



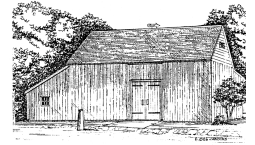
Local Lore

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Issue 16

The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

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Project Grant Awarded

The Topsfield Historical Society has been awarded a 2004 Essex National Heritage Commission Partnership Grant in the amount of \$1,500 to support the Topsfield Historical Records Project. Our intent is to identify the various repositories of historical documents pertaining to the Town of Topsfield and to create a computer-based resource to help people to locate these documents. We are in the process of cataloging material in the Historical Society, town Library and Town Hall. We also expect to include material in the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum. An archives consultant has been hired to conduct a number of surveys that should begin this fall. Volunteers are working to update our records in preparation for the consultant's work.

We are using a software product called PastPerfect that is designed to help museums, libraries and historical societies manage their collections. This product allows us to create a catalog of documents that can be searched from a number of perspectives. We can also attach scanned images. The product allows for the publication of document images on the Internet.

Following surveys, there will be a need for volunteers to help implement the recommendations. Contact Bill Whiting at (978) 887-2283 or wwhiting@comcast.net if you would like to become involved.

Capen House Restoration Update

The structural repairs and chimney replacement have been completed, the plumbing and heating systems removed and the electrical system brought up to code. Major tasks remaining include site drainage and basement moisture control improvements, selective window frame replacement and clapboard siding replacement.

Mystery Item Identified

While cleaning out the Capen House's left basement, an item of undetermined use and origin was found. It consisted of a very heavy hammer on a pivot with a return spring, all mounted on a cast iron frame about 30" high. It was put on display during the Strawberry Festival with viewers invited to guess what it was. Two older members of the community identified it as a primitive striking mechanism for the Revere bell mounted in the Congregational Church steeple. It would have been actuated by pulling on a long rope which went around a large wooden pulley also found. Why its use was discontinued and how it found its way to the basement is not clear, but at least now we know what it is.

Strawberry Festival a Success!

Nearly 100 volunteers gave their time, energy, trucks and talent to make it all happen on June 12th. The crafts from the 101 vendors were all great, the weather was superb, the strawberry shortcake delicious (all 2,000 of them) and Kathie Tromblay's ponies provided a picturesque foreground to the Gould Barn and the quilt show inside. It was a scene that Norman Rockwell might have painted. Music was provided by the Just Friends band and Sergei Novikov with his keyboard, while the Society's own Bill Flagg played the piano. Started 36 years ago as a fundraiser for the Society, the festival has grown into a town-wide event with 30 other non-profit organizations participating. To make this all happen takes a considerable amount of organization and planning, which would not be possible without the support of so many. My thanks to you all, too many to name. Know that your support is appreciated. *Norm Isler*

Contributors	Editor/Designer
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Upcoming Events

Herb Society Tea
July 28th, 2-4 PM

Herb Society Doll Tea
August 25th, 2-4 PM

Women in Medicine
September 10th, 7:30

Bus Trip to John Adams Home
September 18th, 9:30

Kids' Corner



People who had phones in their homes in the early 1900's seldom talked on them. Servants took messages and called back with a reply. In European households telephones were hidden. People installed them under stairways or covered them up.

Many people disliked telephones. Some had trouble hearing and couldn't understand what the other person was saying. In those days, voices were garbled and there was often a lot of static on the line.

Early telephones were hard to use. You held the receiver in your hand, and spoke into the transmitter on the wall. To call the operator, you turned a handle on the phone, which caused a light to come on at the local telephone exchange. An operator handled every call. You usually knew her by her first name (one Topsfield operator was named Belle Dingle). She would connect you to your desired party.

Many people had telephones in their homes by 1940. There were about four telephones for every one hundred homes. *Excerpted from Suite101.com*