

Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Spring 2010

NEWSLETTER

GHS GAINS A PRESIDENT EMERITUS

The front page of the Newsletter is usually graced by Allen Walker's *Letter from Our President*. As many of you know, Allen broke a hip in early April, had surgery at DHMC and is recovering at New London Hospital. Prior to his accident, Allen was honored in three different ways for his many years of caring about the history of our community.

The Historical Society now adds a fourth – election to President Emeritus.

At the April 23, 2010 Executive Committee meeting, a new position was approved - President Emeritus. Allen will be the first person to hold this position and automatically becomes an Honorary Member of the Historical Society as well. He has relinquished his elected position of president as of May 2010 when a new president will be elected at our annual meeting. (See information elsewhere about the annual meeting.)

In addition, over the past six months, Allen has received a Certificate of Achievement Award from the Association of Historical Societies of New Hampshire, has been the honored dedicatee of the 2009 Grantham Town Report and most recently, was featured in a story in the Valley News.

Late last summer, Bob Champagne, a long-time Trustee of the Historical Society, took the lead in submitting an application to the AHSNH for their 2009 awards program. To document Allen's leadership in our organization, Bob wrote: "The revitalized Grantham Historical Society has stimulated our community with challenging and informative programs. Residents can now appreciate how its rich history defines who we are today." He then documented the many achievements of the Historical Society under Allen's leadership:

- promoting interest in Grantham history for school children by sponsoring an archeological dig on his property in 1997 as well as supporting the production of a book of oral histories of Grantham residents by Grantham Village School students;
- participating in the planning for the 2005 trolley tour of Grantham and serving as commentator during the two afternoon tours of the town as well as supporting subsequent walking tours of the village led by Ken Story;



Allen Walker

Photo by R. Gustafson

- leading the Historical Society through the enormous task of turning the old town offices, housed in the historic Village School #7, into functional space for the Society's collections, exhibits and meetings as well as specialized storage for the Town Archives, while trying to maintain the historical characteristics of the building;
- increasing the frequency and quality of programs for residents on topics about Grantham history, giving many talks himself which attracted both members of the Society and other townspeople;
- writing for our quarterly newsletter which keeps our members informed of the many "behind-the-scenes" activities of our volunteers and Executive Committee; and finally and most importantly,
- serving as our resource for all historical information about our town.

The Executive Committee and friends of Allen were at the New London Historical Society on October 27, 2009 to salute him on receipt of his Lifetime Achievement Award.

At Town Meeting on March 9, 2010, Allen was honored by the residents of Grantham by having the 2009 town report dedicated to him. The dedication acknowledged his service as a Planning Board member, a Supervisor of the Checklist, a Library Trustee and Health Officer for the town as well as his many years of commitment to the Historical Society. GHS vice-president, Ken Story, offered remarks at the meeting. Dedication and a photo of Allen are found at the beginning of the Town Report.

And most recently, after an editor at the Valley News suggested that an article about Allen be written, interviews with reporter Aimee Caruso led to a story in the *Our History* section on April 4, 2010. A photo of Allen standing in the vault of the Town Archives with neatly bound copies of town records behind him accompanied the article.

The Executive Committee and membership of the Historical Society send wishes to Allen for a quick recovery and a speedy return to his familiar place at the front table of the Archives every Friday afternoon.

—Pat Andrews

HISTORY OF THE HALL

COLBY-DUNBAR HOUSE~S. F. HOOK STORE~POST OFFICE

In the mid-nineteenth century, the modern concept of zoning was virtually unknown. In cities and towns, proprietors lived in the same building that hosted their business; in fact, it made great sense to do so. For reasons of convenience, security and thrift, combining both uses in one structure was often the rule, not the exception. No standing structure in Grantham better reflects this than the Hall-Colby-Dunbar House/S. F. Hook Store/Post Office.

Located immediately south of the Dunbar Free Library and presently the home and office of realtor Ed MacNeill, this Greek Revival-style house was built by 1850 and could have been built as early as 1830. It was built for Amasa Hall. Although we do not know the identity of the builder, an interesting architectural feature of the house tells us that the same builder built both this house and the Adolphus Hall House (built for his son) next door. The simple, recessed pediments above both front doors (a defining feature of the Greek Revival style) are identical, which also tells us that the houses were built within a year or two of each other.

