

EASTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TRAIN TRACKS



Volume 10, Issue 3

SUMMER 2010

CALENDAR

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

Sunday, May 16th, Annual Meeting at Queset, 2 P.M. Society Past President and author Duncan B. Oliver will be discussing "Maritime Ghosts and Legends around the Cape Cod area."

Monday, May 31st, Memorial Day Observed

Sunday, June 13th, Open House at the Station, 1-5 P.M. "Discovery Day" tours and activities!

Sunday, July 4th, Independence Day. Happy 234th Birthday, America!

Sunday, July 11th, Open House at the Station, 1-5 P.M. Program TBD!

Sunday, August 8th, 2 P.M. Meeting at Queset featuring Anna Lee Ames Frohlich talking about the Ames Monument.

Looking ahead...

Monday, September 27th, Joint Society and Ames Free Library-Easton's Public Library meeting with Ken Gloss with free verbal appraisals.

Special thanks is given to the Ames Free Library / Easton's Public Library and Forest Systems for the use of "Queset" house for the May and August events!

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.

A Message to Our Members from President Deborah MacPhee Shovel Shop Update

Last issue we updated you on the situation surrounding the potential development of the former Ames Shovel Shops. We are happy to announce that in April, Town Meeting voters overwhelmingly approved financing for a plan by Beacon Communities to develop the site into housing. The plan, first put forth by the Friends of the Ames Shovel Works in North Easton, leaves the historical structures well preserved, creates important green space, and allows for a reduced number of housing units on the site. The development of this property, and the partnership with the town to make this possible will become a model of preservation for other communities to follow. This is an historic win for all of Easton.

Beacon will now continue to gather the necessary approvals from various town boards. Once that is done, ownership of the property will pass from the current owners to Beacon and the project will get underway. We are very excited to see this wonderful project get underway!

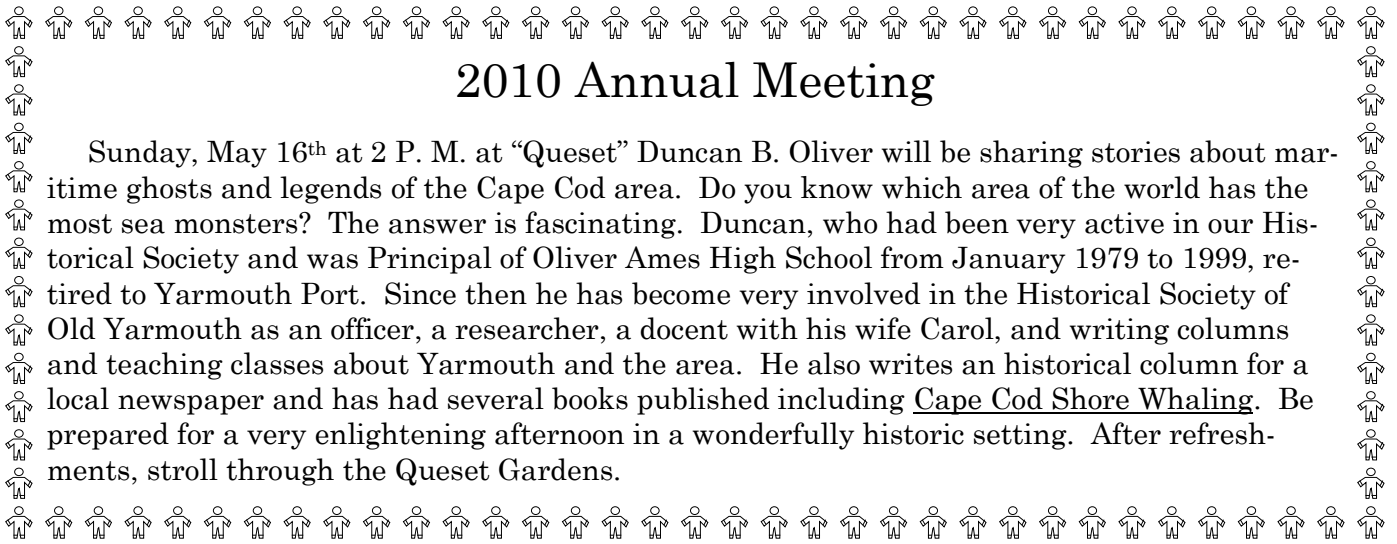
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*The Easton Historical Society Newsletter "Train Tracks" is published quarterly by the Easton Historical Society.
Officers: President—Deborah MacPhee, 1st Vice President—Kenneth J. Michel, 2nd Vice President—Edmund C. Hands
Treasurer—Patricia Baker,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

