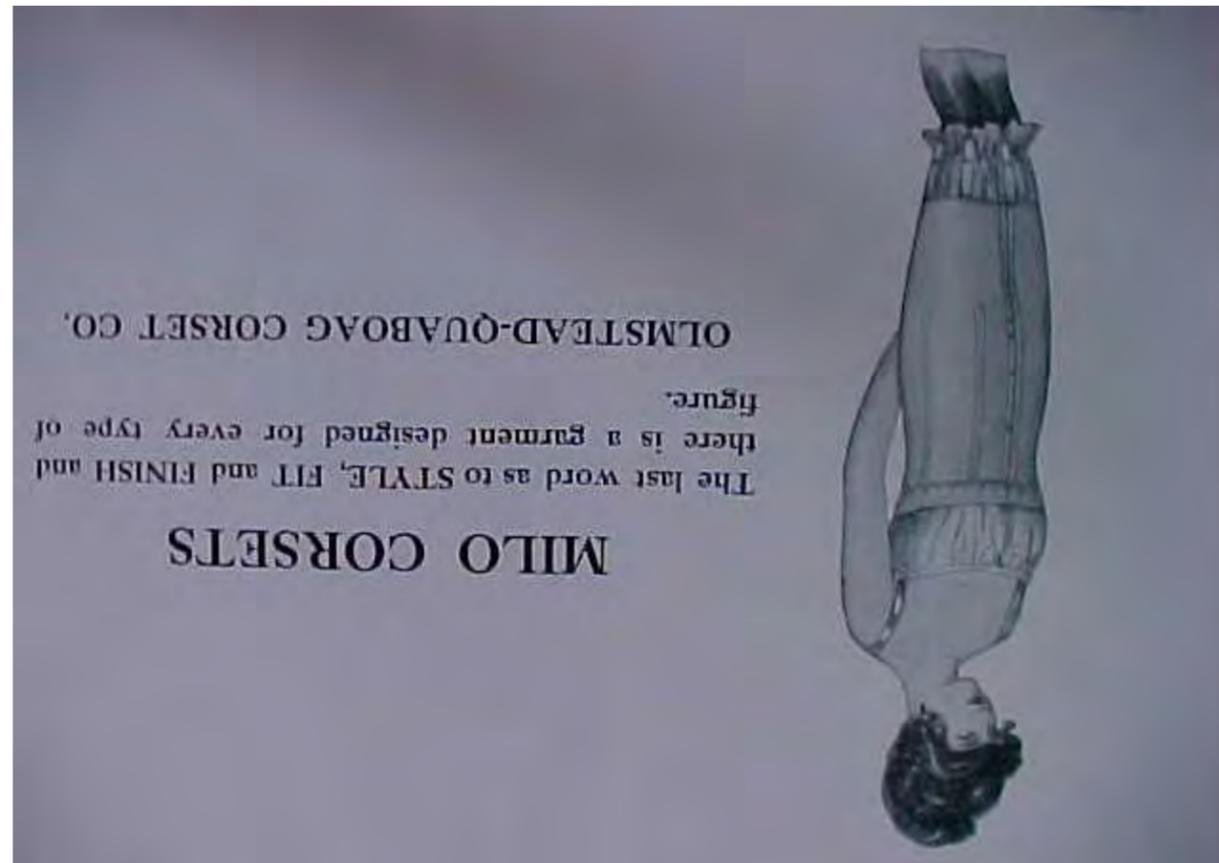


Spring 2011



Quaboag Historical Society



President's Message

Well, 2011 is finally upon us and I have to say, it has started out with a bang. This winter has been one of the most memorable for me in a long time. Snowshoes that I bought three years ago and never used because of lack of snow were a constant companion if I wanted to venture onto our land. Hiking in 2+ feet of snow without them would have been impossible. But, the temps are warming and I saw some open water at Quaboag Pond the other day...a sure sign that spring is just around the corner. Some friends even told me they saw robins nesting in a tree outside their house. Those birds are a bit eager in my opinion, but they are still a welcomed sight.

Spring is such a wonderful time of year and although most of us think of flowers and budding trees, the Society is also thinking about and planning the Annual Meeting. The meeting is a great time for the membership to get together to share ideas and reconnect after the long winter. It will be held at Salem Cross on May 1st from 12:30-4:30. Ms. Christie Higginbottom from OSV will be our speaker and her program is entitled "Native Plants in the Nineteenth Century Garden". Tickets for the event will be mailed out soon so make sure to reserve your spot early.

