



The Peacham Patriot

\$1.50

Volume 25, Number 2

Peacham Historical Association

Summer 2011

PHA Receives Vermont Humanities Council Grant for Civil War Project

The Vermont Humanities Council has awarded the Peacham Historical Association (PHA) a grant to document, preserve, and publicize Peacham's history during the Civil War. In commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the start of the Civil War, PHA will compile biographies of Peacham soldiers and use its Civil War resources to tell the stories of Peacham in the Civil War.

A planned book, *Peacham in the Civil War*, will bring together information about Peacham's soldiers, include a selection of the letters and diaries they wrote, and assess the impact of the war on the families that stayed behind. The research for the publication will also build the foundation for an exhibit and a public program.

With support from the Vermont Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities, PHA will host a special exhibit at the Historical House, PHA's Museum, during the summer of 2011. The exhibit will showcase documents and artifacts related to the Civil War. Visitors will also see all available photographs of Peacham Civil War soldiers. Many will be displayed in Peacham for the first time. We are making considerable efforts to locate photographs, which will also be included in the publication.

The Vermont Humanities Council grant will also fund the needed conservation treatment by M.J. Davis, an experienced paper conservator, to stabilize and preserve the 80 Civil War letters in PHA's collection. The letters will be scanned by the Northeast Document Conservation Center to create digital facsimiles. PHA will also work with the University of Vermont Special Collections Department's Center for Digital Initiatives to

“publish” the letters on the [Vermonters in the Civil War](#) website.

As the capstone of the diverse efforts, PHA will offer twice a public program to local residents and visitors. The public program will tell the story of Peacham's young men, who often volunteered as a group and stayed together in arms. For the past 12 years PHA has presented the stories of people from Peacham's past through Ghost Walks in Peacham's cemetery on the 4th of July and Fall Foliage Day. This year's Ghost Walks will focus on soldiers who served in the Union armies and family members who stayed behind. The program will include readings from letters and diaries that illuminate the experiences of Peacham people during the Civil War and bring these documents, and their authors to life. The letters and diaries offer captivating glimpses of how the war affected men's and women's lives and the sacrifices made by Peacham families. The program will be held on July 4th, 2011. It will also be repeated on Foliage Day, September 29, 2011. The program will start at 2p.m. in front of Peacham's Soldiers Monument with a brief introduction and then move to the nearby Peacham Cemetery. The program notes and the documents will introduce each soldier. People from Peacham will read excerpts from diaries or letters at the graveside of the featured soldiers.

Documenting Our Town's Contributions to the Civil War

To tell the stories of Peacham men who served in the Union armies, PHA is seeking their photographs, letters and other documents. If you have holdings of a Peacham soldier's papers, please consider allowing PHA to make copies.

As a central part of the project to document and preserve Peacham's history during the Civil, we

have prepared a draft list of Peacham soldiers who lived in Peacham before, during and after the Civil War. The list together with photographs, transcripts of letters and diaries and other materials will be published in late 2011. We encourage you to review the draft list at the Library or on the PHA website: peachamhistorical.org. If you have materials, please get in touch with PHA's President, Jutta R. Scott at 802 592-3262 or via email scottjutta2@gmail.com.



President's Report

Jutta R. Scott
PHA President

As we approach summer, we are looking back as PHA is ending its 2010-2011 fiscal year and looking forward to an exciting calendar of summer and fall events.

PHA depends on many sources to support its programs and activities. As always, we could not do it without our volunteers. Their contributions of many hours keep PHA vibrant and make possible the ongoing work in the Research Office, and the array of other activities. Each fiscal year, PHA must raise all the funds for its annual operating budget and special projects.

PHA is ending the current fiscal year with a small surplus. I am pleased to share with you some of highlights of our 2010- 2011 fundraising efforts:

- In fall 2010, the PHA Board launched an Annual Fund Appeal. As a result of this fund drive, PHA raised \$5,000 in contributions that provided 50% of its annual expenditures;
- Membership dues, sale of publications, revenues from the Ghost Walks and other programs and events met the remainder of the budgetary needs;
- In May 2011, the Vermont Humanities Council awarded PHA a \$1,500 grant for its Civil War project (described on page 1), which will document, preserve, and make accessible Peacham's Civil War resources.

