

Carlisle Historical Society Newsletter



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UPDATED EXHIBITS AT HEALD HOUSE

Now that most of the exterior of Heald House has been secured with a paint job and a new roof, the Society has turned its attention to rejuvenating the exhibits within, some of which have remained unchanged ever since the house was organized as a museum in 2000. The exhibits are mostly artifacts that exemplify some aspect of Carlisle's history. In particular, we have expanded the signage that describes each of the artifacts, mentioning notable features, delineating its provenance, and providing informational color to otherwise inert objects. Here are some examples of the new signage and the kind of information that awaits visitors to Heald House, which is open in the afternoon of the third Sunday of each month as well as other times by arrangement.

In an area largely devoted to artifacts from the American Revolution:

reproductions, but they have been hand-colored, enhancing their impact and value.

► HAND-COLORED DOOLITTLE PRINTS

These prints were donated to the Society by Farnham Smith. In December of 1775, Amos Doolittle (1754-1832), a Connecticut silversmith, issued four copperplate engravings depicting views of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. He and a friend, Ralph Earl, who was a painter, had visited the sites in early May, just two weeks after the fighting. Having viewed the battlegrounds and talked with eyewitnesses, Earl quickly produced four paintings for Doolittle's later reference. According to Ian M. G. Quimby, writing in *Winterthur Portfolio* (1968), "We are fortunate to have Doolittle's honest presentation of some of the most significant events in American history, for in their...simplicity we have documents of inestimable value to historians. Crude as they are, Doolittle's prints are the best pictorial record – indeed the only pictorial record by a contemporary American – of the events of April 19, 1775...." The prints are



- I. The Battle of Lexington, where eight colonists died.
- II. View of the Town of Concord, showing British Regulars marching in.
- III. The Engagement at North Bridge, where the first British soldiers were killed.
- IV. A View of the South Part of Lexington, showing action along the Battle Road

[Come to an Open House and see if you can tell which is which.]

►SIGN FOR THE RED LION TAVERN – A PALIMPSEST

The sign [on loan to the Carlisle Historical Society through the courtesy of Janet Lovejoy and her daughter Hillary] originally hung in front of the Red Lion Tavern, built by Captain John Heald in 1771, which stood on the west side of what was then the Groton Road and is now West Street, when that portion of Carlisle was still part of Concord. It is thought to have functioned as a tavern perhaps until the advent of automobiles at the end of the 19th century. In the winter of 1934-5 the building was moved across the street, where it now stands, a privately owned dwelling.

The sign, painted on a single wide board, originally showed a crowned lion rampant, but at some point – probably near the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775 – the lion, being a symbol of England, was scrubbed off, an elm tree painted over it, and the tavern rechristened the Liberty Tree Tavern. Nevertheless, on the sign the lion is still quite visible [Come see it at an Open House], presumably because its paint protected the wood underneath while the unpainted surround was left to weather. This is a palimpsest, a word formed from two Greek words meaning to scratch again, first applied to wax tablets used by the Romans for writing.

►A BRITISH CANNON FROM FORT TICONDEROGA

Immediately after the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, the British laid siege to Boston. In May of that year, the Green Mountain Boys under the command of Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold overran a small British garrison at Fort Ticonderoga in New York State, capturing the Fort and all its contents. Subsequently, George Washington took command of the army outside Boston, and Colonel Henry Knox proposed to him the idea of bringing the captured British cannons from the Fort to Boston, where they could be deployed to break the siege.

Eventually, Knox was given the task of carrying out his idea, and in November 1775 he set about it. Over the course of three months he and his troops moved 60 tons of cannons and other armaments by boat, horses, ox-drawn sledges, and man-power along poor-quality roads, across two half-frozen

ivers, and the forest and swamps of the sparsely-populated Berkshires to the Boston area. Historian Victor Brook called Knox's achievement "one of the most stupendous feats of logistics in the entire war."

