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February 5, 2021

To: Westport Historic District Commission
Re: 188 Cross Highway/ §32-18 HDC Review and Recommendation

Dear Commissioners;

As an alternate Commissioner on the HDC, I have, of course, recused myself from consideration of the application pending before you for alterations to 188 Cross Highway. However, in my personal capacity as a neighbor, as well having been the grantor of the preservation easement in favor of the Town of Westport which governs your considerations of this application, I believe I have an obligation to apprise the Commission of some material facts that are not immediately evident from the application.

To keep it simple, I have attached a history I wrote regarding 188 Cross Highway. The front cover shows a WPA 1930s photo of the original 1728 saltbox which directly shows the western gable facade. Please note that to this day all of the exterior architectural elements shown in that photo remain. Those elements include the three large double-hung windows which were most likely added to the house in the 1820s; a smaller window which is much older and likely original to the house (to the bottom right and partially hidden behind the tree); and most importantly, the original entry door which bears a musket ball hole from a British attack during the 1777 Danbury Raid. For your further information, in the enclosed history I discuss the Danbury Raid and the events at 188 Cross Highway on pages 5-7 of the history.

In addition, the HRI report which accompanies the application states that:

> "The ground floor of the western gable is mostly filled by the flat-roofed connection to the 1961 wing, which leaves the historic fenestration visible above. (The historic exterior door of the house is also preserved within the flat roofed connection.)"

However, I also want to make clear that in looking at the pending application I very much respect that the new owners of 188 Cross Highway, the Fields, have their own vision for enjoying this unique historic house. I have not had the pleasure of meeting the Fields, but from the short conversation my husband has had with them, I believe that they truly value many of the irreplaceable aspects of their home. I will attend the February 9th hearing as a member of the public in the hope that my presence will be helpful.

Very truly yours,

Wendy Van Wie

THE HOMESTEAD AT 188 CROSS HIGHWAY

IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By Wendy Van Wie
Westport, CT.
November, 2014 (rev. Feb. 2017)

WPA 1930s Photograph of Saltbox Dwelling House and Barn

Wendy Van Wie, J.D., is the current owner of 188 Cross Highway, Westport, CT. A scholar of state constitutions, she is a former professor of constitutional law, economics, and history. She is currently the author of the Matthew Bender six volume treatise *Antieau on Local Government Law, 2nd Edition*.

INTRODUCTION

This is a brief narrative of the three century history of 188 Cross Highway, with its still extant saltbox dwelling house and barn, focusing on 1) the families who have lived there, and, 2) the social, economic, and political changes those families were both representative of and subject to. In the two hundred years the Meeker family lived in the dwelling house and farmed the land, the world around them radically changed from the tightly-controlled but prospering Puritan community of Fairfield, to the fiercely independent Revolutionary generation, through the increasing obsolescence of their agrarian way of life, the creation of the new Town of Westport, the rise of manufacturing, and finally, the sale of the property when the Meeker family had stopped trying to reproduce a way of life that had long since vanished. Later, the Schilthuis (pronounced "Skild-us") family would shepherd the property through the 20th century, as Westport became a wealthy, suburban community. Although additions were made to both the saltbox dwelling house and the now residential barn, remarkable care was given by the Schilthuis' to preserve their historic integrity. As land values in Westport skyrocketed and tear-downs became rampant by the early 21st century, the Town of Westport adopted creative and practical solutions for the perpetual preservation of its historic properties. Working with the Town, in 2017 the current owner was able to solve the practical preservation problems these now large separate residences faced by placing each building on its own parcel of land. At the same time, perpetual preservation easements were granted to the Town to guarantee the continued preservation of these historic buildings for the many generations of Westporters to come.

The five generations of Meekers who are relevant to the property are as follows:

Samuel Meeker (1700-1770) An ordinary farmer who, because of the extraordinary society he was born into, was able to acquire land in 1728 and build a dwelling house and farm that would sustain his family for generations. That dwelling house is the "saltbox" that still survives today.

Benjamin Meeker (1741-1817), Samuel's son. A Patriot who was taken prisoner-of-war from the dwelling house by British troops during the Danbury Raid. After he was returned from the old Sugar House Prison, Benjamin would later build the barn that still survives today.

Jonathan Meeker (1791-1863), Benjamin's son, who would lose ownership of his family homestead in the economic turbulence of the 1830s. But Jonathan and his family would not have to leave their farm because:

Edwin Meeker (1816-1891), Jonathan's son, became a manufacturer in Bridgeport and bought back the family homestead for his father to continue to occupy. Later, Edwin's brother **David Meeker** (1814-1882) continued to live on and farm the land with his wife and children.

