Topsfield Historical Society

Local Lore Newsletter

Collection

Local Lore

January, 2011
Issue 76

The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

WEB Address (http [illegible] org) Email: webmaster@topsfieldhistory.org
P.O. Box 323, Topsfield, Massachusetts 01983

The Deadliest War

King Phillips War was the deadliest war in American history in terms of the proportion of people killed to those in the general population. An estimated death toll of 800 and an estimated New England population of 52,000 English colonists equates to 1,538 deaths per 100,000 people; far more deadly per capita than the American Revolution (180 deaths per 100,000), the Civil War (857) or World War II (206). The toll was even greater on the Native Americans.

In November 1675, a call went out to the towns to ready recruits [illegible] major offensive against the Narragansett Indians and Topsfield sent a total of five men, the largest group of men impressed during the war. The men assigned to fill the town's quota were: "Willyom Peabody, Zachos Perkins, Robert Andros, Jack Burton and Zacviah Curtis". Overall Essex County towns sent a total of 357 men to this war and 52 were killed in action. Seven men from Topsfield served during this tumultuous time and two were killed in action. Rowley lost 7 and so did Ipswich. Every town in the county except one lost at least one man killed in battle. In Essex County, Andover was the town most exposed to Indian attack. It must have been devastating to these small towns to have such high losses.

By May 1676, hundreds of [illegible]en and children were [illegible]cated to the relative safety of the coastal towns and were in such dire need that a number of churches in Dublin, Ireland sent a ship with supplies to assist the war victims. Money also came from churches in England. Indian attacks had destroyed many towns or led to their abandonment during this nearly forgotten time of our country's history.

This information was largely obtained from Kyle Zelner's excellent book "Rabble In Arms" available in the Topsfield Library

Did You Know

Joseph F. Smith, President of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City, Utah was a member of the Topsfield Historical Society for 16 years until his death in 1918?

There is a monument in his memory and some of his ancestors in the old section of the Pine Grove Cemetery. There were five generations of Smiths who lived in Topsfield and their history goes back to at least 1674 when Robert Smith is documented as a land owner. In October, 1766 Captain Samuel Smith was Topsfield's representative to the General Court in regard to the matter of compensation to the Boston riot sufferers.

Smith, along with Enos Knight and John Gould were chosen delegates to the famous Ipswich Convention held on September 6 & 7, 1774 where resolutions were passed protesting the oppressive acts of Parliament. On October 11, 1774 Topsfield sent Smith to the Provincial Congress as their representative; clearly he was well thought of by the selectmen. The last of the five generations of Smiths to live in Topsfield was Joseph Smith's father at 22 Boardman Lane. He later moved to New Hampshire, then to Vermont and finally to New York State where his son founded his church.

Upcoming Events

Topsfield's Antique Homes and Their Residents
January 9, 3 PM
Bill Whiting

Northshore Highlights
January 30th, 3 PM
Jim McAllister

Kid's Corner

If you love school "snow days" declared because roads are clogged with snow, just imagine what it was like to live in the 1700s before there were plows, or even many roads! People could be cut off from town and from each other for weeks!

February and March 1717
"The Great Snow of 1717" blanketed New England in a series of four storms, leaving nearly four feet on the ground and drifts up to 25 feet high.

January 1772
"The Washington and Jefferson Snowstorm" is so named because it trapped both men at their homes with snow up to three feet deep throughout Maryland and Virginia.

December 1778
Named after the Revolutionary War troops stationed in Rhode Island, drifts were reported to be 15 feet high after this storm.

Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow…

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Local Connections to Arnold's Expedition to Quebec

Colonel Benedict Arnold led an 1100 man force of the Continental Army on an expedition from Cambridge, Massachusetts to the British Province of Quebec in September, 1775 as part of a two pronged invasion. The other part of the invasion force was led by Richard Montgomery invading Quebec from Lake Champlain. He was later killed during the invasion. This military operation had been sanctioned by General Washington and Arnold's force began as a march from Cambridge to Newburyport. The detachment camped overnight in what is now Danvers Square and a monument to that effect is now located at the intersection of Maple and Conant Streets. The force continued up what is now Route 1A to board seven ships to go up the Kennebec River in what is now Maine, portaging in leaky boats ruining gunpowder and food. This area is very swampy with many lakes and streams and the situation made worse by bad weather and poor maps which were woefully inaccurate, showing the trip to be about 180 miles when in reality it was nearer 350. There is some evidence that these maps were deliberately misdrawn by a loyalist. By the time Arnold reached Height of Land between the Kennebec and Chaudiere Rivers 1/3 of his men were lost. Descent of the fast moving Chaudiere led to the loss of more supplies enroute to the St. Lawrence River. On November 9th they arrived across the river from Quebec. Arnold was now down to 600 men; nevertheless he crossed the river on November 13 and reached the Plains of Abraham where he sent a negotiator with a white flag demanding surrender. The defending forces did not surrender and Arnold's men were forced to retreat, basically following the Lake Champlain route South taken earlier Northward by Montgomery. Arnold was later made a general in recognition of his heroic efforts during this mission.

