

## The Brentwood Historical Society Newsletter

### Summer 2022

#### Surprise at the Museum

Most of the time when people work with museum materials and artifacts, they're looking at items that they automatically place in well-known categories – early 20<sup>th</sup> century school pictures, houses from the 1800s and 1900s, town-owned buildings, tools or kitchen implements, this or that family's genealogy.

However, four years ago we received a phone call about something our eyes used to pass right over with never a thought of its being anything special – the backdrop curtain on the stage in the second floor Grange room. The person on the phone – Christine Hadsel – had heard that we had one and wanted to come and see it. It was probably a “ho-hum request,” we thought. This writer was the officer who ended up meeting the visitor, expecting it would be a short visit and that I would soon say goodbye, satisfied that we had helped a visitor see what she wanted to.

Christine Hadsel arrived, we went upstairs, and before long I was grabbing a notepad to scribble down what she was saying. First of all, there are many of these big stage backdrop curtains. Each one is completely hand-painted, from top to bottom. Nearly every Grange hall had one. Back when Grange chapters were the main organization in town, they usually had some kind of stage for all the programs and events they sponsored. Both the backdrop curtains and the front and side drapes were often painted by traveling artisans.

There came a period when these painted curtains were forgotten, out of favor. In the 1990s they began to be recognized as historical art and to be recorded as such in the state where they are located. They are being cleaned, conserved, and re-hung as legitimate art pieces. Vermont has a list of 190 historical painted curtains, and every one has been cleaned and conserved. A few have had to be put in permanent storage because of serious damage but most have been re-hung and are on display.

New Hampshire has a growing list of about 150 painted stage curtains, and our curtain is one of them! It is basically a quiet scene of woodland with a stream flowing through and curving sharply toward a paved road. It was useful as a simple backdrop for the many programs, concerts and plays that took

place on the stage. Although it is not signed, Chris Hadsel has recognized it as the work of an Exeter painter named Robert Naves. The clues are the particular shade of yellowish green that only he used in some of the trees in every painting, a special blue in his painting of water, and always a touch of white, in this painting the white of a small fence that runs alongside the road.

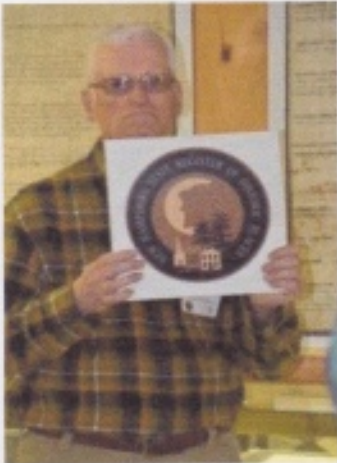
We've been looking at our curtain a lot in the last few months. We were encouraged to apply for a “Moose Plate Grant,” which would supply the money to pay for cleaning and repairing the curtain and hanging it in the best way to conserve it. We had to take it down temporarily while a hole in the stage ceiling was repaired and the ceiling repainted. At this writing it is carefully spread on the floor until we can get it hung properly. Fingers crossed until we learn whether we were awarded a “Moose Plate” grant.

*The BHS historic painted stage backdrop waiting to be cleaned and rehung. Walk carefully around it to see the rest of the Grange hall and the dining room.*





### Important New Status Award



*President Dexter Swasey presented the handsome plaque at the dedication ceremony for the Historical Society's new status, being listed on the state Register of Historic Places.*

This was the year for special applications. We had learned that it was important and feasible to apply for acceptance on the listing of the State Register of Historic Places. The application was long and complex. We are grateful that Becky Dunham was able to consult with Andrew Cushing last October and the BHS ultimately contracted with him to prepare the application. Andrew, formerly of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, is now the director of the Bureau of State Historic Sites for New Hampshire State Parks. Becky Dunham and Mark Tremallo provided files of information to Andrew to assist with his work on the application. This included history, the deed to the building, photographs, forms, and much other information about the building. The town had to give its approval for the application, and the cost of preparing it was covered by a donor.