This summer, PHA is sponsoring an exciting exhibit and several programs (See Calendar of Events on

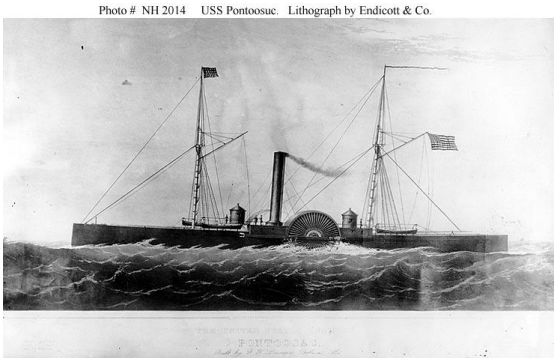
page 7) as part of the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. The exhibit at the Historical House will display information, photographs and items about Peacham's Civil War soldiers and tell the story of Peacham in the Civil War. This year's Ghost Walks will focus on soldiers who served in the Union armies and family members who stayed behind. The program will be held on the upper Town Green and the Peacham Cemetery on July 4, 2011 and will be repeated on Foliage Day, September 29, 2011. The program will include readings that range from the memoir of an early enlistee, Charles Dubois, to letters from two soldiers who were killed in battle, to Mark Wheeler's memoir of his imprisonment at the Confederate Prison at Andersonville, to the diaries written by Isaac N. Watts who served for two years until August 1865 and was instrumental in building the Soldiers Monument. The PHA Annual Meeting on August 2 will offer "The Vermont Civil War Song Book" program at the Congregational Church. Linda Radtke will share songs from Vermont during the Civil War period. This is a Vermont Humanities Council event hosted by PHA. Please join us for one or more of these events.

The Story of Peacham Civil War Sailor Robert Blair

Extracted and adapted from "Green Mountain Mariners in the Civil War," by Tom Ledoux. To be published fall 2011.

Robert M. Blair, a Union recruit from Peacham, was a sailor in the US Navy during the Civil War. He received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the battle for Fort Fisher, North Carolina, on January 15, 1865. Although he gave different versions about his birthplace and birth date, his immigration record shows that he was born in Scotland. His parents George D. and Margaret (Gentile) Blair came to Peacham in the late 1840's and settled in Peacham Hollow. In various Census returns, and his military record Blair reports that he was born in Peacham in 1836. Blair was a sailor before joining the US Navy. His brother George said Robert "followed the sea" for several years before enlisting at age 21 in the Volunteer Sailors and Marines as did only one other Peacham recruit, James A. Dubois.

Regardless of his nativity, he was credited to Vermont when he enlisted on 5 November 1862 on the receiving ship *Ohio*, at Portland, Maine. He was ordered to the steamer *Huron*, the next day, and served onboard her until 21 December 1863, then transferred to the receiving ship *Princeton*. After he was discharged on 31 December 1863, he enlisted again, 18 June 1864, and served as a Boatswain's Mate on the side-wheel gunboat *Pontoosuc* until 12 June 1865.



Courtesy US Naval Historical Center
The USS *Pontoosuc*, a 1173-ton *Sassacus* class "double-ender" steam gunboat, was built at Portland, Maine. Commissioned in May 1864, she served off the Atlantic coast during the remaining year of the Civil War. During August 1864, the gunboat participated in the search for the Confederate raider *Tallahassee*. Late in that year, and in January 1865, *Pontoosuc* was one of the large fleet that bombarded Fort Fisher, North Carolina, during the two assaults that ultimately seized that strategic position and eliminated Wilmington, North Carolina, as a blockade running port.

On 31 March 1865, Commander William G. Temple, commanding *Pontoosuc*, wrote to the Secretary of the Navy with the following recommendation:

“After mature consideration and careful consultation with the officers of this vessel, I would recommend that medals of honor be awarded to the following men under my command for gallantry, skill, and coolness in action during the operations in and about Cape Fear River, which extended from 24 December 1864, to 22 January 1865, and which resulted in the capture of Fort Fisher and Wilmington, viz:

Robert M. Blair, boatswain's mate;
Anthony Williams, sailmaker's mate;
James W. Verney, chief quartermaster;
Asa Betham, coxswain; John P. Errikson, captain of forecandle; Clement Dees, seaman (colored); George W. McWilliams, landsman, and John Anglin, boy.”

All eight were subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor on 22 June 1865. Blair's citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Boatswain's Mate Robert M. Blair, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism in action while serving on board the U.S.S. *Pontoosuc* during the capture of Fort Fisher and Wilmington, North Carolina, 24 December 1864 to 22 January 1865. Carrying out his duties faithfully throughout this period, Boatswain's Mate Blair was recommended for gallantry and skill and for his cool courage while under the fire of the enemy throughout these actions.

