

Historical Society of East Hartford

Newsletter, November 2011



Newsletter abridged due to the weeklong loss of power from the October 29th storm.

NOVEMBER MEETING FEATURES PROGRAM ON CT'S ROLE IN THE CIVIL WAR

The Historical Society of East Hartford is honored to present Dr. Matthew Warshauer, Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University, at its Wednesday, November 16, 2011 meeting. Dr. Warshauer is a co-chair of the Connecticut Civil War Commemoration Commission, which was formed to commemorate our state observance of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War.

His program will feature a Power Point presentation with the highlight on his book, Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice and Survival. The 7pm meeting at East Hartford's Raymond Library is free and open to the public. For questions, call Craig Johnson at 860-568-2884.

NEWS FROM CGN & FCC

Ruthie S. Brown, 860-643-5652 or shapbrown@cox.net, has sent in the following updates.

- A unique Christmas Gift Fair, sponsored by the Connecticut Gravestone Network and Friends of Center Cemetery, will be held on Dec. 3, 9am to 4pm, and on Dec. 4, 10am to 3pm, at the South Senior Center as part of East Hartford's Holiday Fest.

There will be gift shopping for those hard to buy for people... those history buffs and Genealogists - On hand will be vendors with crafts, heritage organizations with books and memberships and more. For sale will be enchantments with stones and herbs, Genealogy books, and cemetery crafts from coffee cups and tea shirts to stained glass pieces and jewelry, and indoor plants.

Stop in for a coffee, a snack, and have your palm read.

We will have Genealogists on board to help those in need of assistance.

Bring in samples of your ancestors' handwriting and our Handwriting Expert will tell you about them.

Gift certificates for Hand Writing analyses will be for sale.

Tarot Card reading will be offered.

Genealogy sessions will be held.

- A CGN meeting date is scheduled for Sunday Nov. 13th - Noon to 4pm - at the South Senior Center in East Hartford. Coffee and snacks will be available. There will be a social time to share thoughts and situations. Two topics to be discussed are 1) Godfrey Library's Statewide Cemetery Inventory Project 2) New Haven's First Catholic Cemetery - 4 skeletons found at Yale New Haven Hospital construction site; where are the remaining 600? Members and friends are welcome. We need a head count to have enough coffee and snacks available, please email and make sure the subject states 'NOV.13th meeting'. Thanks.

NEWS FROM THE MHS

Susan Barlow suggests you check out the MHS website for their activities. One activity she recommends the "Clara Barton and Mary Walker in the Civil War" lecture by former State Senator Mary Ann Handley: At the History Center, 175 Pine Street. Former Manchester Community College professor Mary Ann Handley will describe their efforts in the abolitionist movement and their political activity in the women's suffrage movement. Parking is available along Pleasant Street (no on-street parking) and in a small lot next to the History Center. \$3 for non-members, \$1 for Society members, free for children.

SOME REMINISCENCES OF THE STORM OF SATURDAY OCTOBER 29, 2011

Hopefully by the time you read this newsletter the ravages and outages of the snow storm we had last Saturday, October 29, will be a memory and nothing more than an interesting topic of conversation.

We hadn't really listened to the news or the weather forecasts of late last week. We did know snow was expected on Saturday the 29th. But we had no idea just what was coming. A heavy, wet snow started about midday. Roads, lawns, tree branches, roofs, and power lines quickly became white. Soon power lines were breaking. Our Ridgewood Road lost electricity about 4:30pm that afternoon. We had lost it before and always had had it restored within a fairly quick time. So we weren't worried. Early that night tree branches, still bearing the weight of summer leaves which had not yet fallen off, were beginning to bend with the combined weight of wet snow and leaves. We became worried when the branches of one of our mature dogwoods bent to the ground. The bending branches caused our dogwood's height to be halved. What we didn't realize was that the branches had cracked. We may have lost over half the tree. We tried to ride out the storm that night by reading by candlelight. As the night went on we heard more frequently a thumping sound as tree branches broke and fell to the ground. One loud thump was caused by a large limb from a maple falling on our new garage roof. Luckily there was no damage. An even louder thump may have been caused by a large, old oak, perhaps 70' tall, being uprooted from our backyard hill and falling on an old maple in the yard causing it to lose most of its trunk and branches. Perhaps 7' of these branches pressed against the house. There was no serious house damage. By this time the frequent thumping had become depressing. It was time to go to sleep.

