

# DUBLIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter No. 4 - January, 1987

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## Notice of Meeting

The next meeting of members will be at 12 noon on Thursday, January 22, at Abe Wolfe's house ("High Wells" on the Old Harrisville Road). In case snow or ice makes Abe's driveway impassable, the meeting will be at the McKees' on Old Marlborough Road. B.Y.O lunch.

**Speaker:** Harry L. Katz, Assistant Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Boston Athenaeum, will give an informal talk on New England summer resort architecture. Mr. Katz is the author of *A Continental Eye: the Art and Architecture of Arthur Rotch*, (1985). Rotch did the original (1881) design for the Dublin Town Hall, and was an uncle of the Misses Aimee and Rosamund Lamb. Rotch's original drawings for the Town Hall will be on display at the meeting.

## **Gift from the Hancock Historical Society**

At its annual Christmas party on December 12, the Hancock Historical Society presented us with a surprise gift - a handsome engraved portrait of the Rev. Edward Sprague, Dublin's second and longest-serving minister. Sprague, who was educated at Harvard, came here in 1777 during the Revolution and served until his death in 1817.

The engraving is 14" x 10" in a vaneer frame of the period. It undoubtedly depicts the eccentric country parson more freshly and accurately than the bowdlerized copy in the town history, and was probably taken directly from a contemporary oil painting. It was left to the Hancock society by a late resident of Hancock who was born in Nelson.

Parson Sprague, whose colorful and somewhat raffish personality perplexed the earnest Vic-



Rev'd Edward Sprague

torian authors of the town history, is reminiscent of an 18th-century 'squarson' in a Fielding novel. The history describes him as a "jovial man, fond of conversation, anecdote, repartee, and good cheer," possessing "the simplicity of a child" together with a "sharp intellect" and "a tart wit." He was Dublin's first philanthropist, willing the bulk of his inherited fortune to the town for education.

Hildreth Allison's article on him, *Parson Sprague of the Monadnocks*, is available at the Library.

The Dublin Historical Society expresses its thanks again to the Hancock Historical Society and its president, Edward Burt, its secretary, Gloria Neary, and the resident curator, Mrs. A.G. Bodine, for this most generous gift.

- W.L. Bauhan

### Other Gifts

During 1986, the Society received cash gifts, far in excess of annual dues, from Justine E. Auchincloss, Harold & Isabel Clukay, Jane Frothingham Hawkins and Albert B. Wolfe. Without their generous support, there would not have been enough money in the treasury to cover current expenses, such as the mailing of these newsletters. Sincere thanks to them on behalf of all the membership.

### Book Review

Lois K. Stabler, ed., *Very Poor and of a Lo Make: The Journal of Abner Sanger*, Peter E. Randall for the Historical Society of Cheshire County, 1986. Illustrated. 657 pp. \$30.

Wrote Abner Sanger in a mean, tight hand for April 16, 1794: "Morning fog works on Monadnock like a storm. Cloudy and warm. David Meed and Abner [his step-son and son] draw stones off my field before my door. I brake flax out. After the fog and clouds disperse, afternoon fair and warm. David Meed and Abner go to plowing towards night near sundown. I help them strike out a long land to plow, then turn out the stags [oxen]. . ."

He was working his sister's 100-acre farmstead, not far from the present southwest corner of the Dublin golf course, a little way towards Marlborough on the Old Marlborough Road. Four years earlier, this 50-year-old farmer, hostler, surveyor - this itinerant yeoman of many skills - had made the fourth move in his adult life: first from one farm to another outside Keene on the "Great Road" to Charlestown (Route 12); then, under a version of house arrest for his Tory persuasions, to the middle of Main Street in Keene; then to this small Dublin house and barn. His wife, daughter and step-daughter worked as seamstresses, while he with his son and step-son boarded other people's cows and hogs, bartered and rented additional stock and other commodities, made maple syrup and hay, grew corn and barley, and raised vegetables and flax.

There is history well worth the gleaning from Abner Sanger's journal. He wrote daily of the Revolutionary War years in Keene - October 1, 1774 through December 6, 1782 - and of three of his four later years in Dublin - December 3, 1791 through December 11, 1794. His were short entries, bursts on average of less than six printed lines, concerning the weather, his daily accomplishments and the problems of his family and relatives living their lives on farms in Keene and Dublin. His 3,600-plus entries have been edited and annotated with remarkable skill by Lois Stabler, a Keene scholar of the first rank.

Sanger says too little of Revolutionary War politics for us to know why, after Lexington in 1775, he mustered as a Patriot for the twelve-day trek to Boston, only to be arrested and jailed in 1777 as a Tory. However, at a lesser level, his descriptions of retribution brought on Tories in Keene are vivid enough: the incarcerations and deprivations, and minor harrassments. As he wrote for January 11, 1777: "Old Goody Witch, Dr. Blake's wife, raves and throws clubs at me."

He measures his times from the perspective of a yeoman accountant, for he often made his way by bartering his services as plowman, woodcutter, thresher, stockman, itinerant cobbler and general handyman. In good part, his is an accounting journal of these transactions, but there are reflections on graver matters. On justice: he describes Keene's Superior Court as a social attraction for his sister, Rhoda, who spent idle afternoons there when court was in session, as if it were the equivalent of a modern soap opera. On morals: he observes with a wicked eye the arrival of a male visitor at a female neighbor's home, noting

through the window the lighting and blowing out of a candle, and the visitor's early morning departure.

"Despite the intimacy of this usually quiet world," writes Mrs. Stabler, "one brief conversation in the journal indicates the economic and personal trials that made up Abner Sanger's Dublin years. 'I meet John Barrett on the road. We talked of our misfortunes in getting our work [done] and age.' "

The journal is not all of loneliness and hardship. It is also of well-being: of families shielded in strong houses from the cold - and even Dublin's wolves. Some children died too soon after birth, and some adults were ravaged by smallpox, but more often families were relieved from hunger and disease. (For lack of fodder, however, stock were sometimes tethered to trees in winter for what must have been brutal "browsing.") Sanger tells of inter-farm sharing of tasks ranging from maple sugaring to hoeing potatoes; of day-to-day contacts with neighbors and paid mutual assistance; of talks with passers-by on the road; of trips to Charlestown and Keene.

No Thomas Paine was Abner Sanger. But in the very tapestry of mundane detail he wrote as Pieter Brueghel painted. And in that sense he tells of his part in the history of the region as no one has before.

- Dan Burnham

### **Dues Notice**

Enclosed is an annual dues notice at the newly-adopted rates, along with a convenient envelope for sending in your check.

This notice is being sent only to current annual members, since we cannot afford another town-wide mailing. Please try to think of friends and neighbors who ought to be members of the Society, and do your best to enlist them. The only qualification for membership is payment of the annual dues. (Linda Van Wyk can supply extra envelopes.)

Please send in your own dues promptly. Dues pay for our mailings, so newsletters can only be sent to annual members whose 1987 dues have been received.