



Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

Summer 2013

A Seasonal Newsletter

Dorseter's 19th-Century Crazy Quilt Gift to Museum

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On April 27th, Barbara Taylor Valentin, a great-granddaughter of Julia Scott Towslee of Dorset presented the Dorset Historical Society with the standout crazy quilt made by her forebear. The quilt is signed Julia O. Scott and dated Jan. 1890-1893. Julia lived in the 1790s house on the Dorset-Rupert town line on Route 30 from the time she was three years old until her death at 76 in 1949.

Her quilt consists of 20 irregular sections made of different materials -- cotton, silk, velvet, satin, and taffeta -- its border finished in gold colored thread. Each interior section is surrounded by elaborate embroidery. While most of the illustrations are done in needlework, several painted designs constitute a rarity in crazy-quilt history. Virtually wholly a collection of flower panels, the quilt boasts one lone creature: a spider.

Needlework alone, however varied, was apparently not Julia's only talent. Stitched into her quilt are some lines of verse in perfect iambic pentameter. Individual words of the poem are familiar in a church context, but the text does not turn up anywhere, and would seem to be original with the quilt-maker.

"The amount of work involved in making this quilt had to have taken untold hours of devotion and love," said Barbara Valentin. "The quilt appears to show [Julia's] love of her craft and of color, flowers...and a spider!" Mrs. Towslee, explained Valentin, "was the woman my mother most admired in her childhood, [the person who] taught her how to cook, sew, knit, crochet, and quilt."

During its time in the care of Mrs. Valentin's mother, then a Florida resident, the quilt was documented in 1987 as part of the Florida Heritage Project of the Museum of Florida History. That credit represents a leg-up on parallel documentation in Vermont, said DHS Curator Jon Mathewson.

Donor Barbara Valentin, who hails from Atlantic Highlands, N.J., is a nurse by profession, but an assiduous researcher as well. She presented DHS with a loose-leaf volume of photos and details on the quilt-maker and her family. For years Julia and her husband Charles Albert Towslee ran a shop called "The Maples" in a small building on their property. The shop sold Fro-Joy ice cream, Moxie soft drinks, maple candy and gasoline from two nearby pumps. Remarkably, The Maples was (per Terry Tyler's book, *Woodchucks, Wingnuts & Dipsticks*) one of eleven gas stations inside the two-mile stretch of Route 30 between Route 315 and the Dorset Green.

The quilt presentation at DHS's Bley

House Museum was attended by a sizable group of descendants of Julia Scott Towslee, all eager to see the quilt. One brought Julia's brown wedding dress and (notably narrow) white wedding slippers to DHS. Other family members gave two more of Julia's dresses in elegant fabrics -- all enhanced by needlework of one type or another. Certainly the lady was extraordinarily gifted in these realms. And DHS is delighted to be custodian of the textile legacy of Julia Scott Towslee, who was at home in Dorset for nearly three-quarters of a century. After necessary museum conservation measures, Julia's quilt will be on display in a future e DHS exhibition



(L to R) Cassie Clark Great-Great Granddaughter, and Great-Granddaughters Sandy Pinsonault, Esther Sheldon, Joann Waite, Barbara Valentin, and friend Trudy Billings. John Cave in rear.

The Curator's Notebook :

This is another story of the unexpected happening delightfully.

In 1995, Anne Gilbert Graham gave the Dorset Historical Society seven canvas booklets filled with 500-600 **3.25"x5.5" celluloid negatives shot by Huntington Gilbert from about 1904 – 1917**. At the time of donation, stalwart historical society volunteers set about to digitize and print contact sheets of the negatives. This effort was crucial in preserving and identifying the subjects of the negatives.

In more recent years, the Dorset Historical Society has been digitizing at high resolutions, and printing the images on archival paper. This is slow, and relatively expensive work, so we do a little bit each year. The current schedule sees 50 negatives scanned and printed each year, and twenty of those images are matted for display. This way, we can ensure that the best photographs are displayed, while making sure all the photographs are preserved.