Shovel Shop Update, From page 1

The Ames Shovel Works and the village that developed around it is a gateway to Easton. This was a situation where we gained national attention. Fortunately we will now have something that the nation can celebrate!

Many, many people worked hard to make this possible. We thank all of you who supported this proposal. The Town of Easton has always appreciated its history, and as such, preserved our heritage. We should also keep in mind that the current owners did not have to sell the property. History should look kindly upon the fact that all the parties involved did the right thing, and that future generations will reap the benefit of the seeds now being planted.



2010 Annual Meeting

Sunday, May 16th at 2 P. M. at “Queset” Duncan B. Oliver will be sharing stories about maritime ghosts and legends of the Cape Cod area. Do you know which area of the world has the most sea monsters? The answer is fascinating. Duncan, who had been very active in our Historical Society and was Principal of Oliver Ames High School from January 1979 to 1999, retired to Yarmouth Port. Since then he has become very involved in the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth as an officer, a researcher, a docent with his wife Carol, and writing columns and teaching classes about Yarmouth and the area. He also writes an historical column for a local newspaper and has had several books published including Cape Cod Shore Whaling. Be prepared for a very enlightening afternoon in a wonderfully historic setting. After refreshments, stroll through the Queset Gardens.

Curator’s Corner

Curator / Caretaker Frank T. Meninno

Sometimes history isn’t very kind. One case in point is the recent historic flooding in southern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the result of many days of continual rain. Many of the rivers here were well above flood stage, and even the small brooks were flowing over the roads. Sandbagging area dams helped to prevent erosion from the very aggressive runoff that the spillways were unable to handle. Many driveways, even entire yards, were underwater. The site of sump pumps draining cellars was soon followed by the site of dumpsters appearing in yards around town as residents had to remove many ruined items from the homes. The meteorological service says this was the worst flooding in forty years. It certainly brought to mind the disaster of the 1969 floods that resulted in the failure of the Flyaway Pond Dam.

The Society did not come through this unscathed. There was over 24” of water in the basement. Many days and nights of pumping finally resulted in a dry basement. However, the furnace sustained some damage and had to be repaired. In addition the chimney developed a leak resulting in some interior water damage. Of course, things could have been much worse. We did have the building cleaned up before our April open house. Our Discovery Day, which was scheduled for April, also fell victim to the flooding and has been rescheduled to a hopefully drier day in June. I hope you will come in to see what we’ve been up to!

In Memoriam

The Easton Historical Society sadly announces the passing of Charles F. McCarthy, Jr. Mr. McCarthy, a lifelong resident of Easton, and a consummate gentleman, died on March 12th. He was 79 years old.

Mr. McCarthy and his loving wife Alice have been long time members and supporters of the Society. He was a major contributor of information on transportation for the book Memories of 20th Century Easton. He also was instrumental in encouraging North Easton Savings Bank to help fund construction of the Veterans Memorial Park project.

Besides their interest in history, the McCarthys became very interested in the conservation movement during the 1960's. Mr. and Mrs. McCarthy supported the initial purchase of the Wheaton Farm property on Bay Road, as well as the formation of the Natural Resource Trust of Easton. In doing so they also protected a sometimes overlooked piece of our history: natural history. Included within the conservation sites in Easton are various historical sites as well as evidence of natural events that shaped our town. One example of this is the glacial formations found at the NRT's Sheep Pasture and the scraping of the granite outcroppings made by retreating glaciers during the last ice age about 50,000 years ago. Mr. McCarthy will be missed by all, but his memory will live on in the natural beauty around Easton.

