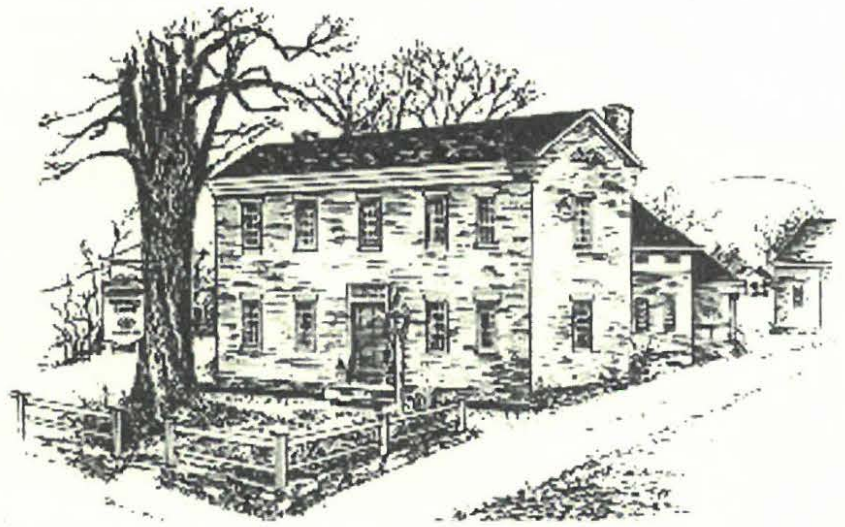


# *The Sheffield Historical Society*

*Late Summer 2008*



## **SHEFFIELD, Frontier Town, Celebrates its 275 Anniversary**

On June 21, 2008, the Sheffield Historical Society observed the 275th birthday of our town with an anniversary celebration. The event drew a crowd of 150 people some local residents, some visitors. (Refer to pages 4-5 for a pictorial coverage of the event.) The Society wishes to acknowledge all those who participated, especially the Bottom of the Bucket Band and the Morris Dancers, who invited themselves and rounded out the afternoon with a flourish.

The Sheffield Historical Society also wishes to thank the following underwriters of the Celebration of Sheffield Incorporation on June 22, 1733 at the first community in Berkshire County.

**BLUE RIBBON**  
Sheffield Plastics

**RED RIBBON**  
Carlson Propane  
Wheeler & Taylor

**WHITE RIBBON**  
Sheffield Water Co.



*Smitty Pignatelli presents Marcia Brolli, Society President, and Julie Hannum, Chair of the town's Board of Selectman, with a certificate honoring Sheffield's 275th Anniversary.*

## **Society Archives Enriched with New Sheffield Quarry Documentation**

The research archives of The Society were benefited recently by a significant contribution by two Ashley Falls natives, Natalie Funk and Priscilla Reger. The subject of their contribution is Sheffield quarries, specifically the Ashley Falls quarry that is now the home of Grace Brown.

The two volume collection was culled "from thousands of such documents only recently discovered when the remains of the old Southern Berkshire Marble Company were sold." Unfortunately, most of them were in such poor condition that they could not be saved.

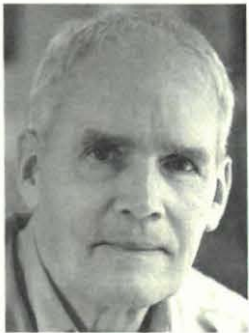
According to Natalie and Priscilla, the collection "tells a story of operations from 1899, the date of the earliest handwritten in the

files, to about 1915. A fatal fire destroyed the quarry buildings, halting production of marble slabs for building purposes for government buildings in Albany, NY, and the nation's capital. According to the introduction by the donors, many of the soldiers' markers in Arlington National Cemetery came from this quarry. In later years agricultural lime was produced, but the site closed down shortly after World War II.

The research archives, housed in the Mark Dewey Research Center, is the major repository of Sheffield history. It is open on Mondays and Fridays, 1:30 to 4:00, for topical research, genealogy, and house histories. Trained volunteers are available each day for assistance.



