

MILFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

***THE MILFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL MEETING
7:00 PM BANQUET HALL, TOWN HALL***

PROGRAM 7:30 PM:

***RUTH AND CJ GORIUS
FROM WINDHAM WILDFLOWERS
LYNDEBORO, NH***

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Now that the warm weather is fast approaching and we will again be enjoying the Common or Oval, and the downtown area, I thought you all would like to hear again the history of the Common and how it came to be. Sometimes we take things so much for granted that we forget the history behind some of these beautiful spots.

According to the Ramsdell Town History of 1738- 1901 "The Common was given to the parish by William Crosby in 1788 before the town of Milford was incorporated. William Crosby lived in a house that was located in what is now the site of the "New Town House" (The "Fish Bowl" building is perhaps this building, having been moved in 1868-69 to make way for the erection of the NEW townhouse) The roads leading east and west of the Common were laid out in 1768 for the convenience of the customers of John Shepard's grist mill and sawmill just across the river. The original piece of land began at the southwest corner of Shepard's bridge, ran southerly on the west side of the road until it came to the main road that leads to Wilton, (the intersection of Union and Elm Streets) then westerly on the north side of the road about 8 rods, then northerly to a bound on the Souhegan River, thence by said river to the place of the beginning, by the meetinghouse (now Eagle Hall. The piece bordering the Souhegan River was sold, two pieces of land on the west and northwest were bought. The town purchased a small triangle piece from Buxton's Tavern Estate for \$40.00" (Try to figure these directions out.)

In 1846 the old meeting house was moved four rods in a northeasterly direction, turned half round so that the end of the building, which originally faced west, now faced south. This increased the available area of the Common. At the annual town meeting of 1849, permission was given individuals to set out trees on the Common, and soon after a number of elm trees were planted.

To enlarge the road on the south side of the Common, the town bought several small pieces of land from Josiah Crosby and Sophia Spaulding in 1851, Thomas and Lucy Farnsworth and Ancel Pratt in 1853, Frederick and Freeman Crosby in 1854. All these purchases allowed for a better roadway around the Common. In 1854 the town purchased another large tract to the south from the heirs of William Crosby for \$200.

In 1872, a committee was appointed to enclose the Common or Square after the removal of the old townhouse.(Eagle Hall was moved from the center of the road to a spot called The Mill Lot, which is now its current location). Mr. Batchelder, Mr. Kaley and Mr. Fifield were in charge. A fence was built at the cost of \$ 1,075.45. By 1891 the fence had become defaced and unsightly. In 1892 the town voted by warrant to take it down provided the Improvement Society would set a substantial granite curbstone in its place and concrete the walks. This was done during the year of 1893 at a cost of \$1,019.00.

There were not many trees on the Common. Some were planted in 1846 and 1849. In 1892, 13 elms were planted to represent the 13 original States, one of which was New Hampshire. These elms grew into beautiful, huge trees and were healthy until swarms of elm beetles started to attack them in 1911. As a result, all the trees were eventually removed by the early 1960's. Maples have been planted to replace the elms plus flowering crabs. The oak in front of the bandstand was planted by the GAR in 1880. It did not survive and was replanted in 1886 and still stands in front of the bandstand.

In 1900 the merchants and the Improvement Society decided that something had to be done about the unbearable dusty conditions of the roads around the Common. A horse-drawn sprinkling cart and driver were hired and paid for by the Society. Water was drawn out of the river into a 300 gallon wooden tank and on the back of the cart was a fan shaped sprinkler. It took 40 to 50 tanks full of water each day to lay the dust in just the area of the Common. In 1905 State aid for the improvement of the highway became available and the roads were macadamized and curb stones put in.

