



Bley House News

Dorset Historical Society

Winter/Spring

A Seasonal Newsletter

2017's Upcoming Exhibits

The Opening Reception for this year's new exhibits will take place on the first weekend in June, and there is already a flurry of activity researching and preparing objects for the displays.

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Chip Ams
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Terry Tyler

MUSEUM CURATOR

Jon Mathewson

OFFICE MANAGER

Betsy Olson

MUSEUM HOURS

W-F 10 to 4, Sat . 10 to 2

Or by appointment

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Dorset Agriculture in the 1800s

Drawing upon memoirs, photographs, agricultural censuses, and farm equipment in our collections, the exhibit will examine what was grown or produced on Dorset's farms during the 1800s, following not just the ups and downs of wheat, sheep, and cows, but also tracing the rise of cheese making and its influence on local manufacturing, and answering why buckwheat, oats, corn, and potatoes were grown in such high volume.

Right: Terry Tyler with a c. 1880 fanning mill



Bea Jackson and David Humpheys

After living as artists in Paris during the 1930s, this couple moved to Woodstock, NY for a while before settling in Dorset, where they painted to great acclaim for the remainder of their lives. This exhibit will be their first major retrospective in two decades.

Left: Beatrice Jackson's "Red Sheds." Oil on canvas, c. 1960

Huntington Pratt Gilbert

Egg farmer Hunt Gilbert lived his entire life on the Dorset West Road, but whenever he could, he would take his camera and photograph his friends, neighbors, and family at work and play. Some of his photographs were sold as postcards for several decades. He had a great eye for framing scenes. The Dorset Historical Society has undertaken a ten-year project to digitize and exhibit pictures from the hundreds of Gilbert's negatives in our collection. Come see the seventh exhibition of these rarely seen views of Dorset life a hundred years ago.



Above: Hunt Gilbert photo of tennis court, 1894. This court was located on what is now the front lawn of the Historical Society. The Library and Dorset Inn are in the background.

Dorset Village Historic District

In 2014 we had a display on the Kent Neighborhood Historic District to much acclaim. This year will offer Part One of a two-part exhibit on the Dorset Village Historic District, featuring the houses in the historic district along Route 30. Church Street will be next year's exhibit. Come see the detailed stories of these iconic homes, including the wide variety of commercial purposes for which they have also been used.

2017's Upcoming Exhibits (continued)

Conference Room Art Gallery Every year we hang a new selection of paintings in the Conference Room or the Historical Society's library. This year we will feature paintings of houses in the Dorset Village Historic District along Route 30, as well as some recent acquisitions. Among the recent acquisitions are an 1884 oil painting by Catherine Elizabeth Dunton (currently the oldest painting in our collection of Dorset artists), a hooked rug by Esther Knipe, two portraits by Elsa Bley, and two 1950s oil paintings by Arthur Jones. The Dunton and Jones paintings are currently undergoing conservation work, so they will look brighter and better than they have in decades.

Right: Hooked rug by Esther Knipe, c. 1950



In addition, the permanent exhibits on Dorset's marble industry and the work of the Fenton family of stoneware potters will remain on view.

Curator's Corner

Providing historical context is perhaps the most important task of a curator. About twenty-five years ago, I encountered a museum exhibit that has influenced my approach to the exhibits I create and curate.

The exhibit was at Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology. The centerpiece was a ceremonial headdress from Africa, displayed by itself, covered by a standard plastic vitrine, the way artifacts are generally displayed. The attached label explained where the headdress originated, what it was used for, and the materials that went into making it. Just like any museum label would.

The next part of the display explained how the centerpiece showed nothing of the context from which the headdress came. Using photographs, it showed the ceremony in which the headdress was used and explained the purpose of the ceremony. But that was still not enough. The next part of the display had a video of the ceremony that showed the headdress "in action" and how it appeared with other headdresses, and the costumes used in the ceremony. But that was not enough, because there was a tribal hierarchy ranking who performed what part of the ceremony and their biological and social relationships with each other. In other words, who specifically got to wear the headdress would not have been addressed in earlier exhibits.

The basic message, of course, was that by isolating artifacts from their original contexts, museums lose many compelling stories about what the artifact meant to the original users of the piece. The unattainable goal for curators is to include as much of that original context through gathered materials, telling us who used the artifact, and what his place in their community was, along with other artifacts used with the artifact. Unfortunately, not all these details can be uncovered.

