



# GUILFORD PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

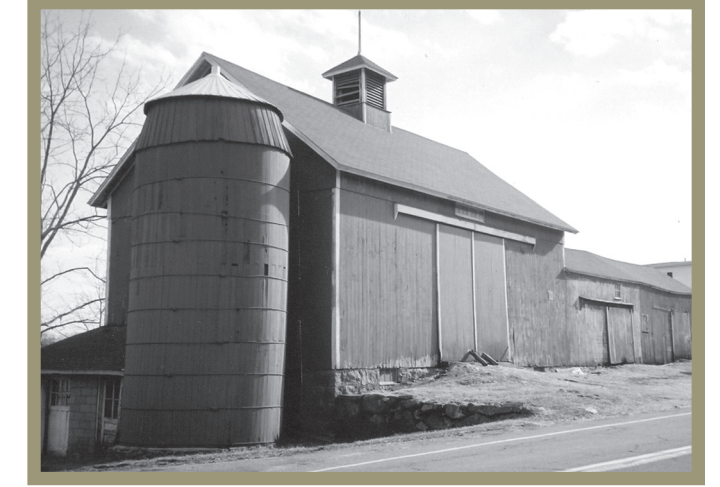
Newsletter

Fall 2008

## Taking Note of Guilford's Notable Barns

If you have recently noticed someone skulking about in your neighborhood taking pictures of barns, it is probably not a would-be burglar. More likely, it is a member of the GPA participating in the first-ever comprehensive survey of the town's surviving agricultural outbuildings. Our goal is to photograph every significant barn, carriage house, chicken coop, corn crib and similar structure in Guilford and to record as much historical information about it as possible.

The GPA's barn survey supplements our recently updated survey of historic houses, which can be consulted in the Historical Room at the Guilford Free Public Library. Now that the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation has embarked on an inventory of barns throughout the state, the



An old barn on Leetes Island Road

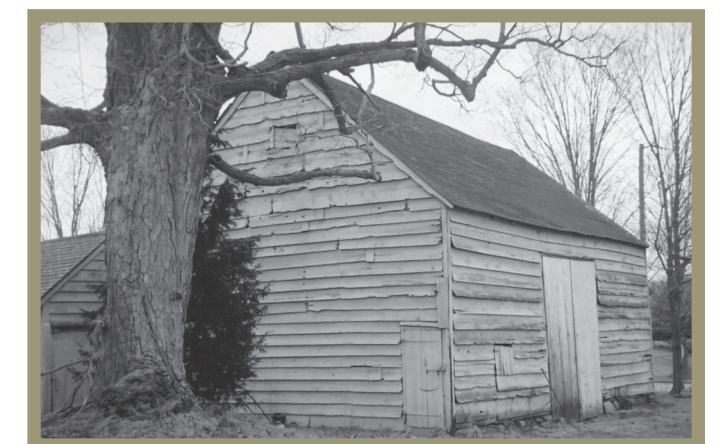
GPA board felt it was a good time for Guilford's barns to be counted and appreciated. The Trust is mainly concerned with historic barns, their architecture and purpose, and is not cataloging smaller outbuildings. The GPA's listings of Guilford barns will be added to the Trust's inventory, but we are also seeking information about any agricultural buildings, small or large.



Barn complex at 1592 West Street

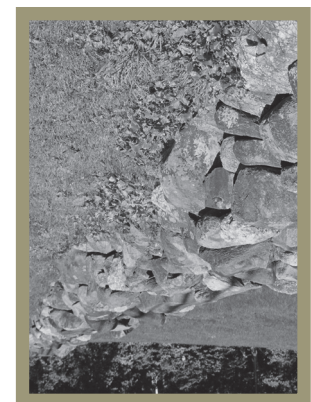
Both the GPA and the Connecticut Trust want to know approximately when a barn was built and its original purpose, in what ways it was used over the years, and its current function. Some Connecticut barns were built especially to store onions or potatoes, hang tobacco, or quarter sheep, but most were general-purpose barns designed to house farm animals, their food, and equipment necessary to the farm. Common styles include the so-called English barn, with the door located under the eaves; the New England barn, with the door under the gable; and the bank barn, dug into a hill, with two stories on one side and three on the other.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to discover the history of a barn, as records were not kept as carefully as they were for



