

Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444 • Founded 1920

Newsletter No. 57 – February 2003

A HISTORY OF THE DUBLIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PART II

In the November newsletter we traced the history of the Historical Society from its founding in 1920 to its sudden cessation in 1944. After the meeting in November of that year, for reasons unrecorded, the Society ceased to function for the next sixteen years. (Not fourteen, as stated in the last newsletter. Historians don't always subtract very well.)

Death and Resurrection

This abrupt halt would be easier to understand had it happened a couple of years earlier, when war work was occupying people's time and gas rationing made it difficult to get to meetings. But by November, 1944, most everybody had learned to cope with those conditions and the war was beginning to wind down. The explanation must be a simple waning of interest.

There was apparently a faint stirring in the Bicentennial summer of 1952. The evidence for this is a receipt book with stubs showing money collected in June and July for several life memberships at \$10 each. Some of the life members who joined at this time later became the nucleus around whom the Society was revived in 1986. There is no record of any meetings or other activities at the time of the Bicentennial.

Then, on September 3, 1960, a meeting at the Schoolhouse was organized by Charles Engvall, a retired clergyman living in Dublin. A Committee of three appointed to revise the by-laws seems not to have felt any great pressure of time, since it didn't meet until December of the following year.

The committee (the Rev. Mr. Engvall, Kay Allison and Belle Gowing) organized a general meeting for December 29th, 1961, at which a supper was provided by the ladies of the Grange. Newton Tolman spoke and autographed copies of his book, *North of Monadnock*. A slate of officers was elected, with Elliott Allison as President. Catching up with old business, the meeting voted to send copies of the speeches delivered at the 1952 Bicentennial celebration to the State Library, the Boston Public Library and the Library of Congress.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

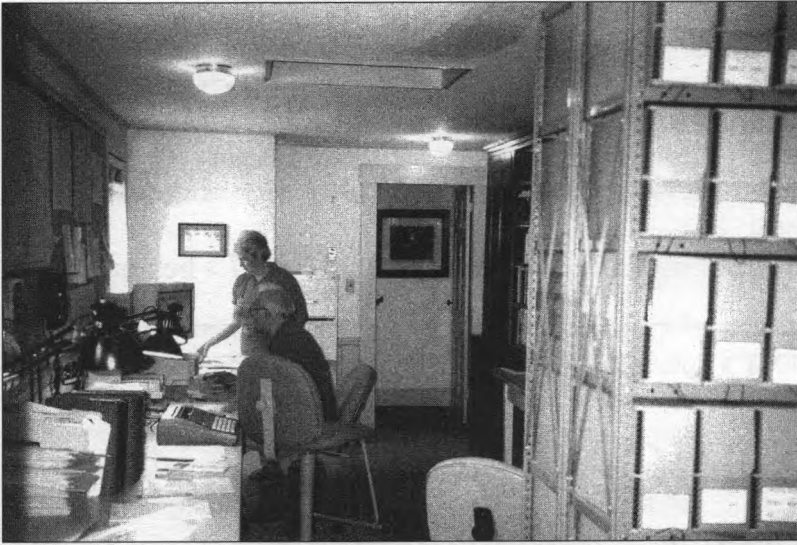
The February potluck dinner meeting, with its Valentine theme, was a success despite bone-chilling cold and frozen pipes that forced a last-minute change of venue from the Community Church to the lower Town Hall. More than sixty members braved the elements to enjoy great food and an interesting talk by Tom Hyman about the issues he faced in writing the new town history, *Village on a Hill*.

The next afternoon a large group showed up at the boat landing on Dublin Lake to witness and participate in an ice cutting demonstration presented by Dave Whitney with the help of Hank Campbell and many others. The chill in the air was quickly overcome by anyone trying their hand at the saw, which slowly but surely cut through the 16-inch-thick ice to yield some good sized but slightly lopsided blocks. We all

need to practice this again before we are ready to supply ice for our summer needs!

As I write this, at the end of a storm that has dropped another foot or more of snow, it is a little hard to look forward to spring projects, but that is what we must do. The fundraising for the schoolhouse renovation has had a generous response and raised half of the \$60,000 goal. We will be renewing our efforts to raise the remaining funds and begin the work. We have also increased the scope of the project somewhat by adding a full basement rather than just a crawl space to the planned renovation. The additional space under the schoolhouse will provide needed storage for objects not on display. The Board feels strongly that we can reach our goal in 2003 if we all give it our best effort.

– Paul Tuller



When the archives were over the Post Office. Nancy Campbell and John Harris doing their best.
 Photograph by Betsey Harris, 1996

The Board of directors met five times in the next several months, organizing a general meeting for June. The Annual Meeting was announced for September 8th, 1962, when Andrew Elder was elected President, along with a slate of officers and directors. Then once again all activity appears to have ceased.

