

GREENSBORO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NUMBER 32
Fall 2009

NEWSLETTER

Greensboro Bend, The Village the Railroad Built

The 2009 summer exhibit of Greensboro Historical Society: "Greensboro Bend-The Village the Railroad Built" provided a fascinating glimpse of this village from its earliest development when the railroad came to town to the middle of the 20th century when the railroad closed down.

The July opening featured Leslie Campos and her 4th / 5th grade students singing a delightful song about the railroad. Afterwards the guests enjoyed a delicious cake with a design of the Bend Depot, baked by Greensboro Bend resident Donna Allen.

Many current and former residents of Greensboro Bend contributed artifacts, photographs, drawings, paintings, and articles to make for a very interesting exhibit.



A very special addition was made by the students at Lakeview Union. With help from the GHS archives, they put together a wonderful display showing how important Greensboro Bend has been to the history and development of the Town of Greensboro. Their special contributions included the Greensboro Bend Game, developed by the Lakeview 3rd Grade class, which gave children an insight into the importance of the railroad to the village, and a comprehensive time line, made by 4th grade student Todd Howard, providing a clear record of important events.

The children's colorful artistic drawings and game added to the photos, documents and artifacts from other sources were enjoyed by many visitors of all ages!

Antique Road Show

A full house of local residents enjoyed an evening of fun and education when James Marquis, Certified Appraiser from Wallingford, VT, appraised over 100 prized possessions at Fellowship Hall on Monday, August 10. Among the more valuable treasures were a scrimshaw powder horn, a large US flag with 38 stars, a rifle that was at Harper's Ferry, and an early pistol taken to Oregon. One family was fascinated to hear that their lamp was probably worth more than they had paid for their cottage! Many other interesting objects intrigued the group as Jim appraised them for more, or less, than their owners had hoped.

An "antique", Jim explained, is any item one hundred years of age or more, and he discussed the various factors that contributed to its fair-market value. Among them are its historical significance, rarity, provenance, and often, its current popularity. He noted, "I'm always learning", and those in the audience at the first Greensboro Road Show also learned.

Winter Program

Early Greensboro, a Hill Perspective

On Sunday, March 7, at 2 PM, the community is invited to Fellowship Hall to view a video interview with Lewis and Nancy Hill as Lewis talks about some of the tools and other artifacts that figured in the life of his family in early Greensboro. In this video Lewis' special Vermont humor and sense of proportion shine through, allowing all to share in his love of this place and appreciation of the ways that his family lived in earlier days. The theme of Early Greensboro/Early Vermont introduced by this program will be explored in other creative ways during the summer of 2010.

Plan to come at 2 PM for a special afternoon of stories and insights introduced by the video and supplemented by the stories of your friends and neighbors.

President's Corner

by Jenny Stoner



Wherever I turn these days news commentators are talking of history. Lengthy articles discuss ways that our current economic hard times are like, or not like the Great Depression. Others compare our current wars to Vietnam and the daily comparisons of the president's record or approval ratings with earlier presidents are so frequent as to have lost meaning. And it is interesting to note that those making comparisons select different "facts" or perspectives on earlier events, to bring the reader/viewer/listener into agreement with their viewpoints.

How can we evaluate such perspectives? Many of us may try to remember what we heard or felt at the time mentioned or what we heard from others who were around then, but our memories often change over time. The best way to evaluate is to go to sources of the period in question and to try to understand the situation as perceived at that time.

How does our local historical society fit into this big picture? The careful documentation of what happened in one small town gives an invaluable insight to the larger society. For example, this past summer's exhibit on Greensboro Bend highlighted the dramatic impact of the railroad on commerce, which in turn determined the livelihood of farmers and shopkeepers alike. The understanding of how a few determined men changed the path of the railroad, bringing it to Greensboro Bend and thus creating a viable village, provides insights into the ripple effect of decisions being made today.

Our historical society is a place to find accurate resources and timely perspectives on what really happened "back then", and to help us understand how people did things during an earlier period.

Our annual exhibits highlight different aspects of life in our town, and each one provides perspective on this community in the particular historical context of Greensboro's past.

