



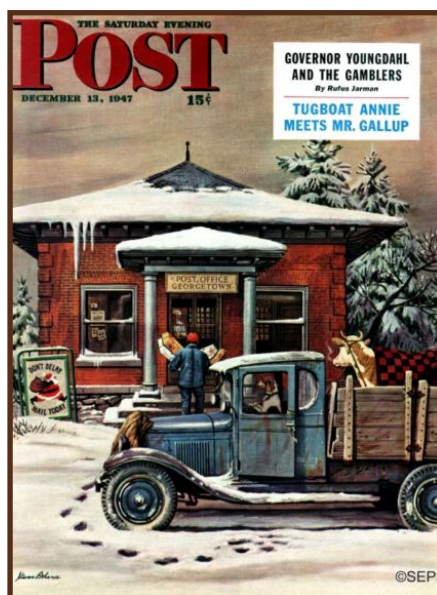
Ridge Record

Volume 18 Number 6—November-December 2020— No. 188

WHAT IS GEORGETOWN?

BY BOB RUSSELL

Despite its name, Georgetown is not a Connecticut town. It has no government and no property-taxing authority but has its own fire department and post office (shown on this 1947 magazine cover by Stevan Dohanos). It is a community that Redding, Weston, Wilton, and a bit there are now 169 towns or cities local governments and defined Georgetown's, were set in the ear-what we call Georgetown were in Weston) sections. They settled between Norwalk and Danbury Umpawaug Roads. The Norwalk later in that century. Redding split came a town. Interestingly, about George Abbott) carved initials (R, walk River where those three those carvings on Boundary Rock are still there. Going south on Old Mill Road, it is near the riverbank at the point where the road comes very close to the river.



spreads across four towns— of Ridgefield in Branchville. in Connecticut, all of which have boundaries, many of which, like ly 1700s. The earliest residents in the Redding and Fairfield (now there because the only roadway was up Old Mill, Redding, and (now Wilton) settlements came from Fairfield in 1767 and be- that time someone (possibly F, and N) into a rock in the Nor- towns met. Over 250 years later,

Who were the Georgetown settlers? Adventuresome farmers who wanted the virgin land, and younger children of large families, who did not inherit land. Families with names like Osborn, Batterson, Rumsey, Barrett, Perry, Taylor, St. John, Bradley, and Coley built homes along Old Mill, Redding, and Danbury Roads in the 1730–1770 period. They were soon followed by necessary services—gristmill, sawmill, blacksmith, woolen mill, tannery, a wagon shop, and a cider mill. Many of these were home operations.

Later came a school, churches, and other businesses. No Georgetown post office existed until 1852, but when Benjamin Franklin was the U.S. Postmaster General in 1786, he requested that mileage markers be

Continued on page 2

placed along the major roads leading to the nearest post office town, in our case, Norwalk. There is still such a marker on Redding Road, in front of a house on the east side at the corner of Umpawaug and Peaceable Streets. It says "12 Ms To = Nw 1786." The N is backwards and the 1's are odd.



How did Georgetown get its name? By the late 1700s, there were half a dozen local settlements, including Osborntown, Burr's Hill, St. John Corners, Sugar Hollow, Burnham's Ridge, and Jack Street. About 1792, at a Fourth of July celebration, it was suggested that they combine under the name Georgetown, for the popular local gristmill owner, George Abbott, who had died recently. A vote was taken and the name has stuck.

What early businesses were here in Georgetown? One of the most unusual mills on the river in 1792 was Coley's Iron Forge, where large iron ingots produced in Brookfield were reduced to much smaller pieces for use by local blacksmiths. With the help of waterpower, a 500-pound weight was raised and repeatedly dropped on the heated ingot until the desired size was produced. The mill was destroyed by fire and the site later sold to Gilbert & Bennett. Another important industry was mining of minerals. In the Branchville area, there were several mines producing mica, granite, and several rare minerals.