We sadly received news of the passing of Curtis H. Chase on March 3rd. He was 69 years old. Mr. Chase, a retired teacher of English at Dedham High School for thirty years, was a board member and corresponding secretary from 2000-2006. His unique sense of humor and love of Easton made for many an entertaining conversation. He was well traveled, visiting many countries and most of the United States. He also maintained a fabulous garden.

The Society extends its sympathy to the members and friends of the McCarthy and Chase families.

Society to Receive Special Gift

Mr. Edwin C. White, longtime member and supporter of the Society and the past owner of the Simpson Spring Company, recently retired from the Board of Directors at the North Easton Savings Bank. He was a director for forty-seven years, and was Chairman of the Board for the last two years. North Easton Savings Bank will be making a donation of \$1000 to the Society in his honor.

Mr. White was president of the Society from 1967-1969, and was a director until 1973; he was in that role when we were given the Station by members of the Ames family. He was very involved with the revitalization of the Society. Over the years Mr. White provided tours, interesting conversation and speeches about Simpson Spring. He also ran the very successful Antique Car shows at the Society for more than ten years. The Society is honored to be the recipient of this very generous gift and sincerely thanks Mr. White for choosing us to receive it.

Tuesday, April 6 many Historical Society members enjoyed the eleventh annual "Chowder and Chatter" at the Regional. Chief Khoury added clam fritters to the traditional meal, and they were enjoyed by everyone. The program focused on long time Easton organizations, and very informative presentations were made by Gloria Freitas-Steidinger for the Garden Club; Lawrence Hurley, substituting for Louis Silva, on Veterans groups; Hazel Varella, Easton Historical Society; Lee Williams, the Easton Lions Club in the reactivation of the Easton Grange, and Ed Hands, who was not only moderator but also represented the Huskies for Buddy Wooster. Again, the Easton Historical Society is deeply indebted to LEE AND KEVIN WILLIAMS for underwriting the cost of the dinner. THANK YOU, GENTLEMEN!!

Coming Events

Kids (and grownups!) Discovery Day

Our June 13th Open House will be your opportunity to discover Easton's history through a variety of activities. Drop by the Society from 1-5 P.M. to find out what makes Easton so special. Planning is underway for several mini-tours of the area surrounding the Society, and some show and tell items and small kid activities as well. This is a kid-friendly event, so bring along your children, grandchildren, neighbors, for a fun afternoon! This event was originally planned for April, but the tremendous rainfall and flooding forced us to reschedule it. Hopefully the weather will cooperate! See you here!

Ken Gloss / Brattle Book Shop

On Monday, September 27th, the Easton Historical Society will hold a joint meeting with the Ames Free Library-Easton's Public Library. The featured speaker will be Ken Gloss, proprietor of the famous Brattle Book Shop in Boston. Mr. Gloss is an expert on rare and collectable books. He is always entertaining, and usually brings a few literary treasures to share. The meeting will be held at the Library and will start at 6:45 P.M.

Do you have a book that you think might be valuable? Bring it along for a FREE verbal appraisal! Who knows what special treasure you might have on your bookcase. We hope you will join us for an evening of literary enlightenment!

Ames Monument Restoration Talk

Anna Lee Ames Frohlich, great-granddaughter of Governor Oliver Ames, will present a program at Queset on August 8th at 2 P.M. Mrs. Frohlich, who lives in Colorado, is involved with a group that wants to restore the famous pyramid honoring Oliver and Oakes Ames for their role in the Transcontinental Railroad. H. H. Richardson designed the memorial and Augustus St. Gaudens created the reliefs of the two men. When the monument was erected it was in close proximity to the railroad tracks and town. However, later the tracks were relocated miles to the south. The area where the monument stands was abandoned, and the reliefs of the Ames brothers have been badly damaged by people using them for target practice.

Mrs. Frohlich has done an exceptional amount of research on the role of the Ames family throughout the American west. She is a very interesting speaker and quite knowledgeable on the subject. Light refreshments will be served. You may also have the opportunity to check out the historic gardens while you are there.

And A Few More Things...

We are planning a September yard sale to be held on September 18th from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. Spaces will be available for a small donation. While you are doing your spring cleaning maybe you'll find some great items to sell! Donations of items for the Society table are also welcomed. All donors will receive a letter of thanks. More information will be communicated in the next newsletter as well as the Easton Journal and on our website, or give us a call at 508-238-7774 to reserve your spot.

