



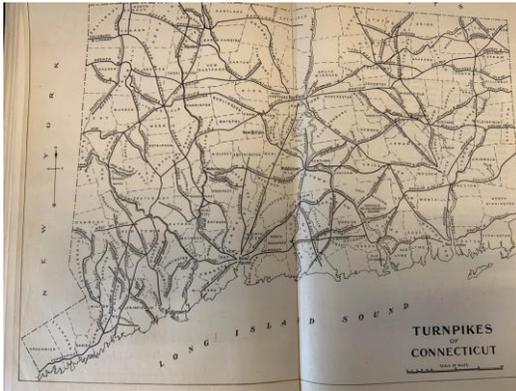
# Sign Post

March 2021  
Volume 29, Issue 1



## COVENTRY ROADSIDE TREASURES FROM THE PAST

*By John Holmy, Town Historian*



**Turnpikes in Connecticut**

Along our roads are treasures waiting to be found by the observant traveler. Nothing you are likely to notice from behind the wheel of your vehicle. I never noticed these things until I started walking instead of going to the gym during the pandemic. These are the sorts of treasures you will notice on foot or while you are looking out the passenger window of your vehicle.

There are different kinds of roadside treasures waiting for you to discover:

- Connecticut Highway Department markers from the 1920's
- Mileage markers along the Middle Turnpike / Boston Post Road
- Memorials erected by the philanthropist, George Dudley Seymour

The Connecticut Highway Department (CHD), an independent agency responsible for the construction and maintenance of state roads, merged with the Department of Transportation in 1969. In the 1920's the CHD was mandated to mark the boundaries of state roads with distinctive markers. There are at least two CHD markers from the 1920's in Coventry, one in front of Hytone farm

on Route 44, and the other on the corner of Springdale and Main Streets.

**Fig 3 Connecticut Highway Department marker from the 1920's in front of Hytone Farm**



The mileage markers along the Middle Turnpike / Boston Post road / Route 44 have a long history. In Colonial times each town was supposed to mark their primary roads with markers. There is an often told myth that Benjamin Franklin, as Postmaster General, put markers along postal routes in the 1750's. During the Turnpike era of the 1800's, turnpike companies placed mileage markers along their routes.



**Fig 1 DOT replica marker from 1972 at the corner of Carpenter Road & Route 44**



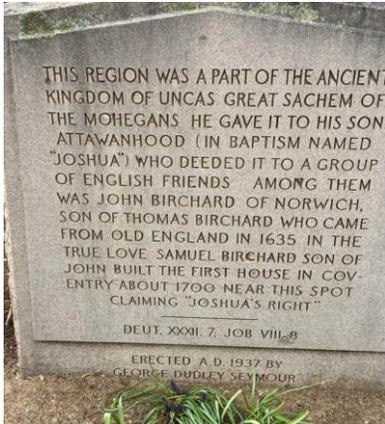
**Fig 4 an original mileage marker from the Turnpike era across from Silver Street on Route 44**



**Fig 2 Commemorative marker on Route 44 in front of Brigham Tavern**

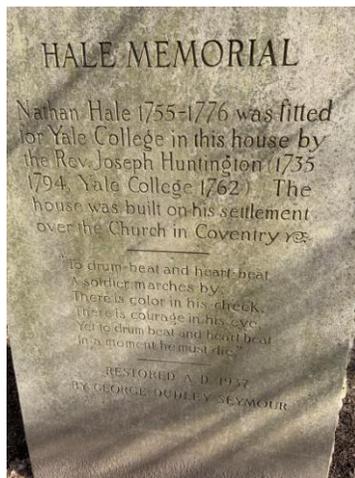
George Dudley Seymour was a patent attorney and philanthropist from New Haven, Connecticut, (Cont'd on page 2)

(Cont'd from page 1) who had a great admiration for and fascination with Nathan Hale. He purchased the Hale home in 1914 and the Strong Porter house in 1926. He erected numerous markers, especially along South Street, commemorating the life of Nathan Hale. The Coventry Historical Society is located in the Strong Porter House and is an excellent place to learn more about George Dudley Seymour, the post roads, and taverns of Coventry from our past.



