



Bley House News

The Dorset Historical Society

Summer 2020

A Seasonal Newsletter

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Curator's Corner: Enduring the Pandemic "Shutdown"

The Bley House Museum is currently closed to the public until further notice. We have been closed since the middle of March, due, of course, to the Covid-19 pandemic sweeping the globe. You have, no doubt, heard of it. This Curator's Corner is meant to let you know what is going on at the Dorset Historical Society, and what is not happening.

Because we are closed, all our programs have been cancelled. The Third Thursday Lecture Series packs up to two dozen people in our small Main Gallery, so we will not host those lectures until groups that size can meet inside. Even our outdoor series of hikes has been cancelled for the summer, because it would be unwise to have large groups of people huddling together to hear Art and me explain historic sites along the trails. The Museum itself is closed until we feel that we can safely accommodate visitors within the current State of Vermont guidelines.

Meanwhile, projects are moving ahead at the museum. I go in once a week to research answers to e-mailed queries, Betsy Olsen is in to pay bills and send out letters, Cynthia Elliot is in twice a week to enter information into the collections database, and Ruth Stewart is in once a week to catalogue our large Jessica Bond collection. We make sure our times in the museum are spread out, and we do leave notes for each other.

When I'm not in the museum, I work from home, researching the new exhibits. The Exhibits Opening was originally set for June 6. Two of the five exhibits have been installed, and I am taking advantage of the extra time to delve deeper into the lives of the first women voters in Dorset for our exhibit on the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment. I think the extra time and effort will be worthwhile.

I have also taken part in several statewide museum Zoom meetings, where I have learned what other institutions are doing, and what the latest state guidelines are. Basically, we find that we are all in the same boat in un-navigated waters, and some larger institutions are planning on limited openings in July.

(continued on page 2)

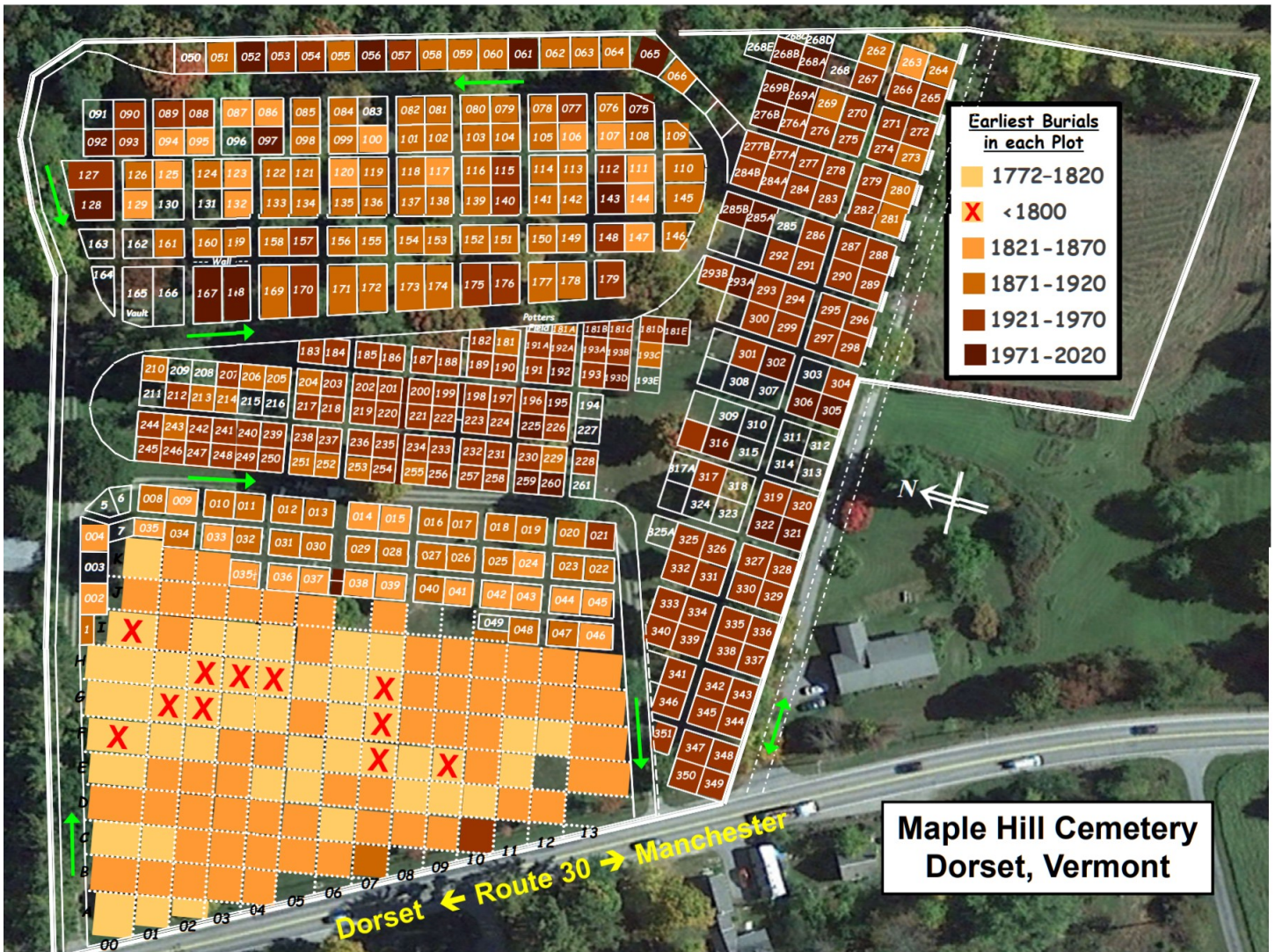
Enduring the "Shutdown"

We do have our own limited opening to announce: individual researchers can now come to the Bley House to look through our archives and library by appointment. Contact me through the Dorset Historical Society e-mail if you would like to set up a time.

