



Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

Summer, 2014

A Seasonal Newsletter

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MUSEUM HOURS

W-F 10 to 4, Sat 10 to 2
Corner of Kent Hill Rd. & Rte.
30 in Dorset

(802) 867-0331

info@dorsetvthistory.org
www.dorsetvthistory.org

A Variety of Current Exhibits at Bley House

A wealth of exciting exhibits about Dorset history are currently on display at the Bley House Museum. Some of these exhibits are ongoing, and some will come down in the first part of 2015. Come see them while they're here!

First Floor:

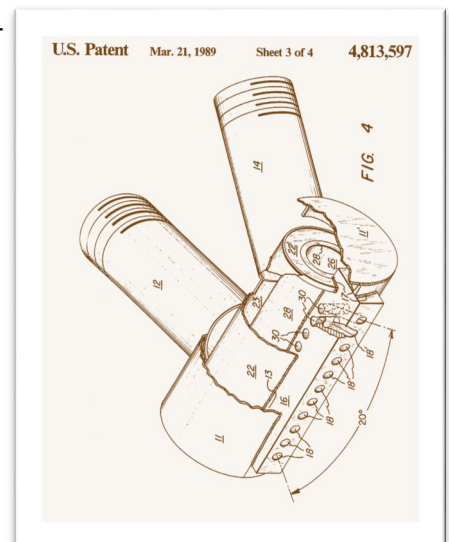
The Stencils of Jessica Hill Bond (1908-2001) - An ongoing rotating exhibit highlighting Jessica Bond's invaluable research into itinerant New England stencillers.

Dorset Marble - Every aspect of Dorset's marble industry from 1785 to 1920 is covered in this award-winning exhibit. Learn about the buildings in the United States where Dorset marble can be found.

Fenton Stoneware (1796-1849) - Jonathan Fenton first established his pottery in Dorset Hollow in 1801. After ten years in the Hollow, Fenton moved his kiln to East Dorset to access more desirable clays for his stoneware. Sons Richard and Christopher continued the operation until 1832, when they moved to Bennington to join forces with the Norton family. The exhibit features pottery made by Jonathan Fenton while he was in Boston, Dorset and East Dorset, as well as the work of his sons in East Dorset and Bennington. The exhibit also displays examples of Christopher Fenton's patented pottery.

Dorset Patents (1836-1989) - Tracing local ingenuity from Johnson Marsh's 1836 patent for a "double shot gun" to Roger Rumney's 1989 patent for a "snow gun," nineteen Dorset inventors and their inventions are profiled in this exhibit.

Cabinet of Curiosities - Some artifacts are in our collections because of the stories they tell. The wood panel with cotton ribbon attached was used by Dwight Sykes as a splint for a wound received in 1863 at the Battle of Gettysburg. The burnt piece of tree was part of Henrietta's Elm, a local landmark of spiritual questing for more than a century. And what exactly was the "Dorset Donkey?" Find out in our Cabinet of Curiosities!



Anti-Icing Snow Gun

U.S. Patent No. 4813597

A Variety of Current Exhibits, Continued

Between the First and Second Floors:

Old Paper (1767-1835) - Straight out of our archives comes this exhibition of deeds, ledgers, contracts, letters, maps and military orders. Each one tells a story, from the 1797 controversy of music in the Dorset Church, to a parent beseeching his son, in 1835, not to take a job in South Carolina, lest he be smeared with the sin of slavery, to a ledger showing who bought what at the local general store in the 1790s.



Stephen Martindale's 1814 survey of the intersection of Dorset West Road and Nichols Hill Road.

Second Floor:

Kent Neighborhood Historic District - In the early 1790s, Cephas Kent and his large family settled in Dorset. Kent and several of his sons built houses both at the intersection of the Dorset West Road and Nichols Hill Road, and up Nichols Hill Road. It was at Cephas Sr.'s house that four conventions of Vermont towns were held in 1775 and 1776 and led to the eventual creation of the State of Vermont. While that building is no longer standing, many others of that era are, each with their own unique history. The Kent Neighborhood Historic District was accepted into the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

Piping Water—Once upon a time, children would wear yokes to assist in carrying fresh spring water to their homes. Once upon a time, people would spend days auguring lengths of wood or stone to create pipes to get the water to their houses. In some villages like Dorset and East Dorset, they eventually piped in water from reservoirs in the hills. This exhibit explores all of those facets of getting water in Dorset.

Elsa Bley Retrospective—Elsa Bley (1903-1990) painted and taught painters in Dorset for more than half a century. Her early portraits in oil and her later watercolor landscapes are represented in the current retrospective of this influential local artist.