The Dorset Historical Society has a nice selection of vitrines that we use to display our artifacts. When researching exhibits, however, I try to discover the social relationships of artists. Comparing biographies and genealogies of Dorset artists and their spouses shows the family connections that brought so many to town in the first decades of the 20th century, for instance. The trading relationships of manufacturers such as the Fentons who brought their own clay from New Jersey in the early 1800s or the habits of farmers in the latter part of the 19th century who preferred buckwheat and oats to barley and rye are also examples of social relationships. Discovering this information creates deeper exhibits than, say, throwing random paintings against the wall or placing old jugs behind plastic.

Leaving the museum walls and sponsoring village walks and quarry tours also helps put history in context. An exhibit can explain the history of Dorset's thirty or so quarries, but walking to the Folsom Quarry helps show the line of quarries along the old road, and hikers can experience firsthand how big the Folsom Quarry actually was by comparison. Hikers can also perceive the difficulty of moving five-ton marble blocks down the side of the mountain.

History exists outside the walls of the Bley House Museum. It can be seen standing by roadsides or abandoned in the forests, but the work done inside the museum better informs us about the historical context of what surrounds us.

Jon Mathewson

***Mark Your Calendar for Forthcoming DHS Lectures and
Special Events for 2017***



Third Thursday Luncheon Lectures: Held at Bley House at 12 noon. Please bring a sandwich. Refreshments and dessert will be served. All lectures are free and open to the public.

Thursday, March 16: Randy Schmidt will discuss “The Birds of Spring.”

Thursday, April 20: Hilary Solomon will introduce “Dams Along the Mettowee.”

Thursday, May 18: Preston Bristow will connect “Logging Railroads and the Long Trail.”

Thursday, June 15: Dave Wilson will tell the story of the Long Trail school.

Thursday, July 20: Bill West will present “The Hunting Camps of Beech Ridge.”

Thursday, August 17: Michele Pagan and Judy Harwood will instruct on “Researching Your Historic House.”

Thursday, September 21: Sue Dern and Judy Harwood will lead a Dorset Village Walk.

Thursday, October 19: Warren Broderick and Ruth Greene McNally will present “The Southern Vermont Artists Database Project.”

Thursday, November 16: Jeremy Davis will uncover “Lost Ski Areas of Vermont.”

Thursday, December 21: Jon Mathewson will give a “Holiday Exhibit Talk.”

Special Events:

Saturday, June 3: New Exhibits Open House, Bley House, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Saturday, June 17: Hike to Gettysburg Quarry, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Meet at Bley House.

Saturday, July 8: Hike to Freedly Quarry, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Meet at Bley House.

Saturday, July 15: Hike to Folsom Quarry, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Meet at Bley House.

Saturday, July 15: Annual Ice Cream Social, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Bley House lawn.

Wednesday, November 15: Dorset Historical Society Annual Meeting, Bley House, 7 p.m.

Saturday, December 2: Holiday Open House, Bley House, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.



Lacunae

Genealogists continue to stop by, researching their Dorset ancestors, but more and more we receive requests from Dorset residents who want to know the history of their home. Who lived in the same space before they did? What did they do there? What happened to them?

To that end, we are beginning to gather information about houses, particularly outside the historic districts. Do you have old photographs, stories, or lines of property ownership for any house in Dorset? Let us know!

Full House at Third Thursday Bley House Lectures



On February 16, Archeologist Steve Butz presented “The Shays Settlement Archeology Project” currently underway in Sandgate. Third Thursday lectures on varying subjects, are free and open to the public and continue to attract a capacity audience.

Welcome to New Members

James and Susan Goodfellow

John and Michelle Pagan

Please become a member of the Dorset Historical Society and help support its activities preserving Dorset history!

St. Jerome's Church Artifacts Come to the Dorset Historical Society Permanent Collection



This fall, Deconstruction Works dismantled St. Jerome's Church in East Dorset. The church was built in 1874 and had fallen into disrepair. DHS received plaques from the stained glass windows and other memorial pieces. The photo below of the long-hidden ceiling covered during later renovations was revealed in the dismantling process.