With the 2010 celebration behind us, Bill Jenkins and I are going to put our best foot forward to host events/talks during 2011 for the membership. Our first one was in January at the West Warren Senior Center. Roger Smith from Athol, an expert on early tools spoke about tool and gun manufacturing in Warren in the late 1800s. For such a cold night, we had a great turnout. There were about 60 people in attendance and many brought some of their own personal examples of early tools from A. W. Crossman & Sons and the Humphrey Tool Co. A good time was had by all. The annual meeting will be our spring event and Bill and I are currently planning the summer and fall schedule. When dates and speakers are set, we will let everyone know so that you don't miss out.

I hope everyone had a safe and comfortable winter. I am excited for the coming months and look forward to working together with the Board to create a strong, active Society. See you all at the Annual Meeting.

Amy Dugas, Co-president



Quaboag Historical Society
PO Box 635
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Inside this issue:

The Rise and Fall of the Blair Block	3
Museum Update	4
Childhood Memories in the Birthplace of Lucy Stone	5-6
Upcoming Events	7

Newsletter printing donated by:



You Think We Have It Bad?

I know we are all ready for winter to be over and spring to begin. Green grass? What a concept! But, if we lived in Boston during the winter of 1843-1844, we would have experienced a winter like no other. Forty-four storms covered the city, dropping a total of 7 ½ ft. of snow. Maybe we don't have it so bad after all.... (From: The Old Farmer's Almanac, Robert B. Thomas, 1860)

Other banner years:

1853-1854: 24 storms, 7 ft., 2 in.
1851-1852: 38 storms, 6 ft., 7 ½ in.
1856-1857: 32 storms, 6 ft., 2 in.

Officer Needed

The Society is still in need of a recording secretary. The position was vacated in mid-2010 and the responsibilities are currently being shared by the Executive Board. The Board would really like to see someone fill that position again. The job responsibilities are not overly time consuming but not having a person in charge of them just adds more work for the Board. We urge a member of the Society to consider this appointment. For more information, contact Amy Dugas (508-867-5428, amydugas@charter.net), Bill Jankins or Marguerite Geis.

The Board would also like to see someone help with the production of the quarterly newsletter. The newsletter is currently being written by Amy Dugas with assistance from Bill Jankins, Marguerite Geis and Kirk Burnham. If there are stories, poems, anecdotes, pictures etc...that a member would like to include in the newsletter, please don't hesitate to contact Amy Dugas. We could have a really great publication if more folks would be willing to contribute time and material. The plantation is rich in history and I am sure much has been written that could be shared with the membership.



Do You Know Where This Bridge Is Located? Look on bottom of page 7 for answer.....

March

Look all around thee!
How the spring advances!
Ludwig Tieck

"I will show you what spring is like!" exulted March, singing in the sunlight of a warm day, in the kindly breeze, in the softened brown earth. "Spring! Don't you remember! Mayflowers and loosened brooks, scudding white clouds overhead, wooded roads curving, beckoning, winding on and on—Forget the short, dark days when the sunshine lost its courage so early in the afternoon; forget the cruel cold, the bitter winds!"

Then in the twinkling of an eye a cloud threw dark, thick veils over the sun, and the gentle breeze scuttled off into nowhere, terrified by the blustering winds plunging down from the north. There was a slanting screen of snowflakes between me and the sky, and a straight screen of doubt between me and my dream of spring. And I thought sadly, "Oh, March is a base deceiver!"

But not for long did I cherish this mood of disillusionment. "Wait!", I bade my impatient spirit. "After all, March has shown me what spring is like, and recaptured for me a hope. Because of those brief, rare moments before the snow overtook and vanquished the warmth, I sensed the long fingers of a happier season reaching through the cold and touching my heart awake. Because of them, I can go on, believing." (From: *New England Memories* by Grace Holbrook Blood, 1955)

Upcoming Events

May 1st: Annual Meeting, Salem Cross Inn, 12:30-4:30

May 21st: Asparagus, Flower & Heritage Festival (Rain Date: May 22nd), West Brookfield Town Common, 10-4

June 5th—Elm Hill Garden Tea

The yearly benefit for the continued preservation of Elm Hill Farm has been scheduled for June 5, 2011 at 2 PM. This year, they have planned a period-style Garden Tea for Ladies under a tent on the mansion grounds. Tickets for the event are \$10.00/person and include tea, goodies, a speaker and a mansion tour. There will also be garden booths set up from 10 am to 2 pm in the garden area, on the porch and throughout the house. The booths may also be open after the tea for those who were unable to browse before the event. RSVP required. Interested ladies in attending and those wishing to have a garden or garden arts booth may contact, Lois O'Leary at 508-867-8426 or email at olearyl@tantasqua.org

Answer to Picture:

Bridge over Quaboag River along Rt. 67, West Brookfield/Warren

Memories of My Childhood in the Birthplace of Lucy Stone (continued)

As we got older we had an awakening pride in Lucy-always taking school friends into the attic even though they weren't really interested. Over time, we started to see things in school books about Lucy and an understanding of all she did began to appear. As I reached adulthood, I became increasingly interested in her and her life of service to the women of this country and re-read all the books and letters I could find. When the farm was sold, lots of the material was put in boxes and sold at auction. I was able to see some letters and papers again when my father pulled them out to show someone writing a biography about Lucy. That was when I saw some of Lucy's "Paid Up" notes she had given her father when he loaned her money for school...

