

Conway Historical Society

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The President's Corner

Sometimes we have too much of a good thing. Right now we can clearly say that we've had enough snow for this season. Over 100" of snow has fallen over the Conway area since October. Skiers and folks who snowshoe like it for sure. But more snow is likely on the way before it all goes away.

Likewise, at the Eastman Lord House, we have too many artifacts. In the early days of our Society, David Emerson (bless his soul!!) accepted everything that was offered to him for "safe-keeping". Over the years we have continued to collect artifacts of significance to Conway, and other items that may or may not have relevance to Conway's history.

A few years ago Bob Cottrell, our Curator, indicated that our accessioning policy needed to be reviewed for relevance to today's needs. Over the last year or so Judy, our administrative assistant, and Jane, our secretary, were assigned the task of helping Bob accession all of the items in our collection on our computer system. That is a formidable task, but in the process we found 3 x 5 cards with lots of information on them relating to items in our collection. What this work tells us now is that at least some of the items we have collected over the years do not have relevance to Conway's history. Consequently, we need to "de-accession" a number of items in order to proceed with our mission of preserving what is relevant to Conway.

We have, for example, assigned Brian Wiggin, our vice-president and residing historian, the task of selling some non-Conway relevant books. So far we have generated over \$500 that we can now devote to repairs at the ELH (more on that later). We also have a partial collection of Kennett High School yearbooks. Books about Conway would be items that we would preserve, but the Conway Library has KHS yearbooks too, and they are also digitized for those folks who browse the

Web. It is a small start, but we've decided to de-accession the yearbooks. Yearbooks are a big part of our early memories, so we've decided to offer those books to our members first. If you are interested in purchasing a yearbook you can find a list of available books on page 2. Remember too that any income generated by these sales goes back to supporting our mission. Likewise with a number of paintings we have catalogued, but you can read more about that later in this newsletter.

A couple of years ago we were encouraged to do some upgrades to the Eastman Lord House. De-cluttering was one task, but other requirements were to upgrade our security system to include fire detection, an addition of two fire exits at the rear of the building, and constructing a firebreak
Continued on Page 2

Upcoming Programs

April 9

Fryeburg Historical Society's Traveling Trunk
Presented by June O'Donal

May 14

Moved and Seconded
Presented by Rebecca Rule
Sponsored by New Hampshire Humanities

June 11

Hidden History: Busting the Puritan Myth
Presented by Olga Morrill

Save the dates

Conway Historical Society monthly program is the second Tuesday of each month
Meetings and presentations begin at 7pm and are open to the public. These are held at the Conway Congregational Church (the brown church). Parking is available at Salyards.

The President's Corner (Continued from Page 1)

between the main house and the addition. Your Board (mostly through the efforts of Treasurer Gary MacDonald) has secured partial funding through a grant from the Goldberg Foundation for the fire detection upgrade, and that work will be done by Pope Security later this spring. This is Phase 1 of our building upgrade process. Phase 2 of the work will include the internal wall construction and the addition of the fire escapes. We are now working on a financial plan that will support that effort.

Over at the Salyards, The Robert Frost Public Charter School is settled in quite nicely. Outside of some troubling water leaks during the February thaw, things are going well there. We are hoping that when (eventually!) the Main Street reconstruction takes place the drainage off the road will be significantly improved and our water issues will go away. On the "upside" as it were, we also need to replace the roof on the Salyards. A small leak on the west roof alerted us to the problem and we've contracted with Addison-Mason to replace the shingles after school is out. Best guess is that the asphalt shingles are about 30 years old and are at the end of their lifetime.

We've lined up some interesting programs for the summer season which begins on April 9th. This year our programs will take place next door at the Brown Church, except for the August Picnic. We will maintain our second Tuesday of the month meeting night at 7PM as in the past. We hope to see you there!

Moved and Seconded: Town Meeting in New Hampshire

Drawing on research from her book, *Moved and Seconded: Town Meeting in New Hampshire, the Present, the Past, and the Future*, Rebecca Rule regales audiences with stories of the rituals, traditions, and history of town meeting, including the perennial characters, the literature, the humor, and the wisdom of this uniquely New England institution.

Hidden History: Busting the Puritan Myth

Plymouth Rock and the Puritan landing in 1620 are an integral part of American history, but the century and a half between that event and the Revolution of 1775 is largely a mystery. Few people know of the shocking events that occurred in 17th Century New England, as they have been omitted from the basic curriculum taught in primary and secondary schools. Hidden History explains why.

