

Quaboag Historical Society Summer Newsletter

August 2013



Quaboag Historical Society

President's Message

Happy August Everyone! I can't believe school is almost back in session and summer is coming to an end. Time certainly does fly when you're having fun! I hope everyone had a happy and healthy summer. Fall is just around the corner and the Board is excited to be hosting a movie night in September where we will show a great film about North Brookfield called Ward Hollow (see newsletter for more details). We are also planning a couple fun and interesting talks to be scheduled over the next 6 months and will let you know more once we have set the dates and times. The museum is currently open on Saturdays from 11-2, when docents are available, and so if you are interested in helping out, please let me know. We are always looking for folks to assist during open hours. The museum garden is looking great thanks to the folks from the Brookfield Garden Club...the Board really appreciates all the time you put in keeping the gardens clean and in bloom! Well, hope to see many of you at the movie night. It should be a very fun and informative night! Take Care and enjoy the rest of your summer....

Amy Dugas, Co President

It's a night at the movies, and you're invited

The Quaboag Historical Society has decided to replace the annual summer picnic with a family movie night on Thursday, September 12, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. at the New Braintree Town Hall.

Please mark you calendar now for a fun night, where you may meet some of the stars of the film!

Ward Hollow, produced right in North Brookfield, will be the feature. Watch and listen as the little town next door, the one we all know and love, comes to life.

We don't promise a red carpet, but there will be light refreshments, and everyone is welcome, free of charge.

The producer and director, Tyler Nickerson, has promised to be present.

Jedediah Foster homesite nominated for National Register of Historic Places

In a ceremony held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission in Boston in March, the home site of one of the area's most famous residents attained recognition for its place in the state's history. The report and the recognition received in Boston is now, finally, on its way to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. for final consideration and recognition.

At the ceremony attended by the members of West Brookfield Historical Commission, the completed application, the culmination of six years' effort by Commission member Amy Dugas was accepted with appreciation by Massachusetts Historical Commission National Register Director Betsy Friedberg and voted unanimous approval by the commission members. "Your report brings everything to life," Friedberg said.

The report, twenty-five pages of the result of painstaking research, was really the tip of the iceberg, Amy said. Each statement or claim must be justified with evidence, that evidence requiring hours of research, study, travel, and consultation. Criteria for acceptance to the register included: archaeology – historic, property associated with events making a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, the lives of persons significant in our past, and has yielded, or is likely to yield, information significant in history or pre-history.

The Foster home, located on the hill named in honor of Jedediah Foster, was built by his father-in-law, Brigadier General Joseph Dwight, a soldier and politician, about 1735. In 1749, Dwight's daughter Dorothy married Jedediah Foster; the house was deeded to the couple shortly thereafter. There, in the small office he built adjacent to the house, he supported the American cause for independence. He served as a justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts, and helped to draft the Massachusetts Constitution upon which the Federal constitution is said to be based. He was one of 30 men appointed to the Constitutional Convention in 1779.

Until 1901, the house and one-half acre remained in the Foster family. When the law office and home were destroyed by fire in 1901, the Foster family deeded the parcel to the Quaboag Historical Society, with the restriction that no building ever be erected there, and that the property be maintained as a place of historic interest.

The property now bears a marker, erected by QHS, noting its historic significance. This year, the society's executive board voted to engage professional services to rid the historic spot of invasive species of vegetative growth. The proposed work will include an analysis of conditions and a preservation maintenance plan, tree assessment and more. The property, relatively untouched and intact, contains remnants of the house and law office foundations, two entry stones, and portions of a stone walkway.

Nearby is the site of the original 1660 settlement of Quaboag Plantation, including the huge rock from which the Indians launched their famous attack in 1675.

Also nearby is the rock from which evangelist George Whitefield delivered his famous sermon to an audience of over 500 people in 1740. Both of these formations are on privately owned property.

