



# The Peacham Patriot

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Peacham Historical Association

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## PHA's History of Peacham in the Civil War Wins Award



Award Ceremony with Mark Hudson, Jutta Scott, Michelle Arnosky Sherman and Lynn Bonfield.

The Vermont Historical Society honored the Peacham Historical Association with the Vermont Local Historical Societies Achievement Award for its publication *A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War: Peacham's Story*. The Award of Excellence in Publications was presented by Mark Hudson, Executive Director of the Vermont Historical Society at the November 2, 2012 League of Local Historical Societies and Museums Meeting in Woodstock. Published in May 2012, the book vividly tells the story of the Peacham men who went to war and the families who endured life on the home front. The book features a historical overview of the units in which Peacham men served, soldiers' letters home, a diary, memories of Andersonville Prison Camp, postwar memoirs, biographies, the story of the town Civil War monument and a detailed examination of the home front.

*A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War: Peacham's Story*, edited by Jutta R. Scott and Michelle Arnosky Sherburne, with an essay by Lynn A. Bonfield. Book design: Bodenweber Design. Now available for purchase

at the Peacham Library and online on PHA's website: peachamhistorical.org. Softcover \$25. Hardcover \$35. Visit the PHA website for a complete list of PHA publications.

## Agreement for Architectural Services for the Proposed PHA Collections Storage and Research Facility

To build a secure future for Peacham's historical collections, PHA faces many challenges. The most critical need is to move the collections from their present overcrowded, environmentally inappropriate, and handicap inaccessible space.

Over the summer, Peacham Historical Association sought proposals from design firms for services related to the design options, mechanical requirements, and cost estimates for a collections storage and research facility. The planned facility would provide secure, fireproof and environmentally appropriate collections storage; collections management and processing space (accessioning; cataloguing, documentation, preservation); exhibit design and preparation; display of the Peacham Academy model of the school; and workspace for collections staff and researchers. The building would be constructed on a parcel of 100'x95' land leased from the Town of Peacham and located in back of the Historical House, PHA's museum, located at 153 Church Street. Although this would be a newly constructed facility, the design would reflect and respect the historical context of our 19<sup>th</sup> century village.

The New Facility Working Group, which is charged by the Board to prepare preliminary plans for a new facility, evaluated the proposals from design firms and met with two architects in September. At its September 28, 2012 meeting, the Board approved the Group's recommendation that PHA work with John Rahill, Black River Design, Architects. The specific architectural services will focus on:

1. Identifying and evaluating options for mechanical requirements to provide environmentally appropriate storage for

- PHA's collections of manuscripts, textiles, art works, and other artifacts.
2. Reviewing code related issues, including handicap accessibility and permits required for the project.
  3. Presenting up to three alternative building design options in sketch form, including preparation of three preliminary comparative cost estimates.
  4. Preparing cost estimates based on the mechanical systems and design option selected by the PHA Board.
  5. Preparing colored site plan and colored exterior sketches of the preferred option, which will be suitable for public presentation and fund raising purposes.

The initial planning phase will be completed by the end of January 2013. You will hear more about this important endeavor in the next issue of this newsletter.

### **President's Page** by Jutta Scott

Our good news is the recognition of our recent publication, *A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War: Peacham's Story*. I am pleased that the book has received the Vermont Historical Society Award for Excellence in Publications. (See story on page one.) This is the second time that a publication by the Peacham Historical Association was selected for this Award. *Historic Homes of Peacham* was honored in 2008.

We continued the commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil War. Our special exhibit at the Historical House, **Peacham Women During the Civil War**, explored the lives of the wives, mothers, and sisters who served the war effort from the home front. The exhibition told their stories through photographs, letters, and artifacts. Women continued to till fields, keep house and take care of the family. The women made and sent clothes and foodstuffs to Peacham soldiers, they shared news of the battlefield, wrote to the soldiers telling them the news at home, and they endured the deaths of their husbands, sons, and brothers. Building on the exhibit, this year's Ghost Walk featured four women. Their stories were brought to life on July Fourth and Foliage Day and are retold in this issue.