# November Program to Remember World War II Invasion of Italy



John Toffey

On November 14, the Sheffield Historical Society will commemorate the sacrifices made by our veterans, particularly in World War II. Our speaker, John Toffey, will discuss and read from his book, *Jack Toffey's War, A Son's Memoir*.

John Toffey is one of four generations of Toffeys who fought in the military. His great-grandfather, John

Sr., earned the Medal of Honor for Valor at Missionary Ridge during the Civil War. His grandfather, John Jr., fought with Pershing in Mexico and retired as a major general in command of the New Jersey National Guard. His father, John III, the subject of this memoir, attained the rank of lieutenant-colonel before his death in Italy in 1944. John IV himself interrupted his studies at Yale to enlist in 1951 during the Korean War, went to Infantry Officer Candidate School, and was a company officer in the U.S., Korea, and Japan.

After his service in the Korean War, Toffey completed his studies at Ohio State University, graduating in 1955 with a degree in English. He has a Master's Degree from Columbia University. Toffey has served on the faculties of the Kent School, the Columbus Academy, Simon's Rock College, and Berkshire School, where he taught English, coached football and baseball, and performed various administrative duties.

John Toffey IV was 13 years old when his father was killed in the hill town of Palestrina, one day before the Allies marched into Rome. Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Toffey had commanded a combat battalion longer than any other officer in the Mediterranean theater.

Only in 1996, when his father's letters were discovered, did John Toffey begin to piece together the story his father "never got to tell." It is a moving account of a young man's journey to know a father who went to war in 1942 and never came back, weaving memories, history, interviews with surviving members of his father's unit, and his father's letters home into a fascinating tale of a family, a war, and the threads that connect them.

Toffey's book also portrays life on the home front in Ohio, where a boy, his sister and his mother waited out the war, scanning newspapers and magazines for news of Dad, and devouring letters full of humor and love for his family and dreams of a good life after the war.

John Toffey's talk and book signing will take place on Friday, November 14, at 7:30 p.m., at Dewey Memorial Hall in Sheffield.

— Joyce Hawkins, Program Chair

Dear Members and Friends,

Summer brings a hectic combination of work and play. And the Sheffield Historical Society has done both. At the Old Stone Store Gallery, we are presently laughing with the "A Serious Look at the Funnies," Paul Banevicius's stunning look at comics through the years. We previously enjoyed the "Red, White, and Blue" exhibit featuring the collection of Stephen and Wendy Leigh, and will end the exhibition season with a look at Rob Robins' work. What talented people Sheffield has attracted!

We've played by celebrating Sheffield's 275th anniversary as a town and holding receptions for each exhibit and, as the summer ends, by gathering at a gracious garden party at the home of Hester Velmans and Peter Cherneff. August 30th we will stroll the gardens, listen to the musical duo, *Contempanissance*, playing classical guitar and flute, and enjoy each other's conversation and company.

As we go into the fall, the program committee, under the able leadership of Joyce Hawkins, has planned a full and varied program for the year. Like last year, the dates, times, and places vary, so please put each event on your calendar now. You'll like the variety. Please join us often.

Joanna Jennings, our administrator, has put the Sheffield Historical Society in the pages of all the local newspapers, on posters all over town (posters which are becoming collectors' items), on CTSB, and in the Shoppers' Guide. I am ever so grateful to her for the success of her first year with us. The office is becoming a busy place-with several of us learning PastPerfect, the museum software which is a data base for the collection and for the membership. Philip Detjens has been the busiest in putting the information from all our handwritten and typed notes into the system, I have been struggling with the membership lists, and by the end of next winter, we should have it well under way.

Thank you for all your support.

