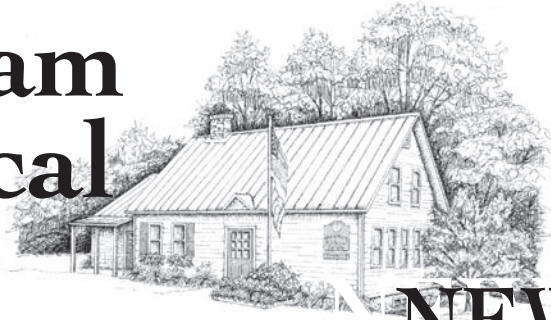


Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Fall 2009

NEWSLETTER

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

The Historical Society lost two valuable members this past summer: Phyllis Horton Forest and Albert “Bert” Smith.

Bert did not live in Grantham but in Croydon. He was an honorary member of our Society in recognition of all the volunteer work he performed for us. The most important and time-consuming job he did was to format and print all Grantham census records from 1790 to 1930 and placed them in a book, thus making it easy for anyone to examine census data. Bert was the treasurer of the Croydon Historical Society and was famous for his questions about expenditures. He was an expert computer maven and often stayed at his computer until two, three or four in the morning, always ready to share information with anyone anywhere in the world. Bert had many physical problems and was familiar with all three local hospitals: New London, DHMC and the VA in White River Junction. He took many a midnight ambulance ride but never complained and joked about his bodily problems. To make matters worse, his beloved wife, Dotty, suffered a bad fall and is now confined to the Clough Nursing Center in New London. I never knew Bert to show any interest in religion but politics was another story. He was right-wing all the way and his great joy was collecting stories about Democrats. He regarded Democrats as complete fools but believed they had



Bert Smith

a right to be fools. Since I am a Democrat, that included me. Nobody who met Bert Smith will forget him in a hurry.

Phyllis was not only a beautiful woman but a beautiful person. She had a wonderful life with her husband, Pete, and her children and grandchildren and she had a successful career in banking. Phyllis had a keen sense of humor and a sharp tongue at times but was never mean or cruel to anyone.

She was our Society’s treasurer for only two years and it was during this time that she was stricken with the illness that took her life. She suffered but



Phyllis Forest

never complained. She was an inspiration to all of us left to carry on the work of the Historical Society.

Now a word about oral histories of people living in Grantham. We now have good digital recording equipment and we have Christina McKahan who gives her time and expertise to interviews. We have

started to interview elderly people who are native to Grantham but the problem is that such subjects are dying before we get to them. I now think that we would do well to interview anyone over 65, whether native to Grantham or recent arrival. After all, it is all Grantham history. Therefore, I invite anyone of age to volunteer to give their life story so that people 25, 50 or even 100 years from now can sample Grantham history over time.

—Allen W. Walker, President

HISTORY OF THE DUNBAR FREE LIBRARY

Among the greatest accomplishments of America during its second hundred years was the establishment of a network of public libraries, each of which served its particular community and all of which were free and open to the public. Private libraries certainly existed and continue to exist today, but the idea that the public should fund and construct libraries – thereby making education open to all, regardless of age – was truly a forward-thinking idea that reflected the understanding of the importance of literacy and access to the printed word.

The massive profits made by a number of American businessmen during the Gilded Age encouraged many to donate to various causes. However, none was more famous than Andrew Carnegie. Considered the richest man in the world at his retirement in 1901, Carnegie spent the next eighteen years giving away the lion's share of his fortune. While Carnegie gave to a number of worthy causes, none was more honorable than his decision to fund the construction of public libraries throughout the United States and elsewhere. By the time of his death, he had funded over 3,000 libraries.

