

THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Preserving and promoting the history of Georgetown

Winter 2019 Newsletter

MURDER ON THE RAIL TRAIL!

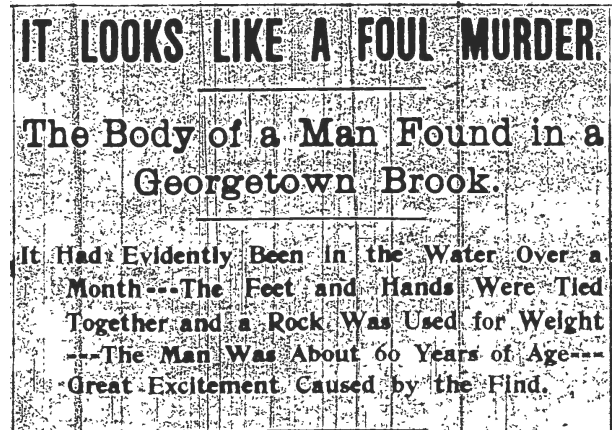
On March 1, 1894, Harlan Pillsbury went out, as he often did, hunting for muskrat. With his gun over his shoulder, he walked a familiar route along the Parker River near the railroad tracks, not far from his Pond Street home. It was around 4:30 in the afternoon when he noticed something sticking out of the water. Not particularly concerned, he went to take a closer look and was shocked to see it was a dead body! He quickly summoned Constable Stephen Hardy, who lived nearby on North Street. Together, the two men lifted the body from the water and made an even more horrifying discovery—the man had been murdered! The man's hands were tightly bound behind his back with string and his feet bound together with suspenders. Under his buttoned coats, a heavy rock had been tied to his chest. Medical Examiner Dr. Richmond B. Root was summoned and the body was transported to the Central Street undertaking parlor of John Jackson, where an autopsy was performed. They reported that the man had been dead for a month or more, had no visible wounds and was most likely still alive, though possibly drugged, when placed in the water.

The dead man was described as being about six feet tall, 175 pounds and probably between 40 to 60 years old. He had thinning dark hair and a mustache tinged with gray. Most notable was a patriotic red and blue tattoo on his right arm, leading some to suspect he may have been a soldier. He was relatively well-dressed in black trousers, white cotton shirt with a blue necktie, vest, cut-away coat and beaver overcoat, all made by various New England companies.

The contents of the man's pockets offered up few clues: a pipe, whisk broom, a comb, and pieces of two newspapers, the latest dated December 23rd, 1893.

The body was placed in a holding tomb at Harmony Cemetery and an investigation was launched to determine his identity. There was much speculation that he may have been one of several men reported missing around New England, but each was eventually ruled out.

About a week after the discovery, a light-haired tramp entered a store in Byfield and asked the store-keeper to read him the newspaper account of the murder, as he could not read (tramps had become a common sight since the railroads came to town, especially after the Civil War). He then became anxious to leave and asked directions to Haverhill, but did not want to go by way of Georgetown. The man's suspicious behavior was reported to the authorities, but they were



Newburyport Daily News headline, March 2, 1894



Old bridge near the murder scene

unable to locate him. A Newburyport man recalled meeting a light-haired tramp in late December who said he had been in a tussle with another, and that tramps were a hard lot and often murdered each other. Georgetown grocer Dennis Donoghue recalled three tramps visiting his store around that time, one taller and better dressed than his shabby, light-haired companions and generally fitting the description of the dead man. Two North Street residents who lived a short distance from where the body was found remembered hearing screams late one night in late December coming from near the tracks, but thought no more of it until hearing of the discovery of the body.

The man's identity was never learned and in the end it was assumed that he was a tramp, albeit a well-dressed one. The dead stranger was finally buried on March 20, 1894 in an unmarked grave in Harmony Cemetery. His murder has remained an unsolved mystery for 125 years.

ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Georgetown Historical Society was held at the Georgetown Peabody Library on December 5, 2018. We had another great year with several successful fundraisers, and our membership continues to grow, with 14 new members joining in 2018.