Olga Morrill retired after 24 years at the Conway Public Library as program coordinator for adults and children. She spent nearly five years researching the historical period from 1623-1663 for her first book *Vagabond Quakers: Northern Colonies* published in 2017 (available on Amazon in trade paperback and Kindle formats). Although the book is historical fiction, it is based on actual occurrences involving real people who lived in the seacoast towns of New Hampshire, which were part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony at the time. The book reveals the remarkable brutality inflicted on Quakers by the Puritan authorities.

Why did the Puritans react so violently to the Religious Society of Friends? What was colonial life like for the first generation of American-born settlers? How did the Puritans govern? Who were the original proponents of religious toleration and equality on American soil?

Author Olga Morrill will answer these questions among others at the Conway Historical Society Meeting at the Brown Church on June 11th at 7:00pm. Questions are encouraged throughout the discussion. For more detail about the book and the research, including reviews, visuals, awards, and recommended reading, visit the blog at www.vagabondquakers.wordpress.com

Yearbooks for Sale

The following Kennett High School yearbooks are for sale at \$20 each:

1963	1966	1969	1973
1964	1967	1970	1974
1965	1968	1971	1975

If you wish to purchase one of these, please contact Jane Rancourt at 447-2720.

Folk Art for Sale

Unlike the yearbooks, the folk art paintings shown below are some of the items we will be selling. We have not found how they relate to Conway. If you know of any relevance to our town, we would be appreciative of any input. As always, any income generated goes back into preservation of our collections. They will be on display at the Conway Public Library in May. If interested please contact Jane Rancourt at 447-2720. We will have a more complete listing on our website later this spring.



The Bridges at "Chataque"

Beginning on this page and continuing to the next page is a program presented by Janet Hounsell in June 1990 about the Bridges at "Chataque":

Welcome! We welcome you to "Rally 'Round the Swift River Covered Bridge". We hope that those of you who are registered voters will cast your votes on July 10th in favor of restoring this historic structure for pedestrian use and as a monument to times and craftsmanship of ages past. It would cost us, as taxpayers, \$25,000 to merely safely remove the bridge, and an estimated \$50,000 to shore it up and preserve it for pedestrian use. Donations from the private sector, which will reduce the bite on the property taxpayers, are coming in daily. If you cannot vote, please give what you can to help preserve the Swift River Covered Bridge for future generations. Many small donations add up!

As We Were

A time-yellowed 1937 newspaper clipping reminds us that Conway boasted of three covered bridges in that year. Frank Broughton, son of one bridge builder and grandson of another, was still getting invitations from all over the country to oversee bridge repairs. It was only his rheumatism that led him to decline to journey to Oregon to superintend the construction of a New England-type bridge.

Now There are Two

In 1975, the Smith-Eastman Covered Bridge spanning the Saco River at Redstone was destroyed by arson. Built in 1845, it was the first known Paddleford-type and the longest on the Saco River in the state. Back in 1935, Frank Broughton was hired to oversee

repairs to the Smith-Eastman Bridge. People were well pleased with the result. Not only did Broughton return to the town coffers \$400 of the 4,000 allotted for the work, but he predicted, "The bridge will serve another 100 years or more." Alas, history was to dispute him.

State Saved One

Ceremonies in early May of 1989 marked the completion of the State of New Hampshire's Saco River Covered Bridge restoration - just a few dozen feet downriver from here. The task took many months, during which time the bridge was very nearly rebuilt under the supervision of Stephen Canton, bridge construction superintendent of the Bureau of Bridge Maintenance, New Hampshire Department of Transportation. The project replaced some two thirds of the lower portion of the 240-foot-long, two-sided structure. Incidentally, the Saco Covered Bridge is one of a very few in the Granite State with two walkways.

Traditional construction techniques were employed when practical; wooden pegs and trunnels were employed, for example, and some heavy timbers were handsawn to allow for custom fitting of the splices. It seems no two pieces of that historical bridge were of the same dimension! The State had budgeted \$400,000 for the project, but final costs were close to \$500,000. Old-timers ruefully recalled that bridge builder Charles Broughton and his son, Frank, had constructed the bridge in 1890 (after fire wiped out its predecessor) for less than four thousand dollars!