**Fig 6 George Dudley Seymour memorial located at the corner of Cross and South Streets next to the Joseph Huntington House**

**Fig 5 George Dudley Seymour memorial located at 1726 South Street**



**Fig 7 The Lexington and Concord Rally Rock in front of the High School opposite the Jeremiah Ripley House and the Jesse Root House**



This is an excellent time of year to be on the lookout for these roadside treasures, since the foliage is minimal and views are unobstructed. The next time you find yourself in the passenger seat or you have restless children in the backseat, look out the window and see what can be discovered.

**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT** - Jim Murphy  
To say the least, this past period has been, well . . . interesting. We had to cancel all our public programs and hunker down with the rest of the world, but in spite of this we did get a lot accomplished. We learned to use Zoom for our Executive Board meetings for one. We were given permission to get things of any value out of the barns at Caprilands; we formed work parties and loaded two “pods” with items for our museum collections or our annual tag sale in the spring or whenever it’s safe to do so. Some things are being sold on EBay with great success. We applied for and received a stewardship relief grant from the State Historic Preservation Office for \$1000. That will help defray the loss of income from programs and parking donations at the Strong-Porter museum for the Coventry Farmers Market. Of course we still have maintenance issues with the museum that have to be taken care of.

Our website has some new pages added with many new images in the Collections section. Please check it out at <https://ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.dreamhosters.com>. In addition to sharing Coventry history, we’re also getting and answering to the best of our ability many town history questions on our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory>.

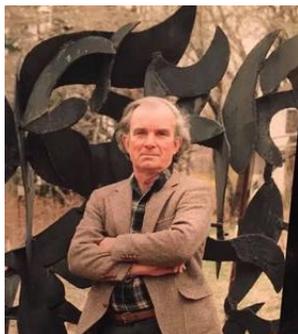
There’s a new exhibit up in the display case at town hall on “Women in Elected Office” and the anniversary of the 19th amendment. An outdoor program is being planned for sometime this summer to replace our annual “Stew and Story” that we had to cancel for March. We also welcomed two new Executive Board members, Jill LaChance and John Holmy.

Stay safe until next time.

Mark Your Calendars	
Mar 11	Executive Board Zoom Mtg 7pm
Apr 8	Executive Board Zoom Mtg 7pm
May 13	Executive Board Zoom Mtg 7pm
May 29-31	Caprilands Tag Sale, Strong Porter (tentative)
Jun 10	Executive Board Zoom Mtg 7pm

### **DAVID HAYES SCULPTURE FIELDS**

Do you know of this hidden treasure located on 905 South Street here in Coventry, CT? The [David Hayes Sculpture Fields](#) and the David Hayes Art Foundation honor the late [David Hayes](#) (1931-2013), whose modern sculpture is found both in the United States and Europe. He is recognized as an American Modern Master.



Hayes was a Connecticut native born in Hartford and raised in Manchester, CT. After graduating from Manchester High School, he attended the University of Notre Dame. Later, he studied at Indiana University where he met and was greatly influenced by the work of David Smith. Being awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and Fulbright award, Hayes moved to France where he had the



opportunity to meet Alexander Calder. Hayes leaves behind an immense body of work that is on

display in national museums, at local landmarks, and here in Coventry.

The artist created most of his work here in the small town of Coventry and lived a quiet, private, productive life on the old farm located on 905 South Street. The

property, an 18th century Colonial house and Studio/Barn situated on 57 acres, is listed on the National



Register of Historic Places. Today the David Hayes Art Foundation allows visitors to imagine this artistic existence by opening the fields to the

public. If you love art and creativity, this is a beautiful destination in any season. Hayes's abstract sculptures are natural forms the artist met in his daily life and will give the art enthusiast plenty to contemplate. A map will guide the visitor through the fields which are open year-round. To arrange for a private tour call 607-353-9000 or send an email to the artist's son at [david@davidhayes.com](mailto:david@davidhayes.com).