Remembrance

Members

Rosemary B. Fraser • Angela C. Kast
Felicity Akin • Anne Tobin Perry

Life Member

George Hasen



November 18 Status
Foundation poured

GHS Addition Sees the Light

Our expansion is underway! Those of you who are in town have seen the work in progress on the addition to the Greensboro Historical Society. For the rest of you, this photo bears witness to the construction beginnings. On November 2 we selected David Gendron Contracting and immediately, work began. Beautiful weather for the next three weeks means that all is progressing rapidly and within 10 days the foundation was poured and the new building beginning to take shape.

We have a great team working smoothly together, with Patrick Kane, architect, consulting as needed, David Gendron, the general contractor, Earl Kasper serving as clerk of the works, and a fine group of subcontractors who all appear at the appropriate time. The building committee of Clive Gray, Willie Smith, Tom Woodward, Nancy Hill, Earl Kasper and Jenny Stoner has been meeting regularly to monitor progress and make necessary decisions.

We are excited by the possibilities that the new building will provide a beautiful, simple space for residents and visitors alike to have access to the town's proud past in a way that enhances our understanding of today's challenges. Your help is making this possible. Thank you! There will be lots to see next summer.

The Rocking Horse: A Second Chance

A beautiful rocking horse was donated to GHS by summer resident Doug Kirtz to use for a raffle to benefit the society. Unfortunately with all the focus on other events relating to the new building, most people were not aware of it and few tickets were sold. So in the summer of 2010 we will send out a platoon of volunteers to give you all a chance to buy tickets. All those who bought tickets this summer will get a slight edge - we'll enter your tickets twice for the drawing next summer.

Thank You Volunteers

Martha Niemi extends a special "thank you" to the faithful volunteers who staffed our exhibit this summer, to the exhibit committee and to all who helped at our programs and special events.

A Last Visit With Lewis Hill

It was a sunny morning late summer 2008 when I trudged up the hill to Lewis and Nancy Hill's old white farmhouse in North Greensboro, camera and notebook in hand. My mission was to make a videotape of Lewis describing some of the many farm & household artifacts that generations of the Hill family had been collecting over the 200 years they have lived in these Northeast Kingdom hills.

Everyone had agreed that Lewis alone could best identify the various tools his family had used, explain their history, and describe their uses as well. Eventually Lewis agreed to the videotaping, making it clear that he didn't much like the idea of performing.

Several years ago, when Nancy and Lewis, two of the founders of the Greensboro Historical Society, offered their antique tool collection to the organization, it was clearly impossible to accept their gift since there was no proper storage room or display space for them in the present village building.

This troubling dilemma opened the eyes of GHS members who responded to the need for a larger place to preserve all of the town's history, a space where townspeople could read about their past and view artifacts once used by their ancestors. Thus began plans for a creating a safe, climate-controlled addition to the present old building, one that would do justice to and protect the Hill collection as well as other possible future donations of local family treasures.

So, my visit to Lewis that afternoon was one of the first steps in the preparations now set in motion by GHS for the eventual transfer of this heritage collection to the future addition to GHS's village home.

"These are things my family made and used around the farm and household over the years," Lewis told me. "Everything's homemade. One thing that impresses me is that if I can't afford something, I go without it. But they got busy and made it."

In one corner there was a large bowl for making bread carved out of a log, weathered wooden buckets of all sizes, substantial round & square barrels made of local ash, a "form" used to make snowshoes, lovely, round cheese boxes, oxen yokes, a boot jack, crude wooden shovels, and much more.

