



Sheffield Historical Society

Fall 2005 Newsletter

New Exhibition: SHEFFIELD SEATING FURNITURE

The examples in this exhibit represent only a few of the types of seating that were used in Sheffield from its settlement in the 1720s down to the end of the 19th century. Among the earliest and most primitive seating was the slab bench – which was an enlarged domestic version of the dairyman's three-legged milking stool, such as the diminutive stool from the Barnum family, on display. Chairs were a symbol of dignity and authority – not an item in general use – in early Sheffield. However, as wealth and sophistication advanced, the once ubiquitous bench was replaced by more fashionable seating styles, such as Sheraton and Windsor chairs, particularly in the 19th century.

This exhibit includes several pieces made in Sheffield or nearby South County. Other examples, while not made here, were used in Sheffield by successive generations of local families (Chapin, Willcox/Cande, Curtiss) – in some cases remaining



in the family for as long as 200 years.

For the most part, local chair makers were farmers who turned to nonagricultural endeavors in the off-season, when they built seating furniture for their families or for trade or sale. The Baldwin Company chairs in the exhibit, however, are true Berkshire County production pieces, made in large numbers in a factory setting.

Thus this small exhibit presents an authentic slice of Sheffield's furniture history—items made and/or used right here in Sheffield.

—James R. Miller

Riddle: when is a chair not a chair? Clue: did you note any similarities between the image on your left and the image on your right? Look again! (Answer: when it's a cradle.) It's the same piece of furniture in two different positions.

Hours: The exhibition opens on Saturday, August 27, and runs through Sunday, October 30. Regular exhibition hours are Saturdays 10 to 2, and Sundays 11 to 3.

Special Sheffield in Celebration Day activities, Saturday, September 10, include extended Stone Store hours (3 to 7 p.m.) and:

Exhibition curator James Miller will give short talks on the elements that went in to designing and creating *SHEFFIELD SEATING FURNITURE*. The talks will be offered at 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.



Throughout the day's activities (3 to 7 p.m.), craftsman Boyd Hutchison will demonstrate techniques used in chair construction, in particular techniques used in the creation of Windsor chairs, which were popular from the late 18th century into the early 19th century.

Calendar of Events

Monthly Meeting

THE STORY OF THE ASHLEY FALLS MILL

Friday, September 9

**NOTE CHANGE OF TIME AND
LOCATION**

This is a special meeting comprised of both a tour and a presentation. Feel free to come for both segments or for just one segment. **Meet at 7 p.m. to tour the Ashley Falls Mill and view the waterpower site and remaining mechanicals.** There will be displays of related memorabilia and photos. The tour includes the first floor and basement. (Call for directions to the Mill.)

Meet at 8 p.m. at the nearby Trinity Methodist Church Parish Hall for a panel discussion of the Mill and its operations.

Speakers on the panel include Fred Hall, a 98-year-old local historian, relating stories from his experiences in the mill; Jim Miller, author of *Early Life in Sheffield, Berkshire County* speaking to the historical significance of this site as the industrial center of the first settlement in the county; Amy Fish, retelling the stories from her mother, who was the last to run the mill as a business; and Howard Chezar, the current owner, as he talks of what the future brings. The panel facilitator will be Neal Chamberlain.

WORK BEE

Saturday, September 17, 10 a.m.
to approximately noon.

(Rain date--Saturday, September 24)

Meet at the Dan Raymond House.

There will be a number of projects to do, and all ages and skill levels are welcome. Painting will figure heavily among the tasks, but there will be many other projects to work on. Call the office to let us know you will be attending.

ARCHITECTURAL WALK- ING TOUR, Saturday, October 1, 10:00 a.m.

This is a part of the Heritage Walks Weekend.

The Sheffield Historical Society is offering a tour of the center of Sheffield, focusing on its 18th and 19th century homes and businesses. Hear the stories of the men, women, and children who resided in these structures. Learn about the special features that make each building a key to understanding the past. When the tour was offered earlier this summer, it was fully subscribed. If you missed it then, plan to join us now. Call (413) 229-2694 to reserve a place. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. The walk begins at the Society's Dan Raymond House headquarters, 159 Main Street (Route 7), Sheffield. Approximately 1 hour, ½ mile.

Monthly Meeting SAMUEL HOPKINS, MAN FROM YALE

**Friday, October 14, 7:30 p.m. at
the Bushnell-Sage Memorial Li-
brary**

NOTE CHANGE OF LOCATION

The Reverend Samuel Hopkins was the first settled pastor of the Sheffield North congregation, later called the First Congrega-

tional Church of Great Barrington. He was a disciple of Jonathan Edwards, one of the leading preachers of the 18th-century's Great Awakening. Hopkins was also one of the country's early abolitionists. The presentation of these historical moments and many other personal aspects of the life and times of Samuel Hopkins will be given by Reverend Charles Van Ausdall, pastor of the First Congregational Church in Great Barrington since 1986.

