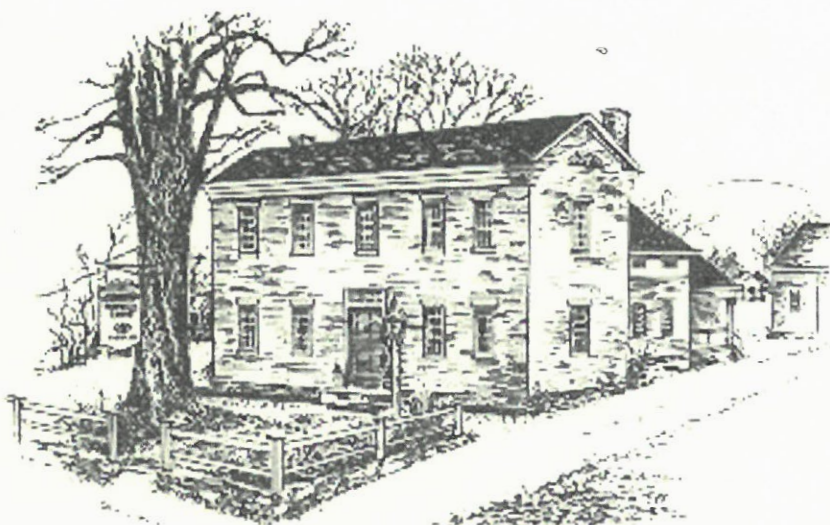


The Sheffield Historical Society

Spring 2009



Illness & Death in 19th Century Sheffield: Collection of Letters Provides a New Window into Old Times

The Mark Dewey Research Center, the library component of the Society, has recently acquired a group of early 19th century letters written from Sheffield to family members in Connecticut. The worth of this collection is the light it sheds on the town's day-to-day life about 190 years ago. The prevailing topics of concern among the correspondents were health and death, and religion and domestic duties as exemplified by the family of Ralph and Maria Fox Little, local merchants of more than average means. Their place of business was an imposing Greek Revival building, now gone, on the site of present-day Gretta's. The missives, extensively quoted below, retain their original spelling but with modified punctuation added for clarity.

Maria Fox Little was from East Haddam, Connecticut, a daughter of Aaron Fox and his wife Eunice Beebe. She had sisters Eunice, Almira and Teresa, and it was among the four of them that the largest number of letters were written with some to their brother Robert and one to a brother-in-law Brainard Palmer.

It is not to be judged which vividly described death in the letters is the most horrendous, that of Ruth Kellogg, age 95, the oldest resident, or that of Almira's new born baby.

Mrs. Kellogg was burned to death alone in her room—"supposed she fell in the fire though they found her some distance from it, her clothes burnt off, her gold beads melted on her neck."

In the baby's death, Almira writes to her mother, "the babe had fits from Friday till sometime on Tuesday. The family & neighbors had no expectation of its life from one moment to another. . . . During the day past it has had several fits. . . . I thought it had done breathing entirely & supposed twas torn from the arms of its fond friends & to kinder arms received but this idea could not prevent my grief." The following day the letter continues, "[T]he babe is much as twas yesterday has turns



Two post Civil War era portraits from the Society archives help bring the letters to life. At left, Dr. Silas Root Kellogg, is the physician referenced in the letters. At right, an 1860 portrait of Lucius and Lucretia Little. Lucius, also referenced in the letters, was the son of Ralph and Maria Fox Little. He and his wife maintained the family business, L. Little, a dry goods store which remained in the family until the building was destroyed in a 1905 fire. The couple's son, William H., occupied the Dan Raymond House with his wife, Clara P. Little as of 1884. They were the last long-term owners of the house before the Sheffield Historical Society established its headquarters on the premises.

of looking purple or almost black & I cannot discern any appearances of its breathing for several minutes. . . . [I]t has not tried to suck since yesterday morn but I try feeding it every time I think twill swallow. . . . During the night it has appeared if every breath & groan would be its last. Seeing it seems to melt the hardest heart. . . . All who see it think it would be a relief too have it breath[e] its last, agonies are so great." Then, the following day, "The conflict is now ended and the lovely babe is now sleeping the sleep of death & this is now a house of weeping and sorrow.

