Town News

Historic Amherst

The Capt. Daniel Fletcher House (1824) at 117 Boston Post Road was built by Timothy Danforth, who also supplied the bricks for the courthouse (now Town Hall) in 1823 from the brickyard in the southern part of Amherst. This ca. 1880 image is from the collection of the Historical Society of Amherst.

Amherst's Building Boom 1823-1825

BY KATRINA HOLMAN

Quite a number of houses were built in the Village in the two years directly following the construction of the brick courthouse (now Town Hall) in the summer of 1823. What did the trend signify? Did Amherst's "taking the bull by the horn" to retain its position as shire town, or county seat, spark economic optimism? Yet several of the builders had trouble selling the new houses.

Pair of Brick Mansions

In March of 1823, just a few months before the third courthouse (now Town Hall) was raised, Timothy Danforth (1778-1855) solicited proposals for construction of a substantial new house of three floors (40 by 20 feet) with a 6-foot deep cellar and a two-story ell (22 by 13 feet). "Old Tim" was a brickmaker (among many other occupations) so it's no wonder that he built the hip-roofed house at 117 Boston Post Road with 45,000 bricks. Danforth also supplied the bricks for the new courthouse. According to local lore (recorded by Emma B. Locke, 1916), he built this house for local merchant Isaac Spalding, but Spalding never owned it, nor can I find any evidence that he ever lived there. (He removed to Nashua in Nov. 1826.) Danforth's out-of-state brother-in-law Crosby took it off his hands in May 1824 for $2250. Danforth lived there for some years and continued to try to sell it, but the six-room house didn't pass to a new owner until Crosby's death in 1834.

Another brick mansion, larger and more elegant, was soon erected less than a block away at 201 Boston Post Road. Robert Means Jr. (1786-1842) placed an ad in the local paper in July 1824, soliciting bids for thousands of feet of lumber; construction was completed in eleven months in Sept. 1825 by an out-of-town master builder and mason. Means was an attorney, so the continuation of court sessions in town would have been important to his career, but the catalyst and inspiration for his timing were more likely the death of his wealthy father in Jan. 1823 and his marriage a few months later, his sizable inheritance enabling him to build such a grand house for his bride.

Twins with Hip Roofs

In the Village there are two look-alike dwellings in an architectural style unusual for Amherst: a hip roof on the main section of 2-over-2 rooms with two chimneys along the back walls. A young builder named Hiram Leavitt (1802-1842) began

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Upcoming 250th Celebration events

Town Picnic Rescheduled for August 18

The Town Picnic, co-sponsored by the Amherst 250th Celebration Committee and the Town Recreation Department, has been rescheduled to Wednesday, August 18th. From 6:30 – 8:00, we'll be entertained by the Amoskeag Strummers whose music includes everything from banjos and a tuba, to spoons and a wash board. Moulton's Market is offering boxed suppers of a wrap sandwich, bottle of water, chips and a cookie for $8.95 and $6.50 (½ wrap). Please pre-order by Sunday, August 15th by calling the market at 673-2404.

The last weekend in September will be a fantastic three-day town wide celebration – Amherst Heritage Days. We will kick off with a contra dance on Friday evening, the 24th at the Wilkins' School.

Saturday will see events for young and old alike including demonstrations, children's games and a variety of activities. There will be concerts by the Amherst Town Band as well as The Blue Hill Brass, a quilting demonstration and a raffle of a beautiful Amherst quilt. There will also be a blacksmith demonstration, a caricaturist, farm animals, face painting, a Colonial dress contest, a toy exhibit, jugglers, hayrides, storytelling and a pillory on the green.

The event will also include a display of a commemorative book entitled "Stories of Amherst", a tribute to Citizens of the Year, and a variety of commemorative collectibles. A town photograph will also be taken on the green during the day.

Both the Wigwam and Chapel museums will be open and the library will be featuring an "Images of Amherst" exhibit. Mark Twain will be visiting Amherst that day, as will the 5th NH Regiment. At 1:p.m. there will be a fun "Battle of the Badges" softball game at Spaulding Field between the Amherst Police and Fire Departments.

Food will be available throughout the day including breakfast treats (and an afternoon bake sale) by the Amherst Pre-School parents, hot dog and hamburger luncheon by the Milford Rotary Club and an old fashioned Ham & Bean supper at the Congregational Church of Amherst at 5 PM.

Sunday will begin with a beautiful historic church service at the Amherst Congregational Church. Throughout the day, there will also be tours of three historic Amherst homes as well as a docent-led "Walking Tour" of Amherst Village and the Town Hall burying ground.

We have heard from some former residents that they are planning to return to town for Amherst's Heritage Days. Please circulate this information to invite old friends and family who would enjoy the celebration.

Many Amherst organizations will be participating to make this a fun and memorable event. For additional information about events and schedules, please continue to check the town website www.amherstnh.gov/amherst250/schedule.html or contact Carolyn Quinn at 673-3308 or ccq02@comcast.net.

Amherst250
1760 - 2010

Amherst Women Making a Difference Part 1 of 2

AMHERST – Women Making a Difference distributed a booklet on the 4th of July entitled Honoring Women Who Made a Difference in Amherst History. We are publishing the information on all 13 women in two parts.

WMD encourages readers to make suggestions of additional women who are worthy of being included. Email: wmdnh@gmail.com

Jane Means (Appleton) Pierce (1806-1863)

Jane was the first, and to date only, First Lady from New Hampshire. In 1834 she married Franklin Pierce, who later became the 14th President of the United States. The couple was wed at the Means Mansion, Jane's grandparents' home, in Amherst Village.

