

# SCOTT HOUSE JOURNAL



## President's Message

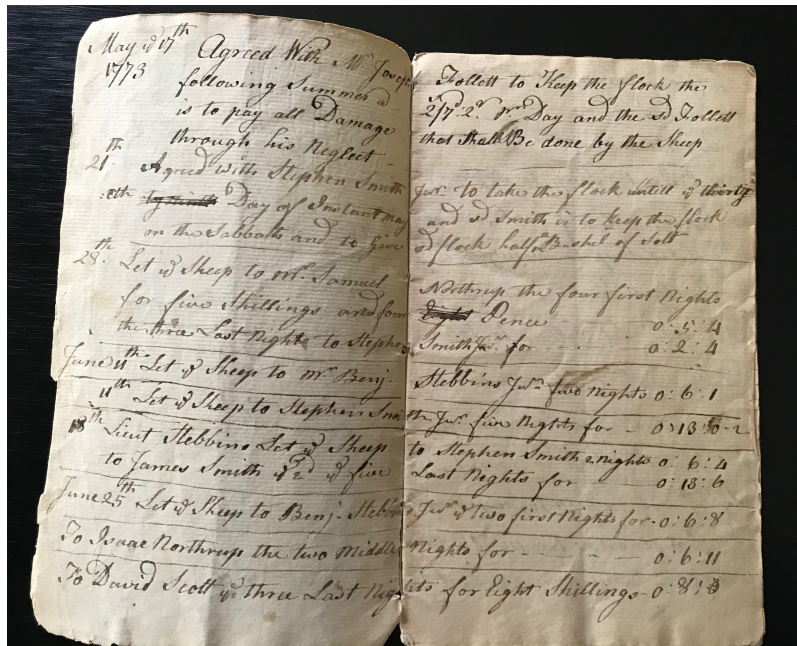
The Ridgefield Historical Society has been broadening its focus on programming in the past few years, partnering with other organizations to present topics of interest that are both timely and rooted in our history.

Recently, Ridgefield historian Jack Sanders gave a lecture at the Peter Parley Schoolhouse on West Lane about the formation of Ridgefield's school districts and the education provided in those neighborhood one-room schools. He'll repeat that talk at our July 28 open house at the schoolhouse.

Jack has also been involved in the recent exhibits sponsored by the Historical Society at Town Hall. Using material from his collection, *Books about Ridgefield* (both fiction and non-fiction) and *Books by Ridgefielders*, opened in January; the current Postal Ridgefield display traces the history of postal service in Ridgefield and highlights the surprising number of Ridgefielders who have been featured on stamps and/or designed them.

Gordon and Karen Casagrande have also done programs for the Historical Society this year: They led very popular Battle of Ridgefield walking tours in April and are developing other presentations.

The Historical Society is working with Ridgefield's Historic District Commission on the



The 'Sheep Book' shows the carefully maintained records of where Ridgefield sheep spent their nights in 1773.

## Grazing sheep raised scholars

In the archives of the Ridgefield Historical Society are items large and small. Among the smaller treasures, but of great interest, is the Sheep Book, a small, hand-written document that was important to a community that valued education.

Ridgefield, settled in 1708, had by 1721 passed a Town Meeting resolution that "eight pounds shall be raised for ye support of a school." School took place in the meeting house; by 1742, the town had one school house, according to historian George L. Rockwell.

At the time, support for the school came from the town and students' families. A Town Meeting vote in 1741 had established that "Each scholar shall find a third part of a Cord of Good Sound Wood, and there shall be allowed after ye rate of 18 shillings a Cord out of ye scholars rate."

The next year, the town had a "sheep meeting," according to Rockwell. The Dec. 24, 1742 vote decreed that "the money coming for the hire of the sheep last year shall be given as a Bounty to help maintain the Town School forever, and when the money is gathered it shall be delivered to the committee that is

Planning and Zoning Commission's 10-Year Plan of Conservation and Development to ensure Ridgefield maintains and strengthens its historic charm. A move is being made to coordinate committees and organizations to implement a more cohesive approach to protect community historic resources. To support this initiative, the Historical Society will be partnering with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and CT Humanities to present programs on the 100 most important architectural structures in Connecticut, on Ridgefield's Main Street architecture, and on resources for preserving the town's notable structures.

The First Principles series examines the issues addressed in the Constitutional amendments and how they are still controversial today. With the November 2020 election in mind, the Historical Society will partner with the Ridgefield Library and Keeler Tavern Museum to present a fall series examining the executive branch, the balance of power among the three branches of government, and what makes a good president.

