

EASTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TRAIN TRACKS



Volume 9, Issue 4

JUNE 2009

CALENDAR

The mission of the Easton Historical Society is to preserve, promote and interpret the unique industrial, social, cultural, architectural and environmental history of the Town.

2009 ANNUAL MEETING

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EASTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL BE HELD ON SUNDAY, MAY 31ST AT 2 P.M. JOIN US AS WE GATHER TO MEET AT "QUESET", THE HISTORIC 1854 HOME BUILT FOR OAKES ANGIER AMES. IT WAS LATER THE HOME OF WINTHROP AMES, THE "GENTLEMAN PRODUCER OF BROADWAY" WHO PRODUCED OVER 100 PLAYS IN NEW YORK CITY AND WHO PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW YORK CITY THEATRE DISTRICT. "QUESET" IS LOCATED JUST TO THE RIGHT AND IN BACK OF THE AMES FREE LIBRARY WHICH IS ON MAIN STREET. THE HOUSE IS NOW PART OF THE LIBRARY CAMPUS.

OUR SPECIAL GUEST AND SPEAKER WILL BE MRS. DAVID AMES. SHE WILL REMINISCE ABOUT MEETING SOME MEMBERS OF THE AMES FAMILY OF THE LATE 1930'S AND 1940'S, PARTICULARLY MARY AMES FROTHINGHAM (WITH WHOM SHE LIVED FOR A PERIOD OF TIME) AND ELISE WEST AMES OF "SHEEP PASTURE". YOU WILL ALSO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TOUR THE GROUNDS AND GARDENS AROUND THIS BEAUTIFUL HOME. A BRIEF BUSINESS MEETING WILL BEGIN THE AFTERNOON. LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED FOLLOWING THE MEETING.

THE SOCIETY THANKS THE AMES FREE LIBRARY FOR THEIR HOSPITALITY AND THE USE OF THE "QUESET" HOUSE.

All events are held at the Easton Historical Society unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, May 31st, Annual Meeting at "Queset", 2 P.M. Our special guest speaker is Mrs. David Ames.

Sunday, June 14th, Flag Day. Show your colors!

Sunday, June 14th, Open House at the Station, 1-5 P.M., featuring a selection of photos of the Ames family homes.

Saturday, July 11th, Can and Bottle Drive and Food Drive, 9 A.M. to 1 P.M. rain or shine!

Sunday, July 12th, Open House at the Station, 1-5 P.M. Program to be announced.

Sunday, August 9th, Open House at the Station, 1-5 P.M. Program to be announced.

Looking ahead...

Monday, September 7th, Labor Day.

Sunday, September 13th, Open House at the Station.

Sunday, October 4th, annual NRT Harvest Fair at "Sheep Pasture", former estate of Oliver Ames.

*The Easton Historical Society Newsletter "Train Tracks" is published quarterly by the Easton Historical Society.
Officers: President—Deborah MacPhee, 1st Vice President—Kenneth J. Michel, 2nd Vice President—Edmund C. Hands,
Treasurer—Patricia A. Baker, Recording / Corresponding Secretary—Hazel L. Varella
Directors—Daniel B. Amorim, Karen R. Cacciapuoti, Nancy DeLuca, Andrew R. Salisbury, Robert J. Wooster
Curator—Frank T. Meninno*

The Station Master

President Deborah MacPhee

Spring is upon us, and offers a welcome relief to the cold winter weather. The Easton Historical Society is taking advantage of this by sponsoring a special event at the historic Queset House on May 31st beginning at 2 p.m..

Mrs. David Ames will be our special guest and offer reflections on her arrival in Easton, her introduction to the Ames family, and her life in town through the years. Mrs. Ames will comment on Elise West Ames, who donated the "Sheep Pasture" to the Natural Resources Trust. Today, Sheep Pasture is a frequent destination for hikers and children and the location of our town's annual Harvest Fair. Mrs. Ames will also comment on Mary Ames Frothingham whose Elm Street home now serves as our town offices.

After Mrs. Ames' discussion there will be a tour through the gardens located directly behind Queset House. Queset House, which was recently purchased by the Ames Free Public Library, is the creation of famed architect Andrew Jackson Downing under the commission of industrialist Oakes Angier Ames. This special event is not to be missed!