David Meeker's Five Children: born from the 1840s through the 1860s, these five of David's children did not start their own families, but rather lived and worked together on the farm until it was sold in 1917. Only Susan (1845-1924) survived until the 1920s.

As Abigail Adams famously admonished: "remember the ladies". The history of the Meeker family that follows is derived primarily from land records, wills, and census records. Because women in general neither owned property nor were considered "head of household", they remain almost invisible in those documents. But from the evidence that does exist, the Meeker women had an extraordinary record as wives and mothers – they had many children over many years (as was necessary in an agrarian society) and, in an age of high infant and child mortality, the vast majority of their children survived to adulthood. Samuel's wife, Abigail Gregory, had seven children between 1725 and 1745, and all survived to adulthood - except one child who died in his teens. Benjamin's wife, Abigail Burr, had ten children between 1765 and 1791 and all survived to adulthood. Jonathan's wife, Sally Ogden, had eleven children between 1812 and 1838, and all but one appears to have survived to adulthood. And finally, David's wife, Salina Case, had nine children from 1840 through the mid-1860s, and except for her first child, who tragically died as an infant, her younger children all survived to adulthood. In sum, an extraordinary accomplishment by these women which also speaks to the standard of living they were able to achieve at their family homestead: while rigorous and with few luxuries, their families were sustained in good health, and compared with people elsewhere, a modest security and comfort.

CENTURY ONE (1728-1817):

Self-Government and Widespread Property Ownership;
Building a House to Last for Generations;
The Terror of the Danbury Raid

The religious conflicts and beliefs that brought Puritan settlers to Fairfield have long since faded into history, but two of their ideas have so permeated the American psyche that we take them for granted and forget how rare they are in the world even today: the revolutionary ideas of self-government and widespread property ownership. The dwelling house and barn, now at 188 and 190 Cross Highway, are surviving reminders of how the dignity, autonomy, and economic security achieved by early residents of Fairfield are the roots of our modern American democracy.

Fairfield was founded in 1639, the eve of the English Civil War, and the same year representatives of three Connecticut towns met in Hartford to create a system of government for Connecticut. Called the Fundamental Orders, the resulting "constitution" (and reason Connecticut is called the "Constitution State") was based on the astonishing belief that "the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people".[1] The Fundamental Orders made no mention of the English King or *his* authority, but because King Charles was fortuitously preoccupied with his own domestic troubles, the Fundamental Orders were not challenged. Thus Connecticut, unlike other colonies, developed under a uniquely autonomous system: there were

[1] Historic sermon by The Reverend Thomas Hooker, Hartford, CT. (May 31, 1638).

no appointed Royal governors enforcing laws imposed from afar, no English joint stock companies controlling the economy, and no member of the English aristocracy controlling the land.

Under this system of government, the Town of Fairfield had the power to distribute land to its own inhabitants which it would do periodically. Early on, home lots for dwelling houses were clustered in the village center, where neighbors and the church could easily enforce Puritan social values of godliness, order, and community. Fields, pastures, and wood lots surrounded the village, and land ownership was spread widely over the resident families - some families had more than others, but everyone had enough. In 1671, the expanding town started dividing and distributing lands much farther from the village center, including tracts between the parallel roads we know in modern Westport as Sturges Highway, Bayberry Lane, and North Avenue. These roads ran northwest at a right angle from what we now call Long Lots Road (Fig.1). The "long lots" that were distributed to farm families from within this grid ranged in width from 50 feet to perhaps 1,000 feet or more, but could run for miles into the not-yet-surveyed interior wilderness. Over time, as some farmers tired of travelling to their fields from the village center, they began building their dwelling houses farther from the center of town and the social controls exerted by their neighbors and church. While that may seem a sensible decision by the farmers to modern Americans, it was very controversial in Puritan society because these "outlivers" were implicitly stating – in total contravention of Puritan culture - that they valued personal concerns over spiritual welfare, and independence and convenience over community values.

