

# Burlington Traveler's Guide:

## A Companion to the Burlington Passport



Dear 2<sup>nd</sup>-Grade Families,

Each spring the 2<sup>nd</sup>-graders at Lake Garda School study Our Community. As part of this unit, we invite you to explore your town and learn about its history as a family.

Each student has received a “Burlington Passport” to fill out as they explore. This “Traveler’s Guide” is intended to help families as they visit places around town to complete the Passport. Use this information with your child to gain a better understanding of each of the historic sites. If your child wants to know more, you can find additional information about many of these places online or at the Burlington Room at the Burlington Public Library (call first for hours.)

You can visit the sites in any order that is convenient to you. Remember that all of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-graders will visit the Elton Tavern, Center Schoolhouse, and Town Hall as part of their Burlington field trip at the end of May. The Elton Tavern will also be open to visitors immediately following the Burlington Memorial Day Parade on Monday, May 27.

To complete the Passport, each student must write two sentences about each site they visit in his or her passport and either take a photo or draw a picture to include. Passports are due back to your child’s teacher by **Monday, June 3**. Students who visit **at least 8** of the 14 sites will be entered to win a prize at the year-end celebration for all 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade families at the Elton Tavern on **Thursday, June 6 from 4:30 – 6:30 pm**.

Please remember to use caution and obey all laws when parking, crossing roads, and visiting these locations. Also, don’t forget your sunscreen and bug spray!

HAPPY EXPLORING!

We are grateful to the JAMES R. PARKER TRUST AT THE MAIN STREET COMMUNITY FOUNDATION for support of this program.

## **Elton Tavern**

*781 George Washington Turnpike*

The building known today as the Elton Tavern was originally built as a house for Giles Griswold in 1810. Griswold ran a store near the center of town. His house was one of the largest and most impressive in town. It had seven fireplaces (more than any other house in town) and a ballroom on the second floor. Giles and his wife had ten children. In 1817 Giles Griswold left Burlington. His house was sold to Julius C. Hotchkiss, who opened part of it as a tavern in 1824.

It took a long time to travel by foot, horseback, or horse-drawn carriage in early America. In 1644, Connecticut passed a law requiring all towns to have at least one tavern or inn to provide food and lodging for travelers. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Burlington had several taverns. Travelers rested themselves and their horses at taverns. At most taverns in small towns, guests ate whatever the tavern keeper was serving that day. In bigger cities, or at new seaside “resorts,” guests might expect more choices and better food.

Stagecoaches stopped at taverns to drop off and pick up passengers. Stagecoaches were the public, mass transit of the 1790s-1840s. Stagecoaches ran on regular schedules and could carry 9-12 passengers. It was not always comfortable, depending on the number squeezed into the coach and the conditions of the unpaved roads. Stagecoaches traveling between Hartford and Litchfield in the early 1800s passed through Burlington several times a week.

The tavern also served as a hub for the local community. It was a place where men could meet friends for a drink or a game of cards or draughts (checkers). It was where you got your news from neighbors, travelers, or the newspapers available in the tap room. It was also where people gathered for an evening of dancing or to see a traveling performer or an exotic animal on display.

This tavern was operated by several owners over the years, including Romeo Elton. His family lived there the longest. This is why we know it as the Elton Tavern today. In 1974 the Town of Burlington purchased the building through grants and private donations. It is operated by the Burlington Historical Society.

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## **Center Schoolhouse**

*George Washington Turnpike, between Covey Road and the Town Green*

In 1779, the Congregational Church laid out school districts for Burlington. Each of the nine districts had its own schoolhouse—most of them just one room. The red Center Schoolhouse was probably built between 1779 and 1800 and was used until 1948. The schoolhouse served all of the children in 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade living in the 1<sup>st</sup> district. The district stretched about a mile out from the schoolhouse. Students would walk to school each day.

