



GUILFORD PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2022

Letter From the President

The mission of GPA is to preserve the built and natural environment of our beautiful town. I would like to share with you some of our accomplishments over the past year.

- **GPA is supporting the use of the cutting-edge tool of dendrochronology** to precisely determine the age of early buildings in Guilford. Town historian Joel Helander has been closely involved with the use of this technology (see dendro core in photo) on five local structures and will soon be dating another house in North Guilford that may have great historical significance to the African-American community.



- **GPA will partner with the Town of Guilford on a new website** that will have an updated look and expanded sections featuring restaurants, shops, farmers markets and other tourist attractions. It will invite more people to the town and encourage more Guilford residents to enjoy the many attractions of the community. Development of the website is being funded by both organizations.

- **GPA's Slavery in Guilford Project** was pleased to co-sponsor with the Guilford Library a talk on Connecticut's slavery laws from 1643 through 1848, presented by Guilford resident Cornelia Bewersdorf. Her insightful talk illuminates the numerous legal efforts in Connecticut and the difficulties that were encountered in the struggle for abolition. If you missed her talk it can be found on slaveryinguilford.org or guilfordfreelibrary.org.

- **The Guilford Information Kiosk** on Church Street has finished its eighth season with eleven volunteers, who answered questions, gave directions and welcomed people to Guilford. More than 200 individuals came with questions, and many more took brochures and consulted the new Guilford Recreation Map and postings on the outside of the Kiosk.

Please read more about GPA's efforts elsewhere in this newsletter. We ask for your support so that we may continue the important work of preserving Guilford for future generations. To continue your support or to become a member, please use the enclosed remittance envelope or use your credit card by visiting www.guilfordpreservation.org

Sincerely,
Shirley Girioni,
President

GPA Champions A New Preservation Tool

It is well known that the Guilford Preservation Alliance has been a leader with many initiatives in the local preservation community. In fact, GPA has been a front-line preservation group for the past 42 years!

In recent years, the GPA has championed a new tool for dating the origins of certain historic buildings: dendrochronology. Dendrochronology is a cutting-edge technology being used in the Northeast for dating wood timbers. Tree rings contain data that can be interpreted like a DNA code i.e. quantitative (# of years a tree lived) and qualitative (how the tree's growth was affected by wet and/or dry seasons of the year). The tree code is measured by the gap or interval of tree rings from season to season and year to year.



The dendro dating analysis is made by extracting a cylindrical core of wood using a hollow drill from a main timber, such as a post, girt, or plate. The core samples are cleaned and sanded in a laboratory and then measured under a x10/x30 microscope. Guided by computer, the cores samples are compared with the master chronology or data base (100+ structures) for Eastern Massachusetts and Connecticut, including five structures in Guilford. They are:

Comfort Star house 138 State Street (2014 analysis)

Hyland/Ebenezer Parmelee house 84 Boston Street (2014 analysis)

Thomas Griswold, III house 171 Boston Street (2016 analysis)

Town Pest house 405 Tanner Marsh Road (2016 analysis)

Increase Pendleton house 30 Water Street (2021 analysis)

Funding for three of these structures was generously provided by the GPA.

Traditional dates of origin for four of these five Guilford houses analyzed by dendrochronology were adjusted as a result of replacement houses on the same site. In the case of the Comfort Star house, the traditional date of c.1645 was rolled forward to 1695; for the Hyland/Parmelee house from c.1660 forward to 1713; for the Griswold House from c.1774 backward to 1764; and for the Town Pest House from 1760 forward to 1799.

For historians, antiquarians, old home owners, and others, we can now tap into this scientific analysis to precisely date old buildings. The science of dendrochronology can provide unequivocal construction dates for oak timbers in early buildings. It allows us to re-interpret and rewrite histories of origin for many structures, particularly our antique dwelling houses. It adds a new, third tool in the tool kit for old house sleuths, who previously relied on two sets of evidence to date houses: architectural and documentary.

It is important to understand that dendrochronology can determine the year in which timbers for house construction were felled, not when the house was constructed per se. Conclusions for date of origin, then, are based on the assumption that it was the prevailing practice to fabricate

oak timbers when the timbers were still green, or within a year or two of the felling dates.

Recently, it has been discovered that a Town-owned house in North Guilford may have great historical significance relating to the African American community. Once again, the Guilford Preservation Alliance has stepped up to the plate to fund a dendrochronology study.