We woke to a world that would have been magical in other circumstances – fall colored leaves under a blanket of snow. But the devastation around us was mind boggling. Branches and limbs, small and large, were down everywhere. Power lines were hanging loose. There was no phone service and no electricity. What we saw was repeated across CT and elsewhere. The four northern CT counties bore the brunt of the storm; the four southern counties were less severely hit. In the week since, CT's two major electric providers UI in the south and CL&P in the north would report the power outages to be over 1,000,000. It would take days to restore power. This morning, Saturday November 5, there were still approximately 200,000 out by CL&P's count; UI had brought its people on line earlier in the week. Luckily the weather stayed in the 40s and 50s in the day; but it did fall to the 20's – 40s at night. Most work stopped for a day or two on Monday and Tuesday. School stopped first for a day or two and then in many places for the week. Travel was hazardous because of the downed lines. There was no trick or treating this Halloween.

As the week started and there seemed to be no prospect of having power restored quickly (there were no utility trucks seen or heard rumbling by) we decided to see what we could do. We managed to get our old land line phone working. We could only send and receive calls. There was no way to get stored messages. But this was good. Cell phones? ATT was having some trouble supporting its system we heard. And without car chargers where would we charge them?... Even with the fairly reasonable day temperatures our house was becoming chilly. We found some old bags of coal and managed to get our old coal stove working. This is amazing as we had given up using it when we moved to East Hartford because of the soot it generated here and the heat it didn't... Our small group of immediate neighbors became friendly. We could meet at the coal stove, have a cup of coffee from a propane stove, and discuss the situation... At the beginning there was no contact with the world outside our area. We asked ATT to come by to fix the phone of an elderly neighbor lady; but they couldn't fix it as their policy required power at the house. There was none. They did, however, put her on a 'medial expedited' list for help as she had fallen and was in the hospital... Finally on Wednesday three large, orange, Asplundh trucks appeared. The crews came to trim that same lady's trees. We didn't realize how isolated from the world we were feeling until those wonderful fellows from Indiana and their trucks came by... One heartfelt memory from Wednesday is of an old man and his caretaker in their house without heat. They were in their overcoats and hats trying to keep warm. He was also under a blanket. The next morning he was scheduled to go to a place with heat. A friend's hot dinner that Wednesday night was the first hot one they had had since Saturday... There were other kindnesses. A water company from the Tolland area (where wells are common) offered free drinking water, 24 hours a day, to anyone who showed up, no questions asked. The only requirement was that the person getting water bring a clean container. UTC donated 150,000 carbon monoxide monitors to the Red Cross for distribution. People trying to stay warm by heating with portable stoves, etc. are being asphyxiated. St Mary's food bank enlisted neighbors' grills and cooked 40 lbs of chicken, which would have been lost, and gave the food to the town shelter. We were told that DuraFlex gave its neighbors meals. Surely the stories go on.

It is now Saturday, November 5. We have just received word that about 4:30pm today electricity was flowing again on Ridgewood Road. Hydro Quebec had come by in their beautiful dark blue trucks and connected our street to the working power grid. Our 7 long, chilly days with dimly lit evenings are finally over.

To share your stories of this week in future newsletters, contact eknose@aol.com or 860-569-7181.

Many thanks to the Raymond Library, the Ansonia Public Library and St Isaac Jogues Church office for use of their computers and/ or power for this letter.