



Bley House News

The Dorset Historical Society

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MUSEUM HOURS

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

❖ OPEN ❖

or by Appointment

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Visit us on Facebook

(Late) Summer 2023

A Seasonal Newsletter

Curator's Corner – Summer at the Historical Society

Summers are traditionally the busiest season at the Dorset Historical Society. Tourists interested in learning about local lore stop in to our climate-controlled comfort, genealogists taking deep dives into their gene pools spend time in our research center, and historians interested in a wide variety of topics, including the life of Bill Wilson, the Dorset Conventions, the mission work at the Mandan reservation, the beginnings of currency engraving in China, and even the history of the house they just bought in Dorset, find answers in our unique resources.

Some visitors remain in our memories more than others, like the researcher with a support parrot perched on his shoulder, prepared to nip the person's earlobe if his glucose levels got too low. My favorite story, though, involves two groups of researchers, on separate days. One day, three middle-aged women exploring the life of their heroine, 19th century novelist and hymnist Elizabeth Prentiss made a pilgrimage to Dorset. After showing them the materials in our collection, I looked up her burial place in Maple Hill Cemetery, pulled out a large map of the cemetery (this information is now searchable on the DHS website), showed them how to find her grave, and sent them on their way. (continued over)

★ A Call For Two Types of Volunteers ★

The Dorset Historical society is run mostly by volunteers. And we need more people who are interested in welcoming visitors to the area, and keeping our institution afloat.

Docents are needed to keep the lights on during our open hours, Wednesday through Saturday, mostly on Saturday. Docents greet visitors, orient them to the current exhibits, and even help with research in our library.

Board members help with the governance and financial stability of this sixty-year-old institution.

If you think you may be interested in either type of volunteer activity, please let us know.

Summer at the Museum (cont.)

The very next day, an elderly couple from the midwest came in search of his Dorset ancestors. After going through our archives, I pulled out the cemetery map, showed them where their ancestors were buried, and noted that I had sent some people to the adjoining lot the previous day, in search of someone named Elizabeth Prentiss. Their eyes widened, and said "THE Elizabeth Prentiss?" I answered in the affirmative, and happy that their ancestors were buried next to such a luminous celebrity they began singing her hymn, "More Love to Thee, O Christ" from memory. As someone who had never heard of Elizabeth Prentiss before becoming the DHS curator, I was most impressed.

Three years ago, Covid ended all of that. Visitors began trickling back last summer, and already the summer of 2023 seems to signal a return to the larger number of people coming to Dorset in search of a solid place to find answers, and more questions, about the past. We are, of course, here to help.

Getting Ready for Vermont's Sestercentennial!

Manchester Historical Society Curator Shawn Harrington and Dorset Historical Society Curator Jon Mathewson are busy working together, and with other institutions, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of Vermont and its neighbor, the United States.



On July 27, 1775, representatives from area towns met at a tavern at the base of Nichols Hill Road. This was the first of four meetings in Dorset held over the next year to decide how to navigate the changing political landscapes brought about by the American Revolution. At the first meeting, the delegates agreed to align the Green Mountain Boys with the Continental Army, and named Seth Warner the leader of the regiment. At the fourth meeting, the delegates decided to declare independence from New Hampshire, New York, and England, but withheld the final vote for a meeting held in Westminster in January, 1777.

1775 was a busy year. the Westminster Massacre was on March 13, the Battles of Lexington and Concord were on April 15, and on May 10, the Green Mountain Boys, and others, seized Fort Ticonderoga. Efforts are already underway locally, regionally, and nationally to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the founding of Vermont and the American Revolution. To find out more information about events in Bennington County, go to <https://www.bennington250.org/>

For Whom the Bell Tolls



Ever wonder about the 83-pound bronze bell that sits behind our DHS museum? Well it originally crowned the Dorset Village School on Route 30 where the Post Office now stands. The bell was shipped from the Meneely Bell Company in West Troy, New York on January 12, 1876, and first rung in place at the School on January 17, 1876. Generations of village school kids in grades 1-8 responded to its pealing until the school was razed in 1960.



Upcoming Historical Society Events

Third Thursday Lunchtime Lectures

(starting at Noon in the Museum; bring a small lunch if you wish)

- September 21: David Pitlyk, "Myths and Legends of the Battle of Bennington."
- October 19: Warren Broderick, "Recent Discoveries in Fenton Pottery."
- November 16: Thomas Fontaine, "Messenger Boy of Grafton."

Plus Other Events on the Calendar

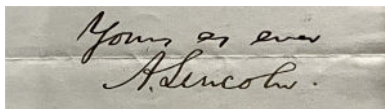
- ⇒ September 20: Our 60th Birthday!
- ⇒ October 16: Dorset Historical Society Annual Meeting, 4 pm
- ⇒ December 9: Holiday Open House, 11 - 1.

2023 Exhibits in the Bley House Museum: well worth Visiting!



↙ Marble Gallery: An award-winning exhibit on the marble industry in Dorset.

Main Gallery: A display of pottery made by the Fenton Family of Dorset and East Dorset, 1801-1832; and an overview of the History of Dorset, 1840-1870. →



"Yours as ever, A. Lincoln"

↙ Stairwell: Autograph Collecting, with original letters written by famous educators, politicians and United States presidents, alongside autograph books kept by local residents.

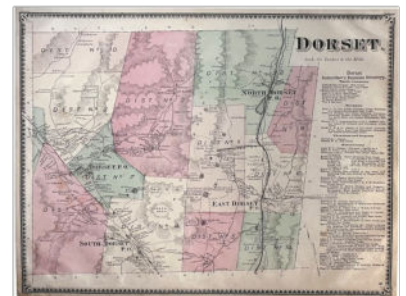


Display of Hunt Gilbert photos

Upstairs Hallway: Mover of Mansions: Charley Wade and the Quabbin Houses →

← Venetian Red Room: Dorset Photographs of Huntington Pratt Gilbert, 1905-1913

Conference Room: Recent acquisitions, paintings and photographs donated in the last year or so. →



An early map of Dorset



Bley House as found in Hebron, NY



Quarry Workers by Edwin Child (detail)

Welcome, New DHS Members!

Mary Hill Forcier

Jack Gilbert

Anne Lauritzen

J. D. Sullivan, Jr.

A Vermont Village... but Who Built it?

In the mid-1970s, this collection of wooden model buildings, both town & country, was purchased in the Dorset area and sent to our children. Does any reader remember where it might have come from?



Treasures in the Barn

The Dorset Historical Society is fortunate that the owner of a local barn donates space in its cellar for storing large artifacts from our village history, including:



← a Saw Bench made c. 1900 by Manchester carpenter William Gillette,



a Butter Works table made by Moseley & Stoddard of Rutland, for kneading salt into butter, →



← a black, mid-19th century Portland cutter sleigh,

a Quarry Scraper for clearing foliage and soil from an area to be quarried, from the Norcross-West & Plateau quarries →



← a Gas Pump (1950-1955) used on the Beebe farm in East Dorset,

& a c. 1880 fanning mill, used to separate the wheat from the chaff. →



We owe great thanks to the Nims estate, Jane & Howard Beebe, and Richard & Kristen McDonough for these donations to the Dorset Historical Society's collection.