New Book from the DRHS! Duxbury...Past and Present

The Duxbury Rural and Historical Society is pleased to announce the availability of prepublication orders for its forthcoming new publication Duxbury...Past and Present. Authored by Patrick Browne and Norman Forgiti, the book is presented in hard-cover format, beautifully illustrated, and just in time for Christmas giving. The book consists of a collection of 75 historical views of Duxbury compared side-by-side with present day photographs of the same locations in full color. It includes images from the archives of the historical society as well as from private collections.

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On the Occasion of Frances Fogg’s 100th Birthday .......................By Bob Hale

Frances (Mrs. George, Jr.) Fogg recently celebrated her 100th birthday in her Chestnut Hill home, surrounded by children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. When assistance in blowing out candles on the cake was offered by a 5-year old great-grandson, Mrs. Fogg let it be known she was quite capable of doing the job.

New and younger members of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society may recognize the name, Frances Fogg, primarily because it is on a plaque at the entrance to the archives room of the recently restored Wright Building. Helping to rescue one of the town’s significant buildings while also securing a properly climate controlled home for the Society’s historical papers and documents was only the latest in a decades long effort by Mrs. Fogg to help preserve Duxbury history. She has accomplished this not only with generous financial support, but with years of hard physical work and enlightened dedication.

Among her most visible trophies are the three magnificent, museum-quality, Federal houses owned by the Society. During the late 50s and early 60s she began fretting about what would happen to King Caesar’s 1809 house on Powder Point when Emil and Elizabeth Weber-Fulop and Alice Moran were unable to maintain it. When Frances Fogg frets, she makes sure other people fret as well, so when the opportunity arose for the Society to purchase the house, its president William Nash was primed and ready to launch the town-wide campaign that made possible its acquisition in 1965.

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From October 6-18, more than 140 volunteers pitched in, wielding trowels, shovels and sifters, and made possible a historic project — the Society's Second Meeting House Archaeological Dig. They were led by archaeologist Craig Chartier, director of the Plymouth Archaeological Rediscovery Project. Chartier was engaged by the Society to conduct an archaeological testing procedure on the site of Duxbury’s Second Meeting House.

According to town records, the structure stood on Chestnut Street to the east of the Old Burying Ground from c. 1707 to 1785. The lot on which it purportedly stood was purchased by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society in 1937. The precise location, size and configuration of the building, however, have long been a mystery. The Society therefore organized the archaeological dig to learn more about this important historical site.

To begin the project, the site was mapped using ground penetrating radar in an attempt to locate the foundation before moving any earth. The Society is most grateful to the First Parish Church for underwriting the cost of this portion of the project. Digging then commenced on October 6 and remains of the Meeting House were immediately discovered. These included nails, wall plaster, brick fragments and window glass.

Eventually, volunteers uncovered a portion of the foundation itself. The stones clearly marked the majority of the outline of the structure. With the precise position of the building now established, the Society hopes to place, in the near future, some permanent markers to indicate where the building stood.

Among the personal artifacts uncovered were countless clay tobacco pipe shards, a musket ball, fragment of a shoe buckle, and numerous Native American artifacts, one of them possibly dating as far back as 3,000 years.

Perhaps the most exciting discovery came on the last day of digging. The following is taken from Craig Chartier’s blog:

“…We discovered a series of 20” in diameter post holes running along the north wall, each spaced 7-8’ apart… We found evidence of a construction technique that was not known to occur in the 18th century in New England, and especially not for a meeting house. It appears that the original second meeting house was constructed using the post-in-ground technique, which is the same way that the buildings at Plimoth Plantation are constructed… It is viewed as a quickie technique, a form of impermanent architecture which we all figured that the settlers would want to abandon in favor of solid cut granite or field stone foundations. But not in Duxbury! The implications for this finding are huge… Those of you who worked on this project have worked on the ONLY 18th century post-in-ground structure ever found in New England and only one of a few known nationwide.”

On October 25, about half of the volunteers who worked on the project gathered at the Second Meeting House Lot to hear about these exciting results and to fill in the trenches. The digging had been difficult enough, but putting such large quantities of dirt back in place was truly tough work. The Society is very, very grateful to the volunteers who worked so hard and pitched in with such enthusiasm to get the job done.

Over the course of the winter, Chartier will be analyzing the artifacts and compiling a final report. When this is prepared, the Society will organize an exhibit of the artifacts and a lecture by Chartier to share his findings in detail.
A Christmas Wish .................................................................................. By Alison Arnold

Christine Barry, Chair of the Decorators for Christmas at the King Caesar House Holiday tours, has chosen “A Christmas Wish” as the theme for this year’s event. Teams of local designers will decorate each room with different holiday wishes in mind.

