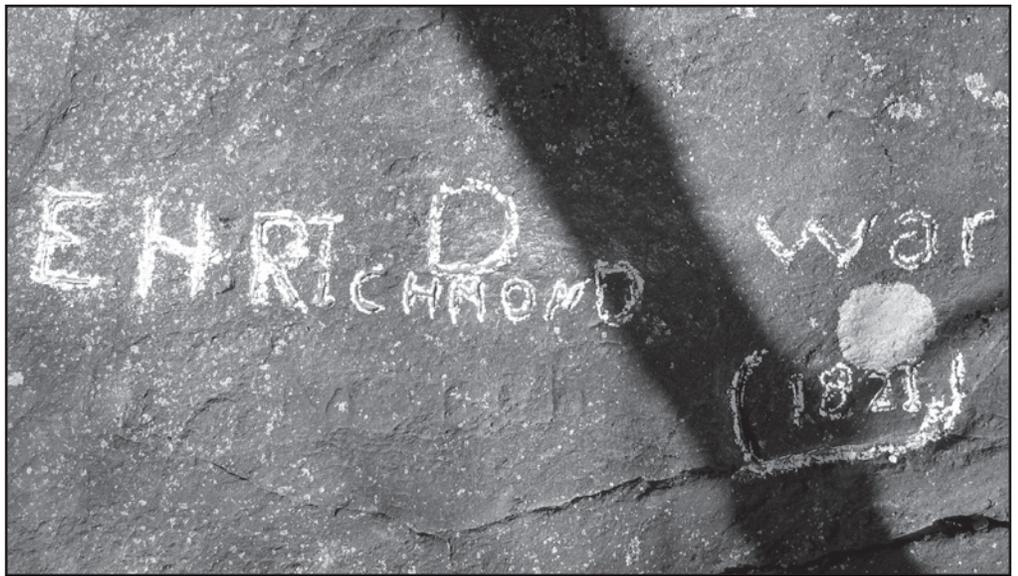
for such an expedition including a camera, chalk, water, binoculars, and, of course, hot chocolate and donuts.

We started out on our adventure early one Sunday morning. This time it was much easier to get to as we could drive and park right up at the top of the mountain in the new development. We were soon at Owl's Rock and the look on my sons face was, I am sure, the same as mine when I first went with my Grandfather over thirty years ago. We took in the view and took many pictures. I even told some of the same stories to Kyle that my Grandfather had told to me. After hot chocolate and donuts, we carved our initials into a tree just as my Grandfather and I had done. I even re-carved my Grandfather's initials as kind of a tribute to him. I was saddened however, because I knew that this would probably be the last time that we could come to the rocks as the new development was going to restrict our access. We gathered our things and were off to find Bee's Rock and the initials that were carved into it.

It wasn't long before we located Bee's Rock and found the initials. After thirty five plus years of being exposed to the elements, they looked exactly the same as when I first saw them. I proceeded to chalk and photograph all visible markings on the rock and I was also able to determine through sign postings, that the rock was actually on state land. This was a good thing as I was concerned that the new condominium development would destroy or cover the rock area, and it would be lost forever. With the photographing done, we packed up and headed home with a good sense of accomplishment in our hearts.