Documenting and presenting the history of our town is an important part of PHA's mission. Equally critical is preserving and protecting Peacham's heritage. The current storage space presents severe problems of

overcrowding, inaccessibility, and concerns about fire safety. To meet the goal of creating an appropriate, safe, and accessible place for PHA's collections, the PHA Board is working to build a future place for PHA's historic archives and collections. We made considerable progress during the past six months, and the preceding article describes the important steps taken.

We are looking forward to a productive new year and are grateful for the ongoing support of the Peacham community for PHA. We could not offer the diverse range of programs without the help of the many volunteers and the generous contributions of our members. This season please consider making a contribution to the PHA Annual Fund to support the preservation of Peacham's history. Thank you all and happy holidays!

### **Four Peacham Women during the Civil War**

For the past fifteen years PHA on July Fourth and Fall Foliage Day has presented historic reenactments of the lives of people from Peacham's past in Peacham Cemetery. This year's Ghost Walk told the stories of four women during the Civil War. Women made vital contributions on the home front, and the lives of the four women illuminate their sacrifices and contributions. Two women were farmers' wives; a third was the wife of Peacham's village doctor; and the fourth, an unmarried teacher, dedicated her life to teaching newly freed slaves in South Carolina during the war and Reconstruction.

Johanna Branson Gill presented **Bridget Keyes Bickford**, and her tale follows:



**Photograph by Jock Gill**

“Hello. I am Bridget Keys Bickford, and on this fine August day in 1863, I am 69 years old. I was born in Plymouth, New Hampshire in 1794, and was married here in Peacham to Benjamin Bickford in 1820. We have had our farm on Centre Street, up on Cow Hill in the northern part of the town, and there we had six children between the years of 1821 and 1841. I had the youngest, Charles, when I was 47 years old.

Today, in fact, we have had some grand news about Charles... but I am getting ahead of myself.

First, let me tell you a bit about our life in Peacham. Our farm was very prosperous at first. Like most of our neighbors, we were primarily sheep farmers, selling our wool for a good price; by 1840, we had 118 in our flock. During these good years, our children were all very well educated, attending the school up on Cow Hill, and then the grammar school. Our second daughter, Carrie, became a schoolteacher herself.

The price for wool crashed in 1844, however, and so we began to let our sheep go, replacing them with beef cattle, then a dairy herd, and we began to sell a good deal of butter. Even so, by 1848, we had considerable debt, and found it a struggle to keep the farm. We did put it up for sale in 1858, mentioning in the public notice that my husband, then more than 60 years of age, was out of health. We sold most of it off in parcels, and we now live in the house with only a few acres left around it.

Our two oldest children settled here in Peacham, and married very well, but the next three fell in with the general western migration of young people, seeing that the life in Peacham was getting harder each year. They keep in touch, though; Benjamin and I have received many good letters, telling us of marriages and grandchildren, and that their new businesses out West are doing well.

Our main concerns besides farming have been two: temperance and abolition. I have been active in the temperance movement here, attending many meetings and lectures at the Temperance Hall. And like most Vermonters, we have been opposed to the enslavement of human beings; indeed, the state constitution itself forbids slavery.

We were very happy to read in a letter from Carrie, our daughter who moved west, that her husband and she hired a former slave, a man named George, and that they have been supporting him as he is buying his own land

and stock. George has located his mother, still living on a plantation in Tennessee. She wishes him to return, but George has a dire hatred of southerners and says he will never move back.

Our greatest pride, however, was that our youngest son, Charles, answered President Lincoln’s call last year for volunteers to fight the Confederates. Charles was one of 25 young men from Peacham who enlisted for ten months; they are in Company F of the 15<sup>th</sup> Vermont Regiment. Charles has sent us letters; the one describing the many means of transportation it took them to get from Peacham to Washington, DC was most interesting.

Like other Peacham women, I have done what I can to support our boys. I have long experience with wool and spinning and knitting and weaving, so many pairs of socks and good blankets have been sent to the troops. We ladies work in our homes, but we also get together at the Temperance Hall and other places for sewing parties; it helps us keep our good cheer and we can all exchange the news we have gotten from the papers and from letters.

