

SHEFFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER/SPRING NEWSLETTER, 1999

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*January 8: Annual **What's It** night with Milton Barnum and Chris Coenen. Bring in old tools, gadgets and gizmos and try to stump the "experts". Dewey Hall, 7:30 p.m.*

*February 10: **Itinerant Painters** - Deborah Taite, retired art teacher and presently a docent at the New Britain Historical Society will present a slide presentation on itinerant painters and their work. Dewey Hall, 7:30 p.m.*

*February 22: **Ice Cutting Demonstration** - Phil Whitney and Dennis Picard will bring their expertise to Ashley Falls where the eighth grade class from Mt. Everett will experience the tools and tasks associated with cutting ice for the ice house. Join us for this fun event. Call the 229-2694 in late January for details. Ashley Falls Quarry 9:00 a.m. to noon.*

*March 12: **Women and Their Quilts** - March is Women's History month, and the second Saturday is National Quilt Day. Connie Logan, well known quilter and teacher will present a lecture/slide demonstration on the influence of women and their quilts in the social, economic, and political development of their times. Dewey Hall, 7:30 p.m.*

*April 7: **History of Irish People in America Through Their Music** - William Hare of Storrs, CT will perform music from the 17th and 18th centuries, reflective of the experience of the Irish coming to the New World. Dewey Hall, 7:30 p.m.*

*May 14: **Genealogy with Chris Bailey** - Author, lecturer, genealogist, horologist, Bailey's talk will be "Understanding the Mormon Church's Genealogical Collections and Family History Library". Dewey Hall, 7:30 p.m.*

*June 11: **Annual Meeting** - Program to be announced. Dewey Hall, 6:30 p.m.*

According to manuscripts at the Mark Dewey Research Center, our town got electric street lights and lighting for town buildings in 1915. The first electric bill of \$618.10 was paid in 1915. At the town meeting of 1914, article 23, "To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate any sum of money to pay for lighting Town buildings and streets" was positively voted. Selectmen were Fred M. Ford, E.W. Bartholomew and G.H. Blodgett.

RECENT PROGRAMS

The last four months have witnessed an unusual amount of activity. A very successful *Festival of Country Arts & Artisans* no sooner ended than the fall season commenced with an informative program on *Shays' Rebellion* by Dorothy Rowe of Pittsfield. The following weekend, Dennis Picard lead a group of stalwarts to the Shays Rebellion monument on the Egremont-Sheffield Road. Picard talked about the events surrounding the battle on that site and displayed clothing and equipment that would have been used by the citizens defending themselves against Shaysites.

The regular October program on *17th & 18th Century Felt and Hat Making* was followed by *The Spirits of Sheffield Will Walk Again* when fifty-two people visited the historic Barnard burial grounds to listen to some of the spirits of 18th and 19th century Sheffield residents. Caleb Barnum, a Revolutionary War Veteran, Charles Bartholomew who died in the Civil War, and Captain Stephen Dewey the genial host of one of Sheffield's 18th century taverns, were among the spirits present. Groups of participants were escorted around the lantern-lighted cemetery and later mingled over cider.

The *Annual Turkey Dinner*, chaired by Harry Conklin and ably tutored by Milton Barnum, was again a success, netting just shy of \$1,000 for our scholarship program.

The Reverend Dr. Rick Floyd presented a program, *The Legacy of Puritanism*, at the November meeting and December brought the *Yuletide Stroll*. Dorothy Marosy arranged for six homes on Main Street to be open to view holiday decorations. Nearly ninety people enjoyed the stroll and concluded their evening with dessert and holiday music at Dewey Hall. Participants came from Pittsfield, Lenox, Stockbridge, Great Barrington, Hillsdale, Copake, Canaan and Salisbury. Many expressed the hope that the event would be repeated next year.

Agriculture production in Sheffield, 1885. Butter 53,242 pounds; milk 568,036 gallons; eggs 27,648 dozen; cabbage 15,635 heads; apples 44,835 bushels; pumpkins 183,310 pounds; chord firewood (used) 2,771 (sold) 598 ½; 55 ice houses in use; 340 plows; 1,484 milk cows; tobacco 94,680 pounds. Tobacco? There were also 23 tobacco barns. Does anybody know of any photos or existing tobacco barns? The Mark Dewey Research Center would like to hear about either.

