

destinA^{tion}Z

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*Side Kick, Mike Michaels,
& Cat in the Wind*





CONNECTICUT TRAVEL

The beautiful thing about travel in Connecticut is that you can travel a lot without having to travel very far. The longest distance, from Greenwich in southwesterly Fairfield County to Thompson in northeasterly Windham County, is a grand total of one hundred and thirty seven miles – about a two and a half hour drive. Texas it ain't.

But really, in our lovely state, the angels are in the details, and what beautiful angels they are. There are the hills and valleys of Litchfield County, the shoreline vistas from Greenwich on up to the gemlike Stonington and museums, aquariums, farms, covered bridges, lighthouses, historic houses, villages, ironworks, mills, mines, pump houses, and even an underground prison. **Oh, so you want some action.** You can try boating, canoeing, kayaking, diving, swimming, gliding, flying, ballooning, fishing (salt, fresh and ice), skiing (water and snow), skating (ice and roller), and of course hiking on numerous trails.

Or finally – weather permitting, you can just chill out in the sun on the beach.

Above photos provided by:
Keith Riley / BerkshireHiking.com, Elaine Keeley,
The Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism,
Mike Michaels, Kim Williams and the Dinosaur State Park



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR!

In creating a travel section for our new magazine, we hoped that the articles would not be so much about going to a place, but into a place, or more specifically into the soul of the place. If that soul was a merry one, and knew how to laugh a bit, so much the better.

We are pleased to bring you the Elias Child House in Woodstock, Stonington in Stonington, Gillette Castle in East Haddam, Warner Theatre in Torrington, and Fishing in the water.

Each one of these had their own surprises and revelations. The 17th century Elias House B&B had an owner who lived in a New York State farm house with fewer conveniences than the Child House's original inhabitants. And then we have the amazing creatively designed castle fortress by the great actor William Gillette, the equally beautiful art deco design of the Warner Theatre and the expanse and depth of the fishing opportunities that are available in our tiny state.

Speaking of "depth" and fishing, when I shot the photo of the four fabulous fisher kids on that funky little dock, I didn't know who they were or anything about them beyond that fact that they were mighty cool and very friendly. But this was definitely a case where silent waters ran deep, and that there were "no coincidences in the program!" Yes, my inner detective eventually tracked them down, and a conversation with Tracy Warfield, mother of two of them, revealed that they had been fishing since the ages of two and three years with their uncle. Now at the ripe old ages of eleven and thirteen, they have themselves become intense anglers, and belong to an organization called "Trout Unlimited," whose members work toward preserving America's waterways, studying and tagging fish, and stocking ponds. The photo's "krew kut kid" is a third generation fly caster, and after I shot the photo, the two Warfield boys traveled to Vermont where they continued their studies in fly fishing and fly tying. When these guys catch a fish, they admire its beauty, measure and photograph it, and then return it to the waters from whence it came. Mrs. Warwick strongly believes that fishing teaches young people patience (which this writer had so sorely lacked as a child), as well as respect for life and nature, which combines wonderfully with the exuberant success of actually landing a fish.

In the next issue of Excursionz, we look forward to bringing you articles about the excitement of auto racing at both Stafford Springs and Lime Rock Park, a "B&B" in the hills of Litchfield County, the wonderful scenic variety of hiking trails all over the state, the Garde Arts Center and Theatre in New London and the very unique Ballard Puppet Institute at UConn.

We LOOK FORWARD TO VISITING WITH YOU AGAIN.

MIKE MICHAELS



THEATRES & PLAYHOUSES *in Connecticut*

Connecticut, that littlest empire state, has an empirical number and a variety of playhouses and theatres sprinkled like big and little diamonds (girl's best friend and not) across the state. The beauty of it all is that they are not necessarily located near the big population centers (such as they are). Sure we've got the Stamford Center for the Arts in - Stamford, The Hartford Stage in - Hartford, and the renowned Yale Repertory and Long Wharf Theaters in - New Haven, but that is merely the tip of a very hot iceberg (reference to global warming not intended). It's not just the big guys that make Connecticut such a special theatrical region, which says a lot about those very vital CTers who support those "little" guys!

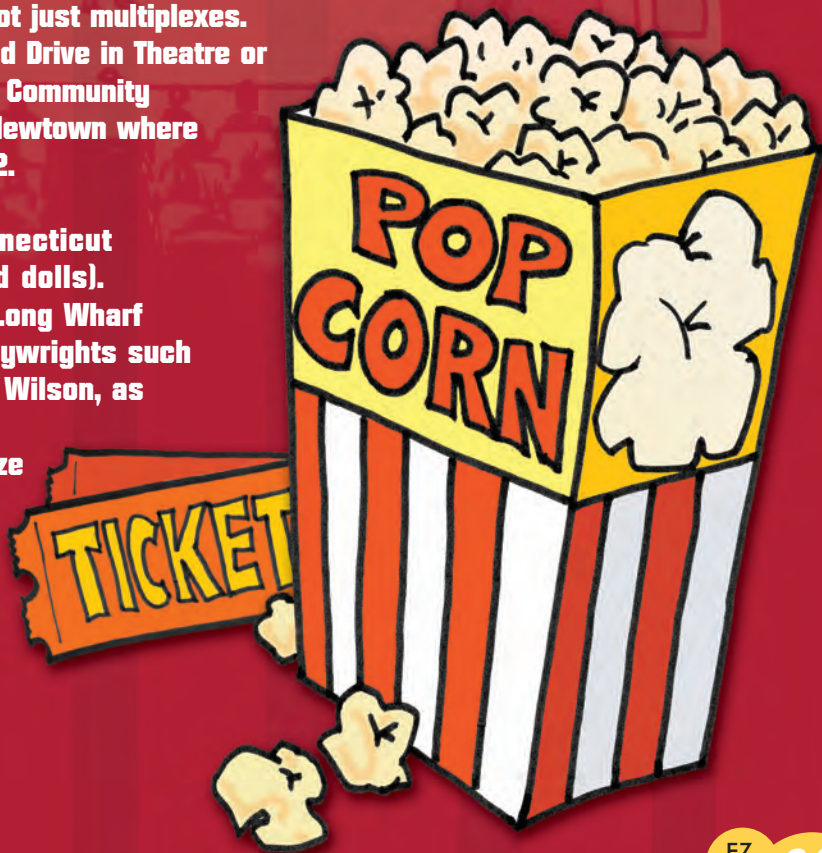
Here are a few: Downtown Cabaret Theatre and Playhouse on the Green in Bridgeport, Ivoryton Playhouse in Essex, Town Players of New Canaan, Shakespeare on the Sound in Norwalk, Repertory Theatre in New Britain, Garde Arts Center in New London, Clockwork Repertory Theatre in Oakville, Bradley Playhouse in Putnam, Seven Angels in Waterbury, and Westport Country Playhouse in Westport.