And now for the good news I mentioned earlier: we were very relieved to hear that although Charles was at Gettysburg for the large battle last month, his regiment was called back from the front to guard the wagons a mile and a half distant from the battlefield. Charles and his company were not happy, and protested very hard that they wanted to stay in the thick of things, but they did obey their orders. Therefore, unlike so many others, he did survive, and we have learned that he was mustered out of the army this August 5. We hear that those who have more recently been drafted instead of volunteering are obliged to serve a three-year term. It is a large relief to us that Charles was one of the “ten-month” soldiers and can leave the war now.

He plans to move directly west to join his sister and brothers to seek his fortune, so we may not see him for another good spell. We know, however, that he must go where there is work, and we are confident that the letters will still be coming so we can keep in touch with him.”

The second woman was **Fatima Varnum**, who lost two sons in the Civil War. Karen Fitzhugh told her story.



Photograph by Edward Schneider

Fatima Robbins Varnum grew up in Peacham on a road that went from Green Bay Loop to Foster's Pond, where only cellar holes and the remnants of the road remain today. In 1832, when Fatima was 21, she married John Varnum, a farmer and cooper. They moved to a farm in the Green Bay area of Peacham, where, as a farm wife with 12 children (in each of her last three pregnancies, Fatima bore twins), Fatima was kept rather busy. To the physical burdens of farm work and child rearing was added the unimaginable grief of losing eight children. Three died in infancy and three children in their teens perished in the space of one month from an epidemic of diphtheria in 1862. Two sons, twins, died in the Civil War.

Her two sons, Jonas and Charles, were born in 1843. The twins enlisted on September 16, 1862 and served together in the same company in the 15th Regiment of Vermont Volunteers. Jonas was discharged on account of sickness and died in Peacham in July 1863. Charles was taken prisoner at Columbia Furnace in Virginia in October 1864 and was imprisoned in Libby Prison near Richmond. After suffering there for more than three months, he died the night after he was paroled in January 1865. Fatima lived to see the names of her two sons inscribed on the Soldiers Monument in Peacham. Fatima died in 1878, aged 67.

**Louisa (Martin) Parker** was the third woman. Marsha Garrison presented her story on July Fourth and Susan Chandler told her story on Fall Foliage Day.



Photograph of Louisa (Martin) Parker from PHA collections

Louisa was the eldest daughter of Moses Martin and Jane Adelain Martin. Born in Peacham on June 10, 1822, she attended the common school and Peacham Academy. On June 6, 1850 she married Luther Fletcher Parker. Her husband received his M.D. degree from Dartmouth and began to practice medicine in Barnet. Her first baby, Jane, was born in 1851. In a letter written on June 21, 1852 to her brother Ashbel she wrote about her first-born, "She is a great girl now, walks round by chairs, feels quite important, we think she is a good, pretty baby, worth more gold than you will get in five years." Their second girl, Arabella, was born in June 1853 but lived less than a year and died in March 1854.

In January 1854 Luther bought Dr. Farr's home in Peacham and took over his practice. They moved to Peacham in the spring of 1854. Their first son, Hazen Merrill, was born in March 1855. They had eight children, but only five lived to adulthood. During the Civil War, Dr. Parker served on the United States Sanitary Commission. The Commission was an official agency of the United States government, created by legislation in 1861, to coordinate the volunteer efforts of women who wanted to contribute to the war effort of the Union states. In May 1864 Dr. Parker was sent to the Union front lines to deliver money collected from Peacham residents. He arrived shortly after the Battle of the Wilderness and stayed to treat the wounded soldiers. Louisa remained in Peacham and was pregnant with

their last child. Dr. Parker served as village physician for over 40 years. Louisa passed away on 28 May 1896 in Peacham, two years before Dr. Parker's death in 1898.

**Martha Johnson's** story was told by Dawn Wright. Her story follows:



Photograph by Jock Gill

“Hello, my name is Martha Johnson and I was born right here in Peacham in 1822 on September 17. I am the oldest of nine children born to Leonard and Betsy (Merrill) Johnson. I attended school at the Peacham Academy and stayed in this area until 1839 when I attended the Franklin Academy in New Hampshire.