See you in Sheffield,

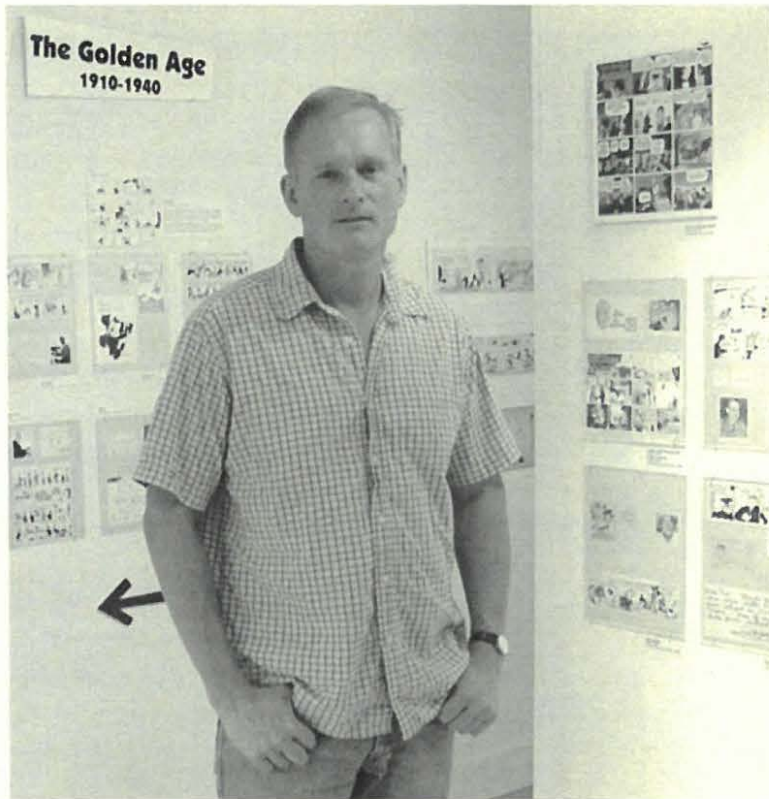
Marcia Brolli, President



A group of Berkshire School students helped with spring clean-up at the Sheffield Historical Society on Gracious Living Day on April 11.



# Spring & Summer Exhibits Remembered...



Paul Banevicius's comic strip exhibit has been a great success—in the guest book there is an entry of Lawrence Klein, Founder & Chairman Emeritus of the Museum of Comic & Cartoon Art in New York City! If you haven't had a chance to see it yet, don't worry, you still have plenty of opportunity. It will remain up through late September. And if you didn't see the article on the front pages of the Eagle look for it in the September issue of Berkshire Living Magazine. Jennings said, "Paul Banevicius has graced our gallery with a top-notch exhibit which is professionally installed and creatively displayed. You learn something of the progression of the comic strip, but what's more is, it's also engaging and fun!"



Above, Norman Hettinger engages Joanna Jennings on some of her "visual narratives" this spring at the opening reception for her photography exhibit Impressions of the Bidwell House Museum. In the interest of teaching people more about her artistic process, Ms. Jennings also held a gallery talk for her exhibit. At right, Georgette & Leonard Bloness also attended the reception.



At top, Stephen Leigh stands nose to nose with one of the Uncle Sams in the Red, White & Blue exhibit this summer. Above, Stephen and former Society trustee Mark Ziobro share a toast at the exhibit reception. In the background Mr. Leigh's super patriot waves a banner pledging "Liberty and Justice for All."

