Branford’s Summer Citizen

Twenty summer hotels once lined the Branford coast, drawing celebrity and literary visitors. Branford’s storied summer resort era “began before the Civil War and reached its peak by World War I,” according to Jane Bouley, Branford’s town historian.

Loosely included in this coastal enclave in Johnson’s Point abutting the town line in East Haven was the Hotel Talmadge, aka, Nellie Green’s, which also attracted author/adventurer Jack London. He enjoyed summers there. Jack was also a frequent visitor to The Bungalow, the three guest cottages forming the estate of Ella Wheeler Wilcox. This is in the Beckett Avenue area of Granite Bay. It is said that London wrote The Call of the Wild while in residence at this location in 1903.

London was a journalist, activist, and a rough and tumble handsome fellow. Jack London, pseudonym of John Griffith Chaney, was born January 12, 1876. London was raised in Oakland, CA, primarily by former slave Jennie Prentiss, who was like a mother to him. He remained close to her the rest of his life.

Among his best-known books are Call of the Wild, White Fang, The Sea Wolf, Martin Eden and John Barleycorn. Call... was burned by the Nazis in 1933; then banned because it was “too radical” and because of the author's infamous reputation for being a supporter of Socialism. It was serialized in The Saturday Evening Post, June 20-July 18, 1903.

He wrote with vigor about the great questions of life and death and the struggle to survive with dignity and integrity. Between 1900 and 1916 he completed more than 50 fiction and non-fiction books, hundreds of short stories and numerous articles.

For much of his life he and his wife Charmian settled down on a little farm in Glen Ellen nestled in Sonoma Valley. But, restless and eager for foreign travel and adventure, he decided to build a ship, the Snark, and go sailing around the world, serializing his adventure. The Snark voyage made it as far as the South Pacific and Australia but was curtailed due to Jack’s poor health. Discouraged the Londons decided to abandon the trip and sell the Snark, returning to the ranch in Glen Ellen. He continued to be a true outdoorsman, enjoying horseback riding, farming, and country life.

The Londons planned their dream house called Wolf House. By 1913 the project had nearly reached completion after an investment of $50,000 in it. One night a ranch hand noticed a red glow in the sky above. Wolf House was burning out of control. In 1995 fire experts concluded that it was the result of spontaneous combustion due to a pile of linseed oil-soaked rags left by workers.


As part of his legacy, Jack London State Historic Park now remains north of San Francisco. It boasts over 29 miles of trails across 1400 acres including stunning vistas and the historic buildings from the time when famous writer/adventurer Jack London used this as his permanent home. In 1963 it was designated a National Historic Landmark.

Thanks to resources provided by Jane Bouley and Sally Bahner.
Vinyl is Final

Our diligent Friends of the Blackstone Library volunteers never know what donations they’ll find when they empty the collection boxes—anything from romance novels, to history tomes, to cookbooks, to the classics. Recently, an extensive vinyl record collection was discovered—a surprisingly large collection of LPs from the 1950s to the 1980s.

As volunteers sorted through the collection, they noticed a small address label on the record jackets that reads that contains a woman’s name and “Pittsfield, MA.” How did her collection end up in Branford? With such a large collection, it’s safe to surmise that she was a music lover who belonged to a record club for many years.

Somehow, the records traveled from the Berkshires to Branford, which was no easy feat. LPs are heavy! Still, someone took the time and effort to donate this treasure trove to our library, when just discarding them would have been easier. Perhaps by donating them, our mystery donor’s memory has been honored.

The Friends book sorters are busy preparing donated record collections for the September book sale. Records, from AC/DC, to Madonna to ZZ Top, will be in the sale. A lost art in the digital age, the elaborate artwork on record jackets is wildly creative and sometimes politically incorrect. Just flipping through them is a memory-awakening trip back in time. So, don’t be surprised if your kids and grandkids think the covers are pretty cool.

Ellen Wagner

Good Reads

One day it’s sunny and warm, the next chilly and wet...the famed New England weather! Whether you’re packing for the beach or huddled under a cozy throw on the couch, there is a wealth of wonderful books just waiting to be enjoyed.

For those who appreciate nonfiction, David McCullough has a great work on the settling of the Northwest Territory, The Pioneers. The Pulitzer Prize winning historian has rediscovered an important chapter in American History and relates the incredible hardships endured by the dauntless pioneers.

Another nonfiction entry that’s sure to entertain is Every Tool’s a Hammer, by Adam Savage. Savage may be known to you from the Discovery Channel’s “MythBusters.” He shares with us his golden rules of creativity and successfully making one’s ideas a reality.

A timely choice, Things My Son Needs to Know About the World is written by Fredrik Backman, the New York Times #1 Best Selling Author of A Man Named Ove. It is a collection of moving and humorous essays about fatherhood. The idea that struck me the most forcibly is the concept that, “You can be whatever you want to be, but that’s nowhere near as important as knowing that you can be exactly who you are.”

