



THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER WINTER, 2011

From the President:

The Georgetown Historical Society held its Annual Meeting on December 7 at the Georgetown Library. Those in attendance were greeted with home-baked goodies and an entertaining slide-show of the Hickory Tree Wild Animal Farm by Curator Steve Keene. We opened our meeting with a recap of our many accomplishments in 2011, including a successful membership drive, and our popular “Georgetown in the Civil War” exhibit at the Brocklebank Museum.

Results of the election of officers was read by Nominating Committee Chairman Ed DesJardins. All of the 2011 officers agreed to stay on for another term, so the only open position was that of a Director. We extend a big thank you to Louise Richardson, whose term on the Board expired at the end of 2011. Louise has done so much for the Society over the years, and we will miss her at our meetings. We wish her all the best, and know that she is only a phone call or e-mail away.

We extend a warm welcome to our newly-elected Board Member Jeff Lamoureux. Jeff, who is a Civil War buff, joined the Society this year after visiting our Civil War exhibit with his daughter, Hannah. He is also a member of the Georgetown Historical Commission.

After our brief business meeting, our special guest speaker was introduced. Dave Mountain gave

a very interesting presentation on “Dam That River—The Industrial History of the Parker River and its Tributaries.” Dave is an Engineering Professor at Boston University and a former president of the Parker River Clean Water Association. He became interested in old mills about fifteen years ago when he noticed how fascinated his daughters were with the workings of the mills at Old Sturbridge Village and realized that this was an excellent way to get children interested in science and technology.

We were thrilled with the large turn-out at the meeting, and hope a good time was had by all. Thank you to all our members and friends of the Georgetown Historical Society who attended!

Chris Comiskey

President



RINGING THE BELL



From church bells and bell choirs, to jingle bells and “ringing out the old and ringing in the new,” bells have long been associated with the holiday season.

When the First Congregational Church of Georgetown acquired its Revere and Sons bell in 1815, “Bell Ringer” was a paid position, and for good reason – it was a much bigger job than it is today. Along with ringing it to call people to church and meetings, he also had to ring the bell daily at noon and other times. It was used as an alarm, it tolled for the dead, and rang out in celebration of such events as the end of the Civil War, when it joined church bells throughout the land in ringing from dawn until dusk. However, much has been lost in the “art” of bell ringing. The following is from an article published in the January 1925 edition of *The Georgetown Advocate*, about how it was done in the “old days.”

At 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings there was a “first Bell” of about fifteen minutes, vigorous peels with occasional but quite brief pauses. The second bell began at 10:15 o’clock and was in three different forms of four or five minutes each, there being a distinct pause between the forms. First, there was a loud peel, rapid and continuous to the first pause. Then came a short, loud peel as at first,

By Christine Comiskey

followed by a moderately-timed tolling, quite firm, with occasional “setting” of the bell. Setting the bell was done by checking its full overturn and holding its mouth up, which caused its tongue to fall, rattling and clanking down and resting on its inner wall, turning all music into harsh discord. Before this din was quite gone, the bell was released from its unnatural position and music restored. The third form was called “ringing down.” There would be a loud peel of a few strokes, which gradually passed into a perfect diminuendo of time and force. Finally there was a soft tone at 10:30 o’clock and the service began.

In 1874, the bell (and the congregation) moved from the Old South Church on East Main Street (across from the Brocklebank Museum) to the new First Congregational Church building on Andover Street, where the old Revere bell continues to call people to worship each Sunday.



SLEIGH RIDE!

January 4, 1869—It was splendid sleighing yesterday. I enjoyed my ride so much coming down from Grandmother’s. The snow was of pure white and the bright sun shone upon it lighting it up in places with a soft warm look, while the bare trees reflected upon the snow added to the picture, making the whole almost as pretty scenery as we get in summer.