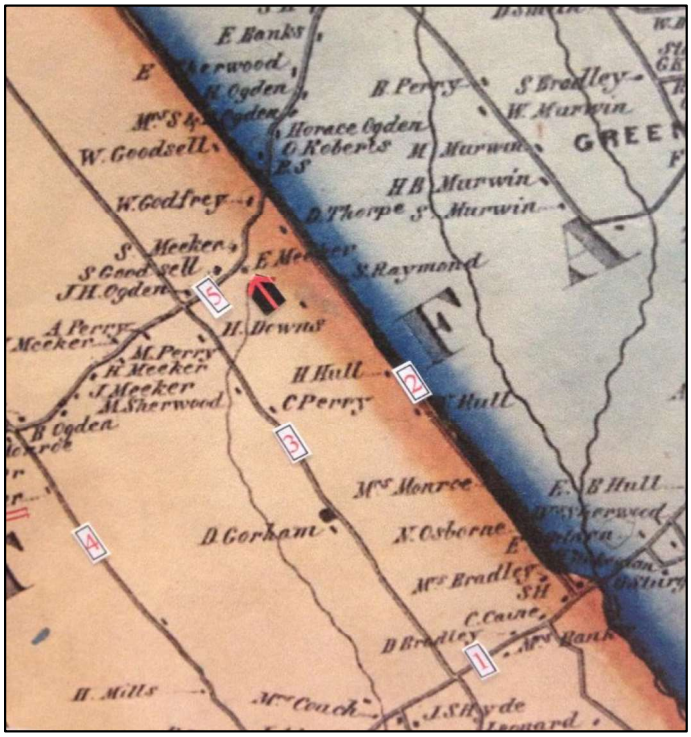

Figure 1. *Although drawn almost 200 years after the Town of Fairfield distributed "long lots" to residents, this early map shows the basic grid in what had recently become the Town of Westport. The roads labeled 1,2,3,4, and 5, are now respectively known as Long Lots Road, Sturges Highway (creating the boundary between modern Fairfield and modern Westport), Bayberry Lane, North Avenue, and Cross Highway. The arrow points to the still extant Schilthuis-Meeker House, then owned by "E Meeker", and built by his great-grandfather Samuel almost 130 years before.*

Clarks Map of Fairfield County, CT. (1856)

Whether living close to the center of town or not, Fairfield farm families needed a lot of land, and Fairfield was primarily a community of farm families. While the vast majority of residents lived above subsistence levels, families needed to have many children over many years to provide labor for the farm and for their parents' support as their parents grew older. Ideally, the parents would be able to provide each son enough nearby land to start his own family - and each daughter could marry a neighbor's son whose family had provided him with land. This was the world Samuel Meeker was born into in the year 1700.

When Samuel's father died in 1716, three of Samuel's older siblings did not have to be provided for in his will because their father had already "done pretty well for them." The rest of his father's estate of about 50 acres of land, two dwelling houses, a barn, stable, farm animals, and personal possessions were divided between Samuel, seven of his other brothers and sisters, and mother. Sixteen year old Samuel inherited 10 acres of land.

By the time he grew into adulthood and married, as one brother died and another moved away, Samuel owned 17 acres and a dwelling house from his father's estate. In 1728, Samuel traded that property for 35 acres in Hull's Long Lot between what is now Bayberry Lane and Sturges Highway in Westport. On the road that transected the long lots (called "Cross Highway" because it crossed the long lots) he built the dwelling house that would be his family's homestead for 5 generations and still stands today at 188 Cross Highway (*see Fig. 1.*)

It is extraordinary that an ordinary young man in the early 18th century would invest the resources necessary to build a wooden house that could and would last for generations, and yet he and many of his generation in Fairfield did. They did so because they had something the peasantry of Europe certainly didn't have, nor even most of the nobility. Even the tenant farmers of the Hudson Valley less than 100 miles away didn't have it – and it would take armed uprisings and another 120 years for them to get it. What Samuel Meeker got in his deed for the 35 acres of land was "a good indefeasible estate in fee simple" - in common parlance: The American Dream.

In language evolved from a feudal hierarchy of property interests, in a world that continued to be mostly feudal in nature, "fee simple" means that there is no elite above you in ownership, and "indefeasible" means that nobody can take your ownership away. It was, and remains in America today, the highest possible form of real estate ownership: you can freely use your property, personally benefit from any improvements you make, leave your improved property to whomever you want, or freely sell it and buy another property from a neighbor who can freely sell theirs. It meant that average farmers in Fairfield, who owned and farmed their own land, lived at a level of economic security, autonomy, and dignity all but unknown in the rest of the world. It meant that they had a reason to build a wooden house that would last for generations.

And Samuel did indeed provide for the next generation. For the "Love, Good Will & Affection that I bear to my beloved son Seth", in 1756, when his son Seth was 24 and of

marrying age, Samuel deeded him a three acre home lot across the road to build his own dwelling house on.[2] Then, in 1765 when Benjamin was 24, Samuel deeded Benjamin a barn and one acre of land adjoining Samuel's own dwelling house for the "Love and Affection I have to my Son Benjamin Meeker and other good causes." When Samuel died in 1770, he left about 20 acres for all four of his sons to divide between themselves, but in addition, to Seth and Benjamin he left "all my Homestead containing about thirteen acres more or less" with a line drawn down the middle. Seth would get the land to the east towards Sturges Highway, and Benjamin would get Samuel's dwelling house and the western half of the land. Benjamin and Seth's descendants would live and farm on that very same land right next door to each other for the next hundred years. But, although living on the very same land, they would be living in a wholly new country: The United States of America.

