



Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

Winter/Spring 2013

A Seasonal Newsletter

THE HOLIDAY EXHIBIT AT BLEY HOUSE

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Jon Mathewson

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Betsy Olson

Museum Hours

Wed-Sat 10 AM to 2PM
& by appointment

802-867-0331

802-867-0412 FAX

info@dorsetvthistory.org

www.dorsetvthistory.org

During this past holiday season the Dorset Historical Society paid tribute to the history of the Christmas Tree. People have decorated their homes with evergreens at the winter solstice since ancient times, but the habit of decorating Christmas trees first became popular in the late eighteenth century in Germany in the area around Strasbourg, and spread from there.



1850 Tree -
Jon Mathewson

When Prince Albert and Queen Victoria placed a Christmas tree in their home in 1848, the fad quickly caught on.

The Holiday Exhibit at Bley House Museum featured four Christmas trees, each representing a different era in the development of the trees that celebrate the season.

In the 1850s Christmas trees were generally table-top models, often the tops cut from pine trees and brought indoors. They were decorated with fruits, cookies and presents. One early description mentioned chess pieces hung from branches. Gifts for adults were often books, principally anthologies.

Christmas became a public holiday in the 20th century, and the first Christmas tree at the White House was lit on the front lawn by President Calvin Coolidge. Even during the Great Depression magazines advertised ornaments, lights, tinsel and snow for decoration. In the 1930s people began purchasing Christmas trees from commercial tree farms instead of finding them in forests. Homemade decorations were

replaced by glass ornaments imported from Germany. In the United States, the 5 & 10¢ chain F.W. Woolworth Co. marketed the majority of ornaments manufactured in this country at that time.

Thomas Edison was the first to put lights on a Christmas tree. In 1903, the General Electric Company marketed the first individual working electric Christmas lights. In the 1930s bubble lights appeared and became popular after World War II.

The Shiny Brite Company was created in America by Max Eckhardt, who had imported glass ornaments from Germany since 1907. Fearing his imports would be cut off by war, in 1937 he joined with F. W. Woolworth Co. to persuade the Corning Glass Company to modify their glass ribbon machines to manufacture the first glass ornaments in the United States. The following year, Corning was producing 300,000 ornaments a day, shipping the clear glass balls to Eckhardt's plant in New York to be silvered, lacquered and decorated by hand.

The trees on display at Bley House Museum were decorated with family heirloom ornaments by Suzanne and Richard Hittle, Heidi and Chip Stokes, and Linda French. Curator Jon Mathewson made the homemade ornaments on the 1860s tree.



1940's Tree
Heidi and Chip Stokes



1910 Tree
Linda French



1960s Tree
Suzanne and Dick Hittle

The Curator's Notebook :

BLEY HOUSE BASEMENT ADVENTURES

The vast majority of museum collections is not exhibited at any point in time, and is kept in storage. One reason to change and update exhibits is to bring things out of storage to share with the museum audience. Museum storage, however, is not static: a great amount of work always happens backstage, and this winter, radical changes have been taking place in the basement of the Bley House Museum.

The basement is relatively new, installed as part of the 2005-2006 renovations. Made of poured concrete, with a separate room for archives, the basement has been a dry, climate-controlled storage environment. **As more items have come into the collections, however, we've been bursting at the seams. In some cases, office supplies have been stored on the same shelf as artifacts.** So, efforts have begun to improve our storage conditions.

First, the furnace room was turned into two rooms: one for the furnace, one for museum supplies. Mike Wilkins, Tyler Electric and Terry Tyler did that necessary work. Then, a ceiling was installed by Robert Hopkins. Terry covered a concrete wall, which now holds part of our tool collection. Adjustable shelves have been installed, and the concrete floor painted, in order to kill the concrete dust.