A March–August 2020 series will celebrate the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote in August 1920. Programs and events include a series of lectures — Professor Akil Amar from Yale Law School will be back by popular demand, an exhibit developed in conjunction with the League of Women Voters, and a field trip to the Lockwood–Mathews Mansion Museum in Norwalk to see the excellent exhibit that explores women's rights through clothing styles.

In addition, a series of salon-style, limited-seating lectures is being planned for the Scott House. Stay tuned — we are on the move!

— Sharon Dunphy, President,  
Ridgefield Historical Society

appointed to take care of the bounty money given by the Government to support ye School, and ordered by the above said vote to let out said money as ye money is that comes from the government, and to improve the use thereof to pay it towards ye maintenance of said town school forever.”

At the time, the town had a large flock of sheep that it grazed on common lands; the sheep's nighttime presence was prized by farmers for the manure that would be deposited, so twice a week the flock was “let to the highest bidder to lay in his ploughland during the night, which method was used toward enriching the land,” wrote Rockwell.

The Sheep Book lists the flock's hosts and what they paid for the sheep's presence. Typically, a landowner might pay six shillings for a few nights of the flock, before planting began. In May of 1773, it was agreed that Joseph Follett would keep the flock the following summer at a set fee per day and was “to pay all damage that shall be done by the sheep through his neglect.” In the fall, after the harvest, the sheep were again being herded to various farm plots to spend the night.

This method of raising funds for the town school had ended by the time this “Sheep Book” was created. District schools were established, each run by its own committee, which was responsible for providing financial support.

## Doc Adams Update

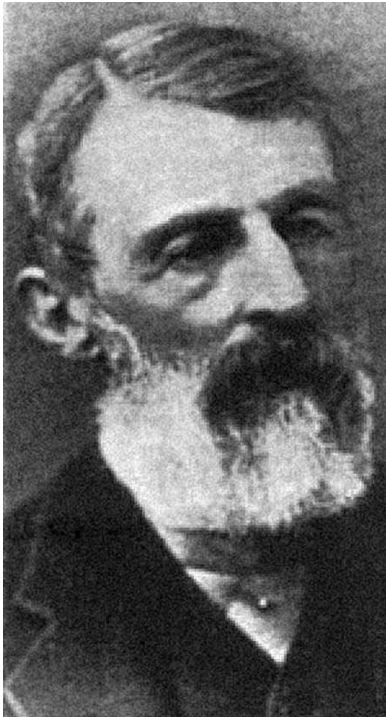
Although he led vote-recipients for Early Baseball nominees to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2016, “Doc” Adams, once a prominent Ridgefield resident, was two votes shy of the required number. His supporters will get another crack at finally getting the good doctor into the Hall when the Eras Committee for Early Baseball votes again in 2020.

Dr. Daniel Adams is considered the “True Father of Baseball” by a growing body of baseball historians. Often cited in evidence is the 1857 document, written in Dr. Adams' hand, called “Laws of Base Ball,” which sold at auction for a record-setting \$3.3 million in 2016.

“He's the true father of baseball and you've never heard of him,” said John Thorn, a noted baseball historian who was a consultant on the sale.

In Ridgefield, Daniel Adams was well known to most folk in the mid-19th Century as a prominent citizen who was the first president of the Ridgefield Savings Bank. The retired New York City physician came to town in 1865 and bought the former home of Col. Philip Burr Bradley — a house later owned by the Biglow and Ballard families that stood in what is now Ballard Park.

By then, he had pretty much retired from the “national sport” he helped to establish. And few here knew of his prominence in fashioning the game.



**Dr. Daniel Adams, as he appeared when he lived in Ridgefield.**

Daniel Lucius Adams was born in New Hampshire in 1814 and went to Yale, Class of 1835. Three years later he earned his medical degree from Harvard University and began practicing in New York City. There Dr. Adams’ interest in athletics was whetted by the formation of the New York Base Ball Club in 1840. Five years later, he joined the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club, which is said to have played the first full game of baseball as it’s known today, on June 19, 1846, at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, N.J., with a team called the New York Nine. Adams continued to play for the Knickerbockers well into his 40s.

Adams was an early president of the Knickerbocker club, and served as its president six times between 1847 and 1861. While president he promoted rules changes that resulted in nine-man teams and nine-inning games. He is said to have created the position of shortstop.

He headed the rules and regulations committee when the National Association of Base Ball Players was formed in 1858. Among the changes he instigated was the rule that bases should be 90 feet apart.