General Orders: War Department, General Orders No. 59 (June 22, 1865)”

After the *Pontoosuc* was decommissioned, Blair was subsequently assigned to the *Ohio* until 13 July 1865, then the *Princeton* until 27 July, and the screw tug *Pinta*, from which vessel he was discharged on 27 August 1865.

No records could be found about his life during the next fifteen years. By 1880 he was living by himself as a farmer in Clear Creek, Stafford County, KS. according to the 1880 Census returns. On 16 August 1885, he married Anna J. Pitcher (Sweet). Their marriage certificate shows their ages as 43 and 42, respectively. Anna was formerly married to William Pitcher, who died 29 March 1883, in Nickerson, KS.

Robert and Anna lived in Stafford, KS from 1885 to 1890. Their daughter, Ruby was born 27 November 1888 and their son, Robert was born 12 August 1890.

Blair applied for an invalid pension from Stafford on 11 July 1890, claiming as the result of injuries received during his service on the *Huron* that he

was suffering from “right thigh bone having been broken and is one inch shorter than the left leg, and very weak. Also a partial paralysis of both hands, and a very weak stomach.” However, the medical journal of Huron does not appear to support his claim, indicating he was admitted 20 April 1863 – “vulnus contusum (contusions): -- in line of duty: premature explosion of rifle: end of middle finger carried away. Discharged, Sep. 30, 1863, to duty.”

It appears that Robert and his wife moved to Port Angeles, Clallam Bay, WA, before 4 July 1890, where he filed an additional claim due to a service-incurred injury to his right thigh, while serving on *Huron* during his first enlistment.

Around 1895, Blair and his wife moved to Enid, in the Oklahoma Territory. The city of Enid was settled as a result of the 1893 Land Run to the Cherokee Outlet. At the end of the Run, homesteaders quickly established farms out of what had been open prairie land, and Enid became a commercial center and the Garfield County seat. Although Robert Blair did not claim land, he found work in Enid. He and his wife resided at the Rex Hotel, where they were both employed as servants in the hotel.

Blair died 2 April 1899 of meningitis, and is buried in Block E, Lot 17, Enid Cemetery, in Enid, Oklahoma.

Sources: [Peck; “Medal of Honor Recipients,” U.S. Army Center of Military History Online, <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/mohciv.htm>; Internet; 1850, 1880, 1900 Censuses; International Genealogical Index, File #1239636, page 1069, www.familysearch.org;

Planning for the Future Home for PHA Collections

In the last issue of the *Peacham Patriot*, I described the need and planning for a future facility for storing PHA’s collections. The PHA Board at its December 10, 2010 meeting agreed to explore further the option of building first an ell addition to the Historical House, PHA’s Museum on Church Street, and eventually a new barn-like, connected structure with fireproof, secure space for storing PHA’s research collections. The next step was the

exploration of the acquisition of town-owned land. PHA only owns a small lot (81’2”x95’) and needs to acquire additional land from the Town of Peacham. An added complication is that the land was transferred to the Town from the Vermont Land Trust with a restriction on subdividing the land.

To start the discussion with staff at the Vermont Land Trust (VLT), Tim McKay for the Select Board, Bruce Urie from the Vermont Land Trust, Lorna Quimby, and Jutta Scott met on December 28, 2010 to discuss the potential sale/lease of the needed parcel of land. Bruce Urie agreed in principle that VLT would support a 99-year lease (instead of a subdivision, which is a more complex transaction) by the Town of Peacham to PHA. During the review of the deed that recorded the transfer of the land from VLT to the Town of Peacham, we discovered that PHA does not own the land on the left side of the Historical House all the way to the driveway that leads up to the senior housing apartments, and a town-owned strip of about 50’ runs from Church Street parallel to the driveway. The Select Board discussed at its January 5, 2011 meeting the PHA’ request for a parcel of land and decided to include an article for the 2011 Town Meeting in order to gauge voter sentiment about a future subdivision. It read:

Shall the Town investigate the possibility of conveying a small parcel of land adjacent to the Historical House to the Peacham Historical Association for building a future home for its research collections?

The voters approved the article unanimously at the Town Meeting on March 1, 2011. As the result of the investigation and further conversations with the Vermont Land Trust, the Select Board at its Wednesday, May 18, 2011 Meeting approved in principle PHA’s request for a 99-year lease for a 100’x95’ parcel of land in back of the Historical House and the right-of access across the strip of land between the existing driveway and the Historical House.