As the economy continues to struggle, this is a great time to take advantage of local tours and open houses. The Queset House tour is just one tour available from The Society. Are you are planning a family reunion or gathering, or are you looking for local activities during summer vacation? If you think a tour of some historic locations in town fits into your schedule please call The Society to reserve a guide.

Curator's Corner

Curator / Caretaker Frank T. Meninno

As I write this column, spring is passing into summer. The grass is greening, the trees are leafing, and the hedges are sprouting upwards once again. When I survey the grounds around the Society I am made aware of the masterful artwork of Frederick Law Olmsted. He is the landscape architect who, working closely with H. H. Richardson, and financed by Frederick Lothrop Ames, put into action a plan to beautify the area around our Station.

Olmsted's original landscape design is still very much in place. A look at his plans reveal the gently sweeping drive from Mechanic Street leading up to and through the arched portico on the east side of the building. The drive does more than allow people to have a nice entrance into the building. It creates three distinct zones within the landscape. A large grassy area immediately in front of the building pleases the eye as it separates the structure from the (then) dusty dirt road and company houses. North of that, another green space is created that is bordered by Oliver Street and Mechanic Street. It is a pleasant area to sit in and serves as a memorial park today. The last area is the south parking area. It is much more utilitarian and is still serving its purpose after all these years. The cars coming and going are barely noticeable when you are in the building, or are sitting in the garden area. Even the sweeping curve into the parking lot and back towards the street evidences Olmsted's touch.

The Station was completed and open for use in 1882. The landscaping however wasn't finished until 1884. Olmsted was confounded in his efforts to finish his work because a building used as a rooming house for overnight travelers stood in the area that is now the garden. It was finally taken down in 1884, allowing Olmsted to complete the task at hand.

The next time you visit, take a walk around the area and take notice of the landscape layout. It is a part of that gift from our benefactors that is sometimes overlooked, but deserves its own place in the wonderful history of Easton.

Remembering Memorial Day

The Civil War took more than fifty years to come to a head and four years to fight. So many tens of thousands perished, many more thousands suffered in fields, woods, mountains, hospitals and prisons. The dying cries of men and boys on the battlefields vanished one by one as the night silenced the war's victims.

In 1868 an act of Congress created Decoration Day, now Memorial Day. In the 1870's, a grassroots movement of veterans and town officials began to raise interest in a monument or hall to honor Easton's war dead. In 1880 Dr. George B. Cogswell, George A. Lackey, Lincoln S. Drake, Oakes A. Ames and Joseph Barrows were given the charge to come up with a design for such a monument. At town meeting in March of 1881, approval was given to erect a monument for such a purpose at a cost of \$5000.

The memorial that was chosen is the handsome Soldier's Monument in Easton Center. High above a New England granite pedestal base stands the figure of a single soldier, well dressed and armed. He looks due south, as if watching to ensure that the Union would never be threatened again. The monument itself was placed in an area where it would represent all parts of the town. The monument was flanked to the east by the Congregational Church and on the west by the Town Hall.

Soldier's Monument
Late 1880's

Memorial Day 1882 was unusually mild. A stage was erected in front of the Town Hall that stood at the corner of Depot Street and Center Street, across from the present Center School. Members of A.B. Randall Post of Easton, Grand Army of the Republic Post 52 of Easton, speakers and singers occupied the platform. More than two hundred carriages and two thousand people attended the dedication ceremony. Seats were arranged in a semi-circle in front of the speakers, and Martland's Band of Brockton occupied a place off to the right.

The Gilbert Quartette, comprised of Eastoners J. Horace Willis, Isaac Littlefield, George E. Russell and Edward S. Powers sang a popular hymn, "I Cannot Always Trace The Way" which went as follows: "I cannot always trace the way where Thou, Almighty One, dost move, But I can always, always say that God is Love. Yes, God is Love, - a word like this can every gloomy tear remove, and turn all tears, all woe to bliss, for God is Love."

