

Old-fashioned BOOK RAISING

Townsfolk gather
to craft
'Voices from
North Guilford'

12-7-12

By Lisa Reisman
Special to the Times

HOW DO YOU REDUCE to a caption the 17 alternative ways of spelling Lake Quonnipaug? How can a photograph capture the ambrosia-like taste of warm, buttered homemade bread baked by a farm wife on a winter afternoon?

Almost eight years ago, that was the dilemma faced by the Dudley Farm Book Committee as it awaited word on a proposal they had submitted to a publishing company specializing in local history. The glitch: the publisher's requirement of a cookie-cutter formula of short, explanatory comments accompanying black-and-white photographs compressed into a 128-page book.

Then came the rejection letter. Not enough of a market, it read. Shortly after, there was another letter. The company had reconsidered.

So had the Dudley Farm Book Committee. It wasn't just the narrow restrictions on text prescribed by the publisher, threatening the committee's mission to "safe-keep" whatever history had not already been lost, according to Oliver



VM Williams/Register file photos

The Dudley Farm North Guilford Book Committee from left: Steve Zan Der Maelen, Janet Dudley, Jerri Gaudagno, Linda Curry and Oliver "Buster" Scranton.



The Dudley Farm Museum as it looks today.

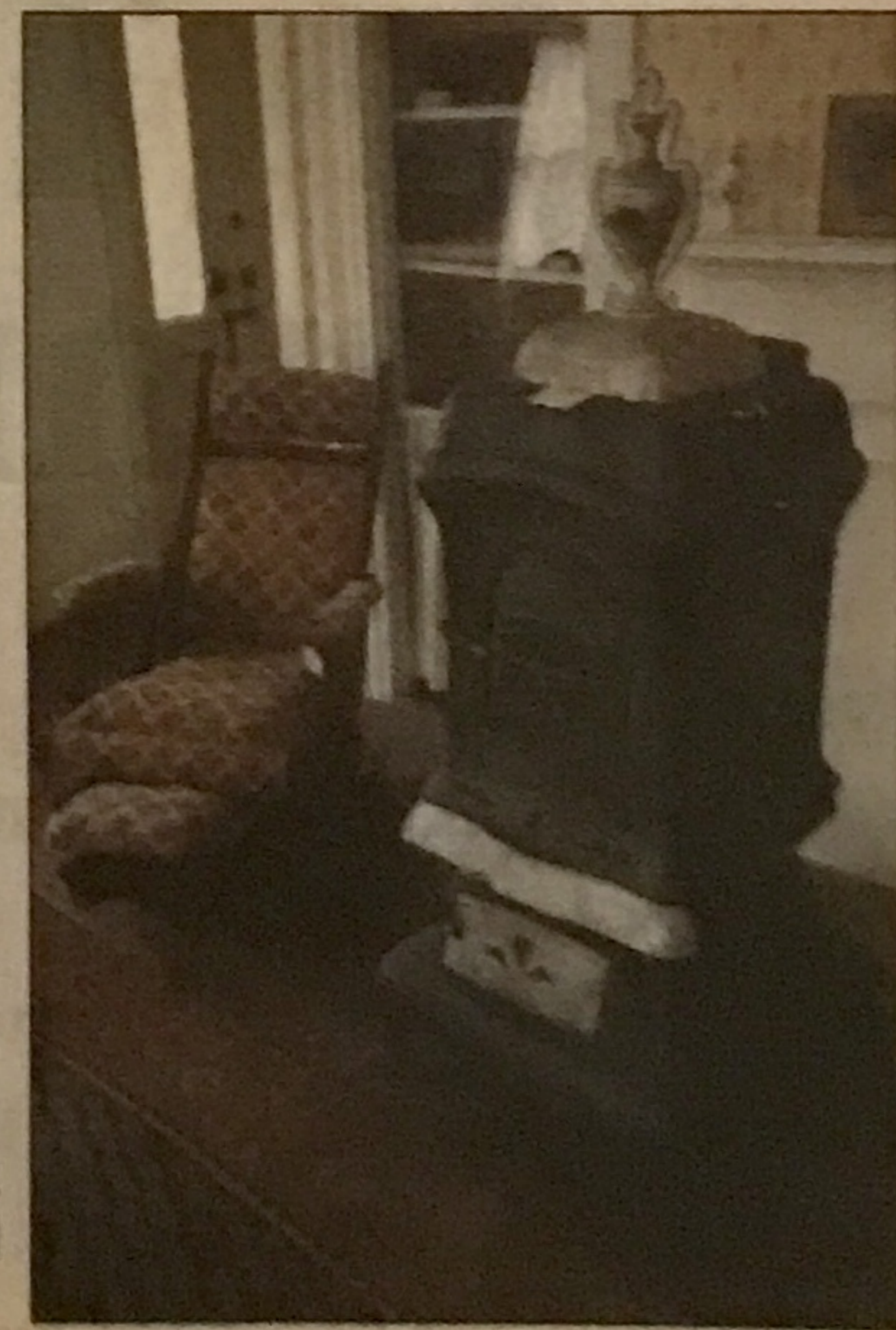
"Buster" Scranton, president of Dudley Farm. Or the tight time frame to finish the book, too tight to cull through the archived documents and photographs already at the Dudley Farm Museum, too short to

