



# Sign Post



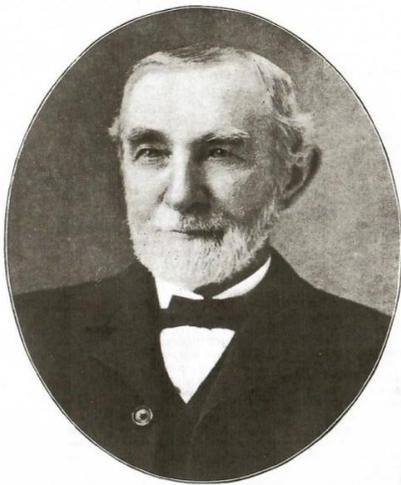
*The Coventry Historical Society*

*Invites you to join us for a picnic on Saturday, June 29<sup>th</sup> at 2 PM at the Brick School*

*We welcome contributions of Salads or Desserts to share*

Following our picnic will be a short talk given on the life of James S. Morgan and his family

## *A Coventry 19th century Common School Education and the family of James S. Morgan*

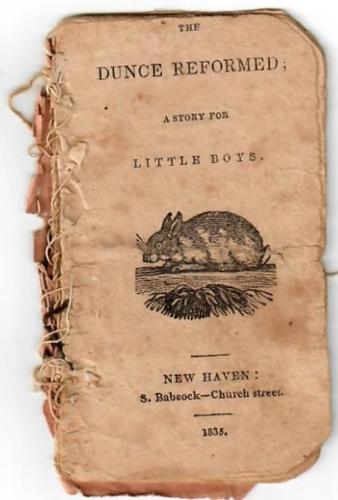


*Respectfully  
James S. Morgan*

James S. Morgan served his home town in many capacities. He was husband and father, mill owner, Town Clerk and Treasurer, Choir Director at the First Congregational Church for some 65 years, and all with just a Common School education. Perhaps you can see the mischeivous glint in his eye that earned him the note of qualified praise from his teacher on the next page. The tiny Chapbook has been sewed back together several times and must have been a family favorite. Its title is "The Dunce Reformed" and its main character is a boy named James!

The family of James S. Morgan clearly valued the education they received in the Common Schools of their day, carefully saving many of their papers and Copy Books to be passed from generation to generation for 236 years and finally to us. The earliest Copy Book was filled by James' grandmother, Cynthia Gager, in 1783. She was 20 and apparently taking the time to finish her education before her marriage to Asher Morgan. Not all young women in her day were so fortunate.

The family of James S. Morgan clearly valued the education they received in the Common Schools of their day, carefully saving many of their papers and Copy Books to be passed from generation to generation for 236 years and finally to us. The earliest Copy Book was filled by James' grandmother, Cynthia Gager, in 1783. She was 20 and apparently taking the time to finish her education before her marriage to Asher Morgan. Not all young women in her day were so fortunate.



The descendants of James S. and Mary Bailey Morgan, having moved to California, have decided that these papers and other treasured pictures and artifacts belong in Coventry. They will be displayed this summer in our one-room Brick Schoolhouse at the corner of Goose Lane and Merrow Rd, and some of the Morgan family are coming to visit us at the end of June. Our picnic celebrates their visit and the opening of this exhibit and completion of other projects there.



On a more serious note, James Morgan accomplished a great deal in his life with only a Common School education. Included in this collection is his Arithmetic Copy Book 1833-35, completed when he was 17. The problems covered include many with practical application to business and every day life. The book, which has just a paper cover, is tattered and worn as if he referred back to these lessons many times during his long and useful life.



The note above reads "This may inform you that Ja's S. Morgan is as good a scholar and as great a rogue as any in his class. \_\_ Smith, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1824. He was only 5 years old!

The Commemorative Biographical Record of Tolland and Windham Counties, J.H. Beers, 1903, p. 566-7, relates that about 1836 James was "called to complete the Teacher's term of the South Street School." He then worked the home farm for 4 years. In 1840 he took a job at

...the foundry of Smith & Washburn, then standing near the present Washburn Silk Mill, remaining there only a short time, however, as he obtained work in the Washington woolen mill. The year after this he took up foundry work again, to which he devoted two or three years, and thoroughly mastered the business. For four years he was employed in a machine



The Asher/Mason Morgan house which used to stand on Old Eagleville Rd. was the family home of James Moraan.

shop, and then resumed work in the Washington woolen mill where he remained ten years and two months, being overseer all of this time, which terminated [in] 1865. After this he engaged in the manufacture of paper boxes fifteen months, the output being sold to the Metallic Cartridge Co., then in business in the village. There were in his employ sixteen or eighteen girls, and his prospects were bright, when the Cartridge Company moved their plant to Bridgeport, a movement disatrous to



James Morgan House, 1117 Main St, present home of John & Tammy Kearney

his enterprise, though he sold his machinery most advantageously. In the spring of 1866 Mr. Morgan bought a water power, including some small buildings, put in machinery, and started in as a silk-throwster. In this enterprise he did well, and continued in it until 1879. That year, being desirous of turning over the active management of the business to younger hands, he admitted A.D. Bottum as a partner, and in 1883 sold out entirely... After the death of [Mr.] Bottum, in 1889, Mr. Morgan was prevailed upon to look after the business for the widow, a work he sustained until 1895, when on account of advancing years he gave it up.