After a dedication prayer, Dr. Cogswell, a Civil War hero, spoke his introductory remarks about the monument, and how proud Easton should be of having it. Evidently there was some dissension in town about what monument had been chosen, for he chides those opponents in his remarks: "Do you feel that, in spending a few dollars to erect this beautiful shaft to their memory, you have done too much for those who did so much for you and for those who will come after you? What would there be to keep the names of our dead heroes fresh in the minds of generations to come, were it not for some such imperishable tablet as this?"

Joseph Barrows called the monument "a grateful tribute of the living to the tranquil memory of the dead." Barrows made note of the fact that the names of the forty-seven men engraved into the New England granite base were the men who walked about town as friends and neighbors. He then solemnly called the roll of those who had gone to "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."

Those immortalized on the base of this monument are: Captain Ansel B. Randall; Lieutenant Albert Tilden; Mason A. Hill; Thomas Duffy; John Goulding; Samuel H. Gilmore; Edward W. Hansel; Charles H. Willis; Minot E. Phillips; Theodore Mitchell; Peleg F. Randall; Seth Ramsdell; Addison A. Lothrop; Cornelius Slattery; John D. Haney; Martin Cunningham; Hosea S. Packard; Patrick McCourt; Michael E. Roach; John Duffy; Seth T. Dunbar; J. Manley Tinkham; Charles L. Britton, Jr.; Daniel Donovan; Richard Seavers; James McCullough; Charles Bellows; James A. Humphrey; Jason F. Eldredge; Phineas A. Randall; Major Crockett; Henry T. Drew; John Mullen; John Phillips; Michael Milleric; Calvin A. Marshall; George H. Davis; Benjamin Boodry; John Randall; William A. Lothrop; George A. Tilden; William M. Packard; John Richards; E. Granville Howard; Franklin Godfrey; H. Frank Pool; Charles S. Torrey.

Reverend William Chaffin, a war veteran himself before becoming pastor of Unity Church, followed with remarks aimed at remembering the surviving soldiers. "You see here in these members of the Grand Army, a remnant of those who bravely saved their country". He continued, "These, thank God! are living, our returned soldiers. Do not forget what you owe them. They faced all the chances of war as courageously as those who did not return. Some have returned with honorable scars, some with broken health and all of them with a record of honorable service of which Easton may be well proud. Be grateful for their great services to their country, and see to it that in their hour of need...they shall not be forgotten."

AN EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

One of the great things to happen to the Easton Historical Society was the donation of the railroad station to us by the Ames family. Wow! What an incredible gift!

Once the society members sat down to see what had to be accomplished, it became obvious that the first thing was to make the building water tight. Broken glass and leaky roof sections were items that had to be repaired. Gus Winroth, Charlie Willis and Walter Hatch immediately started replacing 120 broken panes of glass.

With budgetary restraints, it was necessary to look for donations. Glass came from old storm windows, spare glass that society members had, and even taking glass from old display coolers from a barn on Turnpike Street. It was a labor intensive proposition.

The roof required professional help because it was slate. Companies came to look at it and finally the historical society was lucky to find a company which did it for cost—even to replacing some of the copper nails which held the slate in place.

Volunteers came from all over town. The only accurate list would be to look at the historical society membership of those years—there were that many. Probably the youngest volunteer was Jimmy Varella; the oldest ones were well in their 90's. People scraped paint, took apart the bulls-eye station master's window, and looked at the floors trying to figure out how to fix water damaged wood.

We all knew we had to get financial help, so we started looking for grants to help us. When one looked especially promising, we started the \$4000 renovation. Upon finishing, we found out that you couldn't start until the grant was approved. After that dark day, auctions, bake sales, and numerous fundraisers were held and proudly, we paid for the floors ourselves.

Getting the railroad station water tight and usable was an incredible group effort, but it made the society even stronger. New members joined and old members relearned skills they had long forgotten. No list was ever kept of those who did the work, but it would be a list of honor as they kept an historic H. H. Richardson railroad station from falling into a situation where it was beyond repair.

