



Sheffield Historical Society

Winter 2006 Newsletter

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Friends of SHS,

The Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail celebration in September was a major event in Berkshire historical recognition. The SHS joined with the UHVAHT committee and The Trustees of Reservations to create a weekend of events: a seminar at MCLA under the leadership of Dr. Frances Jones-Sneed; 3 full busses touring African American sites with 3 different foci; and a symposium focusing on adapting historical emphasis to include African American citizens, held at Old Parish under the leadership of Dr. Joanne Hurlbut, Director, SHS. The day concluded at The Ashley House with the Trustees of Reservations naming the Freeman Room—a first honor for an African American citizen in Berkshire County.

The well-received exhibit at the Stone Store on the same theme, "If They Close the Door on You, Go in a Window" based on Bernie Drew's book written under the aegis of SHS 2 years ago, closed at the end of October.

Our current celebration of African American contributions to the Berkshires concludes at the No-

vember meeting with Roselle Chartock's talk about her trip to Ghana to trace the journey of W.E.B. Dubois "From Birthplace to Burial Site," a talk with slides (Nov. 10, at Dewey Memorial Hall, 7:30 pm). *Sponsored jointly by the Sheffield Historical Society and the Great Barrington Historical Society.*

Festival of Trees: *Holiday Comes Early for Festival of Trees*

Many of the members and friends of the Society are creating trees, wreaths, mantel decorations, and centerpieces for your purchase at the Festival of Trees.

Successfully getting miniature trees on the Stone Store tables by November 11 takes foresight and planning. Pinecones and milkweed pods need to be collected and dried; paint spraying has to be done outdoors while the temperature is above 50 degrees; finding the supplies squirreled away last year requires a working memory.

Then one's work space needs to be set up with wire and clippers, glue gun, scissors, ribbons,

thread, and raffia, pots, dowels—and finally each of us makes a trip to the kitchen of the Dan Raymond House, where Jim has set out the trees, wreaths, and lights. Some people, like Doreen Atwood, who annually creates a quilted piece for the raffle, completed their offerings ages ago, but the rest of us are bustling.

In addition to the festive decorations, there will be holiday cookies and candies to delight young and old, as well as other goodies for your holiday table.

For the collectors among you, the hand-painted ornament of the Sheffield Elm is "the best ever." These will certainly be gone before December, so stop by right away or call in your order (229-2694).

Fresh balsam wreaths with magnificent bows will be available in December.

The Festival of Trees is both an important fundraisers for the Society and a fun time. **Join us!**

Thank you all for your continued support and good will.

See you in Sheffield,

— Marcia Brolli



(The Festival of Trees committee: Jim Miller, Rene Wood, Catherine Miller, Lois Levinsohn, Brian Levinsohn, Marcia Brolli, Doreen Atwood, Dorothy Marosy, and Barbara Delmolino.)

Holiday Specials from the Stone Store Shop

A new collection of reproduction redware, made of Sheffield clay by Stephen Earp of Shelburne Falls. This pottery is of finest quality and may be used in the oven.

A new selection of hand-woven pieces, made in Pennsylvania by Family Heirloom Weavers. The goods are woven on antique looms and blend with all design styles. Most are machine washable.

And the Shop continues to offer fine baskets, Shaker boxes, glass jewelry, hand-made brooms, penny rugs, and canvas floor-cloths—all made by local crafts-people.

The very popular **Upstairs Holiday Tag Sale** will be running throughout the Festival of Trees.

Stone Store hours: Saturdays from 10 to 3 and Sundays from 11 to 3 from the opening, November 11, into December. The Store will be open on the Friday after Thanksgiving (Nov. 24, from 10 until 3).

SHS RECIPIENT OF DAY LOGS

The Mark Dewey Research Center, the archival branch of the Society's collection, has acquired a significant group of 25 agricultural day logs dating from 1928 to 1951. They were kept by the late Gertrude "Trudie" Huggins LeGeyt and were a gift from her family.

The LeGeys are a local farming family, and the importance of the logs lies in their insightful glimpses into the pulse of day-to-day life on a Sheffield farm from just before the Great Depression to the end of World War II and beyond. This was a time when agriculture was still the dominant theme in town life, responsible for most of its employment and income. Today their 1,000-acre property, Toby Hill Farm, is run by a fourth-generation LeGeyt.

An early entry, the spring of 1928, says a lot about the local labor market for that pre-Depression period. It reads, "Homer Fuller commenced work . . . at \$20.00 per month with board, room, etc. and with the understanding that if he stays 1 year he is to have bonus to make 300.00." Twenty dollars a month was not much of a wage and, interestingly, the "understanding" of a possible bonus was taken on faith alone, something not seen today.