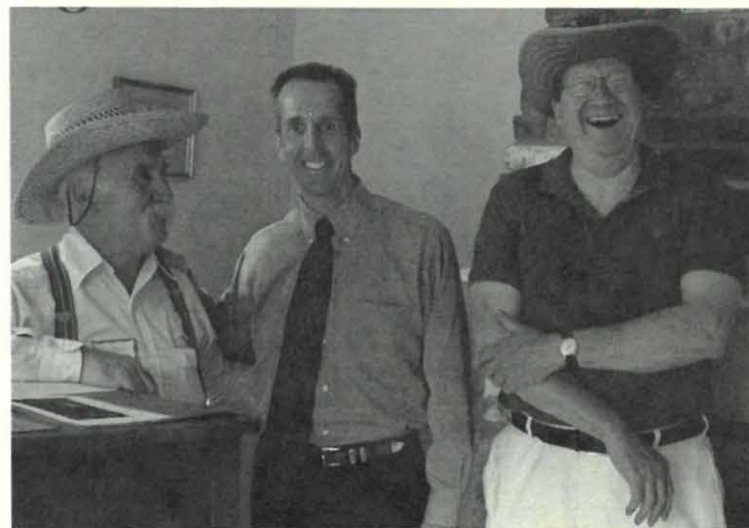




# 275th Anniversary Remembered...



Above, Society Vice-president Gillian Hettinger and her husband Norman stand at the Society entrance drumming up visitation for the 275th Celebration. Below, Jonathan & Lisa Reynolds, Catherine Miller, and Ross Hawkins all turned out dressed for the occasion; Milton Barnum looks on.



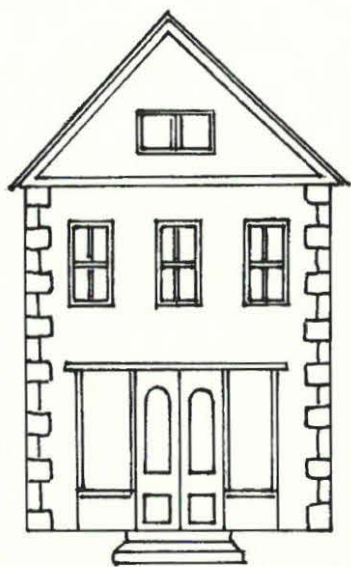
Smitty mingles with Society trustees Harry Conklin and Philip Detjens, who were stationed in the 19th century Law Office. Harry Conklin, Esq. went as Parker J. Hall, Esq. to whom the two-room office once belonged.



At top, Betsy Garcia and Harry Conklin pose in front of some of the various historic structures on the Society grounds. Beneath, at left, Marcia Brolli greets Kathleen Chrisman. At right, Society trustee, Lois Levinsohn, hospitality chair, was one of the busy chefs d'oeuvre at the event. Below, Society Treasurer, Connie Cooper, mans an informational table with various publications the Society has put out over the years. Among the things for sale were both the 250th pictorial history of Sheffield and a newly edited 275th supplement. Ann Barrett flashes a SHEFFIELD license plate as Linda Greenwald looks up.







## Upcoming Events & Exhibition Schedule at the Old Stone Store

July 19-September 28.

**A History of the Comic Strip: A Serious Look at the Funnies.** An exhibit exploring the history of the comic strip through the personal collection of Paul Banevicius featuring original art and over 550 cartoonist sketches. Paul Banevicius is a local resident, faculty in photography, and chair of the Berkshire School Art Department.

Saturday, August 30, 3-6 pm. **The Last of the Summer Wine.**

The Sheffield Historical Society's end-of-summer garden party will be held at the home of Hester Velmans and Peter Cherneff, 778 Hewins Street, Sheffield. This is a fine occasion to enjoy the late-summer bloom of an elaborate garden and property well appointed with history and rural charm in the company of friends. Summer wine and hors d'oeuvres. *Admission is \$30 per person. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged. Call 413.229.2694 for reservations.*

Saturday, September 20 & Saturday, October 4, 11 am.

**Housatonic Heritage Walks: A Walking Tour of Sheffield.**

Many well-built historic houses still adorn Sheffield's main street, and this walking tour is designed to point them out and refer briefly to some of the illustrious Sheffield citizens who owned them. For a more detailed history, visitors are referred to the Sheffield Historical Society's Mark Dewey Research Center. *The tour will start at the Sheffield Historical Society, 159 Main Street.*

Friday, September 19, 5-7pm. **Annual Sheffield Spirit Walk.**

Join us in Barnard Cemetery for a theatrical reencounter with Sheffield history as memorable residents from our town's past are recast! Learn their stories as they are vividly brought back to life before you. *Barnard Cemetery is located on Rte. 7 South, opposite Root Lane.*

Saturday, September 20, 4-7pm. **3-Roast Feast.**

Join the Sheffield Historical Society for its annual dinner.