Gilbert & Bennett, started in 1818, became the most important business in Georgetown. It got its humble start in the Weston home of Benjamin and Charlotte Gilbert. Charlotte's father had a horsehair sieve business in Wilton next to the Raymond Tannery. Charlotte was the principal weaver. She married Benjamin Gilbert, a tanner, and their sieve business soon outgrew the house. In 1820, Benjamin hired Sturges Bennett. Two years later Mr. Bennett married Benjamin's daughter, and in 1828 the company became Gilbert & Bennett. About 1834, G&B began to make wire products and built a small factory on the riverbank of Old Mill Road. Then came a larger place. And another. In the 1850s, they bought a large open space in the center of Georgetown, where the present factory was built. It remained in operation for more than 100 years.



Growth of the community. As the wire mill grew, it needed reliable factory workers. About 1870, the first immigrants from Sweden and Finland arrived. They wrote to friends back home, and more came over. G&B sent recruiters to the landing docks in NYC. Housing was built by the factory, on Portland Avenue, and by local developers. Own Home Heights (on the hill behind Heibeck's) was Wilton's first recorded subdivision, in 1915. Lots

Continued on page 3

were sold for \$45 to \$160, with an easy payment plan, and the population grew.

Schools and Churches. The first school here was established about 1750, near Boston Corners (where Redding Road meets Umpawaug and Peaceable Streets). Next it moved to Chicken Street (now Mountain Road), near the intersection with Danbury Road (now Route 7), and then to the large hilltop that formerly existed where Caraluzzi's is now. By 1914, that school was bulging with children. G&B stepped in and, with the approval of stockholders, offered to build a modern building and give it to the community. This we know now as the G&B Cultural Center. It had eight classrooms, central heat, indoor plumbing, a playing field, a cafeteria, and electricity! None of the other schools in Wilton or surrounding towns had any of that.

The first church was Georgetown Methodist Episcopal, in 1790. It still stands on Church Street. Others were the Methodist Protestant in 1820, Baptist in 1830, Swedish Church, and Sacred Heart in 1881. In 1902, Edwin Gilbert, son of the G&B founder, built and donated the beautiful Gilbert Memorial Congregational Church, now unused at the bottom of our hill.

The Georgetown Baptist Church played a special role in the early Abolition movement in Connecticut. On November 26, 1838, a roving abolitionist preacher gave a stirring sermon despite protests from those who did not support the cause. The sermon was repeated on a second and third nights, with promise of a fourth. But during that night, a keg of dynamite was placed under the pulpit and the church was blown up. Despite that, our local Anti-Slavery Society survived.

Conclusion. As residents of Georgetown, it is important that we know its history. The future of the community is presently in limbo, dependent upon resolution of the G&B site, which has been unused since 1989. Several proposals for it have been presented, but there is a large unpaid back tax bill, a question of ownership, and an unfinished pollution cleanup. The Town of Redding has been working on this for some time, with no solution anticipated in the near future.

EARLY COMPUTER USERS

Were you one of the early users or owners of a computer—say, in the 1980s? The *Ridge Record* would like to do a story about you pioneers. How did you react? Was it wonderful or scary? What was difficult? Is that better now? Did you learn it at work or on your own or take a class? What tasks did you use it for? Did you actually own a computer back then? What would be considered odd today, like floppy disks?

The *Ridge Record* is introducing a new series. It will feature stories from Meadow Ridge residents about how they happened to choose their careers. The aim is to help us learn more about each other. Won't you share your story? Were you always on path to where you ended up, or did you take a few side roads before you found your way onto the right one? Perhaps one person or one incident steered you there. If you are uncomfortable writing, we can assign someone to interview you and write the article for you. If you write it yourself, please send it in MS Word format to Jane Neighbors at janeby@outlook.com.

HOW I BECAME A LIBRARIAN

BY AASE VAN DYKE

The town in Denmark where I grew up had about 3,000 inhabitants and a small public library. Very small. No children's books, and our school had no library. Few books were published, due to World War II, so as a child who loved to read, I had to rely on the books in my home plus whatever friends and relatives could provide. My parents had a respectable collection; but the books were so boring, full of conversation, no illustrations. I only enjoyed our huge Bible, with hundreds of reproductions of famous paintings, and Carl Larsson's *A Home*, with colorful pictures of wonderful family life in Sweden. Otherwise, a few classics, like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Ivanhoe*, and of course, Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales.