Tradition has it that that a detachment of troops returning from Arnold's expedition camped on the lawn in front of the house at Topsfield's Witch Hill.

Topsfield History Resources

At a recent meeting, Bill Whiting reviewed an ambitious project underway to document Topsfield's houses and buildings and their residents' genealogical profiles, using digital technologies. This information will be available at the Town Library and over the Internet. Details on two of the resources referenced are:

MACRIS contains detailed information on 200 Topsfield properties, accessible at http://mhc-macris.net by selecting "Topsfield" then "Next" then "Building" then "Next". Properties are listed by street address. Several buildings may appear for a single address. The database can also be searched by street address or year constructed.

Visit http://www.wardmaps.com/viewasset.php?aid=202 to see detailed maps of Topsfield, showing every building and property owner as of 1910. To access this information go to "Select Topsfield Plate 01" for an index of Topsfield's maps. Zoom in and scroll to find the map number of the location you are interested in. Return to the first page and select that map number.

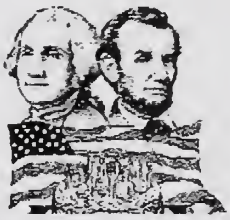
If you are interested in knowing more or want to participate in helping to build this exciting project, contact Bill at wwhiting@comcast.net.

Upcoming Events

The Beau Ideal of a Soldier: Salem's Zouave Civil War Militia
Ken Worthy
February 20, 3 PM

Annual Meeting (members only)
March 13, 3 PM

Kid's Corner



Eight presidents were born British subjects: Washington, J. Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, J. Q. Adams, Jackson, and W. Harrison.

Presidents Adams, Jefferson, and Monroe all died on the 4th of July; Coolidge was born on that day.

The tallest president was Lincoln at 6'4"; Madison, at 5'4", the shortest.

The most common religious affiliation among presidents has been Episcopalian, followed by Presbyterian.

Eight presidents never attended college: Washington, Jackson, Van Buren, Taylor, Fillmore, Lincoln, A. Johnson, and Cleveland. The college that has the most presidents as alumni (seven) is Harvard: J. Adams, J. Q. Adams, T. Roosevelt, F. Roosevelt, Rutherford B. Hayes, J. F. Kennedy, and George W. Bush.

The term "First Lady" was used first in 1849 when President Zachary Taylor called Dolley Madison "First Lady" at her state funeral.

http://www.littleknownfactsshow.com/presidents.html

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March, 2011
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Paul Revere's Other Ride

Every school child has heard of the "Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" but not many have heard of his other earlier ride which helped the colonists before the Revolution.

In 1774 A British ship, the HMS Cancaeux was heading for Portsmouth, New Hampshire to reinforce Fort William and Mary, because the fort had a large supply of ammunition and only six English soldiers defending it. An American pilot enticed the ship behind a shoal and kept her there long enough for the tide to go out and trap her. It was a spring high tide, the highest for several weeks and when the following high tide came in it was not high enough for the Cancaeux to get past the shoal. She remained trapped there for days, giving Paul Revere plenty of time to ride to Portsmouth and warn the colonists. They stormed the fort on December13, 1774 and captured muskets, cannons and one hundred barrels of gunpowder that eventually found their way to Americans who fought the Battle of Bunker Hill June 17, 1775.

Unlike Revere's midnight ride no one has written a poem about this ride; yet it played perhaps an equally important role in winning this country's independence.

Editor
Anne Barrett

Contributor
Norm Isler

Local Mill Sites

Farming was the chief occupation of the early settlers and continued until the last 75-100 years as industrialization increased dramatically. Corn was one of the principal crops and its grinding became an important industry. At first the people of Topsfield had to carry their corn or rye to a grist mill in Ipswich but the road was poor and they soon felt the need for their own mill. Francis Peabody was given the right to set up a grist mill in 1664 by the town and he built it on Pye Brook.

(Continued on back)

Another Arnold Connection

An astute reader of February's Local Lore column entitled "Local Connections to Arnold's Expedition to Quebec" observed that another local connection can be made, through Reverend Daniel Breck. Born in Boston in 1748 and graduated from Princeton in 1774 he was minister in Topsfield from 1779 to 1788. During the Revolutionary War he was a chaplain and accompanied General Richard Montgomery's army in the ill-fated campaign in Quebec where he ministered to the wounded and those stricken with small pox. Directly after his departure from the Topsfield Church he preached the first sermon in Marietta, Ohio on July 20, 1788. Marietta is a quintessential New England village transplanted into the midwest wilderness by stalwart Essex County settlers yearning for better soil as a prime motivation for their relocation. Reverend Breck went on to Hartland, Vermont and served as minister until his death on August 12, 1845 at the age of 97 years.