Through all of this, artifacts have been moved from place to place. Now they need to be put back. Instead of just putting them back where they were, however, I will be creating a new storage sequence. Museums catalogue their artifacts by a system known as "Chenhall's Nomenclature," which divides everything in the known universe into eleven categories. It is a handy, mostly efficient way of grouping like things. For instance, a piece by Arthur Jones would be categorized as Communication Artifact: Art: Painting. A tool made for putting coal into a furnace would be Building Furnishings: Temperature Control Device: Shovel, Coal. **In other words, it's the jargon museum people use to categorize collections. In short, the collections at DHS will now be stored, more or less, putting like items with like items.**

Also, during this project, every artifact that has not been photographed will be photographed, by Art Gilbert and myself. At last count, there were about 650 items yet to be photographed.

This is important work, in that it will make the task of finding artifacts, and knowing where to store new acquisitions, much easier. The collections database will record where each artifact is (and it will be easier to return items to where they belong), and provide a photograph of each artifact, so people retrieving the artifacts from storage will know exactly what they are looking for. In turn, this will make it possible to mount and change exhibits more quickly in order to share the treasures of the Dorset Historical Society with the museum audience more often.

Jon Mathewson
Curator

SAVE THESE DATES

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

James H. Benson
Judith Harwood

Gerry and Nancy Martin
Brent and Catherine Beckett
Barbara Valentin

If you too would like to become a member of the Dorset Historical Society, we have provided an envelope for you in this mailing.

Mark your calendars for forthcoming Third Thursday Lunch Lectures held at 12 noon at Bley House. Bring your own sandwich and listen to lectures about Dorset history. Beverages and dessert will be served.

Thursday, February 21: Judy Harwood will speak about her grandfather, Doc Harwood, Dorset's RFD postmaster.

Thursday, March 21: Bonnie Burke, owner of Wilson House in East Dorset, will give the history of Wilson House.

Thursday, April 18: Kevin O'Toole will discuss the history of The Pinnacle, Dorset's public park, and its creator, Miss Cecilia deNottbeck.

Saturday, July 6, at the Annual Ice Cream Social (1 to 4 pm) enjoy free Wilcox ice cream on the Bley House lawn and tour the museum. Artisan cheese makers from southern Vermont will display and sell their cheeses under the tent.

NEW ACCESSIONS

Several significant artifacts have recently come into our collection.

In November, Holly Whitehead donated several items related to the Barrows family of Dorset. DHS later purchased some items from the family estate sale. The new artifacts include a large spinning wheel made by Experience Barrows (1777-1861) in Dorset Hollow in 1804, along with a bedspread and piece of needlework made from locally sourced materials. The flax was most likely spun on the wheel, which shows signs of continued use and repair.

Also included in this new collection are Philetus (1809-1881) and Experience W. Barrows (1846-1913) family cash books from the 1860s and 1870s, wedding invitations from 1913 and 1930, Barrows family photographs, a 1938 painting of the Pea Street Bridge (perhaps by David Humphreys), an **Aunt Maria's** cookie tin, and assorted paper ephemera related to the Barrows family and the Barrows House. The spinning wheel and needlework are currently on display.

Also of significance, we recently have received Field family letters from 1842-1957 from Paul R. Jones, genealogical research materials for many Dorset families from Nancy Gilbert, and deeds related to the Gifford, Bowen and McWain families of East Dorset from Harvey Brophy.

Visit Our Gift Shop

The space may be small, but the choices are inviting!

Dorset, In the Shadow of Marble Mountain, by

Tyler Resch, hardcover and paperback

Quabbin to Dorset, by Terry Tyler

Dorset Walking and Driving Tour, by A. W. Gilbert, Jr.

Dorset's Marble Mountain

Three Easy Walks to Dorset Historic Quarries. By A.W. Gilbert, Jr.

Some Trails in Dorset, by **A.W. Gilbert, Jr.**

H.N. Williams Store 1840-2007, by Terry Tyler

Harmon Mint Coins

Note Cards: Jessica Bond Stencils, Fern Logo cards, Historic Dorset Photo Scenes **and much more...**



Curator Jon Mathewson and volunteer Dave Parsons bring the Experience Barrows 1804 spinning wheel, donated by Holly Whitehead, up Church Street to its new home at the Dorset Historical Society

How Do We Keep Track of the Collection?