ANNUAL CEMETERY STROLL

**Saturday, October 22,
4 to 6 p.m.**

**Hewins Cemetery (from Route
7 in Sheffield, take Maple Ave-
nue, turn right onto Hewins
Street and drive 2.5 miles)**



This year's journey takes us to a smaller cemetery, away from the bustle of the center of town. Here we will encounter personal stories often left untold. There will be members of the Hewins family present, along with many others such as Lieutenant Theophilus Spaulding and Jabez Keep. Get to know Sheffield's ancestors at this historically entertaining event. Please dress for the weather and wear comfortable shoes; the terrain is uneven. Refreshments will be provided. Free to members, \$4 non-members.



Look what's right around the corner—plan to be a part of one of our most successful activities!

The 7th Annual Festival of Trees

will be held again in the Stone Store on the Green in Sheffield for the four weekends of November. Saturday hours are 10-3; Sunday hours 11-2.

Festive miniature trees, holiday decorations, and sweets will be for sale throughout the month. These are the perfect gift for someone in a small apartment. Festival of Trees committee members encourage people to think of shut-ins, both family members and friends, who have little room for holiday decorations, and spark their holidays with the gift of a unique miniature tree.

New designers are eager to delight prospective buyers with beautifully crafted miniature trees. They will try to match the wit and beauty of the work of past contributors.

Raffles will be held for several items, including another handsome holiday quilt hanging created by Society member Doreen Atwood.

As always, **fresh green wreaths** will be decorated to order for delivery at the beginning of December. Origami light strings and ornaments, so popular last year, made by Society members will be available while they last. Gift packages of holiday sweets may be ordered or purchased throughout the festival.

In response to requests, **this year's hand-painted ornament of a Sheffield landmark, Center School**, and a limited number of the series from past years will be for sale. These beautiful glass balls, hand-painted in Austria, have become highly prized by local collectors. Ensure that you get yours by mailing full payment of \$21, tax included, to the Sheffield Historical Society. Ornaments may be picked up during the Festival of Trees open hours.

The Stone Store gift shop has expanded its offerings this year and will repeat its highly successful upstairs **holiday tag sale**.

Come get in the mood for the holidays—and shop for decorations and gifts and an early taste of holiday treats. For more information, call the Society at 413-229-2694 or Marcia Brolli at 229-2624.

Monthly Meeting A CONCERT BY "THE CARD SHARKS"

**Friday, November 11, 7:30 p.m.
at Dewey Memorial Hall
NOTE LOCATION**

Join us for an evening of American music to celebrate Veteran's Day, with the barbershop quartet known as The Card Sharks. This group performs in four-part harmony, a style that has made them New England's favorite sons. Composed of area residents, the group has been winning awards for some time. They took second place in the Northeast Region four-part barbershop competition. Come and sing along.

Don't Forget to contact us at 229-2694 regarding your contributions to the December heirloom exhibition. We truly need your pieces to make this a worthwhile exhibition.

We are looking for any item that has been handed down from generation to generation, and which is very special to you. December is a month where sharing family memories is a major part of the reason for celebrating. So join our historical family by lending us an item or two and telling us the tale behind the object. We welcome all types of items and stories.

The Society is one of the sponsors for:
**UPPER HOUSATONIC VALLEY
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE
TRAIL**, *A project of the Upper
Housatonic Valley Heritage Area*

The Upper Housatonic Valley African American Trail will hold a series of community meetings to introduce and receive comment on its newly published guide to the *African American Heritage in the Upper Housatonic Valley*. The guide brings together the efforts over many years by local scholars, historians, educators and community leaders to preserve the region's rich African American heritage.

On Monday Sept 12, 7:00 p.m., at the Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, 9 Elm Court, Great Barrington, project members will discuss the making of the guide and the story of African Americans in South Berkshire County. The panel will include Rev. Esther Dozier, David Levinson, Bernard Drew, Elaine Gunn, Wray Gunn and Rachel Fletcher.

For information about the African American Heritage Guide, contact Rachel Fletcher, 413-528-3391, afam-trail@hotmail.com, or visit the website at www.uhvafamtrail.org



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Tours of the 1774 Dan Raymond House are available
Thursday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Mark Dewey Research Center open Monday and
Friday afternoons, 1:30 to 4 p.m., and by
appointment.
Email: mdrc@sheffieldhistory.org

Old Stone Store hours are Saturday, 10 a.m. to
2 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m..

WE'RE ON THE WEB
SHEFFIELDHISTORY.ORG

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Fall Automobile Outing to Hill-Stead Wednesday, October 19, 9:30 a.m.

Meet at the Dan Raymond House

Travel back with us to 1901 and the creation of one of the country's finest examples of Colonial Revival domestic architecture, known as Hill-Stead. This 36-room house sits on 152 acres of fields and woodlands in Farmington, CT, near Hartford. The structure was designed as a retirement home for the parents of Theodate Pope Riddle, who was one of Connecticut's first licensed female architects.

The house is furnished with her father's collection of French Impressionist paintings, particularly Monet and Degas, Japanese prints, and works by Durer and Whistler.

Theodate was a survivor of the submarine attack on the *Lusitania*. At the age of 49, she married the American diplomat John Riddle. Theodate Riddle died in 1949, leaving a will that stated nothing should be removed or added to the house; thus it stands exactly as it did when her family lived there (1901-1946).

Fee: \$15 members, \$17 non-members. Lunch (a separate cost) will follow the tour at a place TBA. Reservations requested.

September 10—Special Chair Exhibit
programming

September 17—Work Bee

October 22—Cemetery Stroll