

The Sterling Historical Chronicle

The Newsletter of the Sterling Historical Society

VOLUME 4

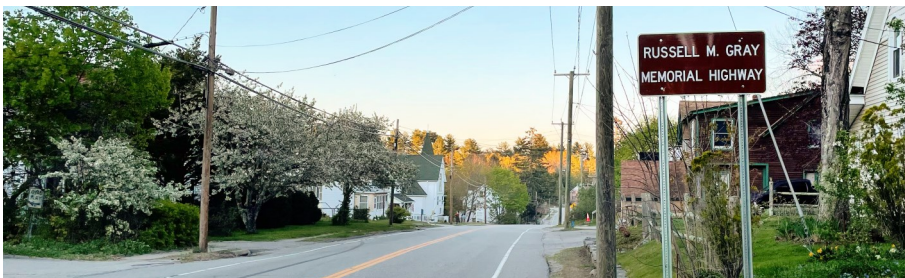
SEPTEMBER 2022

ISSUE 1

Getting Back into the Swing of Things!

Dear Readers,

Even if we haven't been putting out newsletters on schedule, some exciting historical things have been going on behind-the-scenes here in Sterling, Oneco, and Ekonk! You may have even noticed some new signs around town, whether it's the Russell Gray Memorial Highway through Oneco to the new signs popping up at select cemeteries.



Speaking of cemeteries, just as our most recent newsletter went to print last September (2021), Sheldon Cemetery in Oneco got a much-needed restoration done by volunteers in conjunction with Rediscovering History, Inc. Headed by Michael Carroll and an army of volunteers, Rediscovering History has been traveling all over eastern CT doing the back-breaking work associated with restoring cemeteries from finding sunken grave markers to repairing damaged stones and their work is top-notch. How exciting it is to see gravestones come out of the ground which have been hidden and lost for decades! Give them a follow on facebook if you want to see their most recent work and exciting discoveries.

Continued on Page 2



In partnership with the town, we hope to eventually have these signs placed at every cemetery to denote its establishment date, historic name, and present name (if different). Currently, there are signs at Riverside Cemetery and Card-Clark Cemetery, with Parker Hill Cemetery and Hall-Fuller Cemetery to follow.

Continued from Page 1

In other historical society news, we have resumed regular office hours from 10am-12pm every Tuesday. This will give us time to accomplish projects, whether its organizing our photos or cataloging new donations, or generally tidying the room. We have been unable to offer regular hours since 2011 so it is exciting to get that back on track!

Even though we haven't embarked on any large projects lately, there is still progress being made toward the next history book, as well as reprinting other publications. We have been working on updating photographs and fixing typos on *Sterling in Retrospect*, which we last updated in 2017 before we had access to some of the original photos. We have also been working on putting together an updated version of the *Pike Papers/Sterling Mill* history which was originally written by Frank Decker and published in the late 80's before we knew for certain whether the mill would rebuild or not. Considering the former Revere Textile Corp. was torn down and the land cleaned up in 1999, we can close that chapter, update the book, and offer it to the public once again.

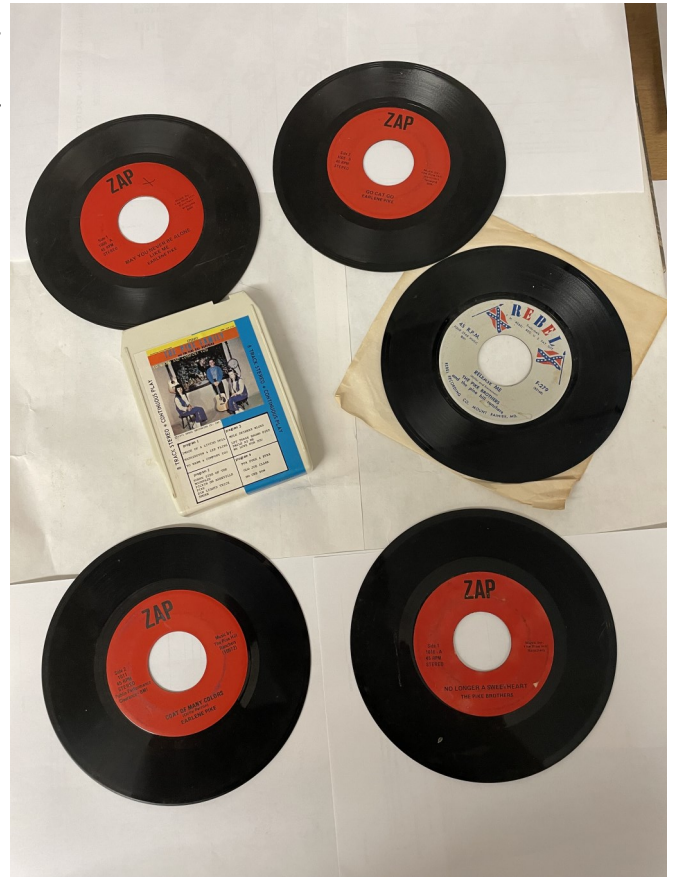
A lot of this newsletter focuses on Ekonk, where I personally had an exciting tour of the countryside by George Molodich back in late April. It is absolutely amazing how well he knows virtually every rock and tree on the property his family has owned since 1923. As a historian and a researcher, we live for days like that, a beautiful spring day heading out to places we normally wouldn't have access to, checking out Native American sites which have remained relatively unchanged since this area was settled. It only serves as a reminder that we have only begun to chip away at discovering the history of this land before the colonists claimed it for themselves, and it is so much more than the "barren wasteland" Ellen Larned once described in her 1874 *History of Windham County*.