But I was lucky. My mother talked the librarian into letting me have a library card when I was nine years old, even though you were supposed to be a grown-up to get one. It was, however, difficult for me to find anything suitable to read. I found travelogues from foreign countries, which fed my thirst for adventure, and books of natural history. (As a ten-year-old, I probably knew more about ants and dung beetles than most adults did.)



There was never enough to read, until I went away to boarding school as a teenager and was exposed to a wider world of literature in a decent public library where one could even get, on interlibrary loan, books that were not stocked locally.

But my real eye-opener came when I moved to Copenhagen to study. Hundreds of thousands of authors and subjects to choose from. Overwhelming! Almost too much to select from. Everything in the world to learn and to enjoy in the grand public library system.

Continued on page 5

My own experience taught me how important public library service is. I swore that if I ever had children, their lives would be filled with the wonder of books and that I would help provide them. I decided to go to library school. After that, I went to the U.S.A. on an internship, theoretically for one year. But I stayed and spent all my working life sharing my passion with anybody who was interested.

So it was that a childhood frustration led to the appreciation of a vital service and to a lifelong career.

The Bookshelf: **POETRY**

BY AUDREY RUBIN

"The joy and function of poetry is, and was, the celebration of man."

Dylan Thomas "Poetic Manifesto"

Reading poetry can reduce stress. Try it with any of the following books from the Meadow Ridge library:

Best Loved Poems of the American People Oxford Book of American Verse

Oxford Book of American Light Verse Treasury of Irish Verse

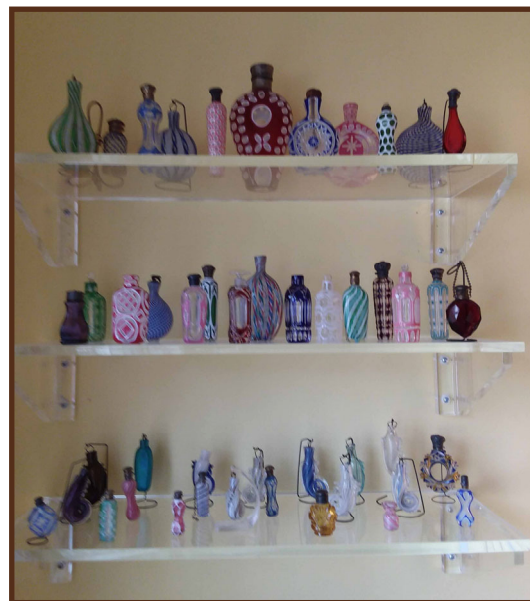
Ashbery, John	<i>April Galleons</i>
Blake, William	<i>The Poetical Works of William Blake</i>
Browning, Elizabeth Barrett	<i>Sonnets from The Portuguese</i>
Bryant, William Cullen	<i>The Poems of William Cullen Bryant</i>
Byron, Lord	<i>Selected Poetry and Prose</i>
Dickinson, Emily	<i>A Murmur in the Trees</i>
Eliot, T. S.	<i>The Complete Poems and Plays</i>
Heine, Heinrich	<i>The Poetry and Prose of Heinrich Heine</i>
Homer	<i>The Greek Poets</i>
Hopkins, Gerard Manley	<i>The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i>
Housman, A .E.	<i>More Poems</i>
Keats, John and Shelley, Percy Bysshe	<i>Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley</i>
Khayyam, Omar	<i>The Rubaiyat</i>
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth	<i>Complete Poems</i>
Lorca, Garcia	<i>Selected Poems</i>
Mallarmé, Stéphane	<i>Poems</i>
de la Mare, Walter	<i>Rhymes and Verses</i>
Merton, Thomas	<i>Collected Poems</i>
Sexton, Anne	<i>The Complete Poems</i>
Tennyson, Alfred Lord	<i>Selected Poetry</i>
Untermeyer, Louis	<i>Modern American Poetry</i>

ANN RAYMOND'S ANTIQUE GLASS

BY JOAN M. KASKELL

A sparkling assortment of about fifty antique glass objects, Ann Raymond's collection consists mostly of tiny bottles two to four inches high, dating from the early 18th to the late 19th centuries. Ann's parents assembled it in the 1930s, making purchases in New York City venues and in Connecticut antique shops along Route 7. Several basic designs include molded ribbing, seahorse, pinched, striped and overlay, displaying colors the rainbow never knew—the primaries and white, of course, but also amethyst, turquoise, and citrine.

