



The Brentwood Historical Society Newsletter

Summer 2025

Greetings,

Summer has passed, leaves steadily fall and the joints of the fingers now ache with the cooler weather. So we accept that winter is around the corner, get a rake and brush the dust off the thermostat.

Looking back, the Brentwood Historical Society had another grand year. Unique new accessions, community events, projects, and ongoing public programs of varying historic interests made for a busy spring and summer.

These are the framework of our mission to the members and supporters of the Brentwood Historical Society and the town of Brentwood. Immense thanks to the membership, old and new, for the continued support. We are here for the past, present, future, and YOU.

Respectfully,

Dexter Swasey, President

The Connected Farm Buildings of New England



The program on Sept. 17th was the most recent program of this Summer's activities at the Historical Society, and with 48 people filling the Grange Hall, it was the best attended program we've ever had. Everyone came to hear more about the many farms in New England with connected farm buildings, an architectural style that has not been duplicated anywhere else in the country.

Our speaker Thomas Hubka, a retired professor of architecture, is the only author who has written an entire book on the one subject of New England connected farm buildings. He was a fine speaker, and he punctuated his PowerPoint show several times with the question, "Why did New England farmers build connected-building farms

from about 1830 until the 1900s?" He seemed to end his program rather abruptly. Since I was advancing his slides for him, I saw that there were about 19 slides left. Whatever his reason for stopping, a number of people were left wondering "Well, why DID they?" So I bought a copy of *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn*. I believe

the following is what Hubka was trying to say. All quotations are from the book.

The explanation involves a combination of several movements, concepts, popular attitudes, and developments that all happened at roughly the same time. That's why it's hard to say it in just a few words. One word that captures much of it is "the culture." New England farmers created the connected-building farms largely because of the culture they were living in.

- We must "take care not to see every era in New England as an age of great turmoil, change and reform, but the pace of revivalist and reform movements in the first half of the nineteenth century (1800s) was truly extraordinary" (pp. 200-201).

- A majority of the settlers in the New England area were from England. They were basically steady, rule-abiding, work-oriented people. Their aim from 1800-1840 was just to have a decent farm. Their basic need was a house and a barn. They copied what they had known in England. But for crops, they learned that even after clearing the stones and boulders, the soil wasn't rich. They had to keep clearing land to provide nutrition for the next crop. Proud of their inventiveness and ability to work, they slowly added other sources of revenue: animals (oxen), for the meat, for the manure to improve the soil, and for the hides, from which shoes and gloves could be made to sell. This inventive, mixed-farming strategy made better income for the farmer. He was ready to build small sheds for the new activities. Other non-agricultural endeavors were logging and timber products, candles, clothes, cloth items, butter and cheese, many requiring a special small building—all plain, unpainted wood, like the barn and possibly the house, and situated wherever was most convenient on his property at the time. The mixed-farming plan worked for a time, and farmers believed they had found the best way to manage their land. But their sons and daughters often moved west to work with much larger tracts of land, better soil, and larger machinery—and with it, better income. New England farmers saw that they were losing business to the big midwestern style of agriculture. They determined that if they worked harder they could produce more. They could not see that yes, their mixed-farming plan was the only way to farm in New England, but that it could not compete with the large-scale commercial farming farther inland.
- There were several agricultural newspapers which all farmers read, full of the latest farm studies and ideas. In the early 1800s the papers reflected the growing idea that it was time to rearrange one's farm buildings into neater lines; to add decorative details to at least the barn; to paint the house and the buildings; to smooth the untended, bumpy land near the house, the barn and the small sheds. "Improvement is now the order of the day; improved stock, improved buildings, improved implements, improved orchards, gardens, mowing, pastures, improved everything" (p.194).
- "What is so intriguing about the way farmers... rearranged their farms is the forcefulness with which they applied a progressive-looking façade of farm improvement to their traditionally ordered farms"(p.180). "This will to improve had its most powerful source in a Puritan work ethic and its sanction of individual toil toward collective improvement...the Puritan sanction of hard work and self-improvement was vitalized by evangelical reform movements"(pp.194-195). Many decided "to give up liquor, read widely in newspapers, attend lyceums and lectures, intensify religious activities, purchase labor-saving farm and household machinery, and conduct a series of building and agricultural improvements" (p.195).
- Hubka named even more reform developments in the early 1800s that added to the culture that ruled the period. "Spiritous liquors" and heavy drinking were unusually strong at this time. "We do know that alcohol consumption reached staggering proportions during the early years of the Republic. From all available information, the prohibition reform movements that swept New England between 1820 and 1860 involved a wrenching reversal of custom for a significant portion of the population" (p. 200).
- The Classic style of architecture, in all buildings large and small, all painted white and neatly lined up, became the order of the day. "In all its varied forms, the classical tradition was one of the most significant, widespread and long-lasting influences to affect rural New Englanders in the nineteenth century"(p.197). Farmers "came to accept the idea that successful farming, which involved the application of scientific techniques and sound economic policies, was integrally

related to the visual organization of the farm. From the record of building construction, it is clear that a farm reform movement of evangelical intensity spread throughout New England, but principally in the north, during the middle of the nineteenth century. This movement contributed to a redoubling of the normal efforts to improve the farm, and its boldest symbol was the connected farm organization” (p. 203).