There are a number of photographs that we want to preserve, but not put on display. These include double exposures, dark exposures, photos taken away from Dorset (for instance, we may exhibit some of his pictures of Lake St. Catherine, but certainly not all of them), and some duplicate photos, or photos very similar to others.



Herrick Picnic at John Harwood's 1908

This year, one of the negatives I chose for digitization was called **"Herrick Picnic at John Harwood's, 1908."** A very dark image, of several people cooking food over a small fire on a mountaintop field, the background and facial features were impossible to make out. This was most definitely, I felt, an image to preserve, but not to exhibit.

I'm willing to bet you know where this story is going. George Bouret scanned the negatives, printed fifty, matted twenty, and delivered them (actually, to my home at 7:30 am, but that's another story...). I set about labeling the photos and housing the unmatted ones in archival folders. Then I came to an amazing photograph I did not recall ever seeing, of a group of people cooking food over a fire in a mountaintop field. The older scan and contact sheet had not done the **picture justice: in the new print, the people's faces are much clearer and the landscape was also well seen.**

I e-mailed George, complimenting his work in general, and said how I wished I had had him matte the mountaintop picture scene. He re-

plied, "I almost matted that one. I love it."

So, "Herrick Picnic at John Harwood's, 1908" will not be displayed this year. Look for it in next year's exhibition. In the meantime, here it is, reprinted in this newsletter.

By the way: John Harwood's farm was in Rupert, and is now part of Merck Forest and Farmland Center. "Herrick" was probable John Herrick, who was

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Mary Q. Ams
Geoffrey and Anne Bennett
Austin S. Felis
David and Wendy Parsons
Ralph T. Olsen
Dennis Ruggere
Paul and Susan Sabert
Curtis and Patricia Taylor
Sidney S. Whalen, Jr.

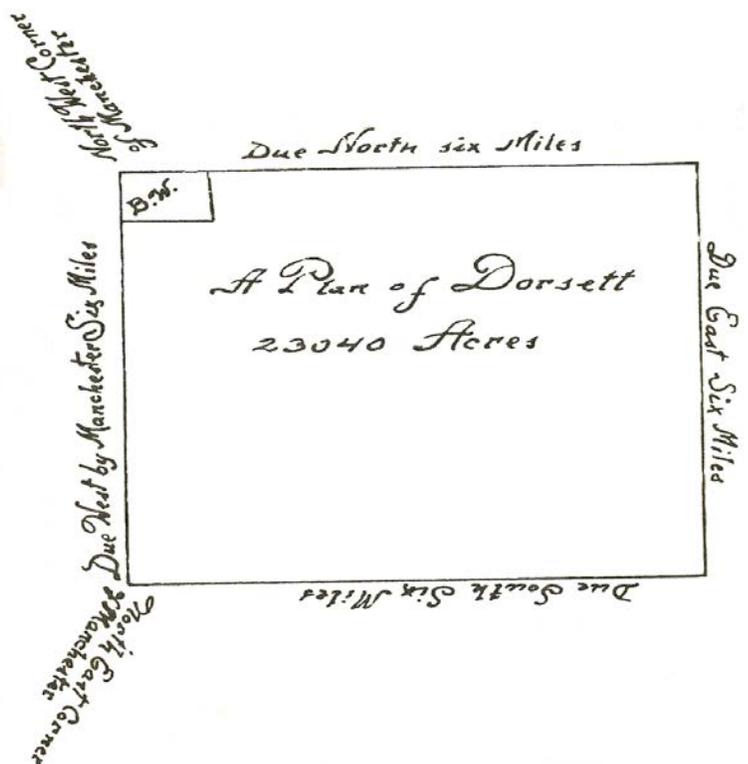
MAPPING DORSET

The 2013 exhibit in the Main Gallery is “Mapping Dorset, 1761-2013.”

The Dorset Historical Society owns about 400 maps, each one unique in its own way. There are many ways to map a location, highlighting some details, eliminating others. The Mapping Dorset exhibit shows how ever increasing detail has made its way into maps of Dorset, and how specialty maps may focus in on one aspect of the town’s geography.