Swift River Covered Bridge History

A covered bridge here early on gave much needed access to the north via the west side, so called. Commerce ran smoothly until the spring of 1869. Then heavy rains swelled the Swift River to an alarming level. The raging freshet lifted the Swift River Bridge from its foundations, turned it around, and sent it thundering downstream into the Saco River Covered Bridge, knocking it too off its moorings! Both damaged structures plummeted along the swift waters for about two miles before they broke up, coming to a sorry rest in an eddy.

New lumber went into the replacement bridge over the Saco River which was to stand until 1890 when a fire at the nearby chair factory spread, destroying it.

As a typical Yankee measure of thrift, much salvaged timber from the two bridge wrecks was used along with new lumber in the building of a "new" Swift River Covered Bridge. Jacob Berry and his son (also a Jacob) were the craftsmen who erected it. For years the route through the Swift River span gave access to the West Side Road leading to villages and neighborhoods comprising the towns of Conway and Bartlett.

The bridge is now 121 years old. Years ago, it was "put out to pasture," a new steel bridge having been erected to replace it close by. And in time, the old covered bridge was even barred to pedestrians. It was feared that the bridge might collapse and the town find itself liable.

Chataque?

Chataque is one of several names the village of Conway, Township of Conway, has been given over the years. Between this venerable Swift River span and the Saco Covered Bridge so close by, the waters of the Swift and the Saco unite. The Indian word, Chataque, means "meeting of the waters."

Highlights of the New Hampshire Covered Bridges

The state's shortest is the 36 foot-long Drewsville Bridge over Great Brooks in Langdon, and its longest is the Cornish-Windsor (Vermont) Bridge, at 460 feet in length.

Conway's newly restored Saco River Covered Bridge is one of three in the state boasting of two sidewalks. The Swanzey-West Swanzey Bridge, 155 feet long, was designed in 1832 with two walkways, but now has only one. New England College at Henniker has the state's "youngest" covered bridge. A 150 foot-long single span, it links the banks of the Contoocook River. Milton S. and his son, Arnold Graton built the Town lattice-style bridge in 1972 at a cost of \$80,000. And the oldest authenticated covered bridge in the Granite State is at Haverhill. Called the Bath Bridge, it's a two span, 278 feet in length, which was erected in 1827 across the Ammonoosuc River to Woodsville. It was repaired in 1973 at a cost of \$40,000.

The covered bridge at Clark's Trading Post (part of the resort's short steam railway line and museum) was imported! It was built
Continued on Page 5

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323-3359

Lawn and Garden Committee

Open

Newsletter - Judy Williams

447-5551

Programs

Open

Membership

Jane Rancourt
447-2720

Continued from Page 4
at Barre, Vermont, then dismantled
and re-erected over the Pemigewasset
River. It's a Howe truss railroad
bridge, weighing 75 tons.

Among near legendary bridge builders
of old, our favorite is James Tasker of
Claremont. In the 1880's he built,
among others, the Cornish-Windsor
Bridge in 1866 (named a National
Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by
the American Society of Civil Engineers
in 1973); the 85 foot-long Plainfield-
Meriden bridge (for \$300!), and the 90
foot-long Cornish-Blow-Me-Down
Bridge. A rural construction genius,
Tasker could neither read nor write!

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Our First Winter

Keep up my flagging spirits, Lord
I don't think I can take it.
I doubt if Spring will ever come
And I wonder if I'll make it.

We haven't seen bare ground
since Fall,
The snow keeps getting higher,
And if I said I liked it, Lord,
You know I'd be a liar.

I long to see the leaves on trees
And watch some green things
growing.
The end of March is now in sight,
And still it keeps on snowing.

And so, dear Lord, please hurry
up,
Let's have a change of season!
To have the winter last this long,
Is just beyond all reason!

A poem by Ada Fuge
CHS Past President, 1969

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Cataloging Project

As of the end of 2018, we have
finished our large project of entering
all the index cards into the Past
Perfect program that represent items
that have been donated. This
program keeps track of all our
accessions and items on loan.

There are currently over 3300
catalogued items, although some of
these may be duplicates.

Work will continue by taking pictures
of all our items and tying them into
the catalog.

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CHS Newsletter

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A significant percentage of our income is generated through membership.
Please pass your newsletter along to a friend when you are finished with it. Recycle and help the society to grow.
Membership Dues are payable in October and run through December of the following year.

CHS Membership Dues are \$20 per person per year

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Phone: 603-447-5551

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