



Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

Summer 2012

A Seasonal Newsletter

Opening Friday June 8 : "Theatre in Dorset: 1878-2012."

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Museum Summer Hours

May 15 to Oct. 31
W-F 10 AM to 4PM
Sat. 10 AM to 2 PM
& by appointment

802-867-0331

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info@dorsetvthistory.org

www.dorsetvthistory.org

On Friday, June 8, the Dorset Historical Society will launch its newest exhibit, "Theatre in Dorset: 1878-2012." The long, storied tale began with the Dorset Amateur Dramatic Club, which first saw the lights come up more than two decades before the turn of the 20th century.

The DHS exhibit has playbills and announcements of plays seen here between 1900 and 1917, as well as the earliest extant photograph of Dorset actors, taken in 1907 by Hunt Gilbert, important local photographer. The show continues with the advent of the Dorset Players in 1927, and their creation of the Dorset Playhouse in 1929. On view: photos of the barns (at their original sites) that were amalgamated to create the Playhouse, which still occupies its initial Cheney Road location.

The Players hired Fred and Pat Carmichael in the mid-1940s to bring professional summer theatre to Dorset. And the couple's Caravan Theatre began its 30-year seasonal run in town. Fred was the author of some 40 plays, seen in Dorset and popular with theatre companies farther afield. Together the couple nurtured many young aspiring thespians, including some whose names became prominent.

From the mid-'70s to the present, the non-profit Dorset Theatre Festival has enhanced the town's place on the map of the American theatre world. The exhibit includes architect renderings of renovations a decade ago that turned the site into a 21st-century performance space, while retaining the feel of its historic structure. Also on view: original set designs by Bill Aupperlee, longtime DTF staff member; among them are shows that started in Dorset and went on to New York stages and Hollywood movies.



Dorset Players in full costume



Breaking ground for the new Dorset Playhouse
1929

This DHS exhibition draws on memorabilia donated over the years by the Players and the Carmichaels, as well as Warren Murray and Bill Aupperlee. Other items in the show are on loan from John Nassivera, former producing director of the Dorset Theatre Festival.

The opening reception will take place at Bley House Museum on Route 30 at Kent Hill Road on Friday, June 8 from 5 to 7 p.m. The retrospective of Dorset theatre history will remain on view at DHS through Summer 2012. For more information call 867-0331 or see www.dorsetvthistory.org

The Curator's Notebook

ADVENTURES IN CURATING

Things are falling in place for a great summer here at the Dorset Historical Society, Bley House Museum. Now, and in the coming weeks, parts of the museum exterior will be painted (white, of course), the incline railroad will be reinstalled, with a new permanent sign. The old school bell and F.R. Allen stoves will also be treated with signs explaining their historic significance.

Inside the museum, our amazing docents will continue to greet visitors (and, as a quick aside, we do need new docents; if interested, please get in touch!). In our Main Gallery, visitors will be treated to a new reconfiguration of the Fenton pottery display, and will delight in the new "Theatre in Dorset, 1878 – 2012" exhibit.

The official opening of the Theatre exhibit will be from 5 to 7 p.m. on Friday, June 8. Great company and wonderful hors d'oeuvres will complement interesting local history. As word has spread about the upcoming theatre exhibit, donations of relevant artifacts have been streaming in. On the day I'm writing this, we have received from different sources a hat that Pat Carmichael wore in a 1999 production, as well as the metal tractor seat used as the Playhouse box office chair for several decades. This is what curators call "fun."

On July 14, we will celebrate the heritage of the Fenton family of potters with a Historic and Contemporary Stoneware Pottery Festival, featuring a lecture on historic New England pottery (including Jonathan Fenton's lost Boston years), a dozen contemporary Vermont stoneware potters displaying their wares, a pottery demonstration, clay whistles, and our annual Ice Cream Social. Across the street the same day, the Dorset Library will be celebrating its 100th anniversary. A small part of that celebration will be a display of library history from the DHS collections.

Meanwhile, summer is genealogy season. Genealogists emerge from hibernation, and go searching for their ancestors, following their historic movements. These researchers will appear and pore over our records for a day or so before moving on to the next town. One of my favorite curatorial "games" is to have random genealogists—people who have shown up from different parts of the country, who have never met each other before, but who are both researching their Dorset relatives from the early nineteenth century—find out how they are related to each other. They can usually find family members who married each other! Beyond that little game, I believe the Dorset Historical Society volunteers and I do an excellent job showing care and diligence in assisting the researchers.

Add in the Third Thursday Lunchtime Lecture Series, two quarry walks, village tours, and you'll see that the summer is a time when the Dorset Historical Society's Bley House Museum buzzes and hums.

Thanks for helping to make it all happen.

