

MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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President's Corner



The Executive Board has just approved the 2005 budget; it currently has an \$18,000 shortfall in income which we will be attempting to close with fund drives and other fund-raising activities in the next few months. Publication costs are one of our major expenditures. We will be requesting donations to help defray these costs. We hope you will be as generous as possible.

In December we had a very successful bus trip to the Mark Twain House and the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museums. It was a treat to see these historic homes decked in their holiday finery. I want to thank our program chair, Len Seeber and our museum director, Ann Galonska for their efforts in planning this delightful trip. They are now busy planning programs and exhibits for the upcoming season.

The first meeting will be held on **Friday, April 8** and 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. Be sure to mark your calendars for these events. In addition, plans are in the works for an antique appraisal program similar to the popular PBS "Antiques Roadshow." An appraiser will be available to tell you how much Great-Grandma's clock is worth and even to identify the purpose of antique items which puzzle you. Another bus trip is being planned for June as well. Details on these activities will appear in subsequent *Newsletters*.

Please check your address label on the back of this mailing. If you find a red dot, it signifies that your membership dues are delinquent. We don't want to lose you as members! Please send in your membership renewal today. We hope to see you all at future programs!

Jody Newmyer, President

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

Much has happened since our last newsletter was published. The repairs to the Old Town Hall were finally completed in December. New footings were dug and additional beams and lolly columns were installed. The floor is now secure and the building will again be available for our use this spring. Thanks to the efforts of Howard Raphaelson, Keith Johnson, Linda Paternaude and Ann Galonska, our collection and exhibit materials were moved from the basement to the upstairs of the building while the repairs were being done. A lot of junk that had accumulated over the years was also taken to the dump.

December proved to be an eventful month. The museum also experienced a hard-drive crash, emphasizing the importance of backing up data on a regular basis. It took some work to reconstruct files and re-enter data. Some information was lost but fortunately our most important records were retrievable. A new CD-W drive and a flash drive should make the arduous, but necessary, task of backing-up easier.



We are now turning our attention to planning our exhibits for the upcoming season. Tentative plans call for reprising the Mansfield Training School and Claude McDaniels exhibits and relocating them to the Old Town Hall building. A new exhibit on Native Americans in Mansfield is being planned in co-operation with the Connecticut Archaeology Center at UConn. We are also planning an exhibit on the local cemeteries, focusing on their 18th century gravestones. This year the 1800 and 1900 kitchens will feature seasonal family celebrations. More details will follow in the next newsletters as our plans are firmed up.

We are very happy to welcome several new people to the Museum Committee: Lisa Ferriere, Joanne Goodwin, Susan Spack, Kendall Rhee and Leona Marcus. More are welcome! Please contact Ann Galonska (429-6575), if you are interested in working on these projects.

SEEKING MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS

Below is our volunteer "wish list." Please call the museum at 429-6575, if you are willing to help.

"Muscle Power" Needed! – We would like to have some strong men or women available on call to help us move heavy objects. We need help moving artifacts back into the basement of the Old Town Hall. Some furniture and display cases also have to be moved to make way for our new exhibits.

Housekeeping Committee needed – We need some volunteers who would be willing to help clean the museum once a month (vacuuming, dusting, cleaning cobwebs, etc.). With only one part-time staff person charged with running the museum, housekeeping has reached the crisis stage.

Handy with tools? We need you! – We are looking for people who can help with carpentry projects for our exhibits. We also need some new shelving built for our office area.

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE COLLECTION

Following the retirement of long-time chair Poppy Whitaker, the Acquisitions Committee needs new leadership and additional members. This important committee evaluates items offered to the

collection, catalogs and labels new accessions and sees that they are properly stored. The committee is in charge of managing and preserving the collection. Please call the museum if you are interested in serving on this committee. Training will be provided.

A full listing of 2004 gifts to the collections will be forthcoming after this committee reconvenes. Among the gifts received during the past year are: an extensive collection of photographs of Gurleyville and other Mansfield sites from Fred A. Cazal, Jr., a Gothic Revival secretary desk from Dr. Peter Brown, and a silver tea service that belonged to Charles Lewis Beach (President of the Connecticut Agricultural College, 1908-19280), given by Mr. and Mrs. Rey Whetten.

Thank you to ALL of our donors. Your generous gifts are much appreciated and will be recognized in the next newsletter.

SILKWORMS IN WINTER?!