The Flag Day celebration and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade graduation was held on the Burlington Town Green each June. This was the only time when students from all of the district schools got together. Early on, few children received an education beyond 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but those who did had to go away to school or attended high school in Farmington, Canton, or Bristol.

The school year was once very different from today. There were two terms: four months during the winter, and another five months starting in April or May and running through the summer. That way, children could help their families with planting and harvesting crops.

There was one teacher, who taught reading, writing, math, spelling, geography, history, and more to students of all different ages. The younger children sat in the front, with the older in the back. Most of the school work was done independently, but older children would sometimes help the younger ones. The school was heated by a wood-burning stove in the center of the room. Boys would bring in the firewood. There was no running water, so students used the nearby outhouses.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

In 1813, teachers' salaries were between \$6 and \$9 per week.

In 1909 the town took over the schools from the old district committees and hired a superintendent. In 1919 the town began providing free textbooks. Power lines eventually reached Burlington, and in 1924 one electric light was installed in each schoolhouse. The one-room schoolhouses closed in 1948, and the Burlington Consolidated School (now Town Hall) opened for the 1948/49 school year. Lewis Mills High School opened in 1961 and Lake Garda School opened in 1965. Har-Bur Middle School opened in 1973.

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## Town Green

*Intersection of Spielman Highway (Route 4) and George Washington Turnpike*

In the 1700s, the center of Burlington was a little to the east, near where Belden Road and George Washington Turnpike intersect. In the early 1800s, the town center shifted to this area. The Burlington Town Green was the center of life in Burlington. It was surrounded by the town's general store and the Congregational Church (moved to this location in 1836), as well as several homes. The Town Hall (which was located where the Johnnycake Properties building is now) and the Center Schoolhouse were nearby. The town's war memorials are located on the Green, and until several years ago Burlington's Constitution Oak stood there. The Town Green was where important community events such as Old Home Week, the annual Flag Day celebration, and school graduation were held. The Green is smaller than it used to be, because the roads have been widened, but we continue the tradition by holding events like the Memorial Day parade, Tavern Day, and the annual Carol Sing on and around the Town Green.

## Silas Brooks Monument

*Directions: Enter the Burlington Center Cemetery on the road between the Burlington Public Library and the T. Charles Scheidel ball field. At the T in the paved road, turn right. At gravel road, turn left. Look for a metal plaque on a stone straight ahead, near the edge of the woods.*

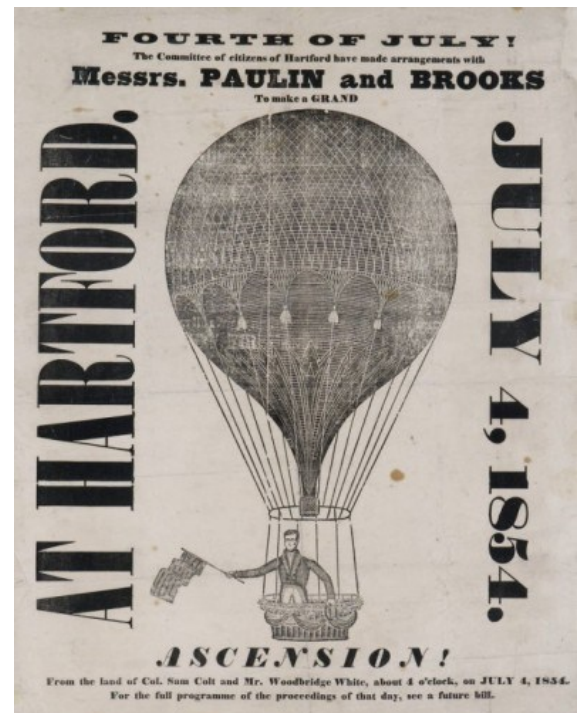
Silas Brooks was Connecticut's first aviation pioneer. He was born in 1824, and his parents moved to Burlington when he was still a baby. He attended school in Burlington and showed talents in both math and music. He brought these abilities together and became a skilled carpenter and maker of musical instruments.