The support of the Select Board is a big step, but many other challenges remain. Future issues of the *Peacham Patriot* will report further on progress in planning for a new facility for storing PHA’s collections.

Plans for the Peacham Roller Barn



Peacham's historic roller barn, located on the Upper Green near the cemetery, may soon be open to the public. Currently, the roller barn serves as the trailhead for the Peacham Pathways. Many volunteers worked to clean up the area around the barn in 2008/2009 during the development of the network of walking and hiking trails. That project also spurred efforts to save the roller barn, which dates back to the mid-1880's and housed the town's snow roller. Dick Hovey has been a leader in efforts to save the barn from demolition and preserve it.

Rollers, large wooden cylinders pulled by teams of horses, were used to compact snow-clogged roads in the days before snowplows. Built by the town some time after 1845, Peacham's roller barn is the only one known to exist in Vermont today. The original roller disappeared some time ago, but Dick located several others in Vermont. Peacham residents donated money to acquire three rollers, the largest from Barnet, and Allen Thresher, Jr. transported them to Peacham. Ron Crisman and Omri Parsons are storing them in their barns until renovations on the roller barn are completed.

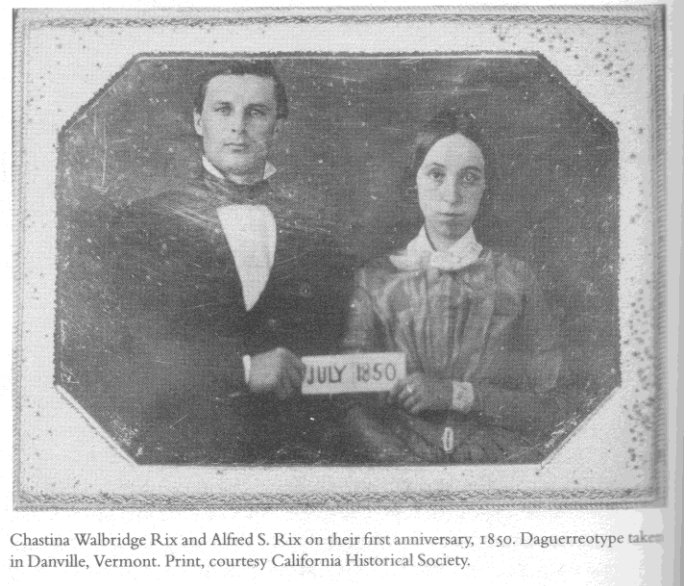
Much work has already been done on the barn. Andy Cochran installed new tie beams to shore up the roof and removed scrap metal and other items that had been stored in the barn. The Peacham Conservation Commission contributed funds to landscape the area around the barn and is supplying a main beam. But much remains to be done. The floor needs to be leveled; the posts and exterior boards on the southwest side need repair; and some items, including an old stove, need to be removed. Some of the rollers also need restoration work. Dick

is hoping for help with these tasks from the town and private citizens.

Dick Hovey hopes to have the repairs made and the barn with its rollers open to the public this summer. People interested in helping to make this hope a reality may contact Dick directly at 592-3266.

Written by Jane Alper

Book Review



Chastina Walbridge Rix and Alfred S. Rix on their first anniversary, 1850. Daguerreotype taken in Danville, Vermont. Print, courtesy California Historical Society.

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.

Diaries interest historians because of the immediacy of their record of everyday life, especially when they are written in extraordinary times. Mary Chestnut, a member of the Southern slave-owning planter class at the time of the Civil War, kept a diary that is still read today. Anne Frank kept her famous diary as she and her family vainly sought safety, hiding in Holland during World War II. Now we have the diary of Alfred and Chastina Rix, edited by Lynn Bonfield and published (2011) by Arthur H. Clark, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press.

It begins in Peacham in 1849 with the Rixes' marriage and continues during a time of great personal and social change (western migration), ending with them in California in 1854. Today, such

hand written records have been replaced largely by blogs: great masses of unedited material. Alfred and Chastina were pre-bloggers, but of the same mind. Lynn Bonfield's editing and commentary have added immeasurably to their work.

Alfred Rix was the twenty-seventh principal of the Peacham Academy, and then law partner of William Mattocks. His wife was a teacher, daughter of Roxana Brown Walbridge Watts of *Roxana's Children*. Their wedding trip in 1849, to visit Alfred's relatives in New Hampshire, suggests something of the enforced intimacy of the time. After Alfred leaves Chastina behind in Peacham, with their young son, Julian, and goes west to seek his fortune in the goldfields of California, Chastina's status in the community changes. "She found herself diminished in the community without Alfred." (p.226) She records her resentment and depression. Alfred, failing to succeed as a Forty-Niner, becomes again a teacher and sends for Chastina and Julian. Her 1853 trip, by way of Panama (the Transcontinental Railroad was not completed until 1869), was extremely dangerous, especially for a woman and child travelling without male protection.