Much less well-known is Grantham's own Andrew Carnegie, Lorenzo Dunbar. The first record of a public library in the town reveals that from 1889 to 1893, a lending library was available in a private home. In 1893, the Ladies Aid began buying books for a collection and J. Madison Howe was paid \$15.00 a year to be the librarian. However, as of 1900, there was no dedicated library building in the town. Dunbar, a Grantham native, former store owner and school teacher who had recently relocated to Enfield, owned the vacant lot in Grantham Village located immedi-

ately north of the house known as the Amasa Hall-S. F. Colby-Dunbar House/S. F. Hook Store/Grantham Village Post Office (now the home and realty office A. E. MacNeill). He first approached the town in March of 1900, offering to give both the tract of land on the east side of Main Street (Route 10) and money to build a public library for the town, in memory of his wife Ellen.

Voters approved the gift, along with a town appropriation of \$50/year for the purchase of new books, and the following month the plans for the new building were on display. These included a single brick flue that vented two wood stoves, one heating the single south room and the other heating the two rooms on the north side, and a "two-holer" indoor privy built into the back of the central hall. The building was lighted with kerosene lanterns. The front room on the north side was to be used by the Ladies Aid and the rear room by town officers. It was built by Newport contractor Charles Partridge (and quite possibly designed with the input of nearby mill owner Fredson Reed) in an architectural style known as American Foursquare.

Upon its completion in June, 1901, a town-wide celebration was planned, which occurred on August 21, 1901, complete with speeches, presenta-

tions and music. The building was dedicated at a church service where Edwin Eastman, state Attorney General and former Grantham resident, gave the address. This was followed



Dunbar Free Library, c. 1905

by a picnic featuring "ice cream and cake with fruit" served on the library grounds.

As of its opening there were 1000-2000 books and the library was open three hours per week. J. Madison Howe, who owned the printing press formerly located on Route 114 immediately east of the road now known as Learning Drive, served as the town librarian until 1933, when his daughter Bernice took over. She remained the town librarian until 1974.

The Dunbar Free Library is part of the late 19th century tradition of private donations funding public library construction. Although Andrew Carnegie may be the best known of such philanthropists, such generosity occurred throughout America at the time. Proof positive is the story of Grantham's own Lorenzo Dunbar and the Dunbar Free Library.

—Ken Story

GHS VOLUNTEER PROFILE: CHRISTINA MCKAHAN

"We probably saw every bed that George Washington ever slept in" reported Christina McKahan, the Historical Society's much-valued oral history recorder. Growing up in New Jersey where she was influenced by her mother's great interest in history, Christina was regularly exposed to historical sites and historical activities of all sorts. Her appearance at the Grantham Historical Society several years ago was prompted by her questions about land that she and her husband had purchased on Burpee Hill Road. Allen Walker shared his vast knowledge of the area with her which piqued her interest in oral history. After settling into her new home, Christina volunteered to begin recording oral histories of Grantham residents. She was enthusiastically welcomed by GHS as a long list of people from whom we wanted interviews had been generated but not accomplished. After attending an oral history seminar given by Jo Radner through the NHHumanities Council with Pat Andrews, Christina began her search for equipment which would provide archival quality recordings for future generations. With Jo's suggestions and guidance from Hanover Strings, in Hanover, NH, Christina and her husband, Brian, researched and offered a recommendation for updated quality digital recording equipment which we purchased to be used to record interviews as well as lectures and other GHS activities.

Christina "loves to hear stories", recalling many that she heard from her father and grandmother. But the greater purpose to her mind is the community service provided by capturing the voice and recollections of long-time residents as well as offering an important outlet for socialization of elders in the community.

To date, Christina has interviewed Allen Walker, Gerry Moulton, Joey Holmes and her brother, Ronald Dunbar, Hap Reney, and Mr. and Mrs. Chick Pillsbury with a long list yet to go. In addition, for the past two years, she has

been a "roving reporter" at Old Home Day. She has interviewed people in the parades (this year getting stepped on by a horse!), by-standers, vendors, participants in the duck race and pie-eating contests as well as people who have attended this event for many years and those coming for the first time. She plans to continue this annual record of one of Grantham's most popular events. She and Renee Gustafson attended a recent Seniors' luncheon where they recorded memories of the 1953 Grantham fire. (A photographic exhibit of this disaster can be visited at the Historical Society on Friday afternoons.)