Upcoming Events

Annual Meeting (members only)
March 13, 3 PM

Kid's Corner

Clovers & Shamrocks

The term "shamrock" derives from the Irish word, seamrog, which translates as "little clover." Since there are many kinds of clovers -- and even more plants that can pass as clovers, there is no "real McCoy" that can claim to be the shamrock.

True clovers all have in common a three leaf structure. The number 3 is significant in the Christian religion, because of the doctrine of the Trinity. Irish legend has it that the missionary, Saint Patrick demonstrated the principle behind the Trinity using a shamrock, pointing to its three leaflets united by a common stalk.

Celtic dominance once extended across Ireland and much of Western Europe. It was the Druids who elevated four leaf clovers to the status of Celtic charms, allegedly potent against malevolent spirits. Their status as Celtic charms is the origin of the modern belief in their power to bestow good luck. However, since "true clovers" usually have three leaves, finding four leaves is extremely rare; the plants sold at your local florist that boast a profusion of four leaf sprays are not really clovers at all.

http://landscaping.about.com/cs/lawns/a/clover_lawns.htm

Local Mill Sites (continued)

In 1671 he was given permission to set up a saw mill on the same site. That site can still be seen just beyond the Northwest corner of Route 1 and the Ipswich Road intersection with its pond extending beyond present day North Street. This mill remained in the Peabody family for 164 years until 1820 when it was sold, staying in operation until1892.

In 1667 William Averill and Daniel Boardman were granted the right to build a dam on Mile Brook where a saw mill was erected around 1693-1695 by Nathaniel Averill. It was owned by the Averills until 1835 when it was sold to Porter Bradstreet. The building burned in 1891 but a dam remains on the site which is now owned by the Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary off Perkins Row.

Ephraim Dorman was allowed to dam Pye Brook before 1692 where he probably had a saw mill. The Dormans lived off Boardman Lane and the records show they received damages from flooding caused by Peabody's dam.

Another early sawmill was Porter's in the early 1700's. Its site was near the Danvers-Middleton-Topsfield line at the Southeast corner of the Porter farm using Nichols Brook as its power source. The actual site is not completely clear from the records and may well be on the West side of Route 95 or possibly covered over by that highway.

If you travel west on Lockwood Lane into Boxford you will pass the site of a saw mill built on Fish Brook by Samuel Symonds before 1700. This site is most likely the first in Boxford. A new mill was built here in 1860; a time when all local saw mills were doing a thriving business sawing ship timber and teams of oxen were busy hauling the timber to the Esses shipyards, a trip that took 1 ½ to 2 days.

All the old saw mills used an up and down frame saw which was six feet long and seven to eight inches long on a side. The saw was hung in a large oak frame which worked up and down as a log on a carriage advanced towards it. It sawed slowly but surely.

About 1738-1740, the Howletts built a grist mill on Howletts Brook, just off Camp Meeting Road slightly North of Ipswich Road. One of the Howlett millstones now serves as a doorstep at the Gould Barn This mill was also used later to saw wood in addition as grinding grains.

By 1869 Boston was the primary wool market for the country, basically because New England's rivers provided the required power which made it worth while to bring wool to the area for manufacture. Locally the manufacture of woolen goods began on the Ipswich River in Hamilton at the Willowdale dam. A large stone building was constructed to house the mill and a dwelling house for workers was erected. It was known as "Manning's Mills" from the name of the builder. In 1864 this factory produced 55,000 pairs of army and ribbed socks and other woolen goods such as blankets that were used by the Union Army in the Civil War. As time went on a village of cottages, several stores and a school were built in the vicinity of the mill. In 1864 the mill burned and was not rebuilt. What remains today are the foundation stones of the factory and the sluiceway leading from the dam to the factory, a silent tribute to the early pioneers of this area.

We thank Dow's History of Topsfield and the Boxford Document Center as the primary sources of this information

Local Lore

April, 2011
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The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

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Irish/English War Assistance

In May 1676 during King Phillip's War, hundreds of women and children were relocated to the relative safety of the coastal towns and were in such dire need that a number of churches in Dublin, Ireland sent a ship with supplies to assist the war victims. Money also came from churches in England. Indian attacks had destroyed many towns or led to their abandonment.

Seven men from Topsfield served during this tumultuous time and two were killed in action. In November 1675, a call went out to the towns to ready recruits for a major offensive against the Narragansett Indians and Topsfield sent a total of five men, the largest group of men impressed during the war. The men assigned to fill the town's quota were: "Williaom Peabody, Zachos Perkins, Robert Andros, Jack Burton and Zacviah Curtis". Overall Essex County towns sent a total of 357 men to this war and 52 were killed in action.

STRAY COW

Strayed from the Neck Pasture in Marblehead, October 16th, a small red cow, about 9 years old, has small crocked horns, her head rather darker than her body. Whoever has taken up or may find said cow, and will return her or give notice thereof to Mr. Moses Gould, at Topsfield, or to the subscriber, shall be suitably rewarded, and all necessary charges paid by Joseph Roundey.

