



Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

Fall 2011

A Seasonal Newsletter

THE INCLINE RAILROAD COMES TO DORSET

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MUSEUM CURATOR

Jon Mathewson

OFFICE MANAGER

Betsy Olson

Museum WinterHours

Nov. 1 to May 15

W-F 10 AM to 12 noon

Sat. 10 AM to 2 PM

& by appointment

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The small hill behind the Dorset Historical Society underwent a radical change this summer. What had been an overgrown eyesore filled with weeds and debris was cleared, smoothed and covered with sod, all to make room for and highlight a new railroad.

The G-scale garden railroad runs up the southern edge of the hill on a bed of crushed gravel. It has a unique three-track rail arrangement which reproduces the incline railroad used by the Imperial Quarry in Danby and the Freedley Quarry in North Dorset.

The idea for, and the construction of the model railroad came from Jim Kingston to test a theory. Back in 2007, he and Hank Westphalen were tending the DHS booth at the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge. By late Sunday, things had slowed down, and Hank began exploring other exhibits, leaving Jim behind to ponder the Dorset exhibit.



Rising Sun Maintenance crew sodding the hillside for the Incline Railroad installation

The Expo theme that year was "Travel and Transportation," so the DHS exhibit featured the Manchester, Dorset and Granville Railroad (a.k.a. The M D & G, or Mud, Dirt & Gravel Railroad). One reproduced photograph in the exhibit began to bother Jim. "I was wondering, what's wrong with this picture?" Jim recalls, "Being an engineer, I had to figure it out. Then I realized there are only three rails. So, with only three rails, and with the wire connected to the coupler of a car at the top of the incline, the other visible wire must have been connected to another car at the bottom. Then I thought, but how are they going to pass each other as they travel up and down two of the three rails? Nobody I knew could answer this question, so I had to dope it out myself."

"I figured that since they were connected by a cable, they would always pass at exactly the same place," says Jim. "At that spot, there would be a divergence of the center rail into two as with normal rail configuration. Since the flanges on railcar wheels that hold the cars on the rails are on the inside, the wheels would turn outward allowing the two cars to pass as if on normal track." Once past each other, the car's wheels would turn inward to continue on the rest of the 3-rail portion.

So, in short, one old photograph sparked many questions in Jim's mind. The mind, however, can be quite imaginative, and there was only one way Jim could find out if he had come up with workable ideas: put them to the test. "So, to test my hypotheses, I decided to build a model. My wife DHS Board member Jean said, 'Why not make it large enough to display outside, and donate it to the Historical Society?'"

Three years later, in July 2011, Dave Lawrence's crew laid down a smooth, sloping bed, and Jim put down the track, the "arresting house," and then installed the cable and the cars. Next he had to find the correct marble block weight so that, when released, it would move the cars. The railroad is entirely driven by gravity, and the weight on the down-moving car needed to be just right to move one car down the hill and the one up the hill. That phase of the project was fun. One troubling phase for Jim was putting in the hundreds of tiny scale rail spikes. Each rail/tie crossing has four spikes, all to scale." The hard work shows through, though, and the railroad is already a very popular attraction here at the museum. (See "Save These Dates" p. 2)

Jim has donated his experiment to the Historical Society,. He says he is relieved to have it finished and out of the shop, and that it works.

The Curator's Notebook

Bley House has been a flurry with activity this summer. Volunteers have been working as docents as well as researchers and catalogers, while tourists and genealogists have been flocking to the museum to see what we have. There have been several quarry tours, a village and a cemetery tour, the celebration of Dorset's 250th birthday, the landscaping of the hill to the east of the museum, and the installation of a model incline railroad on the hill. Also, in June, Curator Susanne Rappaport retired, and in July she began introducing the historical society processes to the new curator, Jon Mathewson (That's me. Hello.).

Starting at the Dorset Historical Society during the height of summer has been a great adventure. I grew up on the Indiana Jones movies, and see museum work every bit as exciting as his exploits. While there is standard preparation to take before embarking on any museum adventure, such as reading the histories of Dorset by Zephine Humphrey and Tyler Resch, you never know when knowledge of Newton's Second Law of Motion will come into play.

