

News Packet

OF THE PLAINVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1968



The Old Town Hall

Spring

"WHERE HISTORY COMES ALIVE"

2019

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By Nancy Eberhardt President's Message

I would like to start this newsletter by thanking those who have "held down the fort" while I was in the hospital. What we thought would be a few weeks ended up being nine months. Rose Stanley, our Vice President worked with Gert LaCombe, who agreed to be interim President. Rosemary Morante, Dave Pipeling, Sue Nester, Candace Hall and Kathy LaBella have lent much needed "helping hands". With all of their help we are slowly moving into 21st century technology. I want to thank all of them and hope they will continue to work with us. Everyone who worked on the Golden Anniversary celebrations thank you. You did a great job! If there is anyone I have left out of this thank you, I apologize.

This year Plainville celebrates its sesquicentennial (150). Our summer display this year will be "Plainville through the Years". We hope to include, in the display, some of those items we remember as kids but do not exist today. We could use your help with the display. If you have any items that are 50 years old or older that you would allow us to display, we would really appreciate it. Any item that you lend us will be tagged with your name and a register will be kept of all borrowed items with the donor's name, address and phone number.

Following, you will find a few of the items we are looking for:

dial phone, rotary phone VHF tape, VHF recorder, 8-track tape, roller skates with key, sled, cassette tape, early radio, early computer, computer floppy disk, record player, records, 78's, 33's, 45's, ration cards, cameras, flash bulbs, slide projector, slides, Lincoln logs, erector sets, hula hoop, Chinese jump rope, jacks, marbles, and stilts. These are just a few of the items we're looking for. Please check your cellar and attic to see if you have any of these or other things you're willing to let us borrow for display. In addition maps will show the growth of our town. Please be sure to bring your children and or grandchildren to see what you had when you were a kid. How many of the items do you remember?

In the next three editions of this year's newsletter, I would like to cover businesses, people and events. This edition will cover three areas: first, Plainville before the English invasion, the Tunxis Indians' second settling of the "GREAT PLAIN" and finally, Plainville becomes a town. Please let me know what you are interested in learning more about. You may drop me a line, snail mail or email (plvhistorical@gmail.com) or call and leave your request. The phone number at the Center is (860) 747-6577.



Plainville Historic Center

The Great Plain Before the English Settlement

Let me introduce you to the first settlers of the Great Plain of Farmington, the Tunxis Indians. The Tunxis were a proud people governed by a strict code of conduct set down by Tunxis traditions. They belonged to the Algonquin family of tribes, as did most of the native tribes of Connecticut. Their lands encompassed all or part of eleven different present day towns.

The Tunxis men were tall, straight and very muscular. They had great endurance. They painted their faces but only for special occasions, red for celebration and black for mourning. The men were responsible for getting food by hunting and fishing, usually specializing in one or the other. As with the communal garden, any game or fish was shared with the village.

The Tunxis women were shorter than the men. They were muscular but their posture was not as straight. They carried themselves with pride. They painted their faces regularly for beauty rather than occasion. The tribe was matriachal which meant that the women owned everything.

The number four was important to the Tunxis. Winds from the different directions, north, south east and west, told them the weather. Southwest meant warm weather, northern meant cold. The four seasons dictated their different food sources, when best to hunt and fish, when best to plant and gather. Their environment ruled their lives. They used everything. No matter what they got from nature, fish parts not eaten were used as fertilizer. Parts of the cattail plant could be eaten. The stem was used for the shaft of bird arrows. In warm weather, the head was lit to keep the mosquitoes away. In the winter the fluff from the head was used as insulation in moccasins and for baby diapers. For the Tunxis, the deer was their equivalent to our modern day shopping plaza.

The leaders of the Tunxis tribe were called sachems. They were usually men but a woman could rule. A body of men called panieses acted as advisors to the sachems. Sagamores ruled over a subdivision of the tribe, as in Plainville's case and were responsible to the sachem in Farmington. The tribe was divided into bands, groups of related families which claimed a particular portion of tribal lands by tradition and usage. The sachem or sagamore did not have absolute power. He or she ruled by the will of the people, if the people did not like what was being done, the women could remove him or her. It was the sachem or sagamore's duty to entertain all travelers, strangers and ambassadors who might visit the village.

If it was decided that the soil was worn out and the village must be moved, the men decided when and where with the permission of the sachem. What could be used from the old village would be brought to the new village what could not would be left behind to return to nature. The village would be two to three acres in area, usually with a palasade surrounding it. Each family occupied a dome wigwam. The men would clear all fields of rocks and large trees. They would plant and tend the tobacco crop. The women would plant and tend the food crops.

