

THE HAMDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2017



Quinnipiac University Demolishes Historic Homes

Back in August 2016, Quinnipiac University announced that it planned to demolish approximately a dozen homes along Whitney Avenue between Ives Street and Mt. Carmel Avenue. Among these were many that were of historical significance. These included: No. 3217, one of Hamden's few surviving pre-Revolutionary homes, built by Ezra Dickerman, who served on the New Haven Committee of Inspection during the Revolution; this was also the home of a famed Civil War hero; No. 3235, built in 1875, in the Italianate style, by Elam Dickerman, train stationmaster and general store owner; No. 3335, built by Alfred Vick in 1890; No. 3341, built in 1875 by Joseph Miller; No. 3369, built by carpenter and joiner Orin Todd c. 1815, which has been called the "finest surviving Federal home" in Hamden by former municipal historian Martha Becker; No. 3367, the old Cheshire Toll House, which formerly stood on the other side of the street, is an extremely rare example of a utilitarian structure dating from c. 1800.

All of these structures, which we recently learned, were on the Connecticut Inventory of Historic Buildings, and the Todd House and Toll House are on the National Registry of Historic Places.

The Historical Society, in conjunction with the Hamden Historic Properties Commission and the Westwoods Neighborhood Association, objected to these demolitions and invoked a ninety-day delay. The university has proved very reluctant to negotiate, and only verbal promises were received that, first, a "few" would possibly be saved, then three. We were especially saddened to see the Ezra Dickerman House taken down, because of initial promises that it would be spared. As of now, only two—the Todd House and the Toll House—are still standing, but they have ominous "Demolition" signs on them.

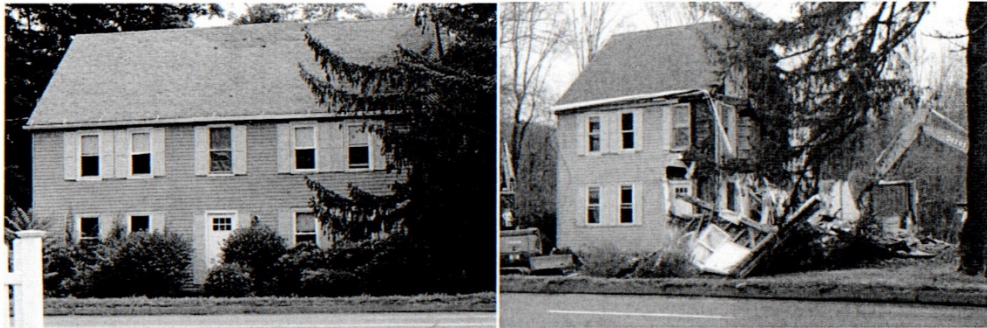
The Historical Society and Historic Properties Commission have been trying to get permission from the university to allow a team of historical consultants from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation into these structures, so that they can assess their conditions and make practical recommendations about their renovation and reuse. Thus far, however, the university, though its representatives know that these consultants are standing by, has not responded.

The Historical Society sponsored a petition to provide an opportunity for citizens to voice opposition. Nearly a thousand people signed this petition, and copies were sent to Quinnipiac University, to Mayor Leng, and to the Connecticut State Office of Historic Preservation. Apparently, to no avail.

Is the university acting according to the law? Yes, it is. It owns the real estate and has provided the required legal announcements. But is it acting like a caring member of this community? Unfortunately not; instead, it shows little concern for the way it is unilaterally changing the area and wiping out its history. Is it acting in good faith? We feel that is not the case.

We have the option to institute a law suit under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act. Obviously we would rather not do that; we would rather like to find a way to have open discussions about how to save, re-purpose, or, if need be, re-locate the Todd House and the Toll House. The university may disingenuously object that they cannot spend student tuitions on such projects, yet, as Municipal Historian Dave Johnson points out, they have not hesitated to buy up property after property at greatly inflated values. Experts and resources are available to the university, if they will only be receptive. Surely everyone, from a university to a resident, has a voice in how the neighborhood that they share should adapt to change.

