

BLEY HOUSE NEWS

DORSET HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Summer/Fall 2015

A Seasonal Newsletter

OFFICERS

Carol Cone, President
John Cave, Vice-President
Albert Eckhardt,
Treasurer
John McInerney,
Secretary

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chip Ams
Steven Davenport
Peter Davis
Art Gilbert
Judy Harwood
Barbara Melhado
Herman Raspe
Heidi Stokes
Terry Tyler

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Kathie Wall Evans
Bob Davidson
Dick Freeman
Rob Gaiotti
Kaye Manly
Sydney N. Stokes, Jr.
Susanne Washburn

DIRECTOR EMERITUS

Richard Hittle

MUSEUM CURATOR

Jon Mathewson

OFFICE MANAGER

Betsy Olson

NEWSLETTER

Carol Cone

MUSEUM HOURS

Wed– Fri 10-4
Sat. 10 AM to 2 PM
& by appointment
802-867-0331
info@dorsetvthistory.org
www.dorsetvthistory.org

DORSET HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS NEW EXHIBITIONS

Dorset's Schools from 1777 to 2015

The Art Students League of New York in Dorset

Hunt Gilbert Photographs of Dorset Life (1904-1915)

Post Cards from the Past

Local Artists

Stereoviews

*Opening Reception For Friends and Members
Saturday, June 6th, 11-1*

What Are Postcards For?

Travelers wrote messages to friends showing the impressive scenes they were surrounded by on vacation. The creators of postcards made the cards to idealize the places they photographed. The scenes, in general, show rolling hills, vast landscapes, historic site, large bodies of water, large beautiful homes, and local businesses. The Dorset Historical Society's collection includes more than 700 postcards of Dorset scenes. As we study the subjects of the postcards over time, we can track changing attitudes towards what makes Dorset saleable to tourists.

Postcard prototypes were used in England, as early as 1840. Advertising cards were used in the United States in 1848, and soon after, the U. S. Postal Service acquired the exclusive right to print postcards, which it retained until May 19, 1898. After that, anyone could print postcards—and just about everybody did. From 1898 to 1901, non-government cards had to be marked "Private Mailing Card." After that, the term "Post Card" was permitted. Beginning on March 1, 1907, postcards were required to have a divided back, half for the message, half for the address and stamp. Postcards were very popular in this period. More than 677 million postcards were produced in 1908.

The current exhibit includes government issue postcards dating from the 1880s, Private Mailing Cards of the Dorset Field Club published by the *Troy Times* in 1900, and several leather postcards (popular from 1903-1908). You will find cards grouped by subject such as The Dorset Inn, Norcross-West Quarry, Emerald Lake, and Prentiss Pond, as well as cards grouped by their photographer or printer.

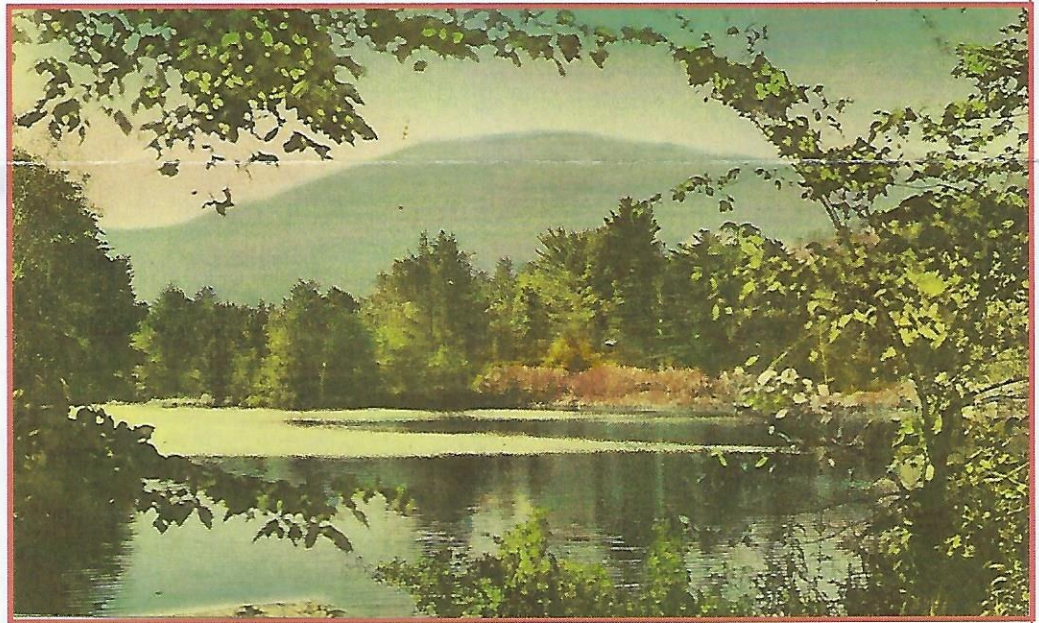
In this era of digital photography, nearly everyone can take a picture of a memorable scene and instantly email it to someone at home, so postcards are not as easy to find as they once were. They do still exist, however, and until you find them, come to enjoy this selection from our archives. You will even find a few for sale in the Gift Shop.