Dr. Adams retired as Knickerbocker president and as a physician before he moved to Ridgefield. A few years earlier, in 1861, he had married Cornelia A. Cook and the couple had four children while living here.

In 1870, he was elected a Ridgefield representative to the State House of Representatives. A year later, in 1871, he helped form and became the first president of the Ridgefield Savings Bank — now the Fairfield County Bank. He led the bank from 1871 to 1879 and again,

from 1884 to 1886.

In 1876 Adams served on the building committee that erected the new “town house,” a building we now call the town hall. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, the structure was built of wood, the material most buildings were made of then. Less than 20 years later, the town house burned to the ground in the great fire of 1895 that destroyed much of the village. Its replacement was fireproof brick.

In 1880, he was elected the first president of the Ridgefield Library.

Adams also helped form the Land Improvement Association of Ridgefield, serving as its president. The 1877 Ridgefield Press article announcing the organization “did not state what improvements were to be made in Ridgefield lands,” wrote Karl S. Nash in a 1971 profile of Adams. (Nash was not a fan of baseball or other sports, and devoted relatively few words to Adams’s baseball past, but he did note that the Doc dug two cannonballs from a retaining wall on his Main Street property. “Presumably, they were fired at the Battle of Ridgefield on April 27, 1777,” Nash said.)

In 1971, one of those cannonballs was owned by Adams’s grandson, Daniel Putnam Adams, who happened to live in nearby Wilton. He himself was a retired banker, from New York City.

Doc Adams played his last formal round of “base ball” on Sept. 27, 1875, in an oldtimers game that was arranged by a longtime fellow Knickerbocker star, James Whyte Davis. However, he continued to play “backyard ball” with his sons even when he was in his 80s.

In 1888, Adams, age 74, moved his family to New Haven, the city of his alma mater. There he died in 1899.

Daniel Adams was an amazingly modest man who one baseball historian said “didn’t like to brag.” In 1881, Yale asked him for a biography for a historical record of the Class of 1835, and Adams wrote not a word about his leadership in creating the by-then popular sport of baseball. “The current of my life has been very quiet and uniform, neither distinguished by any great successes, or disturbed by serious reverses,” he said. “I have been content to consider myself one of the ordinary, every-day workers of the world, with no ambition to fill its high positions, and have no reason to complain of the results of my labor.”

For more information on the campaign to add “Doc” Adams to the Baseball of Fame, visit [docadamsbaseball.org](http://docadamsbaseball.org). If he’s not added in 2020, it will be another 10 years before the Early Baseball Committee of the Hall meets again.

[Thanks to Jack Sanders’ [RidgefieldHistory.com](http://RidgefieldHistory.com) for much of this information.]

## The peripatetic life of a Methodist minister

The last Scott House Journal told the story of the young editor William Wallace Whiting and his clash in 1884 with the town’s Methodist minister, the Rev. Dr. George Lansing Taylor. Dr. Taylor’s part in the dispute, which was basically over the temperance movement, was memorialized in his notes in the parish record.

The archives of Jesse Lee Memorial United Methodist Church, which are now in the vault at the Ridgefield Historical Society’s Scott House headquarters and being studied by volunteers, also include the memoir of Eliza French Taylor, Dr. Taylor’s wife.

Though they spent only three years at Jesse Lee Church, the couple apparently had warm memories of their time here and maintained long friendships with Ridgefielders. “We found the most generous and loving hospitality from many families — especially John W. Rockwell and the Hon. P.C. Lounsbury,” Mrs. Taylor wrote. “We never forgot our dear friends of Ridgefield, visiting them year by year for many years.”

The Taylors were married in October 1861, just as the Civil War had begun. By April 1862, they were in Seymour CT for Dr. Taylor’s first appointment to a church in the New York East Conference. Mrs. Taylor recounted how her husband, as a fervent Union supporter, “introduced a great deal of patriotic matter into his preaching. His congregation was almost entirely loyal, but some attendants at worship tried to show their displeasure. One young man who was constable of the town, after making himself conspicuous in a disagreeable way, arose and left the church in the midst of the service. As my husband saw him going out, he remarked, ‘Good-bye, good day, and good riddance.’”

