



## THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER **SPRING 2014**

### ***From the President:***

Winter has finally released us from her frozen grip, and we are once again seeing our yards turn from white to brown to green. Flowers are beginning to bloom, and we can throw open our windows on nice days to let in the fresh air.

At the Georgetown Historical Society, we can finally get back into the Brocklebank Museum now that the snow has retreated. We have much cleaning to do this year—more than usual due to the amount of dirt and dust that came up through the floor boards during our foundation restoration project last fall. We are also working on ideas for a new “Businesses and Industries of Georgetown” exhibit in the back room, which will involve some moving of other exhibits and display cases. Able-bodied volunteers are always welcome, and we hope you will join us for one or more clean-up or exhibit-shifting days (dates to be announced).

Our *Georgetown in the Civil War* exhibit is moving into its final season. If you haven't seen it yet, please visit the Brocklebank Museum this summer. Many items loaned for the exhibit are on public display for the first—and perhaps the last—time. Don't miss out! The Museum will be opening for the season on June 22 and will be open every Sunday from 2-5 PM through Columbus Day weekend.



Finally, a big CONGRATULATIONS to GHS Board member Ed Des Jardins, who recently learned that he will be receiving a 2014 Local Preservationist Award from the Massachusetts Historical Commission at their awards ceremony on May 16. With forty-six years (and counting) of historical preservation experience, Ed is highly deserving of this special honor. We are very proud of Ed and feel fortunate to have him serving on the GHS Board of Directors.

I hope to see you at the museum this summer, or at any of our special events!



*Christine Comiskey*  
GHS President

## ***ENDANGERED GEORGETOWN***

By Christine Comiskey

What draws people to Georgetown? For many, it is the quaint charm of this historic small community, with its main streets lined with homes and other buildings from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Unfortunately, with no designated Historic Districts yet in place, we continue to lose important pieces of our past as, one by one, these historic buildings are torn down and replaced by modern structures. Though members of the Georgetown Historical Society have been attending hearings to discourage the demolition of historic buildings, there is nothing we can do to actually prevent it. The following is another installment of “Endangered Georgetown,” with one more building under threat of demolition, and another slowly being lost by neglect.

### **60 EAST MAIN STREET**

The Richard and Mary Tenney House, built circa 1842, is described in the 2012 Village District Survey as *a distinctive example of Greek Revival-style domestic architecture in Georgetown Center. The building is a contributing component of the village district.*

The property was purchased by Richard Tenney in 1842, and a house was built shortly thereafter. Like many in town, Mr. Tenney was involved in the shoe industry. He was also a Justice of the Peace, served as a postmaster during the Lincoln administration, and was a librarian at the Georgetown Peabody Library (at that time located at the rear of what is now the town Park & Ride lot). In his obituary, he is described as being a leading spirit in the judicial, financial, spiritual, and musical affairs of Georgetown for over sixty years.



The house remained in the Tenney family until 1906, when it was purchased by Edith and Leonard Dresser. Leonard, too, was involved in the shoe industry, but also served as Town Clerk and was a reporter for the *Boston Globe*. Edith and Leonard's heirs sold the property in 1939 to Mary Meader, who later transferred it to her son, Frank. The property remained in the Meader family until 1984, when it was sold to the present owners.

This beautifully maintained home is currently under agreement with the owner of Georgetown Plaza and Dunkin Donuts next door. Original plans called for the demolition of the house and its beautiful landscaping in order to expand the parking lot and septic system. The plans have since been changed to save the house—at least for now. GHS Board members have been attending ZBA hearings to be sure this beautiful piece of Georgetown's history is preserved.



## 554 NORTH STREET

By Louise Richardson

The early (Adams-Pearson)-Larkin house was once the lovely home of Charles Orrin Larkin (fought in the Civil War and was an original member of Erie 4 Volunteer Fire Company) and Josephine Keough Larkin. This early residence at 554 North Street is a most valuable period 1700s house, likely built just before the American Revolution! It stands as it always has behind a low stone wall. Its lines are good, *but all is not well!*

Today, the house is in ruins. It has been unconscionably abandoned by the owners, the Holcombs, who live in Florida. It is in grave jeopardy of falling down or being demolished—it would heroically benefit from demands of maintenance plans, such as Haverhill has forthrightly instituted.