And that's not all. We still like movies, and not just multiplexes. Bring back the good old days at the Mansfield Drive in Theatre or the Neighborhood Movie days at the Fairfield Community Theatre or the Edmond Town Hall Theater in Newtown where you can see quality movies for as little as \$2.

But it's what's inside that counts and Connecticut theatre does have some real big guys (and dolls). For example, at The Yale Repertory and The Long Wharf you've got world primers by world class playwrights such as multiple Tony and Pulitzer winner August Wilson, as well as plays like "Streamers" by Tony winner David Rabe and "Wit" by Pulitzer Prize winner Margaret Edson.

That still doesn't say it all, but it says a lot, so sit back, enjoy, and be thankful that you're not in Kansas.

Visit our Theater Directory Pages
www.culinarymenus.com/theaters.htm
www.ctmusicscene.com/theatres.htm





Gillette Castle

the house that sherlock holmes built

"You see, Watson, but you do not observe."

The above quote might have been true of Holmes's companion at that undeveloped stage of his detecting career, but it was not true of actor William Hooker Gillette when he sailed up the Connecticut River, spied the Seven Sisters, landed at their feet, climbed to the top of a hill, and fell instantly in love. Gillette certainly "saw" and "observed." He envisioned Mr. Holmes's home, a very special place that after building, he would inhabit for the rest of his life.



Gillette Castle State Park

67 River Road
East Haddam, CT 06423
(860) 526-2336

www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?A=2716&Q=325204





The Seven Sisters were not a sirenic delusion, but a very real group of seven hills rising high above the east bank of the river in the little town of East Haddam.

With money flowing in from Mr. Gillette's iconic theatrical portrayal of Sherlock, he had the means to purchase the most southerly of those hills, and on that seventh stately lady he built the house of his dreams, a house that continues to enhance the dream life of thousands of visitors from all over the world some seventy years after his death. Thanks to the loving and thoughtful attention of Gillette's home state and the mansion's caretakers, it will certainly continue to nourish those dreams into the far distant future.


Although Gillette didn't use the word castle to describe his home, the "Seventh Sister," it was a castle in many senses of the word. Was it a mighty fortress? Well, yes, but not in the physical sense. Built of cement and native fieldstone, and emulating but not imitating a medieval castle, it would not have protected him from forcible invasion, as would a castle of solid stone. And for that it wasn't meant to be. No, Gillette used his very fertile imagination for protection; in fact, when at home, he didn't even lock the front door. An ingeniously placed mirror in the east interior balcony gave him visual access to who the "invader" was, and if he didn't want to see that or those visitor(s), he simply vanished into his bedroom! And there were other mirrors strategically placed for like purposes.

It was certainly the mansion of a noble prince, a prince of theatrical representation and creation known

as "the aristocrat of the stage." Gillette's replacement of the 1880's melodramatic declamation with physical action changed theatre itself, reaching out to the common man and pre-visioning the acting in films. Look at any post Gillette picture of A. Conan Doyle's master sleuth, and what do you see? Why it is a strong lean jawed man enveloped in a flowing tartan cape with a curved pipe in his mouth, a very particular billed cap on his head, and a large magnifying glass in his hand.

In the original Holmes illustration, you do see a lean jawed man with piercing eyes and a straight pipe; and in fact, the literary Holmes did carry a small magnifying glass. But Gillette, certainly a master of thespian deception, knew that he would need to be both looked at and seen from the "cheap" seats far above the stage and at the rear of the theatre. The flowing cape, large curved pipe, and out-sized magnifying glass were of Gillette's invention. Beyond that, was Gillette who coined the phrase: "Oh, this is elementary, my dear Watson," later reused in the first Sherlock Holmes movie as "Elementary, my dear Watson." In fact when the American actor had asked Doyle permission to alter the Holmes persona after revising Doyle's theatrical script, Doyle said, "You may marry him, murder him, or do anything you like to him." The play was an enormous popular success, and Gillette's visionary castle in the air was built on a very solid foundation.

When this writer saw pictures and even visited the castle for the first time, he was thrown off by the "inauthentic" and seemingly make-shift, or really whimsical quality



"You may marry
him, murder him,
or do anything
you like to him."



of the fieldstone and cement structure. When finally viewing it through the lens of a camera, he was hit with the realization that imaginatory whimsy, when combined with the creator's deeply developed sense of drama made for an impact that in its own way actually superseded the dramatic impact of an original castle. The walls, parapets, and towers of the castle seem to rise up, twist, and reach out with every change of angle. This seemingly organic structure seems to actually live and breathe! Gillette was not just a great actor. He had already made use of his inventive visual gifts. On the stage, he contrived to entrance his audiences by innovative improvements in illumination, such as sudden blackouts and the fade in / fade out effect at the beginning and end of a scene. His mastery of illusion came to a final fruition at *The Seventh Sister*.

The interior of *The Seventh Sister* is another story altogether. Here Gillette's imagination took a far more practical turn, using an esthetic of the real.

The walls are covered with rattan flooring in often intricate color patterns that change from room to room. The built in white oak furniture is beautifully solid, seeming to flow out of the walls; and the extraordinarily heavy sliding and hinged doors, forty seven unique ones in all, have ingeniously complex puzzled hand-carved latches, created

by Gillette. A comparison to architect Frank Lloyd Wright's masterful control of his own "Prairie House" interiors of a slightly earlier period seems inevitable. Gillette set off the solidity of his furniture, wall, and door design with the incandescent glow of his colorful stained glass lighting. The two work in a push – pull manner that is a large part of what brings so many visitors to the castle year after year.

The rooms are surprisingly small, but this is no accident. *The Seventh Sister* was meant to reflect the interior of a boat, not just any boat, but Gillette's own houseboat, *Aunt Polly*, the same boat he had sailed up the Connecticut River on that discovery voyage in 1912.

Gillette's visual sense was also reflected in his connection to painting. A gallery on the top floor contains a number of works by American Impressionist painters. The castle is now part of the American Impressionist Art Trail.