Glass dates back to at least 3600 BC in Mesopotamia. Its components were already there: mainly silicates like sand for glazing, soda for melting, and calcium carbonate as stabilizer.



On this continent, America's first industry was reportedly glassmaking, with attempts in the early 17th century to establish a factory at Jamestown, Virginia. It was not, however, until the second decade of the 19th century that, due to highly skilled immigrant glassmakers, mainly trained abroad, Americans were able to challenge the domination of European imports. Two of the better-known manufactories are the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, founded in 1826 on Cape Cod, and the Corning Glass Works, which has been in Corning NY since 1868.

What were Ann's tiny objects used for? Often, when purpose-made items become collectible *objets d'art* in their own right, their original uses are forgotten. Ann, however, knows that her collection consists largely of perfume (scent) bottles, as well as pungents, or vials for carrying smelling salts—slender enough to slip inside a lady's glove.



Selecting examples to photograph was difficult—so many variations in the shapes and the techniques that formed them. Particularly delightful are tiny dolphin or seahorse bottles, formed when a molten bubble was pulled out, elongated, and curled into a tail, the whole being decorated by a *rigoree* (opaque glass thread) to yield the final rippled or fluted effect.

Continued on page 7

Seldom are early glass objects signed by the artisan or even by the manufacturer. A small unsigned bottle, however, may be identifiable by its design as a product of the then well-known designer Nicholas Lutz, French-born and trained. Lutz specialized in striped and swirled patterns, the result of heating and encasing twisted colored rods in clear glass.



The technique of overlay is exemplified by this bottle in a style influenced by Bohemia (Czechoslovakia). The formed bottle was encased in two blown layers of glass, red on the outside with a white intermediate layer. After it was annealed (carefully cooled to prevent cracking), it would have been sent to the cutting shop, where a glass cutter (*puntier*) cut out the design that would best reveal the layers underneath.

At one point, Ann's mother decided to donate the collection. The Metropolitan Museum was only interested in pieces they did not already own—about 25 percent of the collection—but she decided to keep it intact. The Corning Glass Museum was also interested, but the family chose to donate to a small museum in Wilmington NC. It was exhibited there in a large case, until the family learned by chance that it was to be deaccessioned, a word that became infamous in the early 1970s, when museums large and small sold off inventory to raise money, often causing outcries from the donors and others. Now, gifts are usually more rigorously documented to reflect the wishes of the givers. Ann was fortunately able to retrieve the collection from the museum before it was sold.



Postscript: under Ann's chairmanship, the Meadow Ridge Activities Committee has had two sessions at the Hotspot Glass Studio, in Fairfield, where residents learned to put glassblowing techniques into practice, from heating and blowing the molten glass to the annealing, or monitored cooling. The result: objects ranging from paperweights to flowers are now treasured possessions of the Meadow Ridge artisans-in-training who fashioned them.

MEADOW RIDGE TIES TO WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

BY SUSAN AUSLANDER

Long-time Meadow Ridge resident Mary Anne Hyde tells of her late mother-in-law who, as Leslie Johnston, led the New York City suffrage parade down Fifth Avenue on a white horse, wearing a suffragist's purple-and-white sash. The parade was in 1915, and the next year, the young suffragist enlisted as a Red Cross nurse in World War I. While serving in France, she met and married Musgrove Hyde, who was in the military. Cole Porter, who was not yet famous, played at their wedding in Paris.



That October 1915 Suffrage Parade was a five-mile-long spectacular, featuring women in academic robes, crowds of union women, and suffragists dressed in white with suffrage sashes. Official counts of the parade ranged from 25,000 to over 60,000, with at least 100,000 spectators. Unfortunately, New York's spectacular suffrage parade did not accomplish its goal. Just weeks later, the New York State referendum failed in the state legislature in Albany. It would not be until 1917 that New York passed its own women's suffrage referendum—three years before the federal passage of the 19th Amendment.

Researching Mary Anne's story led me to reconsider my own grandmother, Susan Dardis McNamee, who, after her marriage in 1900 to a young country lawyer in upstate New York's Columbia County, served as president of the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The WCTU taught women basic political organizing skills and savvy in getting out the vote. This, before women had the right to vote. Their work culminated in the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution—Prohibition—passed in 1918 and ratified in 1919. This was one reason why the liquor and brewery Industries were so adamantly opposed to women having the right to vote. Both sectors invested heavily in the anti-suffrage side of the battle for the 19th Amendment.