At the age of 24, he met the great showman, P.T. Barnum. Barnum hired Silas Brooks to build and perform on a complex wind instrument that Barnum had designed. Barnum was so pleased with the result that he ordered five more, so that he could start a band. Silas Brooks toured the country with the band. The show eventually grew to include other types of acts, including balloon demonstrations by a man named William Paulin. One day in 1853, Paulin was sick and could not fly the balloon. Rather than disappoint the crowd, Silas Brooks climbed into the basket and flew the balloon himself.

Ballooning in 1853 was much more dangerous than it is today. Extremely flammable hydrogen gas was used, instead of hot air. Both the gas and the balloon itself were very expensive. The balloons were usually made of silk, sewn together and sealed with varnish.

Brooks made his first balloon flight in Connecticut in Hartford in 1854. It earned him \$1,600. Brooks moved back to Burlington and married a circus performer from Terryville named Harriet Beach. Most of his remaining balloon flights were in Connecticut, including one in Hartford in 1862, which attracted 20,000 people to Bushnell Park. Brooks's last flight was in 1894 at the age of 70. It was not a great success. The balloon hit a tree, tearing a hole in its side, got tangled, and crashed. Silas Brooks's flying career was over. The balloon basket was put in storage and was eventually given to the New England Air Museum, where it is now on view. It is believed to be the oldest aeronautical artifact in the country.

Brooks had money problems later in life. He spent his last years living in the Burlington poorhouse. He died in 1906 and was buried in Burlington Center Cemetery. In 1997 the Connecticut Lighter Than Air Society put up the plaque at his gravesite honoring "Connecticut's First Balloonist."



Poster for a balloon demonstration by William Paulin and Silas Brooks, 1854. Courtesy Connecticut Historical Society.

## Burlington Public Library

*34 Library Lane*

*Visit [burlingtonctlibrary.info](http://burlingtonctlibrary.info) or call (860) 673-3331 for hours, upcoming programs, or more information.*

### DID YOU KNOW?

The library owned about 230 books in 1897, but many of those were on loan to the schools in town.

In 1830 the biggest library in town was at the Burlington Congregational Church. It had 135 books. In 1896 the Town of Burlington opened its first public library in a room in the old Town Hall. The library budget was \$50 a year. After the consolidated school opened in 1948, the one-room Center Schoolhouse served as the public library. The library and the needs of people in town soon outgrew the schoolhouse. After lots of fundraising, the new library opened in its current location in 1969. An addition was put on in the 1990s, and the newest expansion—including a new community room, children’s program room, teen room, and study rooms—was completed in 2017. Today the Burlington Public Library (BPL) has 45,840 books—that’s more than five books for every person in town. The BPL is also the home to the Burlington Room, where books, photographs, documents, and newspaper clippings about local history are kept for use by researchers or anyone else who is interested in the history of Burlington. When you visit the library in May as part of the Burlington Passport program, be sure to sign up for your own library card, if you don’t have one yet!

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## Town Hall

*200 Spielman Highway (Route 4)*

The building that now serves as Burlington Town Hall was built as the Burlington Consolidated School. It opened in 1948, taking over from the one-room schoolhouses. The original school had 6 or 7 classrooms, each with two doors—one leading to the hallway and the other to the outdoors. Later, an annex with four additional classrooms was built on the grounds. The auditorium doubled as the lunch room. Early on, the “Mothers’ Club” prepared a hot lunch for the students each day. The school’s first graduation was held on Flag Day, June 14, 1949.

### DID YOU KNOW?

During the Flood of 1955, the school sheltered 35-40 people whose homes were damaged or inaccessible.

Lake Garda School opened in 1965 and Har-Bur Middle School opened in 1973. Soon after that, the town bought the building from Regional School District 10, and it became Town Hall. It now houses the town offices, the police department, and the senior center. The old Town Hall (where the Johnnycake Properties building is now) was demolished. The small brick building that once housed the town records (with the signboard for town notices on the side) is still standing.