A sure to be fascinating memoir of sorts comes from Howard Stern in Howard Stern Comes Again. His first book in more than 20 years, it traces the career of one of the most influential broadcasters in America. Stern reveals introspective and revealing interviews with a wide range of personalities who have influenced and shaped modern culture.

Murder in the Hamptons! The age old conflicts between townies and summer residents; will privilege prevail? Will justice triumph? Read The East End, by Jason Allen and find out!

Do you miss your grandmother’s tales? The Seven or Eight Deaths of Stella Fortuna, by Juliet Grames, abounds with memorable characters and interesting bits of history as it relates the hundred year
saga of family tales and secrets from Italy to America.

*The Clock Maker’s Daughter*, by Kate Morton, will keep you reading, even when you have other things you should be doing. A specter, an abandoned child, an expansive cast of characters... no plot spoilers here - it’s an historical mystery, one of my favorite genres.

There are so many great reads out there; I could go on and on, but column space is always an issue. I can’t close, however, without mentioning *Eat Like a Fish: My Adventures as a Fisherman Turned Restorative Ocean Farmer*, by Bren Smith. Smith’s plan to change the world for the better by changing how we eat and grow is simply genius. It really is simple. I think you’ll find it motivating and inspiring, and there are even recipes!

Waiting on my nightstand are *The Altruists*, by Andrew Ridker, *The Paris Diversion*, by Chris Pavone, and *Britt-Marie Was Here*, another by Fredrik Backman. And I’ve already pre-ordered the next Daniel Silva, *The New Girl*. As far as I’m concerned, every season of the year is the perfect time for a good book. Whether there’s sand between my toes or drifts outside my window, I always find myself with my nose in a book, as my mother used to say. Have a wonderful summer, and read on!

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**Dates to Remember**

*Friends Annual Meeting*

at The Orchard House: Medical Adult Day Center
421 Shore Drive, Branford
Tuesday, June 18 at 5pm
All are invited; no RSVP necessary.

*Annual Book Sale*

on the Town Green
September 26 — 29

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**Success!**

Spring is recognized as a time for new beginnings and renewal, and this year, under the leadership of our new book sale chairperson, Joe Genua, The Friends launched their first spring book sale on the green. I hope you had time to stop by, it was a glorious day and there were lots of book selections from which to choose, something for everyone! The Garden and Compassion Clubs were fellow exhibitors on the green, adding interest and opportunity to the day. How convenient to choose a book on gardening from The Friends and a few feet away purchase a specimen from the Garden Club!

The very successful first ever, spring, one day, five hour sale raised over $1,868.75 for The Friends. Joe Genua, the new book sale chair, was the moving spirit behind this new undertaking and spearheaded operations, organizing the efforts of so many volunteers to bring the project to reality. Our profound thanks to Joe and all who worked so hard to make this sale a success. Our transporters who collect the donated books and the sorters who organize and categorize them are the crucial foundation for our book sales. All the generous volunteers who give their time to set up, sell, and clean up are absolutely invaluable. And, of course, we depend on our patrons who stop to browse, chat, and purchase just the right book! All of our book sales, regardless of size, represent a tremendous amount of work, but it is a labor of love. That said, I urge you to become involved in the effort; the rewards are even more gratifying than the funds we raise for our iconic library. The annual book sale under the tent on the green is fast approaching, September 26th through 29th, and your assistance will be appreciated.

Please help! Give of yourself; your time and energy are always welcome. And please donate your gently used volumes to The Friends! Without your books, there can be no sales. Our fundraising book sales depend on your donated books. When you’re tidying, culling, and cleaning, remember to set aside books for donation. If you have a large collection, we will gladly come to collect it. I cannot stress strongly enough that your donated books are the backbone, foundation, crucial ingredient in the Friends’ fundraising.

Kudos to all who worked so hard, and thanks to all who supported the successful, first ever Friends’ Spring Book Sale!!

Hatsie Mahoney
Friends of the James Blackstone Memorial Library
758 Main Street
Branford, CT 06405

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Renovation Update

The renovation project is expected to be complete by January 2020, and is just about halfway through. The entire 2nd floor has been completed and we are waiting for furniture to be delivered before opening our new computer lab. The lab is planned to have approximately 12 computers for public use and an additional 9 computers that can be reserved for classes. Our 3-D printer will also be available in the computer lab.

The staff offices are also complete on the 2nd floor, and demolition has begun in the old administrative offices which will be transformed into space for the adult fiction collection. This is the area currently serving as the temporary entrance.

Moving to the 1st floor, the Lucy Hammer Room and Reading Room have both been repaired and painted. The new café will open soon, and the new history room is close to being finished. The next step on this floor is to move the nonfiction collection to the current reference space. Of note: this is the location where books were stored when the library was opened in 1896 with 5,000 books—one for each resident.

The new entry and terrace are scheduled to be complete and opened sometime over the summer. Until then, entry from the back parking lot is through the door next to the book drop. The door is accessible with assistance. Please ring the bell if you need help from a staff member to enter.

Many thanks for your support of this project!

Karen Jensen
Library Director