THE DANBURY RAID

As war with England was coming in the 1770s, Fairfield became an overwhelmingly Patriot town. Many cultural and economic factors converged to produce that position, but major factors include themes previously discussed: 1) the fundamental Puritan belief that "the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people"; 2) "outlivers," like the Meekers, who undermined Puritan social constraints by living independent lives away from the central village – and thereby making independence and self-interest important cultural values; and, 3) "fee simple" land ownership which made men "supreme in their own domain" and unwilling to submit to outside powers. In short, in the course of the previous century, Fairfield Puritans had evolved into "Yankees".

In addition, the farmers of Fairfield were prospering and producing an agricultural surplus: long before Connecticut was known as the "Constitution State", it was known as the "Provision State" – an appellation given to it by none other than George Washington because Connecticut supplied more food and cannons to the Continental Army than any other state. Many of these and other supplies such as ordnance, tools, medicine, tents, bedding, and even shoes and stockings were stored in the Town of Danbury. As every Westporter knows because of the cannons at Compo Beach, and the Minuteman statue on the road to the beach, two thousand British troops entered Westport at Compo Beach on the night of April 25, 1777 to begin a march to Danbury to take or destroy those supplies. What most Westporters don't know is that the British *exited* Westport that night past the still-surviving homestead of Benjamin Meeker (*Fig. 2*), the hole from a British musket ball still scarring its entry door[3]. Neither do we remember the suffering and sacrifice Benjamin and his family, and other Westporters like them, made for the patriot cause.

[2] On the Fig.1 map, it's the dwelling house labeled "S Meeker", although by 1856 "S Meeker" referred to "Silas Meeker", Seth's grandson.

[3] The original entry door is pictured on the cover page, but has since been protected and enclosed in the foyer of the "modern wing" as will be discussed later.

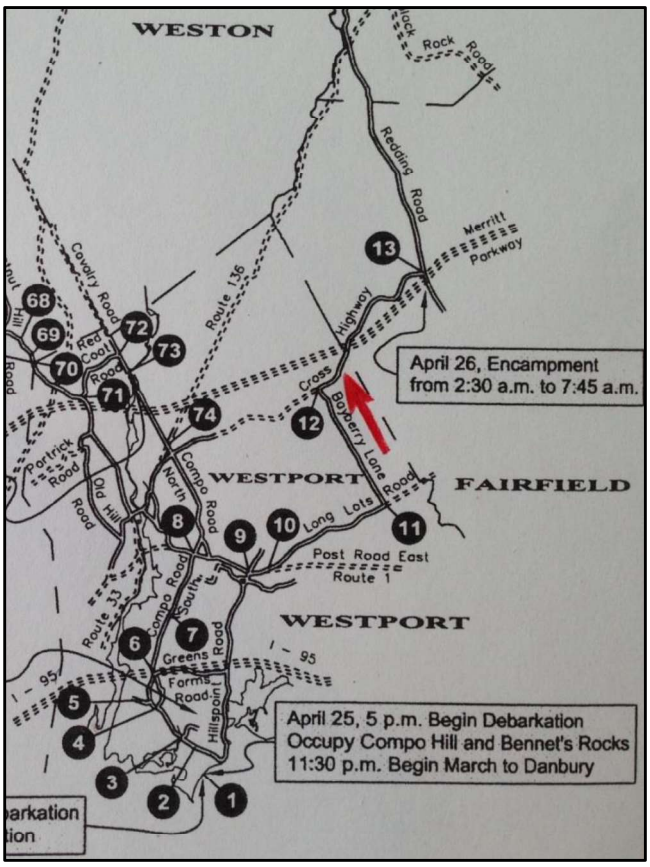

FIGURE 2. *This detail is from a map*[4] *showing the route of almost 2,000 British soldiers after they landed at Compo Beach (Point 1) and marched through Westport on their way to Danbury on the night of April 25-26, 1777. After marching up Bayberry Lane, they turned right onto Cross Highway (Point 12), and raided Benjamin Meeker's homestead (red arrow), as described below. The broken line to the right of the arrow is Sturges Highway, Westport's boundary with the Town of Fairfield. Thus, Compo Beach is where British soldiers entered Westport, and the Schilthuis-Meeker House is where they exited.*

Imagine, if you will, the terror of having two thousand hostile troops of the most powerful empire on earth marching towards your remote homestead in the middle of the night, and then having your worst fears realized when they stop where you are. As described by Benjamin's great-grandson[5], the events of that night were as follows:

> "To wit, Benjamin Meeker of Fairfield, Conn. – Cross Highway District (now embraced in the Town of Westport) was a recognized Patriot. On the Tryon raid for the destruction of the Military Stores and Supplies gathered at Danbury (April 25-28, 1777), the British being piloted by a Tory guide to his place – took him and his brother Daniel prisoners, sacked and gutted his house. They also drove off his cattle and butchered them. He and his brother Daniel were taken to New York and incarcerated in the old Sugar House Prison for a period of 18 months. *See Adj Gen Report page 493.*

[4] Map detail reproduced from *The Bridge Not Taken: Benedict Arnold Outwitted*, Damon Greenleaf Douglas, Westport, 2002

[5] Edward Franklin Meeker, *Application to the Connecticut Society of the Sons of the American Revolution*. Application submitted September 13, 1895, and approved January 14, 1896.