In early February Becky reported that we had received notice that the building had been accepted for listing on the Register. An official certificate came from the state; it hangs inside the museum. A wooden Historic Register plaque was given a handsome backing by Jim Hajjar and hangs on the outside wall near the building's name sign on the porch. A dedication ceremony took place during the May 7 open house. Thanks go to DeMoulas Supermarkets for a donation for refreshments at the event, and special thanks to David Abusamra for taking photos.

#### **Historical Note:**

The road that connects Pickpocket Road in Brentwood to Route 111A in Exeter was originally called Dogtown Road. The section that lies in Brentwood was renamed Michael Bennett Road. The other section is still Dogtown Road.

### Bake Sale Coming Up September 13

Brentwood has a voting day coming up – STATE PRIMARY ELECTION DAY, Tuesday, September 13, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Community Center, 190 Route 125. Once again the Selectmen's office has given the Historical Society permission to offer its popular Bake Sale from 7:00 a.m. until sold out. This Bake Sale is famous for its top-quality, handsomely displayed home-baked items.

There are two ways Historical Society members help make it such a success. First is to donate some home-baked goods to the table. Please be thinking and hopefully choosing what you would best like to make. Friends and neighbors are invited to bake also. We are grateful for all contributions! They can be dropped off at the table in the Community Center from 7:00 a.m. on. We ask that you please package your items in zip-lock plastic bags. Four brownies or bars, six cookies, a large piece of fudge, etc. to a package.

The other way members can help is by volunteering to manage the Bake Sale table for a time slot on Primary Day. A time slot is two hours, running as follows:

7:00 to 9:00 a.m.                      9:00 to 11:00 a.m.  
11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.        1:00 to 3:00 p.m.  
3:00 to 5:00 p.m. on, until sell-out or close.

If you can volunteer to help manage the table, please let us know which time you prefer. The contact information: [fansinger34@gmail.com](mailto:fansinger34@gmail.com) or phone 603-379-1568.

### Next Programs at the Museum

**September** -- the program announced in the last issue of this newsletter has been postponed to May 18, 2023. There will be no program in September.

**Thursday, October 27, 7:00 pm, at the Museum** – a spine-tingling true story told by the master story-teller of the Isles of Shoals, J. Dennis Robinson on his book, "Case Closed on the 1873 Smuttynose Ax Murders." Sponsored by the NH Council on the Humanities.

**Sunday, November 13, 2:00 pm, at the Museum** – the Annual Meeting, all members urged to come.

**Program:** Matthew "Sandy" Thomas speaking on "Understanding New Hampshire's Franklin Pierce, America's 14<sup>th</sup> President."



**New Member on the Board**



The officers are happy to announce that Laura Hajjar spoke about wanting to help more with Museum projects and she accepted our invitation to join the board. She assisted with the application for the "Moose Plate Grant" and she is now working with the Program Committee.

**Mary Abbie Sanborn Diaries and Other Church-Owned Papers**

Members of the Historical Society have seen mention of Mary Abbie Sanborn and read quotations from "the Sanborn Diaries" since the 1990s and the 2000s. Those quotations came from about ten primitive notebooks that Linda Rousseau came upon in the Pilgrim Congregational Church. She asked if she could borrow them and transcribe them onto her computer. She was fascinated, but life was also filled with many other things. She kept at it sporadically for about fifteen years, knowing that some day the transcriptions would be available at the museum. No one needed the information immediately. The booklets were returned as they were finished. There was no call from the church wanting them all back at once.

Then came 2016-17, when the Historical Society was plunged into producing an updated town history book as its gift to the town for its 275th anniversary. No source was passed over in the search for possible new details. The Sanborn diaries became very interesting. The question was asked: Are there any more? It was a new idea. No one had thought to question if there were others apart from that first batch that had been transcribed. Fortunately for us all, Holly Gilbert and Dick Chamberlain are staunch members of both the Pilgrim Church and the Historical Society and have worked to benefit both sides in

this matter. Albert "Skip" Belanger has revealed his gift for thorough, patient research and recording information. The past few months have been astounding. More and more Sanborn diaries have been discovered at the church, and many other Sanborn papers, because Mary Abbie was clerk of the church for years and directed that all her records and papers become church property after her death. To top it off, her personal lap writing desk was found, making a beautiful focus for her collection. The "diaries" are in booklets and are started like diaries around a specific year; but almost every booklet has odd tidbits and dates in any available corner and blank space because paper was so precious in those days. Only when we had computers was it ever imagined that we could transcribe the old-fashioned script into something easily readable.



