

MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 41, No. 2

April 2005

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

It's been a long winter and the snow, ice and freezing temperatures have over-stayed their welcome. Even as I write this, more snow is predicted, but I've seen the first robin, giving me hope that spring will soon be here.

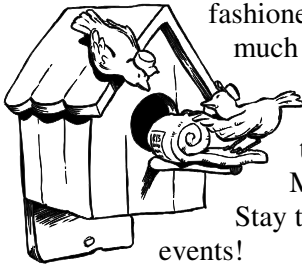
First, let me thank those members who generously answered our call for donations to support of our publishing efforts. In the near future, the Historical Society will be publishing two important monographs. First up is the new revised edition of *Listen to the Echoes*, Roberta Smith's history of the Spring Hill area. This monograph should be available in May. The second is the long awaited book on the local silk industry being written by Janice Stockard, an anthropologist associated with Harvard's Fairbank Center for East Asian Studies. We anticipate that this book will be published within a year. Such publications are an important (but very expensive) component of the historical society's educational mission to promote an interest in local history. I encourage you all to make a donation, no matter how small, to help defray the publication costs and to BUY the books when they are available.

Please mark your calendars for these upcoming spring events. Our first meeting will be held on **Friday, April 8** and will feature one of our own members, Burnham Thompson, who will display and discuss his collection of advertising memorabilia. On **Saturday, April 23**, we will have an Antique Appraisal Day, fashioned after to the popular PBS "Antiques Roadshow." For a nominal fee, you can learn how much Great-Grandma's teapot is worth or find out the purpose of antique items which puzzle you.

This is guaranteed to be a fun event and all proceeds will benefit the historical society!

Also note that this year's museum opening is scheduled for **Sunday, May 22** – earlier than usual so that we may participate in the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor's Museum Weekend. Plans are also in the works for a bus trip to Deerfield, MA in early June.

Stay tuned – details on the trip will follow in the next newsletter. I hope to see you at all of these



events!

Jody Newmyer, President

APRIL MEETING & PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

DATE/TIME: April 8, 2005. 7:30 p.m.

PLACE: Buchanan Center at the Mansfield Library

"It must be worth a million dollars!" Thanks to television there is enthusiastic interest in antiques these days. But what was it like at the turn of the last century? Burnham Thompson, recently retired after 45 years at the family store in Mansfield Depot, will present a program showing how today's antiques were promoted during the period between 1880 and 1930. He will bring examples of vintage advertising posters and publications of those times along with objects of the period from his collection.

TRASH OR TREASURE? COME FIND OUT AT OUR ANTIQUES APPRAISAL DAY!

On Saturday, April 23, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., you can have your family heirlooms and tag sale finds appraised at the Old Town Hall building on Spring Hill. Auctioneer E. S. Eldredge and two other knowledgeable antiques dealers will be available to examine and access your "treasures". Will your \$5 tag sale purchase be worth a fortune or is it merely junk? Should you buy extra insurance for Great-Aunt Sally's hooked rug? And what on earth was that old kitchen gizmo used for? Find out for the nominal fee of \$7.00 for one item or \$15.00 for three. There is no limit to the number of appraisals you may request. In lieu of transporting furniture and other large pieces to the museum, please bring photographs showing front, back and special details.

This is a fund-raiser for the Mansfield Historical Society and your help is needed to make it a success. We need volunteers to serve as cashiers and also some people to bake cookies and other goodies. We are planning to have a bake sale during this event. Refreshments and beverages will be offered for a small fee to customers while they await their appraisals. Please call Ann Galonska, Museum Director (429-6575) or Alice Kolega, Hospitality Chair (423-8126) if you are willing to help at the event or bake. Our appraisers are generously donating their time so all proceeds will benefit the Society.

This will be a fun and educational event. Please support your historical society by participating!

HAVING A BALL IN THE OLD TOWN HALL

On April 23, the Old Town Hall will see its first use since it was temporarily condemned a year ago. Now, with the repair work finally done, the building will again spring to life.