Trying to piece together that history nearly 400 years after it changed, however, has been a formidable challenge. We know that the Greenwich Path, which bisects Ekonk, was once a well-traveled route from Wickford, RI to Peagcomsuck, a trading post on the Quinebaug River, back in the 1600's. It was often referred to as an ancient and abandoned road in property records from the 1700's, but amazingly remains undisturbed through most of its route through our town.

It is easy to assume that because the forests are undeveloped, that they never were, but that is not true. Ekonk, in particular, hasn't given up her secrets just yet, and is worth an in-depth look. You may remember our December 2019 newsletter which had a focus on Pharisee Rock, which we still don't know much about.

Pages 3 and 4 offer a little insight into the April tour, as well as some historic photos. Page 5 also offers an update on the Mike Stefanik exhibit which is currently on display down at the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, NC, which I got to see last February. Enjoy!

-Megan McGory-Gleason, President



Pike Brothers/Earlene Pike 45s and an 8-track recently donated to our archives. When possible, we digitize the recordings but these records are in poor shape with deep scratches. In any case, we can still glean information from them, such as song names, to tell us what to continue to look for.



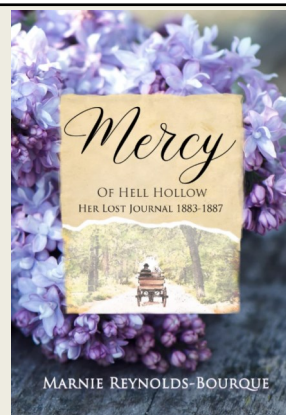
This display case is a new addition to the town hall, honoring both Russell Gray and John Firlik.

Focus on: Ekonk Hill

Today, it is hard to imagine Ekonk Hill as being anything other than wide open farmland with views stretching into Windham County and Rhode Island. It is a place where people go to watch meteor showers and thunderstorms because of the open sky. However, at the turn of the 20th century, in addition to being farmland, it was a busy village which hosted a school, the original Grange hall, a post office, and the church. There was even an effort to change the name of Hell Hollow to Lily Lake Farm, but the new name never stuck and soon reverted to the old. There were also more ancient houses on the hill than exists today, such as the Stanton house, located north of present-day Molodich Farm, the Tanner house (shown upper right), and several others located down Cedar Swamp and Hell Hollow roads. There are not a lot of antique photos or postcards of the area, but every once in a while a new postcard will turn up, or a photograph will trickle in from a personal collection. The photo of the Ekonk School (bottom left) was recently donated by Sue Gray. Speaking of the Ekonk School, which closed in 1927, a new picnic area (bottom right) was constructed by the Molodich family in the spot where the schoolhouse used to stand, which can be enjoyed by all.



1916 view of Route 49, taken at the Voluntown/Sterling town line, facing north. Porch of the original Ekonk Grange barely visible to the left, Tanner home and barns visible to the right. None of these buildings exist today.



On the subject of Ekonk: Marnie Reynolds-Bourque recently published a work of historical fiction which takes place in Hell Hollow in an effort to debunk the urban legend surrounding Maud Reynolds and restore humanity to her family's tale. It is available for purchase through Amazon.



Ekonk Schoolhouse in the 1890's. This school existed from 1856-1927, after which the pupils attended Sterling Hill School until that school was abandoned for the Sterling Center and Oneco schools.



The new Ekonk School picnic area on the east side of Rt. 49 just north of the Molodich Farm barns, overlooking the fields, in the exact spot where the schoolhouse used to be.