Quite a bit happens behind the scenes with cataloguing and storing the collections. All recent donations have been catalogued, and work continues on the “found-in-collection” photographs and archival materials. Ruth Stewart continues to plug away at the archives, David Parsons continues his work on the postcard collection, while Cynthia Elliot and Carol Cone continue to enter information from handwritten worksheets into the Past Perfect software program. Past Perfect makes finding artifacts and researching Dorset history much more convenient and efficient.

To date, 4,061 objects, photographs, archival materials and books have been catalogued.

Meanwhile, Art Gilbert has been photographing artifacts. About half the objects in the museum have been photographed, and Art is finding and photographing the other half. This comes at a time when it is not so easy to locate artifacts: the great construction work in the basement has meant that many artifacts have been moved. The artifacts are now being reorganized and re-housed by Curator Jon Mathewson, who is relocating items according to standard cataloguing order. Believe it or not, this is an adventure for all involved!

Dorset Historical Society Plans 50th Anniversary Celebration

In 1963 two West Road residents, Gene Bond and Alfred Gilbert, united by a love of Dorset and its history, founded the Dorset Historical Society and supported it actively for a number of years until it became firmly established. For the first thirty years, meetings were held in the Church Vestry. As historical artifacts were donated to the Society, it was a challenge to find places to store and exhibit the collection. Some was stored in the public library, some in the small building adjacent to the grocery store, and eventually the Society moved to the unused Fire Department building next to the Post Office.

An early member of DHS was the artist, Elsa Bley, one of the founding group of the Southern Vermont Artists, who also served as a director of DHS. While actively pursuing her own art work, she also gave art lessons to children and other member of the community. At the end of her life in 1990, she gave her house to the Historical Society, which bears her name.

The new housing for the Society provided it with vastly greater display space, meeting space, storage space, a conference room, and office space. The renovation of the house' which was in considerable disrepair, was achieved through fund-raising, extraordinary volunteer dedication, and collective public spirit of loyal businessmen, contractors, and individuals. In August 1991, DHS moved into its new home.

By 2005, however, it was clear that a constantly wet basement and dampness were endangering the collection, and steps must be taken to improve the environment. The entire collection had to be moved temporarily offsite while the 170-year-old house was raised, a new cellar hole dug 35 feet further down the hill, a new concrete foundation poured, and the house relocated on its new foundation. Today it is warm, dry, temperature- and humidity-controlled, and welcomes visitors from many locations.

(With thanks to A. W. Gilbert, Jr.'s research for the 30th Anniversary in 1993)

The ceramics shown here are hand painted and custom designed for the Dorset Historical Society's 50th anniversary by Roseanne Henning of Rah Earth Pottery in Arlington. Rosanne is a former student of the Elsa Bley. They will be for sale in our gift shop. Flat ornament : \$10 Mug: \$20 Round globe ornament \$20



DHS 50th Anniversary hand-painted tree ornament \$10



DHS 50th Anniversary hand-painted mug \$20

Quarry Hikes

This summer's marble quarry hikes will feature walks to the Freedley and Folsom sites north-west and west of East Dorset. The Folsom quarry hike this year will include an optional continuing hike to the Cave quarry and Bat Cave on Mt. Aeolus (Green Peak). Both outings will be scheduled for Saturday morning, with dates (in July) to be announced later.

Mapping Dorset

As this newsletter goes to press, the curator is busily immersing himself in the upcoming "Mapping Dorset" exhibit, which will be on view in the Bley House Museum's Main Gallery for much of 2013.

Included in the exhibit will be maps showing the early development of Vermont, with maps by Vermont cartographers James Whitelaw and Lewis Robinson, and the development of Dorset's borders, with maps showing how Tabor's Leg (the small indentation of Mt Tabor 's border into northeast Dorset) was created, how surveyors did their work (remember: a rod is 16.5 feet!), the progression of USGS and State Highway maps, as well as maps that focus on one or two specific features, like types of apples in a Dorset Orchard, location of quarries and places of interest to tourists, and so much more.

The exhibit will also let you know what the towns of Pocock and Lebenon have to do with Dorset history. (Note, "Lebenon" was then spelled with two "e's.").