While this remarkable effort enabled Washington to break the siege, it did not succeed in bringing all of the armaments from Ticonderoga to Boston. The cannon here was one of the casualties. It is said to have been brought as far as Framingham before being abandoned. Ultimately it found its way to Carlisle by unknown means, and here it has remained ever since. In the bicentennial celebration in 1975, the cannon was loaded with gunpowder and fired five or six times in memory of the events that established America's independence

In an area devoted to old Carlisle institutions:

►THE CARLISLE GRANGE

Ruth Wilkins writes that the first Grange, No. 258, was formed in 1906. Also known as the Patrons of Husbandry, the organization was a meeting place for local farmers, who sponsored lectures, speeches, debates, musical nights, dramatics, patriotic meetings, evenings with poets, and a children's night. At one time it had 82 members, but as the years wore on and the Town did not grow much, its membership dwindled, and in 1914 it was disbanded.

In 1936, a new Grange, No. 402, was formed, initially with 18 members. Mrs. Rena Clark gave land on which to build a Grange Hall, which eventually was done – the Second World War intervening – and the building was dedicated on April 21, 1953. As made evident by this porcelainized sign [now on display at Heald House], the Grange flourished there until sometime in the early 1970s, when the building was converted to a private dwelling. It stands on Concord Street on the same side as the Heald House and four or five doors closer to the center of Town. Today, the house is almost invisible from the road because of a planting of evergreen trees.

►THE EDISON HOME PHONOGRAPH

This phonograph is a model known as the Edison Home Phonograph, probably manufactured in 1899,

twenty-two years after Edison patented his first model. It was used at the Carlisle Grange, though it must originally have been acquired by someone else, since the Grange was not formed until 1906. Unlike other contemporary models that used wax disks as the recording medium, this one uses wax cylinders. Like all phonographs at that time, it is en-



tirely mechanical, relying on the spring-driven motor to supply the energy that rotates the cylinder, which in turn jiggles a stylus attached to a metal diaphragm that transmits the vibrations to the air at the base of the horn. As you can easily hear [if you visit Heald House], compared to modern acoustic reproduction, early phonographs were noisy and lacked fidelity. Nonetheless, they were popular, and they sold by the thousands.

In a room largely devoted to Carlisle home life and domesticity:

► GREAT SPINNING WHEEL

Spinning wheels partially mechanize the process of twisting fibers of flax, wool, or cotton into yarn. This one – called a Great Wheel for an obvious reason [the wheel alone is five feet in diameter] – is turned by the right hand while the left hand feeds the fibers to the horizontal spindle, which serves both to twist the fibers and to accumulate the spun yarn. It is also called a Walking Wheel because the operator, in a kind of dance, walks back holding the fibers at an angle so that they spill off the tip of the spindle, causing them to twist, and then walks forward changing the angle of the yarn so that it spools onto the spindle, an action that requires some degree of skill. Great wheels have two stages of pulleys to speed up rotation of the spindle: first from the great wheel itself, which drives a small pulley attached to a large pulley, which in turn drives a small pulley attached to the spindle, a configuration known as the Miner’s head

(sometimes Minor’s head) or as an accelerator. During the time prior to industrialization, it was said that it took five spinners to support one weaver.

► SAMPLER COLLECTION

Among those who study and value the artifacts of early American history, this collection of 13 samplers [on display at Heald House] is counted one of the most interesting and valuable to be found anywhere. They reveal an age when woven and sewn creations were much more personal and important than they are today.

The samplers were all worked by Carlisle girls, ages ten to nineteen years and date from 1786 to 1838. The oldest one in the collection, by Hannah Lane, carefully notes that:

“Hannah Lane is my name,
10 years old I wrot the same. 1786.”

In 1804 Betsy Adams stitched two alphabets, one of script capitals and one of block letters. She ended with this verse:

"Tis the needle book and pen,
I will learn and strive to mend."



She obviously "practiced what she stitched," as a second sampler completed by her three years later demonstrates marked improvement.

In addition to the charming motifs, the verses that appear on samplers are most intriguing. They often emphasized both the necessity for virtue and the brevity of life. In 1824, ten-year-old Louisa Mansfield worked this verse:

“In my path through this vale of tears
 Let wisdom measure out my years
 May my example useful be
 And benefit posterity
 If good we plant not vice will fill the mind
 For weeds despoil the ground for flowers
 designed.”

Today, needlework samplers, such as those in the Carlisle collection, are treasured for their beauty and for their historical value as personal expressions of their makers’ lives. [Adapted from an article that originally appeared in the *Carlisle Mosquito*.]