## Rail Trail

*Park in the parking area at the foot of the hill, where Route 4 turns right at the light towards Farmington and Route 179 towards Collinsville is to the left.*

Many people living in town today do not realize that Burlington once had a train station. The New Haven & Northampton Railroad Company (started in 1846) built a branch which extended its railroad service from Farmington to New Hartford, including stops in Unionville, Burlington, Collinsville, and Pine Meadow. The Burlington station opened in 1850. Two passenger trains stopped each day. One freight train stopped daily. It picked up railroad ties (the wooden cross pieces that support railroad tracks) produced at Burlington sawmills. Passenger service to Burlington ended in 1928.



Burlington Train Station, 1850-1955. Courtesy Burlington Room, Burlington Public Library. Notice Route 4 is just on the other side of the building.

The station building and much of the track in this area was destroyed in the Flood of 1955, one of the greatest natural disasters to hit Connecticut. The flood also destroyed the first Burlington Inn, originally built as the Woodland Hotel in 1850. It was a popular river-front destination



After the Flood of 1955: The Burlington Inn (which had to be demolished) and rubble from the road and train tracks. Courtesy Burlington Room, Burlington Public Library.

near the train station. The current notice-board is near the former site of the original inn. (A later restaurant by the same name was where Joni's Child Care is now.) Route 4 used to also run here, much lower and closer to the river.

Like many abandoned train routes in the state, the Farmington River Rail Trail has been adapted for recreational use today. The trail currently runs about 18 miles from Farmington to Simsbury and connects into other trail networks, linking huge portions of the state.



## Connecticut State Fish Hatchery

*34 Belden Road, between Route 4 and George Washington Turnpike—open daily 8am-3:00pm.*

The Burlington Fish Hatchery is the oldest State Fish Hatchery. It opened in 1923. The main building was an old dance hall from Farmington, which was moved to Burlington to house the hatchery. Fish are raised from eggs at the hatchery and are then released into Connecticut rivers and lakes for recreational fishing. If you visit the Farmington River Rail Trail at the right time of year, you might see the hatchery trucks and staff preparing to release the fish.

According to the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), wells and nearby streams provide all the necessary water, keeping the electrical needs low and making this the most cost effective of the three state hatcheries. The hatchery produces Brook Trout, Brown Trout, Kokanee Salmon and Rainbow Trout. The hatchery is also working on a Brown Trout “Survivor” Program, designed to produce a strain of fish better suited to survive in the wild.

Visitors can see fish growing in indoor tanks and outdoor pools. The fish in the outdoor pools are protected by fencing and overhead netting.

Near the Fish Hatchery, at the corner of Belden Road and George Washington Turnpike, you may see some old foundation stones. This was the original site of the Congregational Church of Burlington until 1836, when it was moved to its current location by the Town Green.

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## Hogan’s Cider Mill

*522 Spielman Highway*

*Visit [hoganscidermill.com](http://hoganscidermill.com) or call (860) 675-7320 for hours or more information.*

