



# THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## *From the President*

This summer has been a good one for the Georgetown Historical Society. We have had several interesting and well-attended programs. June saw Old-Fashioned Baseball again take the field, with a good time had by all. In September, Georgetown Days were well attended with a Society putting on a scavenger hunt and serving ice cream to participants. Although Trails and Sails was somewhat of a disappointment weatherwise, and attendance at the museum was minimal, we had a productive time rescuing the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Capt. Benjamin Adams' Desk from storage and installing it in the parlor. It now stands in the southwest corner with its old family bibles belonging to the Captain and his daughter Sally. We look forward to soon seeing progress on the repairs to the Brocklebank House and Shoe Shop, which are further evidence of the value of the CPC funding in making Georgetown a better place. This November we look forward to a delectable program on Baker's Chocolate, with more details available in our newsletter and on our website.

Historical Society Curator Steve Keene has an interesting article in this newsletter about new acquisitions in the historic Georgetown photo category. He has done an amazing job cataloguing thousands of items in our eclectic and very significant collections. Volunteer Chris Comiskey has done a great job setting up burial ground tours and has given several fascinating tours to groups at the Union Cemetery. She has also done extensive research on the background of the burial ground and

the sad epidemic which resulted in the loss of so many Georgetown children in the 1730s – a story which she eloquently tells both in this newsletter and on our GHS website. We would still be glad to hear from any descendants that may have information on Col. Joseph Kimball who was so instrumental in the founding and building of Georgetown. We still hope to have copies made of the papers for use by the local Historical Commission in documenting the early nineteenth century buildings of Georgetown. The Massachusetts Historical Commission survey and planning grant will begin soon to document homes along Elm St. and downtown. We again appreciate the vital part volunteers have played in making these community projects possible.

Regards,

Rick Detwiller, President, GHS

## *Inside*

*\* Curator's Corner: Restored old photographs and new acquisitions*

*\* Too Many Tears: Chris Comiskey*

*\* Upcoming Events: Don't miss "Haunted Happenings" Cemetery Tour Oct 24/25 and Anthony Sammarco's presentation on the famous Baker Chocolate Company Nov 12th*

## Curator's Corner

It's a good time to report as the tour season has just ended. Last fall a request for volunteers sought help tackling numerous accumulated boxes of donated items in order to classify and store objects, add them to the data-base, etc. Notwithstanding a paucity of help, progress is reportable. Database growth 600+ records; 2,100+ updates; and 900+ object photos added. Photo based notebooks "For Guiding or Self Guided Tours" were made for 4 of 9 museum rooms. Want eMail of larger copies of the photos, or wish to volunteer? Mailto: [plumviewer.eos@verizon.net](mailto:plumviewer.eos@verizon.net)

Recovered Images: From old and poorly exposed negatives ca. 1916 pictures of this parade were recently recovered by scanning and the application of Photoshop.



Best rescue of all? Fire department pumper, (Erie's?), shooting a rooster tail of water in front of the Union Building, no doubt from a cistern built after the disastrous downtown fires. Note: the gathered flock of kids, Little's Block and a Street Railway car in the background.

Accession Kudos: At a recent visit, Everett "Bud" Spaulding, one of the Spaulding heirs who made the Brocklebank Museum possible through transfer to the Society in 1975, presented a 1738 British coin he found outside the museum when he was a boy of four or five. In 1931 the Spaulding's took ownership, returning occupancy to Brocklebank descendants. Shortly thereafter, Bud made his find. Proudly preserved by him until now, we've assured him we'll take very good care of it.



More's coming: Generations of Knights and Metcalf's have presented over 100 photo's, 1880 to 1920, with names inscribed on the back (wow!!). Helped by collection documents study reveals many local connections; children of blacksmiths, boot and shoemakers who became leading bankers and lawyers; throw in the Georgetown Advocate's founding publisher and one gets teachers galore, including a Perley Free School principal, etc.

## *Too Many Tears by Chris Comiskey*

They knew it was coming. It started in southern New Hampshire in 1735 and slowly crept its way south. Neighboring towns had already been hit. All they could do was pray.

On June 21, 1736, Reverend James Chandler, pastor of the Rowley West Parish Church, wrote in his record book, “John Plumer, son of John and Mary [Nelson] Plumer etatis [age] about 2 years and ½ died June 21, 1736. N.B. This was the first child that died in this parish of ye same sickness of which great numbers have died in neighboring parishes.”

In the early years of Rowley West Parish (now known as Georgetown), there were usually about six deaths per year, most of them infants. Between June of 1736 and February of 1737, there were forty-nine deaths; forty-eight of them children. (Three were actually residents of First Parish, but worshipped and were buried here).

It was known as the Throat Distemper, and it was a highly contagious and brutal killer of children. Within days of the first symptoms, the throat would swell up so severely that the child would die of strangulation. There was no cure, and nobody was known to have contracted it and survived.

Twenty-five families in the Parish lost children during that time, many losing more than one. Some examples:

The second household to be affected by the epidemic was that of Francis and Mary (Cheney) Brocklebank. Three-year-old Samuel died on June 23. Four days later, five-year-old Francis and eleven-month-old Moses died within three hours of each other.

Elijah and Mary (Holms) Blaisdel lost all five of their children, between the ages of six months to seven years, within three weeks in September 1736.

John and Jane (Bayley) Heriman lost three of their children, ages ten, seven, and two, within eight days in August and September. Jane was eight months pregnant at the time.

John's brother, Samuel Heriman and his wife Jane (Colman) lost three children, ages four, two and one, in September.

John and Samuel's sister, Sarah (Heriman) and her husband Samuel Hazen lost five of their children, ages two to twelve, between November 1736 and January 1737.

Hours after her only daughter, one-year-old Sarah, drew her last agonizing breath, Ruth (Fisk) Easty gave birth to another daughter. She named her Sarah. A month later Richard and Ruth Easty lost their only son, six-year-old Zebulon.

Many surrounding towns and parishes suffered even a greater number of losses than our little parish. Stonecutters found it difficult to meet the demand for gravestones. Of the forty-eight children who were laid to rest in the Parish Burial Ground (now Union Cemetery) during the time of the epidemic, only a few have gravestones that are visible today.

Over the years, the town suffered through other epidemics, but none were ever as devastating as the Throat Distemper of 1736-37.

Let us never forget the many hardships faced by the earliest settlers of our town, nor the little voices that were forever silenced during that deadly time.

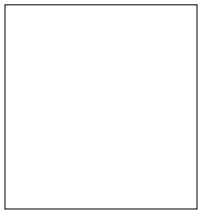


## *Calendar of Events*

**Oct 24/25 10am & 1:30pm: Tour Union Cemetery Rt 133 Georgetown: *Haunted Happenings*. Chris Comiskey.**

**Nov 12<sup>th</sup> 7pm, Buttonwoods Museum 240 Water St. Haverhill: Anthony Sammarco, *A Delicious Memory from the Past: The Baker Chocolate Company*. (Get tickets at Meader's General Store 10 E Main St. G-town).**

**Dec 2 @ 7pm, Peabody Library: *Annual GHS Meeting*. Guest Speaker, Tom Mahlstead on local artifacts found in this area.**



The Georgetown Historical Society  
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## Georgetown Historical Society

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