Christina McKahan

Although most people being interviewed are nervous at first, Christina has learned that starting slowly, asking open-ended questions and being a "good listener" generally gains her interviews full of excellent history. Her non-probing style also very likely puts people at ease. She has become adept at knowing whether to suggest a second recording session for some interviewees.

She has great ideas about ways to support oral history: having elementary students interview older people, (this was last done in 1999 when sixth graders interviewed Grantham residents), developing slide show PowerPoint presentations of interviews with Grantham residents which would include photos or videos, inviting high school and college students to propose projects for which they could receive course credit and expanding the scope of our technology-based projects.

At a time when Historical Societies are dependent on aging and elderly people to sustain their functions, it is a ray of hope to see someone of Christina's young years taking such an interest and making time in her very busy life (she and Brian recently started a new business, True Tool Innovations in Croydon) to make such an important contribution to our Historical Society.

—Pat Andrews

It is *better* to give.

Your membership fees and end-of-year donations will help the Grantham Historical Society develop programs, exhibits and educational materials for anyone interested in the history of Grantham. All donations are tax-deductible and include receipt of our newsletter.

Please mail to:
 Grantham Historical Society
 P.O. Box 540
 Grantham, NH 03753

Thank you for your support.

Membership and Annual Dues Form Grantham Historical Society

Name _____

Mailing address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

PLEASE CHECK ONE:

New member Annual renewal

Annual dues: (check one)

Individual (\$10.)

Family (\$25.)

Patron/business/institution (\$50.)

Extra contribution _____

Total check amount _____

DROWNING IN GRANTHAM'S HISTORY

Did you ever wonder how Grantham's ponds earned their names? From L.D. Dunbar's *History of Grantham*, published in 1886, we learn that "about the year 1791 two men by the name of Anderson were drowned in Anderson Pond – so called after this occurrence." Dunbar goes on to report that "in 1809 a Mr. Miller was drowned in Miller Pond," and that "Joseph Eastman drowned himself in Eastman's Pond in 1812."



Anderson Pond, Grantham, NH

What are we to make of this? Not that self-sacrifice might have been the only requirement for finding immortality in a pond name; early Grantham settlers John Stocker and Nathaniel Leavitt

managed to do it by just getting there first. Ironically, according to Dunbar, "August 26, 1872, Wilmer Leavitt was drowned in Stocker Pond."

Then too, Mr. Dunbar's repeated use of the words "was drowned" leaves one wondering if malicious acts might have been involved. Was there foul play, or did he really mean that they simply drowned by unfortunate accident?

Lily Pond and Butternut Pond seem to be named from nature, as does Grass Pond. There may have been a time when a poor soul drowned (or was drowned) in Grass Pond, but alas, though once of fair size, now it's mostly grass.

—Craig McArt

KNOX TRAIL PRESENTATION

On July 25, 2009 Bob Champagne, a GHS director, shared with an attentive audience at the Society's building his description of the 1775/6 Knox artillery train from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston.

When Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold overtook Fort Ticonderoga in upper New York state in 1775 and forced the British to concede the fort, they came into possession of 183 artillery pieces. General Washington (with the help of many New Hampshire militia units) who was conducting a siege of the British in Boston, asked that Colonel Knox retrieve the cannon from Fort Ticonderoga and bring them to Boston. This was a formidable assignment as it was the middle of winter and Fort Ticonderoga was 300 miles from Boston. Colonel Knox, at Fort Ticonderoga, selected 59 pieces of artillery and enlisted teamsters, soldiers, woodsmen, and villagers to haul the cannon. Eighty yoke of oxen were

used, dragging the cannon on sleds down the Hudson River valley and across the rugged Berkshires.