*The new exhibit on the Mary Abbie Sanborn collection.*

It was decided to organize the newly discovered diaries by simply continuing from the existing numbers of those already transcribed. Holly has transcribed Numbers 11 through 15. There are now a total of 32 diaries, which leaves quite a few still to be done. Skip has reported that the Sanborn Diaries are now scanned and stored in separate binders, one set at the museum and one set at the church. They and other books and papers in the Pilgrim Church Collection are on permanent loan from the church to the museum. This arrangement is being finalized with the church as of this writing. The diaries cover life in the years 1836 to 1902. At the BHS Open House on May 7, an exhibit was opened that explains the discovery and development of the diaries. It can be seen at the coming Open Houses of September 3 and October 1.



### **The New Website**

Take a few minutes to look over the Historical Society's new website. . . [www.brentwoodnhhistory.org](http://www.brentwoodnhhistory.org). It's the same familiar address but we had to start over because the old website had been created with old software on older equipment. Thanks go to Nick Wrighton for getting us started and Karen Ellis for plunging in and keeping it going. This writer finds that there is often something new to read that I didn't know before. And the pictures are bright and sharp. It's still a work in progress. If you come across something that would be great to add or change on the website, our webmaster is not in some far-off city but right here in the person of Karen Ellis. Click on [info@brentwoodnhhistory.org](mailto:info@brentwoodnhhistory.org).

### **Protected Display for the 1857 Map**



*The 1857 map of Rockingham County hanging with its new protections. We couldn't avoid the reflections of the ceiling lights and items mounted on the opposite wall. They shouldn't be noticeable when you're standing right there.*

Remember reading the story in the last BHS Newsletter about the large 1857 map of Rockingham County that had to be transported so carefully from Concord, Mass. to the museum and very carefully moved from the bed of the pickup truck to its waiting space inside on the wall? Fortunately for the map, it now has acid-free matting in back and a sheet of Lexan covering the front. This is the first time the BHS has hung a map so well supported and protected, front and back. It indicates the growth in the way the Society can care for its artifacts.

### **Special Thanks for Special Jobs**

It takes more than devotion to history to keep the Historical Society Museum in good shape. There are always the odd jobs that just have to be done. For instance, our historic painted stage curtain needed to be taken down to avoid being damaged while a large hole in the stage ceiling was repaired. It took four men to carefully lift it from the wall and lay it on the floor fully open to prevent cracks and breaks in the painting. Thanks to Nate Ellis, Jim Hajjar, and Eric Trump for helping Dexter Swasey with that job, which was done beautifully (see page 1). After the plastering was done, the ceiling needed to dry for 30 days and then the whole ceiling was painted. Thanks to Nate Ellis for helping with the painting.

This writer is also going to slide in some well-deserved thanks to our president Dexter for arranging for, and being on hand for, window repairs and painting, electrical updates in every room upstairs and down, fire inspection, building inspection, moving of furniture and display cases for exhibits and programs, shopping for and planting the outdoor decorative plants – this just in recent months.

*Linda Rousseau, Editor*

### **The Brentwood Historical Society**

Located at: 140 Crawley Falls Road, Brentwood  
Mailing Address: Town Office, 1 Dalton Road  
Brentwood, NH 03833  
Website: [www.brentwoodnhhistory.org](http://www.brentwoodnhhistory.org)  
Email address: [info@brentwoodnhhistory.org](mailto:info@brentwoodnhhistory.org)  
Phone: 603-642-8944

Dexter Swasey, President  
Linda Rousseau, Vice-President  
Karen Ellis, Recording Secretary  
Albert "Skip" Belanger, Research Correspondent  
David Menter, Treasurer  
Rebecca Davis, Curator