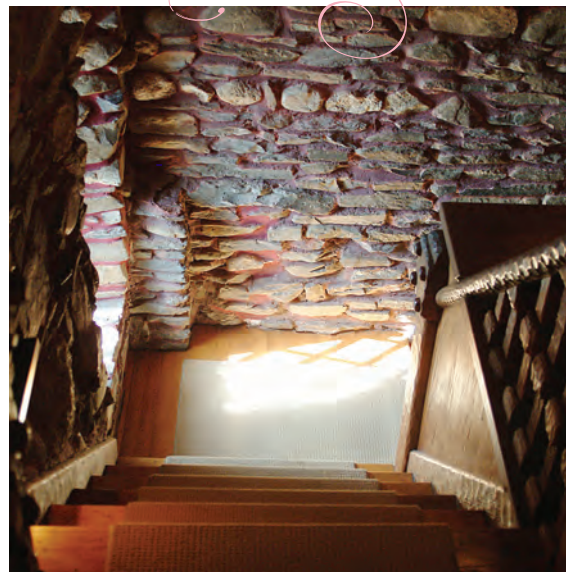
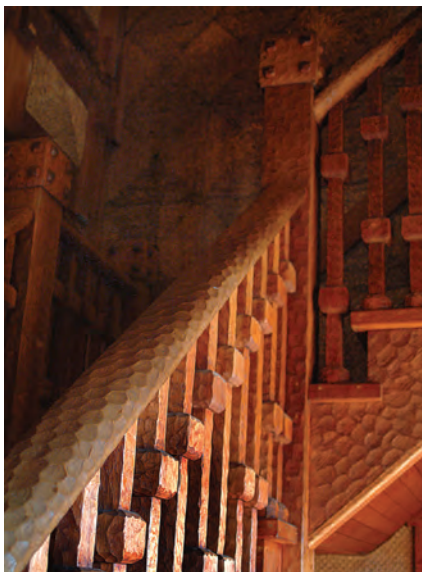
Surrounding the castle are a series of wooded hiking trails that intertwine and intersect with the path of Gillette's former small scale railroad line, in which he took singular pride. With steeply carved steps, long wooden tressels, stone-arch bridges, a tunnel, and a goldfish pond, Mr. Gillette's personality continues to follow the hiking visitor into the outdoors.

One trail leads down to the ferry landing and the former house of Gillette's butler of thirty years, Yukitaki Ozaki. Here you can relax on the shaded edge of the Connecticut River as the ferry and numerous pleasure boats cruise by, and even camp (all of this of course when it's warm). Gillette himself had often walked these trails with guests, one of them who was none other than Albert Einstein.

There is no doubt that Sir Conan Doyle continued to admire Gillette's portrayal of Holmes. At a special ceremony for the actor in 1929 Doyle stated, "I consider the production a personal gratification... My only complaint is that you made the poor hero of the anemic printed page a very limp object as compared with the glamour of your own personality which you infuse into his stage presentment."

Gillette died in 1937, only four years after Doyle himself, but the afterlife of both (actually Doyle was a highly committed spiritualist!) live and breath in the admiration of those who visit and admire *The Seventh Sister*, as well as those who continue to be intrigued, enlightened, and entertained by the everlasting wit, whimsy, and deductive genius of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

Mike Michaels



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ZEE TRAVEL
SPOTZ



Stonington

Connecticut's Magical Seafaring Gem

A few years ago, the *New Yorker* magazine ran a cartoon showing a couple riding in a car. The caption reads (approximately) "You can take a deep breath now dear, we've just reached Stonington." Given the fact that the *New Yorker* is a nationally distributed magazine, the arcane nature of this comment, which doesn't even refer to a state, says a lot about what is special about the subject of this little article.

The reference is to the fact that the Borough of Stonington, the last town on the shoreline before Rhode Island, resides directly north of the eastern tip of Long Island and therefore is the only town in Connecticut receiving breezes directly from the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, the air in Stonington is appropriately fresh. This geo-meteorological trait is very important, yet not singular to the charms of this tightly packed, but paradoxically open little triangular shaped peninsula, whose tiny apex points south toward the Atlantic. It is certainly however, the air and ocean breezes that give a Mediterranean clarity to the light that illuminates the eighteenth and nineteenth century houses that line the streets of Stonington.

The attractions of Stonington's next door neighbor, Mystic, are justly famous, but when the movie "Mystic Pizza" was filmed, the producers needed a location that reflected the lives of the working fishermen and their families who peopled the story. So it is really Stonington that you see in most of the outdoor shots! Yes, this "quaint" historical village is Connecticut's last outpost of commercial fishing and its attendant hard work, insecurity and danger.

Just walk down to the docks on the borough's west side and you can see the boats and real fishermen "down-loading" the day's catch, mending nets, or getting the boats ready to go out to sea. You can hear wonderful renditions of authentic sea shanties at the Mystic Seaport Museum, and then observe the genuine article and





action at close quarters in Stonington, where a memorial near those peaceful docks commemorates 34 local fishermen who have died at sea.

Down on Main Street in this quintessential Yankee port, you will see a building with the seemingly improbable title, "The Portuguese Holy Ghost Society," which speaks of some very non Yankee Stoningtonites who started arriving here about one hundred years after the Yankees, and whose organization speaks of a legendary tradition that is at least one hundred years older than the discovery of America itself.

These are the Portuguese speaking fishermen, who are so much a part of Stonington's past and present, and came mostly from the Azores Islands off the Atlantic coast of Portugal.

The Holy Ghost Society festival, with its "Feeding of the Masses," takes place on the weekend before Labor Day and commemorates the legend of its patron saint, Isabel of Aragon, a fourteenth century Queen of Portugal and her most virtuous gift. This angelic queen was so charitable that when there was a great famine caused by terrible floods, she prayed to the Holy Ghost for food in return for her crown. The floods ceased, and her people were fed. Her memory is kept alive in the Festival.

Another annual fishing event is the Blessing of the Fleet, which takes place at the end of July. This occasion is both celebratory and deeply solemn because a significant part of the ceremonies are devoted to fisherman both from Stonington and worldwide throughout history, who were lost at sea.

Saturday is merrily festive. The twenty boats of the fleet plus the flagship moored at the dock are colorfully decorated. A lobster bake and dancing to many kinds of music unfold. This multicultural dancing embraces a form of music which has been called "Portuguese Soul Music," with a band of musicians playing traditional Portuguese tunes. Sunday is

devoted to the actual Blessing of the Fleet. After a morning mass, a street parade centers around a float carrying a statue of Saint Peter, the patron saint of fishermen. Following the parade is the sacrament at the dock. With the Bishop of Connecticut and Saint Mary's priest aboard the flagship, each of the twenty boats sails by and is blessed. The flagship then leads the fleet past three breakwaters into the open sea, where the fleet forms a ritual circle around the flagship. A broken anchor is thrown to the water in memory of lost fishermen. This observance at sea does not at all take place in solitude. The fleet is surrounded by dozens of leisure craft from yachts on down. In over fifty years, this Blessing has been blessed itself with good weather! Not a storm or even a squall in over half a century!