> After his release he supported the family of his brother Stephen who served his country in the Army having enlisted April 30, 1777 for the war and died in the service February 1, 1778. *See Adj Gen Report page 224 for service of Stephen.*
>
> He also supported his sister Molly wife of Nathan Bradley who was a Patriot Soldier early in the field, enlisted for the war but was honorably discharged April 24, 1780. *See Adj Gen Report page 160 for service of Nathan Bradley*."

In sum, of the four sons of Samuel Meeker, two were taken prisoner-of-war during the Danbury Raid, and one enlisted in the Army five days after and was killed in service. Benjamin and Daniel were in their mid-to-late thirties when they were taken, and each left behind a wife and six young children to somehow find a means of support and cope with the probability that they would never see their loved one again. Their fears would not have been unfounded: it is estimated that 2/3 of the American prisoners at the Sugar House Prison died because of overcrowding, rotten food, and disease. Thus, the British did not just march through Westport on their way to Danbury, they left a lot of now-forgotten suffering in their wake.

But both Daniel and Benjamin would eventually come home to their families – perhaps during one of the prisoner exchanges that were organized from time to time with the oldest surviving prisoners being released first. Daniel would die in 1784, but Benjamin would live another forty years and have four more children, including Jonathan in 1791. Jonathan Meeker (1791-1863) would be the third generation of Meekers to raise his family in the dwelling house his grandfather had built, a house in the United States of America - the new country his family had sacrificed so much to create.

CENTURY TWO (1817-1917):
Fairfield Loses Westport;
Jonathan Loses the Farm;
Agriculture Declines and Manufacturing Rises

The Fairfield Jonathan Meeker was born into 1791 must have looked very stable to him. The baby of the family, a full 26 years younger than his eldest sister, he was born and raised in the same house as his nine older brothers and sisters – the very same house his grandfather had built to raise his own large family in. Jonathan grew up in a neighborhood of similar families who lived in close proximity to each other over generations, and through intermarriage created a tight web of personal relations. But the stable and personal world Jonathan was born into was rapidly changing. Population pressure was undermining the sustainability of the family model, and the economics of farming were changing from providing sustenance for the family, to producing commodities for an impersonal market. These changes would ensure Jonathan's life

would turn out very differently than the lives his father and grandfather had known, even as he tried to copy their behavior.

When Jonathan's father Benjamin died in 1817, he was only able to leave each of his eldest children slightly more than one acre of land – not enough for any of them to make a living on. To each of his three youngest children (including Jonathan) he left a one third interest in the dwelling house, barn, and an acre of land. Thus, Benjamin was not able to accomplish what his father and grandfather had – giving each son enough land to provide for their own families. Whereas land had still been plentiful in Fairfield in the early 18th century when the young Samuel had acquired 35 acres, by the time of the Revolution a long term outmigration of people had begun as there was inevitably too little land for the profusion of offspring. Now, in early 19th century Fairfield, land was scarce, costly, and less productive than the new lands opening up in such places as western New York and Ohio.

Prior to his father's death, Jonathan had been able to buy his own eighteen acre parcel of land, and by buying out his brothers and sisters, Jonathan was eventually able to reconstitute his father's farm (the dwelling house, barn, and about seven acres), and even added another eight acres, for a total home lot of fifteen acres "more or less". But the fortunes of the Meeker family and the many farm families like them were declining, and as their fortunes declined, so did the fortunes of the Town of Fairfield which was, in one sense, merely still an aggregation of these families.

The families were in decline because in addition to population pressure undermining the stability of traditional family life, early 19th century America was experiencing a massive economic transformation that would render Fairfield's farms uncompetitive with new lands opening up in the west. Called the "Market Revolution," it was a period in which farm production shifted from serving the needs of the family to the efficient production of commodities, driven by prices, for a world market. The "market" expanded dramatically as thousands of miles of roads and canals were built connecting the produce of the American interior to large coastal ports. It is perhaps poignant that the most consequential of these infrastructure projects, the Erie Canal, was begun in 1817, the year Benjamin Meeker died, because with the coming of the Erie Canal his whole way of life in Fairfield would inevitably die with him.