Jane didn't relish the political life – she was quiet, reserved, diminutive, and was resistant to Franklin entering the political arena. She was, however, no shrinking violet. She strongly opposed the institution of slavery, and during the Civil War she was in opposition with Franklin's views. Jane wanted the abolition of slavery at all costs, even if it meant breaking up the Union. Franklin first and foremost wanted to preserve the Constitution and the Union, viewing slavery as a secondary issue.

By all accounts Jane suffered from depression most of her life, but it seems with good reason – she buried all three of her offspring. The first son died at three days old, the second son at four years old, and then she witnessed the death of her third son at age 11 in a horrific train accident two months before Franklin's inauguration. Any mother can attest that any one of these events would be difficult to overcome. Sadly, Jane sank deeper into the depths of depression as she aged and then contracted tuberculosis. She passed away at age 57 and was laid to rest beside her sons in Concord, NH.

Sophia E. (Phelps) Dodge (1836-1924)

Sophia, lifelong resident of Amherst and wife of Perley W. Dodge, was a woman who took a very active interest in her community. Her obituary stated that at age 87 she had ". . . been active, alert, interested in all that was going on about her. One never thought of her as old." The sister of Charles H. Phelps, who died at Gettysburg in 1863, Sophia, had a natural involvement in the Woman's Relief Corps (W.R.C.), a patriotic organization formed to perpetuate the memory of Civil War soldiers. She was a member of the Congregational Church, the Ladies Charitable Association, the Grange and secretary of the Improvement Society. Most notably, Sophia may have been the first woman to serve on the School Board, elected in March 1886 and serving for nearly 20 years.

Sarah Lucretia 'Lue' Lawrence (1843-1870)

Lue was a much-loved humanitarian and philanthropist whose brief life touched the hearts of many. Daughter of Aaron and Sarah Lawrence, Lue followed her parents' penchant for giving. Although both parents preceded her in death, they had prepared her to take on the responsibility of administering their rather large fortune at a rather young age. Described in her obituary as having "marked independence, great maturity of judgment, . . .and a most generous and unselfish nature", she gave freely to educational, religious and charitable organizations.

Lue was said to have inherited a "feeble constitution" resulting in "impaired health". She was planning to marry in June of 1870, but sadly the wedding was postponed due to her illness. She passed away in August of that year at age 25. In her will bequests were made to countless Amherst organizations and causes.

Leila (Robinson) Sawtelle (1850-1891)

Amherst has the distinction of being touched, albeit briefly, by this remarkable pioneer of women's rights. Leila was the first woman graduate of Boston University Law School. When denied admission to the Massachusetts Bar based on gender, she worked to change the law; paving the way for countless women to follow. The Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts remembers her with their coveted Leila J. Robinson Award which has been bestowed on such notables as Hillary Rodham Clinton and Janet Reno. Leila, whose life was tragically cut short, is laid to rest in Meadow View cemetery with the an epitaph that reads: The pioneer woman lawyer of Massachusetts, Author, and Journalist. A lover of the true, the good and the beautiful.

Peabody Mill Environmental Center

Hartshorn Summer Program 2010

The mission of Peabody Mill Environmental Center (PMEC) is to foster an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the natural world, by offering environmental, conservation, and science programs to all ages. PMEC strives to foster diligent stewardship of our environment so that future generations may inherit and continue to be inspired by the wonders of a protected and natural world.

With that in mind we are offering our 21st season of environmentally based programs in the Hartshorn Summer Program. Programs will be held at the PMEC located at the end of Brook Road in Amherst. Programs are offered by grade and the grade is what the child will be entering in the Fall of 2010. The week long classes are offered 9am-12pm daily with extended day options available. Be sure to register early as classes fill quickly. Classes will begin Monday 6/21/10 and continue for 10 weeks of summer! Extended day programs are not offered for children younger than those entering 1st grade.

Pre-registration is required for all programs, weekly or daily. Registration is complete only when payment has been received. Register at www.amherstrec.org. Registrations can be mailed to P.O. Box 960, Amherst, NH 03031 and they can also be accomplished in person at the recreation office or by phone at 673-6248.

For more information visit the PMEC website: http://www.pmec.org, or check out the vzriety of programs offered by the Amherst Recreation Department at: http://www.amherstrec.org/info/activities/default.aspx.

Road Reconstruction Project

By Bill Overholt
AMHERST ROAD COMMISSION

July 2010

Work has started on Spring Road. We are doing everything possible to keep at least one lane of the road open to traffic during the construction period. There may be times when the road is completely closed during construction of new culverts, etc. In any case, there will be delays, and for those commuters using the road every day, we urge that either County Road or Baboosic Lake Road be used as a detour going to Merrimack. When the road is closed, detour signs will be in place, and we will attempt to list the closures as early as possible on the town web site and the cable channel.

One of the reasons frost heaves occur is that materials expand at different rates when frozen, and when there are various thickness of paving (which happens over years of repaving and shimming low spots) and different kinds of base material present, the different rates of expansion can cause frost heaves. Most of the work on the road will be reclaiming – that is the top 12 inches of macadam and base will be ground up and put back in place. This process assures a homogeneous base on which the new paving can be laid, thus eliminating one of the reasons frost heaves occur.

The road will be raised in most places by from 3 to 12 inches, eliminating low spots and improving water run-off. By keeping water out of the sub-base of the road, another cause of frost heaves will be eliminated.

The work is expected to be completed, except for some final touches, by about September 1.

Amherst Town Band Concert Schedule

Tuesday, August 24
7 PM Concert on the Amherst Town Common
Sponsored by Amherst Lions Club
Saturday, September 25
3 PM Concert on the Amherst Town Common
Amherst 250th Anniversary celebration
Saturday, October 16
Noon Pumpkin Festival Parade, Keene For more information about the band, see their web site: www.amhersttownband.org.

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