Besides these special events, Stonington is a place to enjoy at your leisure, at a pace that is particularly restful. The streets are dotted with over fifteen antique, gift and jewelry shops. Although these antiques are well worth looking at for esthetic pleasure, esthetics don't stop there. To these you can add at least ten art and crafts galleries. An interesting development is The Velvet Mill on Bayview Avenue. The former home of the American Velvet



Company, its many lofts are now an enclave for artists and an art gallery. Open studios take place quarterly.

Of special interest is The Old Lighthouse Museum in the original Stonington lighthouse, located at the tip of the borough. With a view of both Fishers and Block Island, best seen from the top of the lighthouse tower itself, its exhibits depict the lives of Stonington's fishermen, farmers, shipbuilders, pottery makers, and other trades.

When it comes to eating, Stonington is no slouch either. Noah's Restaurant, on Water Street, has become a real institution for both residents and visitors. It can't really be expressed better than the noted food and travel writer Michael Stern who wrote, "...Whenever we visit Stonington, there is just one meal we want, and that is lunch at Noah's.... This town dining room on the main street has reliably served some of the best seafood (and other) midday meals that a ten-dollar bill can buy...best of all, a dish of scallops, broiled to supreme tenderness in a breathtaking ginger marinade."

To the above this writer can add that the dinners at Noah's easily equal the lunches, and beyond that, the place just feels like home. But that's not all. Skipper's Dock (Which means exactly that – you can "park" there with a full sized yacht.), The Water Street Café, Boom, Zack's Bar & Grille, Nonie's Water Street Deli, and the Yellow House Coffee Shop, make it certain you can satisfy your appetite without leaving Stonington. When it comes to accommoda-

tions Stonington now offers the modern, but very homey eighteen room Inn at Stonington, and the very intimate three room B&B, the Orchard Street Inn.

With this collection of events and places, it is easy to forget that the real beauty of Stonington is best experienced in privacy at any time of the year. A peek into one of the tiny "Pocket Gardens" alongside various houses and filled with gracefully matched flowers is an experience in itself. Walking the streets alone in the early morning, twilight or evening is particularly magical. To give just one example, at the lighthouse point during certain times of the year, you can see sunset and moonrise at the same time. A sweeping panorama of night sky from this same point is equally enchanting. The silence of a peaceful evening hike after a snowfall seems to combine all that is mystical about this little spit of land that has housed people with such dignity for so many years.

Mike Michaels

Fishing in Connecticut



Connecticut is blessed with the three major genres of fishing venues: lakes, rivers (including streams) and Long Island Sound, as well as the Atlantic Ocean beyond. Other bodies of water such as bathtubs, swimming pools, sinks, fish-bowls, and aquariums don't count – usually. Connecticut is among the fortunate eighteen out of fifty states that have salt water fishing – try going deep sea fishing in Nebraska. We're a pretty good, make that very good place to cast or troll for one of the smallest states in the U.S. Speaking of genres (types of stories), creativity and imagination have never been very far from this watery sport. No, ingenuity and originality are part and parcel of the art and science of catching fish. This active use of inventiveness takes many forms. First there is the “fish story.” I don't think there are as many fish stories as fish, but there are certainly more fish stories than fishermen! The use of our left brained powers of fantasy play a substantial role in the science of catching those finny guys in both the creation of hardware (rods, lures, boats, etc.) and software (finding the time, place, and technique to hook the fish), as well as the story of how this was accomplished. The technology and poetic description in the ad below seems to marry both forms of creativity into a seamless match. Here it is.

“The flawless high-shine finishes jump to life with intricate etched detail. Red three-dimensional eyes on every XCalibur fishing lure enhances the attraction. And in the water, XCalibur baits are perfection in motion. The shapes and swimming motions of XCalibur's fishing lures and baits were optimized using computer-aided analysis and intense underwater observation. We won't ask if you want to catch more fish. Instead, we will tell you how – new XCalibur hard baits.”

Think of it. The purpose of all this is to create a sense of realism. That is for the fish!

Now, fish stories: The writer of this article, if truth be told, being a type A personality from birth, could not get into the reflective, contemplative vibe of standing, rod in hand, by the side of a pastoral lake or stream waiting for the eventual or non-eventual strike. Since my father and his friends were avid anglers, I got to partake in a particular adventure which eminently satisfied my type A character, in spades. Again, if truth be told, this adventure took place in the state of Maine, not Connecticut, but we were all from Connecticut, so please read on.

When I was about eleven, my family joined with another to rent a cabin in the Northern Maine Town of Jackman. We had rented a canoe, and one sunny afternoon we took a fishing trip down the nearby Kennebec River. Now there were two adults and four children in this canoe. We all had fishing rods and lures, but not a single lifejacket. About a mile down the river we hit fisherman's pay dirt in the most amazing way. In a calm backwater, we were greeted by a very hungry school of fish that couldn't get enough of our lures. The second we threw in our lines, there was another fish to be pulled into the canoe. Soon the bottom of the canoe was filled with fish. We had to stop for fear of sinking the canoe! But then we had to get back upstream with six humans and many, many, many fish. Not easy, in fact, not at all possible. At one point, my father dug in so hard with his paddle that it twisted out of his hands and I had to jump out of the canoe to retrieve it for him. A very hectic scene. That was the end of my canoe ride. The only way for the

canoe to make it back upstream was for me and my friend Peter to wade ashore and hike back along the river bank. We did, and beat the canoe by about a half an hour!

Well this story has a happy and very delicious ending. The fish were little guys ... whose breed I can't remember, but they made up in flavor what they lacked in size. We had a massive, and I mean massive outdoor fish fry and these freshly caught fish were major delicious. After all these years, I can still taste them!

Getting back to present day Connecticut, the state has developed some ingenious ways to make us fisherman (woman) and fisherchild friendly.

First of all there are the Trout Parks. These are not playgrounds for trout, but ponds and streams stocked weekly that are easily reached by young anglers and those with mobility challenges. These "fishing holes" are a wonderful opportunity for children and families. Then there is the annual free fishing day when anyone can fish at selected sites without a license. The state even provides loaner tackle and instruction.

For the rest of us, from Lake Alexander to Lake Zoar (with Lake Wononscopomuc fourth from the end - the proofreader needs some challenge), there are approximately two hundred and sixty two lakes and ponds in Connecticut that are available for public fishing. (They can be located on the Connecticut Department of Environmental

Protection's beautifully designed and complete Angler's Guide website: <http://dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/fishing/fishinfo/angler.htm>, and a printed version, can be obtained anywhere you can purchase a fishing license, or by calling (860) 424-FISH (3474). Add to that, at least two hundred and fifty rivers and streams, it is obvious that you could probably spend a lifetime fishing these spots without repeating yourself. And that's just freshwater!