Once again I find myself raising silkworms, this time for a silk workshop at the Connecticut Archeology Center. How is that possible in the middle of winter? When fresh mulberry leaves are unavailable, silkworms can be fed with an artificial food composed of dehydrated mulberry leaves. The powdered leaves are mixed with water and then sterilized. The food I ordered came pre-prepared. It arrived as a slimy green block and is fed to the silkworms by grating it over them with a cheese grater. It is definitely easier and less messy than feeding them fresh mulberry leaves. The silkworms recoil when the fresh-from-the-refrigerator gratings land on their backs, but within a few moments they are happily munching away. They are certainly thriving on it.

Recently I ran across an article about "rainbow-colored" silk cocoons. Researchers at the Gunma Sericultural Experiment Station in Maebashi, Japan have been mixing various vegetable dyes with the ground mulberry leaves that they feed the silkworms. Apparently the silkworms turn the color of the dye and produce naturally colored cocoons. The photographs showed pink silkworms and cocoons in an array of pastel colors! Just wait – that may be my next experiment!

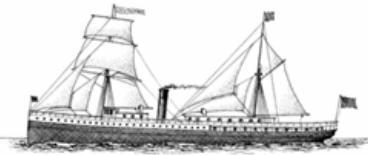


*Ann Galonska
Museum Director*

NEW STUDY OF EAGLEVILLE

Charles Pelletier has just completed an extensive study of the village of Eagleville and has presented a copy to the Historical Society. It contains a complete compilation of deeds from 1707 through 1950, detailing the history of land ownership and of the mill. It contains transcriptions of all the deeds and a series of maps illustrating the transfers of property. It is a very thorough study and will be an invaluable resource to anyone interested in this area of Mansfield. **Kudos, Charles and thanks!**

A MARITIME TRAGEDY TOUCHES MANSFIELD



One of the worst disasters in the waters off Cape Cod took place on January 18, 1884 during a terrible winter storm. At 3:43 a.m. the Gay Head Lighthouse keeper on Martha's Vineyard sounded the alarm. The *City of Columbus*, a 275-foot luxury steamship bound for Savannah from Boston, had crashed onto the shoals of Devil's Bridge beneath the cliffs of Gay Head. Braving the fearsome storm, Wampanoag men with the Massachusetts Humane Society - a precursor of the U.S. Coast Guard - launched a rescue. Again and again, the men went into the icy waters - rowing lifeboats out to the wreck. They were able to save 29 of the 132 people on board, but only 22 survived. Most of the victims had been swept from the decks by the towering waves or were drowned in their cabins. The few people who survived had climbed into the riggings and clung there in the freezing temperatures until they were rescued hours later.

Among the victims was Elizabeth R. Beach, 36, the only daughter of Rev. Nathaniel Beach, pastor of the North Mansfield [now Storrs] Congregational Church. The *Willimantic Chronicle* of January 23, 1884 reported that her body was returned to Mansfield by train and was laid in state at the First Baptist Church. "Miss Beach ...had become widely known both in this country and France by her labors in behalf of the now famous McAll mission [a Baptist mission founded in Paris]. It was in making known that cause to the Christian ladies of America that Miss Beach lost her health some four years ago. She had previously been connected with the mission itself in Paris, and it was her hope to return hither."

Elizabeth Beach was moving to St. Augustine, Florida when she met her fate aboard the *City of Columbus*. "She sailed with joyous anticipations," expecting that the warmer climate would aid in her convalescence, but alas, it was not to be so. Her obituary continues, "Miss Beach was the mover in that great work in this country which has recently taken form in the 'American McAll Association.' Her Christian devotion, her genius, her rare personal grace, find their monument in that association. Her memory will be revered as long as the McAll mission exists or is remembered. She gave her life for the cause she loved."

The story does not end here. In February of 1884, the family of Elizabeth Beach filed lawsuits against the Boston & Savannah Steam-Ship Company, owner of the *City of Columbus*. There were actually two lawsuits - one brought by her father, Rev. Nathaniel Beach and another by an aunt and niece who were her dependants. The suits sought compensation for the loss of Elizabeth Beach's life and her property.

Shortly thereafter the steam-ship company filed a counter-suit, seeking protection under the maritime limited liability act of 1851. According to this law, the owners "shall not be liable beyond their interest in the ship and freight pending" for the acts of the master or crew done "without their privity or knowledge." The intent of this law was to encourage the shipping industry and to protect the owners who invested in such a risky business.

