

A Piece Of GREENS FARMS HISTORY

BESSIE JENNINGS (1895 – 1972), HER GIFT TO GREEN'S FARMS

By Mary Maynard, A Greens Farms resident

The Jennings Trail, a historical trip through Westport and particularly Greens Farms, is an on-again off-again tour about our history. Sometimes it is sponsored by the school system and sometimes by the historical society. Some years it doesn't take place at all. The route was developed and led by Bessie Jennings, a ninth-generation member of her family. (The eleventh generation is here today.)

My children were in the second grade at Greens Farms School when Miss Jennings led the trip herself. The fact that her family had been here so long in our town added to the delight of driving through our neighborhood.

Five farmers petitioned the Colonial Assembly in 1668 for permission to settle at Bankside. One of them was Mr. Frost; the point on the Long Island Shore was given his name, and soon Bankside was called Green's Farms, after another of the settlers.

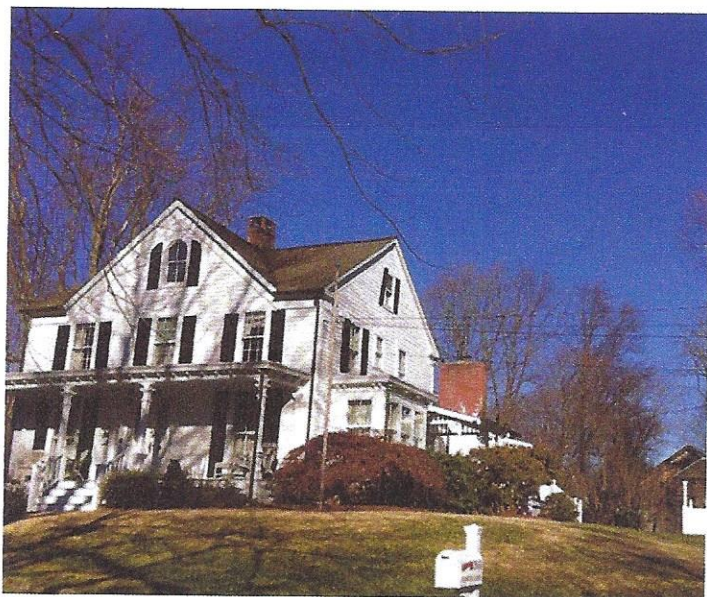
Miss Jennings showed us the stump of a once-towering tree on Beachside Avenue that tradition says was a navigation point for Adriaen Block when he explored long Island Sound in 1614.

The original Meeting House was built in 1711 on what is now a large field on the corner of Greens Farms Road and The Connector. The British, in a raid in 1779, burned the church and several houses nearby. Very old gravestones lie in the cemetery across from that site.

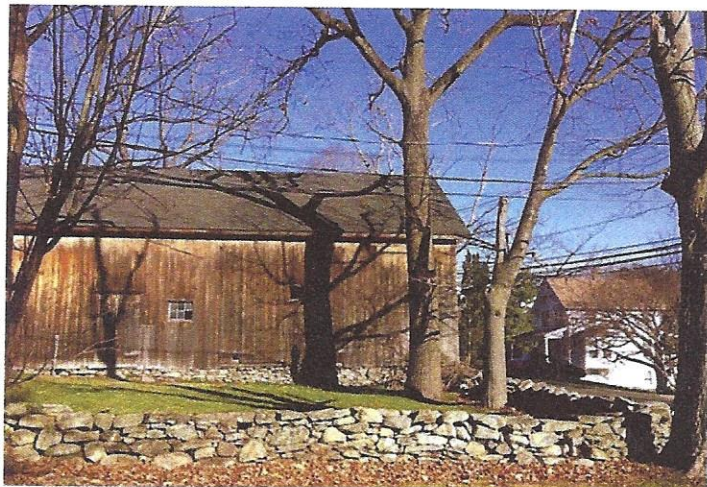
In 1968, when I took the trip, the then-tiny house on the corner of Clapboard Hill Road and Greens Farms Road still had the well where the parishioners of Greens Farms Church hid the silver communion plate during the British attack in 1779. It would have been a quick run from the raid to the well.

A place gone now in the rebuilding of the area that I loved to look at was a closely planted straight row of maples on Maple and Clapboard. Bessie said that they had been weedy seedlings growing next to a barn where the farm women brought their piecework to sell.

There's more to tell: The hill behind Burying Hill Beach was an Indian cemetery. The Greens Farms Commons is now Mach-



Bessie Jennings' House on One Elmstead Lane



Bessie Jennings' barns

amux Park. (I imagine that the Turnpike took a great part of that space.) A stone in the center of the park – near the picnic bench – gives important dates.

This shortened route ends at One Elmstead Lane, Bessie Jennings' ancestral home. Drive by slowly one day, gaze at the beautiful barns on her land and think about a different Greens Farms.

I was sure that second grade was too early for Bessie to show children their neighborhood! My three remember nothing. It was I whom Bessie enchanted.

It was easy to see why the well at the little house held the Communion silver. It was only a quick run in an emergency.

Do you have a story to tell? We want to hear them! Please send to Julaine.Davis@npub.com.