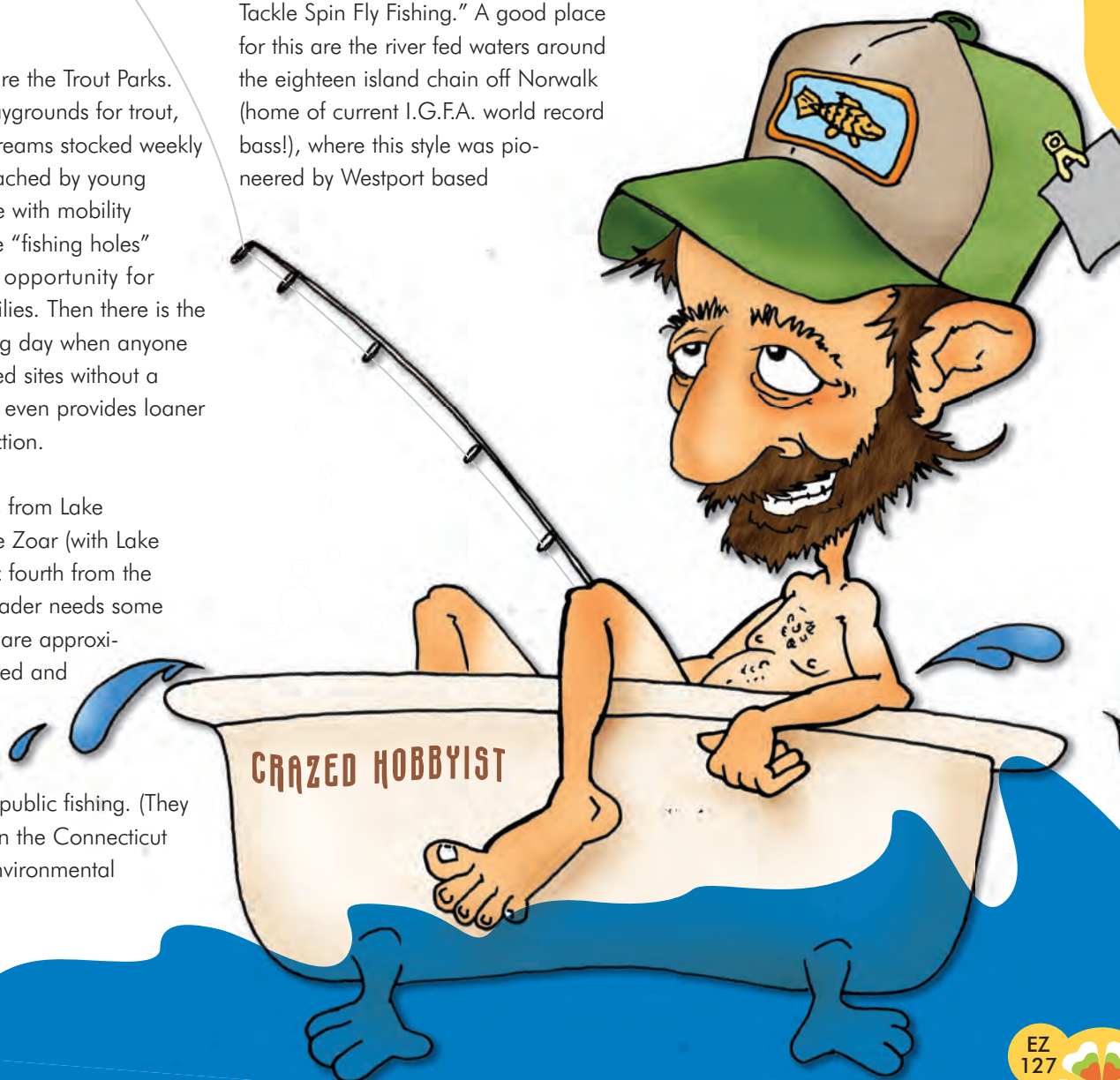
As far as saltwater fishing is concerned, there are a terrific variety of fish and methods of catching them up and down the sound and out at sea.

One fairly recent and interesting saltwater development is "Flats Boats Light Tackle Spin Fly Fishing." A good place for this are the river fed waters around the eighteen island chain off Norwalk (home of current I.G.F.A. world record bass!), where this style was pioneered by Westport based

master guide, Captain Jeff Northrop in 1968. From early spring through fall, there are various varieties of bass, huge daisy-chaining bluefish and in the "fall blitz," these are joined by bonito and "false" albacore.

With fifteen to twenty "blues" aggressively jumping like deep sea tarpon, coupled with the energized rush of the turbulent pre-migration season ending catch, it would appear that there is easily enough excitement to fill the adrenalin needs of the most hardened type A maniac. I think this summer I'll give fishing another try.

Mike Michaels





Best Seats in the House

★ THE
torrington's pride: DAZZLING
WARNER THEATRE

The Warner Theatre in Torrington, CT, bathed in art deco and originally completed in 1931 as a Warner Bros. movie house, is probably Connecticut's most beautiful theatre. It might even be CT's most beautiful building. Its interior is so gorgeous that, in its midst, you can barely chat and breathe at the same time. These are bold statements to be sure, considering our state's eminent history and extant structures dating back to the first half of the 17th century. But who can argue the allure of the art deco period of the 1920s and '30s and its innovators, who threw out rules of artistic decorum and gave a permissive wink to art nouveau-ers poised to do some serious mischief.



Yes, I am partial to the art deco style, and not just because I have eaten at almost every be-decoed, stainless steel diner in New England. The term "art deco" derives from the 1925, Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, a futuristic showcase featuring the streamlining of modern living. The "decoratifs" sported unimagined visual perspectives designed to herald the certainty of progress with bold zigzag, spiral and lock key patterns, sleek asymmetric and geometric shapes, and color schemes previously known only to the deities.