Thereafter he devoted himself to Town and Church business for 16 more years. Sue Way

## The Tools That Built Coventry

Sunday July 21 11am-2pm

Come see a special display and demonstration of colonial era tools and equipment at the Strong-Porter Museum on Sunday, July 21, from 11am-2pm. The blacksmith shop, carpenter shop and barn will be open this day, and the hearses and wagon will be on display.

## Museum & Archive Collection

### Hours

The Strong-Porter Museum is open Sundays June - October from 11am - 3pm

Archives are available for viewing on Saturdays 10am - 1pm or by appointment by calling 860-712-4278. Call ahead to make sure we are there. Things happen.

Come to the Farmer's Market from the round-about side, and park at Strong Porter- very little traffic that way.



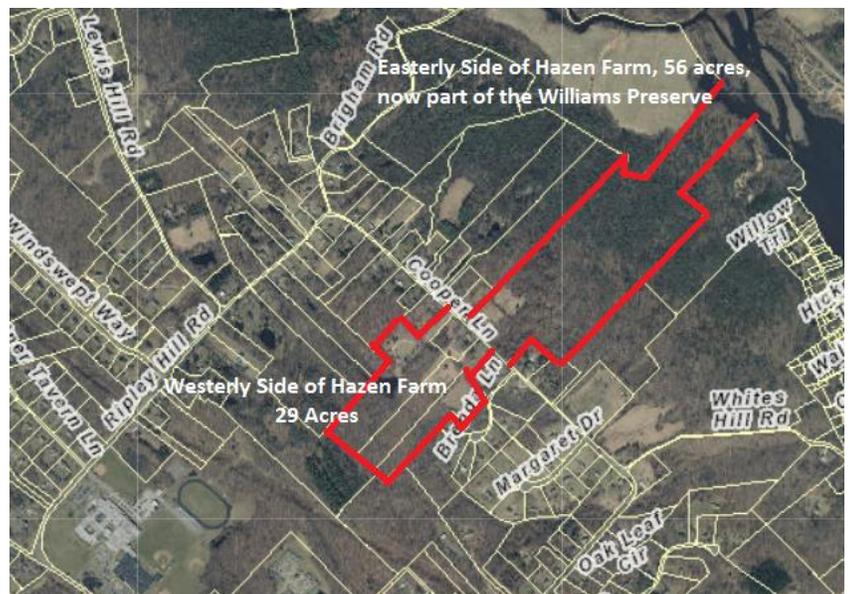
### Jane Covell

Longtime CHS friend and active member Jane Covell passed away on May 23, 2019. She was a member of the Executive Board for many years, in charge of scheduling a wonderful variety of monthly programs. She made cornhusk dolls at Farms Days, and gave talks about her wonderful button collection. She enjoyed being known as the Button Lady of Coventry. She will be dearly missed.

## *A Typical Family Farm in Coventry... The Hazen Farm (1889 - 1919)*

By the late 1800's farming in New England was in competition with farming in the Midwest and striving to be more efficient. Despite the number of gentleman farms in Coventry, farming was still a way of life to many residents of the town.

In 1900, the U.S. Census reported 1635 residents in Coventry. Of the 989 residents listed with an occupation, the combination of farmers and farm laborers represented the largest number of occupations at 316, with 284 occupations listed as being 'at school' and 164 residents working in the silk, wool and box mills. The census reports there being 435 families with 261 out of 445 residences being farms, leaving no doubt that 188 years after the town's incorporation and despite much industrialization, farming was still the main means of life in Coventry.



*The Hazen Farm's approximate boundaries. The Property was purchased by the Hazens in 1894 but its boundaries date back to 1821*



*Deer graze along the edge of the Williams Preserve on Cooper Lane, once part of the Hazen Farm*

The Hazen family lived in what was probably a typical farm during the time. The farm was located on Cooper Lane, a road leading from Ripley Hill Road to Root Road. The Hazen's owned 95 acres of farmland on both sides of the street with a house and barn. There were only 5 residences on Cooper Lane in 1892. The majority of the Hazen farm was located on the east side of Cooper Lane extending to the Willimantic River and comprising 56 acres. It was recently sold to the town as open space by the Williams family, who in 1941 purchased the farm from successors to the Hazens. A significant portion of this

land still remains cleared today. The house, located on the west side of Cooper Lane still stands as well. Deeds on this property reference a dwelling house standing thereon all the way back to 1790, and it probably was built shortly after a known house fire of 1759 that occurred on the property. The title to the property on Cooper Lane dates back to 1711 as part of the Town's 1<sup>st</sup> division after apportioning the original home lots.