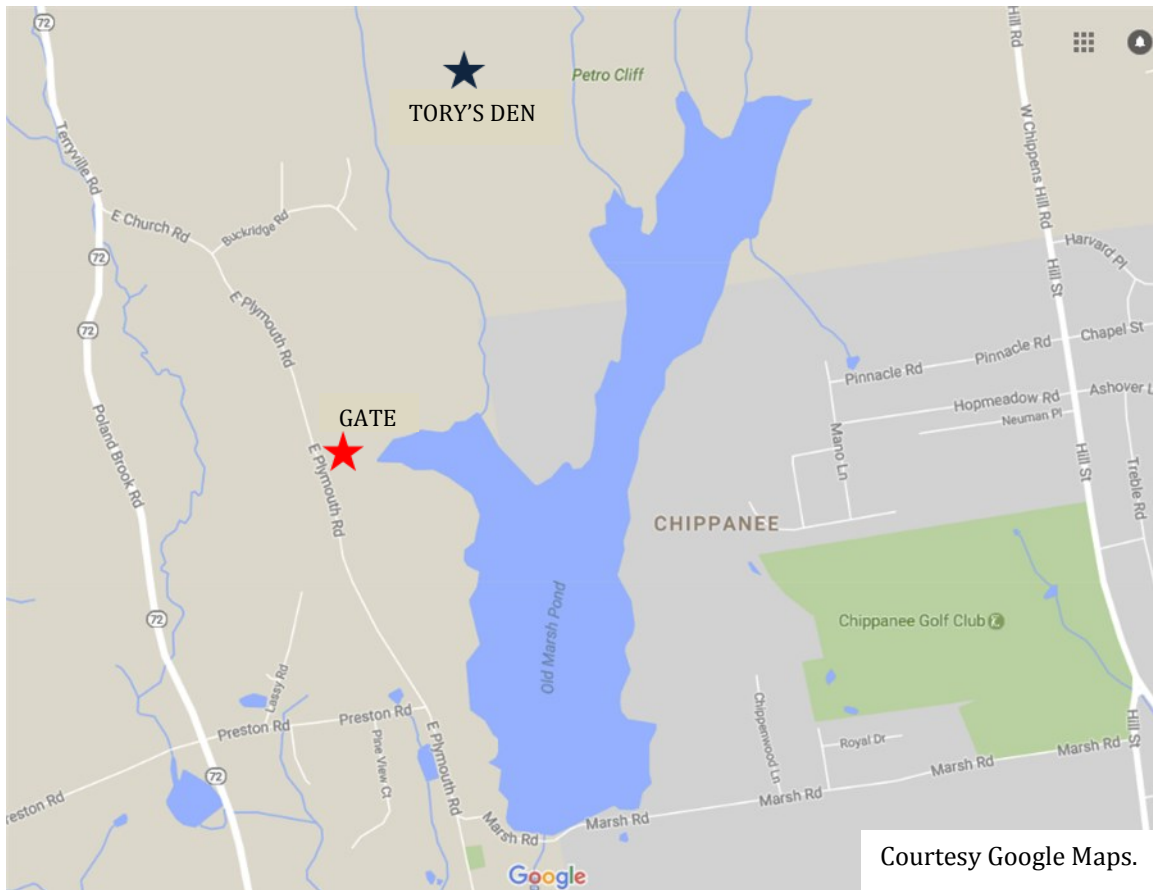
English colonists brought apple seeds to America in the 1600s, and cider soon became one of the most popular drinks in the colonies. Cider lasted longer and was less likely to carry diseases than some other drinks, like milk, or even water. Cider continued to be popular throughout the 1800s and into the 1900s. Hogan’s Cider Mill has been making apple cider in Burlington since 1912. The Hogan family began farming in Burlington in 1910 and soon decided to start making cider. They bought apples from other farmers in the area. Many mills in Burlington’s past once used local streams to provide water power for machinery. Hogan’s original cider press used a steam engine to grind up the apples, and then workers turned two large screws by hand (with the help of long poles to provide leverage) to squeeze the juice out of the ground-up apples. Around 1930, the family switched to an electric motor to power the mill. A typical pressing uses about 25 bushels of apples to make 75 gallons of cider in about half an hour. Today the mill is run by only its second owners in more than 100 years.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1700s, the average person drank about 15 gallons of cider a year.

## Tory's Den

*Directions: The trailhead for Tory's Den is on East Plymouth Road, midway between Route 72 (in Harwinton) and Marsh Road (in Plymouth). From Route 4, take Route 72 south just over 4 miles and turn left onto East Church Street, which becomes East Plymouth Road. Look for the small parking area on the left, near the gate (pictured below). **OR** From W. Chippens Hill Road/Hill Street, veer right at split with Battle Street. Turn right onto Marsh Road by the golf course. Drive 1 mile and turn right onto East Plymouth Road. Look for the parking area and gate on the right. **DO NOT BLOCK THE GATE.** Follow the blue blazes straight ahead (not those going right just after entering the trail), **veering left when the trail splits** (there is a small sign indicating .15 miles to Tory's Den and the yellow dot trail goes off to the right). The roundtrip hike is a little less than 2 miles.*



Courtesy Google Maps.



