



# The Brentwood Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2025-2026

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Greetings,

On Monday, November 10, the Keeneborough Grange building, home of the Brentwood Historical Society, underwent a comprehensive building assessment after 168 years of existence. The assessment, completed with a matching grant from the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, became a cornerstone for our subsequent matching grant request from The 1772 Foundation, for needed sill and foundation repair. We hopefully await the results of the grant application coming in May. Overall, the Grange fared pretty well for being 168 years old with some structural needs, some cosmetic, some urgent and some long term.

Although needing some restoration, the Grange building has been, and continues to be, an integral part of Brentwood. This “diamond” of Brentwood will shine even greater through the combined efforts of all who are vested in its value to Brentwood—say for another 168 years.

Respectfully,  
Dexter Swasey, President

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## The Scythe Mystery



Pictured with her find is Brenda Marotto-Potvin of Middle Road. She came to the Museum with an offer that was unusual, to say the least. She had an old scythe at home that she wanted to give to the Society in memory of her husband Marc Potvin. The unusual part was that they had found it hidden in a wall!

The house in question had been built in 1815, for the express purpose of being the minister’s home, the parsonage, for whom-ever was serving as the minister for the church that was built in “the gully” on Middle Road, which today is called Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Brentwood/Kingston. The parsonage remained

the property of the church until the church society sold it in 1968. There were many periods when the parsonage was not continually used during the 153 years, when there was no year-round minister and visiting ministers came on weekends only.

Brenda and Marc Potvin bought the house in 1999. Soon they decided they wanted to insert a closet between the second-floor bathroom and the room next to it. That meant tearing out the existing wall between the bathroom and the next room, creating closet space between them, and creating new walls on each side of the closet. When the building crew was removing the existing wall, in the tiny space between the wall-boards of each room, they found an iron scythe. It had the curve and shape of a true scythe, it was still sharp, and only the usual wooden handle was missing.

Immediately the questions arose: when was it put there, and why? In 1815 when the house was built, no house had indoor bathrooms. So no construction on the second floor would have happened until the indoor bathroom was built, and when was that? An indoor bathroom was still a rarity around 1850; it was more frequent around 1900; and legally required by about 1940.

The contractor hired by Brenda had one idea. When a tree was freshly cut and being squared for a finished piece of lumber, a scythe could have been used to shave the sides to make them smooth and flat. If that was the case, is it possible that the builders failed to see it when they were putting up the finishing wallboard on each side of the frame? The mystery will never have a full answer.

Brenda Potvin's husband Marc unfortunately became sick and died in 2021, when they were planning the new closet. The construction project was delayed for several years, so the discovery of the scythe has happened very recently. It will be the Historical Society's mystery for years to come.

### Meals in the Grange Hall

The board of directors has become interested in the prospect of having successful meals in the second floor Grange Hall. On October 15 the Brentwood Seniors had their Harvest Luncheon there. The long benches for audience seating were not used; they were moved to the sides and simply lined the walls. There were two parallel rows of tables with cushioned folding chairs for the diners.



About six members of the Society assisted with preparing tables and serving. Dick Chamberlain regaled the group about his memories of holiday gatherings in years past, his recollections of his early life in Connecticut. A total of 38 Seniors enjoyed their meal. The program after lunch was a tour of the museum exhibits.

### Annual Meeting

The Historical Society went into its winter mode in November. We had our Annual Meeting as usual, on Sunday, November 9. The purpose of the Annual Meeting is to acquaint the members with all that has been done through the past months and to vote for the officers for the coming year. It's always amazing to hear the list of programs and projects large and small that take volunteer hours and also funds from our treasury. Following are some of the events and projects. First is the list of officers who have been elected for 2026. Lisa Swasey conducted the installation ceremony.

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|-----------------|------------------------|
| Dexter Swasey   | President              |
| Linda Rousseau  | Vice President         |
| Albert Belanger | Research Correspondent |
| Linda Lambert   | Treasurer              |
| Laura Hajjar    | Program Chair          |

*\* Recording Secretary position awaits a new applicant.*

The Directors are Rebecca Dunham, Karen Ellis, Dawn Higley, Caleb Labbe, Debi Lyons, David Menter, Diane Robinson, and Robin Wrighton.

## Christmas Past and Present

The next public event was Sunday afternoon, December 21, using all of the second floor space for an unforgettable “Christmas Past and Present.”

Children and their families could follow a string of paper rings up the new set of stairs to take the shortest way to Santa Claus. Santa was seated on the stage on a Grange bench throne. In the few cases when a child happened to be afraid of the big bearded man, there was room beside him for the parent to sit with the child in his lap and talk to Santa that way. Spread out below the stage was the Grange



Hall where there was room for the grown-ups to have refreshments and chat, and for Mrs. Claus to lead the children to tables where they could color pages of pictures and munch on cookies. The dining area had been transformed into a fascinating exhibit of souvenirs, décor and decorations from Christmases past. About 70 people came to enjoy the afternoon.



## Care of Our Well-Worn Building



We all like the exhibits, programs and events, but the Historical Society has more to do than provide special occasions for its members and the public. We're lucky to have a Town building for our activities. The agreement with the Town is that the Town will pay for work needed on the outside of the building, while the Historical Society will pay for work on the inside, in lieu of rent. Earlier officers needed to concentrate on restoring walls, painting floors, walls, windows and stairs. They even had to get rid of a large beehive that was too close for comfort. As Dexter pointed out in his letter above, the building is well built, but it is 168 years old.

The BHS Directors have been working with the Brentwood Selectboard, the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, and The 1772 Foundation to apply for matching grants that will enable the structure work to be done professionally.

We have also not forgotten about the fact that we still need a well and a septic system, which would give us running water and an up-to-date restroom!



## The Open Houses

Many Brentwood residents, especially those who are fairly new in town, may wonder what an Open House at the Historical Society is. During the months of April through October, on the first Saturday of each month, the museum is open from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. A group of knowledgeable officers is on hand and everyone is welcome to stop in and stay as long as they wish, at no charge.

You can wander on your own or have an officer accompany you, answering questions and adding details about what you're seeing.

There are dresses, suits, military uniforms and firemen's gear on mannequins, many different displays of tools, household goods, ledger and account booklets and more. It all becomes more interesting as it sinks in that everything was worn and used right here in Brentwood, that there were real people living busy lives on the same land that you live on now. Some people leave saying they should have come a long time ago or that they will come again to see which displays are different from those they saw last time.

There are three rooms to see on the first floor. The second floor features the Grange Hall and stage still appointed as it were for a Grange meeting of the past and dining area filled with additional town history. Rainy days or sunny days are always good for visits. The building is climate controlled and affords assisted access to both floors.



### With Our Sympathy

I am sad to report that our fellow Director, Dick Chamberlain passed away on November 19, 2025. Being a member of the Historical Society Board was just a small portion of the multiple contributions that he gave to the town and people of Brentwood.

Please take a moment to reflect on knowing and working with this wonderful Brentwood gentleman.

Dexter Swasey

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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### 2026 BHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Dexter Swasey**, President

**Linda Rousseau**, Vice President

**Albert Belanger**, Research  
Correspondent

**Linda Lambert**, Treasurer

**Laura Hajjar**, Program Chair

**Rebecca Dunham**, Director

**Karen Ellis**, Director

**Dawn Smith Higley**, Director

**Caleb Labbe**, Director

**Debi Lyons**, Director

**David Menter**, Director

**Diane Robinson**, Director

**Robin Wrighton**, Director



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