An entirely unexpected aspect of the LeGeyt family life was its geographic mobility as attested by Trudie's account of Sunday, May 20, 1933. It reads "After dinner, Mother, Jean, Edwin & I went to Under Mt. road up through S. Egremont to G. B. & over 3 mile hill to Mill River to call on Ada & Fred . . . Came back over Brush Hill & stopped at Chas. . . Went over to Doncaster place & . . . met Chas & family but did not stop. Stopped at Wests a few minutes. [Later] F. decided to go to Hillsdale. So we all went there."

What came to be known as the

Hurricane of 1938 was noted on Wednesday, September 21. "Raining. Gave up all idea of Springfield fair . . . most awful rain & wind we ever saw in late p.m. Got all stock in. Trees blown down—telephone out & flood conditions all over New Eng. . . . Worst flood ever & still rising."

The family dates locally from 1919, when Frank LeGeyt purchased the farm. It was later run by Frank's son Edwin and his wife Trudie, and then by Richard LeGeyt and his wife Betty, and now by their son Philip, making for four generations of family ownership.

Trudie's paternal line, Huggins, dates in Sheffield at least from 1756, when Joseph Huggins Sr. was married locally to Sarah Fox. But the Society's family history files trace it back to immigrant John Huggins, born in England in 1609, and his wife, Bridget Green. Although the Huggins name has disappeared locally, some of the descendant families still in the area are Armstrong, Bennett, Cartinelli, Chapin, Conklin, Clark, Crine, Eichstedt, Gaylord, Markham, Smith, Stanton, and, of course, LeGeyt.

Thanks to the LeGeyt family, the 25 day logs are now part of the archival collection of the Society and are available for public use. They make a rich addition to the source material on the day-to-day life of Sheffield's past and we are grateful to the family for their thoughtfulness.

—James R. Miller



Norman Hettinger as Nicholas Van Deusen



Spirits from our annual Cemetery Stroll held in Sackett Cemetery in Ashley Falls on a very blustery day!

Above: Jean Emberlin as Sarah Esther Austin Pease



Dennis Picard as Dr. John Scoville

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

A-1 Security for fully underwriting the cost, both the equipment and the installation fees, of new fire and security systems in the Mark Dewey Research Center and the Dan Raymond House.

To **Wray Gunn and Pfizer** for underwriting the cost of purchasing 25 copies of the new book *African American Heritage: In the Upper Housatonic Valley*. The items were sold at full value in the Stone Store, thereby raising funds for SHS, and all but one copy has been sold to date.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council award for the Sheffield Historical Society for 2006-2007 has been increased by \$500, to \$2,500 for this year. The extra funds will allow the SHS Director to attend all three days of the New England Museum Association's Annual Conference in mid-November in Connecticut.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly Meetings are held on the second Friday of every month, September through June, at Dewey Memorial Hall. They begin at 7:30 pm.

Each monthly program focuses on a different speaker and theme. Check your local newspapers and the Society's website at SHEFFIELDHISTORY.ORG for the most up-to-date listings.

NEW CHILDREN'S EVENT:



"HISTORY MYSTERY"

This collaborative program presented by the Society and the Bushnell-Sage Library will take place on Tuesday, February 6, 2007, at the Library. (A half-day school program, starting at 12:30 pm.)

Youngsters will be set on the trail of a mystery involving some aspect of a local child's life. They may be searching for when or where a child lived, or where that child went to school. Along the sleuths' journey, they will be given clues to unravel the mystery. The clues will come in the form of historic photographs, maps, and artifacts to view. A special historic spirit or two will be on hand to provide personal information about the children. By answering a series of riddles, the young sleuths will learn where the next clue is to be found.

The event will be intriguing and fun, and based on research from the archives of the Sheffield Historical Society. To register, call the Library at 229-7004.



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Phone: 413-229-2694
Email: shs@sheffieldhistory.org

The 1774 Dan Raymond House hours: by
appointment during the winter months.

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
3 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Closed January
through March.

WE'RE ON THE WEB
SHEFFIELDHISTORY.ORG

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The Freedom of Baseball



Freedom can be found in a wide array of circumstances and times. Do you realize how liberating sports have been for men and women? In particular, baseball has proven a stepping-stone for thousands of people since its development in the mid-1800s. Have you heard about the African American baseball teams the Albany Bachelors or the Sheffield Feathertales?

On **January 15**—the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday—the Bushnell-Sage Library and the Sheffield Historical Society invite you to join us as we explore **"The Freedom of Baseball."** This Family Program, full of

surprises, begins at the Library at **1 p.m.** Bring your whole family, dress appropriately if you like, and bring along your favorite baseball memorabilia to share with others. The program is free and open to the public.



On view in the Stone Store:
The Festival of Trees—

History Mystery—
Tuesday, February 6, 2007
A half-day school program