



# Signpost

January 2020  
Volume 28, Issue 1

## **Cider in Coventry** – by Dan Gorka

Fermented beverages such as beer and cider were a staple of the early settlers in New England. Such beverages were as much necessity as it was a tradition in their homeland. The former was due to concern of waterborne illness, necessitating fermented beverages to be used as a source of hydration and nutrition. Cider was even consumed by children.

The earliest record of cultivated apples in New England was in 1623 at Plymouth. Aside from crab apples, there were no native apples of the varieties that the Pilgrims brought over from England. Early varieties are not the familiar varieties we see today. The early varieties contained higher amounts of tannins and bitters desired for the fermentation process, as this was the main use of apples at the time, aside from making small quantities of vinegar for preservation.

Cider mills were used to crush and press apples and could be water or animal powered. According to Old Sturbridge Village (OSV), a typical family of 6 to 10 members would consume 1 to 1½ gallons of cider a day, requiring 5 to 7 finished barrels of cider per year, with one apple tree fruiting 5 to 6 gallons. If our math is correct, this would require 61 to 109 trees, except that the trees only fruit every other year, requiring a total of 122 to 210 trees for this typical family. For trees spaced 25 feet apart, this would yield 70 trees per acre, a concentration that checks with another reference in Lancaster, PA, and therefore require 2 to 4 acres for a family.

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## **Stew and Story**

### ***Stories of Caprilands and Adelma Grenier Simmons***

**March 19 @ 6:30pm**

Please join us for our annual Stew & Story to be held Thursday, March 19 at 6:30 PM at the Community House of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congregational Church of Coventry, 1746 Boston Tpke. We will tell more of Adelma Simmons' story and hope to gather some of her neighbors and friends to relate tales and anecdotes about Caprilands and the woman who created in herself a world-renowned herbalist, and in her farm the Caprilands experience for many thousands of people.

A variety of stews, including vegetarian, bread, dessert and beverage will be served. Suggested donation is \$8 for members, \$10 for non-members, and \$6 ages 6-12. Bring a mug or bowl and a spoon! Reservations appreciated but not required. Please call 860-977-4831 or email [radawkins18@gmail.com](mailto:radawkins18@gmail.com) for a reservation.

## **Mark Your Calendars**

Jan 9	Executive Board Mtg, Strong Porter, 7pm
Feb 13	Executive Board Mtg, Strong Porter, 7pm
Mar 12	Executive Board Mtg, Strong Porter, 7pm
Mar 19	Stew & Story, 6:30pm, Second Cong Comm Hse

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

Brick School open 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays 1-4 May-early Oct

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

### President's Message - Jim Murphy

I'm so happy the Coventry Historical Society is still vibrant after all these years, and I've been privileged to be the President of this organization since 2012 even though the term was only supposed to be 2 years (chuckles). Anyway, the organization has been growing and doing many wonderful things and has seemed to gain the trust of Coventry residents so much so that we have had several large donations from townspeople and former townspeople during the past year. I would like to give thanks to them through the Sign Post.

The Arthur Albro estate donation was \$3,000, the Nelson Bearce estate donated a little more than \$5100, and their pictures were in the March Signpost. I want to include that Bill Jobbagy gave \$5000 this year, for a total of \$10,000 given in 2 years! For those that might not know, Bill is the author of "The History of Coventry 1700-2006" (available for free through Ibooks), a Society board member, and the author of a number of Coventry history articles for us and others.

Please consider the Coventry Historical Society in your giving plans, be it regular donations or Coventry-related history donations, and keep up the good work.

### Architectural Investigation of Strong Porter

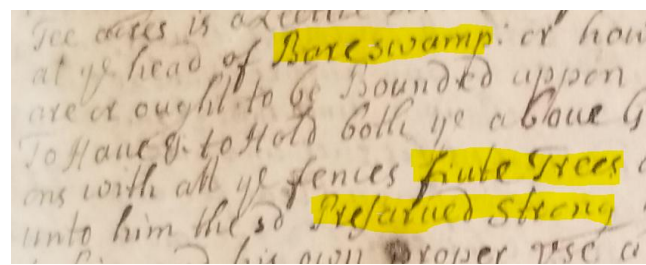
Thank you to old house expert Steve Marshall and Dan Gorka for an interesting and informative members' meeting on November 21 that focused on the family and architectural history of the Strong Porter house. Attendees learned from Steve about the stages of development of the house and how to read architectural clues, as well as the history of the Strong and Porter families presented by Dan.



### Cider in Coventry (Continued from Page 1)

Cider in Coventry - It has been reported that by 1775, 1 in 10 New England families had cider mills, mostly being owned by farmers. Coventry was probably no exception. Orchards were very commonly mentioned in property deeds from the very early 18<sup>th</sup> century, including property associated with the Strong-Porter house prior to the house being built in 1733.

It would be fair to say that there were probably many cider mills owned by farmers and that they probably rented the mills to other farmers during the harvest period. It appears that in Coventry most of these mills were animal powered.



