

### From the President

by Bob Colt

The Winchester Historical Society has come out blazing in 2011 with very strong programs for members and the Winchester community and the second major renovation project for the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center. Each year sees the Sanborn House blossom and shine to a greater degree as the 17-member Board of Directors with the membership's encouragement keeps raising the necessary money and planning the systematic improvement to this gem of a house.

With the signing of the contract with Prism Builders, construction will take place in April and May to replicate the original mahogany door, create an ADA accessible path and front entrance, refurbish the impressive front columns and paint the peeling trim

*(continued on page 2)*

### The Robbins Family of East Lexington: Rising to Prominence in the New Republic

by Dinah Voorhies

Have you ever wondered "What would someone 200 years from now think, if they could see me in this outfit?" Members and guests could ponder this question on November 30 when Museum of Fine Arts Curatorial Researcher and Winchester resident, Jennifer Swope, shared with us the history of the Robbins family, using an extensive collection of family textiles, preserved since 1780-1830, to shed light on their story.

The "founding couple" consisted of Abigail Winship Robbins (1759-1850) and Stephen Robbins (1758-1847).

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*High fashion of the day included a spencer (a short form of jacket worn to just above the waist) such as Miss Robbins wore.*



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### Society Executive Director

Rebekah Beaulieu

(From the President - continued from page 1)

and window frames. The grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the matching monies raised with generous donations from En Ka, the Griffin Foundation, our Board and members make this new project a reality. Executive Director Rebekah Beaulieu has been diligently coordinating all the steps as we prepare for this exciting project.

We look to make Town Day, June 4, 2011 a community unveiling for this important Sanborn House renovation and restoration in our mission to create a true historical and cultural center for the Winchester community. Mark your calendars now for Town Day, when in addition to the historical trolley tours there will be another Strawberry Festival and Classic Car Show at the Sanborn House. Plan to take a tour of the newly refurbished House, enjoy some strawberry shortcake and see the expanded Classic Car Show on the High Street grounds.

If you are in the market for a great place to have your next family function, business or non-profit group meeting, call the Winchester Historical Society at 781-721-0135 and tour the Sanborn House to book your event. The beautification of the Sanborn House and the elegance of the first floor rooms make for a memorable and impressive setting for all types of meetings and soirees.

The blossoming of the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center has been possible because of the continuing support of the Town's leaders -- the Selectmen, the School Committee, the Planning Board and the employees of the Town of Winchester coupled with our invigorated Board of Directors and members. If you can do more to keep accelerating the great progress that we are making by volunteering your time and resources, we would be most grateful. As we preserve the past, we build for the future

### Thank You!

The En Ka Society and the Griffin Foundation both awarded the Historical Society grants to be used to meet the required \$45,000 match for the Society to receive funds from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Thanks to the support of these local organizations -- and member's support during our fall campaign -- the Society secured full funding from the Commonwealth.

## Eagle Scout Project Complete

by Chris Smith

As part of his Eagle Scout qualifications, Chris Smith of Winchester Boy Scout Troop 507, with the help of the Scout Troop, has restored a large second floor room of the Sanborn House. The room will now be available for use.

The restoration included extensive patching of the walls, repairing holes in the ceiling left from installing insulation, and covering the entire ceiling with blue board. A large beam was so badly damaged by water leaks that it had to be boxed in with blue board. After applying three coats of joint compound to seams on the ceiling, the ceiling and walls were primed and painted. Brassware (doorknobs, handles, etc) was polished and replaced. Finally, two chandeliers donated to the Historical Society were installed in the center of the room and above the main door along with two rugs and a large cherry display case. Work was begun in January and Scouts completed their part in March 2011. Winchester Scout Troop contributed 227 hours of labor to the project.

The Society and Scout Troop would like to thank those who contributed donations to make the project possible. The Troop's costs were \$400. In addition, in-kind contributions were provided by:

- Arlington Coal and Lumber gave a large discount on the blue board as well as the joint compound
- Fells True Value Hardware donated paint and primer
- Churchill Corporation loaned large equipment (including scaffolding) so that work could be done on the 12' ceiling
- Period furnishing were donated by Historical Society members: Bill and Wendy Swanton – two chandeliers and two rugs, Clarence and Kathleen Kemper – large legal display case, which will be used to display the Society's collections.

(Researching the History of Your Winchester Home  
- continued from page 6)

1889, and 1906 atlases and the 1910 and 1916 Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlases contain detailed depictions of property, footprint, and ownership. One limitation of the maps is that several do not cover the outskirts of the town.

(First published by the *Daily Times Chronicle*, Winchester Edition, Feb. 24, 2011)

(The Robbins Family of East Lexington: Rising to Prominence in the New Republic - continued from page 1)

She was a daughter of a well-off, landowning Lexington family, and he was from West Cambridge. Married, with three children, they moved from Cambridge to Lexington in 1783. Stephen had fought in the Battle of Lexington and after the war was ready to open a business in dry goods, fur dressing, and finished fur items. Nearby marshlands provided small animals, while large pelts were purchased from Boston and New York suppliers.