My mother and father were both born and raised in Peacham and have very strong abolitionist sympathies. My uncle Oliver was a national publicist and abolitionist leader. It's long been rumored that our home on Danville Road was used as a way station on the Underground Railroad, but that's a family secret I'm afraid I can't give away. But what I can tell you is that my parents encouraged us to be educated and to help others.

So in 1855 I took a job as a matron of the female workhouse located on Blackwell's Island, New York. But my time there did not last long as I returned home that same year due to my mother's health and her passing. I remained in Peacham until 1859 when I left to teach at an industrial school in New York. But in 1863 I received a teaching commission from the National Freedman's Relief Association to teach newly freed slaves in the Union-occupied area of the South Carolina low country.

This was known as the Port Royal Experiment, and it began during the Civil War. The Union liberated the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, and its white residents fled, leaving 10,000 black slaves. This gave former slaves an opportunity to work on land that was



Teachers at the Mission in Beaufort

abandoned by plantation owners, to teach them about how to cultivate the land and sell their goods. The Port Royal Experiment was both an economic and social program; not only did it give former slaves wages to harvest cotton on the land, but also gave them an opportunity to learn how to read and write and how to blend into the new free society.

And so my journey begins as a teacher to newly freed slaves a long way from home, but letters help me stay connected.”

Martha's letters are available on the Vermont Historical Society website, and chronicle her life as a teacher. The plantation schools were discontinued in 1865 to October 1867, but Martha remained to continue teaching. She died of yellow fever in 1871 and is buried in the Episcopal Church cemetery in Beaufort, South Carolina.

## Lynn A. Bonfield Receives Prestigious Award

The Vermont Historical Society annually honors the memory of Professor Richard O. Hathaway for his innumerable contributions to the study of Vermont history. The VHS Richard O. Hathaway Award recognizes one outstanding contribution to the field of Vermont history during the past calendar year. At the Vermont Historical Society Annual Meeting on September 22, 2012 Mark Hudson, the Society's Executive Director, presented the Richard O. Hathaway Award to Lynn A. Bonfield for her book *New England to Gold Rush California: The Journal of Alfred and Chastina W. Rix 1849-1854*. Lynn Bonfield edited the shared journal that Alfred and Chastina started in Peacham on their wedding day in July 1849. For almost five years they alternated entries, writing about the birth and raising of their son, Julian, Alfred's teaching at the Peacham Academy and studying law, his law practice, and the decision to go to California. Their shared journal is unusual in describing the difficulties created by Alfred's decision to go to California and Chastina's struggle to make the trip to rejoin her husband in San Francisco.

Bonfield, Lynn A., ed. *New England to Gold Rush California: the Journal of Alfred and Chastina W. Rix, 1849-1854*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011.

## Alumni Return to East Peacham Schoolhouse By Morris McCain

This year's PHA event at the East Peacham Schoolhouse was a reunion barbecue for former students at the school. From noon to 2 in the afternoon on Saturday, September 15, the school's alumni arrived one after another to take a look at the historic building and exchange recollections of what it had been like to attend school there.

Volunteers from the PHA Board and their friends set up tables and chairs under tents designed to ward off the showers that had fallen that morning. But as is the tradition for our schoolhouse events, the sun broke through just in time to give us a beautiful, warm day together in the yard in front of the school. Dave Stauffer grilled burgers and dogs for the alumni who came, and other volunteers contributed chips, dips, salads, and desserts.



Photograph by Charles Byron

About 40 people attended the event. They were greeted by Jutta Scott, PHA President, and other members of the PHA Board, including new member Susan Chandler, who helped to publicize the reunion and contacted alumni who might be interested. Lorna Quimby, PHA Curator, had researched the school's attendance records to locate graduates who might still be in the area. Lorna was there on the day to give attendees the benefit of her own knowledge of the school's history.

Using an audio recording device supplied by the Peacham Town Hall, Board members interviewed some of the former students and made a record of conversations among them for the PHA archive. The East Peacham School offered different grades at various times, and most of those we interviewed had spent two years there. One alumnus, however, recalled attending there for six years of his elementary schooling. Some came to school by bus, while others remembered vividly their walk into the north wind getting to or from the school.