Fairfield, with depleted soil and old-fashioned, inefficient modes of production, would never again prosper as an agricultural community. By 1835, Fairfield had become so weakened it could no longer effectively defend itself in the Connecticut legislature. When some of its own residents petitioned to create a separate town out of its population and territory, as they had tried a few times before, the legislature finally relented and incorporated the new Town of Westport. Thus, Benjamin Meeker's homestead and farm, now belonging to his son Jonathan, would become part of the Town of Westport.

One characteristic of the market economy developing in 19th century America was a cycle of booms, busts, and financial panics that reoccurred with punishing regularity every 20 years or so – they called them "euphorias" and "revulsions". Then, as now, boom times are characterized by people and institutions taking on debt as prices rise and markets expand, and busts are characterized by bankruptcies when the debt taken on cannot be paid back as income falls. The early to mid-1830s were "spectacular boom" times in the United States, and in 1834, Jonathan mortgaged his family's homestead and farm for the first time in its over one hundred year history. Like a drumbeat towards disaster, a few months later, in 1835, Jonathan mortgaged the 18 acre parcel[6] and then, mortgaged his family's homestead again. In 1836, Jonathan mortgaged both the 18 acre parcel and the homestead yet again. Then, in the Panic year of 1837, due to "being justly indebted to sundry persons and from the embarrassed state of my affairs unable to pay," Jonathan became insolvent and the Westport Probate Court ordered his property sold for the benefit of his creditors. Jonathan had lost his family's farm.

But there was still family. Jonathan and his wife Sally were in their mid-forties when he lost title to the farm. They had already had ten children, but the oldest, Samuel (namesake of Jonathan's grandfather) had died at sea in 1835. In 1838, the year after the bankruptcy, Sally gave birth to their last child, whom they would also name Samuel. As a palpable example of how dramatically the world changed since the first Samuel Meeker built a homestead that would sustain his family for generations, this last Samuel Meeker would spend his adult life as a landless farm laborer and finally, in his older years, as an "inmate" in the Greenwich Town Farm. A century ago, a "Town Farm" was where Connecticut towns housed their indigent. In a final irony, today, our "Town Farm" is where the wealthy community of Westport, far removed from its agrarian roots, can learn about food production and land stewardship.

But Jonathan and Sally and their younger children did not immediately have to leave the family home, indeed Jonathan and Sally would live there until their deaths in the 1860s. In turn, their second son David would take over for them, raising his own large family there and farming the land with his many children. The reason they were able to stay was because Jonathan and Sally's third son, Edwin[7], had successfully changed with the times, and bought back the homestead for his parents and siblings to continue their traditional way of life.

Starting out as a blacksmith, Edwin had moved to Bridgeport to become a carriage-maker, and also became a participant in what is known as the American System of Manufacture. This was the system of mass production achieved by means of machine-made interchangeable parts that hit its stride in mid-19th century America. Thus, for example, in 1867 Edwin applied for a patent for a "new and useful Improvement in the Manufacture of Carriage-Clips" whereby they could be made "of more uniform size and shape" and "cheaper" by machine than those

[6] That mortgage is one of the earliest documents recorded in the newly created Town of Westport's land records – it was the fifth. (Vol. 1, Page 5).

[7] Edwin Meeker is the "E Meeker" on the Clark Map (Fig. 1)

made "tediously" and "inaccurately" by hand. In tandem with the prior Market Revolution, the American System of Manufacture was yet another step in the transition of the United States from an agrarian economy to an industrial powerhouse.

Having no need for farm labor, Edwin and his wife had but two children. His oldest, Edward Franklin Meeker[8], was a Yale law graduate and later a businessman in Bridgeport. Edwin's younger son also eschewed farming and became a clerk in Danbury. These two sons inherited the farm on Cross Highway upon Edwin's death, and in 1899 they transferred title to their cousin George, the son of their now-deceased uncle David (their father Edwin's brother who had remained on the farm). George and four of his older, unmarried siblings would be the 5th and last generation of Samuel Meeker's descendants to live and farm in their ancestral home. Long after it had become obsolete on such limited and depleted land, the agrarian family model was finally ceasing to reproduce itself.

George[9] and his four older unmarried brothers and sisters would live together on the farm until his death in 1910 at the age of 48. Perhaps ailing and in anticipation of his own death, the previous year he had transferred a 1/5 interest in the property to each of the other four. In 1912, the Westport Probate court ordered six acres sold, and in 1917 the family sold the dwelling house, barn, and remaining acres of land to Leonard H. Gault, who from his 500 plus entries in the Westport Land Records, appears to have been speculating in land in the newly fashionable Westport. The homestead parcel changed hands a couple of times between 1917 and 1928 when it was bought by Sally Schilthuis. The dwelling house and farm that Samuel Meeker had built almost two centuries before to shelter and nourish his family for generations had accomplished it purpose, and was about to enter a new phase.