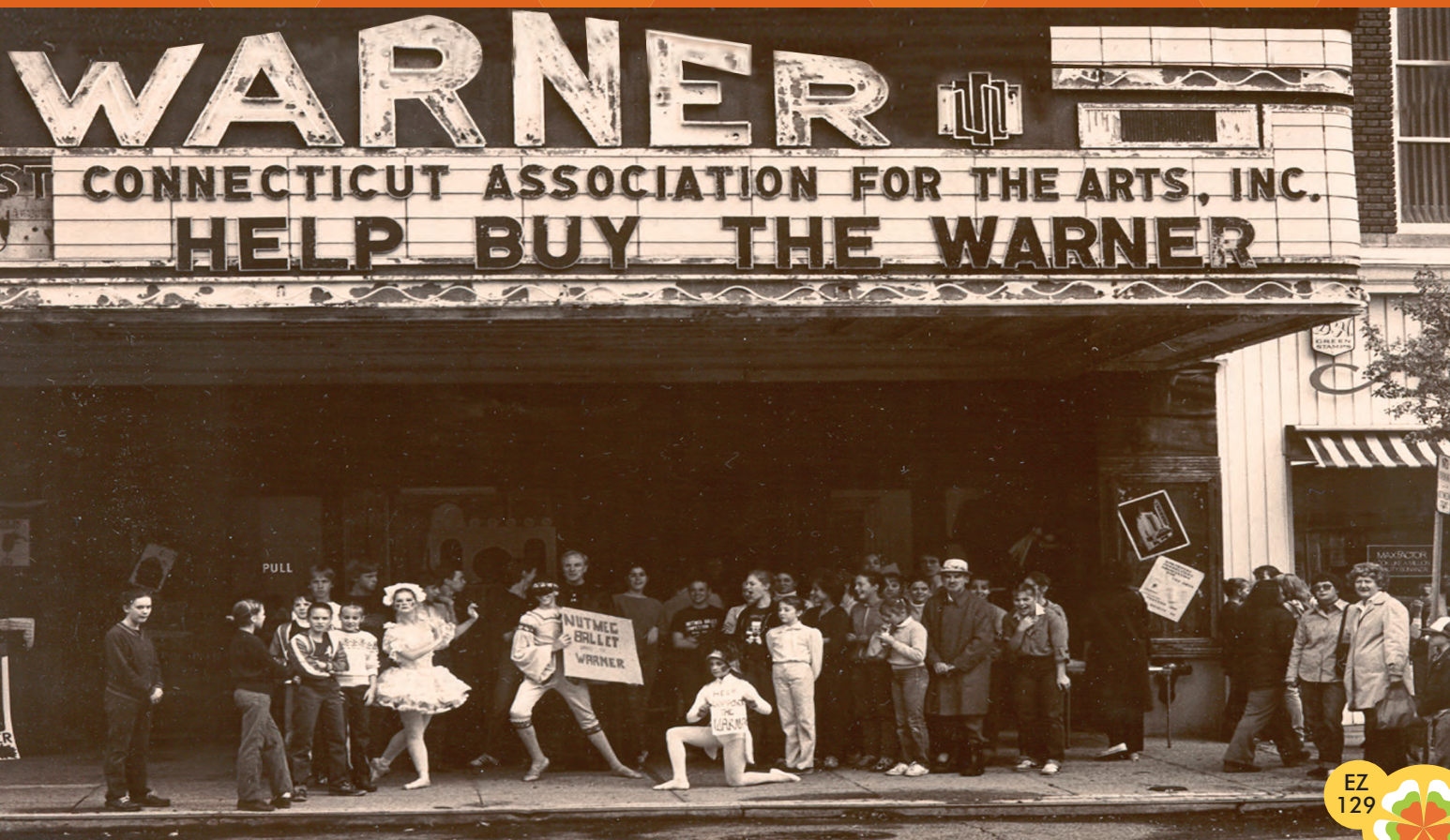
Back then, Warner Bros. (not "Brothers") Studios of California constructed or renovated seventy-six movie theatres across the country including five in Connecticut: The Capital Theatre in Danbury and the State Theatre in Hartford, both since demolished; The Empress Theatre in Danbury, with sections still in use as ballroom space today; The Garde Theatre in New London, which has

been meticulously restored to its 1926 majesty and now exists as the beautiful Garde Arts Center; and The Warner Theatre. The four Warner brothers thought of Torrington as a "little New York," predicting that the Connecticut city would be the perfect testing ground for their full-length reels, before heading to the Big Apple. Consequently, only Warner Bros. movies were shown at The Warner Theatre. Warner Bros. could reliably fill the seats with its star lineup that included James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, Errol Flynn, and Humphrey Bogart; and don't forget Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck.

Steve Criss, marketing director at The Warner Theatre, may have the best "arts" job in Connecticut. The former journalist and graphic designer is the clarion for this magnificent Torrington structure and its multi-faceted objectives. As Steve takes me on a tour of the facility, I am amazed that this magnificent edifice was designed for "just" movies, a statement about the

power, the lure and the contagion of things cinematic back in the '30s. "Talkies" were brand new. Warner Bros. gambled on both the mechanics of the vitaphone, a scientific contraption that could match sound to movement, and on experimental amplification systems newly designed to fill the huge halls with clear fidelity. Cinema's first "talkie" was The Warner Bros. 1927 film, "The Jazz Singer," starring Al Jolson. Their 1929 film, "On With the Show," was the first all-color "talkie."

From a seat in the middle of the orchestra section Steve tells me that the theatre was engulfed during the flood of 1955. (After the flood and because of federally-mandated divestiture of its movie houses, Warner Bros. was forced to put the theatre up for sale. In the '60s and '70s the Warner passed through several private hands running "B" movies and minor live performances. By 1981 the Warner was slated for demolition to be turned into a parking lot for downtown Torrington. A group of





The Warner's 1,765-seat auditorium is home to more than 140 performances annually and attracts over 92,000 patrons. The theatre hosts international talents such as Tom Jones, B.B. King and Bonnie Raitt, Delbert McClinton, The Irish Rovers and professional opera companies.

private citizens got together to save the theatre and formed the Northwest CT Association for the Arts, which raised the money to purchase the theatre.

A two-phase, \$19.3 million capital campaign, restoration and renovation of the theatre and adjacent buildings is in progress. Phase I, completed in 2002, featured a redress of public spaces and administrative offices at the Warner Theatre. In Phase II, the adjacent Mertz building (a 50,000-square foot behemoth that used to be home to the oldest operating department store in the country) will be remodeled to house the Carole and Ray Neag Performing Arts Center, which will include the new Warner Theatre Center for Arts Education, a brand-new 200-seat Nancy Marine Studio Theatre, renovated retail space, facilities for set construction, and comfortable dressing rooms. The theatre complex also includes the 24,000-square foot Quality Building across from the main theatre that currently houses the Warner Theatre's 8,000-square foot costume shop, as well as prop storage and the current 100-seat Nancy Marine Studio Theatre. The return of The Warner

Theatre has already been the major catalyst for the revitalization of downtown Torrington.

The Warner's 1,765-seat auditorium is home to more than 140 performances annually, and attracts over 92,000 patrons. The theatre hosts international talents such as Tom Jones, B.B. King and Bonnie Raitt, Delbert McClinton, The Irish Rovers and professional opera companies. They are also the home base for the internationally-acclaimed dance troupe MOMIX, which uses the theatre to premiere all of their new pieces before they go out on tour.