► **CHEESEMAKING**

Beside being a tasty food, cheese has the merit of keeping well for long periods, even in the absence of refrigeration, and this factor recommended it to the colonial farmers of Carlisle. There are hundreds – maybe thousands – of recipes for cheese, but they nearly all are variants of the following procedures. One starts with warm milk from cows, sheep or goats, or possibly more exotic mammals, like camels. To this, add flavorings as may be desired and rennet, an enzyme traditionally taken from the stomach contents of an unweaned calf. (Today, there are vegetable-based sources of rennet and genetically-modified sources.) Rennet causes the milk to coagulate, after which, slicing into grape-sized curds causes the watery part of milk – the whey – to separate. Then the cheesemaker draws off the whey and packs the remaining curds in cheese cloth and presses them into a mold. A press may be used to force out even more of the whey to make a dry cheese. Allowing the cheese to age for a month or more in a cool cellar or cave completes the process. [A cheese press and cheese molds are on display.] ■

**DONATIONS OF
 HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS
 TO THE SOCIETY**

Virtually all of the items currently on display at Heald House were once privately owned and donated by Carlisle citizens who recognized the potential interest and value inherent in artifacts that recall times gone by. It may be that current citizens of Carlisle possess items that will be of interest to generations of Carilislans yet to come. We solicit donations of this kind.

It is well to bear in mind that some items that are part of today’s ordinary (or extraordinary) experience are tomorrow’s items of historical interest. While one can imagine that an old TV that uses a cathode ray tube (like those that show up at the Transfer Station every week, replaced by the bigger, brighter, better flat-screen TVs), will never be of widespread interest, early examples of such technology might be. Many people alive today can recall that early TVs had black and white screens barely 12 inches wide, which could be viewed through a giant plastic magnifying glass to enhance the experience.

So think about what you have – maybe things stored in the attic; maybe things you’ve kept because of the memories they hold for you; maybe things your forebears kept and you don’t know what to do with; maybe things you acquired thinking they would be of interest to your children or grandchildren but have found that they’re not – and consider donating them to the Carlisle Historical Society. We are registered with the IRS as a nonprofit educational organization, and donations to us, including donations of artifacts, are tax-deductible. Call Phil Drew (978-369-9276) or write to him at phildrew@live.com.

Officers of the Society

President.....Phil Drew
 Vice President.....Dana Booth
 Secretary.....Kerry Kissinger
 Treasurer.....Jim Bohn
 Board Members.....Carl Andreassen,
 Chuck Bagnaschi, Charlie Forsberg

Monthly Open Houses

Times to visit Heald House are the afternoons (2:00 – 5:00 pm) on the third Sunday of each month. The next Open Houses will be July 19, August 16, September 20, October 18, November 15, and December 20. Other openings can be arranged (call 978-369-9276).

OUR GENEROUS DONORS

We are grateful for the generosity and good will from the following donors during the past year

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Make a Donation – Join the Society

Listed in this newsletter are those who have so generously donated during the past year. To them we are most grateful. If you have not yet responded to our requests for support, this announcement can serve as a reminder. The Carlisle Historical Society is an independent, nonprofit organization. It receives no money from the Town, and it relies on donations for the great majority of its expenses. Everyone who donates to the Society in any amount becomes a family member for the year in which the donation is made. All donations are fully tax-deductible. Send your check to:

Treasurer, Carlisle Historical Society
P. O. Box 703, Carlisle, MA 01741

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Make a Difference – Volunteer with the Society

Like many organizations in Carlisle, the Historical Society relies on the energy and dedication of volunteers. There are many roles open, among them:

- Docents to escort visitors and discuss items on display (we can train you)
- Curators to maintain records of artifacts entrusted to the Society; set up exhibits; plan new exhibits
- House and grounds maintenance
- Fundraising
- Editor or contributor to the Newsletter
- Liaison with other historical societies in neighboring towns
- Grant writing
- Anything else that will contribute to our mission of caring for the items in our trust and making them accessible to the townspeople of Carlisle and others.

No prior experience necessary. We will work with you as needs may be. Call Phil Drew (President) at 978-369-9276 or email at phildrew@live.com