According to West Brookfield Historical Commission member Richard Rossman, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, even after the approval of Amy's report in Boston, required follow-up evidence before finally sending the already accepted request and reports to Washington. "It's now finally on its way," he reported recently. "We are so happy, and so appreciative of Amy and all that she does. This was

a huge effort, and so difficult that it required someone of Amy's qualifications and ability to see it through to completion."



Members of the West Brookfield Historical Commission pose with Betsy Friedberg, National Register Director of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, following the state commission's acceptance and approval of the Jedediah Foster homesite for submittal for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. From Left: David Fitzgerald, Richard Rossman, Barbara Rossman, Amy Dugas, Louise Garwood, Betsy Friedberg, and Anne-Marie Nolan.

J. Irving England and Lucy Stone awards presented

The annual Quaboag Historical Society luncheon was held at Salem Cross Inn on Sunday, April 28. The well-attended event enjoyed a convivial cocktail hour and luncheon, followed by a brief business meeting.

Honorees for the Lucy Stone award, presented each year to individuals in the Plantation who have made significant contributions to his or her community over a period of time through active volunteerism, were, in fact, two worthy recipients. Each had been nominated by members of their community, Brookfield. Nomination letters praised both Lois O'Leary and Wilfred Steadman for years of service to their community, their willingness to go the extra mile and to perform tasks at hand willingly, responsibly, and with cheerful good nature and unflinching generosity.

Massachusetts State Senator Steve Brewer and State Representatives Anne Gobi and Todd Smola offered their words of praise and appreciation to those of the committee as awards were presented.

Lois O'Leary, teary eyed, spoke of her love for the community, and expressed her appreciation for the many blessings she'd received throughout her years of life in Brookfield. "I never thought I'd be so honored. I just love Brookfield, and the people I work with; I love every minute of whatever I do there. Thank you," she smiled.

Wilfred Steadman, who has served for many years in official and unofficial capacities in Brookfield, thanked those assembled for being so honored. "I believe it's important to do whatever I do well, and, having accepted a job, to perform it faithfully and conscientiously," he smiled. It has been a pleasure to do whatever I've done; I've enjoyed the people and the town and all that it has to offer. I'm so pleased and honored to be here with people I admire. All of you have given Barbara and me so much joy. Thank you.

Pasquelina "Lee" Lyons was the single nominee for the Lucy Stone award, given to a West Brookfield who has, according to Lucy Stone's advice "made the world a better place".

Beverly Kenniston, presenting the award said, "I just think no one could come up with another person who fit that description so well."

Lee, in her response, said "Years ago, someone back home asked me how I felt about leaving a bustling community for a small town. I thought about it a moment and then said, "the bad thing about a small town is that everybody knows your business – and the good thing about a small town is that everybody knows your business.

"I learned very quickly that everything about a small town is personal. Most everything that needs to be done has to be done with individual contributions, both physically and monetarily. No matter the need, there are still only about thirty-five hundred people in town to make it happen...

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that any one of you should be standing here...Having been brought up in an atmosphere of doing for others... we never thought we were special. That's the legacy my husband and I looked to leave for our children and our grandchildren. If they understand that *this is what our family does*, well, then, we have done our job...It is a privilege to accept this award."

Following the presentations, First-person performer Ann Marie Shea appeared as Frances Perkins, Secretary of the Treasury under President Franklin Roosevelt, the first female cabinet member in U. S. history. Dressed in appropriate costume, she offered insights, at times humorous, into the trials and challenges of holding such a position in an administration that undertook so many changes in government from the great depression to World War II.



Wilfred Steadman



Pasquelina "Lee" Lyons



Lois O'Leary

Brookfield Cemetery gates, archway restored

A splendid sight on Route 9 in Brookfield are the massive iron gates and granite archway at Brookfield cemetery. Finally, the restoration of those important historic structures is complete.

Ron Couture, of the Brookfield Historical Commission and member of the Brookfield Cemetery Commission, told us last week that the project, begun in 2009 and recently completed, is a portion of a historic landscape and preservation plan instigated in 1997.

The cemetery was founded in 1718, just one year after the town was incorporated, and 40 years from its settlement. It encompasses 43 acres; it gained placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003.