*The feast will be held at the American Legion Hall on the Rte. 7 in Sheffield. Call for reservations.*

Friday, September 26, 7:30 pm. **Inside the Berkshires.**

David J. McLaughlin will present a book talk & signing. In this unique book 'unfolding' timelines and human interest stories tell the history of our picturesque and culturally diverse Berkshire region. This program will be presented in conjunction with the Bushnell-Sage Library and the Bookloft. *The program will be held at the Bushnell-Sage Library.*

*For the latest list of upcoming events visit us on the web at [www.sheffieldhistory.org/calendar](http://www.sheffieldhistory.org/calendar)*

*(Flip me over for more!)*



**Saturday, October 4, 12:30 pm. *Traces of the Trade: The Massachusetts Story***

This fall Mass Humanities will be commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the foreign slave trade, with the newly released film, *Traces of the Trade*, as the centerpiece of 6-7 events around the state that bring the film to each locality as a local story that is part of the Massachusetts economy (fishing, textile, finance, domestic economy.) The programming will feature screenings of a shorter version of the film, paired with archival materials, at a number of historical sites throughout the state that have relevance to the economy of slavery.

*The program will be held in Dewey Memorial Hall. The extended program includes a bus tour to the Colonel John Ashley House. For reservations, call (413) 229-8600.*

**Saturday, October 4-November 2. *The Work of Seymour Robins.***

Seymour Robins is a local designer known for his paper sculpture greeting cards which he designed and produced between the mid-1950s through the late 1990s for a myriad of corporate clients in a commercial series; the artist's personal oeuvre also included an annual holiday series. This retrospective exhibit will focus on Mr. Robins's artistic process as well as his finished work. *This exhibit will have a reception on Saturday, October 18, from 1 to 4 pm.*

**Friday, October 10, 7:30 pm. "Cheerful Despite Their Ragged Clothing:"  
Hessian Prisoners in the Berkshires and Beyond.**

Dennis Picard, Director at Storowton Village and previous Director of the Society, will talk about the experience of German prisoners of war during the American Revolution in western Massachusetts and northern Connecticut. The "Hessians," as they were collectively called, served with the British forces under contract to King George III.

*The program will be held in Dewey Memorial Hall.*

**Friday, November 14, 7:30 pm. *John Toffey, author of Jack Toffey's War***

will present this book talk & signing in conjunction with Bushnell-Sage Library in observance of Veteran's Day. In this memoir, Toffey writes of the WW II Allied invasion of Italy where his father was killed. *The program will be held in Dewey Memorial Hall.*

**November 8-December 21. *Holiday Marketplace.***

Saturdays & Sundays from 10-2 with occasional extended hours.

Shop for everyone on your list at the Sheffield Historical Society's holiday bazaar. Featuring an array of handmade goods including miniature trees, wreaths, ornaments, jewelry, holiday treats, gifts, raffles. Upstairs holiday tag sale and Old Stone Store markdowns.

*The Festival will have special extended hours from 11 to 5 on Black Friday (Nov. 28).*

**Sunday, December 14, 3-5 pm. *Dan Raymond House Holiday Social.***

Come gather round the festive Keeping Room fireside and enjoy some holiday cheer. Join friends new and old. Music, merriment and more.

**Friday, January 9, 7:30 pm. *What's It? Night.***

The items as ever have yet to be determined. Curious? Come find out!

*The program will take place in Dewey Memorial Hall.*

*For the latest list of upcoming events visit us on the web at [www.sheffieldhistory.org/calendar](http://www.sheffieldhistory.org/calendar)*



# ...at the Sheffield Historical Society



Above, the Mark Dewey Research Center was kept open by the Society archivists extraordinaires, Jim Miller and Betty Chapin. Below, the director went as Carrie Smith Lorraine, Sheffield's first woman photographer, to take vintage portrait photographs which the children hand-colored. Below from left to right are some of the results—Eastlynd Bates dressed as a girl from the period; Jonathan & Lisa Reynolds as a Revolutionary Loyalist couple; and Elizabeth Hotaling as herself displaying a ribbon she won at the event.