The Beach family's lawsuits claimed that the disaster was "caused by negligence on the part of those employed by the steam-ship company in managing the ship, and by inefficiency in the discipline of the officers and crew, and that no proper measures were taken to save the passengers." The libel further alleged that "after the vessel struck, said Elizabeth R. Beach suffered great mental and bodily pain upon the vessel, and was afterwards washed into the sea, and drowned; that the value of her clothing and baggage lost was \$150; and that by virtue of the premises, and under the general admiralty jurisdiction of the United States, the libelants were entitled to recover \$50,000, and by virtue of the statute of Massachusetts, \$5,000."

In other litigation, the ship's captain was found responsible for the accident. He had gone to bed leaving a second mate in command of the vessel who was unlicensed to pilot in those waters. The steam-ship company claimed that it had no knowledge of nor responsibility for the action of the captain and the crew. It thus alleged that its liability was limited to the value of the ship and its cargo (a

total loss). It further stated that any insurance money it had received had gone to pay its freight vendors and the bank that owned the ship's mortgage. No insurance funds remained to compensate the families of the victims.

The case (*BUTLER v. BOSTON & S. S. S. CO.*, 130 U.S. 527) was finally settled in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1889. The court ruled that the evidence was not sufficient to prove "knowledge or privity" of the shipping company and it upheld the 1851 maritime act of limited liability. The Beach family's claims were dismissed. It was an important decision that would be cited in several other cases involving maritime disasters.

The maritime law of limited liability was once again called into question following the sinking of the *Titanic* on April 14, 1912. At that time, it became the focus of a U.S. Senate inquiry. Senator Isidor Raynor led the call for change: "Mr. President, we must change the admiralty and navigation laws of this country. They consist of an incongruous collection of antiquated statutes which should be repealed and reenacted so as to meet the necessities of ocean intercourse of the present day. This is surely one lesson that has been taught us by this dreadful calamity.... The doctrine of "knowledge or privity of the owner" should be swept from the statute book, and [it] should not be necessary in order to hold the owners to a full responsibility to prove that the negligence occurred with the privity or knowledge of the owners. There is no reason why owners of ships should not be responsible for the negligence of the crew in the same way that railroad corporations are held responsible for the negligence of their employees. The whole subject is largely in our own hands. We should, without delay, pass a system of laws that, in my judgment, would be sufficient to avoid a repetition of this heart-rending disaster."

In 1916, White Star, owner of the *Titanic*, agreed to pay \$664,000 to the American claimants, in return for a release from future claims and a stipulation that White Star was not negligent. The compensation was shockingly little by today's standards, but it signaled a shift in legal thought. The *Titanic* disaster hastened change to an antiquated law that had brought injustice to the Beaches and many other families of victims.

We still have copies of **The Chronology of Mansfield, 1702-2002** available. These make appropriate and symbolic Valentine's Day presents, demonstrating that your love for your Valentine will last as long as has Mansfield itself. Any of our publications would make a great gift for any occasion! Visit our website, www.mansfield-history.org for a complete listing.

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Silkworms are spinning threads in a rainbow of pastel colors at a silk plant in Gunma Prefecture, the result of a research project dubbed Rainbow-Colored Cocoons.

Researchers at the Gunma Sericultural Experiment Station in Maebashi took advantage of silkworms' tendency to reflect the color of their feed in their silk and mixed dyes with the silkworms' favorite food--ground mulberry leaves.

Each strand of raw silk from cocoons colored in this way is pigmented from the core. Such silk tends to have a more natural color than silk that is dyed after being reeled from white cocoons.

The depth of the silk's color can be controlled by adjusting the amount of dye mixed with the feed.

The researchers have produced raw silk in more than 10 colors by adding various dyes to the feed. For example, if silkworms are fed food that is dyed blue and red, they turn purple and produce purple silk fibers. However the researchers still have technical challenges to overcome. It is difficult to get the worms to produce the exact shade of color desired.

The researchers plan to experiment with additional feed additives to produce raw silk of a consistent shade. Sericulture was one of Japan's chief exporting industries from the Meiji era (1868-1912) to the early Showa era (1926-1989). Silk sales were an important source of foreign currency.

However, the Japanese silk industry has been in decline largely due to the increasing volume of cheap silk imports from China and other countries.

During the peak production years, Gunma Prefecture was home to about 40 percent of Japan's silk production. There were about 25,000 silk-raising houses operating in the prefecture, whereas now there are about 1,000.

The researchers worked on the rainbow cocoon project to create value-added silk cocoons, and to help preserve the industry as a cultural tradition.

The project's director, Osamu Shimizu, 55, said his organization wanted to promote Japan as a leading sericultural nation.