There are tourist maps on display, alongside quarry maps, 1800s textbook maps, highway maps, apple orchard maps, hiking trail maps, and even maps showing the location of some of Dorset’s caves. A 1942 aerial photograph of East Dorset is paired with a recent one, showing landscape changes over time.

While not every map of Dorset is on display, this exhibit celebrates the diversity of how people have described where they live over the centuries.



The original map of Dorset Town Charter prepared in July 1761 for New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth

Lunchtime Lectures

Mark your calendars for forthcoming Third Thursday Lunch Lectures held at 12 noon at Bley House. Bring your own sandwich and listen to lectures about Dorset history. Beverages and dessert will be served.

Thursday, June 20-*The History of New England Floor Coverings, with A “How to Create Your Own” Demonstration*—Kathie Wall Evans, master artisan

Thursday, July 18— New book launch and book signing of *Bennington County and the Harwood Homesteads and Heritage* by Sue Harwood Green

Thursday, August 15—Tim Bryant of Pawlet will present stories from his book. *A Father’s Gift: Growing Up on a Farm in Vermont*

Thursday, September 19—*Archaeological Findings on the Southern Vermont Leg of the Long Trail* - Dave Lacey, archaeologist of the Green Mountain National Forest Heritage Program, Rutland, VT

Thursday October 17 - *The History of the Dorset Colony* by John Nassivera PhD. author, theatre producer, retired professor and founder and director of the Dorset Colony, a retreat for professional writers from 1979 to 2011

Thursday, November 21 - *Arming the Union: Vermont Gunmakers and the Technology that Shaped America* by Carrie Brown, PhD. Vermont Humanities Council



Buy raffle tickets for this one-of-a-kind birdhouse or your garden \$5 or 3 for \$10



Our 50th Anniversary hand-painted mug for your coffee - only \$20

Support Dorset Historical Society Educational Programs with Purchase of Raffle Tickets, 80th Anniversary Pottery

Throughout the year, the Dorset Historical Society is selling mugs and tree ornaments with representative drawings of Bley House created exclusively for the DHS by Rosanne Henning of Arlington. Also on sale during this anniversary year are raffle tickets for a bird house replica of Bley House made by local builder, Scott Thompson and a 14 x 18 inch oil painting of Bley House by Brian Sweetland. The raffle drawing will be held on the occasion of the Society's annual Holiday Open House in December. Raffle tickets, which are available at the Dorset Historical Society gift shop and at the Dorset Farmers' Market every Sunday, are \$5 each or three for \$10. The proceeds from the sale of these items will support educational programs, which include monthly luncheon lectures, school tours, research assistance and special and permanent exhibits.



DHS 50th Anniversary handpainted ceramic tree ornament \$10



Ice Cream Social & Cheese Festival

The Dorset Historical Society will host a Southern Vermont Cheese Festival on July 6th from 10am to 3pm. Cheese participants include Consider Bardwell Farm, West Pawlet; Crowley Cheese, Healdville; Grafton Village Cheese, Grafton; Plymouth Artisan Cheese, Plymouth; Southwind Farm, Pawlet; Southwind Farm, Pawlet and West River Creamery, Londonderry. The local cheese artisans will be offering their cheeses to sample and sell while introducing you to their farms and their unique methods of production. The event will be held under a tent on the front lawn of the Historical Society and corresponds with the DHS exhibit on the history of cheese making in Dorset and the annual ice cream social which takes place in the afternoon from 1pm to 4pm. All events are free and open to the public.

OUR WISH LIST

Now that Terry Tyler has completed the renovation of our basement to provide additional storage space, our curator spends more time down there cataloging and photographing our ever-expanding collection. He would dearly love to have a laptop computer to take down with him for data entry on site. Estimated cost, around \$800.

Quarry Hikes

This summer's marble quarry hikes will feature walks to the Freedley and Folsom sites northwest and west of East Dorset. The Freedley hike will be on Saturday, June 29. The Folsom hike will be on Saturday, July 20. Both outings will be led by Arthur Gilbert, Jr. Participants should meet at 9 am on Saturday morning, at the Bley House Museum to carpool to the trailhead. Call DHS for further information 867-0331