At top, the Morris Dancers provide entertainment during the celebration. Above, Steven Borns, of CTSB-TV, attends the event with Roberta Wheeler. Steven is in midst of working on a documentary film about the Captain Truman Wheeler House for the Great Barrington Historical Society.





# Seymour Robins Exhibit to Open this Fall



*Seymour Robins displays one of his paper sculptures he designed between the mid-1950s- the late 1990s. His work will be featured by the Society in a retrospective exhibit curated by Jim Miller and Rene Wood this fall.*

The Sheffield Historical Society will present a unique opportunity to view the creative mind of a prolific and talented

graphic designer, Seymour Robins, in an upcoming exhibit of the paper sculptures he created from the mid-1950s through 1998.

Over 75 hanging or standing paper sculpture creations, which include designs for corporate clients, museums, and UNICEF, as well as his own yearly holiday sculptures, will be featured at a retrospective scheduled for October 4-31, 2008. A reception for the artist will be held on Saturday, October 18 from 1-4 PM.

Seymour "Rob" Robins lived on Boardman Street for almost 40 years in the old Wilcox barn, which he completely renovated over the years into his home and studio. His career followed his military service and, beginning in the early 1950's, he was one of Manhattan's most prolific and talented graphic and package designers. Rob's last commission for a paper sculpture was from MOMA in 1998, when his macular degeneration limited his vision. Rob, a lifelong student of vision, was also a major contributor to the field of perception studies at Princeton University.

The Society recently accepted a gift of his collection of his paper sculptures and other graphic design materials. Several of Rob's sculptures are part of the permanent collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City.

## Sheffield Historical Society Acknowledges the Council's (MCC) Support

FY 2008 marks the last year in a three-year grant cycle of a Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) Organizational Support Grant that the Sheffield Historical Society was awarded in FY 2006. Throughout the past two years, numerous monthly programs and exhibits were all made possible through the support of the MCC. This year the Society elected to apply the majority of the prestigious \$2,500 award toward the administrator's salary.

The Society administrator is a part-time employee of the Sheffield Historical Society. The Administrator manages Society operations in accordance with the policies and procedures established by the Board of Trustees. Reporting to the president of the Board, her primary responsibility is the day-to-day administration of the Society and its historic seven-building complex, with the primary focus of executing administration, providing communication between the Society, Board of Trustees, and the membership. Secondary focuses include developing educational projects, exhibits,



programming, and preserving the Society's collections. The Society is grateful to MCC for the necessary funding to help maintain the integrity of our organization through the position of administrator.

Another part of the award was used to upgrade the Society's Past Perfect Museum Software from 2.0 to 4.0. This software is recognized by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) as one of definitive programs used by museum and historical societies across the county. It allows an organization to compile and combine its collections records (archives, library, objects, and photographs) and membership list in one database. The update was long overdue and its purchase has allowed the Society to start the daunting process of digitizing our paper collections inventory.

At a strategic planning conference held in FY 2008 the Society was successful in forming a number of committees to report to the Board. This kind of extended governance is vital since the Society underwent a significant staffing change in FY 2007 from a full-time director to a part-time administrator. Because of the staffing transition more responsibilities now fall upon the Board, its active membership, and cadre of volunteers. At the conference it