Article continued on page 2

Sheffield Historical Society

2008-9 ANNUAL APPEAL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Thank you all for your support! We have entered your names into a new data base. Please let us know if you would like your name entered in another way or if your name has been omitted.

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in memory of Santi J. Gullotta
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Brian & Lois Levinsohn

Continued from front page

It is a very pretty featured child & appears lovely in death."

The family also endured near-death trauma. Sister Eunice learned in a letter of January 1817, "My Babe has had ill turns all winter. [H]e had something gather in his head which discharged at his ear. [H]e didn't appear sick but crying as if in distress. [W]e thought he was cross sometimes-till the cause appeared. He has since had a bad humor in his head & neck but has now got about well of that. His physician calls it the rickets in the bowels. I am in hopes he is better. [H]e has days of looking very frail & seems to be in pain & nights that he sleeps but little. We have been much concerned for him & think him not out of danger now. . . ." And in the same letter, "All this time I want to be talking to you about sister Teresa health, her babe & yours & etc so much I know not how to begin my inquiries. I want to see T[eresa] very much but would give more if Doct. Delamatter could see her in the critical state which her health is now in. He is exceedingly skilled in intricate cases where every physician around has failed. He frequently gets a correct idea of diseases."

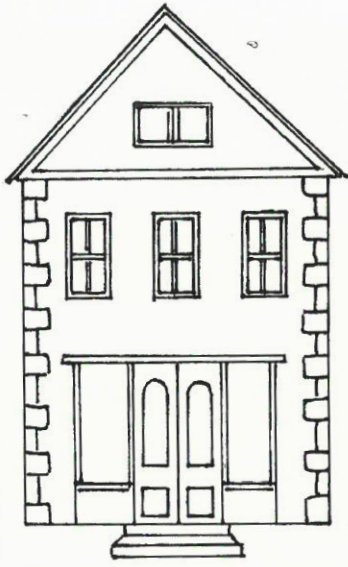
Accidents also were part of life in the Little family. Maria reports to her sisters, "[Son] Robert runs away. We have no fence to keep him in. It is very dangerous for such children in the street where there is so much travel. A few days since a traveller in a covered loaded wagon drove against him, throwed him down. The wheel passed several inches over his hip and bowels cornerways & backed off without breaking any bones. His pa fortunately saw the wagon from the store door. When I was near him ran & called to the driver but he didn't hear him nor see Robert 'till the instant his pa reached him. It was the most narrow escape I ever saw or heard of."

Silas R. Kellogg, a Sheffield physician, was closely connected with the family. He gave Maria's brother, Robert Fox, the following medical advice. "Should you continue at [medical] school, let me caution you against neglecting to take a proper degree of exercise. Without this, you'll have the dyspepsia, blue devils, vapors, & horrors all upon you." He continued on about the Little family's medical problems, "I have no less than three patients in their family now, tho' none of them much sick. Mrs. L has a pain in her side, Robt [Little] has a badly inflamed eye & the babe coughs & belches & wheezes & sneezes."

Epidemics added further concerns for Maria's family. "My family has for some time past been in a situation to require more than ordinary care & concern. . . . They are just now getting over the measles. Lucius first took it. Marietta, Robert & Frank took it of him. Next Ralph, Anna & Augusta & George the eldest had it hardest as is common & are not as soon over it. We called a physician twice. Have not been as well myself since in consequence of the fatigue. I expect have had much of the hardest head-ache & distress in my left side." And another epidemic was "...cholera in almost every city & many of the towns around us."

As with all Society archives, the letters are available for research or simply out of interest. While we have a number of letters in our collection, none are more important than these with respect to the lives of early 19th century residents.

The letters also provide a new window into interpreting how life was lived at the Sheffield Historical Society before its establishment. As noted in the photograph caption on front page, third generation Littles occupied the Dan



Upcoming Events & Exhibition Schedule at the Old Stone Store

Friday, February 13, 7:30 pm.

Edison Meets Victor or Nipper's Valentine.

Classical singer John-Arthur Miller will speak about the early history of music recording technologies. Bring along your Valentine to enjoy love songs, learn the difference between "hill-and-dale" and lateral cut, and, finally, meet "Nipper."

The program will be held in Dewey Memorial Hall.

