



Signpost

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Adelma Abbie Grenier, *The Herb Lady of Caprilands (Latin for Goatlands)* – by Bill Jobbagy

Adelma Abbie Grenier was born December 16, 1903, in Sheldon, Vermont, the only child of



Adelma Grenier- 1935

Albert and Abbie Grenier. Her father was a barber and later a cabinetmaker, and her mother was an elegant woman who wore a velvet ribbon around her neck. The family lived in St. Albans, Vermont, in 1920 where her father owned a barber shop.

Holyoke's 1930 census lists Albert (a designer and cabinetmaker for Steiger's Department Stores in Holyoke and Springfield), Abbie (assistant manager of a department store), and Adelma, who was a sales lady. (Cont'd on page 2)

Mark Your Calendars

Sep 12 Executive Board Mtg, Strong Porter, 7pm

Sep 21 Tag Sale @ Caprilands, 8am-3pm

Sep 22 Annual Mtg & BBQ, Strong-Porter, 4pm

Oct 10 Executive Board Mtg, Strong Porter, 7pm

Oct 26 George Dudley Seymour program @
Hale Barn, 7pm

Nov 14 Executive Board Mtg, Strong Porter, 7pm

Nov 21 Reading the Architecture of the Strong
Porter House, Strong Porter 7:30pm

Dec 8 Christmas in the Village, 12-4pm

Dec 8 Christmas Party 2256 Main St, 5pm

Strong-Porter Museum open Sundays 11-3 Jun-Oct

Brick School open 1st & 3rd Sundays 1-4 May-early Oct

Archives available Saturdays 10am - 1pm or by
appointment (860-712-4278)

Notice of Annual Meeting & Barbeque Sunday, Sept 22 4pm@ Strong Porter



Members are hereby notified that the 57th annual meeting of the Coventry Historical Society will be held at the Strong Porter House on Sunday, September 22, 2019, at 4pm. Business to be conducted includes election of officers and board members, receive and approve annual budget, and any other necessary and proper business. Nominations from the floor are welcome.

Please bring a side dish or dessert for the barbeque. Meats and beverages will be provided. There is bound to be a lively discussion of Adelma Simmons, Caprilands, our acquisitions and our Caprilands tag sale.

Time to Renew Your Membership

Please find a membership renewal form included with this newsletter.



Caprilands Tag Sale

Saturday, Sept 21, 8am-3pm

We are fortunate to have been offered the opportunity to sell the items that are still left at Caprilands after their recent auction. This will involve a huge effort, and we need many volunteers to help sort and price items prior to the sale as well as volunteers the day of the sale to direct traffic and park cars, sell items, and pack up and move leftover items to Strong Porter. Early bird admission at 8am is \$5, free admission after 9am. Contact Sue Way 860-712-4278 to volunteer. Attached is a flyer advertising the sale. Please distribute it widely!

Adelma came to Hartford, first as a buyer for Steiger's Department Store (in The Gateway Shop - Fifth floor selling art, figurines, glass and crystal, and household furnishings). Before age 30 she had traveled the world by steamship searching for exotic pieces for the store. Her outfits included exotic capes and tiny caps. She retired in the summer of 1945 after 20 years of service.

Adelma and her parents bought a farm on Silver Street in 1932, later selling about half of the original 100 acres. The old house at that time was surrounded with evidence of years of neglect. The Greniers made necessary restorations and intended to start a small dairy farm with cattle and chickens. While continuing to work at their regular jobs, they found the dairy farm to be too challenging. That is when they started to develop gardens.

Prior to the Greniers' purchase, there had been an older house on the site from 1760. The present house was built by Zenas Loomis about 1850. The farm was owned by John Wright in the late 1800s, and in 1932 the Greniers bought the property from Harry Wilson of New London, who had owned the farm briefly and significantly neglected it.



Oil painting purchased at the Adelma Grenier Simmons estate auction and signed by the artist Peggy Cullen, Longmeadow, Mass, 1914- 2015

Adelma's first marriage was to Charles Snyder in 1935, but they quickly divorced. On December 25, 1937, she married her second husband, George Simmons, an engineering analyst at Hamilton Standard who had been previously married. They had one child named Albert Everett.

Adelma started goat farming, but the goats proved too much trouble and she gave them up. Husband George helped her lay out her first garden by the main farmhouse, and she began studying the lore of herbs.

Adelma's first garden was called the Butterfly Garden because of its shape. She began making lunches for friends, which became a weekly occurrence. By the early 1950s she was lecturing regularly on herbs and drawing 40 people to her luncheons. She started to give weekly garden tours, writing recipes and selling her herbs. She then began writing, authoring dozens of books on herbs and gardening. She worked until 1978 to create all the gardens and outbuildings.

George Simmons died of cancer in 1971, and her son Albert died violently three years later in Florida. These occurrences grieved Adelma, and she turned more to her herb world. In the 1970s national magazines began to take notice of Adelma, particularly Time-Life. The farm was then active with garden tours, lectures in the green house, and lunch by the fireplace. Adelma became a proficient saleswoman for her merchandise and books.

Adelma presided over the creative side of the business hiring Clayton Greer, a trusted friend, to manage the business. He helped her build Caprilands to a near million-dollar business by the late 1980s. They treated their employees very well and created intense loyalty. Her granddaughters worked the farm in the summers, and two of them stayed for many years.