In the years that followed the schoolhouse quietly rotted on its foundations, the powderpost beetle took hold of many of the wooden artifacts and of the building itself, and the rest of the collections were left to moth and mildew. That the Historical Society owned the schoolhouse was gradually forgotten, and the Town used it as a kind of attic for old records and unwanted property.

A New Beginning

In 1985 I unwarily undertook what turned out to be a decade-long project to gather, sort and index the Town's records going back to 1760. In the course of this effort, Bill Bauhan and I discovered that a great many Town records were stored in liquor cartons in the schoolhouse, where they were so damp as to be well on the way to papier-maché. There were also, and in similar condition, books, records and pictures – clearly not Town property but still of historical interest. For a while we were puzzled as to how we might get legal possession of these materials, so that they could be rescued and cared for.

The breakthrough came when Bill discovered in the schoolmaster's desk a list of people who had, back in the fifties and sixties, paid \$10 to become life members. Of those on the list, eight were still living. Without knowing it, they were the Dublin Historical Society.

Three of the eight life members – Luetta Eaton, Lois Faulkner and Elizabeth Weis – were living in Dublin. At our request, they secured proxies from the

other five – Helen Bastedo, Frances Henderson, Ellen Lee Kennelly, Aimeé Lamb and Emily McFarland. Thus armed, the three resident life members called a meeting for May 17, 1986, at which the Dublin Historical Society was formally brought back to life. New officers and trustees were elected and we were back in business.

The schoolhouse interior was cleaned up and the artifacts arranged into a reasonably coherent display, so that the building could be opened to the public from time to time in the summer. Part of the floor space was arranged to make it interesting to school groups by reproducing as nearly as possible the way it had looked as a school. Only later was it discovered that the schoolhouse lot and building belonged to us, having been deeded to the Society by the Dublin School District in 1928.

Bill Bauhan served as President during the reborn Society's formative first year. He was succeeded by Lucy Shonk ("Young Lucy") who directed a successful fundraising campaign, making possible some much-needed repairs to the schoolhouse. These included painting inside and out, replacing rotting sills and floorboards and attacking the powderpost beetles.

The Archives

Meanwhile, all paper materials – documents, books and pictures – were moved to the long, narrow room above the Post Office. As storage space, this was an improvement over the schoolhouse in having a more-or-less even temperature, but no improvement at all in terms of fire protection. It also soon got seriously overcrowded with more and more of the gray boxes so dear to an archivist's heart, and was always understood to be a temporary expedient. During the Post Office years, I was joined by Nancy Campbell, who turned out to have the perfect set of talents for archives work. She has been



Building the new archives building. The main part of the building is a concrete bunker inside a decorative – and expendable – shell.
 Photograph by Betsey Harris, 1996

a full partner in pulling together the Society's archives, as well as the Town's.

In 1988, I wrote the first of a number of proposals to include a purpose-built archives room as part of the planned expansion of the Library. To recount the next eight years of negotiation and maneuvering would only reopen old wounds. When it became clear that the only solution was a separate archives building, we were fortunate enough to find an angel who offered to contribute \$100,000, conditioned on partial matches from the Society and the Town. The Society, under Nancy Perkins's leadership, raised more than its share and the Town voted \$15,000 at the 1996 Town meeting. The building, designed and engineered by Dick Hammond, was built in the following summer in time for an opening ceremony in September.

One of the speakers at the opening was the late John Frisbee, Director of the New Hampshire Historical Society. In recognition that the Town now had the facilities, as well as the commitment, to take care of its records, he returned the Town's 1771 Charter, which had long ago been sent for safe-keeping to the State society's vault in Concord. In archival terms, Dublin had grown up.

Before the move from the Post Office, I was able to report to the Selectmen that the Town archives were now up to date, and to turn them over to Nancy Campbell as Town Archivist. I remain the Society's Archivist (at the pleasure of the Board) and Nancy and I are each other's assistants. Having the Town and Historical Society archives (as well as those of the Community Church) under one roof with a joint administration makes all the difference in the efficiency with which we can answer questions. We have many visitors from other towns who are interested in learning how we do things, so we can reasonably claim to be a model for small-town archives.

Educational Programs

One of the purposes of a historical society is education, and to that end we have worked on a variety of programs with the Consolidated School. Each year's third and fourth grades make a guided visit to the schoolhouse. There is some interest in the old school desks, copybooks and slates, but even more in the summer and winter hearses, and most of all in the outdoor privy. Apparently most children of this generation have never seen a privy.

During Paul Tuller's presidency, the Society's other programs for young people have included maple sugaring demonstrations, visits to other one-room schoolhouse sites and other

historic spots. For grown-ups, Society docents conduct bus tours of the Town on Dublin Day, and a history walk for members of the Riding and Walking Club.