Born in 1789, Captain Amasa Hall was a veteran of the War of 1812. He resided in Croydon in the early 19th century where he raised sheep. He also began an active political career there, as he served as state representative from that town 1824-25. He relocated to Grantham in 1829 and continued his civic activity, representing the town in the state legislature in 1832, 1834, 1835 and 1836. His civic commitment continued, as in 1841 he served as road commissioner and by 1846 he was one of six

justices of the peace in town. Within two years thereafter he served a one-year term as president of the Sullivan County chapter of the New Hampshire State Agricultural Society. He also was a founding director of what would become Sugar River Bank and remained in that capacity until 1861.

However, Amasa – and later his son Adolphus – was also a businessman. He ran a general mercantile store out of the ell at the rear of the house with the help of his son, and later the help of his grandson Rufus. By 1865 Rufus bought out his father and ran the store with his partner Lorenzo Dunbar for the next six years. At that time he sold his share of the business to George Dunbar and turned to farming. By the 1880s, S. F. Hook operated his dry goods store here. By the early 1890s, when Samuel F. Colby lived in the house (probably as a rental), the ell sheltered the village post office. S. F. Colby was a partner with John M. Root in the Colby & Root business that stood directly across Route 10 in the north end of what is now the town parking lot.

By the late 1890s the family of George Washington Dunbar was living in the house (his brother Lorenzo donated the land and the money to build

the library next door). “Wash,” as he was known, had lived in the mill house across Route 10 – which he owned, along with the mill – and in fact his son Joshua was born there. He sold the mill by 1897 and moved into this residence. His son Joshua served as

town clerk for two separate terms and the rear ell functioned as his office. It has served exclusively as a residence since 1900.

The quiet that pervades Grantham village today belies the significant civic, commercial and social activity that truly defined it in the nineteenth century. Other buildings formerly stood nearby that also sheltered such assorted uses, but unfortunately, none of them have survived. The Hall-Colby-Dunbar House/S. F. Hook Store/Post Office is the last survivor of this era and the sole reminder of how closely integrated the professional, public and private lives of the town used to be.

—Ken Story



Dunbar House. GHS collection.

GHS VOLUNTEER PROFILE: DIANNE WALLACE

If you see a car rushing down a driveway onto Miller Pond Road, scattering chickens and pheasants in its wake, it is likely Dianne Wallace on her way to volunteer at the Historical Society on a Friday afternoon. Dianne began helping us during the summer of 2009. Her interest was piqued by the cellar holes found during walks and hikes near the family's property. She visited GHS for information and put together what history was available. This contact was enough for her to return later and offer her services as a volunteer.

Since joining us, her project has been to assist in cataloging our large collection of photographs which increases regularly by donations. Someone willing to do the sorting, identification, numbering and filing on a regular basis was needed. She first assisted Craig McArt (who has been working on scanning the photography collection), cataloging those already scanned which needed numbers assigned, identification (if possible), descriptions and dates. Once that was completed, she migrated to the multiple folders of photographs still awaiting her organizational skills. As these are cataloged, they are sent onto Craig for scanning. At home, she has updated the two binders that list the photo collection index and lists by photograph and description.

Dianne's interest in history developed at a young age when she, her siblings and father explored well-known historical sites around Concord, Massachusetts. In addition, she had grandparents living in Randolph, Vermont, where hikes to old cellar holes were a favorite activity. Dianne and her husband, Jack, bought property in

Grantham about four years ago. Jack grew up in Lebanon; with a background in masonry, he built their brick house off Miller Pond Road. Jack and Dianne's sons, Sidney who is in kindergarten at the Grantham Village School and Mitchell, age 4, now experience the benefits of living in a small town and the country way of life. The family menagerie includes two dogs, two cats, thirty pheasants and ten chickens. Dianne says that sheep are "on the horizon". She also has a large garden.

Dianne brings a world-wide perspective to GHS. A flight attendant for United Airlines for sixteen years, she met Jack in London. She has flown almost everywhere in the world except for the Middle East. Jack is still an international pilot for United. We are grateful that he provides childcare on the Fridays that he is at home so that we can have Dianne. Dianne has also been a flight instructor, a substitute teacher and a hospice volunteer. As a young mother, she has contact with Grantham people who express surprise that Grantham even has a historical society and has given us ideas of ways to increase our visibility.