The crops grown were known as “the 3 sisters”, corn, beans and squash. The seeds of the three would be planted together in each hill. The corn would come up first, followed by the beans that would twist around the corn stalk. Finally the squash leaves would appear, covering the soil, keeping the weeds out and the moisture in. In the center of the garden would be a small platform. Young boys would occupy it to keep any bird or animal away from the crops. He could also improve his aim with the practice of throwing stones at the invader.

Children would gather nuts and berries, in season, to add to the family’s food supply.

The Tunxis believed in a Creator God called Kietan. Only Kietan was perfect, therefore people must make a small mistake in all that they make. They believed Kietan lived in the southwest, where the warm weather came from. They believed that the soul was immortal, therefore, those who died with honor, kept his/her word, treat all people fairly, cared for the elderly, would go to live with Kietan.

They also believed in the devil. He was called Hobbamako. He was the spirit of evil, the source of all misfortune. He lived on a mountain in Moodus. Those who died without honor were doomed to wander about in darkness for eternity.

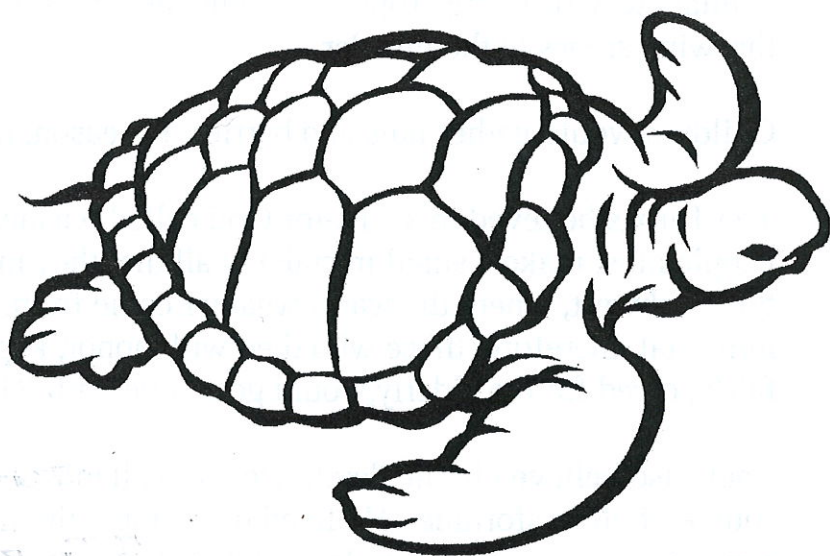
They believed that the song birds were the spirits of loved ones. Crows were Hobbamako’s agents.

For the Tunxis, the powwow was not a meeting but a person . They believed that the powwow held special powers, especially for healing.

Because they had no written language, the children learned “Tunxis ways” by stories, songs and adult examples. There were two particular traditions that helped rule the tribe. First, those who entered the village were made welcome. Their needs were met. They were entertained and allowed to stay as long as they wanted. There were three reasons for visitors: one, a hunting trip; two marriage or third, a journey for religious or political reasons. Second was the conduct of a guest and the host. Upon entering a home the guest must admire one of the host’s possessions. It then became the host’s duty to give

the possession to the guest. The guest must accept the item and use it. The guest must return the item after using it, along with something made with it or killed by it. If the gift was damaged, the guest must replace it with a new and better one. Do you think our misunderstanding of the Tunxis way refers to our expression "Indian giver"?

There were problems between the Tunxis way of life and the English way of life. The English believed in the private ownership of land. The Tunxis believed they had the use and care of the land but did not believe you could own land any more than you could own the water or the air. Misunderstandings between Tunxis tradition and English law finally led to the Tunxis, along with five other Connecticut tribes, to leave their lands. In 1775 the six tribes moved to the lands of the Oneidas, of the Iroquois Confederation.



English Settlement of the Great Plain of Farmington

Farmington was settled in 1640. It was almost 100 years later before the Great Plain of Farmington, what we call Plainville today, would be settled. The reason is simply land. People were basically farmers. Farmington had rich soil in its meadows and uplands. The soil of the Great Plain was sandy, and thus considered worthless.

In Castle's history of Plainville he tells the story of a Farmington settler who upon entering the Great Plain would dismount and crawl on his hands and knees over sandy spots, along what is now route 10, for fear he might sink in.

The first settler of the Great Plain appears to have been John Root, sometime around 1657. Between 1657 and 1737 land was granted by the Farmington proprietors to individuals. The Farmington proprietors were those men who had the exclusive right to the land given to them by the colonial government.