In 56 days the train of cannon, weighing a total of 60 tons, reached Boston and was delivered to General Washing-

ton. Subsequently in the darkness of a March night, these Fort Ticonderoga cannon were deployed atop elevated Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston. The next morning the British, to their dismay, realized the futility of their position. The British abandoned Boston removing their entire garrison of 10,000 Redcoats to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Evacuation Day, March 17, 1776, is celebrated in Massachusetts to this day. This was the first major victory of the war for the Americans.

Colonel Knox's challenging feat in the Revolutionary War is rarely recalled though his contribution was pivotal in our struggle for independence.

—Bob Champagne



NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The fall meeting of the NH Old Graveyard Association was held at GHS on September 26, 2009 at our invitation. Fourteen members from all over New Hampshire attended the day-long meeting which opened with coffee and goodies, followed by their business meeting and before lunch, a presentation by Allen Walker on the history of Grantham. In the afternoon, two groups formed, including some GHS members, for tours of the Four Corners cemetery, led by Renee Gustafson and Bob Champagne, and the Dunbar Hill and Brown cemeteries, led by Allen Walker. The visitors to all three cemeteries were excited by what they found and appreciated the work that had gone into preparing for each tour. Members of NHOGA were helpful in providing information about regulations regarding town responsibility for the upkeep of cemeteries.

In recent months, we have received five boxes of papers and objects relating to the Colby family who originally lived in Springfield but when that town gave the "gore" to Grantham in 1858, suddenly found themselves Grantham



Members of NHOGA at GHS, September 26, 2009

residents. The first two boxes have been sorted; exciting finds include five letters dating between January 1862 and April 7, 1865 written by James T. Colby, Civil War

soldier, to his family; advertising cards from Newport providers, 90 calling cards from residents of local towns as well as those at a distance including Manchester and Lynn, MA; and a handwritten notebook probably belonging to a miller containing directions for use of grindstones and water power. When the other three boxes have been accessioned, we welcome volunteers to help catalogue the materials.

The program on Draperville and the Draper Corporation, held on October 15, 2009, had to be moved to the Town Hall as 67 people attended, the largest crowd the Historical Society has ever had. Renee Gustafson's exhibits and Craig McArt's slide show added great visual interest to the talks by Allen Walker and Ken Story. The exhibits and slide show can still be viewed at the Historical Society any Friday afternoon between 1:00 and 4:00 PM. The talks were recorded for our oral history collection.



Ex-students at N. Grantham school raise their hands during a GHS program on Draperville.

GRANTHAM RESIDENTS!

Stop before you throw anything old away! The Grantham Historical Society collects objects, photographs, personal papers and other items. If you are not sure about whether we would be interested, call us at 863-9701 first – before you throw it away!

*Design and Layout by Susan A. Janicki,
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VOLUNTEERS ALWAYS NEEDED!

The Historical Society has enough projects to take us into the 22nd century. We always need help and have large and small independent projects as well as opportunities to help the current volunteer staff with on-going work. Call an officer or Board member or stop in some Friday afternoon—we will always be happy to see you!

VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.GRANTHAMHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2009-10

GRANTHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*The Grantham Historical Society and Town Archives are open on Friday
afternoons from 1:00–4:00 PM or by appointment.
The building is located at 34 Dunbar Hill Road.
The telephone number is 603-863-9701.*



Grantham Historical Society
34 Dunbar Hill Road
P.O. Box 540
Grantham, NH 03753

2010 CALENDAR

*Check our website and posters
around town for more details.*

May 20, 2010

Annual GHS meeting,
potluck supper and NHHC
program

July 17, 2010

Summer program with
GHS member presentation

October 14, 2010

Fall meeting with program
on some aspect of
Grantham history

GHS WEBSITE

Thanks go to Laurajean Whitcomb for maintaining our website which has recently been updated. Information about current programs and exhibits, future meetings, geneology research resources and publications from GHS are found there. We hope to add information about our collections in the near future.