Huntington Gilbert, Photographer—Poultry farmer Hunt Gilbert would take his camera out a few days each year to take pictures of his neighbors at work and play. A few years ago, a large collection of his celluloid negatives, dating from 1905 to 1914, were donated to the Dorset Historical Society, and each year we digitize another segment of them. On display are twenty of the most recent digital prints from the collection—intimate portraits of our town in the early 20th Century.

Local Artists: New Acquisitions—Recently donated paintings adorn the walls of our research library. Included in this exhibit are works by Jay Connaway, Edwin Child, Arthur Jones, James Montague, Burr Phillips, Herbert Meyer, Beatrice Jackson, Claude Dern, Jessica Bond and many others.

Jon Mathewson
Curator

The Flora Hilliard Cup

Olga Payne of Owensboro, Kentucky has donated a tea cup to the Bley House Museum. The cup is a standard late Victorian model, hand-painted but signed "F.M. Hilliard/Dorset, VT/ 1881." So, the question was, who was F.M. Hilliard, and why did he or she paint this cup? Turns out, Flora Melissa Risdon Hilliard (1826-1892) was born in Danby and she married a farmer, Azariah Hilliard (1829-1870). They bought a farm with about 188 acres from A.B. Armstrong on Kirby Hollow Road in 1868. Two years later, Flora was a widow living with her daughter. In 1881 she painted this cup with leaves and the word "Emerson." Was this made to sell to the burgeoning tourist market? How many did she make? This simple tea cup helps us remember this Dorset woman, and pricks our interest in the art and business of the 1880s.



Highlights of Recent Activities Offered By the Dorset Historical Society



Jennifer and Wilson Brown discuss their new book, “Colonel William Marsh: Patriot and Loyalist” on June 19.



Adam Boyce reenacts the life of Vermont farmer Charles Ross Taggart in his portrayal of “The Old Country Fiddler” on July 17. Presented in conjunction with the Vermont Humanities Council.



“Southern Vermont Artists and the Development of the Southern Vermont Art Center” was the subject of the Dorset and Manchester Historical Societies’ booth at Vermont History Expo on June 21 and 22 in Tunbridge.

The Annual Ice Cream Social on Bley House Lawn July 12, 2014

Our Way of Saying Thank You to the Community for More Than 14 Years.



Director Emeritus and loyal volunteer Kaye Manly delivers ice cream from Wilcox Dairy the morning of the Ice Cream Social. Thank you Kaye!



Silhouette artist Carolyn Guest from Saint Johnsbury demonstrates her artistry at the Ice Cream Social.



Volunteers offer four different flavors of ice cream to guests.

More than two hundred guests enjoyed ice cream and toured the museum the day of the Ice Cream Social.



Save These Dates

Upcoming Third Thursday Lunch Lectures:

The Society's successful Third Thursday Lunch Lecture Series continues for its fourth year. Come explore many subjects and individuals from local and state history. Please bring a sandwich. Dessert and refreshments will be served at Bley House. All lunch lectures take place at Bley House at 12 noon and are free and open to the public.

August 21: "The History of New England Braided Rugs with a How-To-Make-Your-Own Demonstration," by Tracie Salmon.

September 18: "Bears!" by Forrest Hammond, Black Bear Project Leader for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

October 16: "Edward Hopper in Vermont," by Bonnie Clause.

November 20: "Don't Scratch Too Deep," by Terry Tyler.

December 18: "Thomas Jefferson in Vermont and His Role in Vermont Statehood," by Sydney N. Stokes, Jr.

Upcoming Special Events:

October 29: Dorset Historical Society Annual Meeting at Bley House
6 PM

December 6: Holiday Open House and Opening of Holiday Exhibit
1 to 3 PM at Bley House.

Wish List

From time to time the Dorset Historical Society is in need of new equipment to replace necessary worn out and obsolete items. The DHS is currently in need of two new sturdy outdoor tents for its off-site activities. The price of one commercial strength 10' X 10' tent from Celina is \$310. Also, because DHS collections of documents, letters and ledgers are in a wide variety of sizes, the DHS needs a state-of-the-art flatbed digital scanner capable of scanning documents as large as 11" X17." The approximate cost of this scanner is \$1,500. Any donations toward the purchase of these items will be welcome. Please call Jon Mathewson, Curator, at the Dorset Historical Society at (802) 867-0331, if you are able to contribute.

Welcome to Our New Members

John Bradbury
Adrienne Coté
Warren and Nancy Fuller
Rob and Kelly Gaiotti
Sara H. Garay
Clinton Gilbert, Jr.
Suzanne D. Green
Nancy C. Hagen
Jerard and Pat Jordan
Thomas and Pauline Ketchum
Cathy McLellan
David Murphy
James and Elizabeth O'Gara
Joseph and Catherine Sullivan



Curator's Corner: *Preserving the Museum's Framed Art Collection*

The most active part of the Dorset Historical Society collections is pieces of framed art. We have two in-house art exhibitions each year, one in the Conference Room highlighting various local artists, and one in the Venetian Red Room spotlighting a single artist. In addition, we have some on loan exhibited in the Dorset Town Offices, and this summer and fall, more than 70 were displayed as part of the "Dorset: Then and Now" exhibit at the Bickford House.

