



# Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

*Fall/Winter 2012*

*A Seasonal Newsletter*

## *A Message From our President*

Dear Members and Friends of the Dorset Historical Society:

This year our Annual Meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 at 7 PM in our Bley House Museum. Members and friends are invited to attend, and we surely welcome all to come and meet our board and other Society members. This year four board members have terms expiring and one director is taking a leave of absence. These board members will be sorely missed as major contributors to the success of the Society. They are Jean Kingston, Kaye Manly, Susanne Washburn, Ruth Stewart and Kathie Wall Evans.

With these openings, I am particularly pleased to propose the following persons as candidates for election at the forthcoming Annual Meeting. They are John Cave, Malcolm Cooper, Al Eckhardt, Judy Harwood and Barbara Melhado. In addition to enthusiasm, each brings experience and knowledge welcomed by the board.

**I would also like to express the Historical Society's sincere appreciation for** the assistance local businesses have rendered to the Society. Among them are Dave Lawrence and Lisa Caler of Rising Sun Maintenance, arborist Joe Blair, builder Ricky Wilkins, and individuals such as John and Cathy Rano, and Jim and Jean Kingston.

The Society acknowledges with great appreciation the many gifts and loans of artifacts, photos, letters and other memorabilia given by residents and their families throughout the year. We also acknowledge with gratitude the several monetary memorial gifts which have been bestowed on the Society in the past year.

Next year the Society plans to create a separate Advisory Council which will meet periodically to supplement the board in its various endeavors. All in all, the directors and I are planning for another year fulfilling the Dorset Historical

**Society's mission of fostering** historical research and educational activities with a variety of programs and exhibits.

*Richard Hittle*

President



Pottery on display at the Ice Cream Social

### OFFICERS

Richard H. Hittle, President  
Jean Kingston, Vice-President  
Art Gilbert, Treasurer  
Ruth Stewart, Secretary

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Carol Cone  
Kathie Wall Evans  
Suzanne Hittle  
George Long  
Kaye Manly  
John McInerney  
Heidi Stokes  
Terry Tyler  
Susanne Washburn

### DIRECTORS EMERITI

Hank Westphalen

### MUSEUM CURATOR

Jon Mathewson

### OFFICE MANAGER

Betsy Olson

### Museum Hours

Wed-Fri 10 AM to 4PM  
Saturday 10-2 PM  
& by appointment

802-867-0331

802-867-0412 FAX

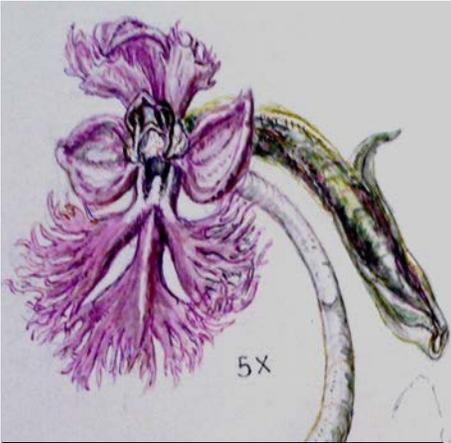
info@dorsetvthistory.org

www.dorsetvthistory.org

## The Curator's Notebook :

### ARTIFACT OWNERSHIP IS NOT ALWAYS CLEAR

When artifacts are donated to a museum, the donor signs a “Deed of Gift,” a legal document which basically says the donor donates the listed items to the museum. That way, if fifty years from now someone claims an artifact was stolen from them twenty years ago, the museum can show proof the item was donated fifty years ago. This may seem like an oddball example, but these sorts of things do happen often in the museum world.



Small Purple Fringed Orchid

A Deed of Gift shows clear ownership transfer, but sometimes museum collections contain items not owned by the museum. The most obvious example of this is the short term loan, where an institution or individual lends artifacts for a specific exhibit. Even with our superb collections, the Dorset Historical Society has borrowed 30 items in the last year alone. The evil twin of the short-term loan is the long-term loan, where an institution is expected to care for someone else's artifacts for an indefinite, perhaps infinite period of time. These are stored away from the regular collections, and cause headaches. In a perfect world, long-term loans would not exist. However, there are some rare times when they are necessary.

Then there are the artifacts cared for by local institutions, which are actually owned by the United States government. Twenty such items are now stored, and will be exhibited, at the Dorset Historical Society.

Many government programs were introduced during the 1930s to alleviate the economic suffering caused by the Great Depression. One of these social welfare programs was the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, which was active from 1935-1942, and employed artists and provided art to remote places. The most visible of these were the murals which began to grace post offices, town halls and schools throughout the nation. One such mural, Martha Levy's depiction of quarry workers, hung in the Granville (NY) High School for decades, until it was removed and installed in the Slate Valley Museum. Smaller works were exhibited, filed away, passed from institution to institution, and mostly forgotten.

