



THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER **SUMMER, 2013**

From the President:

Dear Members and Friends of GHS:

After two Saturdays of cleaning and getting everything ready, we welcomed 117 Penn Brook School third graders, along with their teachers and chaperones, to the Brocklebank Museum on June 13th for their annual field trip. We always enjoy their great questions and comments and their enthusiasm to learn about local history, but the comment I most enjoy hearing as they gather to head back to the school is “Thank you! That was FUN!”



Bev Knapp talks to Penn Brook School 3rd graders.

I want to thank our wonderful tour guides, who always do such a great job: Starr Anderson, Beverly Knapp, Terry Hart, Ed Des Jardins, Barry Crawford, and Steve Keene.

The museum opened for the season on June 23rd. Despite the heat, our dedicated tour guides have had little time to rest, as a steady stream of visitors have been coming to the museum each Sunday. Our hearty historians are always happy to share their knowledge with others, even when the temperature soars into the 90s. We are New Englanders, after all, as are most of our guests. But as much as we enjoy talking about local history, we are always happy to return home at the end of the day to our modern conveniences, especially, on these hot days, our air conditioners!

We are now in the third year of our observance of the Civil War Sesquicentennial. We hope you will come visit the museum and our ongoing special exhibit, “Georgetown in the Civil War,” honoring the brave men and women from Georgetown who served. The Brocklebank Museum, located at 108 East Main Street, will be open every Sunday from 2-5 PM through Columbus Day weekend. Admission is free for current members. Hope to see you there!

Christine Comiskey
GHS President

THE BEECHER TRIAL – 150 YEARS AGO *By Christine Comiskey*

The summer of 1863 was a very difficult time for our little community of about 2000 residents, as the Civil War raged on into its third year. From the start of the war up through April of 1863, the families of sixteen Georgetown men had received the dreaded news that their soldier would not be coming home. Then, in just four months, from June through September of 1863, another nineteen would be lost.

In the midst of all this grief, a controversy was brewing in town, one that would become national news: Reverend Charles Beecher was about to be tried for heresy.

Charles and Sarah Beecher, along with their six children, arrived in Georgetown in 1857 when Charles accepted the position of colleague pastor at the First Congregational Church. This caused great excitement in our little town, as it was assumed that his famous siblings would visit town, too (they did). Charles became Senior Pastor the next year, following the death of Reverend Isaac Braman. The Beechers purchased a house (now known as the Brocklebank Museum) across the street from the Old South Church, where the congregation worshipped.

Like other family members, Charles was sometimes controversial in his beliefs and teachings. He began making waves in town in 1860 when he opposed a proclamation by President Buchanan in response to escalating problems with the South, and urged the congregation to do the same. A set of resolutions was presented and voted on, among them: *That the President of the United States is in treacherous conspiracy with rebels to overthrow the government.* The proposed resolutions were accepted by the congregation by a narrow margin, and those opposed (mostly Buchanan supporters) were angry. The resolutions were published in the newspaper, as was a protest by the church members opposing them.



Tensions continued to build, and by the summer of 1863, the church had become deeply divided between supporters and opponents of Reverend Beecher. Those opposed to Reverend Beecher's unorthodox preaching finally decided to take action and signed a petition calling for an Ecclesiastical Council, accusing him of heresy. Reverend Beecher, confident that his preaching would stand up to the Council's scrutiny, freely consented to the petitioners' request. Shortly before the Council was to begin, Charles and Sarah Beecher received word that their twenty-two year-old son Frederick had been severely wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg. Sarah Beecher made the perilous journey to Pennsylvania to retrieve her son. On July 15 and 16, Charles Beecher defended his beliefs before the Ecclesiastical Council, while heavy on his mind was his son, fighting for his life.