Continued on bottom of page 9

The Bookshelf: REINCARNATION OF THE NONFICTION ALCOVE

BY BOB RUSSELL

If you have been intimidated by the very large collection of books in the nonfiction alcove of the Meadow Ridge library, stop in and see the effect of the recent reorganization. Three new categories have been created—American History, World History, and Science & Nature. Many other books have been relocated to their proper places, such as Biography, Mystery, and Fiction. And the shelves for Countries, States, and Cities have been adjusted so that the books are now more accessible, as they stand upright.

Here are some books that may catch your interest.

American History

These Truths, by Jill Lepore, 2020. Her complete history of the U.S. as she sees it today.

Jacksonland, by Steve Inskeep, 2015. Andrew Jackson's land grab from the Cherokees.

World History

50 Battles That Changed the World, by William Weir, 2004

Science & Nature

Into the Planet: My Life as a Cave Diver, by Jill Heinerth, 2019

Miscellaneous Nonfiction

My Paper Chase, by Harold Evans, 2008. Stories of vanished times.

Greenspan's Bubbles, by William Fleckenstein, 2008. Age of ignorance at the Federal Reserve.

These I Believe, edited by Jay Allison & Dan Gediman, 2006. Personal philosophies of 80 remarkable people.

With All Disrespect, by Calvin Trillin, 1985. Longtime writer for *The New Yorker* discusses uncivil liberties.

Continued

SUFFRAGE

This political training helped my campaigner when her young Yale in 1906 for county judge. She when someone drove her she drew on those contacts and course, she could not vote for until 1917 in New York that she anyone else.



grandmother become a formidable Law School graduate husband ran knew folks all over the county, and around in auto or horse and buggy, helped to get him elected. Of him herself, and it would not be could vote for my grandfather or

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION FUND

BY BETTY LEE KENT

During the first weeks of October each year, we residents have the opportunity to express our gratitude to our dedicated staff for their efforts to ensure our safety, comfort, well-being, and enjoyment throughout the year. Since Meadow Ridge employees are not permitted to accept gratuities of any kind, this is our only tangible "thank you" to show our employees how much we value their service.

There are more than 300 individuals working in administrative services, food services, housekeeping, maintenance, transportation, health, security, activities and other departments that keep Meadow Ridge running smoothly 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We see some of these employees rarely, if ever, despite the fact they work just as hard for all of us as those with whom we come into daily contact. The Appreciation Fund enables us to thank every employee of Meadow Ridge, both those we see working for us and those we may not be aware of.

Contributions are voluntary and confidential. An amount has been suggested to each resident based on the size of your unit. If you have been here less than a year, your contribution should be pro-rated. Sometimes a resident thinks the suggested donation is too large—until they consider the amount they would tip in a year's time if they ate in a restaurant every night, if they tipped the driver each time they went to a doctor's appointment, if they tipped their yard man when he mowed the lawn, if they tipped the plumber when he fixed the leak . . . and on and on.

The total sum of our gifts is divided among all employees of Meadow Ridge based on the actual hours each worked—not on his/her salary or position in the organization. This means that a person who works in the kitchen will receive a check in the same amount as the director of a department who worked the same number of hours. The smallest check written is \$50; the largest check in the past has been over \$1,400. (The Executive Director and the Health Services Director are employees of the owner and not of Meadow Ridge; therefore, they do not receive anything from this fund.).

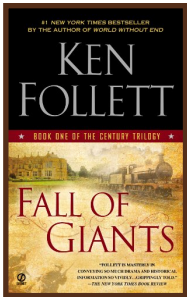
Your donation should be turned in by November 15. We'll let you know how the checks will be given to the employees this year as soon as that is determined.

