

Spring Newsletter

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GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving and promoting the history of Georgetown



A Note From The President

As our 2023 museum season begins, I would first like to thank the Kiwanis for inviting us to their pancake breakfast. It is always a pleasure for us to be able to join in this community event, as our season gets underway. There were two new additions to the pancake breakfast event this year; “The Missing Man Table” and the Easter Bunny. Both additions were very well received. From our perspective the event was quite a success. Thank you again to the Kiwanis for letting us participate in your annual pancake breakfast event.



Roger Mercaldi explaining the Missing Man Table

This Spring the grounds of the Brocklebank sprang to life. The spring flowers were anxiously anticipated by the “intrepid gardeners”, especially with the unusual winter we had. We hope you had a chance to drive by and enjoy the daffodils, tulips, grape hyacinth, and lilacs. One lilac we discovered surrounded by brush several years ago was in bloom for the very first time behind the shoe shop area. We have also discovered lady slippers and trillium, both an unanticipated delight in the woodland areas. We make new discoveries every year. The beginning of the gardening season is always a long-awaited event for the “intrepid gardeners”. We are there most Tuesday mornings if you care to join us. Keep an eye out as you drive by. You never know what is next to show itself. Do you know what the bloom pictured below is?



It is that time of year again as we welcome some of our annual first guests - the third-grade students at the Penn Brook School. We are hoping for a beautiful sunny day on May 30th.

When you are in the Georgetown Peabody Library be sure to check out the display cases on the second floor. The Society will continue to rotate items in these cases for your enjoyment. Let us know your thoughts.

We welcome and value the input of all our members. As always, if you have the time, we welcome your participation in all our goings-on. Email us at – info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com. Thank you again for all your support.

Betsy Moran

GHS News

The Georgetown Middle/High School Advanced Placement American History class with their teacher, Chris DiFranco, will again help the Penn Brook School Third Grade tour the Brocklebank Museum in the morning of Tuesday, May 30. The classes will break up into groups that will rotate through the museum rooms, the schoolhouse, and the gardens. Each station needs GHS volunteers to present that station briefly to the students in order to engage them in Georgetown history as represented by the museum. Please contact us at our email or call Mary Saunders, (978) 352-6886 and leave a message.

Good News

We have heard from member Michelle Prior, the 2009 recipient of the Homer Tapin Scholarship and high school intern who worked with Steve Keene and Terry Hart some years ago. She is now Senior Program Officer at the State Department's Cultural Heritage Center. She will be overseeing the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation which provides funds to heritage projects around the world. She writes, "You never know where a 3rd grade field trip can take you."

The Merrimack Valley Chapter of the Massachusetts Society of Genealogists sponsored a GHS tour of the Harmony Cemetery in a light rain on Sunday, April 30. Jeff Lamoureux, Betsy Moran, Mary Saunders, Jen Abbe, and a surprise addition, Beverly Knapp, presented several features of the cemetery and the lives and accomplishments of a few of the people buried there. The event was so well received that we plan to offer a repeat session later in the summer when, we hope, the weather will be more pleasant. Here is a [link to the pictures](#) taken by member Randy Boback at the event.

On April 22 in the Georgetown Peabody Library, we unpacked and examined around 50 marionettes carefully crafted by Georgetown resident artist Grace Spofford in the 1930's and 40's. Kathleen Ivanowski and her husband Bill own the collection and drove here from North Brookfield so we could see and appreciate it. The collection includes some partially constructed figures and raw materials that Grace was keeping. Clearly, Grace was making these puppets for use in storytelling. There is a set of Alice in Wonderland figures, Jack and the Beanstalk, George Washington and companions, and more.

Kathleen and Bill would like to find a permanent home for this collection. GHS doesn't have a place to properly store them. Meanwhile, Kathleen has loaned us several story-telling sets of the puppets in order to

display them in the library. Come see them soon.



On display at Georgetown Peabody Library is a collection marionettes crafted by Georgetown resident artist Grace Spofford in the 1930's and 40's.



Andrew's Excursions #17 Baldpate - Quick Escape
By B&MRRHS Director *Andrew Riedl*

Feature Article (reprinted with permission from “Boston and Maine Railroad Historical Society Newsletter” January/February 2023).

Many locations on the former Boston & Maine system offer not just fascinating railroad history, but also provide an interesting glimpse into the histories of the towns that the lines served, and what led them to be railroad locations over the years. Often times the railroad established stops at locations that featured attractions and facilities that warranted having train service. This is especially interesting when I’m researching a particular location in that it very often becomes a chance to immerse myself in the town’s history as well as the B&M history.