Duncan Oliver

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Album of early Easton postcards, from Richard L. Schiffer in memory of Elinor R. (Farrell) Pfeil; Ames butter churn, Louis Frothingham Memorial Book, Ames Shovel blotters, from Burt Lewis; photo of the Outlook Club, 1948, from the American Legion; Ames Flying School receipts for lessons for Harold Barter, from his son James Locke; Easton town reports from 1951-2008, from John Reardon; law notebooks kept by John S. Ames, Jr.; Foster and Beshong carpenters apron, from the Meninno family; various uniform items, hats, pants, shirts, family photos and prints from the Johnson home on Williams Street, from Bob Carroll; World Book Encyclopedia, Modern House Carpenters Companion and Builder's Guide, from Wayne Legge; Watson family history, from Rheta (Watson) Rusillo; book—Katie's Work, Sunday school book, from Priscilla Almquist-Olsen; War ration books belonging to Steven, Anna and Winthrop Hanscom, sugar stamp, report card for Annie Florence Pearson, 1922, from Norma-Jean Hanscom; Oliver Ames sweater and football letter awarded to Charles McCarthy, 1948, believed to be the first year sweaters were issued with school colors, from Charles and Alice McCarthy; handmade blacksmith's tongs belonging to Frank Phelan, and a custom made oak stand to display the tongs, anvil and vise, from Roger McNamara.

The Easton Historical Society is grateful for the continued generosity of the donors of these and other historical items to our collections.

Looking for...

The Society is looking for photos of the two Grange halls: Harmony Grange on Bay Road in Furnace Village, and Easton Grange on the corner of Washington and Elm Street in Unionville. Harmony Grange is currently a private home. Easton Grange still operates and interest is rising in the building. Any photos you have that we could either add to our collection or copy would help. Please check those photo albums for snapshots of interiors and exteriors, or perhaps there may be a photo included in a bulletin or other paper. Thank you!

Bottle and Can Drive / Food Drive

We are going to try something new! June and July are popular months for cookouts and celebrations. At the suggestion on Ken Martin, who has run our bottle drive for a number of years, we will hold a bottle and can drive on July 11th from 9 A.M. to 1 P.M. at the Society, rain or shine. All donations of clean returnable bottles and cans are appreciated. Call Ken at 508-238-2185 for pickup of larger quantities.

During the bottle drive, we will also be collecting donations of food items at that time to benefit the Easton Food Pantry. Donations typically drop over the summer months but the need now is stronger than ever. Currently the pantry is helping to meet the needs of over 100 Easton families. Your donation of non-perishable food will be most appreciated by the volunteers at the pantry, and will be a blessing to many needy families.

2009 DUES REMINDER

We wish to thank our many members who promptly sent in their 2009 dues. If you haven't done so, please do! To see if your dues have been received, check the upper right hand corner of your mailing label. There you will find your current membership status. If you believe we have made an error, please notify us so we can correct the situation. Thank you!

Past Memories of Bay Road and Life on the Farm in 1938 -1942

By Althea Russell Thornton

Part Two

On the west side of the field there was a large pile of rocks, cleared from the fields at the end of the last stonewall before Beaver Dam Road. Tina, Barbara and I were standing on top of the rocks and we heard a distinct rattling. We turned our heads, and there was a large diamond back coiled snake with maybe five rattles shaking and his fangs showing. To this very day I still get my adrenal and heart pumping when I think about that! We grabbed Barb by both arms and raced through the huckleberry bushes to Beaver Dam Road. We never went back. Nobody believed us. We gave up, but we had a lot of natural history from our father. No mistake. Also south of that pile of rocks, a large hole was dug by the firemen. We saw black racer snakes when we were picking blueberries. They scattered when we approached. We were startled, but not afraid. The hole had clear water with lovely plants.

We lived on the 24 acre farm formerly known as the Hewitt's before the bank foreclosed on the property. There was fire damage to the shed and Tommy Truman told me who that person was that did it. There is a well, stone lined in the middle of the pond down back, behind the tool shed. The firemen dug around that to put out the fire. We played and skated there in the winter. Our produce was grown in five large fields. We also had animals, including chickens. We had a very mean rooster. One day he chased me up from the tool shed and I barely made it into the side hall of the house. He waited for me for over an hour. The same rooster attacked Barbara and dug his spurs into her face. That was his Waterloo! At dusk a skunk (bad smell) would amble to our side porch. When he would stamp his front paws we left. We never got sprayed. Our dad showed us how to chop the head off the chicken and pluck its feathers to prepare it for dinner. It was interesting to see it run around after its head was gone. We also had honey bees and pigs. There was a long chicken coop on the south side. Jerry the work horse did the plowing and hauling of logs from the woods in winter over the snow.