Curator's Corner: What You Won't See in Two of This Year's Exhibits

The exhibits are now finished, and on display. They are all, in one way or another brand new, and also repetitious of former displays. While there has not been an exhibit specifically on the Art Students' League of New York in Dorset before, most of the artists in that show have been highlighted in other shows. For each of the exhibits, I depend on the work of previous curators and researchers, while trying to bring more light to the subjects. In the case of two of this year's exhibits, though, I have left some areas for future exhibits to flesh out.

The two exhibits are Dorset Postcards and Dorset Schools. The Schools exhibit relies heavily on the wonderful research conducted by Ruth Stewart a few years ago. It also includes newer information, such as the fractional school district shared with East Rupert, and the temporary annex school which served the children living at the Prince Quarries in the late 1860s. However, I did run out of time to complete research on a chart showing the number of students in each school district over time. An interesting project, because it shows the declining enrollment in some of the district schools, but also because it shows the changes in ways students were counted: the sharp decline in the student body from 1862 to 1863 was due to the change in counting students, from student age population to number of children actually attending school.

The Postcard exhibit relies heavily on the research and cataloguing efforts of Dave Parsons, who has spent Friday mornings for several years working on the project. The exhibit talks about the general history of postcards, and separates postcards by creator and by topic. Two interesting finds are that some of the postcards were signed "Charles Parker," and some "Bunny Photos," both of Dorset. I was able to dig up some information on Mr. Parker, but none on "Bunny." The major items left out of



Postcard of Prentiss Pond, seen from Church Street as you approach the Dorset West Road

the exhibit are a sizable series of black and white postcards from the 1910s of Dorset scenes. The one unifying factor of these postcards is that they have handwritten titles and numbers on the front. These postcards were made by Austrian-born Rudolph Richter, who opened a photography studio in Salem, New York in the 1920s. Some of his postcards are on display, but more work needs to go into listing the numbered series, and finding out which ones we still need for the collection.

You can certainly learn from and enjoy the exhibits as they are, but just as they move deeper into local history, they also hint at what else there is to discover.

Jon Mathewson

Dorset Schools from 1777 to 2015

The District System

From 1777 to 1890, Vermont schools operated on the "District System." Basically, every village, collection of farms, or large extended family was responsible for providing for the education of their youth. At first, students were often taught in private homes, and only later were one-room schoolhouses built. Depending on how you count them, there were 15 or 16 such District schools in Dorset during this period.

The first reform to this system came in 1827 with a law that made towns delineate district boundaries, required teacher certification, and listed required courses of study. Districts were also allowed to tax people who lived in the district, but did not have children in schools. This made possible the possibility for the free education of all children in the district, although the law needed to be strengthened in the 1850s.

The Town System

Education reformers did not like the district system because, as they saw it, poorer districts had poor schools and even wealthy districts that had no need for schools had poor schools. Their solution was to remove governance and economic control from the local "Prudential Committees," transferring power to a new town-wide school board.

Towns were allowed to transform voluntarily to the new Town System in 1870. By the 1880s, only 20 – out of 248 – had consolidated into town-wide control of schools. In 1890, the state implemented a state-wide property tax for education (5% of the value of the Grand List), which was divided across the state. It quickly became obvious that the plan was unworkable with more than 2,000 districts across Vermont, so, in 1892, the state mandated the Town System.

Problems with Consolidation

It was a departure from the established ideas and traditions in school administration. Many parents felt that they were surrendering their personal privileges and prerogatives in the education of their children, removing control of the schools from the patrons to non-interested school-lords. It took more than twenty years to overcome the hostility born of this sense of personal right and community privilege. During this time only twenty towns passed into the township system; fifteen of these reverted later to the local system.