Marblehead, Nov. 6.

Salem Gazette, Nov. 10, 1797.

Annual Meeting Notes

The Society's 117th annual meeting was held on Sunday, March 13th followed by a delicious potluck supper. The most important development at the meeting was the announcement by President Norm Isler that, after being in the long range plan for seven years, work will begin this Spring on the custodial dwelling unit in back of the Capen House.

The addition of this dwelling unit is one element of a three part Capen House Preservation Project. It has long been recognized that one of the major hazards to the house is the fact that the property is vacant, leaving it vulnerable to vandalism. The other two parts consist of adding a fire suppression system to work in conjunction with the existing fire detection system, and returning the house to its original 1683 configuration by eliminating the rear stairwell and chimney that will no longer be needed. Cost of this major project has been estimated at $382,636 with some of this amount coming from the Society's capital account, some from private foundations and some from the membership as well as the community.

There will be more information forthcoming as both the work and the fundraising proceeds. This project is the largest undertaking in the Society's history following the acquisition of the Capen House in 1913 and the Gould Barn's renovation in 1996.

Editor
Anne Barrett

Contributor
Norm Isler

Upcoming Events

Digging Up your Family Roots
April 15, 7:30 PM
Marcia Melnyk, Wendy Thatcher

Dinner at the White House
May 20, 7:30 PM
Judy Bernstein

Kid's Corner

While no one is certain, one popular theory on the origin of April Fool's Day is that when the western world switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, the new year celebrations changed from April 1 to January 1. Those who could be tricked into believing April 1 was still the proper day to celebrate the new year earned the title of April fools. To this end, French peasants would unexpectedly drop in on neighbors on that day in an effort to confuse them into thinking they were receiving a New Year's call.

In Scotland, an April fool is called an April "gowk" — Scottish for cuckoo, an emblem of simpletons. In England, a fool is called a gob, gawby or gobby. In France, the victim of a hoax is called a "poisson d'avril," an April fish. ("April fish" refers to a young fish, thus one easily caught.) The French delight in shouting "Poisson d'Avril!" in announcing their foolery.

http://www.snopes.com/holidays/aprilfools/origins.asp

Local Lore

May, 2011
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The Sub That Sank a Train

It was after 4 AM on July 18th, 1945 off the coast of Karafuto, Japan when Commander Eugene Fluckey peered through his periscope and saw a rail line running along the enemy coastline. The U.S.S. Barb had completed 11 war patrols before this one, four of them under his command and had scored direct torpedo hits on six enemy warships in Mamkwan Harbor in only 30 feet of water. The commander had received the Congressional Medal of Honor for this heroic patrol and should have turned over command to another pper after his four patrols but he managed to strike a deal with his Admiral to make one more trip. The rail line itself would not be a problem. A shore patrol could go ashore under cover of darkness to plant the explosives- one of the sub's 55 pound scuttling charges. As the commander and his officers thought about it they came up with the idea of blowing up not only the rail line but one of the frequent trains that shuttled supplies to the Japanese war machine. Thus the problem... how to detonate the charge at the moment the train passed without endangering the shore party. An exciting new idea came to them: instead of having a crewman on shore to trigger the explosives why not let the train blow itself up? By rigging a micro switch to complete the detonator circuit, the sagging of the rail nder the weight of the train would

(continued on back)

Editor
Anne Barrett

Contributor
Norm Isler

The following appeared in the Salem Gazette, written by Charles H. Holmes to advertise the sale of his property, now known as the Emerson Center on Topsfield Common.

For Sale

Whoever wants a country seat
Removed from summer's dust and heat,
With a wide common right between
The road and house in living green,
Shaded by stately ashen trees
And shut out from noxious breeze,
Let him leave the country road
And step across to my abode,
A view of which will here be seen
A photographic view I mean.
Terms easy to the man who'd buy,
At any rate one can but try.

C. H. Holmes
Topsfield, Mass.
May 25, 1885

In 1886 the Congregational Parish purchased it for a parsonage.

Dues are Due!

Please send them in ASAP!

Open Position

If you love flowers and herbs, we have the perfect job for you! Joyce Bergsten is retiring as head of the Priscilla Capen Herb Society and we need someone to take over the position. This is an interesting and fun activity that is crucial to the continuation of the herb garden. To learn more please contact Joyce at 978 887 8637.

Please won't you help?

Upcoming Events

Dinner at the White House
May 20, 7:30 PM
Judy Bernstein

Strawberry Festival
June 11, 10 AM to 4 PM

Kid's Corner

Lacrosse is the oldest sport in North America, dating back to the 1400s. In the 1600s Jesuit missionary Jean de Brebeuf saw the Hyron Indians playing it and was intrigued by the stick the Indians used, likening it to the "crosier" carried at religious ceremonies by a bishop. Thus, the name la crosse evolved, and this later became simply "lacrosse."