Gate marking the trail entrance.



Tory's Den. Courtesy Plymouth Historical Society.



At the time of the American Revolution, a “Tory” was an American colonist who was loyal to the King of England. Tories were also called “Loyalists.” In 1775 and 1776, the colonies passed laws to punish Tories. Tories could be put in jail and have their property (money, land, house, or possessions) taken away. They might even be executed.

Even though most Connecticut residents supported the Patriot (Revolutionary) cause, the corner where Bristol, Burlington, Harwinton, and Plymouth meet was a Loyalist stronghold. Many Tories lived and met in this area. One man, named Stephen Graves, lived in a cabin about a mile from the site of Tory’s Den. The revolutionary Sons of Liberty tried to get Graves to fight with them against the English, but Graves refused. To escape arrest, he and other Tories in the area would hide out at the natural rock shelter now known as Tory’s Den. Someone would blow a horn to warn if Patriot soldiers were coming and then again when it was safe for the Loyalists to come out of the woods. Mrs. Graves would sometimes carry them food through the dark woods at night.

For detailed trail maps, check out the CT Forest and Park Association website, [ctwoodlands.org](http://ctwoodlands.org).

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## Sessions Woods

*341 Milford Street (Route 69)*

*Trails ranging from .4 – 2.6 miles are open daily from sunrise to sunset. You can also connect to the Tunxis Trail. Exhibits open weekdays, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm (except holidays).*

The land which today is Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area once belonged to the Sessions family of Bristol. John Humphrey Sessions was born in Burlington. As an adult he moved to Bristol and started a company that made trunk hardware. He became an important businessman and civic leader in Bristol. After John Humphrey Sessions’ death, his son, and then

### DID YOU KNOW?

The camp at Sessions Woods had an outdoor cooking and dining area, a swimming pool, and even tepees and a covered wagon for sleeping.

his grandson, Albert L. Sessions, took over the trunk hardware company. In addition to running the company, Albert liked to tinker and invent things, like a new kind of washing machine and a dishwasher.

In the 1920s Albert bought the big piece of property in Burlington that would later become Sessions Woods. In 1957, the land was sold to the New York Conference of the Methodist Church, which built a summer camp there. In 1981 the Methodist Church sold the land to the

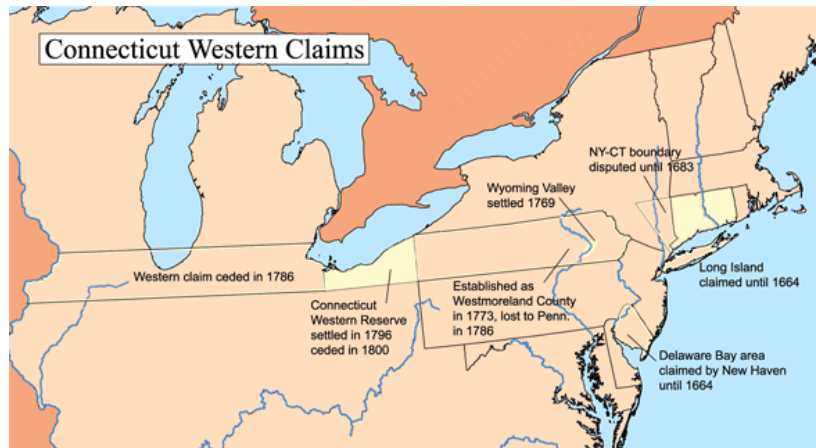
state. The Department of Environmental Protection turned it into the first Conservation Education Center in Connecticut, where people can learn about wildlife and forest management.