We encourage members of the Historical Society, or anyone who values Hamden's heritage and the integrity of its community, to write to Salvatore Filardi, QU's Vice President for Facilities, at salvatore.filardi@quinnipiac.edu, to Mayor Leng, to local newspapers and online feeds. Make your opinions known and support the preservation of Hamden's history.



The Ezra Dickerman House (No.3217)



UPCOMING EVENTS for Spring 2017

March 25 Renaming and dedication of the HHS Room
3:00-4:30 p.m. Miller Memorial Library
(article below)

April 11 Joseph Plum Martin: Hero at Yorktown
7:00-8:30 p.m. Mt. Carmel Congregational Church
(description below)

April 22 Walking Tour
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Eli Whitney Museum
(summary below)

Stay in touch.....special events being planned for May through August 2017.

Go to: hamdenhistoricalsociety.org

From the History Room, Beth Shutts-Archivist

As I write this I am in the midst of preparing the *Al Gorman Collection* for the dedication of the History Room on **March 25 from 3:00-4:30**.

To an archivist, the arrival of boxes of papers and other “old stuff” is a treasure hunt. The process of gleaning the interesting, historic and valuable is a tough one because almost everything is interesting, historic and valuable. Archival procedures dictate that personal papers stay intact as a collection. So when going through Al’s boxes, it was a challenge to resist the impulse to remove and the document on the Farmington Canal, or the one on slavery in Hamden. Instead, as thin as the papers in a file may be, they stay together, just as they were when Al saved them.

Besides what would you expect from the President of our Society (minutes, financial reports). Al saved clippings about the Ghost Parking Lot, scenic bridges, the Linton printing press and more. It’s all here, I’ve preserved it for you.

Our collection of HHS newsletters is fairly complete, but if members of the Society have been saving their copies and would like to donate them it could help fill some of the gaps we have. And duplicates will be tossed, just to let you know before you donate. If this is a concern, I could make a photocopy of issues we need and return them to you

And as always, when cleaning out your attic, or downsizing, please remember to pass on any Hamden-related items you may not need anymore. I would especially like to expand our collection on Hamdenites and their military service.

Joseph Plumb Martin: Hero at Yorktown

On **April 11, 2017**, Tim Chaucer, a retired history teacher from Hamden High School will portray Joseph Plumb Martin, considered a hero at Yorktown during the American Revolution.

Martin grew up in Connecticut and is sometimes referred to as the most famous private in the American Continental Army. He witnessed General Washington on several occasions. Martin’s descriptions of constant hunger at Valley Forge earned him a modern trail named for him at Valley Forge, Pa. He wrote his memoirs later in life to remind Americans of the suffering that privates such as himself went through in order to win the war to guarantee our independence.

Mt. Carmel Congregational Church
7:00-8:30 p.m.

Eric Lehman will lead Walking Tour

As part of a special series exploring Connecticut's towns, our own author and Hamden Historical Society member Eric Lehman will be leading a walking tour on **Saturday, April 22 from 11 am to 1 pm**, beginning at the Eli Whitney Museum for adults and children 8 and above. A limited number of participants is necessary, so advance registration is required with a \$20 fee towards the

Connecticut Museum of Natural History. Sign up on their webpage, <http://www.cac.uconn.edu/mnhcurrentcalendar.html>.

The natural and cultural history of Connecticut, in each of its 169 towns, has a unique story to tell. From the indigenous peoples arriving after the glaciers receded and the European explorers and settlers establishing colonies in the "New World," to the innovators of the industrial revolution leading to the present day, Connecticut is steeped in history. Join us as we explore Connecticut's towns and learn about the people and places that have shaped and continue to shape the Constitution State.

In 1640, in what was the Colonial Colony of New Haven, William Fowler constructed a gristmill. The mill burned in 1662, was rebuilt, and remained in use until inventor Eli Whitney bought it in 1798 and built an Armory, manufacturing rifles for the United States Military. Now it's the location of the Eli Whitney Museum in the heart of Hamden's historic Whitneyville neighborhood.

Eli Whitney and his son helped build both Hamden and America, and their legacy of innovation and hard work is one that continues to astonish and inspire today.