With a seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy, highly honed organizational skills and a sense of humor that brightens up our Friday afternoons, Dianne is making a major contribution as a volunteer for the Historical Society. We urge those of you who feel you do not have time to help us out to think of Dianne – and contact us to see how you might join our Friday afternoon group.

—Pat Andrews



Diane Wallace

Photo by R. Gustafson

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 _____

MY FAMILY TREE AND ME

As happens frequently at GHS, Grantham residents come in with boxes of old letters, photos and, occasionally, diaries that have been in the family over time. A number of Grantham families go back several generations here who shaped the history of our town.

We are more than happy to receive these donations that help to shed light on Grantham's history. I wonder what other treasures are still to be uncovered in deep desk drawers or dusty attics.

The Grantham Archives have been helpful to many people in their search for family genealogy. Our cemeteries, too, can reveal interesting facts of ancestry.

When members of the Western Association of Leavitt Families visited Grantham in 2000, GHS volunteers cleaned the old Leavitt Cemetery so that they could place a plaque there recognizing Nathaniel and Lydia Leavitt, who were among the original Grantham settlers. Arriving on what was to be called Leavitt Hill in the early 1790s, they had twelve children and left many descendants. At one time, there were more than fifty Leavitts attending Leavitt Hill School.

There seems to be a growing interest in family histories these days, probably an influence of Internet browsing. For years "write family history" lingered on my list of things to do, always preempted by more pressing demands on my time. When I finally got it done, I had it bound in several copies, which I gave to my kids and my brother and my brother's kids. The youngsters aren't really very interested yet, but my brother is. There's a certain age at which one begins to look back on life more often and with more pleasure, and I think the two of us have reached that milestone. I tell myself that the kids will come to appreciate my effort some day after I'm gone.

I forgot to mention why my family history is titled *My Family Tree and Me*. The "Tree" part has descriptions of all my grandparents, parents, brother, wife, children, uncles, aunts, cousins, second cousins, nephews, nieces. It has dates and places of birth, marriages and deaths – all ordered in a descendance starting with my grandparents. The "Me" part includes a little autobiographical piece. There I recount the important milestones in my life, being careful to include only the more flattering details.

My parents, as I remember, used to talk about their lives

growing up, what they did in school, how they spent their summer vacations, how they met, how they decided to get married and have me. I heard all that, but much of it must have gone in one ear and out the other. I remember

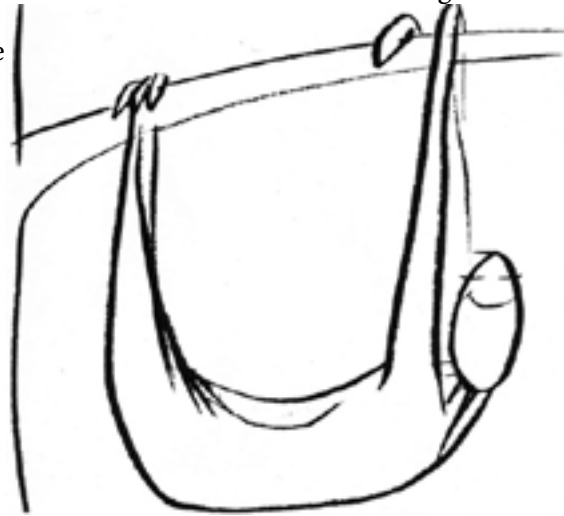
even less about conversations that dwelled on their parents and siblings. Now all those details are vague in my mind if not gone. I just wasn't that interested at the time. I have done my best to patch this information together but I sure wish they had written some of it down.

Well, I went to great lengths to contact my cousins—some long-lost—who I hadn't seen since I was a teenager. They helped me fill in some of the blanks about their parents and provided me with short bios and photos of themselves and their families. They were so enthused about my project that one thing led to another, and before

long we were planning a family reunion. At the reunion, which was a wonderful event, I was able to hand each a copy of an illustrated family history, abridged, of course, to exclude my autobiography.

Since that special occasion, I've further developed my family history using a PowerPoint slide show that can be emailed as a PDF file. It has better visuals, and text content has been reduced to a minimum. I'm guessing that it will be a more palatable format for the younger generation of the family. For those of you who have been thinking about trying something like this, don't procrastinate over what format to use. Like the ad says, "Just do it."