## Katherine Gaylord Monument

*Directions: The entrance to the Milford Street Cemetery is on Route 69, just south of Route 4. Coming from the corner with Cumberland Farms, look for the driveway on the left, just after the third house and the white and grey fence.*

Katherine Cole was born in Harwinton in 1745. She married a man named Aaron Gaylord and had three children: a son, Lemuel, and two daughters, Phoebe and Lorena. They lived in New Cambridge (then a part of Farmington, now Bristol.)

In the 1700s, Connecticut claimed that its borders continued west and included parts of what is now Pennsylvania and Ohio. This land was better for farming than the land in Connecticut. To encourage pioneers to move there, families were offered free plots of land.



Courtesy Wikimedia Commons

In 1776, forty families, including the Gaylords, moved out to what is now Eastern Pennsylvania and built a settlement called “Forty Fort.”

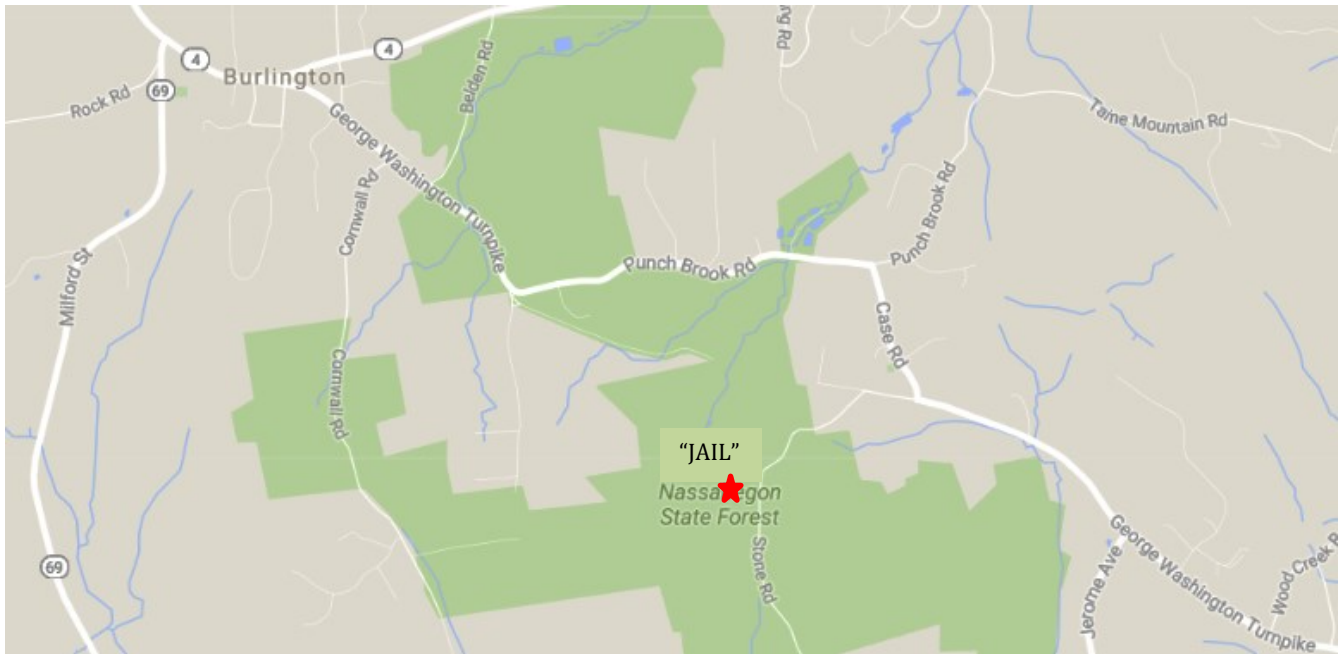
It included about 100 buildings: houses, barns, and the fort, which was intended to protect the families from Native Americans in the region.