Adelma met Edward Cook in the mid -1970s, and they began travelling together to Europe in the 1980s. After Clayton Greer's death in the early 1990s, the farm lacked a trained business eye. Adelma talked to an attorney about creating a foundation from her estate. She had originally intended to leave the farm to her granddaughters, but she was concerned that they would have had to pay estate taxes and worried about the farm being sold. She knew that legally a husband would not have to pay estate taxes. She married Edward Cook in 1993 at the age of nearly 90!!! Conflicts between Cook and the employees and granddaughters began soon after, and there were many police calls.

Adelma continued lecturing and advertising at flower shows on the East Coast, (Cont'd on page 3)

but by the fall of 1997 she was having difficulty breathing and became less and less active. Three days before her death a confusing series of events led to the creation of a new will by Mr. Cook's attorney. Adelma, hospitalized, signed the will, apparently of her own accord. The will stated that an educational foundation would be created to be overseen by her husband and granddaughter. Her husband would be the executor of her estate and was allowed life use of the house. Adelma came home and died on Dec 3, 1997. Her ashes were scattered under a white ash tree at her home.

Auction at Caprilands July 27, 2019 –by Sue Way

Three of us from CHS attended the auction at Caprilands on Sat, July 27, hoping to buy a few things for our collection with limited budgets that might somehow capture the spirit of Caprilands and its



creator, Adelma Grenier Simmons, that have meant so much to so many in Coventry and, in fact, across the country. It was a daunting task to look over those 500 lots and make choices. I was with Steve Marshall and Bob Visny, and talked to neighbors and friends of CHS. During the preview we made our choices, and then had to decide we would hold our bidding cards up even when the price climbed beyond what we were hoping for. I chose 2 oil paintings of the house, a trunk of paper, photos and artwork that went into Adelma's books, a basket of postcards to sell at Strong Porter, and an antique harness maker's stool. There was some very



interesting old farm equipment, and I decided I would try to buy one piece. The harness maker's stool was something we did not have and I thought, perhaps, not easy to find. Bob Visny,

with the help of a friend, bought a beautiful goat milking stand.

I think we were fairly well satisfied with our purchases, although there were certainly other things we would have liked to have for our collection. As the auction was coming to an end, I spoke to the attorney for the estate, George Purtill. I wanted to tell him that if there were other papers that might help us tell Adelma's story, we would be very interested. In response he asked if CHS ever holds a tag sale to benefit the Society. I said yes, and he asked if CHS be interested in holding a tag sale to benefit the Society if the estate were to donate what remains in the house. I said, "I think so." And so since then we have been working out details and making plans for a Caprilands tag sale. We'll be adding more pieces to our collection and to what we hope will eventually be a Caprilands exhibit at Strong Porter.

Remembering Pat Natusch

Sadly, past president Patricia Randall Natusch passed away unexpectedly on July 24, 2019. Pat and her family lived for many years on Riley Mountain Rd. She became active in the Coventry Historical Society, volunteering at the Brick School, and joined the Executive Board in 1998. In 2001 she became Vice President, stepped up as President later that year, and served as President for about six years. In that position, she oversaw many events and fund raisers and the completion of several grant projects that have helped maintain our buildings. After stepping down as President, she remained on the Board to give us the benefit of her experience. We are grateful for all the work she did over the years.



The Coventry Historical Society together with
Connecticut Landmarks present William Hosley's

Prophet of Place: George Dudley Seymour's Vision for Connecticut's Environment

*The story of a progressive era
visionary & advocate for urban
parks, city planning & historic
resources. A pioneer place-maker, collector &
preservationist. He taught Connecticut to
preserve & use wisely its cultural heritage.*



Saturday, Oct 26, 7pm
N Hale Homestead Barn
2299 South St, Coventry
Free admission

This presentation will be of particular interest to Coventry residents because George Dudley Seymour gave us the Nathan Hale State Forest, and he bought and restored the Nathan Hale Homestead, the Strong Porter house (now a museum), the Huntington house (where Hale studied for Yale), and the Sprague house, all due to his fascination with Nathan Hale. Come learn about the man who gave the state of CT and Coventry so much.

Strong Porter Farm: Reading the Architectural Progression of the House From Its Construction To Today



Join old house expert Steve Marshall for an architectural investigation of the Strong Porter House.

Thursday, Nov 21, 7:30pm
At the Strong Porter House

Free Admission

Sundays at Strong-Porter

Sundays are busy days during the summer at the Strong-Porter House. Parking for around 150 cars is available for the Coventry Farmer's Market June through October, and visitors start arriving by 10am. We receive approximately \$150 in donations on a good day. Volunteers are always needed to help park cars. Contact Jim Murphy 860-742-3054 irishbrit0471@att.net for info or to volunteer.

The museum is open from 11am-3pm June through October, and we are also always looking for volunteers to staff the house and outbuildings and run programs.

Friends of Strong

The Maintenance Committee has created a list of jobs, large and small, that need to be done at Strong Porter and the Brick School. We are putting together a work group called Friends of Strong and are calling for volunteers who are willing to give a hand with necessary repair work. We hope to put together a list of people willing to help whom we will notify when we get together. Contact Jim Wicks (860-874-2346 jiwicks@gmail.com) or Steve Marshall (historichouseguy@gmail.com) for more info or to volunteer.



Mark Your Calendar!
Christmas Party Potluck
Sunday Dec 8 - 5pm
Wicks House, 2256 Main St



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