### **REMEMBERING LYNDON WILMOT, BOB VISNY AND ELLIE D'ANNOLFO**

CHS would like to take this opportunity to express our sadness at the passing of three longtime active members of our Society and our gratitude for their contributions to this group as well as the spirit in which they gave their time, talent and effort.

**Lyndon Wilmot** lived in Coventry all of his life, born with his twin brother in 1943. He served on the Coventry Police force for 32 years, starting when there was only a Police Chief and 3 officers. Officers worked very long hours and always alone and were always on call for emergencies.



In those days Lyn was a member of CHS but had little time to devote to his interest in local history. As the years went by he served in many ways, as Treasurer, President and on committees of all kinds. He was passionate about the antiques in our collection, like the Burnap clock, the Laura Farnum Booth and West family portraits, and other treasures. Our members will probably remember him best for the stories, (Cont'd on page 4)

(Cont'd from page 3) mostly about policing, he told at our annual Stew & Story program. One especially memorable story was about a call concerning a small herd of cows that had moved in on someone's front lawn, probably thinking the grass was greener over there. The advice he got from a local farmer was to find the "Boss Cow" and all of the others would follow her.

**Bob Visny** lived in town all but the few years he spent in college in Ohio and in the military and a brief time when the house his family lived in on Brewster St got blown apart by the '38 hurricane. They moved several times before they settled in the old Richardson Tavern on Main St. Born in 1931, he passed away peacefully Nov. 7, 2020. He attended the Red and the Brick one room schools in Coventry and Manchester High School before attending Marietta College in Ohio and UConn, and he taught 6<sup>th</sup> grade for 32 years at Washington and Verplank schools in Manchester. In 1960 he and his wife Wilma bought the 50 acres that they would turn into their Hickory Ridge Tree Farm.

Bob devoted his time and enthusiasm to the Brick School and reunions of his graduating class, our antique hearses and Armstrong wagon that he saw



through to restoration, and Memorial Day Parades, as well as Farm Day events, our

Haunted Evenings events, a dramatic cemetery tour of Center Cemetery and really all things pertaining to Coventry history. At the Caprilands auction he decided an antique goat milking stand was the piece he wanted to buy for the Society. He

had his lawn chair with him and he sat next to that stand until it went up for sale and befriended a man in the crowd who offered to chip in \$100 towards the cost. When the stand went up for sale, Bob stood and held up his card with a look of determination in his eyes and did not take his card down until that stand was his. It is now a proud part of our Caprilands collection.

**Ellie D'Annolfo**, a native of Teaneck, NJ, age 96, passed away peacefully in her sleep at home Jan 8, 2021. While working in an office in NYC she met and married her husband Guy before moving to Sturbridge, MA, where they raised three children. In 1976 they moved to South St in Coventry and Ellie went to work as a secretary in the Mansfield school system. They later moved to Yarmouth, MA, where she worked as a secretary in a private school until retiring in 1987. She then moved back to Coventry to live in with her daughter Andrea and son-in-law Steve Marshall in the Huntington house on South St.



Ellie served as CHS Treasurer and on our Finance Committee, looking out for our investments, and sold and shipped cookbooks for us for many years. When we were given the Jacobson dollhouse she went to work cleaning and repairing it and getting it ready for display. It remains on display at the Coventry Visitors Center, which we hope will be back open on weekends this spring. Dollhouses were a hobby of Ellie's and she created several, and she was also known for making 3" stuffed bears.

#### CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

For the latest information about any meeting or program changes watch your email or our Facebook page [facebook.com/coventryhistory/](https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/).