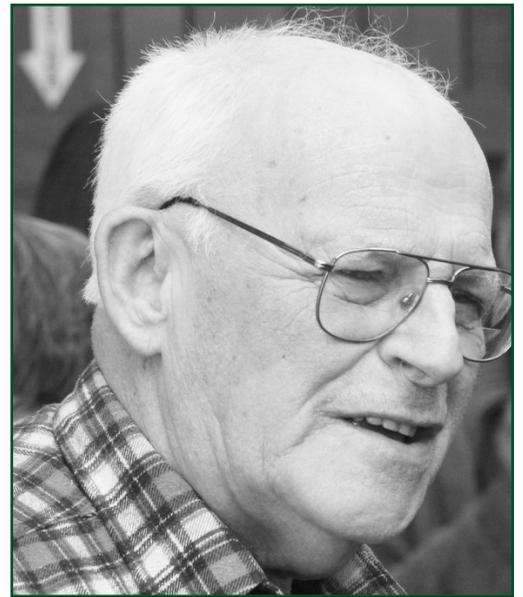
"I think they must have been busy every minute of the day," Lewis commented, "what with their saw and grain mills, building houses and barns, sugaring and butchering and clearing land and raising their own food. We have my great grandfather's account book and it makes me tired just reading it."

The Hill family came to Vermont from Saybrook, Connecticut in 1791, one family in a group of 65 proprietors. They were allotted three lots, two on Caspian "pond" as it was then known, and the one in North Greensboro where Aaron Hill, Lewis's great-grandfather started his homestead. Lewis grew up in that farmhouse which he and Nancy called home during their 39 years of marriage.

Strolling slowly around the room, Lewis would stop, pick up an item, and lovingly examine it...a torn piece of leather harness, a wooden maple sap bucket. Occasionally, he would pause longer at some piece that stirred a memory and reminisce.

Picking up a wooden cream separator with a long handle, he recounted, "As a kid I was supposed to turn this 70 times a minute. Of course I didn't know what a minute was. So I got yelled at a lot. I was either too fast or too slow – either there wouldn't be any cream or the milk would be mixed in with it!"

He held up an odd-looking tool fashioned from two sticks of wood tied together at one end with a leather strap. "This is a flail for thrashing wheat or flax. I remember being told that if you didn't behave at school you'd be thrashed. I could never figure out what that was all about." A typical wry Lewis Hill comment.



Lewis giving a thoughtful reply.

See LEWIS, continued on page 4

Lacey Smith Challenges Old Ideas

Humor and analysis marked the GHS July program by Lacey Smith. His talk on the American Revolution from the British Perspective, provided both a new view of history and some insightful questions concerning current US policies. Smith asserted that key factors in any war hinge on the ease of providing supplies to troops, communication, the ability to quickly move troops to locations of choice with the element of surprise, and an understanding of on-the-ground conditions. The British army, directed and supplied from England, was challenged in all these areas and further, used the outdated methods of 18th century warfare, and was unclear about their objectives. In contrast, the American troops had great flexibility and cared passionately about defeating the British. In addition the war was very expensive for England, financed by additional taxes and borrowing. The parallels that Professor Smith drew to US wars in both Vietnam and Iraq provided a powerful example of ways that a study of history can help increase our understanding of our present world and decisions we have to make.



Lacey Smith shares a British perspective on the American Revolution

LEWIS, continued from page 3

Some of the items in the barn revealed quite another aspect of the normally hard life farmers experienced during those early years — an artistic side. Quilting frames and small decorated travel trunks sat in one corner. The trunks had been carefully etched with mosaic patterns, series of dots and slashes burned into them with a hot metal tool. “There were blacksmiths in the family,” Lewis explained. “And I think they got quite artistic when they had extra time in the winter.”

Sugaring was an important source of income for a family. With no refrigeration here, the preferred end-product was maple sugar rather than syrup, sugar being easier to ship. “When I was a kid I loved to reach down into a barrel and come up with a handful of dark, sweet sugar. It was a wonderful treat,” Lewis remembered.

And so it went that afternoon. From object to object; tool to tool. And always Lewis’ entertaining comments and memories and Nancy’s helpful interjections.

As we brought the taping to a halt, I noted an assortment of glass bottles, a reminder that the Hill homestead functioned as a tavern in the early 19th century, a stop-off on the old road from Hardwick to Newport. A long, thin wooden sign from those days proclaims: “A. Hill Entertainment.” Looking up at the sign, an impish smile formed on Lewis’s face. “But I don’t think they had any go-go girls.”