Before you know it, fall will be here. The Society is looking forward to seeing many of you at the NRT Harvest Fair in October.

Also on October 16th the Oliver Ames High School Class of 1960 will be here for their 50th reunion!

Do you have visitors coming this summer? Looking for something to do? The Society can be open to accommodate your visitors. Please contact us ahead of time to arrange a visit for your group.

OLD HOUSES of EASTON

Benjamin Williams House and Tavern, 1727



Captain Benjamin Williams already was well established in Taunton before moving to the Easton section of the Taunton North Purchase around 1725, the year Easton was granted its charter. The house is a wonderful early Cape Cod style home, with a center entrance balanced by two tall windows on either side. Fireplaces on both floors fed into a massive central chimney, typical of the construction of the era in which the house was built.

Captain Williams' first wife, Susanna Howard had died just prior to the move to Easton. Looking for a way to make a living for himself and his young

son, Williams purchased land on the westerly side of Bay Road near the Norton line. Bay Road, being well traveled even at that early date, provided an opportunity to run a tavern, or inn, out of the house. The only other licensed tavern around at that time was across town on Lincoln Street. Clearly there was a business opportunity here, and Williams was going to take advantage of it.

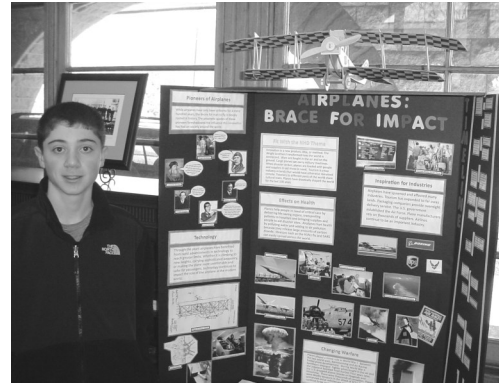
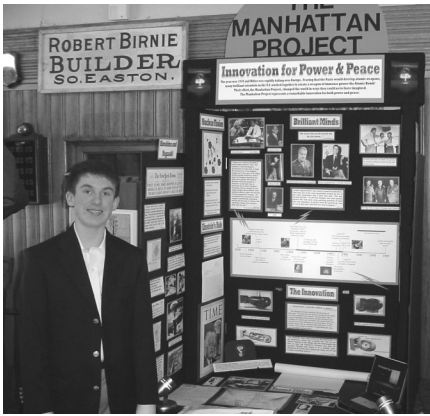
He built his house, probably the second oldest in town, by 1727. It has heavy beams that create a sheltering overhang. Similar massive beams were found later when the corner posts of the house were exposed. The chimney, which measured more than four feet wide even in the upper story, was set on the ground as the house had no cellar. Stagecoaches and travelers soon became accustomed to stopping there. Weekly mail deliveries were left there for the towns of Easton, Mansfield and Norton.

Benjamin Williams kept the inn running until he sold it to his brother John in 1730. John carried on the establishment until about 1756. It evidently was still an inn long after that as mail continued to be left there for Daniel Wheaton, who was postmaster at his house a short distance north in the 1830's. It is supposed that Daniel Wheaton lived at this inn while his own house was being built. However, the title of most famous guest goes to none other than General George Washington. Believe it or not, Washington is supposed to have stayed here while negotiating for cannon and cannon balls at the iron foundry at Furnace Village! Chaffin records that event in his 1886 History of Easton.