## **THE COVENTRY MANUFACTURING COMPANY (1815-1839)**

*By Bill Jobbagy*

The Mill Brook, which flows from Lake Wangumbaug to the Willimantic River, was the primary source of water power for mills in Coventry Village. During the 1700's, the brook supported a grist mill, two fulling mills (to shrink and tighten cloth) and at least two saw mills. Production was primarily for local consumption. With the coming of the industrial revolution in the early 1800's, small factories were built that produced goods for a broader population. The first of these manufactories was a paper mill built in 1812 by Jeremiah Fitch and Solomon Gilbert at the site now occupied by Ackert's Electric. Fitch was a Captain in the Revolutionary War and a prominent landholder. Gilbert was a merchant, having a shop on South Street, and an industrialist. The second factory was built in 1815 by John Boynton to make wool carding machines of his own patent. It was located in the building on Lake Street across from the flea market. The first incorporated firm was the Coventry Manufacturing Company, also known as the Coventry Cotton Manufacturing Company.

The Coventry Manufacturing Company's (hereby referred to as CMC) various activities spanned a few decades, and it was relatively successful in its stated objective to produce cotton. The company owned, over time, a thriving grist mill, a small saw mill and a small cotton yarn manufactory and tenements, as well as a minority interest in the Mansfield Manufacturing Company on the Willimantic River for a time. The company's directors engaged in many purchases and sales of property, some vacant land and some land with buildings, for no obvious purpose other than speculative investments.

In August of 1814 Daniel Dimmick sold, for \$2000, to Calvin and Royal Manning, Jeremiah Parrish and Eben Loomis (all of Coventry), and Benoni Bates of Kent County Rhode Island, under the firm of the Coventry Cotton Manufacturing Company, seven acres with a saw mill and five acres on the Mill Brook with a factory frame and the privilege to dig a tail race and raise the

dam located there. The saw mill was located where the Clock & Whale Factory is today on Mason Street, and the factory being built will become the cotton mill and was located on the east side of today's Woods Lane on the brook. Mr. Bates would relinquish his shares in the company for \$2,500 a year later. In June of 1815, the Directors of the company leased the cotton factory to Mr. Bates and Ira Dimmick. The machines inside include two mules with 396 spindles. The lessees will make cotton yarn at 2-1/4 cents per skein and erect additional tenement houses. The yarn produced was roughly equivalent to a heavy tweed today. The CMC will provide the raw material and purchase the finished product. (A mule is one of the first mechanized versions of the hand driven spinning wheel. It duplicated the drawing and spinning motion and allowed many bobbins or spindles of yarn to be produced simultaneously.)

The CMC was incorporated by an act of the State General Assembly in October of 1815 by Nathaniel Dunham of Mansfield, Solomon Gilbert of Coventry, and Daniel and Dudley Bucks under the firm of Daniel Bucks and Co. of Hartford. Mr. Dunham was a prominent businessman and landholder in Mansfield, also having an interest in the Mansfield Manufacturing Company. Messrs. Bucks owned a "merchant tailor and clothing store" in Hartford and possibly were looking to the CMC to produce cloth for their shop. The act of incorporation stated that the company's objectives were to manufacture wool and cotton, that its land holdings were not to exceed 50 acres, and that it could issue capital stock at \$1,000 per share, not to exceed 100 shares. It is believed that about 25 to 30 shares were issued at \$500 per share, and that the share value of the company never exceeded \$30,000.

According to published reports, the lessees of the mill were relatively unsuccessful, and early in 1818 the CMC sold the cotton mill and the saw mill to Mr. Dunham and Elias Howe (also of Mansfield) for \$5,000 (roughly equivalent to \$80,000 today). As a reference, the average homestead at the time was valued at \$700. Later that year, Mr. Howe relinquished his share back (Cont'd on page 6)