This just about brings me up to date though I could talk forever-I "come naturally by it" as they say.....

Age Old Advice

Farmer's Calendar from 1860 (From: The Old Farmer's Almanac, Robert B. Thomas, 1860)

If you want your name to be held in grateful remembrance, plant trees; if you want to improve the roadsides in your town, plant trees; if you want to add to the beauty of the surroundings of your dwelling, for your own and your friends' eyes, plant trees....

A tree which furnishes a cool shade to the inhabitants of the house, is at the same time and on that account its best ornament. In the summer season, a modest house shaded by an oak or an elm speaks more to the feelings and is more beautiful than the showiest house unprotected from the sun.

Trees should be planted not only by dwelling houses and along roads, they should be in every pasture, and by watering-places, and near every barn,--wherever cattle, horses, or sheep, are to be provided for.



The Brick Works, Brookfield, B & W Photograph, early 1900s

The Rise and Fall....and Rise and Fall Again.... of the "Blair Block"

It saddened me to hear of the roof collapse at the Blair building on the corner of Central and Main St., West Brookfield from heavy snow. The building, which covers an entire block, has been an important part of our historic downtown for many years and I can't help but worry about its future.

Ironically, the future of that block has been a topic of conversation for over a hundred years. The property was initially owned by E.H Blair, who had returned to West Brookfield during the mid-1800s to open a general store. He began his business in a small space downtown but in 1860, moved his store into the Town Hall. Within 10 years, Blair's store occupied the entire first floor and part of the basement of the Town Hall. The business quickly outgrew the new space and so Blair decided, along with his partner B. F. Blodgett, to construct a new and improved general store on the corner of Central and Main.

Blair and Blodgett hired architects Barker and Norse from Worcester to design the building and John Conway, a contractor from town, to build it. The new store was a single-story building with an ornamental facade that contained the grocery and 4 other businesses-a jeweler, a millinery, gentlemen's fine furnishings and a druggist. The building was dedicated in January 1880 with great celebration. The Blair Block was a busy cornerstone of downtown for 7 years until it was destroyed by fire in April 1887. The fire spread so quickly that the only merchandise that could be saved was from G. A. Bailey's jewelry store; everything else was lost. The heat was so extreme that several other buildings nearby were damaged.

After the 1887 fire, the block was rebuilt in 1889 by John Conway, who had done quite well for himself in the lumber and contracting business. He partnered with Norman Wheeler of Springfield and together they financed the construction of a two-story building that housed four businesses. Many of the shop owners from before the fire returned to the building, including Blodgett who with his new partner, Eli Converse, opened a grocery and general store in the old location. Little did everyone know that disaster would strike the building again. On October 29, 1892, the Blair/Conway Block burned to the ground taking the building next door (Maynard Building) with it.

Within a year, John Conway had begun rebuilding the block for a third time. Its design was similar to the previous structure but had residential apartments on the second floor. Once again, the same businesses returned, Blodgett and Converse Store (grocery), Charles Clark (druggist), George Coolidge (millinery) and George Bailey (jeweler). Fire, however, plagued this building because there were four more by 1932. Various parts of the block were damaged but the burned out sections were rebuilt and the store fronts reopened again.

Several owners and the passing of time caused the block to fall into disrepair during the 1980s and 90s. It was sold in 2001 and improvements were made. Six businesses were occupying the first floor at the time of collapse and the second floor had been empty for years. Now the big question...What will happen to the Blair-Conway Block? Rebuild, restore? Who knows...I guess time will tell. We can only hope that it will open again and continue to be an important part of the downtown. Amy Dugas

(From: History of West Brookfield, Jeffrey Fiske, 2009; Bill Jenkins, The Blair Block, 2005)



