

SCOTT HOUSE JOURNAL



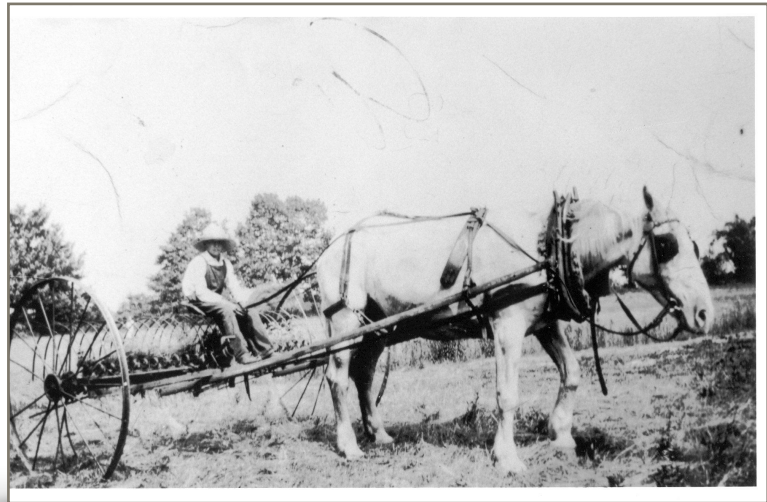
President's Message

Happy New Year! I hope you had a healthy and restorative holiday season.

2021 not only offers promise with the rollout of vaccines, it also marks the Ridgefield Historical Society's 20th year anniversary. What started as a small group of concerned citizens, who had the foresight to establish an official society when they stepped in to save one of our oldest original colonial structures, is still going strong today.

I want to thank everyone who supported the Annual Fund drive. The success of this year's appeal is a true testament to the dedication that has continued in our community over these past 20 years. We recognize 2020 was a challenging year and are grateful for the support and

Joe Tulipani's memoir of farm life adds texture to Ridgefield history



A young Joe Tulipani guiding the farm's harrow. —Ridgefield Historical Society

When Joseph A. Tulipani died in 2004 at the age of 85, he left behind a memoir that provides an incredibly detailed picture of a boy's life growing up on a Ridgefield farm in the early part of the 20th Century.

Joe Tulipani's boyhood memories — 242 pages of single-spaced typescript that he recorded later in life — are part of the Ridgefield Historical Society's collection and comprise a great resource for anyone researching early 20th Century farm life in Ridgefield, or more generally, in New England.

During the period he recreates, there were great changes underway in the country and in Ridgefield, which had been a small and mostly rural town before the turn of the century.

Life on a farm was labor-intensive and at a very young age Joe began learning the many tasks essential to keeping a family fed and warm. Among the first memories he describes was his fascination with a neighboring dairy herd that provided milk for the family and for sale. It was one of the boy's first adventures, following the neighbors' cows back to

commitment to the work we do. Documenting and preserving history seems particularly poignant as we are living through such a historic time. As we remain focused on the work ahead, we will share memories, highlighting individuals and stories that reflect our organization's foundations throughout this year.

We have a great line-up of live webinars on tap — local historian Jack Sanders, award-winning journalist and author Libby Copeland, Emeritus State Archaeologist Nick Bellantoni and architectural historian Phil Esser are just a few of our planned speakers for 2021.

Even with the constraints of a pandemic, we remain active. On behalf of everyone who works so hard behind the scenes at RHS, nothing would be possible without the support of our generous community. The ability to pivot successfully from an in-person experience to a virtual platform allowed us to reach an even greater audience.

Please stay tuned and continue to check out our weekly eBlasts for new content as we celebrate our important milestone year. I am sure, together, we all look forward to brighter days in 2021.

**Tracy Seem
President,
Ridgefield Historical Society**



The Tulipani barn is at the left, on Nod Road; the family home was off farther to the left. — Ridgefield Historical Society collection

the barn and watching how the milking was done. (Meanwhile, he also explains, young Joe's parents were frantically searching for their five-year-old as daylight faded.)

Vincenzo Tulipani, Joe's father, was part of the migration of Italians to Ridgefield at the turn of the 20th Century; he first arrived in 1906 and worked at the Port of Missing Men alongside his brother Giulio (Julius) Tulipani (later a Ridgefield selectman), then returned to Italy in 1908 to serve a year in the Italian army.

After his return to Ridgefield, he married Evelina Branchini in 1912. Vincenzo, known to his friends as "Jimmy," was a native of Ripe, Ancona, Italy, and Evelina, who immigrated in 1911, was born in San Giorgio, Italy. By 1916, they had purchased a 65-acre farm on Nod Road. Joe was third oldest, behind Ada (later Ada Walker) and Aldo; his younger brothers were Albert, Alfred and John.

Vincenzo Tulipani was known for his skill with horses as well as his farm: in earlier days, he drove a team and worked in livery stables. In the early 1930s, he mowed the Ridgefield Golf Club's fairways using his horse, wearing special boots to protect the turf, to pull the mower (as recorded in "Impact: The Historical Account of the Italian Immigrants of Ridgefield, Ct.," by Aldo P. Biagiotti). This was one of the side jobs he took to support a large family and pay the farm's bills.