Now, Indiana Jones would need to know about Newton's Laws to escape from nefarious, ancient traps. This summer, I needed to brush up on the actions of weights on pulley systems to understand and explain the incline railroad Jim Kingston built and installed.

An historical museum requires a willingness to be a detective of the material culture of the past. One recent donation from Dr. William Winter, for instance, included a scythe and an extraordinarily large wooden pestle. The scythe has a beautifully turned



Meet our new Curator, Jon Mathewson, who displays a recent donation to our collection

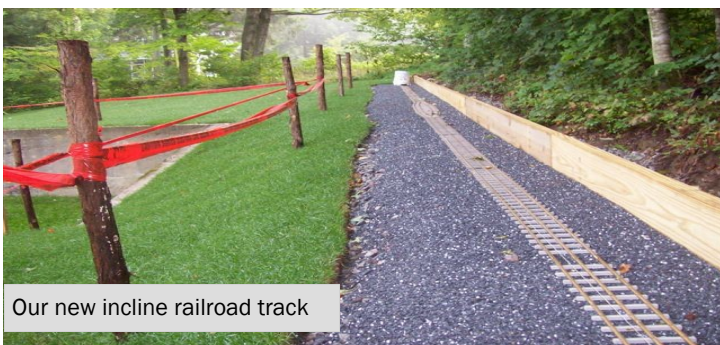
wooden handle, or snath, an intriguing blade-release mechanism, and two swans: one imprinted, and another on a decal remnant. From only those clues, we can find out quite a bit of information. First, decals were not cheap enough to widely use in this country until 1895, which suggests the scythe was made after that time. Usually, it would be easier to deduce the era the scythe was made because such a unique blade release mechanism surely must have been patented, yet there is no patent mark on the blade. This suggests that the company was stable enough to last beyond the expiration of the patent.

The part of the blade which connects to the snath is curved, like a swan's neck, hence the logo and nickname. These were made by the Seymour Manufacturing Company of Seymour, Indiana. The company was founded in 1872, and received its first scythe snath fastener patents in 1878. The company received several more similar patents through 1930, but the one which looks most like the fastener on our scythe was granted in 1883. The patent would have expired by 1900, and so the decal was probably put on sometime after that. Thus, the scythe dates, it could be argued, from any time after 1900. Usually, we can close up that date by finding out when the company went out of business, but the Seymour Manufacturing Company is still very much in business, and they still make scythes. The blades of the contemporary scythes, however, are made in Austria, and are clearly marked as such.

The pestle was even more interesting. Nearly four feet tall, it came to us as a "cabbage smasher." Asking around, I learned that it may have been used to make sauerkraut: cabbage would be placed in a large receptacle and then, well, smashed by the smasher. Sure enough, while cataloguing the object, Art Gilbert discovered that "Chenhall's Nomenclature," the museum guide for naming and organizing artifacts, found the term "masher, kraut." The "kraut masher" opens up a whole area of historical food processing previously unknown to me.

It is a great pleasure and constantly an adventure to join the exploits of the Dorset Historical Society.

Jon Mathewson, Curator



Our new incline railroad track

SAVE THESE DATES!

Saturday, Oct. 8 10:30-noon. "Incline Railway" demonstration.

Sat., Sun., Mon., Oct. 29, 30 & 31 9:00pm. Halloween Tour of Maple Hill Cemetery. Meet Linda McGinnis at Barrows House.

Tues., Oct 25 7:30pm. DHS Annual Meeting at Bley House



In this very special anniversary year of the signing of Dorset's charter, more than 350 people attended the Dorset Historical Society's annual Ice Cream Social on August 20. Visitors gathered as Todd Hathaway and Bob Davidson read the charter signed by Benning Wentworth on August 20, 1761. Town Manager, Rob Gaiotti took a town photo. Dorset School manned an information table and visitors checked out DHS's new incline railroad model on the hill, visited the museum and gift shop and purchased last-minute raffle tickets.