ACTIVITY ON THE SOCIETY'S GROUNDS

Dan Raymond House Museum: It was reported in the last newsletter that much of the house had been reorganized to reflect its 18th and 19th century heritage. This fall the house was open Thursday through Saturday for tours, and interpreters, trained earlier in the season, greeted visitors for the holidays. Dennis Picard supervised volunteers in making swags, milkweed pod stars and hydrangea accents to make the house festive for the Yuletide Stroll. A Della Robbia created by Dennis hangs over the front door. (A workshop on Della Robbia construction will be conducted by Dennis next December).

Carriage House: The whitewashing in display areas is completed and the tools and equipment tagged with identifying cards and electrically illuminated.

Parker Hall Law Office: The *Berkshire Bar Association* has awarded a \$500 grant for the restoration of the law office according to Paul M. Vrabel, President of the *Association*. The circa 1820 building was saved from demolition through the efforts of the Society in the mid

1970's and moved to its present location at that time. The structure was considered significant enough to be professionally photographed and blue printed in the 1930's under the Department of the Interior's Historic American Buildings Survey, one of only two structures in Sheffield to receive such attention. While the 175 year old structure is basically in sound condition, its wood shingle roof and some of the interior woodwork is in need of attention. The generous gift of the Bar Association will be used to fund some of this work and to electrify the building to make it more useful for educational programs.

GRAVE MATTERS

Carl Proper has moved a gravestone, rescued from destruction years ago by Milton Barnum, from the grounds to the Carriage House for preservation. Deciphering the carving with the use of a raking light, revealed the following inscription:

Here Lies Buried
The Body Of
Zebulon S[tevens]
Who Died Of
The Small Pox
June The 9th 177[6]
& In The [Year]
Of [His Age]

Through the efforts of Jim Miller at the Mark Dewey Research Center, a little more of Zebulon's story came to light. Zebulon "Stevens" or "Stephens" appears on the tax lists from the 1760's and 1770's and is noted as being in the "West Squadron". In 1776 "Wd. [widow] Rhoda Stevens" appears on the town tax lists. Likely she was Zebulon's wife. Miller also found that in the same year John Spoor and his wife, Christina, who lived in the same part of Sheffield, likewise, died of small pox. There is a curious story about John Spoor's burial. His brothers were returning John's body to town for burial when the Selectmen interceded and refused to permit the diseased corpse to enter the village. Hence, John Spoor was buried along the side of the road, in a place not far from Zebulon Stevens. What turmoil, fomented by pestilence and war, there must have been in Sheffield in that fateful year, 1776.

The presence of the gravestone in our collection will provide many opportunities to talk about life and death in Sheffield over the past two hundred years.

Dam construction brings suit. The flooding of farm land of Messrs. Andrus, Hughes and Griffith of Sheffield resulting from the construction in Falls Village of a dam on the Housatonic by Berkshire Power Company of Canaan is an example of history repeating itself. According to a newspaper article of 1906, "Away back in the early part of the last century a company of northern Connecticut capitalists built a big dam almost exactly on the spot now occupied by the dam of the Berkshire Company, intending to utilize the water power for promotion of large industries at Canaan. The result, so far as the Sheffield bottom lands was concerned, was the same as in the later instance. Farms were flooded, considerable damage was done and there issued bitter disputes between the dam promoters and the farmers. Here, however, the parallel between present conditions and those of the early days ceased.... [In the early 1800's] Sheffield took the law into its own hands. The people of the town, after endeavoring to protect what they believed to be their rights by protest and futile appeals to the law, finally decided upon the use of force. One night a big posse of Sheffield men started south, equipped with a heavy supply of gunpowder, fuses and determination. Before morning the dam was gone. Gunpowder did, in those days, the work that dynamite does now and in this case quite as effectively. There has never been a dam at that point since until the erection of the [recent] one...."