Saturday, February 21, 9:00 am. **Board Retreat.**

The Sheffield Historical Society board and extended board will follow-up on the process of last year's strategic plan. Admission is by invitation only. *The retreat will be held at Landmark Volunteers.*

Friday, March 13, 7:30 pm. **Sheffield Planting Schemes.**

Local horticulturist, writer, and lecturer, Ron Kujawski, author of the popular "Gardener's Checklist" *Berkshire Record* column and the *Berkshire Eagle's* "Berkshire Garden Journal," will present a power point presentation on plants and flowers that will thrive in your Sheffield garden.

The program will be held in Dewey Memorial Hall.

Friday, April 10, 7:30 pm. **The Portraiture of Carrie Smith Lorraine.**

Joanna Jennings, the Society Administrator, will present a power point presentation focusing on the life, times, and work of Carrie Smith Lorraine, Sheffield's first woman photographer.

The program will be held in Dewey Memorial Hall.

Friday, May 8, 7:30 pm. **Confessions of a Revolutionary Loyalist Couple.**

Jonathan & Lisa Reynolds, Revolutionary reenactors extraordinaires, in a program TBA.

The program will take place in the Dan Raymond House.

Friday, June 12, 7:30 pm. **Annual Meeting & The Battle of Midway.**

Grieg Siedor will speak in commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the Battle of Midway at the Society's Annual Meeting. *The program will take place in Dewey Memorial Hall.*

Friday, June 26-Sunday, July 12. **Five Friends Art Exhibit.**

Walter Bogard, Hans Heuberger, Sean Ryder, Lois Ryder, and Lois Van Clef return for their fourth year to the Old Stone Store with new and recent artwork. The exhibit will correspond with the Sheffield Art League's Annual Juried Art Competition in Dewey Memorial Hall, where more of the friends' work will be featured.

The exhibit will be displayed in the Gallery at the Old Stone Store.

The Gallery will be open Fridays, 11-6 pm, Saturdays & Sundays, 11-4 pm.

The exhibit will have an opening reception, Saturday, June 27, from 1-3 pm.

This schedule is subject to change. Please visit us on the web at www.SheffieldHistory.org for the latest information.

February 2009

Dear Friends,

What an amazing year we have had! This organization has the most talented and hard-working staff and volunteers. We have much to be proud of. Since the last newsletter in June, we have been busy.

We celebrated the 275th anniversary of Sheffield's founding in a party on the grounds, held a public program every second Friday for ten months of the year, entertained at a reception for each of the Stone Store Gallery openings, joined the spirits at the Center Cemetery in October, celebrated the holidays in December at the Dan Raymond House, researched countless records in the Mark Dewey Research Center, and maintained the property, enjoying our new visibility thanks to the completion of the town hall parking lot.

We've held three fund-raisers: the End of the Summer Garden Party at the home of Hester Velmans and Peter Cherneff, the Three-Roast Feast in September, and the two-month long Festival for the Holidays. In addition, you have been generous in your membership levels.

The Stone Store Gallery rose to new heights. The season ended with Rob Robins' exhibit in a retrospective of an amazing career which brought together his family, his friends from Sheffield and Kimball farm, and examples of his work that even he hadn't seen for years. Joanna Jennings' exhibit, "Impressions of the Bidwell House Museum," started the season in April with great visual images in her photography. In May and June we were stunned by the "Red, White, & Blue," featuring in large part the collection of Stephen and Wendy Leigh. This combination of historical and whimsical and truly fine art following the theme gave great delight to attendees. From July-September, we saw Paul Banevicius's remarkable collection of comic strip art. Presented chronologically, it was a true history of the form.

One of the highlights of the winter has been the purchase of the Little letters (see the front page article by Jim Miller) which have added great depth to our collection and a new understanding of their residence, the Dan Raymond House.

In the near future, as a cost-saving measure, Joanna Jennings will be moving into the upstairs apartment of the Dan Raymond House. We welcome her to Sheffield as a neighbor. The Annual Appeal for 2009-2010 is almost ready to be mailed. It is important for us to have your membership and partnership in telling Sheffield's story.