Century Three (1928-2014):
The Colonial Revival Period;
Merritt Parkway and "No Man's Land";
Lost in Foreclosure Again

The economic cycle of boom, bust, and financial panic, the cycle repeated every twenty years or so in the United States since The Market Revolution over a century before, would reach a crescendo in the "roaring twenties", and crash into the Great Depression of the 1930s. A year before the devastating stock market crash of 1929, Sally Schilthuis, wife of Willem, bought the dwelling house, barn and 4 parcels of land totaling 14 acres "more or less". The wealthy

[8] It is Edward Franklin Meeker's description of the events on the night of the Danbury Raid that appears on pages 7-8 of this document.

[9] George Meeker did have a brief marriage to an apparently 15-year-old neighbor in 1903 which ended in divorce. Their son, Frederick Ralph Meeker (b. 1905) rose to the rank of Captain in the Westport Police Department. When he died in 1961, the flags on Town Hall and other municipal buildings were lowered to half staff. Frederick Ralph Meeker appears to have many descendants in Connecticut, although it's not clear if any now reside in Westport.

Schilthuis' would safely shepherd the dwelling house and barn through all the coming upheavals of the 20th century, until Willem's death at age 95 in 1990.

Since the late 19th century and the advent of commuter lines, Westport's waterfront and proximity to New York City had been attracting residents of wealth and influence. As automobiles became more common in the early twentieth century, old farms like the Meeker homestead in the interior countryside began to attract these types of residents, like Willem and Sally Schilthuis, as well. Willem Schilthuis, born in the Netherlands, had been sent to New York City in 1915 to be the representative of his family's grain business. By 1921, Schilthuis American Trading Co. would export almost 1% of American wheat exports. He married Sally Kavenagh of Boston in the early 1920s, and later became an executive in The Continental Grain Company, Chairman of the North American Export Grain Association, President of the New York Produce Exchange, and a member of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Advisory Committee for Grain Export. Notably, trading grain had become more profitable than growing grain in this gradually suburbanizing and well-to-do community.

Among the attractions of the Meeker homestead to the Schilthuis' were its colonial origins: the early 20th century was the heyday of the Colonial Revival movement. The Market Revolution and the American System of Manufacture had converged by the late 19th century to produce a newly industrialized America along with its dizzying rates of change in technology, social mores, immigration, and sense of economic stability. A nostalgic yearning for an idealized vision of a simpler, more stable, and homogenous past was popularly expressed in home decoration, architecture, and the arts. Thusly, Mrs. Schilthuis decorated the rooms surrounding the 18th century fireplace with a 20th century romantic notion of hearth and home. (*Fig. 3*). When the Schilthuis' built an east wing to the original saltbox, providing bedrooms for themselves and three young daughters, it was also in the Colonial Revival style. Happily, in addition to encouraging the Schilthuis' to preserve the saltbox dwelling house and barn, the Colonial Revival movement spawned the idea of historic preservation in general.

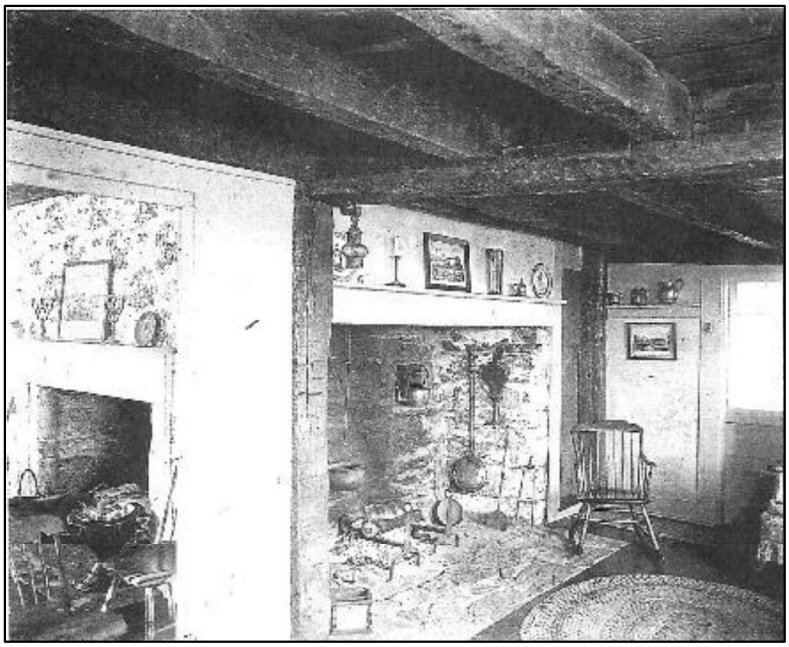

Figure 3. *1930s WPA photo of the still-extant fireplaces, posts, and beams in the Schilthuis-Meeker House.*