The barn at 132 Three Mile Course

Stone Walls - see page 3  
Ellen Ebert photo



REMEMBER  
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## GPA's 2008 Awards

Each year the Preservation Alliance recognizes a number of individuals and organizations for their outstanding efforts to "preserve and protect the built and natural heritage of the town of Guilford." Ellen Ebert, chair of the awards committee, presented the 2008 awards at the GPA's well-attended annual meeting last June at the Dudley Farm.



First Selectman Carl Balestracci, Jr. received the Charles Hubbard Award in recognition of his longstanding commitment to historic preservation "through work of a scholarly nature or relating to the history of Guilford." As an elected official, educator, and private citizen, Carl over the years has contributed time, energy, and expertise to countless projects that have enriched our lives and helped keep Guilford in touch with its past.

Mark Miller, a local builder and history buff, received the Jane Berger Award for bringing new life to two modest frame houses in the center of town. One of them, at 335 Old Whitfield Street, was built in 1842 and belonged to a Civil War soldier. These beautifully restored private residences are enjoyed daily by hundreds of commuters passing through the adjacent Shoreline East railroad station.

Two groups received awards of merit for the sensitive restoration or creative reuse of existing buildings. The honorees were

Paul Mohor, Janie Umbricht, Carleton Voos, and Karen Voos, for rehabilitating their early-19th-century farmhouse at 1169 Long Hill Road; and Boston Street Real Estate Partners (Elizabeth Cook, Charlie Dear, Pamela Dear, Elizabeth Eden, Ethan Eden, Meredith Eden, and Gloria Gorton) for rehabilitating the stately Italianate residence at 58-60 Boston Street as office space.

Joe Ferrall, a member of the Guilford High School Class of 2008 and an enthusiastic Eagle Scout, received a hard-earned award of recognition for his volunteer work in repairing and repainting the white picket fence that runs along a stretch of River Street at the foot of Broad. The fence marks the boundary of Olmsted Outlook, a small public park owned and maintained by the Guilford Land Conservation Trust.

Finally, letters of appreciation were presented to Ruth Brooks and Bill Mack, for their quietly persistent efforts to enhance the quality of life for local residents by collecting litter along town roadways; and to Guy Esposito, owner of the Repellapest extermination company, for donating his services to several preservation projects, including the historic cider mill on River Street featured in our last newsletter.

To each and every one of these civic-spirited benefactors, the GPA's board of directors extends its heartiest congratulations and thanks.

— Harry Haskell



## Guilford's Historic Pest House

At 405 Tanner Marsh Road in Guilford stands what may be the oldest surviving “pest house” in the United States. The residents of the surrounding Clapboard Hill district contended with famine and severe weather, bears and wolves, Native Americans and British. During the last half of the eighteenth century, they faced an even deadlier foe: smallpox.

The scourge of colonists everywhere, smallpox is a virulent and highly contagious disease that once affected an estimated 60 percent of the world's population. One in ten of its victims died, and those who survived were often blinded or disfigured. Outbreaks of smallpox were frequently triggered by the homecomings of soldiers or mariners. That is what happened when the Fifth Company of the Second Connecticut Regiment under the command of Captain Ichabod Scranton of East Guilford returned from the French and Indian War in December 1760.

Scranton's company of seventy-four men had journeyed to Louisbourg, Nova Scotia, and from there to Ticonderoga, New York, in the service of the English king. On November 22, 1760, fifty-seven men were discharged in Albany, where they were exposed to smallpox. At least twenty-nine of these soldiers have been identified as Guilford men, so their route home brought them over the Boston Post Road, which passed near Clapboard Hill.