Since its completion in 1843, the Old Town Hall has been the scene of many lively political debates, meetings and elections. It has also been a popular venue for other events such as dances, concerts and lectures. And now, the Historical Society is privileged to use the building for its museum exhibits and public programs.

Below is an article from The Willimantic Chronicle, dated March 3, 1880, that describes a ball that was held in the Old Town Hall. The "Mansfield Silk Boys" who sponsored the ball were Philo and John S. Hanks who operated the silk mill

on Hanks Hill and Orwell S. Chaffee who owned the silk mill in Chaffeeville. We hope that our Antiques Appraisal Day will be just as successful, although maybe not quite so lively!



The ball advertised by the Mansfield Silk Boys, came off at the Town hall, Spring Hill, Friday night, Feb 27th, and proved a success, financially, universally, and otherwise. The music furnished by T.H. Rollinson, five pieces, was all that could be desired, and was the theme of praise from all who listened to it. Notwithstanding the unfavorable and muddy condition of the roads, the hall was well filled. Delegations from Willimantic, Coventry, Willington, and other places, were present and added much interest to the occasion. Some sixty tickets were sold, (not including dead-heads.) Supper was furnished by George G. Ross, the popular caterer, at Jared G. Freeman's hotel across the street [now the Altnaveigh Inn]. Our acting selectman, George W. More was the acting floor manager, and never seemed more at home than when surrounded by a bevy of dazzling beauties, giving them instructions as to place, position, &c. George Wheeler, prompter, prompted in his usual prompt style. Conspicuous on the floor was the portly form and genial countenance of Bradley M. Sears of Rockville, who appeared to enjoy himself immensely. The disparity of ages was one noticeable feature of the evening, the difference ranging from the pretty lass of fourteen, to the veteran of sixty, who was as supple as any young man of twenty. The best of order prevailed, and not until daylight did the party disperse. This is the second party of the kind held at the hall within a short time, and is conclusive proof that when the Hanks Boys and "Doc" Chaffee take hold, they mean business.

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

Old Man Winter is still hanging on and has caused some delays in our exhibit preparations. The seemingly never-ending snow and ice has made it impossible to move the collection materials that were temporarily stored in the upstairs of the Old Town Hall back into their basement storage area. We are praying for a spring thaw soon!!

In the meantime we have begun working on the exhibits in the main building. The front room will house a new exhibit about the local cemeteries,

focusing on their 18th century gravestones. The exhibit will highlight the Eastern Connecticut Ornamental Style and the gravestone carvers whose work is represented in Mansfield. It will also include historical facts about some noted people buried there and information about cemetery preservation.

We are also working with State Archaeologist, Nicholas Bellantoni and Cheri Collins of the Connecticut Archaeology Center on an exhibit entitled "Ancient People of the Mansfield Area." This exhibit will feature Native American artifacts that have been found in Mansfield and surrounding towns, together with information on ancient technologies and culture. If you have found any artifacts on your property, please let us know! We are seeking additional items for this exhibit. Plans are in the works for a special Opening Day program in conjunction with this exhibit. The details will be in the next newsletter.



Soon there will be a new furniture gallery in the room that now houses the Storrs bedroom set. Here we will feature some of our finest furniture pieces along with information about their history and furniture style. Period decorative artifacts and costumes will compliment this display.

This year, in our two period kitchens, we are going to represent two different seasonal celebrations. The 1800 kitchen will feature a vignette showing preparations for a Thanksgiving dinner, while in the 1900 kitchen, the dressed mannequins will be preparing food for a Fourth of July picnic. The accompanying signage will describe the history and celebration of these two national holidays.

And finally - if spring ever comes - we will re-install last year's Mansfield Training School exhibit and the Claude McDaniels exhibit in the Old Town Hall building. We hope that the thaw will come soon for this must be accomplished before our Antique Appraisal Day on April 23.

Please contact Ann Galonska (429-6575), if you would like to help with these projects. We especially need some "strong bodies" to help us move furniture and display cases. We would also WELCOME some volunteers to help us with Spring cleaning.