Update on the Jonathan Dickerman House



The little red house and cider mill on Mt. Carmel Avenue, though they often sit quietly, are maintained and made available to visitors by the Hamden Historical Society. We have had to cut back on open hours during the summer, but even so we still see a regular stream of visitors, classes from local public schools, and even classes from Quinnipiac University guided through by dedicated docents headed by Lois Casey.

If you have passed by the house recently, you may have noticed that it is looking a little the worse for wear. Woodpeckers have made some holes in the siding, clapboarding has been damaged by moisture and exposure, and the exterior is badly in need of repair, caulking and new paint. We salute and thank Bob Zoni for all of his donated efforts to keep up repairs, but we cannot expect him to do it all. Happily, funds generously given recently in memory of our beloved past president, Al Gorman, provide a foundation on which to proceed with restoration. But they are not enough. We need your help to continue preserving and presenting this vital historical resource.

Please consider giving to the Jonathan Dickerman House Renovation Fund by sending a check to:
The Hamden Historical Society P.O. Box 5512 Hamden, CT 06518

2017 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

The Hamden Historical Society welcomes your membership, support and involvement. Our recent activities on behalf of preserving Hamden’s history and educating the public include:

- Maintaining and conducting tours of the historic Jonathan Dickerman House
- Acquiring, preserving and making available archives for research in the Al Gorman History Room at Miller Library
- Resisting Quinnipiac University’s efforts to destroy Hamden’s history;
- Cooperating with other organizations to promote Hamden’s historic and cultural legacy.

Now, we need your help!
Please give at any of the following levels:

- Annual Membership: \$15.00
- Family Membership: \$25.00
- Life Membership: \$500.00

Please also consider supporting the Historical Society’s mission by giving to either or both of the following initiatives integral to the Society’s mission:

- Jonathan Dickerman House Renovation Fund: \$25.00
- Al Gorman History Room Fund: \$25.00

I would like to speak to someone about making a bequest

Check the appropriate circles above and send your donations to
Hamden Historical Society
P.O. Box 5512
Hamden, CT 06518
And thank you for your consideration!

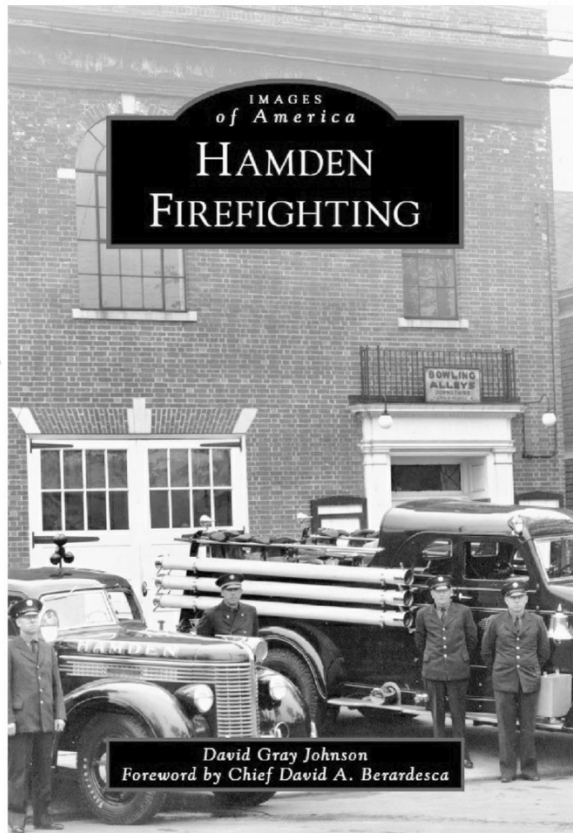
Name _____

Address _____

Tel. No. _____

Email _____

Check enclosed for: _____



Hamden Firefighting will be available by the end of this year from Arcadia Publishing as part of their popular *Images of America* series. The book will feature over 200 historic photos chronicling the history of the Hamden Fire Department, its career and volunteer companies, from 1896 to present.

NEWSLETTER
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