In today’s world it’s very hard to conceive that there was a period when so many people believed that the look of their farm was part of successful farming. Then my thoughts turned to us in our “culture.” Did we ever dream that we would be living in the culture we live in today? And just like the New England farmers of the 1800s, we don’t know what it will be like here when this culture ends. We just go on doing the best we can. If we can accept that people have lived in eras of very different cultures, it might add to our understanding of the bits of history that confront us.

The Little Free Library

People have been driving up and visiting the Little Free Library that was installed near the front porch of the Historical Society Museum in May. You can borrow a book free of charge and either return it or replace it with another book. Co-operating in this project is the Exeter chapter of the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution), which joins the Brentwood Historical Society in promoting history and community service.



Standing left to right are Daughters of the American Revolution Exeter Chapter Regent Renay Allen, BHS Board member and member of the DAR Laura Hajjar, Dexter Swasey, BHS President, and DAR State Regent Kay Stemenberg.

Early Magician Jonathan Harrington

Andrew Pinard, a noted magician and speaker, appeared at the Historical Society on May 15, talking about Jonathan Harrington, the first great magician in this country, and doing just a few tricks that Harrington had done.



Pictured here are Kim Meyer and Bill Dunham.

Jean Pedrick Kefferstan

Members of the Kefferstan family visited this spring to check on any historical information about the family farm, Skimmilk Farm on Lake Road. During its recent years the farm served as a weekly forum for writers, the “Skimmilk Farm Workshop,” held in the summer for 30 years by one of its recent residents, Jean Pedrick Kefferstan, who died in 2006. Jean’s granddaughter, Emily Kefferstan, graciously accepted our invitation to come back and tell us more about the workshops, at which she often assisted her grandmother. The farm is still owned and used by the family.

Emily, with her father, John Kefferstan, returned on July 30 to present a very interesting program in the second floor Grange Room. Jean Pedrick Kefferstan was an award-winning poet, author, and publisher. Her workshop was attended



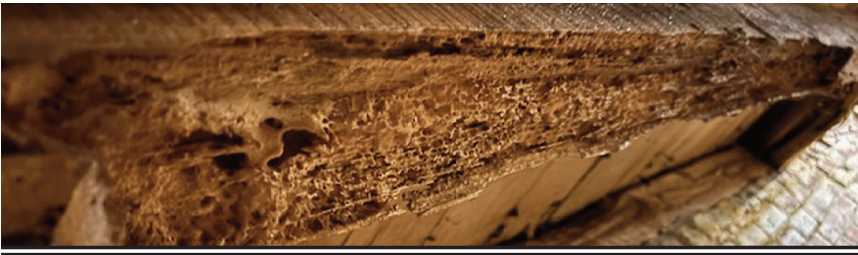
by many writers who cherished the opportunity to be assisted with their work without damaging criticism. Several authors from the nearby area attended the program with great interest. The Historical Society presented Emily with flowers and a box of chocolates for John, who advanced the slides, as an expression of its appreciation.

Seniors Luncheon



On the 25th of June the Brentwood Seniors had lunch in the refurbished dining room on the second floor where the Grange members used to eat some 60 years ago. They enjoyed the occasion and have scheduled their Harvest luncheon again in the Grange Dining Room.

Our Bad Basement Beams



The housekeeping side of our historical building is never far from our eyes. Dexter was waiting for the time when the Select Board would tour the town buildings to plan for its budgeted repairs. Nothing was more effective than simply seeing the crumbling beams in the basement which Dexter had ready to show them. We hope it won't be long before we can show you the strong new replacements.

Preservation Grant Awarded to BHS

On August 27th, the Brentwood Historical Society was honored with the approval of a matching grant from the NH Preservation Alliance for \$3250. The grant will help fund a Condition Assessment for the Keeneborough Grange/Waldron Store building. The matching funds for the grant were unanimously supported by the allocation of building maintenance funds by the town Select Board.

As stewards of the Grange building for the town, we are obligated to care for the building, our home. The assessment will identify historic and condition aspects that could qualify for additional grants to help rectify and maintain the unique home of the Brentwood Historical Society. This is the first step of many to come.

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

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