Dorset artists John Lillie and Carl Ramsey benefitted from the Federal Arts Project. Ramsey was commissioned to paint a series of American orchids, which were exhibited in 1937 at the University of Vermont's Fleming Museum. As best as can be determined, the Fleming passed them on to UVM's Pringle Herbarium. The Pringle kept a few of them, and passed the rest on to the Rutland Free Library. In 1977, the library, in turn, passed them to the Rutland Historical Society. In September, 2012, the Rutland Historical Society passed them on to the Dorset Historical Society, where they will be exhibited in 2013.

No Deeds of Gift were signed along the way: the federal government, which originally commissioned the pieces, has never relinquished ownership. The feds paid no attention to them for half a century. Some were destroyed by the ravages of time, and many were sold to private collectors. In the mid-1990s, the United States General Services Administration (GSA) began cataloguing the surviving pieces. To date, the GSA has catalogued more than 20,000 such pieces around the country.

Of course, the folks at the GSA do not have the resources to care for all of these artifacts, and do not want them back. Besides, they were created to be in far flung places. The Dorset Historical Society may not own these orchid watercolors outright, but they have finally returned to Dorset, where they will stay and be appreciated for decades to come.

*Jon Mathewson*  
Curator



Large Whorled Pogonia

## 1890 Crazy Quilt Coming to DHS

Barbara Ann Taylor Valentin of Atlantic Highlands, N.J. was born in Rutland, Vt. and her mother and grandfather were born in a 1790s house on Route 30 on the Dorset-East Rupert line. Mrs. Valentin has decided to gift to DHS the crazy quilt—replete with images of local flora—that her great-grandmother Julia Scott Towslee (1872-1949) made before her marriage. Mrs. Valentin plans to visit Dorset next spring to deliver her gift to the Bley House Museum. In the image of the crazy quilt shown here it is clear how the name originated. Each piece is a different shape and color from its neighbor. In a future newsletter: more details of Julia, her crazy quilt, and her life in the Dorset house long owned by her family.



1890 Crazy Quilt Coming to DHS

## Summer Activities



Dishing out the ice cream at the Social (above); Curator Jon Mathewson at the Incline Railway (L); Austin Chinn does Revolutionary War reenactment at Thursday luncheon lecture (L).

## SAVE THE DATE

**Thursday, November 15, 12 noon "Vermont's Civil War Regiments" with Gary Roosma.** Brown bag lunch — dessert provided. We will not hold a "Third Thursday at Noon" program in December. Watch for 2013 programs as of January 17.

**Saturday, December 8th 11 am-1pm Holiday Open House "Christmas Trees 1840-2012"**



## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Andrew and Courtney Cherna  
Robert and Carol Ferraro  
Dr. and Mrs. G. Brock Magruder  
Scott and Valerie Nichols

## The Vermont Blanket Joins DHS Collection

Anne August, of Shelburne, VT, formerly of Dorset, has donated a blanket made by Charles Gilbert's Vermont Blanket Company. Charles Gilbert was born in Dorset in 1920, the son of Rufus & Ethel (Kerr) Gilbert.



DHS President Hittle receives Gilbert blanket donation from Anne August

He graduated from Burr & Burton Seminary and Middlebury College. He received his Masters from Washington University, and embarked on a career teaching English in St. Louis schools, with a stint in the US Army Air Force in World War Two.

He returned to Dorset in the 1970s, where he practiced rolfing (with clients as far afield as Montreal!), weaving, and was active with the Dorset Theatre.

His business, "The Vermont Blanket Company," sold blankets which he designed and wove. He also had others weave his blankets. According to a label which came with this blanket, the yarn came from Christopher Farms, the design was by Charles Gilbert, and the blanket was woven by Rob Joynt of Middletown Springs.

This blanket joins two other Gilbert blankets, both of red and black Tattersall design, as well as Charles' own loom, already in the DHS collections. Gilbert passed away in Dorset in 1991.

## Can You Help Us?

This year's Holiday Exhibit will feature Christmas Trees through the Ages, specifically from the 1840s to the present. If you have any vintage ornaments you can do without this December and can lend to this effort, or if you would like to assist in setting up the exhibit, please let us know: [info@dorsetvthistory.org](mailto:info@dorsetvthistory.org) or 867-0331. The exhibit opens December 8th.

### MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM

**Yes, I want to join the Dorset Historical Society.**

Please enroll me at the level indicated

Enclosed is my check, payable to **Dorset Historical Society**

**Membership runs from January 1 to December 31**

**Membership Levels (please check one):**

Regular - \$35                       Supporter - \$50

Sustaining - \$100                 Patron - \$250

Benefactor \$500                 Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:** Dorset Historical Society, PO Box 52, Dorset, Vermont 05251

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_