(Diary of Georgetown resident Susan Elizabeth Nelson)

CURATOR'S CORNER

Steve Keene:

CURATOR'S CORNER. In addition to contributing to the Civil War Display, two curatorial activities dominated 2011, adding all but 29 of the years 1336 database entries. The first, featured in the last Curator's Corner, The Program to Reclaim the Curator's Room is off to a fine start, but will stick with us well into 2012. It started with 1,717 lines of database items without assigned locations suggesting they'd be found in the Curator's Room. 864 items have been "found," processed (adding 454 new records and 534 photos), and assigned "keeping" locations. Do only 853 remain? No such luck. The number of additional reclaimable items found raise the number to at least 1,225. The second activity, work on our Digital Archives Program (rights assigned to the GHS to use photos, transcripts, etc. of non-owned items) added 834 records and 893 photos. The remaining 29 new records involve objects about long time Georgetown families. They'll be in the next Curator's Corner.

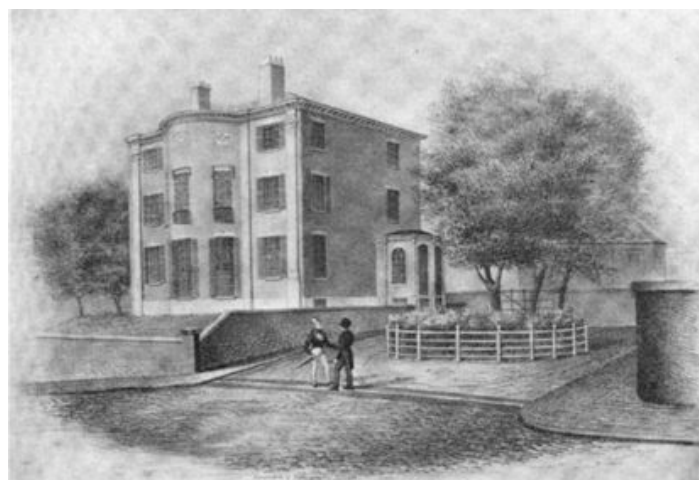
Regarding our exhibit of the "Slave Collar" inscribed "Jo Mason, Mt. Vernon St." we have, since 1998 when we sought appraisal, considered that it is highly probable that although given, and received, as a slave collar it probably is not. Our current "information for guiding" points out that probability and present the exhibit as a lesson that the more history is researched the more it is likely to change. We owe what follows to Rick Detwiller's research.



SLAVE COLLAR?

By Frederic C. Detwiller

The Jonathan Mason House of 1800-1802 on Mount Vernon St. in Boston is discussed and pictured in Harold Kirker's book *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch* on pages 156 – 157. Jonathan Mason was the first of the Mount Vernon Proprietor's to build on the property they acquired from John Singleton Copley in 1795. Mount Vernon Street did not exist prior to that time. As a Massachusetts Federalist, it is unlikely Mason had any slaves on Mt. Vernon St. after 1800. The collar we have is very significant and likely would have belonged to Mason's dog, as no slaves were allowed in Massachusetts after ca. 1780. The house shown below is where the dog would have resided.



Jonathan Mason's mansion ca. 1800-1802 from Charles Bulfinch biography by Harold Kirker.

If anyone has further information on the Beecher's part in the Underground Railway or on the Brocklebank "Slave Hole," please let us know.