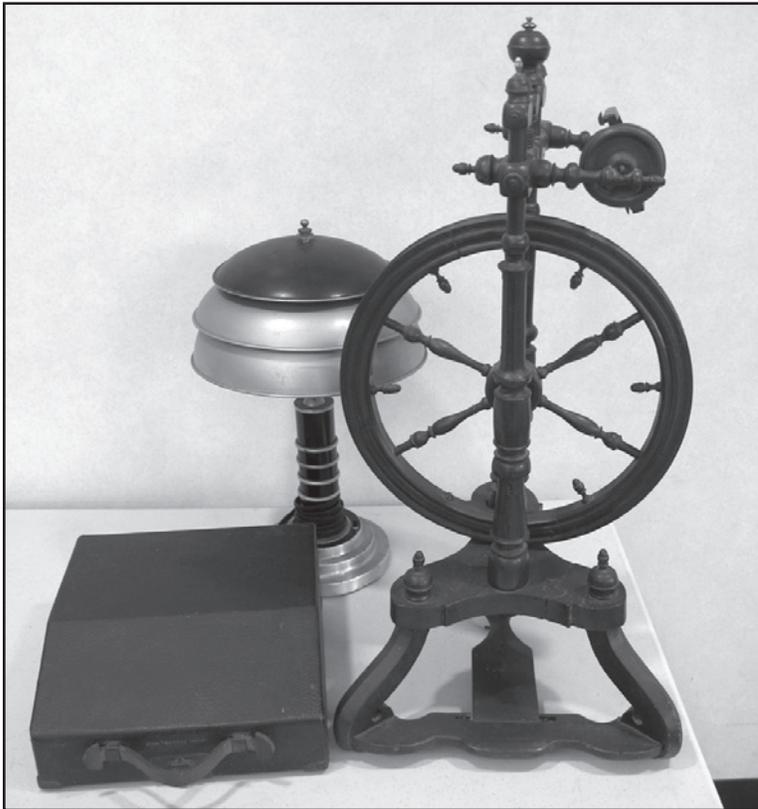
I subsequently contacted Patricia Rist, President of the Bethel Historical Society and Pat Wild, the Town of Bethel Historian about my current findings in regards to the initials. I sent them the photographs that I took and conveyed the fact that I was pretty certain that the rock in question was on state land. There was discussion on what should actually be done to preserve the initials and the rock location, and it was determined that the best course of action would be to just leave the area alone. Due to the fact that the rock is located on the side of a mountain, makes it a potentially very dangerous area to visit. There was talk of obtaining an easement to maintain access to the site and that is still something that may happen in the future. It has not been discussed, but maybe the images could be blown up and possibly put on display at the Bethel Historical Society for all to enjoy. It would definitely be a safer experience for everyone.

The pursuit of finding these initials again has taken me full circle. The experience has conjured up memories and images of my childhood and has allowed me to pass on these experiences to my son. It has also given me the opportunity to have hopefully preserved a small piece of our local history. I am sure that the individuals who made these carvings would never have guessed that we would be looking at them almost one hundred and fifty years later!



# Better Than the Antiques Roadshow, Here in Bethel

A Glimpse of the Annual Appraisal Day at the Stony Hill Fire Department With Jay St. Mark PhD



photos by Rob Sauber



We're looking for vendors for...

## The 2013 Bethel 2nd Meeting House Artisans & Vendors Festival

**"A Celebration of Neat Stuff!!!"**

*An afternoon of vendors, artisans & craftsfolk,  
who celebrate the vintage, the handmade  
& the beautiful*

**Saturday October 5th, 2013  
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at the beautiful 1842 2nd Meeting House  
40 Main St. Bethel CT**

For more information please contact:

Pat Rist (info@bethelhistoricalsociety.com or 203-743-5893)  
Marc Moorash (marc@bethelhistoricalsociety.com or 832-515-9539)

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# History's Story is Rarely Complete

## A Plate, A Traveling Pastor, and a Stamp - Part 2

In the last issue of The Bethel Lark we began the tale of a child's prayer plate, and the curiosity of the "Bethel Conn" maker's mark on the back. Here we exhaust our knowledge if not so much conclude the tale.

First, a little bit more about the plate in Rev. Applegath's own words. From an April 29th, 1955 article in the Indiana (Pennsylvania) Gazette:

"I wanted an appropriate prayer to go with the picture" continued Rev. Applegath, peering through gold-rimmed glasses at one of the plates.

"I didn't find a suitable prayer in the books, so I wrote one. It is, "Our Father, we thank Thee for this food. God bless us and all Thy hungry children everywhere. Amen."

"The prayer is designed so that little children would learn to sympathize with hungry children of the world. Basically the cause of the world's problems is hunger. That's what causes wars. If you don't have any hungry children, you may not have wars."

The key to the mystery came in the most unlikely of places - The August 2010 issue of Muskoka Magazine and an article entitled "Reviving Chautauqua" written by Patrick Boyer: "Then the big step forward occurred in 1921. While honeymooning on Tobin Island, Applegath and his bride Edna Lightle of Port Hope became enchanted by the Waskada Inn where they were staying. The property spread over 218 magnificent acres. It ran along more than two miles of spectacular shoreline. The view from the inn's hexagonal towers atop its rocky summit was one of Canada's finest."