Over the summer DHS has offered commemorative activities including a self-guided walking tour of Dorset and East Dorset, an exhibit of antiquities from the society's collection spanning the town's earliest days to the present, guided tours of two Dorset quarries and the East Dorset Village, and a lecture about the New Hampshire Grants by Mark Hudson, executive director of the Vermont Historical Society. The newly-updated time line, note cards of historic photographs and a reprinting of Dorset's charter have been added to the gift shop's permanent inventory.

Support for DHS's educational programs and workshops came from the proceeds of two endeavors: the sale of more than 2,000 raffle tickets for a one-of-a-kind ceramic bowl and plate featuring pictures of Dorset designed exclusively for the DHS by Janno of Flower Brook Pottery (Congratulations to the winners Kasey Straiton of Kent, CT and John McInerney of Rupert, VT), and the production of commemorative bread boards by Malcolm Cooper of J.K. Adams. More than 150 boards have been sold to date, and they will remain on sale through 2011 at the Dorset Historical Society, J.K.Adams and H.N.Williams stores.

In addition to those mentioned above, we would like to thank Rising Sun Maintenance, Inc. for keeping the museum grounds beautiful, Dorset and Manchester Chambers of Commerce, Mettowee Mill Nursery, George Bouret Photography, Jenner Custom Framing and the Manchester Music Festival for their support. Last but not least, kudos to our DHS volunteers, the board and spouses for countless hours of preparation to make Dorset's 250th a huge success!

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Gail Burlington

Alexander Marshall

Robert Brock

Lyman Orton

Peter and Missy Crisp

Chad Smith

Lee and Rosalie Fox

Knox and Cherie Thompson

Marguerite Freeman

David and Pamela Tuttle



Two members of the cleanup crew after the Ice Cream Social

LACUNAE

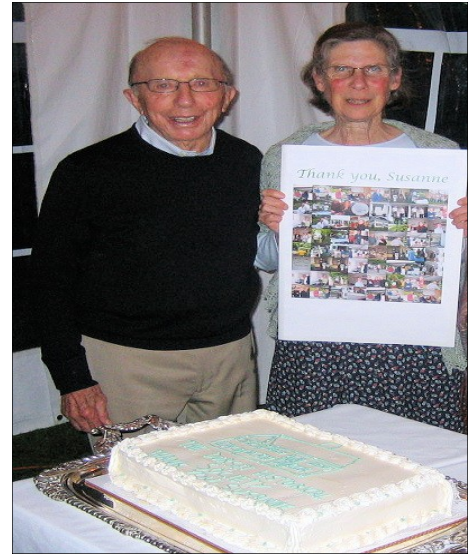
This is a list of items we do not have in the collections, but wish we did. We have a bound set of Vermont Life magazines from Summer 1946 issue through 1982. We also have many issues which make up a second unbound set. Ultimately, we would like to have two complete sets.

If you happen to have any of these issues, and are willing to part with them, we will give them a good home here at the Dorset Historical Society!

For the bound set: everything from 1983 to the present.

For the duplicate set:

All issues from 1946 – 1952; 1953: Spring; 1954: Spring, Fall, Winter; 1955 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 1956 : Spring, Summer, Fall; 1957 : Summer, Fall, Winter; 1958 : Spring, Summer, Fall; 1962 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 1963 : Spring, Summer; 1967 : Spring, Fall; 1969 : Summer; 1974 : Fall; 1976 : Fall; 1977 : Winter; 1978 : Spring, Summer; 1979 : Spring, Summer, Fall; 1980 : Summer; 1983 : Fall; 1984 : Summer, Fall, Winter; 1985 : Spring, Summer; 1986 : Spring; 1987 : Spring, Summer; 1988 : Summer, Winter; 1989 : Summer, Fall, Winter; 1990 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 1991 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 1994 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 1995 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 1996 : Spring, Fall; 1997 : Winter; 2008 : Spring ; 2009 : Winter; 2010 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter; 2011 : Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter.



President Dick Hittle and retiring curator, Susanne Rappaport, at the party honoring her service and her retirement from DHS in June.

The DHS exhibit for Vermont History Expo in June, 2012 will be about the Civil War as it effected Dorset and its residents. If you have photos, letters and memorabilia you can lend to this exhibit, please call Jon Mathewson. Letters and photos can be scanned and returned to the lender.

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