AN OLD GEORGETOWN TANNERY Adams-Kimball Barn

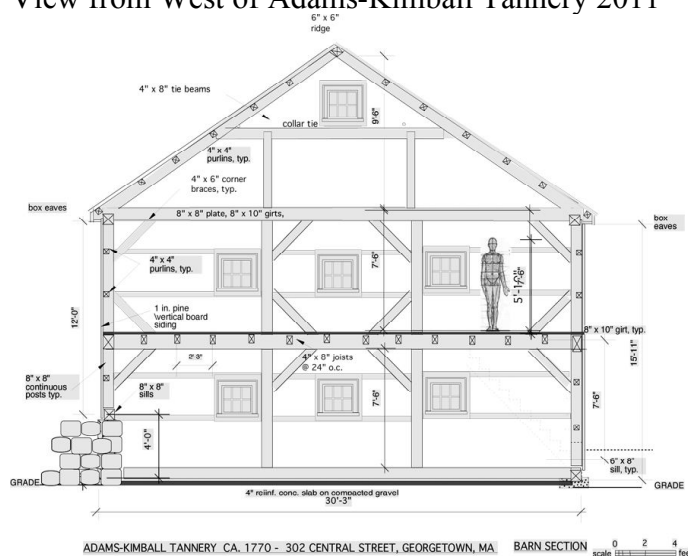
By Frederic C. Detweller

There is a relic of Georgetown-Rowley's early tannery-shoe manufacturing industry remaining in Georgetown. The old Adams-Kimball Barn, is believed to be the former tannery built by Capt. Benjamin Adams around 1770. The sturdy timber-frame building was later used for the same purpose by Col. John Kimball who owned and operated a tannery on the property in the early 1800s. Now located at 302-304 Central Street the property was more recently Dr. Lewis Skeiriks's prior to the lot's subdivision in 2005. Inside the tannery barn are stored heavy mortise-and-tenon jointed timbers, the remains of what may formerly have been a cider press.

The building is currently being documented by former GHS president Rick Detweller, of New England Landmarks, who has done research on the Adams and Kimball families who operated a tannery here for almost 100 years. Historic photos and details found in the course of making measured drawings show it has changed little over the years.



View from West of Adams-Kimball Tannery 2011



Cross Section of Tannery by F.C. Detweller



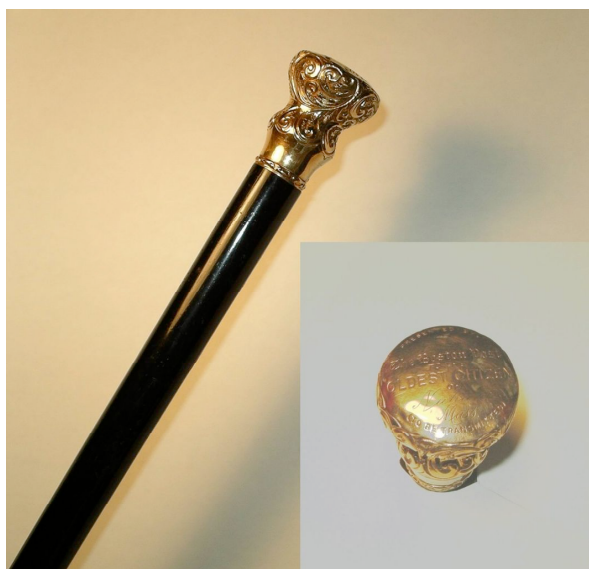
View from Central Street in photo above ca. 1900 shows Adams Kimball tannery at lower right.



Tannery Interior view shows sturdy timber frame.

HISTORY OF THE BOSTON POST GOLD HEADED CANE AWARD

Mr. E. Grozier became publisher of the Boston Post Newspaper on Oct. 14, 1891. In August 1909, Mr. Edwin A. Grozier, wrote a letter to the Board of Selectmen in 700 towns (no cities included) in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. It is unclear why he excluded Conn. & Vermont. With his letter, he gave specific instructions that this gold-headed ebony cane be presented with the compliments of the Boston Post to the oldest male citizen of the town, to be used by him as long as he lives, and at his death handed down to the next oldest citizen of the town. The cane would belong to the town and not the person who received it.



J. F. Fradley & Co., a New York leading manufacturer of fine cane, made all the canes, from ebony shipped in seven-foot lengths from the Congo in Africa. They were cut to cane lengths, seasoned for six months, turned on lathes to the right thickness, coated and polished. They had a 14-carat gold head two inches long, decorated by hand, and a ferruled tip. The head was engraved with the inscription, " Presented by the Boston Post to the oldest citizen of the Town, in this case Georgetown --- To be Transmitted." The Board of Selectmen were to be the Trustees of the cane and keep it always in the hands of the oldest citizen. In 1930, after considerable controversy, eligibility for the cane was opened to women, as well. But the feminine issue did not end there, as some women were not enthusiastic about divulging their true age.