Dr. Daniel Miles of the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory (England) and his counterpart in the United States, Michael Cuba, of Transom Historic Preservation Consulting, are scheduled to analyze the small story-and-a-half dwelling in November. A full historical interpretation of this hitherto unrecognized house is pending.

- Joel Helander

Town of Guilford and GPA Partner to Develop New Tourism Website

A few months from now, visitguilfordct.com, GPA's website which focuses on heritage tourism, will have a new look and a greatly expanded menu of information intended to draw more people to the town and to encourage Guilford residents to enjoy the many attractions of the community.

The website will reflect collaboration between the GPA and Guilford's Economic Development Commission inspired by Sheri Cote, the Town's Economic Development Director. Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations, the town solicited proposals from website developers. Having received five proposals, a subcommittee of the EDC narrowed down the number to three which in turn were referred to the GPA for consideration. Tracy Tomaselli, Veronica Soell, Wendy Dockray and Shirley Girioni reviewed the three proposals, and with representatives from the EDC, interviewed two companies which both organizations thought submitted the best proposals. Regan Communications of Boston, a firm demonstrating extensive experience with tourism websites, was selected and as of mid-October, work was underway on the design.

The new website will include significantly expanded sections featuring restaurants, shops, farmers markets and other tourist attractions, in addition to most of the information currently contained on the visitguilfordct.com site. There will be no charge for listings. The events page of the site will likely be substantially redone, with up-to-date search features added to the site. A significant emphasis will be placed on visuals—from drone generated vistas to colorful and captivating photographs, and perhaps a video or two.

Development of the website, estimated to cost \$15,000, is being funded by both organizations. The GPA received a grant of \$7,100 from Connecticut Humanities and has committed \$4,000 of the grant to the project. The town is providing \$11,000 in ARPA funds, along with some additional dollars for photographs, graphics, etc. The Town of Guilford will also retain responsibility for the website, although updates to certain sections, such as Historic Sites and Tours and Guilford Stories, will be provided by the GPA.

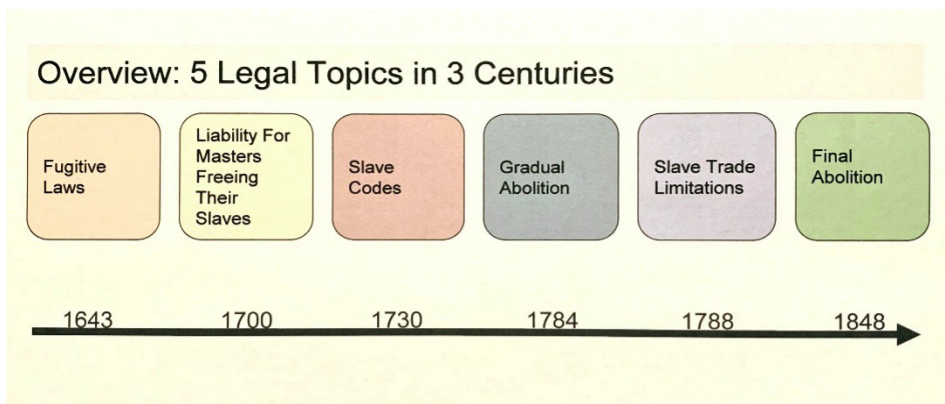
- Wendy Dockray

Survey of Connecticut Slave Laws 1643-1848

If you asked someone on the street in Guilford what the word “manumission” means, few would probably know that it comes from the Latin noun for “hand” (manus) and the Latin verb for “to send” (mittere) or when put together translates “to set forth from the hand.” Few would know it is often used to describe the laws that freed the enslaved from slavery.

Cornelia Bewersdorf of Guilford would not be one of those people because of her training as a lawyer, first in Germany where she worked as an attorney before moving to Connecticut and then at the University of Connecticut’s Law School, where she gained her Master of Law.

For one of her classes, she researched Connecticut’s Slavery Laws from 1643-1848. On Nov. 17th this year, she shared what she learned in a talk sponsored by the Guilford Library’s and the GPA’s Slavery in Guilford Project, the latter of which she is a member. If you missed the talk it was recorded and can be found at slaveryinguilford.com and guilfordfreelibrary.org.