Reverend Charles Beecher

Much to the dismay of Reverend Beecher and his supporters, the Council sided with the petitioners, and recommended that the church immediately terminate their pastoral relation with Reverend Beecher. The church refused to accept the decision of the Council and accused them of overstepping their authority. The issue dragged on for months as arguments and appeals continued. Reverend Beecher offered to resign after being expelled from the Essex North Association of Churches, but the congregation would not accept his resignation. As a result, the church was shunned by the other churches of the Association. On January 14, 1864, eighty-five church members opposed to Reverend Beecher's ministry requested to be dismissed from the First Congregational Church of Georgetown to form a new church in town. They became organized as the Orthodox Congregational Church on January 29, 1864.

TRAGEDY STRIKES THE BEECHER FAMILY

After the difficulties of his heresy trial and the months of nursing his severely wounded son back to health, things began to look up. The congregation was growing and was filled with people who enjoyed Reverend Beecher's sometimes controversial preaching. However, Charles felt he was needed elsewhere. In June of 1867, Charles Beecher submitted a letter of resignation, stating his desire to work with the freed slaves in Florida. His devoted congregation refused to accept his resignation, and instead granted him a leave of absence. However, his plans were put on hold following two devastating family tragedies.

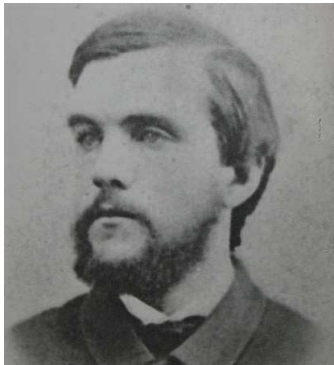
On a beautiful August day in 1867, five young cousins went sailing on Pentucket Pond. A mishap occurred, their boat capsized, and only two survived. Fifteen-year-old Esther Beecher and her thirteen-year-old sister Harriet, daughters of Charles and Sarah, drowned, as did their twenty-year-old cousin, Albert Beecher, son of Rev. Dr. Edward and Isabella Beecher.

One year later, tragedy struck the family again. Frederick Beecher, although disabled and walking with a cane, had returned to the Army and was sent out west to assist with the building of a fort. On September 17, 1868, he was killed in a battle with Indians at Arrickaree Fork, Colorado Territory, later named the Battle of Beecher's Island, after Frederick, who is buried there.



The Beechers visit the grave of their drowned children.
(Photo courtesy of Dan Meader)

Frederick Beecher



In 1869, Charles Beecher submitted another letter of resignation, stating again his desire to move to Florida, and again the congregation refused, granting him a leave of absence instead. After several years of living and working in Florida, Charles and Sarah returned to Georgetown. The congregation finally accepted Charles' resignation in 1881. Charles and Sarah spent their senior years in the 85 Central Street home of their daughter, Mary Noyes. They are buried in Harmony Cemetery.