A portion of a deed from 3 Mar 1732/3 granted by Samuel Parker to Preserved Strong referencing fruit trees as part of 60 acres of land. Preserved Strong deeded the land on 11 Sep 1733 to his son Aaron, referencing a dwelling house that "Aaron Strong" now lives in. This is the first record in a deed of CHS's Strong-Porter house.

In 1818, Josiah Brown purchased several parcels of land in North Coventry from Eleazor Pomeroy, Sr. (father to Eleazor, Jr., who built the Pomeroy Tavern in 1801). While this deed did not reference a cider mill, when Josiah Brown sold the property to Nathan Dexter in 1836, the deed calls out Nathaniel Root's right to one half of the cider mill and the building standing over it, as well as Zolvah Brown's right to one quarter of the same. The cider mill stood on the northeasterly corner of said land by the Windham and Coventry Turnpike Road (Rte. 31).

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### Cider in Coventry (Continued from Page 2)

Interestingly, prior to Nathan Dexter's purchase of the above farm and his  $\frac{1}{4}$  right to that cider mill, he advertised on 21 Feb 1815, a 90 acre farm for sale for less than \$1,000 or public auction if not sold by March 15<sup>th</sup>. The farm produced "40 to 50 barrels of cider annually" and had a "220 gallon Still and Worm, almost new, together with cider-Casks and Tubs, holding 4 to 500 bbls." Nathan Dexter was residing on the farm at the time, according to the advertisement.

Richard Brown (sons Jacob and Abram) occupied a house that was incorporated many years ago (prior to 1864) into the Lillie Farm and made into a cider house. This mill was located across from the old Samuel Lillie Place (owned by Zenas Loomis in 1869) on Grant Hill Road on the same side and just before the Grant Hill cemetery.

The farm of Gurdon Edgerton, an insolvent debtor at the time, was advertised for auction in 1834. The farm was 140 acres, located one mile north of Boston Turnpike was advertised as containing a Cider Mill House and Cider Mill among other buildings that 'have been built but a few years'.

In 1810, a mercantile stand and 100 acre farm in North Coventry located a few rods east of the Meeting House was advertised for sale. It consisted "of a good dwelling house, large and convenient store, barn, chaise, wood, smoke houses....Annexed to which a distillery stands, where one to two thousand barrels of cider can be easily purchased in a good fruit year." The stand had existed for nearly 20 years.

This last advertisement for a farm suggests a yield that could provide for 200 to 400 families. However, by our estimates, this would require 15,000 trees to produce 1,000 barrels. At our estimate of 70 trees per acre, this would equal 215 acres, so it is likely that the trees were more concentrated on this 100 acre farm and/or apples were imported from other neighboring farms. ❖

### Tag Sale at Caprilands – by Sue Way

After many hours by dedicated volunteers spent cleaning, sorting, boxing, and moving items from upstairs and down, by block and tackle from the attic, to the front rooms and finally out into the yard, the day of the tag sale (Sept 21) dawned with volunteers moving items out into the yard. We were blessed with a sunny day.



The 8 am Early Bird hour arrived with cars pulling in and people lining up. We had a steady stream of customers, and the yard was full of people who found their items and quietly checked out. We soon went from 1 checkout station to 3, and worked hard to keep up with the line.



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## Tag Sale at Caprilands (Continued from Page 3)



We all agreed later that it was an appreciative crowd. Some said thank you for doing this, and some left a donation above their purchase costs. There was very little haggling until later in the day, when bargain hunters do come out.



Our volunteers were very pleased with the response to our efforts and were happy to see friends and former Caprilands workers have the chance to meet again and share memories and find things to take home. There was happiness and sadness in the air.



In exchange for the opportunity to hold the tag sale, volunteers donated hundreds of hours not only to sorting, cleaning, and pricing items to make them available to the public, but many hours were also devoted to cleaning the house, removing damp carpets that were in danger of damaging floors, and facilitating other necessary maintenance of the house, including a temporary roof repair. We truly contributed to the first steps of what will hopefully be a larger preservation effort! As a bonus, we've been privileged to receive many articles and other bits and pieces of information about the fascinating life of Adelma Simmons, which we will continue to share through displays and archives.



Moving items to the Strong Porter barn has continued right up to the date of this publication with some boxes still to come down from the attic! We are planning another tag sale for the spring at Strong Porter and plan to offer space to those who'd like to set up a table of their own. Stay tuned for details. ❖

### SPRING TAG SALE AT STRONG PORTER

*Space available*

Stay tuned for details

## Archivist Corner: Collections & Displays – *by Sue Way*

We have been separating items from Caprilands to keep for our collection and for use in displays, and plan to set up our first display in the display case at the Booth and Dimock Library for the month of December.

Among the many interesting things we have found are file folders containing many clippings and magazine articles written about Adelma Simmons and Caprilands over 60 years. The reporter would often send Adelma a copy of the published article with proofs of the pictures used along with a note, often saying how much they had enjoyed their visit.