(Cont'd from page 5) to the company. Capital was invested and the cotton mill continued to produce yarn and later cotton cloth on power looms. The 1820 Federal Census of Industry lists the CMC, Solomon Gilbert agent, consuming 30,000 pounds of cotton, producing yarn valued at \$9,450, and employing three men, two women and eleven children that year. The machinery included two mules with 396 spindles and three throstles with 288 spindles, cards (for combing and aligning the cotton fibers), and a drawing frame. (A throstle is a machine for spinning wool, cotton, etc., from the rove, and is more sophisticated than a "mule", so called because it makes a singing noise like the bird of the same name.) Total annual wages were \$2,000. Total capital invested was \$7,000. According the census, the demand for yarn is good and the proceeds to the owners is "modest". The company also owned three "dwelling houses" which were presumably used as tenements. Unfortunately there are no further records of the company other than a few notes in historical accounts and abutting deed records that make reference to the cotton mill.

Upon Mr. Dunham's death in 1831, his probate records indicate his 1/4 share of the company was worth \$6,800 indicating the share value of the entire company was a little over \$27,000 (about \$400,000 in today's value. It is likely the mill was producing cotton for the next two decades. Its ownership, which was generally held by Dunham, Gilbert and the Bucks, was consolidated by John Boynton in 1839 and sold to his son Leander. The sale included the mill, a few tenements and the machines to produce cotton cloth. Leander later sold to Enoch Hovey who started a silk manufactory located on Woods Lane.

The previously mentioned saw mill, which was built in the very early 1800's was owned and operated by the CMC through May of 1839 when it was acquired by John Boynton. Mr. Boynton owned the saw mill until the late 1850's when it was sold to Walter Loomis who operated a general store on the site now occupied by the Coventry Country Store and in 1861, Mr. Loomis sold the site to James Morgan who erected a silk manufactory there that operated,

under various owners (Bottum then Dady) until 1927 when it was acquired by the National Silk Company.

Part of the original land acquisition located on Mason Street near the cotton mill was an eight-acre tract adjacent to the mill where the town garage was located. The CMC leased, then sold one-half of this tract for \$1,000 to Hezekiah Edgerton and Frederick Strong in 1832, and they mutually agreed to build a shop to make textile machinery, 64 by 36 feet, three stories high, and the privilege to build four tenement houses. A fair amount of investment occurred here, as the site with a forge and machine shop was sold to John Boynton in 1835 for more than \$4,000. This site was later to hold the huge Washington Mill that made cotton then woolen flannels though the mid and later 1800's.

In 1821-1824 the CMC also acquired a 9/11 interest in the grist mill which was started in 1716 and occupied the site on the Mill Brook in Coventry Village now held by the Teleflex Company. The grist mill was acquired from Messrs Gilbert, Buck and Carpenter and was previously held by the heirs of the Thomas, then Noah Porter family. The Porter family owned the mill from its early beginnings in the 1700's. The grist mill produced corn flour or grist from 1716 to 1877 when it was converted to make bedquilts, then silk fish line, then silk sutures, and now makes polymer sutures using some machines that are 112 years old. The CMC relinquished its share of the grist mill to John Boynton in 1834.

The Coventry Manufacturing Company also bought and sold several pieces of land and homes in South Coventry from 1824 to 1837. All of its remaining possessions were sold to John Boynton in 1839 and the company was dissolved around that time.

#### References:

Coventry and Mansfield land and probate records.

Federal Census of Industry, 1820

"The History of Tolland County", J. R. Cole, 1888

An Article by Elijah Robertson "Mill Brook, Some History Concerning South Coventry's Manufacturing Interests", 1905

## **CAPRILANDS UPDATE**

*By Sue Way*

In mid-October CHS got a message from the Adelma Simmons' estate saying the Caprilands property would soon be sold and that we were given permission to clean out the barn and greenhouse and remove items for our collection or to sell. It was sudden notice with not much time given to get it done, and with the pandemic raging we were very fortunate to get some help from a couple of local carpenters, Ray and Noah, who took a few days off to help us. Anne Burke, Jim Murphy, Bill Jobbagy, Joyce Wicks, Jim Wicks, and Sue Way from CHS, and our friends Arlene Fiano, Byron Hill, and Sarah Stearn all worked hard to find things of interest and get them into trucks, vans and pods.