At a Guilford town meeting in April 1760, it was “voted that the Selectmen in behalf of the town and for their use purchase a lot of land belonging to Daniel Parmelee containing nine acres, and build a Pest House.” The deed was transacted in May for pastureland high on the west bank of the East River, set back deeply from the public road (today's Clapboard Hill Road). The timing of the vote suggests that the town had experienced a smallpox epidemic in 1759–1760, prior to the soldiers' arrival.

Pest Houses, named for their function as quarantine stations for persons with pestilential disease, were built in isolated areas of towns and cities across Connecticut. Their original purpose was to protect the healthy; care of the sick was a secondary function. State statutes empowered local selectmen

to quarantine persons suspected of spreading smallpox. Accordingly, the Guilford selectmen escorted Captain Scranton and the remnant of his company into quarantine before they could return to their homes.

The soldiers must have camped in the open because Pest House construction was delayed. Scranton's wife is said to have come to the eastern riverbank, opposite the encampment, to bid her husband goodbye. When he died on December 1, at age forty-three, Mrs. Scranton was heard to quote biblical verse: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Adna Crampton, another member of the company, died on December 15 and, like the captain, was laid to rest in the town's newly acquired quarantine lot.

Dead bodies ravaged by smallpox caused as much fear, ignorance, and superstition as the disease in live victims. Burials were conducted at night, when smallpox germs were believed to be least active. Tradition

relates that victims were wrapped in canvas, nearly thrown into the grave under flickering lantern light, and expeditiously covered with earth. Indeed, the family genealogy published in 1855 states that Captain Scranton was “buried in the night on Clapboard Hill.”

Sometime before 1775, the Pest House was eventually built, according to town meeting minutes. The quarantine lot in which the house stood had earned the sadly descriptive title of “Pock Lot” because smallpox survivors frequently bore permanent scarring called pocks, or pockmarks. Fortunately, survivors also developed an immunity to the disease. The realization that the smallpox virus could infect any individual only once led to the development of viral inoculation. This procedure, which became controversial because of its own mortality rate, induced a mild case of smallpox disease by infecting an incision with smallpox matter extracted from an actual pox pustule. As early as 1777, General George Washington ordered the inoculation of all new troops in the Connecticut Continental Army.

Because inoculation required strict quarantine, it became customary for half a dozen or more persons to submit to the procedure



*This is how the Pest House appeared in 1929, before the Theiss family made renovations. In form, the place has changed very little since its construction, circa 1765. Guilford Keeping Society*



*The W.F. Rogers family owned and lived in the Pest House from 1953 to 2003. In this view, Bill Rogers stands in front of his home, disguised by additions on all sides. Collection of Joel Helander*

## Stone Walls Make Good Neighbors

As development pressures continue to build and the price of native fieldstone soars, New England's old stone walls have become an increasingly marketable commodity. A number of Connecticut towns have already taken steps to preserve this iconic feature of our traditional landscape, but the majority of Guilford's stone walls remain vulnerable to theft, cannibalization, and neglect.

In his book, *Stone by Stone: The Magnificent History in New England's Stone Walls*, Professor Robert M. Thorson of the University of Connecticut makes a compelling argument for preventing the wholesale “strip-mining” of this irreplaceable resource. He cites a 1939 engineering survey, which estimated that New England had about 240,000 miles of stone walls at the end of the Civil War. (By comparison, China's so-called Great Wall is a mere 4,000 miles long!) Many of these walls have been dismantled or destroyed over the years, making it all the more important to extend some degree of protection to those that have survived intact.

How did Guilford's stone walls end up where they are now? As the forests were clear-cut in the 1700s for pasture land, many rocks and boulders were tossed in heaps along the edges of fields, just to get them out of the way. During the eighteenth century, as individuals relocated farther out from the center of town, the Puritans invested these primitive stone walls with religious significance: Both literally and symbolically, the walls surrounded the people and assured them of the Lord's protection.