The family's involvement in the business, their rising social status and affluence, and the trade routes and business practices of the day, such as the extensive use of goods for barter and credit, were all delightfully illuminated by Swope, with examples of clothing and accessories that Abigail, Stephen and their children left behind together with diary and account book entries and period prints.

Dress that we associate with late colonial representations appeared, such as Abigail's large neck kerchief (think Martha Washington's portrait). An account of Stephen's old age by an acquaintance described his unchanging "ruffled shirt, knee breeches, and a low crowned broad-brimmed hat, and his hair in a queue." Yet items owned by daughter Caira, occasionally referenced in a diary she kept from age 15 to 29, showed up-to-date styles of the new Republic, starting around 1810, and access to desirable imported accessories and fabrics via her father's store.

Parents in the audience got a chuckle and a smile from situations that never seem to change, though centuries may pass. "Be sure to wear something warm" isn't always heeded. Caira writes on May 20, 1821, after wearing only her fashionable short silk jacket to church, "Attended meeting. Walked. Wore my spencer, was cold."

Helping in the family business was considered important, as was saving for financial independence and one's old age. Caira made a significant income as one of up to 100 people Stephen employed at a time making fur accessories. Paid piecework cutting and sewing muffs and linings earned her \$170 (equivalent to considerably more today) in store credit in just six months, according to entries in her account book between August 1810 and February 1811. Her father, in 1812, was ambivalent about her staying with her older sister in Montpelier, Vermont, beyond summer and through the winter, writing "We want your work. You know, yourself, that what you could earn this fall would amount to quite a large amount when you are eighty."

Though able to afford good things, the family also exercised frugality typical of the time. Textiles were costly, or labor-intensive if made in the home. Homespun linens made by Abigail were preserved, and a number of garments, including hats, reveal evidence of being made over to make them more stylish.

A discussion of later generations brought the talk to buildings still seen in Lexington – the Stephen Robbins house (today standing); the first brick building in Lexington, built as a store by son Eli Robbins in 1828 and now the Waldorf School's preschool building; and the Follen Church, in which Eli was active.

The collection was ultimately preserved by a classic "New England spinster," Eli's granddaughter Ellen Adelia Stone. She grew up and remained in the family home, never marrying or moving away. Beginning in 1898 with a pair of moccasins purchased by Caira on a solo trip to Niagara Falls, Ellen Stone presented the Museum of Fine Arts with more than 500 textile pieces and gradually placed family possessions at additional institutions such as the Whipple House in Ipswich. The Lexington Historical Society holds the family papers.

### **Town Archives has Expanded Hours**

If you ever wanted to visit the Archival Center, there is good news. The Archival Center in Town Hall will have expanded hours through June. Ellen Knight, historian and frequent contributor to the *Black Horse Bulletin*, will join Charlene Band, Nancy Schrock, and Randy Bairnsfather to provide reference service to researchers.

#### **Hours for April, May and June, 2011:**

1st Monday, 7-9  
1st & 5th Thursdays, 9-1  
3rd Thursday, 9-1 and 3-5  
2nd & 4th Thursdays, 12-4.

## Thank You for Your Generous Response

The Society would like to thank the donors to the 2010 Annual Appeal:

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## Thank You for Your Support

The Society would like to thank contributors to the 2010 Capital Campaign:

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The Society held its 2010 holiday party at the Eunice Thompson Memorial Library in North Woburn.

## Society Celebrates the New Year!

by Carol Keller

The Society held its holiday party at the Eunice Thompson Memorial Library in North Woburn, honoring a tradition of having its party in a historic structure in a neighboring town. The site is the same age as the Sanborn House and is a beautiful Arts & Craft building. The event was held on January 9, 2011.

John McElhiney, attorney and local historian, spoke about the prominent Thompson family who built and donated the library to the town. Jonathan Thompson's intent in erecting the library in his wife's name was to offer library service to the North Woburn area, especially for the children, when in the early 1900's it was difficult for the citizens to go into Woburn Center to use the main Public Library. The library remained open until the 1980's; some of the books appear to be original to the opening. Today the library is available for public use. A trust fund from the Thompsons assists with its upkeep.



(l-r) Mary Ann Marmon, Lauri Minniti, and Nancy Kilker enjoy the event.



Society members listen to the remarks on the Thompson Library and North Woburn event.



John McElhiney, program speaker, converses with Bob Tedesco, Program Committee member.