We sold some large display pieces and work tables as word spread and through Facebook Marketplace, so you will find some of these in shops and homes in town. The potpourri bins are now installed at Nathan Hale Farm and Feed, for instance. We have continued to sell some things out of our barn in order to organize so we can empty the rented pods at Strong Porter.

Many pieces have been added to our collection and our museum display. We brought back many boxes of Christmas decorations which transformed our exhibit for the season. Many decorations will be added to the collection, some were sold to visitors, and many more will go into the next big Caprilands tag sale!

Many boxes of paper and books were brought back to the museum to be sorted and read. We have doubled the number of articles and magazines with Caprilands stories in them. We have found account books kept by Adelma and her husband George Simmons; letters from Adelma written home from her trips abroad, and more of her poetry; more original illustrations for her books; one of the Underwood typewriters she used to write her books; Caprilands very first visitors' log book; many photographs; and so many more treasures. Some of these have been added to the



exhibit and the rest are being stored in archival boxes and will be cataloged.

The sale of pieces from Caprilands continues to provide us with a steady income to support our budget. There are some items available for purchase at Coventry Arts & Antiques, and we hope to be setting up a display of items to be sold at Nathan Hale Farm and Feed. The Caprilands property has been sold to David M. Parent of Tolland. We understand the family, which now lives in Tolland, has horses and intends to keep the land as farmland. We do not know what other plans they have.

### **CAPRILANDS TAG SALE**

***Memorial Day Weekend 2021 (tentative)***

We are fortunate to have been offered the opportunity to sell the items that remained in the sales barn and greenhouse at Caprilands before the property was recently sold. We hope to sell this collection at a tag sale on Memorial Day weekend, provided we can do so safely during the pandemic. Stay tuned for more information as the date approaches.

### **STRONG PORTER MUSEUM**

***Visit our Caprilands Display at Strong Porter***



Strong Porter Museum has a Caprilands display devoted to the life and legend of Adelma Grenier Simmons and her famous herb farm. The Museum is open Sundays 11-3 until further notice by appointment only for

groups of up to 4 in order to maintain social distancing. Tours on alternate days may be possible. Face masks required. Email [info@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org) to schedule an appointment.

**Coventry Historical Society**  
 P.O. Box 534, Coventry, Connecticut 06238  
  
**E-Mail:** [info@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org)  
  
 CHS Website: [ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org](http://ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org)

<b>Executive Board 2020-21</b>		
<b>President</b>	Jim Murphy	860-742-3054 <a href="mailto:president@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org">president@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org</a>
<b>Vice President</b>	Vacant	
<b>Secretary</b>	Dan Gorka	401-265-1085
<b>Treasurer</b>	Joyce Wicks	860-707-6305
<b>Archivist</b>	Susan Way	860-712-4278 <a href="mailto:susanway@gmail.com">susanway@gmail.com</a>
<b>Members at Large</b>	Anne Burke Rachel Dawkins John Holmy Bill Jobbagy Jill LaChance Jim Wicks	860-874-2346 Maintenance

**Become a Member**

If you are not a member of the Coventry Historical Society, please consider joining!

Single Membership \$15.00  
Family Membership \$25.00

Send name, address and contact information using one of the methods listed above. Telephone and email would be appreciated.

*Questions, comments and corrections on this issue or suggestions for future issues can be sent to [joycewix@gmail.com](mailto:joycewix@gmail.com)*

**NOTE: Covid schedule changes are in effect until further notice.**  
 Executive Board Meetings are held on the second Thursday of every month, 7pm at the Strong Porter house. All are welcome.  
 The Brick School is generally open on the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays from 1-4pm May-early Oct  
 The Strong Porter Museum is open Sundays from 11am - 3pm June - October.  
 Archives are available for viewing on Saturdays 10am - 1pm or by appointment by calling 860-712-4278.