A local preservationist architect, who once lived in this house, reports on some significant period details that will be historically, regrettably lost: the dwelling is a wood-framed structure, having a center chimney with attached kitchen ell. There are square multi-paned windows with muntins that are tucked up under the eaves along with a raised field vernacular multi-paneled door. The great architectural interest centers on the marvelous heavy quarter-round incised summer beam that exists in the north chamber, running from the front plate to the rear plate. There is a drawn out “rat-tailed” chamfer stop at both ends of the quarter-round chamfers. Further assessment by a noted New England historian gives us an additional profound architectural insight: *The summer beam is parallel and this is the great feature of this house—an extraordinary chamfer and most unusual, a comparable detail in England, but can not remember any in this country.*

As this house seems close to final decay, not only do we lose an early American architectural wonder, but we lose part of our local history as well; the Larkin house location provided needed access to the once near-by Larkin-Morrill Snuff Mill in Byfield (razed in 2012). Thus, we are now deprived of studying and enjoying visible structures highlighting the workings of an early local family and industry.

### ....AND ONE VICTORY!



One property featured in an earlier “Endangered Georgetown” newsletter article (January 2013) was the building on 5 Elm Street. We are pleased to announce that it was recently sold and the new owner is in the process of restoring it while retaining its historical character. The property is currently zoned commercial, and the owner has filed a Citizens Petition to have it re-zoned residential. This will be voted on at Town Meeting on May 5<sup>th</sup>. We hope you will attend and show your support.

## HELP NEEDED TO RESTORE SIGN



(photo by F. C. Detwiller)

A reproduction of our original 1754 Tavern sign was installed in front of the Brocklebank Museum in 2008. Unfortunately, our harsh New England weather has taken its toll—the paint is peeling, and moldings have fallen off. The sign was recently removed for refurbishing by local artist Chuck Margeson. The Georgetown Historical Society is looking to raise funds for this costly restoration. If you would like to help, please make checks payable to Georgetown Historical Society and note that it is for the Sign Restoration Fund.

## REVOLUTIONARY TIDBITS

By Christine Comiskey

Many times, while working on an historical research project, I come across something that sends me off in a completely different direction. Such was the case recently when I was looking through old Rowley West Parish birth records and came across this curious entry recorded by Reverend James Chandler:

*Archebald Dawson, son of Peter Dawson, a British soldier (who, with his wife & three other soldiers & their wives, live in the parish as prisoners of war,) born 13 January, 1777.*

I had never heard or read about prisoners of war being kept in Rowley West Parish, so I of course had to learn more. We had no known jail, so where were they kept, and by whom? Unfortunately, after hours of scouring the internet, and more hours pouring over the old hand-written Rowley and Rowley West Parish records, I came away with little more than tired eyes. No mention of the prisoners—very disappointing. Their story will continue to be a mystery. Maybe another historian will solve it someday.

However....I did come across another interesting tidbit in the Rowley records: *March 13, 1777: It was put to the town to see if they would build a house to put the town's stock of ammunition in. Past in the negative. Voted that part of said stock be removed to the meeting house in the West Parish in said town and the selectmen to do the same when a suitable place is prepared for it.*

They were storing ammunition in the meeting house, where people worshipped? And the parishoiners didn't have a problem with that? Yikes!



Old South Meeting House



## ASK GHS

We recently put a posting on our Facebook page to “ASK GHS” a question for our newsletter. Here are two great ones that came in:

***Where exactly is “the rooty plain,” and what is/was the root for which it is named”***

Rooty Plain was an area located on the southeastern slope of Long Hill, lying mostly in Rowley and now known as Millwood. Our ancestors, unfortunately, rarely recorded why they gave any particular place a name. We found two possible explanations: (1) this is the area where the pigs were driven—pigs root; (2) there were several sawmills in the vicinity who had woodlots in rooty plain. Many trees were cut down, leaving stumps and roots.

***I’m curious about all the fires in Gtown over the years. Seems like we’ve had some major ones here. Did Gtown have more than other towns in that time, or was this town no different from others? If we had more, why did this happen? Was it related to the industries here?***



I checked with our fire-fighting historian, Rusty Ricker, for this one. Although the many fire pictures make it look like buildings were burning down all the time, these fires were spread out over many decades. In reality, we didn’t have it that bad. Most of the big fires were in commercial or public buildings which in those days had no sprinklers (such as the Little’s block, pictured left, which was destroyed in 1923). If the fire started after the building was closed for the day, it could spread quickly before being noticed, especially at night.