One Town, One School

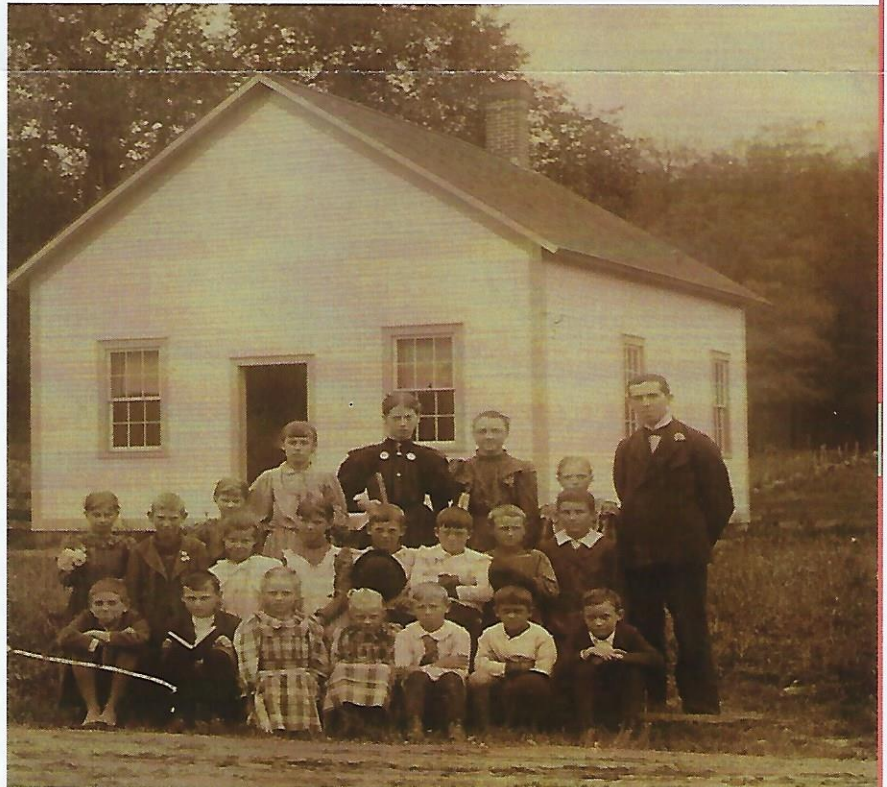
After World War II, increasing student populations and educational expectations led to the consolidation of schools. Some had already closed when the quarries ceased operations. The Dorset Village and East Dorset schools closed in 1959. The following year, students from both schools attended the new Dorset Elementary School on Morse Hill Road

Act 60/68 and Beyond

The 1997 Vermont Supreme Court decision, *Brigham v. State of Vermont*, led to a major overhaul of Vermont's public school financing. Towns with higher real-estate values and therefore lower taxes, had to raise their taxes and send the increased revenue to the state to be shared with towns with lower real-estate values. Predictably, citizens of the wealthier towns balked at the new town law, and quickly set up the Dorset Education Fund to raise education funding through direct donations, thus bypassing the increased taxation. Other towns set up similar funds. In 2003 the legislature passed Act 68, which barred such funding efforts.

Today

The Vermont legislature is again working on education reform, exploring a consolidation of school districts so none would have less than 1,100 students, thereby reducing the current 272 school districts to 50 or 60. Next year's legislators will take up this matter in the coming session.



District #2 Sykes District School 1910

LONG TRAIL SCHOOL

David Wilson and Rene Schrauth started the Long Trail School in 1975. The present schoolhouse was built in 1982. It has grown significantly over the years, adding a 200-seat theater and several other additions. It now has 46 faculty members and 170 students who come from Dorset, other Vermont towns, and from abroad.

BURR AND BURTON SEMINARY

When Manchester merchant Joseph Burr (1772-1828) passed away, he left a bequest of \$10,000 to build a secondary school in Manchester, provided that another \$10,000 was raised by the community. It was, and the first building of the new school was completed in 1832, and the first students were admitted to Burr Seminary on May 15, 1833. Girls were admitted in 1860, and in 2001 the name was changed to Burr and Burton Academy.

DON'T MISS THESE CLASSIC ARTIFACTS

School Bell from Dorset Village School,

first rung on January 17, 1876

Made in West Troy, NY

Weight 83 lb.

Chalkboard and chalk used in District #2 School

Inkwell from the Dorset Village School

School Handbells

Yearbooks

Class Pictures



Regarding Membership

If you have already joined the Dorset Historical Society for 2015, we thank you for your support. We welcome new members. Further information about membership maybe found on our website:

www.dorsetvthistory.org

Membership is our principal means of support!

THIRD THURSDAY LUNCH LECTURES

Our successful Third Thursday Lunch Lecture Series continues for its fourth year. Come and explore many subjects and individuals from local and state history. You are invited to bring a brown-bag lunch. Dessert and refreshments will be served after the lecture. All lectures take place at Bley House at noon and are free and open to the public. We hope to see you there.

June 18 – “The History of the Dorset Field Club” by Dudley Barrow

July 16 – “A Visit to Artifacts in our Storage Barn” – car pooling from Bley House

August 20 – “One House in Four Centuries” by Sue Washburn, current owner

September 17 – “The Story of Samplers” by Maria Timmerman

October 15 – “The Enfield Houses and the Quabbin Reservoir”

November 19 – “Looking Back at Christmas Decorations” by Linda McKeever

December 17 – “Christmas Treats from Historic Recipes” from DHS recipes or your own favorites from yesteryear.

OUR WISH LIST

We are grateful to those donors who contributed toward making our long-dreamed-of wish for a large size flatbed scanner come true. It is in place and is currently being used by Linda French, who is archiving the Parson Pratt genealogical documents and journals.

The Conservation Assessment Report that was done last year to evaluate our collection and facilities recommended that an automatic standby generator be installed to insure that temperature and humidity remain as constant as possible. The main reason for getting one is to support the heat and air conditioning so that damaging variations in all seasons would be eliminated. Our needs would be covered by a 20 KW system, totally automatic and installed, to be powered by propane which is presently on premises. Total cost is estimated at around \$10,000.

We would be grateful for any contributions toward this important step. Any sums donated toward this would be kept in a separate fund until the total amount is collected.