The main stage also offers productions from a rich diversity of local volunteer talent and support crews through the auspices of the Warner Stage Company. Volunteers are everywhere, over 800 strong, and include set designers, seamstresses, lighting technicians and more – many with backgrounds in professional theatre. Volunteer actors come from all over CT, NY and MA to perform at the Warner, with many open call auditions seeing turnouts in the hundreds. The stage company produces

familiar hits like "Cats," Disney's "Beauty & The Beast," "Peter Pan," "Guys & Dolls," "The Sound of Music," and "Man of La Mancha." Unbelievably, these native productions are downright cheap, with the highest priced seats capped at \$22.50.

I am pleased to hear that the Warner is home to one of the most progressive and comprehensive arts education programs in the state. The Warner Theatre Center for Arts Education offers adult education courses, as well as after-school enrichment classes and performance labs for ages 4 through 18. Students can take part in a six-week summer arts programs for ages 7 to 16 and learn fundamentals of costume design, creative writing, movie making, drama and other facets of performance and production. Students enrolled in the theatre's Young Actors Series soak up some real life experience by acting in musicals like "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe" and Disney's "Aladdin Jr." Steve explains that thousands of school children visit the Warner each year to witness these and other productions that tie into the school curriculum and open young minds to acting and the arts.

The nucleus of the theatre's beauty is a majestic blue star that graces the ceiling and floats like a celestial planet amidst a blue galaxy of crescent moons, stars and peacocks. I learned that layers of grime once encrusted the view. A friend of mine who grew up near Torrington has told me that she does not even recall noticing the star during her theatre visits. Today, the ceiling star once again radiates with its six, blue and gold chevron bars fanning away from its brilliant centerpiece, an impressive chandelier that protrudes as though it were a sculpted lighthouse beacon with its folded and overlapping panes

of glass. An expansive golden curtain stretches like God's pleated robe the width of the stage, highlighted by lush orange velour tapestries and scrolls of blue and white floral stenciling. The combination of colors and design is nothing short of breathtaking.

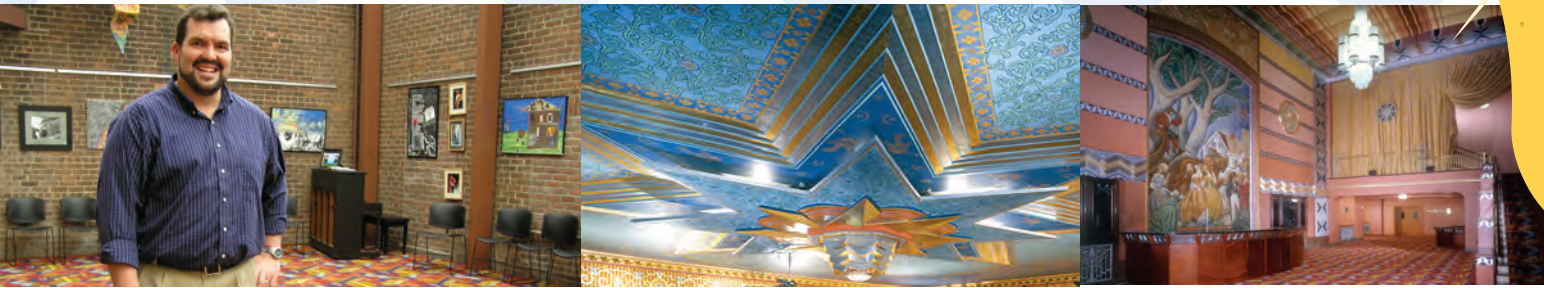
The theatre lobby is, likewise, a feast for the eyes. Gracefully curved mahogany counters sit beneath a ceiling-to-floor color mural of 18th century Torrington. Multi-colored, "mod" deco carpeting, a Flash Gordon chandelier, horizontal zigzag panels, a Trompe L'Oeil canopied ceiling and a Cinderella staircase


adorn the lobby in their spirited pinks, golds and blues. Amazing!


Don't miss this hidden treasure of CT's Northwest corner. Add the historic Warner Theatre to your itinerary this summer. For a complete schedule of upcoming events and more information, contact:

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“B&Bs” Bunks & Bunz

the ELIAS CHILD HOUSE



“If you can't hold your arm in the beehive oven to the count of ten, then it's still too hot for cooking.”

MaryBeth Gorke – Felice on oven temperature control – eighteenth century style.

We have always enjoyed the New England bed and breakfast experience. From New Hampshire to Connecticut, the B&Bs have always been comfortable, homey, personable, and most of all restful; a wonderful escape from both the pressures of home and job, as well as the machinelike precision (or imprecision) of the chain motels.

Every once in a while, there is a B&B that provides all of the above, plus a special magic and even a kind of spiritual inspiration. The Elias Child House is such a place. Nestled in the “Last Green Valley” town of West Woodstock in northeast Connecticut's “Quiet Corner,” the Child house is an eighteenth century colonial with nine (count them) fireplaces fronting forty eight acres of pasture and woodland. If you want a place to get away, this is truly a place.

Getting away can mean more than a place. If you would like the opportunity to travel back in time with all of the comforts of modern

life, this is a chance to have your cake and eat it in multiple forms. Originally built in 1714, the house probably started with four rooms and grew as the Child family increased in size and wealth. By the mid 1700s it was described as a “mansion house.” But a “McMansion” it was not. All the cooking was done in the enormous “walk in” fireplaces or cooking hearths, which included a “beehive oven” built into the side on the hearth. Without refrigeration, the only way to preserve meat was to salt or smoke it. An original smoke chamber is still present on one of the chimney columns in the attic. In addition, there are still small door holes from the attic to the cellar that allowed the Child's cats to get to the little critters (mice) who were after the grain that was stored in the house.

But that cave like cooking hearth is not just for show and it is through the stomach that your journey into the past can continue. MaryBeth and Tony, her husband, invite their

guests to participate in a genuine open hearth cooking and eating experience. Dressed in period costume the Felices and guests join together in pounding cheese, turning the roasting ham on the spit of an open backed “tin kitchen” which sits in front of the fire, and watching as various dishes are placed and removed from the beehive oven. It takes about three hours for the fireplace to warm to the right temperature. A separate fire is built in the beehive, and then removed. And how does the cook know that the temperature in the beehive is just right – there wasn't and isn't a thermometer. Not in the world of the eighteenth century into which you have now entered! The cook sticks her arm into the oven. If she can't hold it there until the count of ten, the oven is still too hot and must be allowed to cool before baking.

Finally, the oven is right and the next juggling process will begin. The dish that needs to cook the longest will be slid to the back. Like ducks in a row the rest of the dishes are

put in the oven. Onion pie, carrot pudding and various pies and breads take their rightful places in line, and await their part in a genuine colonial feast. Pumpkin soup and sweet potatoes with ginger root hang simmering on a crane over the fire. All recipes are genuine 1700's "receipts." Meanwhile, other guests have been put to work at the churner creating a whipped cream to end all whipped creams for those pies. No Reddi Whip in the Elias Child House, no sir.