After discussing the year's highlights, President Chris Comiskey thanked the following volunteers for their service during the past year: Sylvia Johnston, Ralph Chouinard, Lew Harrold, Michelle Cook, Karen Brockelbank, Rick Detwiller, Jeff Lamoureaux, Mary Saunders, Joe Corcoran, Betsy Moran, Starr Anderson, Beverly Knapp, Hannah Lamoureaux, Dan Meader, Eileen Seaberg, George Comiskey and Brendan Comiskey.

The following officers were elected for 2019: President – Betsy Moran; 1st Vice President – Sylvia Johnston; 2nd Vice President – Ralph Chouinard; Secretary – Lew Harrold; Treasurer – Michelle Cook; Curator – Karen Brockelbank. Joe Corcoran was elected to a five-year term on the Board of Directors and Chris Comiskey was elected to a four-year term.



Dr. Michael Cross discusses "Medical Quackery"

After eight years as President, Chris happily turned the gavel over to Betsy, who spoke about her plans for 2019.

Our special guest speaker, Dr. Michael Cross, Associate Professor of Chemistry at Northern Essex Community College, was then introduced and entertained and enlightened the audience with a fascinating presentation on medical quackery of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Thank you to all our GHS members and friends who attended the meeting or mailed in their ballots!

FROM THE GARDENING COMMITTEE

Your very active gardening committee—Betsy, Mary, Eileen and Sylvia—cannot accomplish much outdoors this time of year, so they are busy planning for the next season of new and improved Brocklebank gardens.

We would like to take this space to acknowledge and thank the many friends of the Society who contributed plant material for this year's gardens; they include Ann Lacey, Karen Langlais, Jim Saunders, Betsy Moran, Rick Detwiller, Nancy Zapf, Dale Angelica-Hart, Karen Brockelbank and Karen Cummings.

Now to wait for spring and hope our tulips bloom!



A THANK YOU LETTER TO GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We recently received a wonderful letter from Michelle Prior, which she asked us to share with our members. We are more than happy to do so and are very proud of Michelle's many accomplishments.

Dear Georgetown Historical Society,

I am finally sending a letter written in my head a hundred times. A small gesture to say thank you for profoundly impacting my life. People always ask me, "What got you interested in historic preservation?" Yes, Massachusetts is a historical place. Yes, I had great teachers in the Georgetown Public School system. Yet I distinctly remember when my third-grade class visited the Brocklebank Museum to supplement our unit on local history. As a volunteer explained our town's past, I marveled over the stories. Little did I know that I would commit a decade of service to this museum before the age of 25.

I began volunteering for the Georgetown Historical Society (GHS) when asked to wear period costume for a Victorian Garden Party at the local library. From that first volunteer role to my final role—stepping in as Interim Curator for my dear friend—it was a wonderful 10 years. I learned from a generation committed to civic engagement that valued hard work. Inspired by your teachings and humbled by the time invested in me, public history and accessible heritage remain priorities in my career. You all nurtured my dreams, my passions, and saw me through many life milestones.

Last August, I moved to Washington D.C. to work for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Every day, I am humbled as I walk into the Watergate Office Building (yes, that one) and work to save America's special places. I am the Coordinator of Publications and Programs for the Preservation Resources Division, which involves developing and delivering educational materials, including trainings, webinars, conference content, and online resources, for cultural heritage professionals. A GHS "GTWN" bumper sticker adorns my desk—the same one I brought to my undergraduate dorm at Miami University, to my first job after school, and to England while I studied at the University of Cambridge. Wherever I go, I want to remember where it all started.

I especially want to remember those who are no longer with us. Steve Keene and Terry Hart, I adored you both. You were perfect gentlemen and taught me the value of selfless public service. You both had complete confidence that I would do great things. After getting my dream job with the National Trust, I was heartbroken that you both did not live to see the day. Yet perhaps two guardian angels were exactly what I needed. Thank you for everything.

Now is a critical time to enter historic preservation. Personally, I am ready to commit to the field I loved since childhood. Professionally, I am eager to contribute to the conversation of what it means to be American by telling our full history through historic spaces. Before taking on the world, I wanted to sincerely thank the Georgetown Historical Society. Thank you for the volunteer opportunities, internship, and college scholarship. Thank you for being mentors, teachers, and friends. Finally, thank you for taking a chance on a bright-eyed teenager. The gesture will never be forgotten.