The artifacts in the schoolhouse museum have – finally – been catalogued, and a beginning has been made on photographing each item. Quite a lot of the things had lost their identifying tags, so that we don't know who gave them, or what their connection with Dublin may be. (Fifty or sixty years ago anything "old" was considered fair game for a historical society, no matter what it was or where it came from.) Gradually, we will start a weeding process, so that the museum reflects specifically life in Dublin as it used to be.

Plans for the Schoolhouse

The schoolhouse building is itself a historical artifact, being one of the few unreconstructed one-room schoolhouses remaining in the State, and since it belongs to the Society, we have inherited the obligation to maintain it as nearly as possible as it is, and as it has been for the past 160 years.

In the last couple of years, the Trustees, under Paul Tuller's leadership, have faced up to the bald fact that in order to preserve the schoolhouse it will be necessary to move it. It was built in 1841 with no firmer foundation than stones laid on the ground. Construction of the Consolidated School (1916) involved a rearrangement of the landscape, with fill encroaching on the schoolhouse from two sides. At the back, the retaining wall is so close that even a thin person cannot walk behind the building. The result is that the wooden sills rot, and that the rot spreads into the floor and walls.

The plan is to move the building forward on the lot and nearer the center, allowing proper circulation of air around it,

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Miss McCord's third and fourth graders at the old schoolhouse. Photograph by Lesley McCord, 2002

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and to put it on a sounder foundation. With that slight change, the schoolhouse ought to be good for another 160 years, at least.

What next?

We say on our letterhead that the Society was founded in 1920, and that is strictly true. For nearly half of its 82 years, however, the Society was effectively non-existent. This is not an altogether unusual record for small-town societies, which necessarily depend on the interest and energy of the small number of people whose interests reach further back than last week.

Because of the direction in which our country was settled, most New England historical societies spend much of their time supplying ancestors to people living further west. As it happens, there are only a couple of people in town who can claim more than a generation or two of Dublin ancestors, and

they know well enough who those ancestors were. Consequently the people we serve are, for the most part, out-of-towners, whereas it is the current residents – YOU – that we have to rely on for encouragement and financial support. You may not be the descendant of a Dublin family, but you are probably the ancestor of one. Where will your great-grandchildren look when they are old enough to start wondering about you?

Beyond genealogy, our town's history is more interesting than that of most small towns because of Dublin's experience as an art colony and summer resort. We get a lot of inquiries from scholars and writers interested, for example, in Abbott Thayer and Joseph Lindon Smith. (Indeed, we have been asked by an institute in Cairo to send copies of photographs from Smith's collection.) It would be a pity if there were no one here to answer requests like these.

In 1970, when the Society should have been celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, no one even noticed. Will the Society be alive to celebrate its hundredth in 2020? Let us hope so. Let us, indeed, do more than that. Let us resolve to make sure it happens.

– J. W. H.

ACCESSIONS AT THE ARCHIVES

Through the quick thinking of **Rusty Bastedo**, a guest book kept by the late Grosvenor and Josefa Backus at "Beech Hill" and "Spur House" in the 1920s and 30s has been rescued from oblivion. Among the Backus guests who signed the book were Calvin Coolidge and his family.

From **Lillian Carter** comes a pencil drawing of the famous Pumpelly cave ("Megalithia"), signed "H.H., Jr.", which probably stands for Henry Holt, Jr., the first husband of Elizabeth ["Libba"] Cabot.

Suzannah Parish, daughter of the late Joan Brush Parish, has given us a number of photographs, and has permitted us

to copy others, of descendants of George deForest Brush through his son, Jerome.

Other generous donors of historical materials include Steeve deVargas, Katherine Hoffman, Cathy LaMontagne, Richard Rebolledo, Lucy Shonk (Mrs Peter), Robert B. Stephenson and Ann Walsh.

We also receive from time to time interesting contributions from thoughtful strangers – persons whose forbears lived in Dublin, but who have no present connection with the Town. Among these are **Genevieve Ames** of Marlow, who has sent us a collection of 19th century photographs taken at one of the Moses Adams farms, now Clarissa Silitch's house.

Likewise Professor **Joseph Betz**, of Farmingdale, Long Island, has sent us a Betz family genealogy, photographs of family members and of their house, no longer standing, on the Old Peterborough Road near the town line.

We are grateful to all these friends, old and new, who help us, in the words of the Society's charter, to collect and preserve "all facts, relics and memorials pertaining to the Town of Dublin".

IN MEMORIAM

We record with sorrow the passing in January of our Honorary Member, **Raymond Arthur Ellis**, of Keene.

Ray Ellis was born in Brattleboro, but grew up in Dublin, where he married Alice Emily Fiske in 1946. When Alice was a Society Trustee (1994-1997), Ray used to accompany her to meetings, so that we had the benefit of both their recollections. They were elected honorary members at the 1997 annual meeting.

The Society extends its sympathy to Ray's widow, Alice, and their son, Bruce, and his family.

C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society Newsletter was edited by John Harris.

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