Meanwhile, I will continue getting new exhibits in place for when we do re-open to the public, as well as respond to the many requests for information that come our way. Unfortunately, the DHS phone number and e-mail address have become attached to many web pages advertising the Dorset Swimming Hole Quarry, and with the warmer weather we have been asked what the quarry rules are with the pandemic, several calls a week at this point!

But meanwhile, you can watch several lectures on our YouTube Channel, and look through our on-line maps and databases at our website. As for me, I'm hoping to hike to the various quarries, just to make sure they are still there.

Jon Mathewson



These data were gathered, and are herein presented, by Andy Longacre

Looking into East Dorset's History

DHS volunteers and East Dorset residents Ruth Stewart and Michele Pagán are assembling documentation to nominate East Dorset Village for the State Register of Historic Places. Many interesting stories about the people, industries, houses, events and history of East Dorset have emerged from their research, and reviews of their findings are planned for future editions of this newsletter. Sources for these stories include Tyler Resch's history *Dorset: in the shadow of the marble mountain* as well as primary documents at the Dorset Historical Society, historic maps, town records, genealogy databases and local interviews. Please contact Ruth (stewdor7@comcast.net) or Michele (mpp1@aol.com) if you have memories, stories, memorabilia, photos or artifacts about or from East Dorset that you wish to share.

"The Lord's barn" on Maple Hill... a mystery Resolved?!

A "graveyard" is a burial ground that's adjacent to a church; a "cemetery" is a burial ground that's located apart from any church. Over its history, Dorset's Maple Hill has been BOTH.

From Tyler Resch's history *Dorset: in the shadow of the marble mountain*, we read:

"Dorset's largest cemetery is located at Maple Hill because the first church was located there, though no trace of a foundation can be seen and graves have been placed without regard for the original building site. The first meetinghouse, a log church that because of its draughtiness came to be known as 'the Lord's barn', was built about 1773 ... and was moved in 1797 or 1798 to the north side of Church Street."

Now some recent research yields insight as to just where this log church must have been.

The Sexton's Ledger for Maple Hill Cemetery lists approximately 1000 names and dates for early burials in unspecified locations, mostly in the "Old Grounds" adjoining Route 30. It also records an additional 2000 names, dates and other information for later burials in over 350 numbered plots, each 20' square, that are laid out across the back of Maple Hills' present 6.6 acres. Then in 2016, a pattern of gridlines, extending the 20' spacing, was established across the Old Grounds, and a walking survey of the still-legible headstones succeeded in locating about 70% of the previously unrecorded gravesites!

These new data, besides substantially augmenting the online "Maple Hill Cemetery" listing on the DHS website, were recently gleaned to create a colored map (opposite page) showing the earliest burials in each "plot", from lighter colors for the earliest dates to progressively darker colors for more recent gravesites. Visually then, one can get a sense of how Maple Hill has grown outward over its nearly 250 years, first as a graveyard and later as a cemetery.

Going one step further, all the plots with headstones dated *before* the church was removed have been highlighted on this map with a red "X" — locations where the Lord's barn *could not* have been! — clearly indicating it must have occupied the NW or lower left corner. Visiting that corner, all of those earliest burial sites (beneath the red arrows in the panoramic photo below) are found well up on a ridge surrounding a low flat "bowl" (outlined below) about 50' x 90' in size. Convincingly then, that lower flat section must be where the Lord's barn sat before, as Zephine Humphrey's *The Story of Dorset Vermont* states, "it was drawn across the fields" into the village "nearly opposite our present church."



Lacunae

Normally, I ask for specific things created many years ago which we should have in our collections. This time, I'm going contemporary. If you have any items that future generations may find intriguing about living through the Covid-19 Pandemic, please send them our way. I'm thinking specifically about the mask you wear every day, but also hand- or typewritten accounts of what your life has been like through this. Of course, please do not send us your masks until it is safe to do so!

Jon Mathewson

Dorset Artists on Vacation...

While Dorset artists are best known for paintings of regional landscapes and activities, here's a small gallery of scenes they have brought home after venturing beyond the Green Mountain state.



Jay Connaway, near Pont-Aven, Brittany



"Marché aux Fleurs" - Patti Campbell, in Aix-en-Provence



"Into the Canyon" - Cynthia Rosen, in AZ



Arthur Jones, on the coast of Maine



"Atlanta from Afar" - Andy Longacre



"Pincio Gardens Roma"



somewhere out West



a riverside village in Japan

...from the Vacation Sketchbooks of Elsa Bley



"The County Fair" - Edwin Child

Welcome, New DHS Members:

William & Jo Venezia

Ian Sheldon Ludd &
Krsista Lynn Johnson Ludd

... & our New Board Member, John Rodenburg