### *Ralph and Clara Belle remove to Coventry...*

Ralph and Clara Belle (Segar) Hazen married on October 31, 1889. Ralph was 18 and Clara Belle was only 16 years at the time. Clara Belle was from Lebanon and lost her father in 1887 when she was 13 years of age. Ralph was born in Dresden New York, on Lake Seneca. He lost both his parents by the age of ten. Ralph was resigned to a church home in nearby Rochester, New York and only came to Coventry after being adopted by a couple who removed from Rochester to Coventry to reside in the Nathan Hale Place in 1883. Ralph was adopted in 1885 and probably learned much of his farming skills during his adolescent years on the Hale Place. His adoptive father, Parsol Peterson, was, for sure, a gentlemen farmer.

### *Beginning a life of farming...*

When Ralph and Clara Belle married, Clara Belle's aunt, Clarissa (Greenman) Seagrave owned the farm on Cooper Lane, having purchased it in 1883, upon which she and her husband Bezaleel Seagrave made significant improvements to the farm and house. The Willimantic Journal reported on November 7, 1889, that "Ralph Hazen and Miss Clara B. Segar were married Thursday, Oct. 31, and have commenced housekeeping. Mr. Hazen takes the farm of B. Seagrave "on shares" the coming season." ... and thus begins the Hazen's farming journey. In 1894, Clara Belle purchased the farm from her aunt Clarissa, probably with proceeds from the estate of her father, which was held in guardianship until around that time. Clarissa passed away the following year.

### *Livestock and crops on the farm...*

The Hazen's had 12 head of cattle in 1896 that were inspected by the state's commissioners on disease of domestic animals. The inspection did not find any cows to have tuberculosis, although one other herd in Coventry had one of its 5 cows condemned. It was likely that Ralph's herd were dairy cows, as in 1887, several of the Cooper Lane farmers worked with a local creamery in Merrow, and in 1904 Ralph was on the Board of Directors for a Mansfield Creamery.

We know that the Hazens had a horse team in 1917 and they had at least one horse, a king bolt, in 1894. While breaking that king bolt in, Ralph and Clara Belle were each thrown from their wagon in separate incidents within a month of each other. They both escaped serious injury. The Hazens also had sheep on the farm, and it is likely that their livestock included chickens, as we know that Clara Belle's aunt and uncle had 200 chickens in 1886, although a newspaper report dated 9-16-1886 reports 40 chickens stolen by "Sneak Thieves" the night before.

It was only a few years before the Hazens took the farm that Clara Belle's uncle, Bezaleel Seagrave, raised a large quantity of new potatoes for market in July, 1886. For sure, the Hazens grew potatoes, if not on their farm then on a neighboring farm that Ralph managed in 1917 and 1918 that was owned by New York City grocer. Ralph harvested 800 bushels of potatoes in the fall of 1917 and 700 bushels the following year on that farm. It is also certain that the Hazens raised hay. Ralph had a circular saw and engine and probably used it when he cut 80 cords of wood in a week in 1916 for F. S. White as well as others. He also sprayed elm and other trees in the village in 1910.

### *Lifestyle and modernization...*

The Hazens lived through a time of great technological transformation. As much as they started off with horses, they purchased their first car in 1914. In 1919, they owned a 1917 Model T. The Hazens also installed 'illumination', which was a surprise to the guests at their silver wedding anniversary gathering in 1914. They had telephone service by or before 1918 from S.N.E. Telephone Co. None of these technologies were available when they started the farm!

The Hazens gave their second daughter away at her wedding which was held at their house in 1916. About forty people were present. Their neighbor and Reverend, R. H. Sherman led the ceremony. Regular neighborhood social events were organized by the Hilltop Home Club, a ladies club started in 1910 to support the Ripley Hill district school. The Hazens partook in other activities, including picking huckleberries, swimming, baseball and going into the city of Willimantic.

### *Hardships...*

Life during this period was not without its hardships. A Hazen daughter had appendicitis in 1914 but survived. In 1909 and 1910, diphtheria outbreaks resulted in district school closings. Ralph and Clara Belle's daughter Alice May succumbed to the disease in 1909 at the age of 14.

Electricity was not as safe as it is today. Two years after the Hazens installed 'illumination', their son Forrest was struck by lightning in the house. The bolt came through the utility pole and into the house. Forrest survived but suffered a severe wound to his ankle and was knocked unconscious. His mother had to extinguish his clothes, which were on fire.

Despite the hard work that came along with farming, the Hazens seemed to be living a fruitful life. However, in January 1919 the Hazens suffered a fateful hardship. Ralph Hazen and a fellow RFD carrier for the town both contracted influenza. Ralph, Clara Belle, their daughter and two sons died within a week of each other. It very much saddened the neighbors.

The two surviving sons went on to live with their sister. One became a well-known home restorer in Connecticut. The boys probably drew much attention to their brother-in-law, John L. Reinartz, who participated in the first amateur two-way transatlantic radio communication using equipment he designed. Subsequently in 1925, he designed and operated radio equipment on the first polar expedition utilizing an aircraft carrier. At that time, it was still not known whether the North Pole was a land mass or ice cap. Reinartz also wired the electricity that provided illumination to the Hazen house in 1914 when he was 18 years of age. *Dan Gorka*