In 1737 the Farmington proprietors met to lay out what would become practically all of the central portion of our town. The land was divided into two divisions. The western tier of lots were 60 rods or 16 1/2 feet wide, east to west. An eleven foot wide passage separated it from the eastern tier of similar size. This was a fairly accurate picture of the layout of the Great Plain district.

There were three things that led to the development of what would become Plainville.

First, the building of the Farmington Canal. Opening in 1828, the canal brought growth and prosperity to Plainville. Though a small town, it began to increase in importance. The population grew. Houses were built. Real estate values increased. Merchants prospered. Farmers, tinsmiths, as well as the wagon and clock manufacturers found the canal a way to sell their products to new markets. Second the establishment of the Congregational Church, Plainville's first church. Before the establishment of this church Great Plain residents were required by law, to attend the Farmington church. Castle's History of Plainville stated that "Deacon Roderick Stanley may be considered as the religious leader of the town and it was through his efforts that our Congregational Church was organized."

In January of 1839 a meeting led by Deacon Stanley was called to ask the General Assembly for the right to establish a separate church independent of the Farmington church. It was granted in 1840.

Did you know that Connecticut had Black governors? Plainville can boast of being the hometown of two governors, one Black and one White. It was the custom of the African-Americans of Connecticut to assemble at the same time as the state elections and elect, among themselves, a governor. He did not have the same power as his counterpart but he was the person to represent his people should questions arise.

In the 1840's Lyman Homer, a man of color, moved his home to the triangular piece of land, situated between route 10 and Whiting Street. It was called Smut Island. The name was later changed to Governor's Island. Lyman Homer worked at Whiting's Store situated in the Bristol Basin. We know that Lyman Homer or Gov Homer as he was called was elected at least once, if not more, as one of Connecticut's Black Governors.

In 1640 the General Assembly granted the request and the Plainville Society was established.

The Baptist Meeting House was built in 1852.

In 1859, the Methodist and Episcopal churches were established.

Finally, the last thing affected not only the economic but also the social pattern of the village. In 1850, the Plainville Manufacturing Company was established. Prior to this, single women, unmarried or widowed, had basically four choices to survive; depend on family, do housework for someone else, work in the clock industry painting the clock faces. Young women got very sick from lead poisoning because of the lead in the paint. Finally, there was teaching. The new normal school had just opened in New Britain.

The Plainville Manufacturing Company manufactured knit underwear. In its early years, men did the cleaning, carding and spinning in a small wooden building.

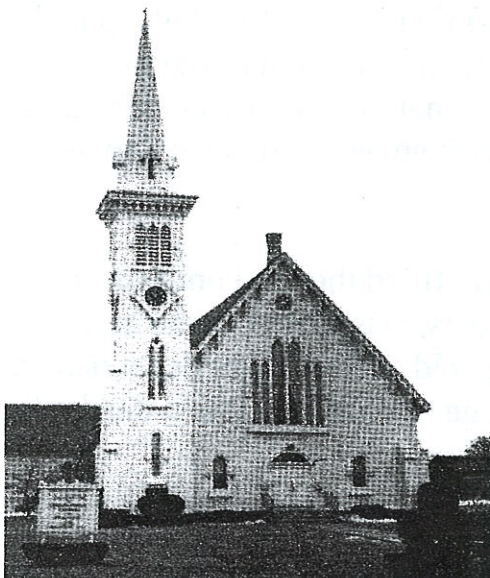
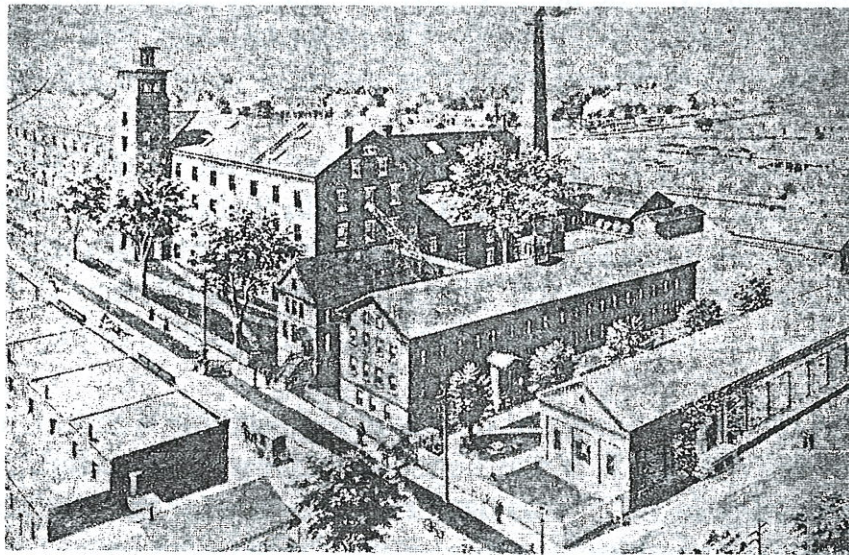
Once the material was knitted, it was sent to women who created the underwear. At home women would do the seaming, make buttonholes and sew on the buttons (12 to 18 buttons per pair), knit the cuffs for the arms and legs on small hand machines. Some women did the whole process while others specialized in certain areas. Children would often do the "ravelling". This was done to be sure the knitted material had a straight edge.