The house had no indoor plumbing in 1938 and a black soapstone sink with a hand pump that you had to prime in the kitchen to get water from the outside well. The well house had a rope with a bucket attached to it which broke at times. It was on the south side of the porch. I had to climb down the stone lined well to get the bucket back. That took a lot of bravado. I wouldn't admit it was scary, but it was. I did it a few times while the other kids kept watch.

Althea has given us lots of stories about growing up on Bay Road. Watch for more of them in upcoming newsletters!

Easton Historical Society Sponsors National History Day

The Easton Historical Society, in conjunction with the Easton Middle School, hosted a special open house on February 8th featuring the winners of the local National History Day Contest. National History Day is an annual event that promotes topical research on a variety of historical subjects and the impact of historic events or persons on our country. Presentations can be posterboard displays, video / slideshows, research papers or live performances. In Easton, the event is held at the 8th grade level as a part of the Social Studies curriculum.

These 8th grade students had the opportunity to share their wonderful work with the public. Subjects ranged from Blanche Ames to Dr. Samuel Mudd, Abraham Lincoln to Mozart. Students who showed their work were on hand to explain their presentations to the public, and to have a critique done before moving on to the district competition. In return for the students participation the Easton Historical Society sponsored the students by providing the entry fee for the district competition.

The following students took part in the South Shore District Competition: Julia Mudd, Christina Watson, Amelia Antone, Nicole Taylor, Kelsey Brown, Caitlyn Aborn, Kevin Grant, Davis Healy, Megan Fitzgerald, Ariana Scurti, Olivia Marcus, Liam McCafferty, Izzy Kagan, Kristi Humphries, Leah Minsky, Gwen Kozak, Keara Benton, Bradley Fleming, John Morley and Denali Bennet.

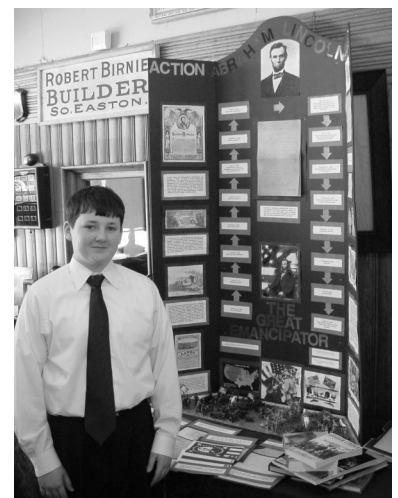
Students Christina Watson, Davis Healy, Kevin Grant, John Morley, Denali Bennett, Olivia Marcus, Keara Benton and Gwen Kozak advanced to the state finals at Clark University in Worcester. The winners at the state level will advance to the national competition in June. As you can see we are very proud of these students! We will update you on the results in our next newsletter.

The Society congratulates all the students who took part in the National History Day Competition, and wishes the winners the best of luck as they compete at the national level.

Below are a few of the students who took part in our open house.



Clockwise from lower left: Julia Mudd and her display about Dr. Samuel Mudd, one of Julia's ancestors; Christina Watson with her display about Easton's own suffragist Blanche Ames; Keara Benton, left, and Gwen Kozak who presented a PowerPoint presentation on Mozart; Display by Kevin Grant and Davis Healy (not pictured) about Abraham



WHO AM I?

Do you recognize any of these little ladies? Are you one of them? They were participants in a doll carriage parade. This photo by Joseph Lyons was taken at an Easton Huskies Field Day at Frothingham Park circa 1947. Please let us know if you know who they are!

Address changing? Please tell us!

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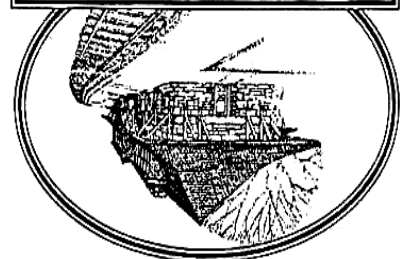
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Old Colony Railroad Station



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