Dr. Taylor was not just a man of words but of action during the contentious times of the Civil War, as his wife described:

“In town there were a large number of foreigners employed in a rolling mill — a very low grade of labor. There was fear amongst the Union men that they would be inspired by some of the ‘Copperheads’ and under the influence of liquor carry out some of the threats that had been made. Threats had been made that the Methodist parsonage would be burned, that Parson Smith’s paper mill would be burned, and one or two other buildings. A Union League was organized comprising the leading men of the town. They had their lodge. A load of rifles was sent to them from the Springfield



Armory, which was brought to town secretly covered up under a load of other merchandise. These rifles were distributed at one of the evening meetings; the men returned to their homes in pairs generally. The next day rumor went around that there were a hundred armed men seen going through the streets which was probably five times the real number, but they deployed back and forth through the streets to make the impression of a large number. This seemed to have an intimidating effect, and the rifles were never needed but each union man kept his rifle by his bedside for many months. My husband kept his and a heavy hickory club besides, quite ready to hand.”

As a Methodist minister, Dr. Taylor was accustomed to moving to a new parish regularly, after three years in one situation generally, but sometimes sooner, depending upon the needs of his Conference. He also filled temporary vacancies on occasion. Among the many places that he and Mrs. Taylor served were New Britain, several parishes in Brooklyn, Hempstead, L.I., New Haven, New Rochelle, Torrington, City Island NY, Georgetown, Hamden Plains, and finally New Milford.

Following a post in Brooklyn at Centenary Church, the Taylors came to Ridgefield in 1881. Mrs. Taylor clearly found the situation pleasing, recording her impressions thus:

“Ridgefield is a beautiful spot in a beautiful country. The scenery was like Switzerland; a place of health. We seemed to be full of malaria coming from Brooklyn, for shortly our entire family were shaking with chills. This was quite a surprise to the people of Ridgefield, for they said no one ever contracted ague there. We were well aware we had brought it with us, but after three months we had all recovered.

“Here we spent three healthful years. We had our own horse and carriage, and revelled in the beautiful scenery in all directions.”

Late in his career, Dr. Taylor was assigned to the Georgetown Methodist Church. “This was the smallest appointment we had had. My husband’s deafness had increased to such an extent that it was more difficult for him to do his work. He devoted a good deal of time to literary work and public lecturing, making long trips through the West each summer.”

“As we were within four miles of our former home, Ridgefield,” wrote Mrs. Taylor, “we renewed our friendships there.”

Dr. Taylor’s last charge was New Milford and he died on July 26, 1903, at the Methodist Hospital in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

Eliza Minerva French Taylor did not spend much time in her memoir recounting her own achievements, which were substantial. Born in Gambler, Ohio, in 1834 to Mansfield Joseph French and Austa Malinda Winchell French, she grew up in a family of academically accomplished Methodists. Her parents were staunch supporters of both education and the abolitionist movement, and later of the Union cause. Both were teachers and writers of note and Eliza followed in their footsteps, earning a degree, “Mistress of Liberal Arts,” from Ohio Wesleyan College in June 1854, before beginning a teaching career.

She met George Lansing Taylor, a protege of her father, in Ohio, and after an engagement of three years they were married in New York. As the Civil War raged, her father, and at times, her mother, were working with freed blacks in the Hilton Head area of South Carolina. Mansfield French, who before the war had helped found the first college for blacks, now Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio, was commissioned by Abraham Lincoln to minister to Union troops and also to report on the conditions of blacks in Virginia and South Carolina.

He and Mrs. French wrote the 312-page book *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; or, The Port Royal Mission*. Among his many other publications was *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French, the Joiner, of Stratford, Connecticut*.



While her parents devoted themselves to their causes, Eliza French Taylor devoted herself to her family and the church; having lost their first child at an early age, the Taylors went on to raise and educate five other children. Two sons and three daughters all attended college. After her husband’s death in 1903, she moved to South Orange, N.J., where she died on Sept. 4, 1924 at age 90. One of her children wrote, “There was never a minister’s wife who could equal her.” Her nephew said, “Her face was usually illuminated by a smile, with a hearty laugh instantly ready upon provocation.”

A late-in-life portrait of Eliza French Taylor.

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## Ridgefield Historical Society Events

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Exhibits at Town Hall: Postal Ridgefield and Authors from Ridgefield, through Aug. 15.

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Open House: Hands On History, Saturday, June 8, 1 to 4 p.m., at the Scott House.

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Author Talk and Book Signing with historian Marty Podskoch, Connecticut 169 Club; Saturday, June 29, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Ridgefield Library.

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Sundays at the Peter Parley Schoolhouse, June 30, July 28, Aug. 25, Sept. 29, Oct. 27, 1 to 4 p.m.

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## The Ridgefield Historical Society

4 Sunset Lane

Open Tuesday-Thursday, 1 to 5 p.m.

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