The company's first home, the wooden warehouse, burned to the ground in February, 1857. Plainville had no fire department. By early 1858 the new five story brick building was opened, complete with a sprinkler system. The new larger building allowed for more machines. The underwear could now be completed in-house. This also opened up for women a new job opportunity in which many took advantage. This

led to problems for some families. Up to this time, Mom was at home, now she would be leaving to go to work.

The Plainville Manufacturing Company employed up to 10% of the village's population, most of them women. This brought new people to the village. The company continued to expand until it took up the south side of West Main Street, from Pierce Street almost to Whiting Street. The company would become one of the leading suppliers of knit underwear to the Union soldiers during the Civil War.

These three things, the Farminton Canal, the establishment of the Congregational Church and the Plainville Manufacturing Company, led to an increase in the population and to economic opportunities. This led the people in the village of Plainville to start thinking about the town of Plainville.



PLAINVILLE Becomes a Town

In 1869, The General Assembly was to convene on May first. Thirty-five men from the village, led by Henry D. Stanley sent a petition requesting that they be allowed to become a separate town. The town of Farmington and the village of Plainville had little in common. The success of the Farmington Canal and the Plainville Manufacturing Company led the people to believe they could make it on their own. The village now had four churches; Congregational, Baptist, Methodist and Episcopal; increase in more manufacturing, expanding population, and the experiences of our Civil War veterans so that by 1869 the people wanted to break away from Farmington.

On April 21, 1869 the petition requesting that the village of Plainville be set off from Farmington and incorporated as the town of "Welch". The name Welch was selected to honor a prominent family. The name Plainville had been given to the village when the first post office was established in 1830. The proposed town was to be twelve square miles. The petition was endorsed by 240 of the legal voters of the village.

The General Assembly passed the act of incorporation on July 16, 1869. There were two changes in the request, first the name would remain Plainville not Welch and second the town would be nine square miles. Plainville was assigned to the third Senatorial District and the Farmington Probate District. Theodore Strong and Henry D. Stanley were ordered to call the first town meeting to be held on August 2, 1869.

As soon as word reached the town of the General Assembly's action, it was decided that the event had to be celebrated. It was hoped that every citizen would have a chance to be included. Thursday July 22nd was decided as the day for the celebration. Can you imagine trying to get something like this together in six days today? The celebration began with the firing of 100 cannons by the New Britain battery, quickly followed by the firing of rifles across the town line from Plainville to Farmington. At 10:00 the parade started. The first division had the Bristol Cornet Band and the children of the town. The second division was made up of invited guests. The final division was made up of the town citizens both on foot and in carriages. The parade ended at Royce's Grove where a platform for the speakers had been set up.