Again, pure Lewis.

Ed Donlon

Cribs for Fishing

Have you ever wondered about a “sunken log cabin” at the bottom of the lake? This summer Ercel Harvey led a group of kayakers to the perfectly preserved “log cabin” of stacked logs cabled together on the bottom of the lake about 50’ from the Barr boathouse. Local legend has it that some farmers built such cribs (this one is 14’ square and 4’ high) both to hold the rocks cleared from their land and to enhance fishing. They would clear their land (the Young farm on Campbell’s corner which has since burned down), build the log crib and place huge rocks in it. Then when the lake froze, they would hitch up horses (or oxen) to the crib and take it out to the lake. The crib would stay there until spring and then of course it would sink. Bruce Young was said to have put a dead calf into one of the cribs to attract fish when he was a fishing guide. Elsa Barr Williams remembers a swimming platform on it in her childhood.

There is a similar crib near Spahr Cottage (now Anne Parke’s). The family story is that sometime before 1920 it was built on land then dragged on the ice to sink when the ice melted, as described above. The original swimming platform, diving board included, was replaced at least once, but in the 1950s the last platform fell victim to the ice. The crib remains about 4’ below the surface to delight children who can “stand in the water” and even without a dead calf, it is known as a fine fishing spot.

Finding the Funds

The campaign committee wants to express our appreciation to all who have donated and/or pledged to our building fund. Your heartening and energizing response has enabled us to begin construction on our new facility.

With thanks to a wide range of persons in the Greensboro community we are happy to report that we have so far received over 200 gifts. A great many were given in memory of Lewis Hill, one of the founders of the Historical Society and a motivating force for decades and many other gifts were in memory of Bill Carter. As of this writing, we have personal gifts and pledges exceeding \$102,500, added to the \$40,000 in generous pre-campaign contributions, including Olmstead gifts and bequests. These have been happily augmented by grants of \$50,000 from the Preservation Trust of Vermont, of \$18,500 from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and \$10,000 each from the Freeman Foundation and the Town of Greensboro. We are less than \$20,000 short of our goal of \$250,000 to complete both Phases 1 and 2 of our expansion.

We're close, but not quite there yet!

We realize that many of you who have not yet made a donation may be waiting until the end of 2009 to make your charitable gifts. With your help we could complete in 2010 not only Phase I (the exhibit space), but also Phase 2 (archival storage and heated work space). We hope you will consider donating to our building fund at this time to bring this dream to reality..

Tax-deductible gifts can be made by check, earmarked "Building fund," and mailed to Greensboro Historical Society, P.O. Box 151, Greensboro, VT 05841. If you would like a pledge form or have any questions, contact me at tmwjr@myfairpoint.net.

Tom Woodward

Cheese & Wine Support GHS

On August 2, the Greensboro Historical Society and Highland Lodge hosted a wine and cheese tasting party as a fund raiser for the new GHS building. Over fifty people came and enjoyed the selection of local wines and artisanal cheeses, all graciously donated by their producers.

Boyden Valley Winery from Cambridge, VT brought over a wonderful selection - Riverbend Red, Big Barn Red, Lake Champlain, Cow Tipper, Rhubarb and Cassis and Gold Leaf Dessert Wines - all of which are now offered on the Highland Lodge wine list.

Cow, goat and sheep dairies in Vermont make a great variety of cheeses. Greensboro's Jasper Hill brought its Bayley Hazen blue and Constant Bliss cheeses. Albany's Neil Urie, having welcomed triplets to his family just a week before, came with his 2 year old daughter Tressa and a sampling of his Bonnieview Sheep cheeses: Ewes Feta, Coomersdale, and Mossend Blue. Neil's former cheesemakers Marisa Mauro and Princess MacLean, now on their own in Albany at Ploughgate Creamery brought their Elmore, Hartwell and Willoughby cheeses. Cabot Creamery sent cheddars to sample and Barbara and Harvey Levin of Hope Farm Sheep Dairy in East Charleston dropped off their Tommed de Brebis, a smooth creamy cheese with a mottled edible rind. Judith Irving and Steve Reid of Fat Toad Farm in Brookfield set up a beautiful display including flavored Chèvres and goat milk caramel sauces. Jon Wright of Taylor Farm Cheese in Londonderry brought European-style raw milk Gouda cheeses. The cheesemakers who came a long way stayed at the Lodge and enjoyed a short getaway.