Almost all of Guilford's stone walls were built without the use of machines. Both the size of the individual stones and the height of the wall were determined by how much weight a single man could lift. This explains why most walls are no higher than a man's thighs. Stone walls are classified according to function and structure. There are retaining walls, boundary walls, estate walls, stone fences, cattle guides, pens, foundation walls, cellar walls—even “walking” walls, designed to serve as walkways. Wall structures can be single-stack, double-stack, or “tossed.” A classic double-stack wall, constructed between 1937 and 1939, can be seen along the perimeter of the Henry Whitfield Museum property. Most stone walls in Guilford, however, are of the cruder tossed variety.

Guilford is fortunate to have many miles of well-preserved stone walls. A large portion of these structures are visible from roadways and contribute in important ways to the town's rural and historic character. Should Guilford consider instituting a regulatory process to ensure that these walls survive for future generations to enjoy? We want to know what you think. To send us your comments, click on “Contact Us” at the GPA's website, [www.guilfordpreservation.org](http://www.guilfordpreservation.org), or write us at Box 199, Guilford, CT 06437

—Joe Nugent

as a group, rather than face the prospect of languishing alone at some remote pest house. Dread of the smallpox disease was so great that those who could afford treatment were willing to banish themselves from society for a time.

Did Guilford's Pest House serve as an inoculation center? If so, it seems likely that it was supervised by Doctor John Redfield, then the town's leading physician. Redfield lived in a big colonial house on the site of the present-day Town Hall parking lot. His second wife was the daughter of Doctor Benjamin Gale of nearby Killingworth, who was one of the eminent inoculators in Connecticut.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Edward Jenner in England developed a safer method of protection against smallpox by inoculating people with material from cows infected with “cowpox.” In 1817, the Connecticut General Assembly resolved to carry out a “general vaccination” of the state's inhabitants. (The word vaccination derives from the Latin word for cow.) At long last, with the advent of the medical miracle of vaccination, Guilford's Pest House became obsolete. In 1814, the Guilford selectmen sold the Pock Lot to the brothers Abraham Dudley, Jr., and Joel Dudley, “together with an old dwelling house thereon.”

Nearly all of Connecticut's Pest Houses were destroyed after the introduction of the smallpox vaccine. For many years, it was generally assumed that the Clapboard Hill Pest House had met a similar fate. In a conversation with the writer nearly forty years ago, the late Mrs. George Goss, Sr. matter-of-factly referred to the odd little structure at 405 Tanner Marsh Road

as “the Pest House.” Mrs. Goss acquired the old house, plus surrounding woodland acreage, in 1930. By then, the dwelling had been renovated for farmhands working on the former Joel Dudley Farm at Clapboard Hill.

Title search evidence traces the Pest House property back to Joel Dudley's ownership. However, in 1822 Joel released his rights to the nine-acre Pock Lot to his brother, Abraham, Jr. This resulted in Joel's move of the Pest House to its present site, which is west of and adjacent to the original location. Structural evidence confirms the building's age. Hand-hewn post-and-beam timbers, fabricated with mortise-and-tenon joints, form its eighteenth-century framing. The original exterior sheathing consists of wide oak planking approximately one inch thick. Moreover, the exterior dimensions of the existing Pest House (14.5 by 27 feet) correspond closely to the measurements specified by the vote of town meeting to have it erected (16 by 30 feet).

Early in the last century, a group of Madison residents rescued the little smallpox burial place from oblivion. The Madison Historical Society has owned the property since 1949 and maintains a private right of way for its members. The little cemetery enclosure (¼ acre) is symbolic of the original nine-acre Pock Lot. The Pest House, standing in its second location and disguised by the intrusion of awkward additions, remains in private ownership. The GPA is working with other interested parties to develop a long-term preservation plan for both the historic structure and the “Smallpox Cemetery.”

—Joel Helander