During this process, complete strangers have become friends in this shared experience. Then, dinner is enjoyed by all before the roaring hearth.

The bedrooms themselves are unique in their relation to the past, and this relationship is very personal to the life of innkeeper MaryBeth Gorke – Felice. Of course by now you would expect that the bedrooms are furnished with antiques, but these are not just any old pieces. Many of them came from her childhood home. MaryBeth grew up in a

nineteenth century farmhouse in the little hamlet of Voorheesville, New York, just north of Albany. The house had been a wedding home to her grandmother, and in fact is still in the family, now occupied by MaryBeth's brother. Little MaryBeth's home had no running hot water; the only heat in the house was supplied by three downstairs stoves. And as far as the upstairs bedrooms were concerned – lots of quilts and very warm pajamas. (The eighteenth century Child house had fireplaces in the bedrooms and still does).

The farm was a working one, on which various grains were raised, as well as chickens, pigs, and a horse. Oh yes, MaryBeth still has horses, which can be seen from the back porch of the Elias Child house. Those back forty eight acres are crisscrossed with bridal paths and are well ridden by you know who.

Inside the very comfortable bedrooms, which are each named after a lady of the house, are toys, dolls, and even a crib from the New York farmhouse. To get even more personal, on a set of shelves in Suite Aimee, there is a pair of ancient and

ornate child's high button shoes and above them a picture of the little girl who wore them, MaryBeth's grandmother. To top this off, in the downstairs hallway are two wedding pictures with beautiful detailed and flowery



lettering – these were not purchased in any antique store. They are the actual marriage certificates of MaryBeth's great grandparents.

MaryBeth's philosophy is simply, "When you cross the threshold of the Elias Child House, you become a member of the family. We want our visitors to feel like our home is their home."

The Elias Child House is designed to be comfortable, but if people prefer to stay by themselves, there are lots of places to get away to within the house and on the grounds. In the colder weather guests enjoy relaxing in front of the many fireplaces. In the summer, the swimming pool and gardens are popular areas.

There is also the opportunity to enjoy Reiki, a Japanese energy balancing process. A new activity will be a treasure hunt to discover the secrets of the house.

The Elias Child House is certainly a very homey place. Once guests (adults, children and dogs) are greeted by Murphy, the miniature poodle "watch dog," they are welcome to say hello to the barn cats or even feed carrots to the horses. Having been in the hospitality business for over twenty years, Tony and MaryBeth have had the pleasure of welcoming guests from all over the world.



After a very restful night's sleep, surrounded by the almost mystical warmth of personal history, my stomach was warmed by excellent coffee and an even more excellent country breakfast at the dining hearth. Included were such delicacies as lemon lavender bread, rose geranium jelly, and bananas with an orange amaretto sauce.

I had to be on my way, but foremost in my mind was how soon I could come back.

Mike Michaels

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By now we know that Gillette Castle is a unique Connecticut experience. But getting there and going home can give us a chance to sample some what's looking good in this area of our state.

In this particular ride we will start at the Guilford Mooring Restaurant, located at 505 Whitfield Street in the town of the same name, sitting on an inlet on Long Island Sound with a view of the marina from almost every table. If you are coming from west of Guilford, you might try getting off I-95 at exit 56, and heading south down Leetes Island Road to the Stony Creek harbor and its view of the very appropriately named Thimble Islands. Then follow Rt. 146 (still called Leetes Island Road) past some absolutely stellar wetlands scenery into Guilford (If there are more than one of you in the car, you might catch a view of a particularly charming house actually placed on the edge of a waterfall!) Guilford is a historic trip in itself with a mere four hundred and fifty plus pre-twentieth century houses, many of them classic saltboxes.

Driving north on Rt. 77 past Rt. 80, we hit a beautiful stretch of farmlands, upland wetlands, ponds, and arching hills which climax at Lake Quonnipaug. (Please keep your eyes on the road; the cows will take care of themselves!) As you head into Durham right after Rt. 77 dovetails into Rt. 17, you will pass what is undoubtedly the most splendid view from any gas station in Connecticut looking across the Cogenchaug Valley from Dick's CITGO (full serve only, for sure!)

Following our map to Middletown, we can switch from eye feasting to just plain feasting with over 48 restaurants of every variety (Natural, Bistro, Mexican, Italian, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, and even Hawaiian) on South Main, East Main, and plain old Main Streets alone.



FOUR WHEEL EXCURSIONZ RIDE AROUND GILLETTE CASTLE

Of course, Middletown brings our first encounter with the Connecticut River where we can get an eye catching view of the Arrigoni Bridge which will bring us to Portland on Rt. 66. It is here that Farrell's Restaurant will certainly warm your stomach with its classic old-fashioned steamed cheeseburgers, to say nothing of steak, prime ribs, and seafood.

After East Hampton with its antique and gift shops, a turn onto Rt. 151 winds through the cozy village of Middle Haddam. This little town is nudged up to the east bank of the good old Connecticut River, ending in East Haddam. There you pick up Rt. 82 taking it to Rt. 148, which brings you to the Gillette Park and Castle. THERE ARE PLENTY OF SIGNS FOR YOU TO FOLLOW! The road up to the castle is picturesque and the view from the grounds is breathtaking. Grab some food and a blanket, and you're set for picnicking or hiking there too. If time allows, a side trip eastward on Rt. 82 to Salem will give ample reassurance that there is still an abundance of verdant open farmland in CT. On the way back you can loop around and go by Devil's Hopyard, which is also a popular spot.

Completing the third part of our triangular turn through mid Connecticut, East Haddam provides an awesome collection of jewel-like Victorian homes leading to that unforgettable Victorian masterpiece, Goodspeed Opera House. It rises like a true queen over the river as well as the East Haddam Swing Bridge (Thought to be the largest of its type in the world.) A brief detour

up Rt. 149 brings us to the tiny Nathan Hale Schoolhouse lovingly placed on a peaceful knoll overlooking the river, as if remembering the days of 1773 when this young hero in the making taught young men and women of the town.

On the Haddam side of the bridge turn left on Rt. 154. The Haddam Restaurant is there on the right, serving excellent pizza and Italian food. Then switch over to Rt. 148 and picturesque Chester, with its art galleries and bucolic restaurants. Following Rt. 148 to Rt. 81 and then to Rt. 80 brings us to the very scenic Chatfield Hollow State Park. Rt. 80 then joins up with Rt. 77 back in Guilford to complete our ride, making it quite clear that traveling through Connecticut can provide a never ending series of delights.

Mike Michaels

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FOUR WHEEL EXCURSIONZ

AROUND GILLETTE CASTLE

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