Indian lacrosse was a mass game and often teams were made up of one hundred to one thousand braves on each side. The goals were usually five-hundred yards to one-half mile apart. On occasion, the goals could be separated by several miles. Usually a score was recorded by hitting a designated rock or tree with a ball. Some tribes used goal posts six to nine feet apart, and the ball had to pass between them for a score.

Games lasted from sunrise to sundown stretching over the course of two or three days. Lacrosse toughened braves for actual combat. There were even times when games were played between two tribes to settle their differences.

www.laxhistory.com

The Sub That Sank a Train
(continued from front)

do the job. Now all that remained to do was go ashore and set up the charge. There was no shortage of volunteers; one criteria set by the Captain being no married men and another being half the men had to have been boy scouts. What was needed was some cloud cover to darken the moon and a pick and shovels to bury the charge. These tools were fabricated in the engine room For four days the saboteurs built the microswitch and watched the weather. At midnight on July 23rd the Barb crept within 950 yards of the shoreline. Slowly and quietly small boats were lowered to the water and the 8 saboteurs paddled ashore. 25 minutes later they were on the Japanese homeland. One man was assigned to examine a nearby water tower which turned out to be a watch tower... an occupied watch tower! Fortunately the sentry was sleeping and the crewman quietly withdrew and warned his raiding party.

Watching from the deck of the Barb Commander Fluckey watited for the flashlight signal from the beach announcing the departure of the shore party. He had skillfully and daringly guide the Barb within 600 yards of the beach with less than 6 feet of water beneath the sub's keel. The shore party's two boats were only halfway back when the sub's machine gunner yelled "Captain! A train coming up the tracks!" The Commander yelled through a megaphone "Paddle like the devil!" knowing full well they wouldn't reach the Barb before the train hit the micro switch. The darkness was shattered by a brilliant light and the roar of the explosion. Five minutes later the saboteurs were lifted to the deck by their exuberant comrades as the Barb moved at two knots towards water deep enough to allow it to submerge.

The story of the saboteurs from the U.S.S. Barb is one of those unique, little known stories of WWII. It becomes even more important when one realizes that the eight sailors conducted the ONLY WWII GROUND COMBAT OPERATION on the Japanese homeland.

Footnote: Commander Fluckey retired from the Navy as a Rear Admiral and was awarded four Navy Crosses in addition to his Medal of Honor. He had graduated from the Naval Academy in 1935 and lived to age 93, passing away in 2007.

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Topsfield During the Civil War

At a town meeting in 1861 the residents of Topsfield resolved to appropriate funds and recruit men for National Guard. Topsfield furnished 113 men for the war, which were six more than required. Five were commissioned officers. Most of the men enlisted gave their occupation as either farmers or shoemakers. The ladies of Topsfield worked heartily in the cause and forwarded to the army money, clothing and hospital supplies.

In April, 1861 the news of the firing on Fort Sumter reached town about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, a militia officer bringing it over the road from Salem, and three men, James Wilson, David Casey and Edward Otis Gould dropped their tools and started at once to the rendezvous at Salem. James Wilson was the only one of the three who had a uniform and proper equipment and was accepted on the first call.

A training camp named Camp Stanton was established at the Southeast corner of Washington Street and Lockwood Lane for training of locals, recruits in close order drill, firing of arms and other military disciplines. No trace of this camp exists today.

By the will of Dr. Justin Allen, M.D. former President of the Topsfield Historical Society, who died in 1908, $8,000 was given to the town "to erect a monument suitable to commemorate the lives of the citizens of Topsfield who enlisted in the U.S. Army in defense of the country in the Great Rebellion of 1861-1865". The committee formed to carry out this objective selected a design created by Mrs. Theo Ruggles Kitson entitled "The Wounded Color Sergeant". This bronze statute was dedicated in front of the Library on July 25, 1914. Sadly, this inspirational, privately commissioned work of art had, by the end of the 20th century, become badly tarnished, darkened by green mold and pollutants. It was in desperate need of conservation. The Topsfield Historical Society recognized the need and utilizing the remnant of funds left from Dr. Allen's original bequest, undertook a professional refurbishment of the memorial. It remains today a fitting and beautifully restored tribute to all those who represented Topsfield during the Civil War.

Editor
Anne Barrett

Contributor
Norm Isler

REMINDER

Please send your contribution in to the Preservation Project Capital Campaign in support of the Capen House dwelling unit construction and fire suppression system installation. We need you!

Thank You New Volunteers!

We are pleased to announce that Renee Pagnani will be taking over the Priscilla Capen Herb Society from retiring Joyce Bergsten and Nikki Larson will be maintaining the garden. We couldn't survive without volunteers! **Thank you!**

Upcoming Events

Strawberry Festival
June 11, 10 AM to 4 PM

Doll Tea
August 31, 2 to 4 PM

Kid's Corner

I LOVE ketchup, and as I was enjoying my passion the other day on some French fries, I wondered how this fabulous invention came to be.