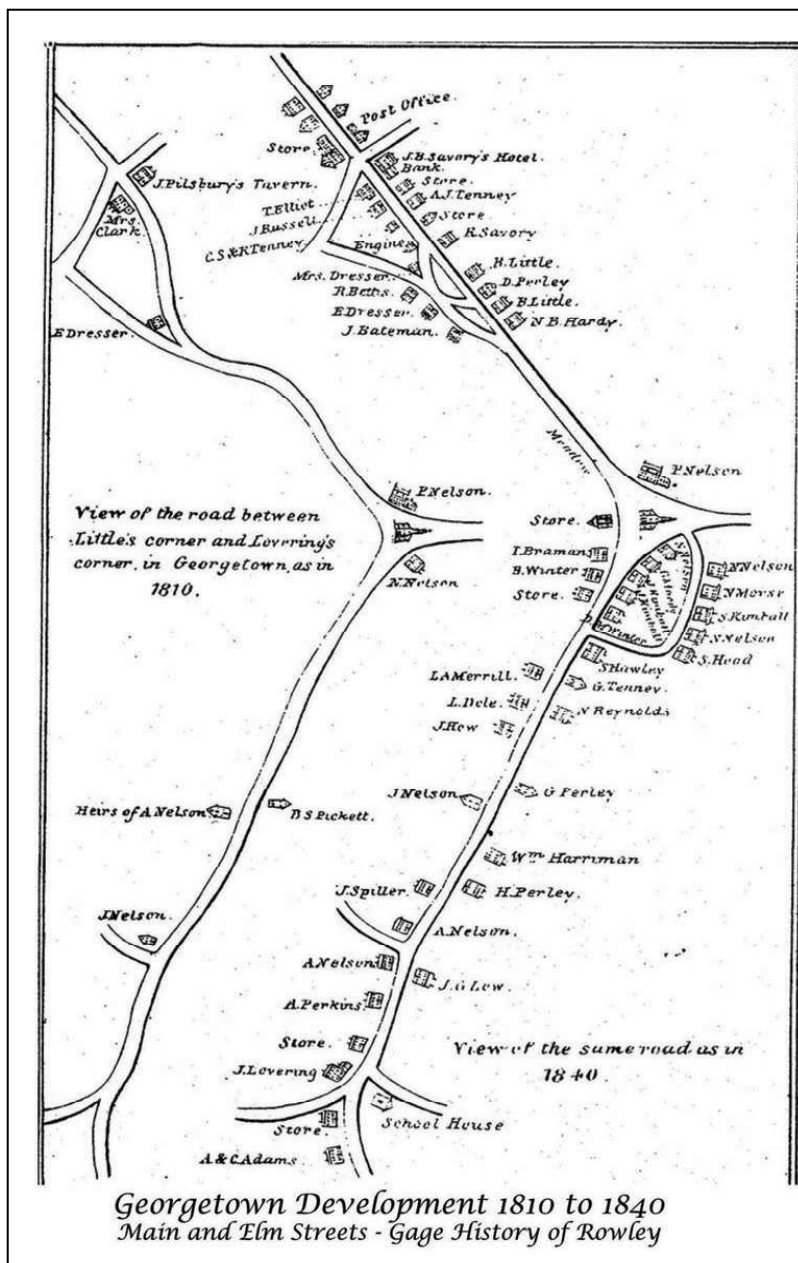


Charles and Sarah Beecher at the home of their daughter Mary Noyes in 1881.
(Photo courtesy of Dan Meader)

GEORGETOWN INCORPORATED FROM ROWLEY'S WEST PARISH, 1838

By Frederic C. Detwiller

Georgetown had its beginnings as part of Rowley, settled in 1639. It was 200 years later that the village of New Rowley outgrew the mother community. As described on the Town of Georgetown website: "The West Parish or New Rowley village experienced a building boom from 1830 to 1838 when 80 houses were constructed. In one year, 1839, more than 50 houses and stores were built. The rapid growth brought demands from the townsmen for separation from Rowley. The distance between the two parishes hampered businesses. Mail was delayed because it went to Rowley before being sent to New Rowley. Of Rowley's population of 2,444, 1500 individuals lived in the New Rowley section and only 944 in Rowley. There was overwhelming sentiment for separation and in 1838 the Town of Georgetown was incorporated. Muddy Brook, on the East Side of Route 95 became the easterly bounds of the new town and Rye Plain Bridge near the Newbury line another."



The town is shown on a pair of maps in Gage's History of Rowley picturing it as it grew between 1810 and 1840. These two side-by-side maps clearly show the development of the town along Main Street and Elm Street. Central Street was not extended until a few years later.