See you in Sheffield,
Marcia Brolli

Feature article concludes

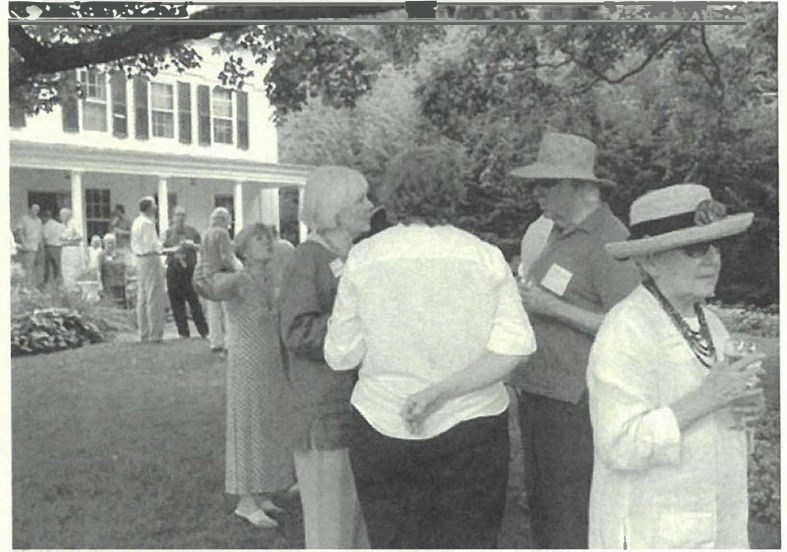
Raymond House in the late nineteenth century.

According to Gregory Farmer, who completed a detailed history of the Dan Raymond House for the Society in 1985, "The Littles seemed to have appreciated the historic value of the brick house and were careful to preserve its character." He notes that, "William H. Little...should receive some attention. By recognizing the historical importance of the old house, Little aligned himself with the growing antiquarian movement in New England. Much of what is known about New England towns and

many of the collections of local historical societies are a direct result of the early antiquarians." If Little's efforts didn't receive proper recognition before, Sheffield history can no longer overlook his presence in this old house both in the flesh and in spirit. The letters bind the Little lineage with that of the Sheffield Historical Society in a direct record which Little started and which the Society preserves, promotes, and transmits.

—James Miller, *Volunteer Archivist*

The Society Summer & Fall 2008 Program...



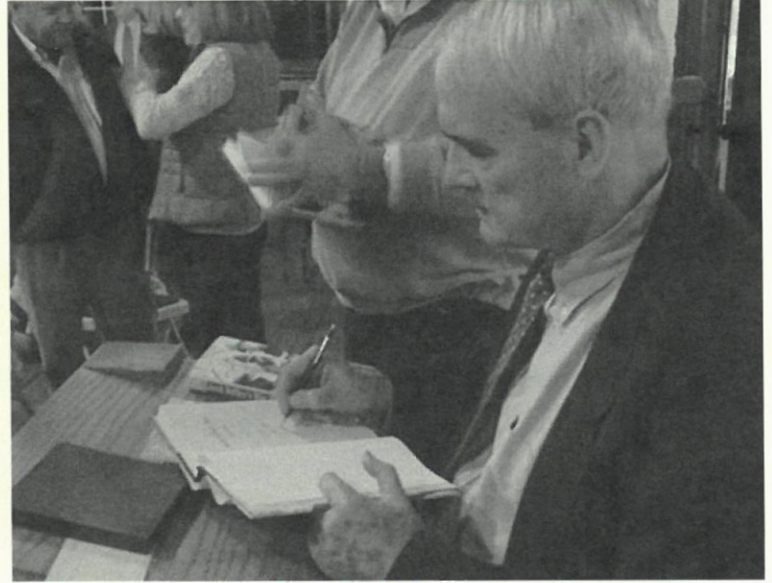
The Last of the Summer Wine garden party was a success (above.) Above left, an exotic Indian umbrella contributed to the shelter provided by the branches of a great old sugar maple which rises above the gardens of the Burrell homestead, presently owned by Hester Velmans and Peter Cherneff, who graciously hosted the party. Though rain threatened, the storms held off for the duration of the Labor Day weekend event. Opposite, Marcia Brolli and Nina Worth man the admission table.