We have learned something new with almost every article read. Some of these reporters were able to make you feel like you were right there listening to one of Adelma's lectures. In one article she is quoted as saying, "It is our custom to feed you and then tell you what you've eaten" - she smiled broadly - "when it's too late." Other reporters had a wonderful talent for encouraging Adelma to tell more of the details of her story. She was not always forthcoming with details and could get annoyed, especially when asked again about her age, but perhaps if the reporter had time for tea and was a good listener they would be rewarded with more of the story. Possibly as the years went by she had time to reflect and became more willing to tell her story. In "Country Journal" 1978, reporter Anne S. Warner tells us that while Adelma was working for Steigers Department Stores "in the 30's she started the Gateway Shops (which included the first herb shops) at the old Steigers in Hartford. She traveled widely to Paris, Mexico, Central and South America on a regular basis and to Cuba. Eventually her husband (George Simmons) persuaded her to retire and come home. 'It was Awful', she says the painful memory still vivid. 'I had been Little Miss Albert Steiger all those years - I had had a position, and all

at once I was nothing. I had no identity. I was miserable, and I even became ill'".

Something was needed to fill the gap, and it turned out to be goats. "I had seen goats in Europe and the islands," she relates, "and thought them the most enchanting creatures." Why did she give them up? "At one time I had fifty of them. Nothing ever stays small with me. I raised and exhibited four breeds, all purebred." The reporter commented that goats have become quite popular. It was not true at that time. "Nobody understood goats", she says. "My Vermont relatives wouldn't speak of it - I was in disgrace. Male goats smell, you know. I earned my name 'Stinky', and I couldn't get anyone to care for them."

In another article we learn that there were several years of drought. Adelma tells us, "The earth cracked under my feet. I thought everything was gone. The beautiful flowers died, and the herbs lived. I decided I'd been spoken to." (From the Champaign -Urbana News- Gazette 1991)

More enlightenment comes through George Weigel of "The Patriot News Gazette" of Harrisburg, PA, 1993. Adelma is quoted as saying that the books she wrote came as a measure of self defense. "We found out very soon we had to write books because people would forget everything we told them almost before they got to their cars....Some people would call in the middle of the night to get a recipe, or because I knew something that could help them."

Please watch for an announcement about our annual Stew & Story in March when we will tell more of Adelma's story and hope to gather some of Adelma's neighbors and friends to retell their stories of Caprilands and the woman who created in herself a world-renowned herbalist, and in her farm the Caprilands experience for many thousands of people. ❖

## George Dudley Seymour Lecture *Prophet of Place*

On October 26 we had a great lecture about George Dudley Seymour called "Prophet of Place" presented by William Hosley. The presentation was held in conjunction with CT Landmarks, which graciously provided the venue in the newly repurposed barn at the Nathan Hale Homestead. The barn was a fitting place to hold this event about the man who started the enlightenment of Nathan Hale, historic preservation, and open space preservation.

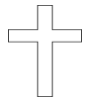
This presentation was of particular interest to Coventry residents because George Dudley Seymour gave us the Nathan Hale State Forest, and he bought and restored the Nathan Hale Homestead, the Strong Porter house (now a museum), the Huntington house (where Hale studied for Yale), and the Sprague house, all due to his fascination with Nathan Hale.



Hale Homestead

## Remembering Mark Poglitsch

Sadly, Coventry Historical Society member Mark Poglitsch passed away on December 8, 2019. We offer our deepest condolences to Mark's wife, Susan Way.



## Friends of Strong

The maintenance committee is looking into applying for a grant to do ground work between the Strong Porter House and the carriage shed, including improving drainage, replacing septic lines, providing better drainage for the basement sump pump, repairing the foundation in the carpenter's shop, and providing handicapped parking and access, and regrading the area and improving parking. We also hope to have the State Archeologist conduct a ground- penetrating radar study of the site.



Current priorities for the maintenance committee include upgrading our tenant's kitchen, something that is expected to be done by volunteers this winter. Contact Jim Wicks (860-874-2346 [jiwicks@gmail.com](mailto:jiwicks@gmail.com)) or Steve Marshall ([historichouseguy@gmail.com](mailto:historichouseguy@gmail.com)) for more info or to volunteer.

## Annual CHS Christmas Party



A fun time was had by all during the annual CHS Christmas party on December 8.



Special thanks go out to Fred and Carol North for providing holiday music and games.



## Christmas in the Village



Thank you to Sue Grace, who offered display space at the Main Street Wellness Group, 1153 Main Street, during Christmas in the Village on December 8. We offered cook books and garden books for sale from Adelma Simmons' library along with framed photos from the Society's collection.

You can also find an Adelma Simmons display at the Booth and Dimock Library and at the Worn Yesterday Shop in the post office plaza.

## Thank you Milt Natusch!

For the beautiful wreaths you hung on the doors of the Strong Porter house.



## Shop Amazon

Log on to [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com), select Coventry Historical Society, Coventry, CT, as your preferred charity, and a portion of the cost of your purchases will be donated to us.