Much of the building was done by local builders, especially Col. Joseph Kimball, whose diaries from the 1830s to the 1880s at the Peabody Essex Museum Phillips Library describe his voluminous work in detail. His gravestone at Union Cemetery clearly shows his profession with a hand holding a hammer:



SOME HISTORIC GEORGETOWN HOUSES *Frederic C. Detwiller, Ed.*

Joseph and Mary (Nelson) Kimball House at 16 Elm Street

(Courtesy Georgetown Historical Commission MHC
Survey Form B Recorded by: Kathryn Grover, Neil
Larson)

This house was built about 1824, probably by its long-time owner, the house carpenter and builder Joseph Kimball (1798-1881) and remained in his family for more than a century. Kimball was the son of Samuel and Susannah Kimball and was born in Boxford, the town bordering Georgetown on the southwest; Elm Street was the main route between the two towns. He was the brother of John Kimball,¹ who lived at 20 Elm Street, and both were housewrights, as local historian Henry M. Nelson noted in 1888:

Many of the earlier house-builders have been already named, as several of the Spoffords, eminent in this especially honorable avocation, also two or three of the Hazens, and others. . . . The Kimball brothers, of which John, survives, were active for many years in their chosen work, and is now repeated in their sons also.²

Sixteen Elm Street appears on the 1830 map of Rowley on land owned in 1800 by Nathaniel Nelson, who lived at 8 Elm Street. In 1827 Kimball, who had married Nathaniel's daughter Mary, bought the land from his father-in-law. The marriage took place in 1824, and it seems likely that he built the house for himself and his new wife on a lot that Nathaniel Nelson still owned. All of the couple's eight children were born in Georgetown between 1830 and 1841. His brother, John Kimball, married Nelson's daughter Sarah in 1828.

Joseph Kimball's diaries, extant from 1832 to 1881, the year of his death, are in the collections of Phillips Library and may document that he and his brother built numerous houses in Georgetown, including many on Elm Street itself. By 1860 Kimball's son Charles Alfred, born in 1837, was working as a carpenter as well, but his son Joseph Henry, born four years later, worked first as a farm laborer and then as a shoemaker; he remained in his father's household in 1880.

After the death of his first wife in 1855, Joseph Kimball married again, to Martha P. Holmes, and survived her as well; she died in 1867. After he died in 1881 his daughter Mary Susan, who died in 1895, continued to live in the house. By 1900 the census listed Joseph H. Kimball as a farmer and in 1910 as a shoe factory clerk. The younger Joseph Kimball married by 1884, when his first child Mary Josephine was born. The couple had one other child, Joseph Stickney Kimball, born in 1888. Joseph H. Kimball died sometime between 1914 and 1917, for his son's World War I draft registration notes that he was then living with his mother at 16 Elm Street. His sister, a stenographer in Haverhill who had married by 1922, transferred her title to the property to her brother Joseph S., who lived there until 1939. In that year Kimball sold the house to Arthur C. Merrill Jr. From that year until 1973 the house had six owners; in the latter year current owner Judith C. Gordon, who then rented the property, bought 16 Elm.



¹ John Kimball is often shown as John Kimball Jr.; in the manner of the time it might more appropriately have been John Kimball 2d, because he was contemporary with the older Colonel John Kimball of Georgetown [who lived in the former Captain Benjamin Adams House at 302 Central St.]

² "Town of Georgetown History," in D. Hamilton Hurd. *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1888), 1: 847.

HELLOS AND GOOD-BYES

We extend a warm welcome to the following new GHS members: Beverly Enos, Harold Roeder, Frank and Deborah Scearbo, Roland Spofford, Jr., and the Wallace family.

We also note with sadness the passing of former GHS Board Member Clifton Morse and GHS members Edgar “Ted” Johnson, Richard Kwapniewski, and Steve Keene.

STEVE KEENE



We were shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the sudden death of our curator, Stephen W. Keene, on Sunday, July 14th.

Steve’s contributions to GHS over the past 4+ decades have been immeasurable. He first joined our Executive Board in 1971, and has held nearly every office since that time. His most recent projects as curator have included the “Digital Archives Program” which Steve has been diligently working on for years. He has photographed and entered into the database over 8,000 items. He also spent many hours helping design our “Georgetown in the Civil War” exhibit which opened in 2011, as well as compiling detailed guides to the items on display in the museum for the use of our visitors and tour guides.

