



*Summer 2015*

A NEWSLETTER OF THE OLD TOWN HALL MUSEUM  
624 SOUTH BRITAIN ROAD | SOUTHBURY, CONNECTICUT 06488

## *Annual Meeting at Audubon Barn*

**Old Town Hall Museum**  
Wednesdays 10—Noon  
Other hours by appt:  
(203) 405-3124

**Museum Administrator:**  
Leigh Graham

**Archivist:**  
Kimberly Neuenschwander

**South Britain Library**  
Tuesdays 6—8 PM  
(203) 232-9874

**Librarian:**  
Robin Stiles

**Board of Directors**  
2015—2016

**President:**  
Jim Flaherty

**Vice President:**  
Jennifer Carey

**Treasurer:**  
Bill Wilhelms

**Secretary:**  
Rebecca Dawn

**Board Members:**  
Shilpa Chandrashekar  
Suzie Fateh  
Leigh Graham  
Joyce James  
Ian Lowell  
Marty Ludorf  
Mark Manville  
Don Meyer

**Immediate Past President:**  
Joyce James

The Southbury Historical Society held its 39th Annual Meeting at the Audubon Center Barn at Bent-of-the-River on Sunday, May 17. A brief business meeting was held by the Board of Directors after which SHS president, Jim Flaherty, presented the 2015 Preservation Award to SHS member Don Meyer. Congratulations to Don, who received this year's award due to his hard work and tireless dedication to the restoration of the historic Ludorf Barn! This year's guest speaker was, Peter McLachlan, a retired railway engineer and an historian for the Danbury Railway Museum. Peter's stories included tales of "boom boom" trains (trains carrying nuclear fuel), the rigors of training and communicating with hand signals before radio communication, and the meaning behind the nickname for the NY, New Haven, and Hartford Lines (Now Your, Never Home, and Hungry). A special thank you to Peter for his heartwarming and insightful personal accounts and to all those that organized and attended this year's meeting.



Guest speaker, Peter McLachlan



Don accepting his award

## *Astronomy Night at Ludorf Barn*



Chris during his interactive lecture



Dave and John with a telescope

Mother Nature was somewhat cooperative during the SHS's first ever stargazing event on July 25. Held at the Ludorf Barn, Astronomy Night was a collaborative effort with the Astronomical Society of Greater Hartford (ASGH). ASGH member Chris Markiewicz began the evening with a slide show and an interactive discussion/answer session. ASGH members Dave Opalenik and John Sillasen manned the large telescopes outside the barn — one being a 13" Newtonian lovingly nicknamed the "Red Giant." At one point, before the clouds rolled in, Dave and John had the craters of the Moon and the rings of Saturn in focus! The SHS would like to thank all those that participated, plus the volunteers that helped the night run smoothly. A special thanks to the ASGH for their time, knowledge, and equipment. We hope to collaborate on more astronomy nights in the future. For more information on the ASGH and their observation schedule, please visit their website at [asgh.org](http://asgh.org).

## 2015 Scholarship Recipient



Every year the Southbury Historical Society donates funds to the Connecticut Community Foundation to award a Southbury high school student a \$1000 college scholarship. This year's recipient is Jessica N. Hicks, who will study journalism at Lehigh University in the fall. Our congratulations to Jessica! We wish her much success in her future studies and endeavors!

Dear Ms. Richardson,

Thank you so much for choosing me to be the recipient of the Elizabeth H. Andersen and Nina E. Andersen scholarship, as well as the Southbury Historical Society scholarship. I am so grateful for the awards and I am honored that I stood out to you amongst the other applicants. I also wanted to reach out to you and thank you for your assistance throughout the application process; you always ensured that I handed in the necessary forms and that all of my information arrived in the correct place. Your little reminders were greatly appreciated!

Words cannot describe how excited I am to attend Lehigh University in the fall as a Journalism major. I enjoyed my time in high school, but I am certainly ready to begin this next chapter of my life, which could not be written without the help of the Connecticut Community Foundation! Thank you for enabling me to make my college dreams a reality.

Sincerely,  
Jessica Hicks

## Research Your Ancestors at the Library

Did you know that researching with Ancestry.com is a free service of the Southbury Public Library? For those unfamiliar, Ancestry.com is an online tool that provides access to public records, such as census reports and military records, in one convenient location. Currently Ancestry.com provides access to over 12 billion records! It is an invaluable tool for people

performing genealogical and historical research. When used at home, Ancestry.com charges a monthly subscription after a 14-day trial period. However, access to Ancestry.com is completely free when using your patron id and the public computers at the Southbury Public Library. Give it a try — it is never too late to start researching your family tree!

*From the Vault: You Never Know What You'll Find  
Buried Deep Within the Archives*



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON

January 23, 1961

Dear Mrs. Curtin:

Before my term of office comes to a close on January 20, I want to take this opportunity to tell you how much Pat and I appreciated the letter you wrote after the election.

A message of congratulations after winning an election is of course always appreciated although not unexpected. But nothing could have meant more to us than to receive such a warm and thoughtful message after losing.

In the years ahead as we look back to 1960, the disappointment of losing the closest election in history will fade into the background. But your act of thoughtfulness will always remain close to our hearts.

Pat joins me in sending our very best wishes.

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

Mrs. John J. Curtin  
South Britain  
Connecticut

Vice president Richard Nixon wrote this letter to Southbury resident, Winifred S. Curtin, during his last days in office after losing the presidential election to Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960. Mrs. Curtin was the wife of John J. Curtin, a resident of Southbury and a former zoning enforcement officer in Newtown. Mr. Curtin is most notable for inventing and patenting the Perk-o-Meter — a device that measures the rate in which water seeps into the ground. His device proved instrumental in percolation tests — a test that determines whether soil levels are dry enough for the installation of septic systems. Curtin's invention was so accurate that results gathered from it were admissible as evidence in a court of law. The motto of Mr. Curtin's small soil testing company, Suburban Soil Testing, was "Investigate Before You Invest." Mrs. Winifred S. Curtin retired from the Anaconda American Brass Company, Waterbury in 1973. This letter is part of the John Curtin Collection.

*Southbury Historical Society's 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Attic Sale*

Remember the Southbury Historical Society when doing your late summer cleaning this year. Our annual Attic Sale is scheduled for the weekend of September 19 – 20. Starting August 19, donated items may be dropped off at the Old Town Hall Museum on Wednesdays from 10 AM to 12 PM. Donations will be accepted through September 16. Items should be clean and in good condition. The Society can-

not accept: computers or computer related items; televisions; exercise equipment; appliances; child car seats; clothing; and items that are large and difficult to handle. Smaller furniture items are acceptable, but please contact the Society as we have limited storage space. All funds raised through the Annual Attic Sale are used to support programs and activities of the Southbury Historical Society.

Contact the Society for further information or if you need attic sale items picked up.





THE SOUTHBURY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 124  
Southbury, CT 06488

Phone: 203-405-3124

Website: [southburyhistory.org](http://southburyhistory.org)

Email: [info@southburyhistory.org](mailto:info@southburyhistory.org)  
[archives@southburyhistory.org](mailto:archives@southburyhistory.org)

A Newsletter of the Old Town Hall Museum

SAVE THE DATE!

Old Town Hall Museum

- ◆ Annual Attic Sale, September 19—20: donations accepted on Wednesdays (10—Noon) from August 19 through September 16

Bullet Hill School

- ◆ Open House, August 9 (12-2 PM)
- ◆ Alumni Day, September 26 (12-3 PM)

South Britain Library

- ◆ Book Club, September 18 (7 PM): reading *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy



South Britain Congregational Church