



The Brentwood Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2024-2025

Hello to the members of the Brentwood Historical Society! This is a look back at the events and the "housekeeping" work of the Society over the past winter. As supporting members, you deserve to have a reminder of the many things that contribute to the growth of this Society and its Museum.



Johnny Appleseed Program

It's a good guess that most of us thought we knew enough about Johnny Appleseed. A strange man, almost a folk story figure, who wandered around planting apple seeds. Therefore we were a little befuddled when a program was scheduled, the speaker being the author of a recent book entitled *Johnny Appleseed, The Man Behind the Folklore*.

The author, Mark Bodanza, turns out to be a resident of Leominster, Massachusetts, the city where John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed, 1745-1840) was born. Leominster is thoroughly dedicated to its famous folkloric character. Bodanza, who has worked for years as an historian, writer, and lecturer, as well as being a successful trial lawyer, became more and more intrigued with the large gaps in the Appleseed story and the lack of documentation to support the facts. He put all his talents to work. The book he wrote gave us not only many more revelations about Appleseed's life, but also a breathtaking account of the unusual corners he had to investigate, the unexpected, ordinary people who happened to have the details he wanted.

We learned that John Chapman grew up with a deep conviction that this was God's earth, that man must continually love and obey his Maker and leave as little mark as possible of his passage here. He also felt the pull of expanding the frontier in a healthy, appropriate way. His clothing often consisted only of the few scraps needed to cover his body. He traveled with one kettle for whatever cooking he did, and often wore it on his head. He had money enough to occasionally buy a tract of land, farm it for a while as a nursery for his apple tree seedlings, then leave it in other hands and move forward on the frontier.

These were things we learned in the program by Mark Bodanza on October 17th. We also learned that our board member Robin Wrighton was the book and cover designer of the book. The illustrator, Steven Leger, provided a number of drawings with a "misty" look that lent itself to the folklore suggested in the book. Mr. Leger added color to the evening by dressing in the rags like those sometimes worn by Johnny Appleseed, including the pot on his head. It turned out to be a presentation we'd all remember.

Brentwood Second Graders Visit Museum

One of the events we look forward to these days is the annual visit with the second graders in Ms. Wilhelmina Bradley's class at Swasey School. This year they walked from the school to the Historical Society Museum, to give them a sense of how most students walked to their school in the old days, about a hundred years ago. They were full of information they'd already learned, and asked President Dexter Swasey lots of questions as he led them around the various exhibits. Several students wore costumes reflecting the old days.

Toward the end they carried their lunch boxes into the second floor dining room next to the main Grange Hall. Some of the long benches and chairs had been moved from the Grange Hall to the dining room, placed on each side of the original long table that runs almost the full length of the room.



Second graders from Swasey Central School were the first group in 60 years to have lunch in what had been the dining room of the Keeneborough Grange.

The students enjoyed their lunch at the table, not realizing that they were making a bit of history. The dining room had been used as a storage area for a long time. Under President Dexter Swasey, the room was cleaned, the storage items moved, and this was the first time in sixty years that a large group was dining in the room where the Grange members had often eaten in years past.

Purchase of Fireproof File Cabinet

This is an example of the “housekeeping” that takes place in a museum. For the first time since the Historical Society was founded in 1965, it was considered possible to buy a fireproof file cabinet. It’s a decision that wasn’t made lightly. For one thing, it’s very, very heavy. Once it’s in place it won’t be moved easily and it’s designed to withstand high temperatures and protect the contents during a fire.

The Society is now holding documents and items that were written or produced in the 1800s and earlier. To genealogists and all who work with historical subjects, they are exceedingly valuable. The new cabinet is a great step in providing protection for these records.



It is **you**, our members who support the Society and the Museum, and the Bake Sales and any other fundraisers, that make it possible to take these constructive steps. Thank you for your continued interest and support.

Officers Elected at Annual Meeting

At the Annual Meeting on November 10, 2024, there was a brief business meeting to begin with.