Thanks for the great questions! If you have a question for GHS, please post it on our Facebook page or e-mail it to: [info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com) with the subject “Ask GHS.”

## GFD HONORS FALLEN FIREFIGHTERS

Another new display has been added to the entryway of the Central Fire Station, this one honoring our fallen firefighters of the “Christmas Day Fire” of 1885, a night with temperatures near zero and high winds howling from the North. Shortly after the firefighters arrived on the scene, a huge explosion blew the Adams building apart, spreading the flames to neighboring structures.

Two Georgetown firefighters were killed in the explosion. George A. Chase, age 22, left a wife and two-year-old daughter. Joseph Illsley, age 23, was to have been married that winter. Clarence Clark, age 21 and single, was seriously injured when a wall of bricks crushed his leg, which was amputated later that night. He died a month later from amputation-related complications.

The display contains photos of the three men who died, as well as the three playpipes they were holding at the time of the fatal explosion. Also included are photos of the aftermath of the devastating fire, which destroyed four commercial buildings and one house, and damaged several other downtown buildings. (photo by R. Ricker)

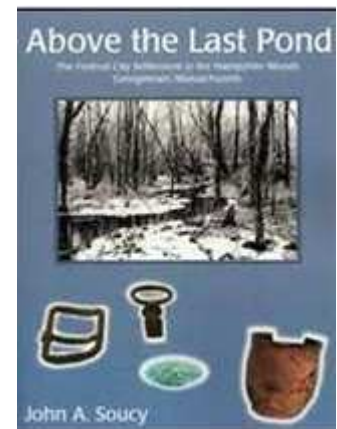


Our thanks to Rusty Ricker for creating this fine tribute..

## ABOVE THE LAST POND

A talk on the book *Above the Last Pond: The Federal City Settlement in the Hampshire Woods, Georgetown, Massachusetts* by John Soucy will be held at the Georgetown Library meeting room on Wednesday, June 18 at 7 PM. Learn about the generations of Hardys that lived in this small settlement at the edge of town in the 1700s. This event, presented by Joe D'Amore, is free and open to the public. Copies of the book will be available for \$18.

Then...on June 21, join Joe on a hike of the Federal City and Hampshire Woods area and see the remains of the old settlement, as well as the scenic Duffy's Landing area. This hike will take approximately two hours. Meet at the Groveland Business Park, just over the town line on Route 97, at 12:45.



## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined GHS in the past few months: Annette & Tony Bilo, Malcolm Burr II, Michelle Wilkins Cook, Robert and Cheryl Cropley, Douglas & Pamela Dawes, Stuart Egenberg, Doug Gordon, Sara & Doug Gunzelmann, John and Galina Petraborg, and C. David Surface.

## HAVE YOU JOINED OUR FACEBOOK GROUP YET?



Our Georgetown Historical Society Facebook group has been growing by leaps and bounds lately, but many of our GHS members are not yet a part of it. If you are on Facebook, we hope you will join our GHS facebook group, too!

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**May 5:** Annual Town Meeting, 7 PM

**June 18:** *Above the Last Pond* talk by Joe D'Amore. 7 PM, Georgetown Library

**June 21:** Federal City/Hampshire Woods hike. 12:45 PM, Groveland Business Park

**June 22:** Opening day at Brocklebank Museum



## 2014 DUES REMINDER



If you have not yet paid your 2014 dues, we hope you will do so soon. We count on the support of every member to help us in our efforts to preserve and promote the history of Georgetown for future generations to learn from and enjoy. A membership form is included with this newsletter for your convenience, or you can pay online by visiting our website, [www.georgetownhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.georgetownhistoricalsociety.com) and clicking on "Join the Society."



# Georgetown Historical Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 376, Georgetown, MA 01833

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## 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 newsletter by e-mail. ☐ Yes ☐ No

### Membership Levels:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 BENEFACTOR(S)  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$300 LIFE (One-time payment) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 SUSTAINER(S)   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 50 CONTRIBUTOR(S) |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 30 MEMBER(S)      |  |

*Your membership contribution is tax-deductible. Please make 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*  
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## *Georgetown Historical Society*



### **OFFICERS**

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

### **DIRECTORS**

*Ralph Chouinard, Rick Detwiller,  
Jeff Lamoureux, Ed Des Jardins,  
Michael Hinchliffe*

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