The iron gates project was performed by DeAngelis Iron Work of Easton. The granite work, begun in 2009, came to a halt when the initial contractor was unable to complete the contracted project. Last year, Brookfield resident and contractor Ken Uracious took on the job, repairing the top, inserting re-cut pieces of granite, and bringing the project to a successful completion. Grants in the amounts of \$25,000 for the arch and \$17,500 for the gates were received from the Massachusetts Preservation Projects fund.

The original entrance structure was donated to the town in 1893 by the Hayden family.

Three years ago, the GAR statue nearby was restored through the joint efforts of the two commissions. You will note it, flag flying, as you travel Route 9 at night. There, it is noted that two hundred sixty-six volunteers went to the Civil War from Brookfield in 1861-1865. Thirty-eight died in the service. There also is located the grave of Civil War hero Abner Woolcott, whose family were 1685 came here in the re-settling of Quaboag Plantation.



The gates and archway at the entrance to Brookfield cemetery (above)



GAR statue at Brookfield cemetery (right)



Abner Woolcott grave (left)

Pynchon Mill site now protected – East Quabbin Land Trust plans passive pleasure trail

It is exciting news, although, strictly speaking, it's not our news.

For years, recounts West Brookfield Historical Commission chairman Richard Rossman, his commission, joined by those from New Braintree and Warren, wished for and hoped to re-establish a storied Indian trail beginning in Barre and traveling through the tract known locally as Dr. Bill's to the Warren-Palmer town line. However, the owner of the Bill property would neither grant a right of way nor sell the land.

Finally, the commission reached out to East Quabbin Land Trust. "We took Cynthia Henshaw (executive director of EQLT) to the site. She was excited and delighted by what she saw, Dick recounted." The trust was able to obtain a \$35,000 state grant toward the \$69,000 purchase. The trust is still working to raise another \$20,000. The West Brookfield Historical Commission has donated \$10,000 toward the purchase, through donations from the J. Irving and Jane L. England Charitable Trust of Worcester. "We don't sit on the funds we receive," Rossman said. "We like to put them to work in the community." The purchase price includes a conservation restriction to prevent future development.

The picturesque property, 43 acres encompassing a brook, pond, woodland and the site of the town's earliest grist mill, dating to 1669 or possibly as early as 1664, was owned in the twentieth century by Dr. Clement E. Bill. Dr. Bill was a dentist in West Brookfield for forty-seven years. He was a sportsman and naturalist, active in town affairs, serving as selectman and library trustee. He died in 1938.

John Pynchon, the son of William Pynchon, founder of the city of Springfield, established the mill, an essential facility in the burgeoning Quaboag Plantation. It was burned during the Indian rampage of 1675. It was re-built by John Pynchon in 1686, and remained in operation until 1705.

On a recent visit to the property with Cynthia Henshaw, historical commission members were excited to spot a sizeable portion of a mill stone, apparently uncovered by the recent rains, near the original site of the mill. Historian Ed Hood of OSV examined the stone, but could not determine its age. Its placement might be simply to shore a portion of an abutment or dam, but it was an interesting find, said Dick Rossman and Amy Dugas.

By this time this year, Cynthia says, the site will be opened to the public for passive pleasure. The first step, she says, is a management plan. She is in hopes, she says, that persons now using the site for motorized vehicles will cooperate and desist from that use of the property.

To assist in raising the remaining \$20,000 of the purchase price, contributions may be mailed to this non-profit organization at: East Quabbin Land Trust, PO Box 5, Hardwick, MA 01037.