—Craig McArt



Cartoon by Osborn

GHS HAS A NEW EMAIL ADDRESS

The GHS Executive Committee recently decided that we needed Internet access. Therefore, we finally have an email address: granthamhistory@gmail.com.

A Board member will check our email every Friday afternoon and respond to any questions or requests that have come in during the week.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEW EXHIBIT

Renee Gustafson has developed a new exhibit at the Historical Society on the history of early boundary changes in Grantham. She and Pat Andrews have been researching the proprietors of the 1761 and 1767 charters of Grantham, trying to identify the original settlers and lot owners as the town developed after 1767. You can visit the exhibit Friday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:00 PM.

COLLECTIONS POLICY

On April 9, 2010, Pat Andrews attended a workshop given at the NH Historical Society on Collections policies and cataloging collections. Our Society was one of the few there who already had written a policy. However, as some new points were raised, it is now time to review and revise it. Any GHS members who would like input into the next version are welcome to let us know. The session on cataloging focused on new challenges to historical societies. For example, if a society's photograph collection is put on their website, how is downloading and misuse of the photographs prevented? Our Executive Committee will need to discuss this as we make decisions about what to add to our website.

HOUSE HISTORIES PROJECT

Imagine your home 100 years from now. A new family moves in and wonders who the original owners might have been, what brought the family to Grantham, what their occupations were, and whether this home was a retirement dream house. Were there children in the family who made those "dents" in the doorjamb, or grandchildren who slept in the loft area? Who might the builder have been, and who lived in the house after the first family?

In addition to our project of Historical Homes, we are compiling a database of all homes in Grantham so that in the future the answers to these questions will be readily available. We received a great response from the questionnaires distributed on Town Meeting Day. If you didn't receive one, please pick one up at GHS on Friday afternoons, or contact us and we'll mail one to you. Or better yet, write up your house's "story" including the physical address of your home. The more details, the better. Thanks so much for your help!

GHS ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD MAY 20, 2010

The Town Hall will once again be the site for our annual potluck supper and meeting. Because speakers from the New Hampshire Humanities Council have been so popular, this year we invited Dr. David Stewart-Smith to speak on "Native American History of New Hampshire". Several of our Executive Committee members attended the series of lectures during the winter at the Mt. Kearsarge Indian Museum on Indian history where we heard Dr. Stewart-Smith speak several times and learned a great deal from his presentations.

REGIONAL MEETING

Almost 30 people who are on the Boards of historical societies in our area squeezed into the Reney Room on March 16, 2010. In recent years, our Board has been frustrated by questions relating to technology, website development, recruitment of new members, and resources for programs and talks.

We decided that others probably shared these frustrations and so invited Board members from Cornish, Croydon, Enfield, Goshen, Newport, Plainfield, Springfield and Sunapee. A two-hour session was led by Ken Story and

was an excellent chance for people to vent, share stories and make suggestions. Everyone agreed that the meeting

was useful and that it should happen again. GHS will take the lead in encouraging another meeting, perhaps at one of the other historical societies, within the next year.



Photo by R. Gustafson

Ken Story leads discussion



Photo by R. Gustafson

Participants share information.

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The potluck supper will begin at 6:00 PM in the Town Hall. Main dishes, salads, breads and desserts will be welcome. At a brief business meeting at 6:45 PM, the Executive Committee will review the current status of the Society and elections will be held, followed by any other business to come before the group.

Dr. Stewart-Smith will give his illustrated talk as soon as the business meeting is finished.

Everyone is invited for any part or all of the evening.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2010

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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.

2010 CALENDAR

Check our website and posters around town for more details.

May 20, 2010

Annual meeting, potluck supper, program: Dr. David Stewart-Smith of NHHC “Native American History of New Hampshire”

July 17, 2010

Program: Ken Story speaks on the history of the Cote and Reney Lumber Company

October 14, 2010

Program: Allen Walker speaks on Grantham in the Civil War

GHS WEBSITE

Laurajean Whitcomb, our Website manager, has recently added the holdings of the Grantham Historical Society’s library to the other materials currently found there. Some minor changes in organization and descriptions will be completed soon. Our Library is available to all Grantham residents to use during our open hours on Fridays, 1:00 – 4:00 PM. The website (www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org) can give you an idea of what we have. Also note that the Draperville and Grantham Mountain Fire slide shows, from a GHS program and an exhibit respectfully, can be viewed on the website.