The diary is essentially a story of America as the Land of Opportunity: how a young couple from Peacham with vision, talent and determination left behind a world of subsistence farming and opened doors to abundance. Although they express regret about forsaking Vermont, it is clear that they had little to lose. As it happened, Alfred eventually established himself as a lawyer and became a very wealthy man, although Chastina died too young to enjoy his success.

Peacham Patriot readers will recognize that Alfred and Chastina were part of the great out-migration that reduced Peacham's population from 1,443 in 1840 to as few as 433 in 1960. The diary provides the particulars of what this trend meant for one couple: what it required of them and their family, and what they gained.

Lynn Bonfield, retired San Francisco State University archivist well known to many Peacham friends as a summer resident and PHA member, has done a loving and thorough job as editor. She will help readers with a Peacham connection recognize people and places. Alfred and Chastina hoped that "future generations" would read their account of

devotion, danger and determination; because of Lynn's work, their intention has come true.

New England to Gold Rush California is recommended for purchase by libraries with collections of New England or California history, and by anyone who cares to continue the story of Roxana's family, and by general readers who see value in following the dramatic story of one couple's transition from small town to boomtown.

Written by David E. L. Brown

Membership Support

Your annual membership support is a critical investment in PHA and PHA depends 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. Please renew when you receive your annual reminder.

Don't Miss the 4th of July Celebration In Peacham!

Visit www.peacham.net for the full schedule of events.



2011 Calendar of Events

Sunday, July 3

Author and Artist Reception

Reception at the Peacham Library will celebrate the publication of Lynn Bonfield's new book and the opening of Karen Lewis' art exhibit.

Sundays, July 10 to September 25

PHA Historic House Opens for the Season

2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

PHA Historical House opens for the season. The exhibit will commemorate the Civil War and will display documents, photographs and memorabilia.



Monday, July 4

Peacham Fourth of July Celebration

Historical House and Blacksmith Shop will be open.

The PHA Ghost Walk will feature readings from Civil War letters and diaries. The program will start at 2p.m. in front of Peacham's Soldiers Monument with a brief introduction and then move to the nearby Peacham Cemetery.

Sunday, July 24

Appreciation Reception at the Historic House

2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Tuesday, August 2

PHA Annual Meeting

Peacham Congregational Church

7 p.m.

The Business Meeting starts at 7p.m. followed by the Program: "The Vermont Civil War Songbook". Singer Linda Ratke will share a selection of songs popular during the Civil War. Refreshments will be served after the program.

Friday, August 12

Ray Anderson Memorial Concert

Peacham Congregational Church

7 p.m.

Ray Anderson Memorial Concert to Benefit PHA Paul Orgel will play piano sonatas by Franz Schubert, Dvorak, Chopin, and Carl Maria von Weber.

Saturday, September 3

Community Yard Sale at Peacham Hollow

Schoolhouse

10:00 - 2:00 p.m



Thursday, September 29

Peacham Fall Foliage

Celebration

The Historical House and Blacksmith Shop will be open.

The PHA Ghost Walk will be held at 2p.m. (See July 4 for program).

With Grateful Thanks

We thank James Keeney for donating Hazen Hooker's 1859 pocket diary. The diary records his daily work on his parents' farm, the weather and general observations.

The diary is a wonderful addition to the PHA Hooker Family collection. PHA is fortunate to have 76 letters from Hazen Hooker, which he wrote during his service in the Union Army. Hazen Hooker enlisted three months before his twentieth birthday on August 8, 1862, served in Co. G, 3rd Vermont Regiment, and was killed in the battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864.

PHA's collections were also enriched by Leslie Moore's donation of sermons and an 1830 letter by David Merrill, Peacham's second minister of the Congregational Church.

PHA thanks Dave Warden for donating five flags that had probably belonged to the Grand Army of the Republic veteran's organization.



Peacham Patriot • Summer 2011

Peacham Historical Association
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The Peacham Patriot, published twice each year, is a benefit of membership in the PHA. The editor is Jutta Scott, with assistance from Mel Reis and Lorna Quimby.

PHA Board 2010-2011

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