The word ketchup is derived from the Chinese ke-tsiap, a pickled fish sauce. It made its way to Malaysia where it became kechap and ketjap in Indonesia.

Seventeenth century English sailors first discovered the delights of this Chinese condiment and brought it west. Ketchup was first mentioned in print around 1690.

The Chinese version is more akin to a soy or Worcestershire sauce. It gradually went through various changes, particularly with the addition of tomatoes in the 1700s. By the nineteenth century, ketchup was also known as tomato soy. Early tomato versions were much thinner in consistency.

F. & J. Heinz Company began selling tomato ketchup in 1876. By the end of the nineteenth century, tomato ketchup was the primary type of ketchup in the United States, and the decriptor of tomato was gradually dropped. *~Editor*

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September, 2011
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P.O. Box 323, Topsfield, Massachusetts 01983

Brigham Young's Topsfield Ancestry

Communicated by Charles Tapley

It is well known that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, descended from a Topsfield ancestor, his father having been born here on July 12, 1771. Brigham Young, the second President of the Mormon Church, could also claim a Topsfield ancestry, through his mother, Abigail Howe, a great-great granddaughter of Francis Peabody, whose home was located about a quarter of a mile from the Smith house*, so that the ancestors of these two leaders of the church were near neighbors. The line of descent of Brigham Young from the settler Francis Peabody is as follows, viz:

Lieut. Francis Peabody, had
Mary Peabody, who married John Death. They had
Hepzibah Death, who married David Howe. They had
Thankful Howe, who married Peter Howe. They had
Phineas Howe, who married Susannah Goddard. They had
Abigail Howe, who married John Young. They had
Brigham Young.

This information comes from Vol. XXX-1933 of the Society's Historical Collections.

* The Smith house was located at 22 Boardman Lane while Francis Peabody's dwelling was near his mill which is close to what is now the intersection of Ipswich Road and Route One.

Editor
Anne Barrett

Contributor
Norm Isler

ifarm

On Sunday, July 10, nearly 150 people attended an open farm day in Boxford. The event took place at ifarm, a rare, intact Federal Era farmstead. The day included tours of restored structures, local beverages from Mercury Brewing and a discussion by Tom Hubka. The event was organized and sponsored in part by Ben Nutter of Topsfield and Arron Sturgis of Berwick, Maine. Ben and Arron have been collaborating over the past two years with ifarm owner and Boxford resident Chris Barensfeld. Her goal is to reestablish a 19th century working farmstead.

In the restored dairy barn, complete with barn swallows, Tom Hubka, author of "Big House, Little House, Back House Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England", spoke about the connected farm-house architecture that is unique to a limited region in northern New England.

Attendees were asked to make a donation to either the Topsfield or Boxford Historical Societies. Thanks to their generosity, $700 was raised.

~Ben Nutter

Parson Capen House Goes Public

WGBH's This Old House program recently came to the Capen House, where a short segment was filmed for an October/November show, hosted by Norm Abram. The series features an old 1720 Bedford, MA property that is being remodeled, and the Society was asked to be part of the reconstruction research, offering key information on Early Period/Early Georgian architecture that will be highlighted in the show. *~Bill Whiting*

Upcoming Events

Facebook, Twitter and Topsfield Post Cards of the Last Century
Joe Iarocci
September 16, 7:30 PM

Lake Winnepesaukee Boat Tour and Lunch, Wolfeboro, NH
September 20, Departs 8 AM

1940s Radio Show: Amelia Earhart
October 14, 7:30 PM

REMINDER

Please send your contribution in to the Preservation Project Capital Campaign in support of the Capen House dwelling unit construction and fire suppression system installation. Your contribution is still needed!!!

Kid's Corner

The birthdate of football in the U.S. is generally regarded as November 6, 1869, when teams from Rutgers and Princeton Universities met for the first intercollegiate football game. In early games, there were 20 players to a team and football still more closely resembled rugby than modern football. Concern over the increasing brutality of the game led to its ban by some colleges. Nearly 180 serious injuries and 18 deaths had been reported from the brutal mass plays that had become common practice. So in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt called upon Harvard, Princeton, and Yale to save the sport from demise. Subsequently, many reforms and rule changes helped save the future of football. *www.hornetfootball.org*

Local Lore

November, 2011
Issue 83

The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

WEB Address (http://www.topsfieldhistory.org) Email: webmaster@topsfieldhistory.org
P.O. Box 323, Topsfield, Massachusetts 01983