A post-war picture of the family of Vincenzo and Evelina Tulipani, mid-1950s. — Ridgefield Historical Society collection, donated by Joseph Tulipani.

The Tulipanis later moved from the Nod Road farm to Ivy Hill Road where they had another farm. Vincenzo Tulipani died at age 90 in 1977; Evelina Tulipani died in 1972.

As a youngster, Joe Tulipani learned farm work by observation, he explains in his memoir, and there was much to learn, from handling the team of horses to baking the week's bread for a family of eight.

What makes his memoir such a treasure is the depth of detail he provides about seemingly mundane tasks that were once familiar to many and now are largely unknown. By the time he was six and beginning school, Joe was also starting to take on the work of the farm. In the following section (he writes the entire book in the third person), he's explaining how he absorbed the details of the many skills he was to acquire:

"This was also the trend of the closeness of he and his father in the learning of the many odd jobs and chores that were attached to the farm work daily. He was constantly with his father trailing behind about the various sections of the farm, and the barn with its cows and horses. To watch the milking, the feeding, the watering, the hitching of the horses, the plowing, the haying, the hauling of feed from the depot, the taking of the horses to the blacksmith, the sending of the cows to their

pastures, and the many other continuous odd jobs pertaining to the hard life and long hours of a farmer.”

By second grade, Joe was considered old enough to be a “farm boy,” and one of his first challenges was to milk a cow.

“After watching constantly for several years now, his first opportunity came to try his hand at milking the first cow of his life. His cow, as a starter, was the lame one, as she could not kick and the danger of knocking over the milk pail was very slim. This was to be his daily job, along with all the others.”

Before Joe’s memoir gets to describing the actual milking, he details the steps that precede each morning’s and evening’s milking, starting with picking up the clean strainer cloth, which will be used as the milk from the pail is poured into the milk can. The cows must be fed, with the feed kept in barrels (transferred from bags, he explains, to prevent mice and rats from getting at it). Beet pulp was added to the feed, one scoop. Then the cows’ udders had to be washed and dried before the boy could pull up his milking stool and get to work.

Every step is explained with precision as well as the wonder of a young boy who has learned a new and important skill. Even the process of having breakfast back at the farmhouse has an order to it: first, a wash-up in the pantry where *“the old iron hand-type well pump with its long handle and protruding spout supplies the water to the house for all purposes. A few strokes of the handle and the water poured out into the wash basin in the sink itself. The quite large speckled wash basin with a small hole along the rim for hanging saw considerable use as there were eight in the somewhat large family...”*

Throughout the memoir, Mr. Tulipani weaves in the thoughts and dreams of a young boy who loves his farm life and his family, even when the financial pressures of the Depression mean that every bit of family cash must go to obligations. One of young Joe’s fascinations is the game of baseball, which, typically as he explains, he spent a good deal of time observing whenever he had the opportunity. Determination was his strong suit and he spent much of any free time practicing with a tennis ball (all that was available) and a homemade bat.

While there were youngsters in town whose families could provide them with mitts, bats and balls, it was not the case for young Joe. But, undaunted, he figures out how make a mitt on his own, using the scraps from an old horse collar and heavy mason’s twine and tools available to him. He used it until he was able to earn the dollar that a store-bought mitt would cost (by retrieving home-run balls during semi-pro games on weekends on the East Ridge field).

One of the prides of Vincenzo Tulipani’s farm was its vineyard, described by his son:

“The uniformity of the grapevines and all the poles was so exact it was a picture of beauty and upon viewing the entire planting of the first section, it would seem like the workmanship of a professional draftsman. This huge area extending down or in a southward direction was fifty rows.... To complete the picture of the vineyard, peach trees were planted in the rows, two to a section between the first and second vine and the fifth and sixth vine. The grape vine rows were spaced six feet apart and every five rows were planted a row of peach trees. Some 3000 grapevines and over 500 peach trees made up this field.”

Joe Tulipani’s memoir also includes an extended description of how wine was made by the Italian families in Ridgefield, who ordered a variety of California grapes by the boxcar load. No detail is omitted in his account, from picking up the grapes at the Ridgefield depot to the sounds

of gases escaping the barrels as the wine fermented — “an array of many different sounding blurps, and almost a new rhythmic beat unknown.”

Joe Tulipani was later well known in Ridgefield for being one of the five Tulipani brothers who served in World War II and who all came home safely. A 1937 Ridgefield High School graduate, he was one of the first Ridgefielders to fight in the war (enlisted April 1, 1941). A member of an Army radar unit, he was stationed in Australia, the jungles of New Guinea and the Philippines. He survived Japanese bombing attacks in Australia and in the jungles and was with General Douglas MacArthur’s forces in the liberation of the Philippines.