Recently discovered millstone

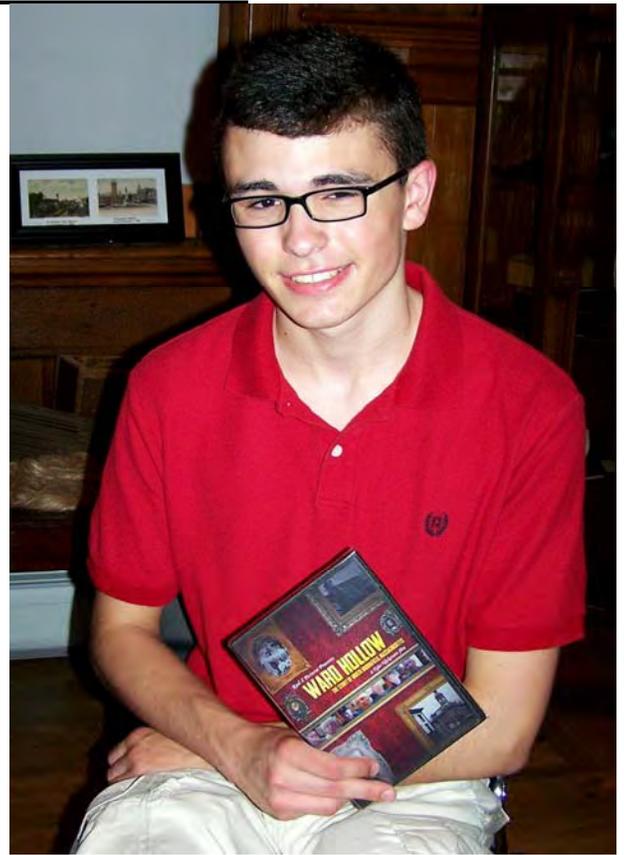
Ward Hollow wins rave reviews

When Tyler Nickerson began work on his opus, it was, he said, just another school assignment. Bigger and more involved than most, but still, another achievement on his way to graduation from Quabbin Regional High School in June of this year.

A requirement for membership in the National Honor Society, he said, was forty hours of community service. He'd begun that service with a few hours at the Barre library. Enter his grandfather, who, noting that Tyler had produced small documentaries already, suggested "what if you were to make one on the history of North Brookfield, and donate it to the town?"

"I thought about the time it would take, and finally decided it would fill up all of those forty hours, so decided to go ahead with it," he said. Ten months later, and too many hours to count, *Ward Hollow* the completed DVD was introduced to the public with a public showing on May 25 at North Brookfield High School.

"More than 150 people came," enthused Linda Grace of North Brookfield Historical Society. "I just can't say enough good things about Tyler's work. I want everyone to have the opportunity to see it." Her husband, Dr. Louis B. Grace, was the first person interviewed for the production, Tyler said. He noted a reluctance, at first, among residents, to be interviewed on film. But perseverance paid off, as viewers will note.



Mr. Nickerson

Ward Hollow is the name by which the Ward Street area, where Oliver Ward established his first shoe factory, was locally known. "It's certainly a more catchy title than A brief history of North Brookfield, Massachusetts," Tyler grinned. Although North Brookfield's history is, in a sense, a history of the shoe industry in New England, the ninety minute documentary cleverly weaves the story of the town and its people around the title. No aspect of the community is untouched, from the earliest settlers to the present, and we scarcely realize we're having a history lesson encompassing all aspects of a community, its people, and its place in the country and the world.

Tyler discovered how to plan his production, he says, by reading through Linda's book written last year as part of North Brookfield's 200th anniversary. He learned, he recounted, that his town wasn't as dull as he'd believed. "For eighteen years I've lived in this town and I've always believed it was a small town that never had anything and never will have anything," he grinned. "I learned a lot."

The DVD has proven a best seller, but, at this writing, a few copies of the first printing are available, and more will be produced. They are available at North Brookfield Historical Society, Haston Library and town clerk's office, at a modest price of \$10. All proceeds go to the town, for the restoration of the town hall, he said.

In response to a question, Tyler commented that his parents, Jeff and Sharon Nickerson had fronted him the funds, hundreds of dollars, for the production. That was repaid through DVD sales, and all monies collected now go to the town.