Steve could be found at the Brocklebank Museum nearly every Sunday afternoon during the summer. He thoroughly enjoyed welcoming visitors, entertaining them with his amusing stories, and sharing his immense knowledge of local history.

It is difficult to put into words how very much he will be missed by all of us. Although we will regroup and carry on, Steve’s passing has left a tremendous void that can never truly be filled. The Georgetown Historical Society is a richer and more meaningful organization as a result of Steve’s many accomplishments.

Please keep Steve’s dear wife, Margie, in your thoughts and prayers. A Celebration of Life will be held at a later date.

If you wish, you can make a donation in Steve’s memory to the Georgetown Historical Society, PO Box 376, Georgetown, MA 01833



Steve Keene holds court in the Museum, entertaining the local grade school students with his tales of Georgetown shoemakers. Steve’s warm presence will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

BROCKLEBANK FOUNDATION REPAIRS UPDATE

The Brocklebank Museum foundation repairs will begin later this Summer and extend into the early Fall. Many of the historical artifacts found in the basement have been moved to storage to allow work to proceed. Some larger items remain to be moved and able-bodied volunteers to help relocate these would be appreciated. We are grateful for the funding of these repairs by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) and we will give updates as the work progresses.



HISTORIC VILLAGE SURVEY

At the Spring 2012 Town Meeting, Georgetown voters approved the use of Community Preservation Act funds for a survey of historic buildings in the Downtown Village District. We are happy to announce that the report is now available for viewing in the Georgetown Library Local History Room. If your home was among the 90 properties surveyed, or if you are simply curious about some of the historic downtown buildings, we hope you will find an opportunity to review the wealth of information provided, and with it, perhaps, develop a greater understanding and interest in our town's history.

TRAILS & SAILS and GEORGETOWN DAYS—VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

The Georgetown Historical Society will be participating again this year in the *Trails & Sails* weekends. GHS will be hosting an Open House at the Brocklebank Museum from 12-5 PM on September 21 & 22, and again on September 28 & 29. The second weekend is also *Georgetown Days*, celebrating Georgetown's 175th anniversary with a variety of fun and interesting events throughout the town.

We will not be offering guided tours of the museum during those days, but we need some extra volunteers to welcome visitors and keep an eye on things in each room. If you can spare a few hours and are willing to assist, please contact us at info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com.

Visit <http://www.essexheritage.org/ts> for a full listing of *Trails & Sails* events and information.

DUES REMINDER

We still have a few members who have not yet paid their annual dues for 2013. If you have not paid your dues PLEASE do so soon. We count on every member to help us achieve our goals.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Every Sunday—Brocklebank Museum open 2-5 PM

September 21 & 22—Open House at Brocklebank Museum 12-5 PM, as part of *Trails & Sails*

September 28 & 29—Open House at Brocklebank Museum 12-5 PM, as part of *Trails & Sails* and *Georgetown Days*.

October—Historic and Halloween Cemetery Tours, dates and times to be determined.

Georgetown Historical Society
P.O. Box 376
Georgetown, MA 01833



Georgetown Historical Society



OFFICERS

<i>President:</i>	<i>Christine Comiskey</i>
<i>1st Vice President:</i>	<i>Terrance Hart</i>
<i>2nd Vice President:</i>	<i>Sylvia Johnston</i>
<i>Secretary:</i>	<i>Karen Brockelbank</i>
<i>Treasurer:</i>	<i>Barry Crawford</i>

DIRECTORS

*Ralph Chouinard, Ed Des Jardins, Rick Detwiller,
Chuck Keilty, Jeff Lamoureaux.*

- JOIN US ON FACEBOOK! Search Groups: “Georgetown Historical Society.”
- VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.georgetownhistoricalsociety.com to see more information about GHS and upcoming events.
- E-MAIL US AT: info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com