History of Hood's Pond

This beautiful body of water lies about 2/3 in Ipswich and 1/3 in Topsfield. In the 1600's it was known as Baker's Pond and later Pritchards Pond. It is the source of water flow into Pye brook where Topsfield's first mill used to grind grist. At town meeting on March 4, 1664 residents voted to give Lieut. Francis Peabody liberty to set up a grist mill and to flow so much of the town's water as needed The pond covers about 70 acres and is 200 rods in length (one rod equals 16 ½ feet) and has various widths. Its depth varies to 20 feet (now 17 feet in 2010). Its only inlet is a small stream at its eastern end its outlet is at the western end near the house of Salmon D. Wood where four generations of Hoods lived- which is likely where the pond's current name comes from. Near this residence is an excellent spring issuing clear sparkling cold water forming a rivulet which, after running a few rods, flows into the pond outlet which then flows until at length it divides into two streams, each of which have enough water for mills before their junctions with the Ipswich River. (Note: These two streams are Pye and Howlett brooks both of which had mills).

Pickerel and perch are the most popular kinds of fish taken from these waters with an occasional pickerel over 5 pounds. In August 1879 the Topsfield Fish Committee issued rules and regulations which

continued on back

Editor: Anne Barrett
Contributor: Norm Isler

Capen House Preservation Project

A milestone was met on Thursday, September 22 with the start of the custodial dwelling unit framing. The site and driveway had been final graded to facilitate delivery of the first major lumber delivery on September 19. All underground utility trenches have been dug, six conduits (2 power, 2 telephone and 2 security) and one water line were laid and the trenches refilled with the exception of the gas line which is awaiting the gas company. The basement was finished several weeks ago including insulation, water proofing, and stucco on that portion above ground.

Because of ledge encountered during foundation excavation, as a precautionary measure a layer of crushed stone was laid down before pouring the concrete floor and a ventilation pipe installed leading underneath the basement floor to facilitate ventilating the area in case of any radon gas. Ledge was again encountered while laying the 4 inch water main for the sprinkler system which required jackhammering by hand as it was felt to be too close to the fragile Capen House to use the backhoe's large jack hammer. **(continued on back)**

Our Sympathy

We are saddened to report the loss of Jack Reid, husband of long time volunteer Carol. Jack passed away in September. Carol, as co-secretary, issues our newsletters and is a dedicated member. Donations in Jack's memory can be made to Hospice of the North Shore & Greater Boston, 75 Sylvan St. Suite B-102, Danvers, MA 01923.

Upcoming Events

Short Skirts, Oh My!
Evolution of the Women's Movement
Anne Barrett
November 18th, 7:30 PM

Thanksgiving Open House
Costumed Interpreters, Treats
Thanksgiving, 10 AM – 12 PM

Kid's Corner

by Hannah Barrett

Many people look at owls as beautiful insect eating birds that can spin their heads around in a complete rotation, but they were not always looked upon this way. The owl is a popular Halloween image. In Medieval Europe, owls were thought to be witches, and to hear an owl's call meant someone was about to die. In ancient Greece, Owls were a favorite creature of Athena; they were looked at as holy, and were encouraged to live in Greek temples. Years later, from the Roman perspective, Owls were looked at as evil creatures from the underworld. People believed that witches would transform into owls and fly through the darkness. **So be on the lookout on Halloween night!**

Winnipesaukee Trip

Tuesday, September 20th was an overcast day but it did not dampen the enthusiasm of the 46 individuals who made the one day trip to the lake and the town of Wolfboro "The Oldest Summer Resort in America". A narrated tour aboard the Winnipesaukee Belle was followed by a bountiful lunch at the historic Wolfeboro Tavern. This was the first Society field trip in several years and, based upon the response, there may be more trips.

Capen Project *(continued from front)*

The sprinkler system installation is about 50% complete with care being taken to minimize its appearance. Floor holes that were left when the steam heating system was removed years ago are being utilized for the system risers. After the distribution piping is installed the control unit will be assembled in the dwelling unit basement and connected to the 4 inch water main.

Although not part of the preservation project, the two Capen bulkhead doors in poor condition were rebuilt as a maintenance task by volunteers during the Saturday, September 17 work day. Another task that will be done by volunteers- this time the Cub Scouts- is the rebuilding of the Herb Garden fence. The existing fence is in poor condition and will be totally replaced under the direction of Director Bill Whiting.

As of September 26th our fund raising stood at $117,330 with the latest gift coming from the Priscilla Capen Herb Society. The rejection of our grant applications by three major bank charitable foundations - TDBank, The Institution for Savings and Danversbank - has been a major disappointment. It has been speculated that our large net worth, built up in anticipation of this project, may have played a role in the rejections. The funds we have received thus far have all come from our members, the community at large and local businesses **Please send in your tax deductible contribution today!**

History of Hood's Pond *(continued from front)*

defined the fishing season from August 1st to March 1st and limited the catch to ten pounds or five hours of fishing time, whichever came first. . Only a single hook and line could be used and the fish could not be sold.