Lighting around the Common started in 1873 when Abijah Wood hung out a kerosene lamp from his home at the corner of Franklin and Nashua Streets. Neighbors began to do the same thing and soon the town installed lamps around the Common. In 1876 two "Bruce Vesper Lamps" were put in near the Town House. Eventually a pulley arrangement made it unnecessary to use a ladder to light the lamps. In 1897 the Town signed a contract with the Electric Light Company for 40 lights at \$15 per light per year. In 1913 they were replaced with incandescent lights. As the quality of lights available improved, so did the lighting around the Common. Six hundred candle power lights on ornamental metal tankards with underground wiring came into use in 1934. In 1962 new lights on wooden posts were installed. During the renovation of the Common in 1995 Hitchiner Mfg. provided the new victorian lamp posts all around the Common that we see now.

The Common has always been the site for political gatherings and Presidential visits. President Taft in 1912 and President Gerald Ford in 1975. And, of course, the never-ending political candidates running for President always stop in Milford.

TIDBITS

The first Christmas tree on the Common was put up in 1914. Candy and 800 gifts were given out to children. In 1927 the World War I Memorial was dedicated on the Common on Armistice Day. Rotary traffic was started in 1944 and helped the flow of traffic around the Common. Parking meters came in 1951. During the renovation of the downtown area in 1995, bricks were added to the Common. One could buy a brick for \$50 (or was it \$25) and have it engraved to remember a loved one, or whatever.

This gives you a nutshell history of the Common we love so much today. Hope you enjoyed it.

We have had another very busy year at the Society this past season. The production of the book "Milford - Images of America" was a huge undertaking for our Board member Chris Thompson. A few copies are left for sale. More work has been accomplished at the Carey House with the installation of a new display case purchased from Hick's Jewelry. The case is in the Hutchinson Room and holds some of their memorabilia. Please stop in during open house and see Milford's history first hand. Again, my heartfelt thanks to our dedicated Board of Directors and all you loyal members who have given of your time and energy to the work that was undertaken. I am only a small cog in a big wheel and you are all to be commended on what has been accomplished. We do still need volunteers in many areas. If you have an hour or two to spare, please contact one of our Board members - Open House volunteers are needed all the time.

Polly Cote, President



CURATOR'S REPORT

One change you will see when you visit the Carey House will be in the Hutchinson Room. Nellie Galloway organized this room when the artifacts were moved into this building. Very little was ever changed until we were able to purchase a display cabinet from Hicks Jewelry Store. This doubles the display area, makes the exhibits easier to read and adds a nice touch to the room. Norman Cote repaired the electric cords so that we may light the displays in both cabinets.

One more addition is the World War II Honor Roll of pictures. This is a new exhibit on the wall in the Civil War and Military History Room. Sarooch Ricciardi donated large pictures of Milford veterans and Ed Carey built a hinged display area for them. We expect to have this completed by Memorial Day.

We have had an exhibit about Harriet E. Wilson who lived in Milford from about 1828 to after 1850. Her book, "Our Nig", was the first novel published by an African American woman anywhere and the first novel to be published by an African American in this country. We will be changing this exhibit as items are returned to the files and books to the bookcase. However, the desire to honor Harriet Wilson has been taken up by the Harriet Wilson Project. The idea came originally from Peggy Miller's article in the Milford Cabinet over a year ago. Jerriane Boggis was inspired by that article to start a group to honor this native of Milford. The Harriet E. Wilson Project was formed with the sponsorship of the Business and Professional Women's Club. This project is in the preliminary stages of looking for ways to permanently honor Harriet Wilson in Milford and in New Hampshire. It is a separate group but works closely with the Historical Society.

Have you noticed pictures of Milford in the Yankee Chef? Mr. Sullivan had several of the Historical Society's pictures copied and enlarged for his restaurant.

The plans are being made for the annual tour of the Historical Society Building and other places in the downtown area by the Third Grades of Milford. The children have to come by bus instead of walking over from school. This is another sign of changes in our town.