transcribe the rich oral histories they hoped to record.

To understand why, above all, the hearty band of North Guilfordites decided to forge ahead and make "Voices from North Guilford" from scratch, just observe the highchair in the kitchen of the Dudley Farm Museum. It incorporates a potty. Or the courting couch in the parlor, designed to allow a couple to converse in

See **BOOK RAISING**, Page 3

No dependence on foreign oil back in the day! At right, an old wood stove at the Dudley Farm.



Book raising: 'Voices from North Guilford'

From page 1

comfort while being sufficiently separated to frustrate amorous impulses.

As "Voices from North Guilford" makes plain, there's nothing prepackaged or generic about North Guilford, or its voices, or the many contributors who compiled those voices into a book. This is a people with inventiveness, ingenuity, and, yes, whimsy, encoded in their DNA.

Take an anecdote from Morris Rossiter, a North Guilfordite who died this past June at 96, about the preternatural tranquility of the school bus driver, no matter the noise and commotion aboard.

(The driver was profoundly deaf). Or the one about a particular lunch at County Road School. Young Morris found himself fervently hoping he had covered a pot of soup that was heating on a register of the furnace. A classmate of his had wet her pants, and he had spotted her drying them out over the pot.

Consider the astonishing career of Melissa Jones, and you'll get a sense of the engine of perseverance that drove the Book Committee on its eight-year journey to publication.

The Ellsworth, Maine, native taught grades four to six from 1929 to 1947 without missing a day. That's 18 years, one more year than the consecutive games streak of Hall of

Fame Baltimore Oriole Cal Ripken. And all the more impressive, given her school day lasted longer than the 3½ hours of a typical baseball game and exacted more mental, if not physical, stress.

Melissa Jones is hardly the only formidable female to grace the pages of "Voices from North Guilford." Rossiter recalls a 6-year-old girl trudging a mile-and-a-half through the woods to school on dark, winter mornings. There was also Gertrude Dudley, who summered at the Erastus Dudley House. During the academic year, she busied herself on the faculty of the University of Chicago,

perhaps than in the person of Louise Anderson. The diminutive 82-year-old still inhabits the Great Hill Road house in which she was born, on the same property deeded to her grandmother in 1890, and on the same land farmed by her father Elmer. "This book is my story and my father's story," she declared recently at a presentation at Guilford Free Library. No wonder. Virtually every page of "Voices from North Guilford," somehow relates to her.

It was Anderson who recalled the "cow barn" perfume of wet wool pants wafting through the classroom on a cold

winter morning from boys who had milked cows before they set off for the two-room County Road School. And Anderson who summoned from memory the reply

of Melissa Jones, when her students asked if they could go to Old Man Baker's Store for candy: "You can, but you may not."

It was also Anderson who remembered the intrepid Annette Beckwith Chittenden, grandmother of Janet Dudley, vice president of the Dudley