And DON'T FORGET – this year's Opening Day is going to be on Sunday, May 22 (two weeks earlier than normal). We need to start lining up our summer hosts and hostesses soon. Please be ready to "answer the call". We can't stay open without your help!

MODERN SILKWORM FARMING IN OHIO

Since my experiment with raising silkworms on artificial food, I've been in further touch with my supply source. This modern silkworm farm is located in Ohio and raises silkworms year-round as food for reptiles. They hatch about 20,000 silkworms a week and raise them in large plastic tubs. Once a day the silkworms are dumped into strainers to remove their droppings and any leftover food. The tubs are cleaned and then the silkworms are returned to their sterile home. At all times they are handled with gloves to prevent any infection.

At this farm, the silkworms are fed exclusively on a diet of powdered mulberry leaves that are reconstituted with water. The chow is crumbled over the top of the silkworms and the amount and number of feedings is adjusted according to their size. This powdered version of mulberry leaves makes it possible to raise silkworms year-round.

In my experience in using the artificial food, I found that the resulting silkworms were smaller and weaker than those that I've raised in the summer and fed with fresh mulberry leaves. They also produced smaller cocoons. This is apparently of no concern to these Ohio silkworm farmers. Their silkworms are all sold and EATEN before they can produce cocoons. Consequently they do not have a breeding program and purchase all their eggs from another source.

This modern silkworm farm markets their product on their Web site (www.silkwormfarm.com) and on e-Bay. They supply feed for pet stores and reptile owners throughout the country. Oh, how things have changed since the early 1800's when Mansfield had its heyday as America's largest silk producer!

*Ann Galonska
Museum Director*

IN MEMORIAM

We are sad to report the loss of two of our long-time members: Wilma van Dusen and Walter Wardwell. Wilma and her husband Albert were among the founding members of the Historical Society. Walter Wardwell had been an active member for over thirty years. We extend our sincere condolences to their families and friends.

DONATED ARTIFACTS ENHANCE THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

Each year many individuals are generous with their gifts of artifacts and memorabilia to the Society's Museum. The following list of people and their contributions in 2004 are listed in appreciation.

Dr. Peter Brown – Gothic Revival secretary desk, c. 1840; **James Buell** – Poster for the Annual Harvest Fair in Merrow, 1939; **Fred A Cazel, Jr.** – Collection of photographs of Gurleyville and other areas of Mansfield, bottles dug up on his property, earthen ware cups and saucers; **Sheila Quinn Clark** – Enlargements of postcards showing “The Village Well” and the Mansfield Centre whipping post; **Miriam Epstein** – Two postcards with Connecticut Agricultural College scenes, 1915; **Arlene Gray** – Long-handled skillet, rotary gridiron, two steamed pudding molds; **Betsy and Hugh Hamill** – Watercolor painting of Echo Lake by Wilma Keyes; **Stewart Johnson** – Baby bassinet, 1946; **Joyce Roscoe** – Collection of photographs showing old Mansfield roads and houses; **Betty Savage** – Two beaded purses, petit point purse, German silver mesh purse, two hand-woven towels, lace pieces, celluloid advertising card, and a Tollman’s blackhead remover; **Mr. and Mrs. N. Rey Whetten** – Silverplate tea service that belonged to Charles Lewis Beach (President of the Connecticut Agricultural College, 1908-1928); **Francis Wright** – Steelyard marked “GURLEY”, made in Gurleyville in the early 1800s.

Once again, thank you everyone, for remembering the Mansfield Historical Society. Your gifts are greatly appreciated!

The Mansfield Historical Society was founded in 1957 with the mission “to discover, collect and preserve whatever pertains to the history of the Town of Mansfield and the surrounding area; to promote and encourage historical research in all its aspects and to make available the results of this research.”

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April 8 – Meeting

DATES TO REMEMBER

April 23 – Antiques Appraisal Day

May 22 – Museum Opening