Framed pieces of art are kept in the basement in a series of wall cubicles called the Art Bin. Over the years, how and where things have been stored there has changed, and some things have been misfiled there until the situation arose where it was almost impossible to find anything in the bins. Therefore, this summer and fall, especially while reuniting the items on display at the Bickford House, I re-organized the art bins, which contain about 266 works.

This meant putting the pieces in accession number order, removing any eye-hooks or wire from the back, cutting custom sized pieces of acid-free, lignin-free corrugated board buffered with calcium carbonate, updating location information on the database, and placing them in their new homes. Fun, essential, and time consuming work.

The art bins are now better organized, and potential for damage has been lessened; however, that does not mean the work is done! Future phases of work on the art in our collections include placing carpet fragments on the bottoms of the bins to soften the placement of the frames in the bins, and performing conservation work on individual pieces. Some need to be cleaned. Some need acid-rich mattes and backing boards removed. Further down the line, they will all need to be reframed with solid backing boards and special tape applied to the frames to insure that the canvas does not stick to the frame.

Basically, everything here at Bley House is well-kept and in stable condition, thanks to the efforts of scores of people over the decades. However, storage and exhibition techniques are always being improved.

Jon Mathewson

Curator

Save These Dates

Holiday Open House: Saturday, December 7, 11 AM to 1 PM Opening of Model Train Exhibit at Bley House.

Third Thursday Luncheon Series. Free and open to the public. Visitors are invited to bring their own sandwich and dessert and refreshments will be served. All lectures are held at the Bley House Museum.

Thursday., November 21, 12 Noon "Arming the Union: Vermont Gunmakers and the Technology that Shaped America." by Carrie Brown, PhD., in conjunction with the Vermont Humanities Council.

Thursday., December 19, 12 Noon "Dorset's Former Train Depots and Stations," by Bill Badger, architectural historian.

Thursday., January 16, 12 Noon "Collecting and Displaying Model Trains," by John Schaub, curator of the Rutland Railroad Museum and of the Rutland Model Railroad Club.

Collections Assessment Program

On July 11, the Dorset Historical Society underwent a Collections Assessment through the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Heritage Preservation in Washington, D.C. Architect Tom Keefe inspected the buildings and grounds, and conservator M.J. Davis assessed the collection storage areas.

Their final reports spelled out suggestions for improving the physical plant and the collections storage to bring the DHS to the next level of best museum practices.

The last assessment of this type was conducted in 1993, and most of the recommendations made then have been put in place. Some of the suggestions then included having curated exhibits with interpretive labels, and to create collections storage areas with artifacts stored in archival housings.

These are now all implemented and standard fare here. In fact, comparing the Dorset Historical Society which was assessed in 1993 with the DHS of today really is like comparing apples to oranges.

The assessors had to work harder than usual to find suggestions to make. Most of the institutions they have evaluated are like the DHS of 1993. Their final reports, however, do contain many ideas on how to better conserve the artifacts placed in our care. Implementing the new round of suggestions will make the DHS an even stronger institution in the area of collections care.

Dorset: Then and Now

In 2011, some Dorset artists, under the leadership of Georgine Holman and Barbara Melhado, got together and staged a month-long exhibit in the Bickford House on Dorset Green, just west of the Dorset Union Store. The first floor of the building was filled with contemporary art, the second floor contained an exhibit of older Dorset artists, curated by Barbara Melhado. About 18 of the works of art in the “Then” section were from the Dorset Historical Society collection. In 2012, the event was repeated, only this time, Barbara went further afield with artists from around southern Vermont. In 2013, she turned the task over to the Dorset Historical Society.

From the beginning of August through mid-October, the Dorset Historical Society collections were represented by more than 70 pieces of work by Dorset artists. Included were oil paintings, watercolors, drawings, carpentry, quilting, stencil work, needlework and photography. This was an excellent venue to showcase our collections, and to bring the wide breadth of our collections to an audience which might not see similar exhibits at the Bley House.

The Then and Now components were both very well received, and extended from the original end date of mid-September to mid-October.

Model Train Exhibit Opens Saturday, December 7



The Dorset Historical Society is seeking loans of model trains and accessories to display in its holiday exhibit December and January. Loans will be acknowledged with a DHS Loan Agreement and returned in February. So far, the Society has loan donations of some circa 1950 HO scale trains and Lionel trains, but we would welcome more. Advertising and authentic packaging are welcome, also. Call Jon Mathewson at 867-0331, if you are able to loan items to our exhibit.