All of these cheeses can be bought directly from the cheesemakers or at neighborhood stores and can be sampled at local restaurants.

A Mystery: Where Was the Tent?

From *The History of Greensboro, the First Two Hundred Years* p. 44:

"For many years Louis and Esther Kesselman were the entire Jewish population of the town. Louis had migrated to New York from Russia in 1906 after arrest and incarceration for his involvement in the revolution in 1905. He spent some time in the sweatshops of New York City where he contracted tuberculosis. To improve his health, he traveled north to the clean, cold air of Greensboro in the 1920s and opened a tailor shop in the village.

Esther found her way to the United States from Austria-Hungary when she was three years old. At twelve, after her mother's death, Esther left school to work in a hair curler factory. At her New York City high school, the Downtown Ethical Culture Society, she discovered music and the theatre. Esther took care of Greensboro summer visitor Pearl Dufur, when Pearl was a child in a New York City nursery school, and parents Norman and Molly Dufur invited Esther to visit them at their Caspian Lake House hotel in Greensboro. There she met Louis."

The Kesselman's were fictionalized in Stegner's *Second Growth* which described a tent where Louis tailored and Esther lived with him when they were first married. The mystery: where in Greensboro was this tent located? Anyone with a reasonable story will win a copy of the above-mentioned Greensboro history. Send your answers to GHS, PO box 151, Greensboro, VT 05841

Greensboro Historical Society a Sponsor of Wallace Stegner Centennial

Highland Lodge September 25-27 was the site for the celebration of the centennial of the birth of Greensboro's Pulitzer Prize winning author Wallace Stegner. Renowned for his writing on conservation and the American West, Stegner was founder and director of the Stanford Creative Writing Program and recipient of the National Book Award for his works of fiction. Stegner, with his wife Mary and son Page, spent many summers in Greensboro where he frequently read from his books and which he portrayed in *Second Growth* and *Crossing to Safety*. Greensboro was the perfect setting to study and celebrate the life of a man who remains one of America's greatest writers.

During the weekend, Stegner's biographer, Philip Fradkin, and his literary agent, Carl Brandt, spoke about Stegner's literary world. Clive Gray led a discussion of the semi-autobiographical book *Crossing to Safety* in which Gray's parents and the Stegners are models for the protagonists and showed a home movie of Grays and Stegners on the mule-packing trip described in the book. Many friends and admirers attended the events: a tea and discussion, family-style breakfasts and dinners with friends and Stegner scholars exchanging ideas, a self guided tour of his Greensboro haunts, a PBS Stegner documentary, a walk up Barr Hill (Folsom Hill in *Crossing to Safety*) followed by a picnic on a perfect sunny day. Anne Hanson of Highland Lodge organized the weekend and moderated the events. The weekend was sponsored by the Greensboro Historical Society, Greensboro Free Library, Galaxy Bookshop and Highland Lodge.

GREENSBORO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Published Twice Yearly

P.O. Box 151

Greensboro, Vermont 05841

Trustees

*Tim Breen, Clive Gray, Linda Johnston, David Metraux
Martha Niemi, Tom Woodward*

Officers

*Jenny Stoner, President
Wilhelmina Smith, Vice President
Catherine Wilkinson, Secretary
Janet Long, Treasurer*

Committee Chairpersons

*Wilhelmina Smith, Acquisitions
Catherine Wilkinson, Program
Mary Ciaschini, Membership
Earl Kasper, Building
Martha Niemi, Volunteers
Elizabeth Metraux, Clive Gray and Tom Woodward,
Capital Campaign*

Newsletter Contributors

*Ed Donlon, Ercel Harvery, Nancy Hill,
Wilhelmina Smith, Jenny Stoner, Tom Woodward*