Michelle Prior



Michelle volunteering at the Brocklebank Museum in 2008

*Sincerely,
Michelle Prior
Georgetown Historical Society Volunteer, 2004 – 2014*

A NOTE FROM OUR NEW GHS PRESIDENT, BETSY MORAN

As we begin 2019 at Georgetown Historical Society, I would like to thank my fellow Georgetown board members and the society members in general—some of you I know and others I hope to get to know in the coming year—for both your trust and confidence in electing me as the incoming society president. I want you all to know I will work diligently to champion the historical society's objectives of continuing to make GHS a valuable, interesting and educational feature of the town of Georgetown and its residents. I look forward to working with my fellow board members not only with the daily upkeep and maintenance of the Brocklebank Museum property and grounds but to engage in the continued growth and prosperity of our society.

I am committed to the continuation of the landscaping project that began at the museum in the spring of 2018; the museum painting had been completed and looks beautiful as we began to landscape the grounds. The second phase of our landscaping will begin this spring with the sprucing up of the fence; this was to have begun last summer but the hot and humid weather was not conducive to painting. In 2019, along with my fellow "intrepid gardeners" (thank you Mary S. for our title), our plan is to begin the design, layout and planting of kitchen gardens inside the iconic Georgetown fence. What would the early settlers have grown, how and for what purposes? The plants as well as the design of these gardens can then be incorporated into the curriculum of future Penn Brook School third grade field trips. It is our hope that this additional educational layer of the life of our earliest settlers will spark their interest not only in history but also in the horticulture that was vital to the survival and prosperity of the earliest settlers.

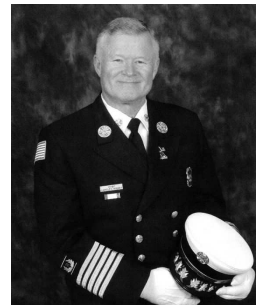
Please feel free to reach out with any recommendations or concerns you have regarding the museum, the gardens or GHS in general; we welcome and value the support of all our members. If you have time, we welcome your participation.

In closing, I want to thank Chris for the past eight years she has given as President of GHS. Chris, you have given your time, energy and passion to GHS. I am thankful you have chosen to remain on the board as a director as are your fellow board members.

HELLOS AND GOOD-BYES

We extend a warm welcome to our newest members, Diane and Peter Davis.

We note with sadness the passing of GHS member Harold Roeder on November 8th at the age of 77. Harold was a firefighter for 44 years, 36 of them in Georgetown, where he rose up through the ranks to Fire Chief before his retirement in 2004. He was also a small business owner, having acquired fire alarm equipment companies B&B Engineering and L.W. Bills Company, both of Georgetown. We extend our condolences to his family and friends.



TIME TO RENEW YOUR GHS MEMBERSHIP!

Thank you to all our members who have already sent in their membership renewals! If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2019, we hope you will do so very soon. All annual memberships expire on December 31st.

A membership form is included with this newsletter for your convenience, or you can pay online by visiting our website, www.georgetownhistoricalsociety.com and clicking on "Join the Society." If you are unsure of your membership status, please e-mail us at info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com.

Your GHS Board of Directors is busy planning events and fundraisers for 2019 and we are looking forward to another great year. We hope you will be a part of it!



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

Membership Form

Name(s) included in membership _____

Address _____

Phone number (optional) _____

E-mail _____

I would like to help GHS “go green” *and* save money. Please send my newsletter by e-mail. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Membership Levels:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 | BENEFACTOR(S) | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 | LIFE (One-time payment) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 | SUSTAINER(S) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 50 | CONTRIBUTOR(S) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 30 | MEMBER(S) | | |

Optional:

- ☐ I would like to make a donation to Georgetown Historical Society’s Homer Tapin Memorial Scholarship Fund in the amount of \$_____

Your membership fee and scholarship donations are tax-deductible. Please make all checks payable to: Georgetown Historical Society.

Optional:

I would like to help as a GHS volunteer (check area(s) of interest)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Museum tour guide | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising/Merchandise sales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Board member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special events | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |



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

Georgetown Historical Society



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