Now, with the first reference to the name of his wife, a quick search brings us her obituary and finally a reference to Bethel:

*Edna Applegath - Lived In Bethel - December 01, 1994*

*Edna Applegath, a longtime Bethel resident whose husband was a minister at churches*

*in Meriden and Middlefield, died Tuesday at the McKerley Health Care Center in Keene, N.H. She was 98.*

*Mrs. Applegath was born in Port Hope, Ontario, Canada, and was married to the Rev. Charles S. Applegath in 1921. She handled the role of minister's wife at Methodist churches in Port Hope and Hamilton, Ontario; Beaver Falls, Pa.; Ashland and Ashtabula, Ohio; Indiana; and Meriden and Middlefield.*

*Her husband died in 1958, and Mrs. Applegath later lived in Bethel, and Newtown.*

*She is survived by four children, Hope Werner of Naples, Fla., Douglas Applegath of Midland, Mich., and Ruth DeLaney and John Applegath of West Swanzey, N.H.*

*She will be buried Saturday in Bethel, where she lived for 19 years. Remembrances may be sent to the United Methodist Church in Bethel.*

What we see then is that not long after Rev. Applegath created his plate, he passed away. There must have been enough of a demand for the plate that it was reprinted, seemingly multiple times. Mrs. Applegath must have found her way to Bethel and eventually had more plates made. So, while the plate did not originate here, it did have its home here for a while.

The next steps, one supposes, would be to try and contact any of the surviving children or by now, more likely, grandchildren, and see if any stories of the plate were passed down. Also, a trip over to the Methodist Church is in order for while the Rev. Applegath never presided over a congregation here, maybe there's some record through Edna's involvement in the church.

Maybe then at some point there will be a part three to this article, but for now, we'll end our search and tale.

P.S. See the plate on display in the Bethel Museum!  
article by Marc Moorash

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

Friday July 5th, 2013 - 5:00pm

### Barnum's Birthday Party & Crazy Hat Contest

This is a FREE, all ages, event! Join us at the big bronze Barnum at the Bethel Public Library for a rousing round of Happy Birthday, refreshments, and the 2nd annual crazy-beautiful-awesome-spectacular humbug hat contest with prizes in multiple categories to both kids and adults! Top hat cookies and cakes and who knows what other entertainments on what is becoming Bethel's own unique way of celebrating both her favorite son and the founding of America.



Monday August 19th through

Friday August 23rd, 2013

### Kids Colonial Summer Camp

What was it like to be a kid in 18th century Colonial Bethel?

To have played games as colonial children did? To have made toys and books? Come spend five mornings with us and find out! Children will experience activities reminiscent of life in the 1700s, including craft projects, games, butter making, a visit inside Plumtrees School House to learn what school was like, a trip to Holbrook Farm to learn about working on a farm and much more. Come dressed for colonial times! Snacks and supplies included in fees. Please bring a bagged lunch.

Activities in the field behind Plumtrees School House.  
\$150.00/\$135.00 (mem. discount)  
Space is limited - Paid reservations required by July 15th, 2013

### Thanks to Our New Members!

Katie Danise  
David & Emily Mancusi  
Colleen Plimpton  
Sandra Wilkins

PAGE 8— THE DISPATCH, LEXINGTON, N. C., T



GIVING THANKS — The Rev. Charles S. Applegath says grace with small companion, reading from prayer plates.

### Parents M

DOROTHY V. WHIPP  
AP Newsfeature

Ray was 13 and in .J School. He had done through the elementar but for the past year had been slipping badly in mathematics was poor, and there was gr he would fail the course. His teacher said he wa boy, but that he just attention in class; h dreamy and lazy. He al brought in a completed assignment.

His mother brought h a complete physical ex

Belk - Mc



A much younger photograph of C.S. Applegath from the Meriden Daily Journal on April 6th 1938

A photograph of C.S. Applegath from The Dispatch, out of Lexington North Carolina on June 7th, 1956

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Friday July 5th at 5:00pm at the Bethel Public Library out by the Barnum statue. Free event. All Ages! Refreshments, prizes for best hats, a rousing Happy Birthday to Barnum & more...

Some of the hidden history of Bethel as seen through the eyes of a family's adventures...



-- The Bethel Historical Society Museum will be open the following dates and times:  
Open from 2:00pm - 4:00pm on Sat. July 20th, Sun. August 18th & Sat. September 14th  
-- We're Now on Facebook! Like us at - [facebook.com/bethelhistoricalsociety](https://facebook.com/bethelhistoricalsociety)

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