Note: Don't miss our invitation to Movie Night at New Braintree Town Hall on September 12. (See front cover)

West Brookfield Old Indian Cemetery undergoing restoration, preservation work

Another project of that tireless West Brookfield Historical Commission will be an ongoing project in years to come. The commission has engaged the services of Fanning-Lehner Preservation Consultants, who have been spending Saturdays on site this summer.

It is, perhaps only recently that much importance been placed on the resting grounds of our forbears. That attitude, however, has changed, as people realize that our cemeteries function as art, historical record, religious symbols, and contemplative space.

Our Old Indian Cemetery was used from 1710 to 1849. It maintains a silent vigil over much of West Brookfield's history. It is the resting place of 16 French and Indian War soldiers, 11 Revolutionary War Soldiers, and 6 men who were killed in 1710 by Indians and became known as the Haymakers. It is also the resting place for Jedediah Foster, his wife and daughter, and the Honorable Diederick Leertouwer.

The cemetery, rectangular in shape, is surrounded by stone walls on all sides, with one walk-in entrance on Cottage Street. It retains the simplicity of an old cemetery; it is plain, level, and covered with grass, with several large pine trees.

According to historical commission members, the work of the conservationists involves straightening, repairing, resetting and cleaning of stones, assessing the condition of gravestones and monuments, and recommendation of preservation measures. In all, 115 tombstones have been earmarked for attention. "We hope to do twenty gravesites this year," Richard Rossman said recently. The total cost of the project is expected to amount to \$54,000, none of those funds coming from the town budget.

If you've noticed the pink ribbons adorning some of the stones, they're the ones slated to be worked on this year.

We visited the Fannin-Lehner crew as they worked at the cemetery on Wednesday, July 18. Minxie and James Fannin welcomed us and explained their process. Prior to any work, Minxie said, the cemetery is surveyed and carefully examined, and a plan proposed and accepted.

Each facet of the work is carefully recorded, photographed, (before and after) and described in detail. As Minxie and Jim spoke with us, assistant Paul Butterworth brushed the dirt from the gravestone of Mr. John Batchelor, who died October 31, 1715 in his 42'd year.

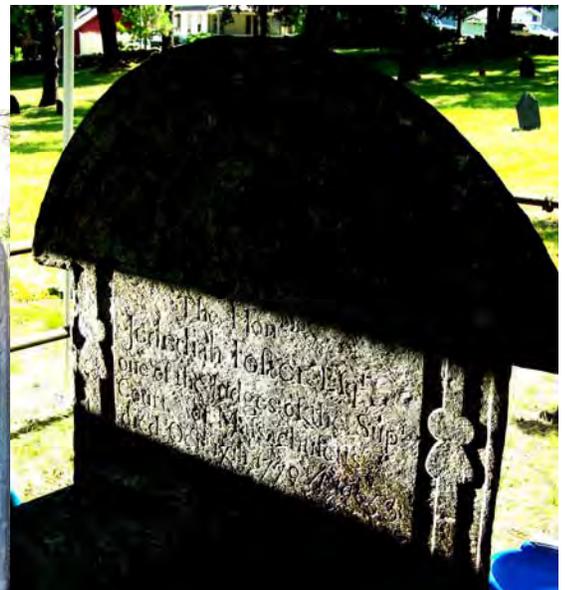
Jim, noting the urn and willow motif on the slate stone, remarked that this design had become popular at about that time. The "face" motif we will see on the Jedediah Foster headstone had become outdated. The inscription reads as follows: "*Farewell my spouse and children dear/ I've left the world of pain/May virtue be your practice here/till we do meet again.*"



The stone has, at this point, been excavated and laid upon the ground adjacent, where Paul is brushing the surface with a whisk broom. Next, it will be washed. The site for the stone has been excavated, lined with four inches of sand and pea stone, and compacted. Once cleaned, the stone will be re-set, with forty percent of the stone beneath the surface. It is leveled and surrounded with sand and pea stone, which is tamped.

Plaque outside the wall installed by Historical Commission (center)

The inscription on the Jedediah Foster headstone comes to life when Jim performs his mirror trick. (right)



Upcoming Events:

It's a night at the movies, and you're invited

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