But as the automobile came to open up interior sections of Westport to wealthy families, so came a need for roads for the automobiles. In the 1920s the Merritt Parkway was proposed to link New York with Fairfield County, CT. When construction began in the 1930s, the State of Connecticut chose to buy the land necessary for the Parkway, and its exits, from private owners rather than by using its power of eminent domain. To that end, the state started buying acreage in the vicinity of the Schilthuis property for a proposed Exit 43 near the Westport-Fairfield border.

Mrs. Schilthuis and many of her influential neighbors fiercely opposed the possibility of a parkway exit in their neighborhood and circulated a petition which stated: "Access for or from the Merritt Parkway is not only unnecessary, but very undesirable for the community". But Mrs. Schilthuis went one step further and in 1934 bought nineteen acres of land that lay between her own land and the proposed Parkway, thereby precluding the state from acquiring them. It is not known how much she actually paid the landowner but it was at least $4,000 - an astronomical sum for low and wet land at the height of the Great Depression. In the end, concerted and influential community opposition prevailed and no Exit 43 was ever built. Now known as "No-Man's Land", the seven-and-a-half mile stretch between Exit 42 in Westport and Exit 44 in Fairfield is the longest segment of the Merritt Parkway without an exit.

Figure 4. *Aerial Photographs from 1934 and 2014, respectively. Point 1 is the Schilthuis-Meeker House, Point 2 is the 19 acres Sally Schilthuis bought defensively in 1934 to prevent an exit for the Merritt Parkway from being built, and Point 3 shows Daniel Court, a luxury cul-de-sac on land the Schilthuis family sold after Sally's death.*

By the middle 1930s, the Schilthuis' had three young daughters, Sally Jr., Carel, and Pamela. The barn, no longer needed for agriculture, was used for "art classes, dance classes, neighborhood plays, roller skating, etc." for kids by day, and "raucous parties with music, singing, dancing and drinking . . . with writers and artists they knew from Greenwich Village, who had also moved from New York City to Westport" for adults by night.[10] During World War II, while Sally Jr.'s husband was serving in the Pacific, the Schilthuis' built an addition to the caretaker's cottage for Sally Jr. and her young son to live in, and connected the cottage to the barn – which was used for packing boxes for Dutch war relief near the end of the War. As of 2017, all five of Sally Jr.'s children have been frequent visitors to the property to reminisce about idyllic summers spent there as children.

In the late 1950s, Mr. Schilthuis retired from business and added the "modern wing" to the west side of the colonial saltbox, sensitively preserving the original entry door with the musket ball hole from the Danbury Raid within the new foyer. Still very social, the Schilthuis' attached a barreled-ceiling "great room" to entertain in, and the barn and cottage apartments were rented out. After Mrs. Schilthuis' death in 1978, the family made various divisions of the 34 acres, including lots for new luxury homes on Cross Highway, and the development of Daniel Court, a cul-de-sac of luxury homes off Sturges Highway (*see Fig. 4*). Mr. Schilthuis would live at what had become his homestead on Cross Highway until his death at the age of 95 in 1990.

After all of the land divisions, the original Meeker dwelling house and barn – each still intact but augmented by the Schilthuis' - remained together on a three acre lot. The property was purchased by a partner in Metropolitan Models, a modeling agency specializing in bringing European models to the United States to become the "supermodels" of the 1990s, including Claudia Schiffer, Heidi Klum, and the future First Lady of the United States, Melania Knauss Trump. But the devastating impact of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks on the economy of New York City, and its advertising industry in particular, apparently caused the new owner to struggle financially. And just as Jonathan Meeker had done 170 years before, the land was mortgaged over and over until finally, for the second time in its almost three hundred year history, the Meeker homestead would again be lost in a foreclosure action.

Recognizing that an extraordinary history was embodied in these buildings, and that the buildings were being threatened by skyrocketing land values and consequent tear-down activity, the Schilthuis-Meeker homestead was bought at auction in 2003 by the author of this paper. After restoring the buildings, it became evident that the best course to take for the perpetual preservation of these two large historic structures was to divide the land again so that each could have its own owner to care for it, with preservation easements to protect each from demolition. Working with a Town government that is both forward-looking and grounded in its heritage, this preservation strategy was accomplished in 2016.

[10] Schilthuis-Johnson, Sally (Jr.). Interview with Connie Johnson. Oral History.

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