In 1778, a group of Seneca Indians joined with British soldiers to retake the land from the settlers. Almost half of the 300 men from the fort—including Aaron Gaylord—were killed in the fighting. That same night Katherine Gaylord packed clothing, supplies, and all the money the family had. She loaded herself and her three children onto two horses and left Forty Fort. Lemuel was 13, Phoebe was 10, and Lorena was 7. Katherine and her children traveled through dark and unmarked woods. At dawn they could see the smoke from the burning fort and houses. On the second day, one of the horses went lame and had to be left behind. They traveled for weeks with very little food. They had to eat berries and roots they found along the way. They slept in the woods or in abandoned cabins, with just one blanket for the four of them. They worried wild animals would attack them.

After weeks, the family arrived at Katherine’s father’s house in New Cambridge. They lived there until the children grew up. The older children moved away, but Lorena married a man from Burlington. Katherine lived with Lorena and her family here in Burlington. Katherine Gaylord died at the age of 95 and is buried in the Milford Street Cemetery. There is a street in Burlington named after her. Do you know where it is?

## Site of Camp Nepaug and the “Old Jail”

*Nassahegan State Forest. At the intersection of Case Road and George Washington Turnpike, turn right, then left onto Stone Road. The “Old Jail” is on the right-hand side of Stone Road, just past the parking area and trailheads. Watch for mountain bikers if you venture onto the trails.*



Courtesy Google Maps

A small stone building on the side of Stone Road is one of the few remains of Camp Nepaug. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many people were homeless and could not find work. In 1934, the federal government set up Camp Nepaug to provide shelter for older, single men and to keep them from moving from town to town in search of work. The men cut firewood, built forest trails, and did other work in exchange for housing, food, and a very small salary. The camp was managed by the new Works Progress Administration (WPA), which employed millions of American men and women during the Depression. The camp shut down in 1936. No plans were made for the remaining men living there. They were taken to Hartford and dropped on the street.

From 1936-1943, the National Youth Administration leased the buildings and ran a program called “Nepaug Village.” Young men ages 18-25—most from cities—would apply to spend 5 months (late spring to early fall) at Nepaug. Nepaug Village provided a combination of work training, school, and recreation. They would work for half the day in the woodworking shop, machine shop, or kitchens. Then they would have the other half day for studying or having fun. There was a baseball diamond, and the camp hosted dances. The buildings once included a dormitory, dining hall, kitchens, staff houses, and more. Today the fireplace/chimney from the dining hall and the small stone building on the side of the road are some of the few remains of the camp. Local stories suggest that the small stone building was used as a “jail” during the work camp period.

Note that the “Old Jail” and other structures in this area have been vandalized with graffiti. You may want to use this opportunity to discuss making good choices to preserve our town’s history.

## **Whigville Grange**

*163 South Main Street*

The Whigville Grange #43 located on South Main Street is the home of a fraternal organization—a group of people who get together socially or professionally. The Grange supports people involved in agriculture/farming in hopes of making the whole community better. The National Grange was founded in 1867, when agriculture in the South was suffering following the Civil War. One hope was that the knowledge of northern farmers could help farmers from the south. Farmers were introduced to newer and better ways of farming at Grange meetings. Regular monthly meetings and regional and national conferences were held. Education and current events were a focus.

Long before women had a right to vote, the Grange system allowed women to be full participating members. The Whigville Grange, which started in 1893, is a second rung or “Pomona Branch.” Sarah Bailey was elected President in 1894 and held the position for many years. She was also the long-time teacher at the Whigville School, which was directly across from the Grange. The Grange offered her—as well as other women and men—opportunities to be part of a larger world outside of their community.

The Grange has done many valuable things for Connecticut. It helped to start the Department of Agriculture and the University of Connecticut. It was the heart of Whigville since its beginning and continues in that role today. Each fall the Grange holds a country fair, and it is the meeting site of the Whigville Preservation Group, as well as the site of the annual Whigville Harvest Fest and the Burlington 5k..