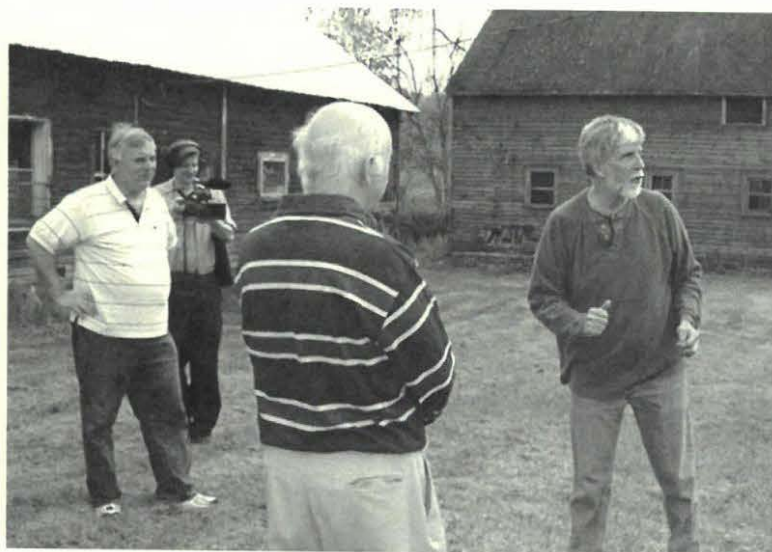
*article continues on page 7*



# Spring & Summer Program Highlights...



Ruth Green of Green Arts Garden Design in Monterey, MA and head gardener at the Bidwell House Museum prepared a thoughtful powerpoint presentation about heritage garden planting schemes at the Society's March meeting, "Colonial Garden Planning and Planting." On account of Green's following, no doubt, the program was very well attended with garden enthusiasts from Berkshire and Litchfield Counties alike!



Great Barrington Historical Society President, Brian Burke, and Vice-President, Gary Levielle, provide members of the Sheffield Historical Society with a tour of the Truman Wheeler house barns this spring. In the background Steven Borns of CTSB-TV records the tour for use in a documentary film project he has started as part of the GBHS's Capital Campaign to restore their future headquarters.

*MCC Acknowledgement article continued from page 6*

was agreed that one of the organizational priorities was to bring the Society into the 21st century by the digitization of our paper records. To answer this a collections committee was formed. The Society has set a goal of three years to this project, but the recruit of a collections intern in the future may help expedite this process.

The mission of the MCC is to promote excellence, education, access, and diversity in the arts, humanities, and interpretative sciences in order to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents and to contribute to the economic vitality of our communities. The grants are awarded through a competitive process. Receiving a MCC GOS grant signifies that the Sheffield Historical Society provides a high level of quality in its programs, community service and administrative capacity.



Massachusetts Cultural Council

*Sheffield Historical Society administration has been made possible, in part, by support from Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.*



Meanwhile, GBHS trustee James Parrish in full military character regaled the rest of the group with the story of the Wheeler family and their ancestral home.





## 2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marcia Brolli, *President*  
Gillian Hettinger, *Vice President*  
Connie Cooper, *Treasurer*  
Harry E. Conklin, *Clerk*

Joyce Hawkins  
Lois Levinsohn  
Philip Detjens  
Dennis Sears  
Kathy Tetro

## MUSEUM STAFF

Joanna Jennings, *Administrator*  
Betty Chapin, *Volunteer Archivist*  
James Miller, *Volunteer Archivist*

The Society is in the midst of updating our membership database. Please review your name & address, and notify us of any changes!

We are also in the midst of redesigning our website. Please continue to check back for future updates. New developments will include the calendar & special events page with photographic highlights from recent exhibits & programs. Thank you for your patience.

# A Serious Look at the Funnies

## A History of the Comic Strip



Featuring Original Art & Sketches  
from the Collection of Paul Banevicius  
**July 19-September 28, 2008**

## The Sheffield Historical Society



Dan Raymond House Museum • Mark Dewey Research Center  
[WWW.SHEFFIELDHISTORY.ORG](http://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.*

159 Main Street  
PO Box 747  
Sheffield, MA 01257

1774 Dan Raymond House is open May-October,  
Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Or by appointment.  
Phone: (413) 229-2694 Email: [shs@sheffieldhistory.org](mailto:shs@sheffieldhistory.org)

Mark Dewey Research Center is open year round,  
Monday & Friday, 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Or by appointment.  
Phone: (413) 229-3682 Email: [mdrc@sheffieldhistory.org](mailto:mdrc@sheffieldhistory.org)

Old Stone Store & Gallery is open on weekends, April-December,  
Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Phone: (413) 229-2287