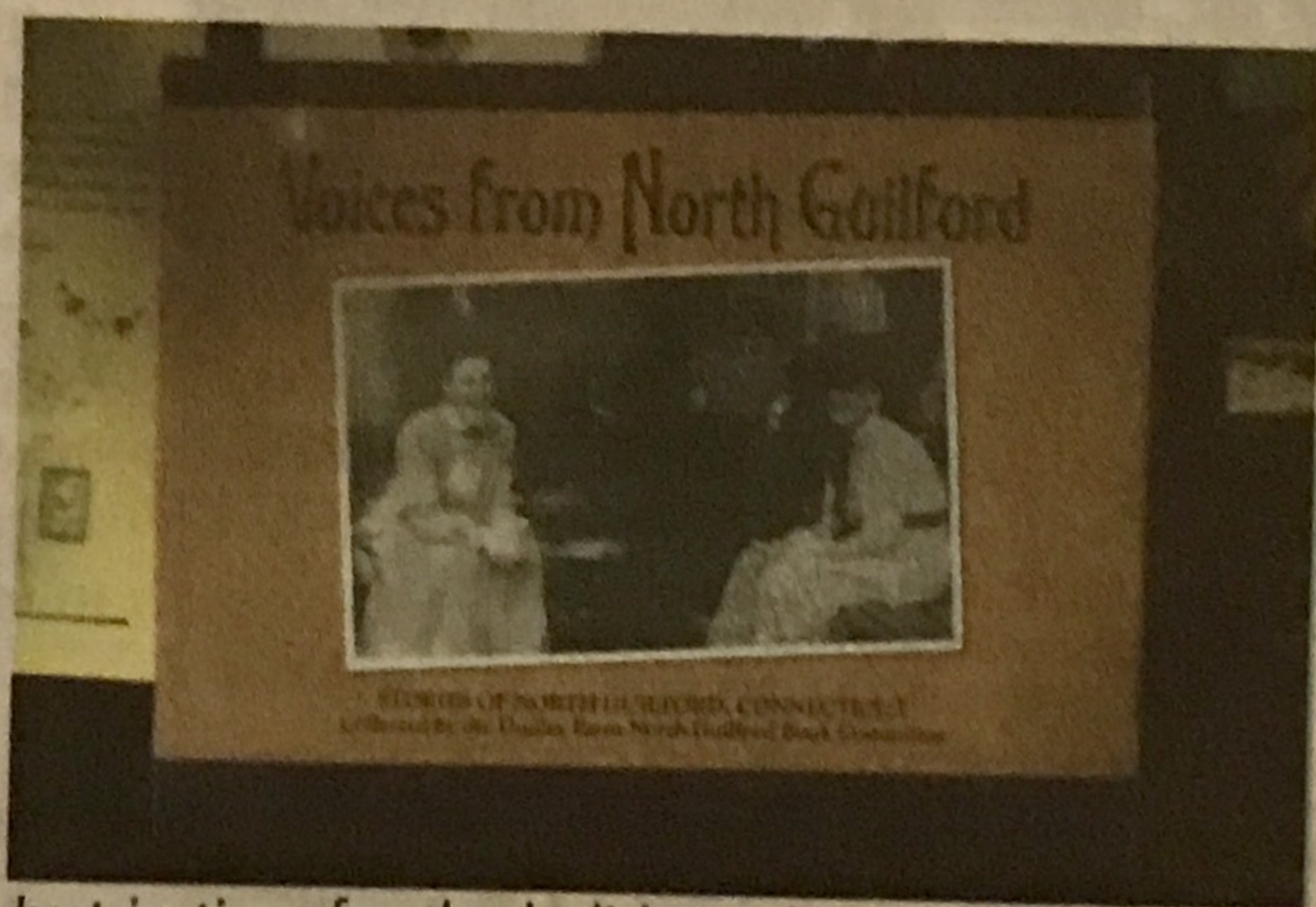
Foundation. Each March to each May, from 1942 to 1954, Nettie, as she was known, scaled the 47-foot steel fire tower atop the 720-foot Bluff Head observation platform, keeping watch over 100 square miles for the purpose of spotting and reporting forest fires. Better yet, she kept a handwritten account.

It might have been Anderson who typed up that account. Like many on the Book Committee, she also edited text, contributed her own oral history, and sorted through documents and photos.

In a way, it doesn't matter. "Voices from North Guilford" is, in the end, the collective act of a community — from those contributed artifacts from their personal collections, to the nuns from Our Lady of Grace Monastery who collaborated on a chapter on their history, to donors who ensured the book would be printed, to, not least, "the North Guilfordites who predeceased us," as the acknowledgement reads, "for without them, there would not be much to write about."

Indeed, one might say it was an old-fashioned book raising, with its own idiosyncratic character.

If you'd like to place a this homespun gift under the tree, you can find copies of "Voices of North Guilford" at the Dudley Farm Museum, Breakwater Books, Page Hardware, Lakeside Feed and Sagem Card and Party, all located in Guilford.



Just in time for the holidays, the book is available at the Dudley Farm Museum and other outlets; see below to find out where. Vern Williams photo.

launching the first program of competitive athletics for women students at a major university. Following her death in 1945, her ashes were scattered in the peony garden of her beloved North Guilford.

That kind of palpable pride of place animates "Voices from North Guilford," no more so