Such an instance occurred recently when I was exploring the old roadbed of the Newburyport branch within the town of Georgetown, MA. My good friend Chris DiFranco, who is on the Board of Directors of the Georgetown Historical Society (GHS), came along with me as I explored a section of the former line that was abandoned way back in 1941, but lives on as a rough trail to this day. My initial objective for this hike was to hopefully locate a milepost or two, as I know this line does have several still scattered along its length, but upon doing a little more research about the area this line served within Georgetown, I was soon set on finding the location of a long lost station known as Baldpate.

“Baldpate” is a name that many people outside the immediate Georgetown area might not be familiar with, but within the town, it holds a place of importance. There is a hill in the town that carries the Baldpate name which is not far from the former station site, and also near these two landmarks stands the building that was a century ago the Baldpate Inn, and now continues to carry the Baldpate name serving as a psychiatric hospital.

The oldest part of the structure was built back in 1733 by Stephen Mighill and passed through various family members and owners over the years until finally, in 1889, being converted into a hotel. Although initially not successful, it passed into new ownership and under this new direction was a hit until the Great Depression forced it into foreclosure. The building itself was expanded several times over the years, and during its years as a successful hotel, it was known for its elaborate rooms and fine food. (Thanks to the GHS Summer 2016 Newsletter for the preceding information). Baldpate became famous as a place for city dwellers to escape to the country without having to travel too far.

From the B&M perspective, Baldpate was a station built to serve this hotel as well as the neighborhood of South Georgetown. Located about 20 miles from Wakefield Junction and 30 miles north of Boston, this station did not feature much in the way of amenities, but served a solid purpose as a neighborhood train depot. While I do not know exactly when the structure was built, I’m fairly certain it stood until the line was abandoned in 1941 and was likely demolished shortly afterwards. It was once located where the Newburyport Branch crossed Nelson Street and about a mile south of Georgetown center. With this information in hand, and a desire to explore what remains of the right of way within Georgetown, Chris and I set up a time to take a hike on the line and experience history firsthand.

On a sunny November day, Chris and I along with his daughter and my son set off down the rail trail in Boxford heading north and soon crossed the town line into Georgetown. The roadbed passed through some woods and then a wetland area where the town line marker sat in the water. After passing by a campground site and through a shallow cut in the earth, we soon entered a more populated area with new townhouses adjacent to the roadbed.

Approaching the Nelson Street crossing and the former site of Baldpate depot, we passed behind a popular garden center and in the ground we were walking on, I was able to find some chunks of stone that were in fact pieces of spent coal and crushed cinder that certainly dated back to when steam engines last played along this route before abandonment. Holding them in my hand and showing them to the two kids was especially gratifying as I truly felt like I was passing along knowledge and pieces of history. We then returned them to the ground to ensure others would have the excitement of discovering as well.

While it took me a minute or two to orient myself when we were at the station site, I was soon able to determine where the Baldpate depot once stood using an open area of ground next to the roadbed as the clear indicator that this had once been the station site. Although nothing remains of the building, looking at old photos of the location you can clearly tell where the site once was and it's almost easy to envision the former depot building standing once again on the now open land.

After documenting the former depot site and grabbing the photo that accompanies this article, we headed back, with the low November sun in our faces. The roadbed was easy to follow the whole time since it continues to live on as a power line corridor in its second life. While I didn't find any physical B&M artifacts on this hike, it still was one of the more rewarding ones I did since it's always great to place something that has been long lost to time. This is just the beginning of my explorations of the northern parts of the Newburyport branch, as I'm constantly learning of more pieces of the B&M to hunt down despite it having been gone for over 80 years.

I want to give a final shout out to my friend Chris whose knowledge and interest in the local history of the area was extremely informative and helpful on this hike. The GHS was a fantastic resource for writing this article and the facts stated in the earlier paragraphs above can be attributed to the GHS newsletter from their online archives from back in the summer of 2016. Exploring these sites is very rewarding with others who appreciate the history of the B&M, and where possible, I'll plan to include these friends in further articles, maybe along the lines of an occasional "guest star" on these adventures.

Don't let lines that have long been abandoned deter you from exploring them. While buildings and tracks may be long gone, sites often remain empty, and with a little bit of historic research, you can often find what you're looking for out in the field, and Baldpate was no exception. Happy Explorations! - AR



What type of bloom was shown at the beginning of this newsletter?

Answer - **rhubarb**

We allow ours to bloom as it is not wise to eat much of it because it is planted in an area of high lead content.

Upcoming Events

- Museum opens Sunday, July 9th from 1-5 PM

GHS Officers

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