A number of teachers were remembered fondly, though for the most part discipline at the school was described as strict. Some of the alumni had music instruction, while others recalled a radio in the classroom in the 1960s that let them listen to the news each day. Some brought their lunches from home; others had hot meals provided. At one time the school was heated by a wood stove, then later by an oil furnace, which – because of its proximity to the outhouse – made this one of the most comfortable places to go to school.

Not surprisingly, recess was one of the favorite memories with students at the East Peacham School. They played dodge ball against the back wall of the

school, shot marbles in the road (when traffic must have been a little lighter than it is today), were taken on walks in search of wild flowers, and sledded on cardboard in the winters. On the whole a pretty great place to spend your schoolhouse days!

Thanks to Stan Fickes at the Town Hall, we're putting a CD of our conversations from the alumni barbecue into the PHA archive. As always, we would be happy to hear from anyone with pictures of their days at this or any of Peacham's one-room schoolhouses. For more information, please phone Lorna Quimby at 592-3571, or Jutta Scott at 592-3262, or contact PHA at [info@peachamhistorical.org](mailto:info@peachamhistorical.org).

## **The Flagpole on the Green** **A Recollection by Edna Furr**

We have the flagpole on the green in Peacham thanks to three late residents who enjoyed spending hours together in their day, just talking and playing poker:

Bob Bean, a Peacham Star Route mail carrier (rural Routes); Ed Brown, a retired history professor who came from Buffalo; and Bob Furr (born in South Dakota!), a retired IBM (Burlington) electronics engineer.

One day up at the green, Bob Furr was talking with another Peacham resident, and he said he'd like to see the flag flying there in a tribute to all the veterans of the Civil War from the Peacham area as listed on the tall monument. (The other monument listing the veterans of later wars was not yet in place on the green.) The idea seemed a good one.

So, during the 1980s, Bob Bean, Ed Brown, and Bob Furr planned it all. Bob Bean found a perfect, straight, healthy tree in the woods behind the Severinghaus home—the gray cottage with the pond beside it up on Mack Mountain Road. He trimmed and smoothed it, and then he, Ed Brown, Parker Williams, and Bob Furr painted it, fitted it out for attaching the flag, and had it put up.



**This ca. 1995 photograph shows Bob Furr taking down the flag with help from his daughter, Mary Beth Furr Guest and grandchildren.**

Bob Furr attended to raising and lowering the flag regularly while he lived in Peacham until, nearing the end of his life, he became too ill to continue. Today, the flag still flies in all its glory from the flagpole on the green.

## **Carrie Ellen Thresher Memorial Gift** **Awarded to Brittany Berwick and** **Jonathan Reis**

The Peacham Historical Association at its Annual Meeting on August 1, 2012 awarded the Carrie Ellen Thresher Memorial Gift to Brittany Berwick and Jonathan Reis in recognition of their contributions to the Peacham community and in Carrie Ellen Thresher's memory. This year the gift was awarded to two graduating high school seniors and is designed to further the students' education. Brittany Berwick plans to attend the New England Culinary School in Montpelier in summer 2012. Jonathan Reis is studying at the Schulich School of Music at McGill University in Montreal. Carrie Thresher was an important person in the Peacham community. She felt that it was essential to take an interest in and give back to our town. The annual gift recognizes her strong interest in community service. Established in 2002, this annual gift to a graduating senior encourages high school students to take an active role in our town.

## **Peacham Patriot Available Electronically**

PHA now offers our members the option of receiving the *Peacham Patriot* electronically. For our small organization, email distribution saves printing and mailing costs. Many members already receive renewal notices for their PHA membership in their email box, and we hope that you will consider taking advantage of the electronic distribution of our newsletter. If you are interested in switching to email distribution, please send a message to [scottjutta2@gmail.com](mailto:scottjutta2@gmail.com). Future issues of the newsletter will then be sent to your email inbox as an attachment in the Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format. Thank you for supporting PHA.

## **Membership Support**

Your annual membership support is a critical investment in PHA and we depend on membership dues to support its many programs.

Dues are \$10.00 per person or \$15.00 for a family. We also offer a life membership for \$250. We hope that we can count on you.

## **Peacham Patriot • Winter 2012**

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## **PHA Board 2012-2013**

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