Expedition at Ekonk

Back in April, Marcus Mason from the Old Mystic Research Center and I were invited by George Molodich for a tour of important Native sites around Ekonk. Our first stop was Egunksunkapong, which is a natural spring which still flows today, located on Molodich farm property. Nearby was the Ekonk Hill Pteroglyph Site, which are a series of carved rocks and a rock-based solar calendar. This site was studied extensively by David Wagner and others in the 90's but I had yet to see it for myself. George Molodich's knowledge of almost every rock and geological formation on the farm is unparalleled. Our four-hour ATV tour spanned both sides of Route 49 and brought us not only to the spring and the petroglyph site, but also to a native burial ground and other sites which left us with more questions than answers, and I'm excited to continue researching this area. Some days it feels as though we've barely scratched the surface! (Special thanks to Mr. Molodich for the tour as well, it was informative and exciting!)



Above left: A man-made stone cavern located elsewhere on the Molodich farm. It is not a root cellar as it is too far from any former dwelling to have been of use, and there are a few similar structures in town as well as all over New England.

Above right: This barred owl was spotted overlooking a Native burial ground. (The photos of the burial ground itself would not reproduce well in black and white). Barred owls prefer mature forests, such as the ones found around Ekonk.



George Molodich points out multiple carvings on the largest rock in the Ekonk Hill petroglyph site. This particular rock is the one which appeared in a 1995 Norwich Bulletin article and is often the focus of study even though there are dozens of other rocks with markings in the vicinity. There are also rocks with similar carvings in the area of Camp Yawgoog, the Boy Scout reservation in Rockville, R.I. However, the rocks at Ekonk also form a solar calendar. A more locally-famous solar calendar made of rocks is located at Gungywamp in Groton.

Left: Another large rock with a variety of markings.

Sterling Gardening Club Spruces Up Andrew Shippee Memorial Park



The Sterling Gardening Club worked hard at the memorial park on September 4th.

Photos courtesy of the Sterling Gardening Club Facebook Page/Diane Stoy

A Trip to Charlotte for Mike Stefanik



Mike Stefanik's Modified race car sits in the gallery of inductees at the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, NC. Stefanik, a nine-time champion, was posthumously inducted into the Hall of Fame this year, two years after his passing from injuries due to a plane crash which happened in this town.

Research Requests

These are requests which have been received by our society. We do our best to answer questions but perhaps our readers may be able to help, too! Please email

sterlinghistoricalsocietyct@gmail.com with information if you are able to help.

- Information regarding Michael Dowling, Hanna Dixon, and Robert Dixon, who lived on Sterling Hill at the time of the town's founding.
- Information regarding the railroad spur which lead from the railroad tracks to the Marriott Quarry

Our Wishlist

- Newspaper clippings from articles relevant to town, including obituaries.

We have many resources available in our room for your own historical research including the C.E.T.A. Research papers compiled by a team of researchers in 1978 and led by Carolyn Bailey-Orr. Much of the research was later compiled by Mrs. Orr into her book, The Roads Lead Back to Glory (1982), of which only 50 copies were originally printed. Another 50 were printed in 1991, and we are currently at work on scanning and digitizing her book in order to have it reprinted in the future.

Other resources we have include Frank Decker's life work of The Pike Saga, five large tomes of genealogical research written by Mr. Decker from the 70's through 1990. We will also be digitizing these and printing them so that they will be available to the public for the first time ever.

We also have The Hale Collection, some early Voluntown church records, and many hard to find & out of print books relating to all of eastern Connecticut. Come visit us and learn something new!

The **Sterling Historical Chronicle** is published quarterly with issues in March, June, August, and December.

Deadline for submissions: November 1, 2022

Sterling Historical Society Officers:

President: Megan McGory-Gleason

Vice President: Arlene Roberts

Secretary: Ruth Battey

Treasurer: Ron Marchesseault

Curator: Michael Gadoury

The Sterling Historical Society is located in Room 19 of the Sterling Municipal Building (the former Sterling Memorial School). Our mailing address is:

Sterling Historical Society

c/o Sterling Town Hall

P.O. Box 157

1183 Plainfield Pike

Oneco, CT 06373

Our meeting schedule is the **second Tuesday of every month except December** at 7PM unless otherwise announced. As of September 2022, our room is open from 10am-12pm every Tuesday, by appointment, and by chance.

Email: sterlinghistoricalsocietyct@gmail.com

Website: <http://sterlinghistoricalsocietyct.weebly.com>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/SterlingHistoricalSocietyct>

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