In 1924, Mr. Grozier died, and the Boston Post was taken over by his son, Richard, who failed to continue

his father's success. At one time, the Boston Post was considered the nation's leading standard – sized newspaper in circulation. Competition from other newspapers, radio, and television contributed to the decline of the Post and it went out of business in 1957.

The custom of the Boston Post cane took hold in the towns lucky enough to have canes. As years went by, some of the canes were lost, stolen, burned, taken out of town and not returned to the Selectmen, or destroyed by accident. Over the years, there are canes that have journeyed thousands of miles, found, and returned to their native town years later.

Georgetown has kept their Boston Post Cane safe and secure by storing it safely in the Town Hall Basement vault after the formal presentation is made.

Through all this chaos, the Canes have endured and now celebrates their 102nd birthday (1909) just 2 years prior to the birth of this years recipient, Mr. Jim Boynton of Georgetown, born in 1911. The town of Georgetown congratulates you as the recipient of this award which began in August of 1909.

Edward Des Jardins –Chair.
Georgetown Historical Commission



l. to r. Selectmen David Surface & Gary Fowler, Des Jardins, 2011 recipient Boynton, & State Rep.

Year End Wrap-Up

Brocklebank Museum Visitations were up substantially in 2011, due in part to our new *Georgetown in the Civil War* exhibit. We were especially pleased when some Civil War buffs visited and said they were very impressed with the exhibit! In September, *Trails & Sails* and *Georgetown Days* weekends brought in even more visitors from near and far to our Open House event at the museum. Curator Steve Keene and summer intern Michelle Prior did a great job cleaning and organizing the Curator's Room this summer.

Shoe Shop The exterior work on the shoe shop is nearly done, and is just awaiting a final coat of paint in the spring.

Cemetery Tours The September tour of Harmony Cemetery during *Georgetown Days* weekend went well, although the weather on Saturday could have been better. We were glad that we planned on two weekends for the Union Cemetery *Tragedies and Tombstones* tour in October. That five inches of snow just before Halloween was *not* appreciated, and caused the cancellation of our Sunday tour.

Educational Outreach Along with our annual Penn Brook School third grade tour in June, we also had a group of home-schoolers and their parents (about 80 people in all) tour the museum in October. That same week, GHS President Chris Comiskey took a group of Georgetown Cub Scouts on a *Tragedies and Tombstones* tour of Union Cemetery. We are now pen-pals with a fifth-grader in Iowa, whose assignment was to contact a Massachusetts Museum for help with an ongoing

history project. We thoroughly enjoy helping young people gain a better understanding of and interest in our history.

Thank you to all who volunteered their time to help with our various events in 2011, and to all who helped us financially with membership dues and donations. We look forward to a fun, educational, and profitable 2012!

MATCHING GIFT PROGRAMS

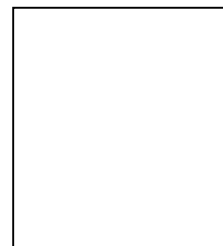
Recently, one of our members made a generous donation of \$100 to GHS. Her workplace has a 3-for-1 Matching Gift Program. After completing the necessary paperwork, we received a check from them for \$300!

This is a great way to help non-profits like GHS. If your workplace has a similar program, we hope you might consider helping us by making a donation and using your company's matching gift program.

2012 Membership Dues

Thank you to everyone who has already sent in their 2012 membership dues. If you have not sent yours in yet, we hope you will do so soon. Visit our web-site, www.georgetownhistoricalsociety.com, and click on "Join the Society." You can print and mail in the membership form along with your dues, or pay online using Paypal.

The Georgetown Historical Society
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Georgetown Historical Society



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2nd Vice President: TBD
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