In Summer this pond was a popular resort of young people for purposes of bathing and fishing. It also had an abundance of white pond lilies. In July 2010 a population of water chestnut (trapa natans) was rediscovered growing in the pond. This invasive plant from China was the second known in the Ipswich watershed and was pulled up by hand for the second year in a row. It will take a few more years to complete this restoration effort.

In Winter the pond's surface is generally frozen smooth and having no large springs within its borders ice becomes solid thus rendering it an excellent place for ice skating. Ice fishing for pickerel is also popular. The ice used to freeze 14 to18 inches thick and considerable quantities were taken for Summer use. When the Danvers and Georgetown Railroad was being planned around 1850 the original intention was to have it pass close by the pond so that harvested ice could be shipped by rail; however the route was changed away from the pond much to the dismay of the Topsfield stockholders. In the Fall large quantities of geese and ducks light in the pond on their migratory routes.

Two known fatalities occurred on these waters prior to1869. One was a woman who was fishing in a leaky boat, her mind was apparently so intent on her good luck in taking fish that she neglected to bail the water out until it was too late and it sank carrying her with it. The other was a man named Perley from Boxford who was also fishing from a boat with a companion named Chapman when by accident it was upset. Perley could swim but Chapman could not. After a hard struggle Perley succeeded in getting Chapman upon the boat which lay on the water bottom up. He then told Chapman to remain there quietly until he could swim ashore and obtain a raft with which he would come out and take him ashore. Perley then started to swim ashore with heavy boots and an overcoat but his feet became entangled with his fishing line and within a few rods from shore he became exhausted. One of the Hood family, seeing the danger he was in, rushed into the water as far as he dared, hoping to encourage and stimulate him not to give up but to persevere a little farther to where his feet would touch bottom but Perley's strength was gone, he could not rally and, almost within reach of help, he perished.

The pond now has a private beach and offers swimming lessons from ages 4 to Junior Lifesaving. Membership is available to all Topsfield residents and non-residents as well.

Local Lore

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Fair Topsfield

Still are the hills of Topsfield fair,
Her valleys rich in beauty rare
As when my childish feet first trod
Her varied ways and knew each sod!

Since then the world I've journeyed 'round
And joyously my pulses bound
As glistening spire and peaceful farms
Smile from the hills' encircling arms

And though before my yearning eyes
Regretfully the bright day dies
Yet as the glow fades from the hills
A calmer light the valley fills,

So sweet in memory shall abide
The comfort of the eventide
O early home forever dear
Blessed the fate that bought me here!

---- Nehemiah Cleveland, 1875

Remember...
...to send in your tax deductible donation to the Capen House Preservation fund before the end of the year. We need your help!

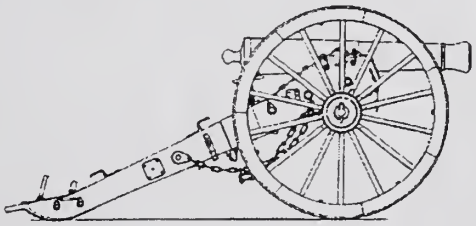
Editor
Anne Barrett

Contributors
Norm Isler
Hannah Barrett

Towne Family Historic Marker

In September a sign was unveiled at the corner of South Main Street and Salem Road commemorating the location of the Towne Family Homestead. The event was sponsored by the Towne Family Association and the Topsfield Main Street Foundation. The society helped with the sign wording which provides a brief history of the early Towne settlers.

Local Civil War Facts



31 men from Topsfield died from wounds, disease or starvation related to the Civil War. This was at a time when the town's population was only about 1290, so it must have had a profound effect on the town during and after the war.

Private Michael R. Glispin died in Alexandria, VA on July 22, 1865 at age 18 and although he lived in South Groveland he enlisted in Topsfield's quota. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery and is believed to be the only soldier from Topsfield who is buried there.

Ladies of Topsfield collected about $500.00, clothing and medical supplies for the Grand Army of the Republic.

Happy Holidays & Happy New Year!

Upcoming Events

Holiday Party
(members only)
December 11th, 3 PM

History of Pleasure Island
January 15th, 3 PM

Kid's Corner
by Hannah Barrett

If you celebrate Christmas you are probably pretty used to having a Christmas tree every year, with its glowing lights, the many ornaments that each have a different memory behind them, and the sparkling star on top. But if you think about it, getting a whole tree from outside, putting it in your living room and covering it with various decorations is kind of an odd thought. So how did this Christmas tradition come to be? Well, about one thousand years ago in Germany St. Boniface, a man who converted the Germans to Christianity, is said to have once come across a group of Pagans (people with no religion, or worship plants) They were gathered around an oak tree worshiping it. In anger St. Boniface cut down the oak tree. And from where the oak tree once stood grew a pine tree. St. Boniface took this as a sign of the Christian faith. But it was not until the 16th century that pine trees were brought indoors for the celebration of Christmas. I can't wait to see the glimmer of lights and ornaments on Christmas trees this year! Happy Holidays!