## Sanborn Construction

by Rebekah Beaulieu

Big changes are happening at the Sanborn House! As the Historical Society was pleased to report in 2010, we received a matching grant of \$45,000 from the Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Fund, one of the largest awards given last year. Having raised the matching funds and completed our pre-construction work, we are happy to share with you that we have hired Prism Builders, Inc. of Wakefield to complete our project, which will begin in April.

We plan to install a new walkway and a new front door that reproduces the door original to the 1907 design of the entry. The entrance and the newly graded front path will be fully ADA accessible. Also included in this project is the refurbishment of the columns on the front façade, as well as painting of the trim and window frames of the entire house.

This project is being undertaken with the utmost care for the historical integrity of the building. For instance, we are completing a historic paint analysis that will ensure the color of the paint used matches the original paint choice as closely as possible.

In celebrating this huge step in the restoration of the Sanborn House, we thank our board and members for your support thus far. We look forward to welcoming the next phase of the Sanborn with you!

## Researching the History of Your Winchester Home

By Ellen Knight

One of the most frequent reasons people visit the Winchester Archival Center is to find out more about their homes. To help home owners learn how to research their houses with local resources, the Winchester Historical Society sponsored a program February 9, 2011 on "Researching Your Winchester Home."

One place to start is with the house itself. The style (massing, plan, structure, and embellishment) is a helpful tool for establishing a rough date of construction, although one may be misled by alterations and the ongoing revival of styles. Then one may look for records in Town Hall.

The Building Department is a good place to start the research. For homes built from the mid-1920s on, building permits supply the date and names of the owner, architect, and builder. For all homes, building permits (if they were pulled) document changes to the original construction made since the mid-1920s. The Building Department has many plot plans but does not have an archive of architectural blueprints (no department does). It does keep plans associated with Zoning Board of Appeals' decisions, but those are limited to the scope of work in the special permit.

The Assessor's Department keeps current information on properties, including a line drawing of the building footprint, description, valuation, and estimated date of construction (which may or may not be accurate). Earlier assessors' records, as published in the Annual Reports of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, generally give the acreage and list what buildings (e.g., house, shed, chicken coop) were on the property, as well as the valuation and tax. These reports are not available at the Assessors' Office but are at the Archival Center and Public Library. The old Assessors' Reports are organized by owner rather than by address. Therefore it is helpful to be able to trace the ownership of a house.

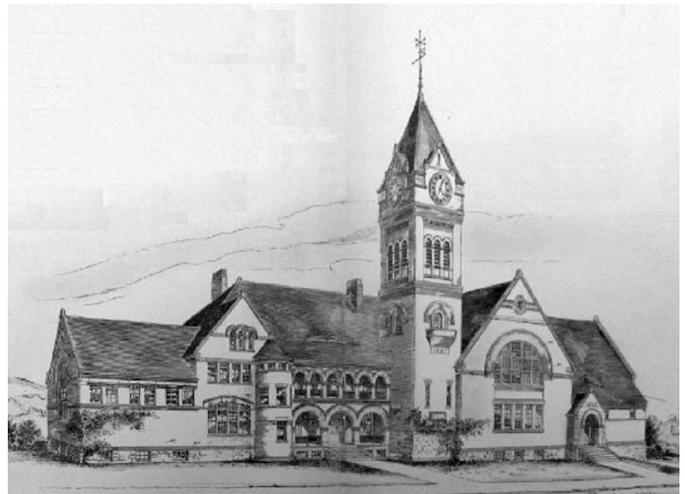
This could be done by visiting the Registry of Deeds, but there are also local resources that may help. In the 1970s, the Winchester Historical Commission put together a survey of buildings built before 1917 – numbering about 2,000 – which is available at the Archival Center and the Public Library. The survey forms provide a date or estimated date of construction and the name of the original owner. In some instances the forms provide a list of owners and further history on the building. An advantage to consulting the survey at the Archival Center is that the original files of the survey team are filed there and may also include a researcher's notes and the original photograph(s) used in the survey.

Another resource to trace owners at the Archival Center is the street directories, first published in 1874. In addition to an alphabetical list of residents, they contain a list of all streets with the house numbers and names of residents on those streets. With the owners' names, one can not only do research in the Assessors' reports but also search through the Winchester Public Library's microfilm collection of local newspapers for obituaries and other information about the owners. If one knows the construction date, a scan through papers of that time may reveal real estate ads or news articles.

Research about the owners may also be conducted in the censuses, available online at the library through Ancestry.com or through HeritageQuest or FamilySearch.org (which are also available from home). While the street directories often only list head of household, the censuses list everyone dwelling in the household, including any servants, and give ages and occupations.