Looking at three centuries of laws and statues, Bewersdorf organized what she learned into six categories: 1) *Fugitive Laws*, 2) *Manumission Laws*, 3) *Slave Codes*, 4) *Gradual Abolition Laws*, 5) *Slave Trade Limitation*, 6) *the Final Abolition in 1848*.

In her talk, Bewersdorf explained how Connecticut approached abolition through legislative regulation and how manumission laws discouraged masters to free their enslaved servants. It was a gradual process that took more than 60 years to complete. She noted that while the slave codes applied only to black persons or Native Americans, fugitive laws could also apply to indentured servants or apprentices.

She cautioned listeners not to assume that the laws show us the whole truth. She pointed out how laws can be on the books, but enforcement of them is another matter. As an example she noted that although trading in slaves was forbidden in Connecticut in the late 1700s, it was nevertheless still happening. To learn more about what she said, please listen to her talk which was recorded and be found at slaveryinguilford.org and guilfordfreelibrary.org.

- Douglas Nygren

Guilford Information Kiosk Volunteers Finish Summer Season

Braving hot days and an occasional lost motorist, eleven residents of Guilford happily served in the Information Kiosk on Church Street this past summer. Operated under the auspices

of the Guilford Preservation Alliance since 2015, the Information Kiosk is a resource for visitors as well as individuals from the town who seek to learn more about their community.

Beginning Memorial Day and ending Labor Day, the booth was open most Thursday mornings, Fridays from 9:30am-3:30pm, Saturday 9:30am-3:00pm, and Sundays 11:30-2:30pm. Thanks to the efforts of one volunteer, the Kiosk remained open on Saturday mornings through Indigenous People's Day (aka Columbus Day).



Richard Moalli, Charlie Kelly, Wendy Dockray (in booth), JoAnn Mendillo, Madison Hutchens and Cathy Hutchens meet at the end of the season.

Individuals requesting assistance came from as far west as Bremerton Washington and Boise Idaho, as far south as Rusk Texas and Walton Florida, and as far east as Nottingham England and Switzerland. More than 200 individuals came with questions, along with many more who took brochures and consulted the Guilford Recreation Map and event notices posted on the



Sandy Glover and Amanda Hitchcock refer to the Guilford Recreation Map. Missing from Photos: Tracy Tomaselli, Marcia Safirstein, Shirley Thompson and Chris Robinson.

outside of the booth. Approximately 45% of questions to the volunteers came from Guilford residents with regard to beach passes, parking and specific events, among other inquiries. The busiest day was the Sunday of the Guilford Art Center Craft Expo.

Volunteering this year were Chris Robinson, Sandy Glover, Amanda Hitchcock, Cathy Hutchens, JoAnn Mendillo, Richard Moalli, and Claire Kingsbury assisted Tracy with the walking tours. GPA Board member Wendy Dockray aided by GPA Board Member Marcia Safirstein led the effort.

- Wendy Dockray

GPA Welcomes New Board Member, Bernie Pitterman

My wife and I are both retired—Ricky was an IT manager at Middlesex Hospital and I was an attorney in Danbury. After retirement we moved from Cheshire to the shoreline and rented a home in Guilford for a year. We loved the community so we purchased and renovated an antique home a block from the Green. After months of renovations we are finally settled in. Because of my interest in history I joined *A Witness to History: Slavery in Guilford*.



P.O. Box 199
Guilford, CT 06437

**GPA Board of Directors
2021-2022**

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GUILFORD PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

A New Map of Guilford Recreational Areas

All of the outdoor recreational areas in Guilford can now be viewed on one map. Displayed on the outside back wall of the Information Kiosk, the new map includes the Land Conservation Trust properties, the Parks and Recreation properties, and the Guilford schools and their outdoor recreation spaces.

Guilford Preservation Alliance wishes to thank Kevin McGee of the Inland Wetlands/Natural Resources Department for formatting this map, and both Rick Maynard of Parks and Recreation and Sarah Williams of the Land Conservation Trust for supporting the creation of this resource for townspeople and visitors alike. GPA is also very grateful to Tracy Tomaselli, Marcia Safirstein and Veronica Soell for their hours spent gathering data for the new map.

Maps can be purchased for \$2 at Bishop's Orchards or Page Hardware.



**Be sure to visit us at:
www.guilfordpreservation.org
www.visitguilfordct.com**