Jon Mathewson
Curator

Summer Events

"Theatre in Dorset, 1878-2012"
Opening Reception
Friday June 8, 5-7 pm

Quarry Walks

Saturday June 23 * July 23

9:30 to noon *Carpool to trailhead*

"3rd Thursdays at Noon"

Brown bag lunch—dessert provided

June 21: "Reenacting the American Revolution" Austin Chinn

July 19: "Gloria Jordan's Rods and Flies"

Gloria Jordan

August 16: "History of Stenciling:

Focus on Dorset & Vermont"

Kathie Wall Evans

September 20: "Adirondack Notes, 1895 & 1896," Sidney Whelan

Ice Cream Social & Pottery Festival
Artisans at work

View historic & contemporary stoneware

Saturday July 14, 1-4 pm

BOARD ADOPTS FIRST LONG RANGE PLAN

At the May Board Meeting, the DHS Board adopted the first long-range plan for the society. The plan seeks to provide structure and guidance in six key areas: collections, exhibits and programs, audience development and community relations, technology, physical plant, and finance and governance. Goals, strategies, and tasks are outlined for each of these areas for the short term (1-2 years), medium term (3-5 years), and long term (5-10 years). Each key area has a plan steward responsible for implementing the plans and stewarding the progress at year end. Completion of these plans should result in the Dorset Historical Society attaining its vision of being “the leading center for learning the history of Dorset for many people from near and far and of all ages.”

A major long-range challenge will be to have the funding to continue having a Curator position. Visitors to Bley House can attest to the improvements in the displays, exhibits, and research facilities under the leadership and professional expertise of a Curator. As a result, the Society is enjoying a growing reputation as one of the leading societies in the State. Continuing to have a Curator beyond 2015 will require that significant funding be raised. Longer-range, the Society envisages expanding the building to be able to exhibit more of the collection and to accommodate larger audiences for all programs. Below is the plaque honoring those who contributed to our first Curator Fund in 2008. We thank them every day.

Organizationally, a Finance and Governance Committee, headed by the president, is being formed to oversee implementation and updating of the plan.

For those interested, a copy of the plan may be obtained at Bley House.

DORSET HISTORICAL SOCIETY CURATOR FUND

The Board of Directors is most grateful to the many supporters of the Curator Fund. Their generosity helped us meet and exceed our goal of funding the Curator position for five years.

\$30,000 and Above

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DORSET AND THE CIVIL WAR: IN OUR SOLDIERS' OWN WORDS

The Dorset Historical Society will participate in this year's Vermont History Expo (in Tunbridge June 16 and 17) with an exhibit of artifacts, maps and letters from the DHS collection and on loan from residents. Letters and diaries have uncovered personal accounts written with enthusiasm and despair, longing for home, asking for home-made comforts to be sent in packages and for news about friends at war. The soldiers answered questions from home about the war, Negroes and rebels. In every letter there is a request for newspapers, as the soldiers didn't learn of successes and defeats for many weeks. Excerpts from some letters follow with the authors' own spelling and punctuation.

Ezra Nichols, Pvt., Co. C 14th Vt. Infantry writes on January 28, 1863 from Fairfax Station, Virginia: *"You wanted to know about my steel plated vest. I wore it last across the long bridge and then I took it off and put it onto my knapsack and carried it on to the hights and from there back to capitol hill and then back on to Arlington hights about 1 1/2 miles from where we encamped the first times and Hiram Walker was up there one day and I gave it to him. I wore it long enough to find it would kill me quicker than balls. It kept my breast all of a wash. Sweat all the time and it hurt me under my arms. The rest of the boys threwed these plates away."*

Walter Nichols, Pvt., Co. E, 5th Vt. Infantry, Ezra's brother, writes Nov. 21 and 22, 1864 from Winchester, Virginia: *"Father, you may send my boots as quick as you are amight to send them by rail. Put them boots in a box and send me some eatables with them. Have mother bake some pies and send some fried cakes sweetened. A good cake of maple sugar put in what other stuff you are might to throw in. A good pair of socks oh send me some good apple and a lot of good pills. One thing I like to forgot send me 1/2 or 3/4 pound of good tea. If you send any pies you send some mince. If you can get them put in some cheese and butter. Put in some good apples and a loaf of good bread."*

One letter illustrates the provenance of an artifact in the DHS collection. Gilbert Sykes donated a hand splint used on a wounded ancestor, Dwight Sykes, at the Battle of Gettysburg. George Williams, Quartermaster Sergeant in Company C of the 11th Vermont Regiment, wrote to his friend, William Fuller, stationed with the First Vermont Cavalry in Washington, D.C.:

"Dwight Sykes came home about six weeks ago. You know he was wounded in the battle of Gettysburg in four places: in the foot, hand, shin and thigh. The ball was not taken out 'till about 8 weeks ago because it was swelled so much after the battle that they could not find it. He is not getting along very well and I fear he will never have the use of his hand."

You are all invited to Tunbridge on June 16 and 17 to see the entire exhibit with more letters, artifacts, maps and photographs. Admission is \$10 for two days.

**We wish the Dorset Village
Library a HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY
on July 14th!**

- WELCOME TO
OUR NEW MEMBERS**

 - Edward and Shirley Babington
 - David and Marilyn Brockway
 - Donald and Barbara Carse
 - Thomas Cooper
 - Jiffy Mart #32
 - Ellen Maloney
 - Jim and Jenny Matthews
 - Keith and Amy Mithoefer
 - Nancy Norris
 - Hans and Jeanette Pausse
 - John and Joyce Phelan
 - Blair and Jennifer Potter
 - Brent and Catherine Beckett
 - Edward and Jane Shotwell

MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM

Yes, I want to join the **Dorset Historical Society**.

Please enroll me at the level indicated:

Enclosed is my check, payable to **Dorset Historical Society -Membership**

Membership runs from January 1 to December 31

Membership Levels (please check one):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular - \$35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter - \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining - \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron - \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$ _____ |

Mail to: Dorset Historical Society PO Box 52, Dorset, Vermont 05251

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