The Paper Sculptures & Other Works by Rob Robins exhibit drew a contingent of visitors, including two bus loads of friends from Kimball Farms and the artist's extended family. The exhibit, which was curated by René Wood, featured an explanation of the creative process, a display of the collection, commercial applications, and other design memorabilia from Rob's prodigious career. Opposite, Rob Robins seated beside the exhibition booklets he designed for the exhibit. Below, at left, Rob's daughter speaks with a guest. In the foreground are some of the paper sculptures on display and in the background, in the photos at left and right, are the graphic arts & die cutting processes explained.

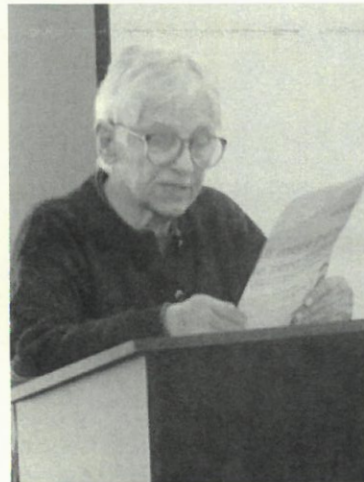


Our Winter 2008-9 Program Continued...



Above, the Society hosted John Toffey at its November meeting in a book talk & signing of his recent WWII memoir *Jack Toffey's War*. Below, Jessica Roseman and Betty LeGeyt address Martin Luther King, Jr. at the annual commemorative program in conjunction with Bushnell-Sage Library, while (beneath) the granddaughters of Patricia & Peter Elsbach sing from the King hymn, "Let There Be Peace," which John-Arthur Miller led with a piano accompaniment by Jessica Roseman.

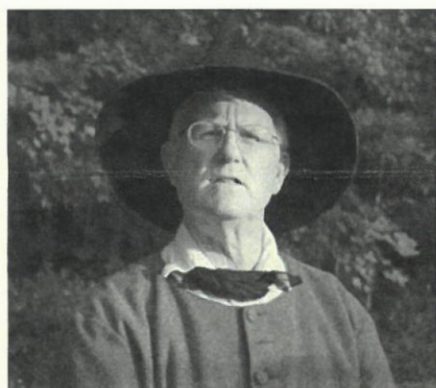
At top, Philip Detjens lights the tinned iron chandelier in the Dan Raymond House keeping room at the Holiday Party, while Brian Levinsohn keeps company with Connie & Doug Logan. Below, Joyce Hawkins and Harry Conklin participate in the holiday spirit. Not pictured is Lenny Graziano who returned on keyboard for the occasion.





Photos by Alan Papsun & Gary Schumer

Catherine Miller steals the show at the 2008 Sheffield Spirit Walk with her stellar portrayal of C. Catherine Root Leonard (1812-1907), a tactful invalid woman who lived on to become the "oldest woman in Sheffield." Below from left to right, Grieg Siedor as John Pell (1697-1758); Lynn Wood as Sally Bronson (1796-1877); Neal Chamberlain as Levi Glezen (1775-1842); Ethan Chamberlain as Daniel Bush (1754-1840); Lisa Reynolds as Mary Doten (1770-1843); and Jean Emberlin as Mary Canfield (1773-1857). Not pictured are Jonathan Reynolds as Dan Raymond (1736-1809) and Joanna Jennings as Eunice Hickock (1750-1822).



AA 08-09 Contributors continued from page 2

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Hey! Would you like to join us too?
The 2009 Sheffield
Spirit Walk
needs the talent
of YOU!



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GO GREEN
tomorrow by
subscribing to
our e-mailing list!

The Sheffield Historical Society



Dan Raymond House Museum • Mark Dewey Research Center
WWW.SHEFFIELDHISTORY.ORG

The Sheffield Historical Society's mission is to promote a wider understanding of the people and events that preceded us in this area, and to preserve and transmit that heritage to current and future generations.

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Sheffield, MA 01257

Phone: 413-229-2694
E-mail: shs@sheffieldhistory.org

1774 Dan Raymond House is open weekdays,
Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Or by appointment.

Mark Dewey Research Center is open weekdays,
Monday & Friday, 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., or by appointment.
Phone: 413-229-3682. Email: mdrc@sheffieldhistory.org

Old Stone Store is open on weekends,
Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Closed January through April. Phone: 413-229-2287