THE RIDGE RECORD

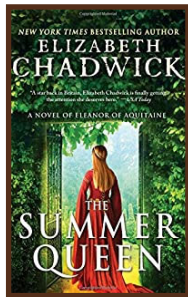
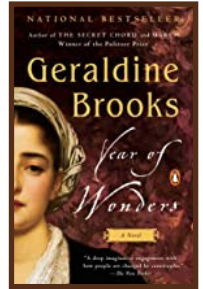
Editor	Jane Neighbors
Design & Layout	Jane McCaffrey
Copy Editor	Teruko Craig
Photographer	Celie Rosenau

The Bookshelf: HISTORICAL FICTION

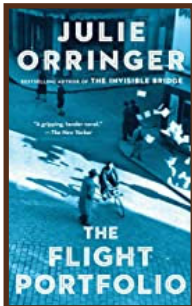
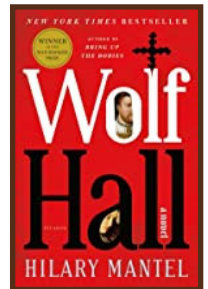
BY RUTH WOLSCH



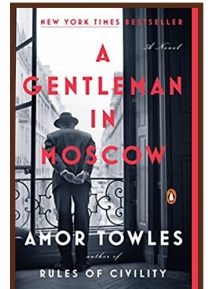
If you enjoy both history and fiction, you may wish to explore the genre of historical fiction. The author uses a period in history, a notable historical figure, or a historical event as the centerpiece or a tangential part of his narrative. The story may occur in that period in history or the historical component may be used in a contemporary setting. Historical fiction often gives insight into the environment, social, political, and family life of the time. At the beginning or conclusion of the novel, many authors will relate what was fact and what was invented.



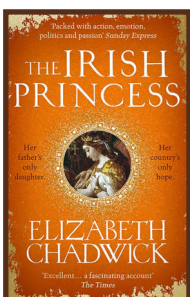
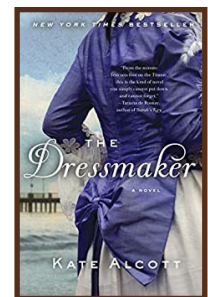
Although historical fiction can be found in ancient Greek and Roman literature, contemporary use is considered to have begun with authors such as Tolstoy, Scott, and Cooper.



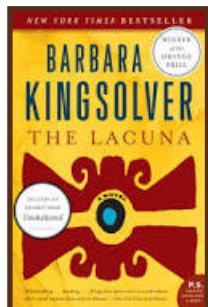
Our library has much classic and contemporary historical fiction available. An example is Ken Follett's trilogy *Fall of Giants*, *Winter of the World*, and *Edge of Eternity*, which follow five interrelated international families, beginning in England in 1911 before World War I and concluding in the U.S. in 1989. Another Follett in our library is *World without End*.



Other authors in our library that you may wish to consider are Kate Alcott, Marie Benedict, Steve Berry, Geraldine Brooks, Elizabeth Chadwick, Tracy Chevalier, Bernard Cornwell, Sarah Dunant, Diana Gabaldon, Philippa Gregory, Barbara Kingsolver, Hilary Mantel, Brad Meltzer, Julie Orringer, Edward Rutherford, and Amor Towles.



When reading historical fiction, you may become interested enough in the period, person, or event that you investigate it in a nonfiction source—something that you might well not have done if you had not read the historical fiction book.



A HOLIDAY TRADITION

BY HAL HEALY'S FAMILY

Thanksgiving is a holiday steeped in traditions, such as gathering with family and friends, eating good food, tuning in to the Macy's parade, and watching football. In Hal Healy's family, there is one more tradition—decorating for the upcoming holiday season. This ritual began in Hal and Mae's Ridgefield home and was carried over to their Meadow Ridge residence. While some consolidating was necessary for the move to MR, most of their cherished Christmas decorations made their way to the storage unit there. As in Ridgefield, Hal's family creates an assembly line to carry all the boxes out of storage. The high-light is decorating the eight-foot Christmas tree. As hundreds of ornaments collected or made over the years are hung on the tree, there is a lot of sibling banter, barbs, and laughter comparing their children's artistic talents with their own. While decorating the tree takes a lot of time, with each ornament carrying its own story as far back as Hal and Mae's childhoods, the result is wonderful. Hal finds tremendous joy and pride in sharing his tree and other decorations with Meadow Ridge residents. While no one knows what this Thanksgiving will bring, the hope is that his family will somehow find a way to continue this holiday tradition.