After an annual report by President Dexter, the members elected the slate of officers for the coming year of 2025. They are:

President, Curator	Dexter Swasey
Vice President	Linda Rousseau
Treasurer	David Menter
Research Correspondent	Albert Belanger
Recording Secretary	Laura Hajjar
Lifetime Advisor	Alma Vahey
Director	Richard Chamberlain
Director	Rebecca Dunham
Director	Karen Ellis
Director	Dawn Higley
Director	Caleb Labbe
Registrar	Karen Ellis
Director	Diane Robinson
Director	Robin Wrighton

Our guest performance that evening was given by Jeff Warner, folk singer, using a guitar and banjo as accompaniment.



Officers from left to right: Linda Rousseau, Dexter Swasey, Skip Belanger, David Menter, Rebecca Dunham, Laura Hajjar, Diane Robinson, and Dawn Higley.

Brentwood, December 25, 1872: Mr. Lyford T. Graves and wife invited about 50 of their neighbors to spend the evening with them at their house. It was very pleasant to meet so many neighbors and friends around their fireside and then to receive gifts from the Christmas tree: this tree was a nice spruce tree which grew in the forest; it was well loaded with things for the company, some useful things, some good books, some toys to please the children. Miss Celia Robinson played on the Seraphim and Miss Augusta Robinson and Joseph Graves sung some very pretty pieces with which all were pleased. Refreshments were passed round and I think all enjoyed the Christmas Festival.

From the diary of Mary Abbie Sanborn

"Christmas Past" at the Museum



Good girl Janice Smith spends a few minutes with Santa!



The Historical Society would like to thank Nathaniel Swasey and Fran Lajoie for bringing Santa and Mrs. Claus to Brentwood.

Brentwood children had an extra chance to see Santa Claus at the Historical Society Museum Sunday afternoon, December 15th. Santa (Nathaniel Swasey) was seated on the Grange Hall stage on an old long bench. If a child was very frightened of sitting on Santa's lap, the parent could sit next to Santa with them on their lap and everyone could have a good visit. And as a special surprise, Mrs. Claus (Fran Lajoie) came along too! She was so friendly and nice in her long red dress and apron, and she gave everyone a Christmas Tree cookie and a picture to color.

The grown-ups had plenty to see as well. Many recordings and books from earlier days; a miniature train running in a circle; an old German goose feather tree; a wonderful small village with little lighted buildings; old fashioned tree ornaments and lights; and many other reminders of "Christmas Past."



Mrs. Claus helps with coloring pages as little ones enjoy cookies!

It was the first time in several years that the Historical Society had a Christmas event. The grown-ups had time to chat with each other. The children could run around a little and take long peeks at Santa without being rushed away. It was a delightful afternoon, and we look forward to another one next winter.

Research Correspondent Assists with a Visitor's Project

Here is yet another example of the growth the Museum has experienced in recent years, with files being created and indexes added. Skip Belanger, as Research Correspondent, fields calls and emails for information and will make appointments to sit down with visitors to help them find important details such as particular dates and other facts that lend credence to an account the person is working on.

People seeking information are invited to drop in at the Museum's Open Houses (open first Saturday of each month, April to October: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm), or they may email Skip at info@brentwoodnhhistory.org to set an appointment. If you prefer, you may call the Historical Society Museum number, 603-642-8944, and leave a message.



Albert "Skip" Belanger, Research Correspondent of the Historical Society, provides some information for Reuben Downey, a visiting client who is working on a research project involving Brentwood's history.

The Brentwood Historical Society directors and members are deeply informed on a wide variety of topics of interest to anyone who is searching for geneological clues, maybe the history of your old home, or interested in finding out what that "gem" is you may have uncovered in your own backyard excavations.

Don't hesitate to contact the BHS with any questions, we are here to share the history of Brentwood!

The Historical Society sees a steady growth in people's awareness of the earlier days in our town and an understanding of how the past has led to the life we know today. It always delights us when you, the members, and other friends of the town, bring us pictures, documents, clothing or other items that tell something more about Brentwood life in the old days.

Linda Rousseau, Editor



A recent Brentwood find was identified by BHS members as a vehicle thermostat valve by English manufacturer, S. Smith and Sons Motor Accessories Ltd.



Brentwood Historical Society

140 Crawley Falls Road

603-642-8944

Mail address: 1 Dalton Road
Brentwood, NH 03833

info@brentwoodnhhistory.org

president@brentwoodnhhistory.org