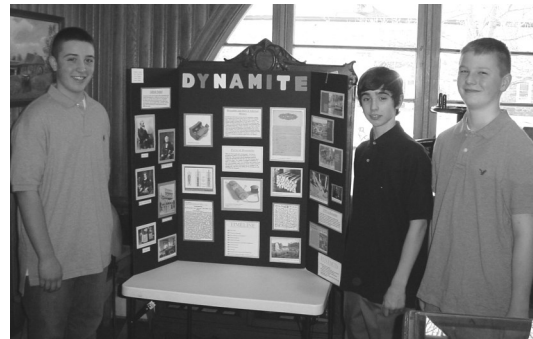
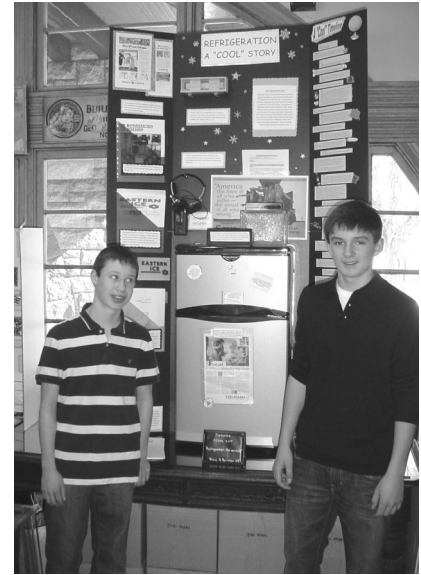
As we said before, Williams was well established before coming to Easton. In Easton, he was always prominent in town affairs and served as selectman for one year and treasurer for two years. He was a captain in the militia. His service included fighting in the French and Indian Wars in 1754. In 1756, at more than sixty years old, he raised a group of thirty men to join an expedition to Crown Point. Williams also had at least one slave, whose name was London. London, or "Lunan" as he was sometimes called, is on record as being baptized at the town church in 1773 by Rev. Archibald Campbell. Two years later his master died at age 80. London died one year later.

The house has had several owners in the 20th century. Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Garbitt owned the house at one time and renovated it. A later owner sadly removed all of the original interior paneling. In 1957 ownership passed to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin C. White. After visiting a similar house at Sturbridge Village, they nearly cried when they realized what was missing from the home. They spent the next forty-eight years lovingly and meticulously restoring the home into the wonderful historic landmark that it remains.

One other landmark is associated with the home. It is the Benjamin Williams milestone, erected in 1773. It records that the traveler is eight miles from Taunton. Perhaps this was just enough information to convince a weary sojourner to spend the night in the comfortable confines of Williams inn.



NATIONAL HISTORY DAY AT THE EASTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Easton Historical Society, in partnership with the Easton Middle School, recently hosted the winners of the 8th grade National History Day competition. This theme this year was “Innovations in History.” Students had the opportunity to have their projects critiqued by Ed Hands and Debra Salisbury and Bryan McSheffrey, 8th grade history teacher and National History Day leader at the Easton Middle School. At the district competition in March Easton swept many of the categories, and four students won at the state level. They are now preparing for the national competition in Washington, D.C. The Society is pleased to sponsor these students, and congratulates all who participated.

Pictured clockwise from the top left is Chris Naughton (The Manhattan Project); Jack DeDonato (Airplanes:Brace for Impact); Britton Copley, left, and Reid Starr (Refrigeration—A Cool Story); Brad Capece, left, Nick Charleston, center right, and Chris Duggan (Dynamite); Tayllor Wright, left and Gillian Male (Penicillin); Hannah Altieri (Telegraph).



Remembering Our Fallen Heroes

Pictured at left is the Soldier's Monument, erected in 1882 to honor the memory of Easton's forty-seven men who died fighting the Civil War. The soldier faces south, forever keeping a watchful eye out so the nation would never be divided again.

The photo shown here clearly shows the monument solemnly dressed for Memorial Day exercises around 1900. The base is trimmed in black garland and small wreaths, waiting for the exercises to take place. Sometimes funeral buntings would also be placed on the monument.

The exercises were held on the front lawn of the old Town Hall building which stands in the background. A platform would be raised to allow the several speakers a place to speak from. It served as a reviewing stand as well for local officials to watch the parade.

The old town hall was torn down in the early 1930's. The green area surrounding the monument has shrunk, and traffic is busier than ever. However, the Soldier still stands, a silent testimony to the tributes past and present given in honor of our war dead.

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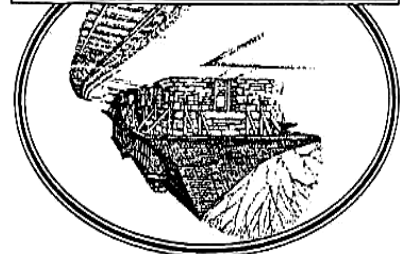
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