As usual we have many to thank for their contributions to the viability of the Society. We wish to say thank you again to those who donated artifacts this year. Thank you to the Girls Scouts who have finished their work with the Society. We appreciate the help given by Erica Benson and Molly Champagne. Thank you girls! Thank you to the Boy Scouts who come on Thursday evenings to enter our holdings on the database and bring us up to the 21st Century. Their work is above and beyond what the committee could do. I greatly appreciate the support of the Board Of Directors and I most enthusiastically thank Nancy Ashford, Nancy D'Amato and Mary Johnson for their work on behalf of the Committee.

Louie Carey

OPEN HOUSE at the Carey House has been held the 2nd weekend of each month on Saturday and Sunday from 2-4 pm. Sometimes we have 3 or 4 people who visit and sometimes no one comes. There has been 300+ children and adults tour the building since May 2002. With the "Our Nig" exhibit and the release of the book "Images of America-Milford" by our very own Chris Thompson, many people came to visit and purchase the book. Our web site also helps get visitors into the Carey House. The house has also been opened at other times to accommodate visitors and researchers.

In November, 2002 I was privileged to visit Hutchinson, MN. This town was founded by three of the Hutchinson singers. Asa Hutchinsn also lived much of his life there and he is buried there. The town is about the size of Milford, but it is surrounded by large farms. Hutchinson, MN has two large industries, one of them is Hutchinson Technology – employing about 1600 people. I also visited the McLeod County Historical Society. It appears Hutchinson is the County Seat for neighboring towns. Hutchinson, MN has a Historical commission with many of the same problems as Milford, NH. All the people I met at the Historical Society and museum were most gracious.

Open House committee By Janice Adams.

Please welcome Ruth & CJ Gorius from Lyndeboro to our meeting tonight. Ruth and her husband are propagators of wildflowers of the Northeast. She and her husband ran a nursery business in Vermont for 15 years. George Aiken originally started the business in 1917. He authored the book "Pioneer in Wildflowers". Ruth and CJ took over nursery in 1985. They transferred the business to growing plants from seeds. They will present a computerized digital program for us. They now have an Internet business called Windham Wildflowers more for the hobby person, and sell flowers that propagate by seed. They will bring handouts, brochures, and we will have a quiz and may win a packet of seeds. If you are a gardener this will be a wonderful Spring program to enjoy. It is not too late to start seeds for the garden.

MEMBERSHIP AND WEB SITE

About a year ago when I volunteered to handle the membership duties for the Historical Society, I created a computer database for keeping track of members. The database has names, addresses, phone numbers, membership types, and fields for tracking who has paid their dues. The database currently has 165 people and businesses in it. There have been 9 new additions since September of last year. Thanks to everyone for their continued support of the Historical Society. One field in the database that is quite lacking in entries is the "E-Mail" field. If you have an E-mail address and would like to receive periodic E-mails about upcoming events or general Historical Society news, please send me your E-mail address to chris.thompson@milfordhistory.com.

Our web site continues to get visitors on a daily basis. A lot of people are looking for information on their antique French & Heald furniture pieces. Other people are looking for their family roots. People find the web site by going to Internet search engines (such as google or yahoo) and doing searches. Other people arrive by clicking on links on other Milford based web sites. If you would like more details on the web site, our last newsletter had a page dedicated to the first year of the web site and it included quite a bit of information.

I have many great ideas for web site projects but don't have near the time I'd like to dedicate to them. Most projects simply involve the preservation of Milford's history in digital format. As time allows, I continue to scan pictures and re-type books, documents and our newsletters. Everything is put onto CD's for preservation and completed items will be put on the web site for everyone to enjoy. I would eventually like to grow our web site to the scale of what the town of Hollis has done. Check out the outstanding work that they've done at this web address: <http://www.hollis.nh.us/windowsonhollispast>.

Chris Thompson

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EVERYONE
OPEN**

The Carey House is open:

**2nd Saturday & Sunday of every month 2PM – 4PM
2nd & 4th Tuesdays 9AM – 11AM**

Visit us on the web at:

www.milfordhistory.com