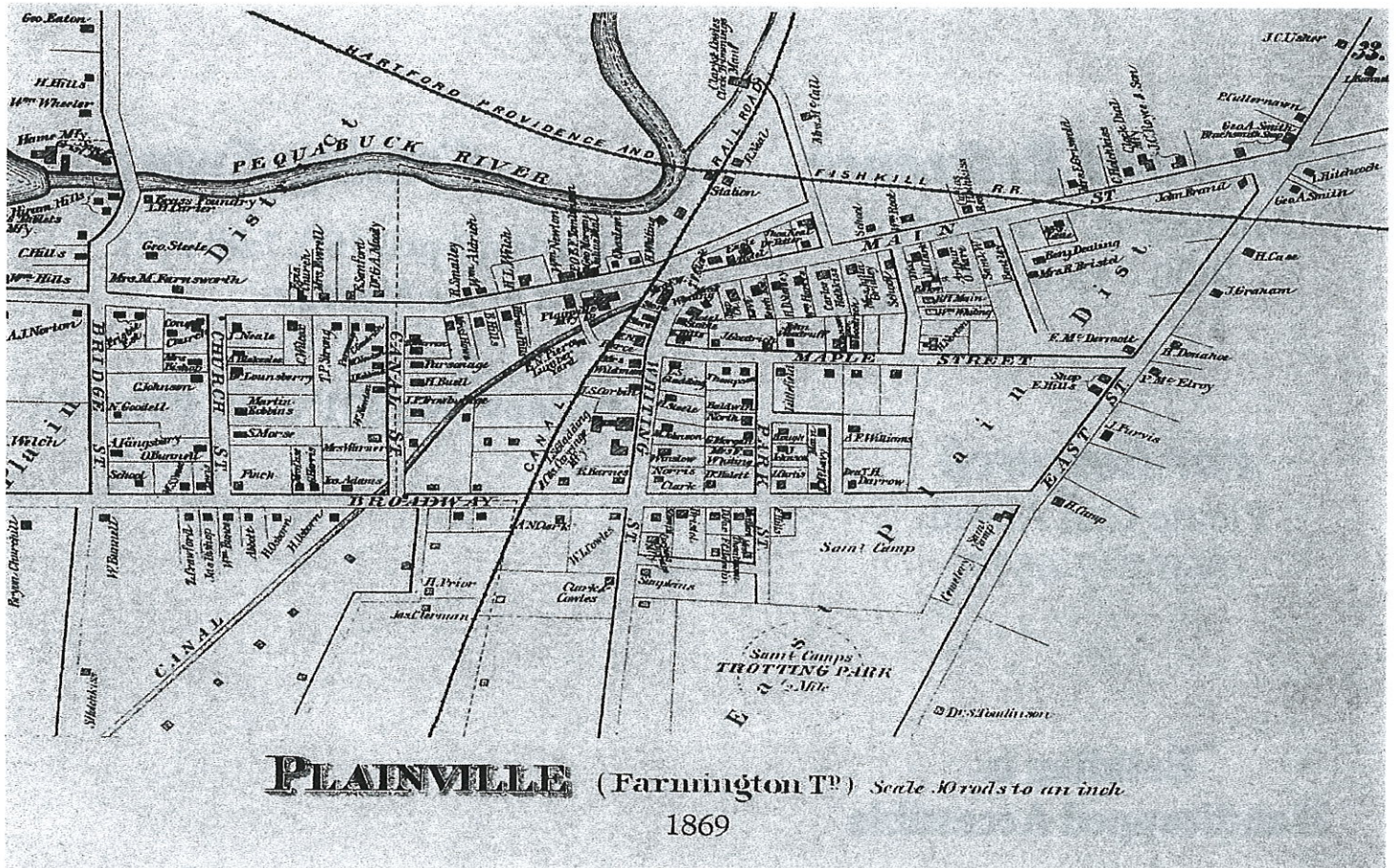
After the speeches were completed, a concert with singers filled the void until the dinner was ready. The dinner, enjoyed by guests and town citizens, was roasted lamb and vegetables. The celebration ended that night with a ball held at the freight depot named "Jubilee Hall" for the occasion. On Pinnacle Rock, a huge bonfire concluded the day's celebration.

As ordered by the General Assembly, Plainville's first town meeting was held on August 2, 1869 at Newton's Hall. The meeting began at 1:00. It was decided to give people until 4:00 to cast their vote for the town officials. Among the officials elected were: Robert Usher as town clerk; the four selectmen were Theodore Strong, William Newton, Burwell and William Bolles. Some of the other town positions filled that day were: Tything Men, Sealer of Weights and Measurers, Haywards, Fence Viewers, Measurer of Wood and Pond Keeper.

Plainville's first annual town meeting was held on October 4, 1869. Almost all of the town officials elected that previous August were returned to office.

On April 4, 1870, at the state elections, Hiram Hills was chosen as Plainville's first Representative to the General Assembly. Plainville would remain in the third Senatorial District.

The new town of Plainville was on its way. The future was unknown. What happens to it depends upon its people. As a town we have much to be proud of. There are some amazing people recognized both nationally and internationally, who called Plainville home. We are a town who can claim both a Black Governor and a White Governor as residents. There are has many lessons to learn. Our future will be determined by how well we have learned those lessons.



The Plainville Historical Society, Inc.
29 Pierce Street, Plainville, CT 06062

Office and Reference

Monday & Wednesday
9:00 - 12:00

For Research

Please Call Ahead
(860)747-6577

Coming Events

Tuesday, April 16th, 7:00 PM:
Night at the Museum

Tuesday, May 21st, 7:00 PM: TBA

**Building is
Handicapped Accessible**