Another resource at the Archival Center is its map collection. The 1854 map of Winchester marks buildings and names the owners. The 1886 and 1898 pictorial maps show bird's-eye views of Winchester with drawings of the buildings. The 1875,

*(Researching the History of Your Winchester Home - continued on page 2)*



*The program included a guide to which Town departments have helpful resources by local historian Ellen Knight, a methodology for research by preservation consultant John Clemson, and a case study by Nancy Schrock who showed the documents, maps, and photographs she uncovered while researching her own 1904 home.*

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## Vice President's Report, Sanborn Operations, 2010

by Nancy Schrock

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the Griffin Foundation will match the En Ka Society's grant to the Society for the front entrance of the Sanborn House. With this in place, we will have matched in full the \$45,000 grant from the State thanks to En Ka, the Griffin Foundation, and our October fundraiser for a total project cost of \$90,000. The Society will fund the architect and contractor fees of \$25,000.

When we finish this project, we will have raised and invested a quarter of a million dollars on the renovation of the Sanborn House. Given the state of the economy, this is an incredible achievement. It has taken a tremendous amount of coordinated work from the Board, local government, and the Winchester community.

As Society members, we should all understand how complicated the process was for getting work on the house underway. It explains why the Sanborn House has stood unpainted so long. I have often compared the early stages of this Sanborn House project to a giant jigsaw puzzle. Here are some of the pieces that had to be in place:

Permanent Preservation Restriction was first supported by the Selectmen and then passed by Town Meeting in fall 2009. This allowed the Society to apply for state funds.

Griffin Foundation gave a grant for \$5000 in 2009 to develop plans for the front entrance, making it ADA accessible while restoring the original front door.

These plans became the basis for a grant application to Mass Historical Commission for a Mass Preservation Project Fund grant. We had less than 2 months to prepare the plans and application, and the fact that we had a "shovel ready" project was critical. We had support from all our legislators and local town boards. We received \$45,000.

A master plan for handicapped access was developed with the input and support of the Winchester Disabilities and Access Commission. The Town provided \$6000 in funding to plan the bathrooms and side entrance, to be constructed by the Town.

The Planning Board and Town Counsel wanted a parking plan for the entire Sanborn site before approving an ADA space in front of the Sanborn House. This required extensive meetings with neighbors, the Planning Board, the Historical Commission, and the School Board. The plan was developed by architect, Karle Packard, with joint funding from the Society and the Town. It was approved by the ZBA in June 2010.

For the last five months, Rebekah Beaulieu, Society Executive Director, has worked with the Mass Historical Commission on the designs and specifications for the front entrance. These required approval for variances for ADA from the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board and for changes to an historic structure from the Mass Historical Commission. These have been approved.

It has been so good to have the guidance of the Mass Historical Commission as we recall Board Member, David Stirling's warning that as soon as we touched the building's structure, we would have to meet state requirements. To have all this settled means that we can move forward with restoration. At the same time, being ADA accessible the Sanborn House can be open to all members of the community in the summer.

I'd like to acknowledge how much help we have received from our architect, Karle Packard, of Red Hawk Studio. Having his consistent design vision and expertise has been critical. He also provided information for grants at a moment's notice. David Stirling's architectural expertise has also been crucial at every stage. Bob Colt's mastery of the political process guided us through the preservation restriction, parking issues, and set up strong relationships with the Selectmen, which continue to serve us well. Having Rebekah as Executive Director, on-site and in communication with the Mass Historical Commission, has been essential.

2011 will be an exciting year as we open the Sanborn House to the Town. Let's make it a time to celebrate and reach out to other organizations and our friends who may not know about the Sanborn House. It will also be a time to raise additional funds to complete the restoration of doors and windows, especially our beautiful but deteriorated stained glass window. We have much to look forward to.

- Meetings** Board meetings are held in the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center on the third Tuesday of the month (April 19, May 17, June 21) at 7:30 PM. The meetings are open to the public and all are welcome.
- Programs** **Saturday, April 9, 2011: Pot Luck Dinner**, 6:00 to 9:00 PM, Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center
- Tuesday, April 12, 2011: "What's It Worth: Is There A Treasure in You Attic?"**, Skinner, Inc., 7:00 to 9:00 PM, Winchester Town Hall
- Tuesday, May 17, 2011: Society Annual Meeting, "Between Two Cities: New York Architects and the Domestic Architecture of Greater Boston, 1895-1930,"** Rebekah Beaulieu, Society Executive Director. 7:30PM, Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center
- Saturday, June 4, 2011: Town Day with Trolley Tours** departing from the Town Common beginning at 10:00 AM, and the **Strawberry Festival and Antique Car Show** at the Sanborn House, 1:00 to 4:00 PM.
- Help Wanted** The Society has many volunteer opportunities. Some tasks can be done at home, others in the Sanborn House. You can help with our programs, collections, or the Sanborn House. For more information, contact Rebekah Beaulieu (781-721-0135; email [director@winchesterhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:director@winchesterhistoricalsociety.com)) or Nancy Schrock (781-721-1229; email: [ncschrock@verizon.net](mailto:ncschrock@verizon.net)).