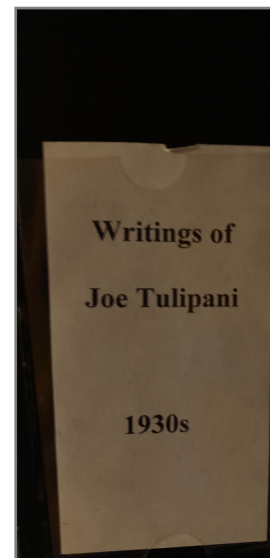
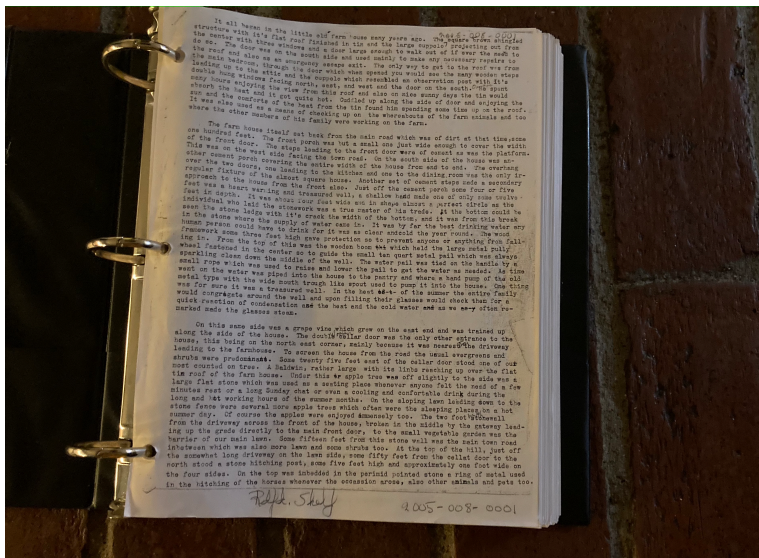
Joe Tulipani during World War II.

After the war, he was the superintendent of Ward Acres estate for many years and also worked semi-professionally as a photographer. A musician like all his brothers, he performed with them in the pre-war Tulipani Orchestra and after the war for countless square dances as the Sagebrush Serenaders.

The husband of Annie Marconi, who died in 2003, he was a member of the Italian American Mutual Aid Society, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and of St. Mary’s Church. He was an avid gardener and a fan of the New York Yankees and UConn Women’s Basketball Team.

He was buried in St. Mary’s Cemetery with full military honors.

The notebook of memories that he entrusted to the Ridgefield Historical Society is a legacy that will continue to illuminate an earlier era in the life of his hometown. Unlike many 19th Century farmers’ diaries, this memoir is rich with detail and vivid memories.



The Heroes of Ned's Mountain webinar:

Sanders to tell hidden stories on Feb. 10

Edward "Ned" Armstrong and his wife, Betsey Armstrong, lived a quiet, hard-working life in Ridgebury in the 19th Century; their tombstones are found among the ancient monuments in Ridgebury Cemetery.

They have been remembered in the name of the area where they lived: Ned's Mountain, and Ned's Lane, where it's believed the family, comprising three generations, had a small compound. But there is much more to the Armstrongs' story, as well as the story of others who also lived on the mountain, than has been included in published histories of Ridgefield.

On Wednesday, Feb. 10, at 4 p.m., Jack Sanders will share recent research that reveals that the Armstrongs not only operated a Ridgefield station on the Underground Railroad, but that shows that their grandsons were among the many black soldiers who fought and died in the Civil War. He will introduce other black families who lived on Ned's Mountain and also sent sons to the 29th Regiment (Colored) of Connecticut Volunteers.

Newspaper articles, contemporaneous accounts, old maps, records of the Town of Ridgefield, census records and military records all provided pieces of this story of how Black Ridgefielders were able to assist the formerly enslaved on their journey north to safety and how Black Ridgefielders also fought in the Civil War when the State of Connecticut finally permitted their service.

Mr. Sanders found a number of surprises in his research, which he will discuss in the Feb. 10 webinar. Following the hour-long presentation, there will be an opportunity to ask questions.

The program is presented by the Ridgefield Historical Society, with the Ridgefield Library, and Ridgebury Congregational Church. To register, visit ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org; a Zoom link will be provided a few days before the program. The webinar is sponsored by CT Humanities and Fairfield County Bank.



The graves of Betsey and Edward Armstrong are in Ridgebury Cemetery.

Save the Date: Upcoming Webinars

The Cultural Phenomenon of Home DNA Testing, with author Libby Copeland,
Tuesday, Feb. 23, 7 p.m.

Deemed A Runaway: Black Laws of the North, with genealogist Judy Russell,
Sunday, March 21, 3 p.m.

Ridgefield Historical Society

The Scott House, 4 Sunset Lane

203-438-5821

ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org

Headquarters closed to the public until further notice because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Visits are by appointment only and may be scheduled Monday through Thursday from 1 to 4 pm. by emailing info@ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org or calling 203-438-4821.

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