The museum has been closed for the winter and will reopen on Saturday, April 2nd. I normally open the first Saturday of March but I need more time this year to organize all the materials that were used for various displays and activities during the 350th celebration. There will be many new images on display from the plantation towns that I used during my 350th photo exhibit at the library. I am also planning on adding a few new exhibits to the cases. As always, I would welcome anyone who would like to volunteer for a few hours on a Saturday as a docent. I have a few folks who have been with me from the start but I am always in need of more. So, if you would like to pick up a Saturday here and there at the museum, please don't hesitate to contact me....Amy Dugas, 508-867-5428, amydugas@charter.net

Besides the Quaboag Historical Museum, other plantation towns also have some great material on display at their own museums. Here are their hours and addresses:

North Brookfield Historical Museum: Brandon Avery (contact); avery468@aol.com Hours: First Saturday in April, 10-1:30ish, then every other Saturday after that

East Brookfield Historical Museum: Dennis LeBeau (contact, 508-867-8924); Hours: 2nd Saturday of Every Month, 12-4, or by Appt.

New Braintree Historical Museum: Tom Fiorello (contact, 508-867-3583)

Age Old Advice

Farmer's Calendar from 1860 (From: The Old Farmer's Almanac, Robert B. Thomas, 1860)

If you want your name to be held in grateful remembrance, plant trees; if you want to improve the roads in your town, plant trees; if you want to add to the beauty of the surroundings of your dwelling, for your own and your friends' eyes, plant trees....

A tree which furnishes a cool shade to the inhabitants of the house, is at the same time and on that account its best ornament. In the summer season, a modest house shaded by an oak or an elm speaks more to the feelings and is more beautiful than the showiest house unprotected from the sun.

Trees should be planted not only by dwelling houses and along roads, they should be in every pasture, and by watering-places, and near every barn,--wherever cattle, horses, or sheep, are to be provided for.



**While doing research on Lucy Stone, I came across some index cards filled with the recollections of Lucy's great-grand-niece, (Beeman family), who was raised on the farm on Coy Hill. The speaker's full name could not be found in her notes but her memories of farm life and of her famous Aunt are very interesting. She gave this talk to the Warren 3rd Grade class, June 15, 1976.

I would start by saying that the things a child pays attention to are usually not the mementoes-stories- and life of a famous relative-particularly one not of her own generation. So, I will make this my memories as they relate now to my adult appreciation of this very interesting great-grand aunt.

I would first like to describe her: physically she was short, round-faced and roly-poly, though by no means a large person. She was attractive though not beautiful. Her mind was alert and quick. She had boundless amounts of energy and worked very hard at home, at school, always. She was a non-conformist; would not wear a hat in church, dressed as she liked and stepped in many times where angels feared to tread. Her life was spent achieving the goals she set for herself-to free women from the tyranny of men-even that of their own husbands and fathers, however well meant. She fought long and hard for women and gained the respect of the world in that fight. With that said, I will go back and describe the farm.

The farm was a big rambling house in my day. I do not know how much was added after she left. There were many outbuildings and barns and lots of fields, meadows and pastures. It was a beautiful place to have been born and raised on.

Lucy's father, my great-great grandfather was from a respectable military family and grew up in North Brookfield where he learned the tanning trade. Her mother, also of good lineage and a very public spirited person descended from two very prominent families and so with that heritage, it is not surprising that Lucy was the type of person she was. After living in New Braintree for a while, Lucy's mother prevailed upon the father to buy the Hill farm in West Brookfield-which he did.

Lucy was the eighth of nine children and was born after they bought the farm. She did chores as was expected. Lucy also noticed that boys were treated differently than girls and she was determined to change this at a very early age.

A Child

A little girl has no understanding of family history, or of Aunts and Uncles a generation back but there were attics to play in where there were all sorts of books, magazines, cloths, spinning wheels, and letters. We would come down in high spirits with some of these items, only to be told, "Don't tear that, it belonged to great-Aunt Lucy" or "Put those things back before you lose them, they were Lucy Stone's". To a child they were just things to look at and play with, but the memory of being told they were Lucy Stone's stuck with us.

As we got older, we would get the cows in the morning and stop to play at the top of the hill-in the very spots that Lucy had played, but we didn't realize it. We did know as children though, Cousin Alice, Lucy's only child and a very dear and nice elderly lady. She would come and see us and tell us that we did this and that like her mother used to. This impressed us as Cousin Alice lived in Cambridge and was a city person and her visits were much looked forward to. She loved to come to the farm and never failed to keep in close touch with us all until she died. Even when she became blind, she would have someone write to dad and Mother and they would go see her. She gave us all autographed copies of her biography of her mother when we married. As we grew older, we were told many times how very hard Lucy worked to go to school. Her father didn't believe she needed more than to read and write well. She walked back and forth to school and had to pay to get the equivalent of our high school. All these things were told to us when we didn't want to go to school. (continued-page 6)