The Members Preview party, chaired by Beth Wahle, will be held Friday, December 12th from 6-8 pm. Then, on December 13 and 14, the general public is invited to tour the house. Hours on Saturday will be from noon til 6 p.m. and Sunday from noon til 4 p.m. Tickets are $10 adults, $5 students/seniors and children under 6 are free.

The ever-popular “Story Hour with Santa” at the King Caesar House will be held on Saturday, December 13 from 11 to noon. There will be no charge to attend this event. Santa will be there to tell children a little bit about how he got started on his career and read a few of his favorite holiday stories.

If you are interested in helping out with any aspect of Christmas at the King Caesar House — we are looking for room hostesses, Boutique workers, ticket takers — please call Alison at the office 781-934-6016 or email aarnold@duxburyhistory.org.

Christine Barry (left), Chair of Christmas at the King Caesar House, and Mimi Walsh (right), decorating chair of the dining room

As always, the event will feature a Holiday Boutique offering jewelry, crafts, and other unique gifts for sale from local South Shore artisans.

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Duxbury...Past and Present provides detailed information and intriguing personal stories behind the photographs — some familiar and others not so familiar — of historical places in Duxbury. Readers will learn about the decline of the shipbuilding industry, rise of the tourist industry at the turn of the century, evolution of Duxbury’s neighborhoods, and the untold stories behind several familiar landmarks.

The historical images range from 1839 through 1971 and feature a variety of sketches, postcards and photographs. Many views have never before been published.

Duxbury...Past and Present chronicles surprising changes in Duxbury and documents the endurance of many aspects of Duxbury’s environment and its cherished landmarks.

To order a pre-publication copy, send a check in the amount of $35 (plus 5% sales tax of $1.75) per copy to

DRHS, Attn: Publications Committee, PO Box 2865, Duxbury, MA 02331. Books will be ready for pick-up December 12th either at the Nathaniel Winsor Jr. House at 479 Washington St, or at the members Christmas party at the King Caesar House.

The Society will also host a book signing on Saturday, December 13, from 1-3 p.m. at the King Caesar House. The event is being held in conjunction with the annual Christmas at the King Caesar House tours. Members will have an opportunity to pick up their books, have them signed by the authors and tour the beautifully decorated King Caesar House.

The prepublication price of $35 is available through December 10th, after then the price is $40 per copy. Shipping and handling is additional, if required. For further information contact the DRHS office at 781-934-6106 or online at www.duxburyhistory.org. ⭐
This Fall has seen many new additions and accessions to our collection at the Drew Archival Library in the form of donations, loans and purchases. In October, the Duxbury Free Library gave us 18 books for our collection, most notably various editions of John and Helen Philbrick’s books in different languages. In addition to donating items to our larger DRHS collection, Mrs. Althea Magoun donated archival material and photographs pertaining to the Litchfield family. Natalie Janvrin Wiggins and Mary Janvrin did the same, donating materials to our objects and textiles collections, as well as seven photographs which have been added to our existing Train collection. We have also recently purchased a collection of 62 photographs and photographic postcards from Brian Patenaude, which include unique shots of Duxbury. Lastly, Tom and Kris Delano have generously donated a large collection of books which had been in their family for many years. Perhaps the most noteworthy items in the donation are 12 bound volumes of Harper’s Weekly, spanning from August 21, 1858 to December 31, 1870. The volumes are in great condition and feature political cartoons, news articles, advertisements, and beautiful full-page illustrations. We are certainly grateful for all of these new acquisitions and thank our generous donors.

A photographic exhibit, entitled ‘Duxbury Goes Back to School’ went up at the beginning of September to welcome in the new school year. The exhibit featured photographs of Duxbury schools and students from 1886-1938. Beginning in mid-December, come and see “Through the Camera Lens: William Facey’s Duxbury”, a new photographic exhibit which will feature photographs that William Facey shot in and around Duxbury from 1890-1910. The photographs are exceptional because not only do they include scenic pictures of Duxbury, but the majority of the photographs are of children and groups of people, which enable us to sneak a peek at what life was really like in Duxbury at the turn of the century.

Our Letter Reading program has been quite a success thus far and we hope that success continues. Our last program, entitled “Dispatches from the Battlefield,” featured letters written to and from soldiers and nurses in the Civil War. Selected letters from our collection were read aloud by volunteers and items from the DRHS collection pertaining to the Civil War were exhibited in the Rotunda. If you haven’t had a chance to come for one of our Letter Readings, please watch the Clipper for upcoming announcements about “An Evening with the Kents,” which will highlight letters written by the daughters of Rev. Benjamin Kent, who was a minister at the First Parish Church in Duxbury.

On November 18, Carolyn Ravenscroft gave a lecture at the Drew Archival Library on Charlotte Bradford’s experiences working as a nurse for the US Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. Carolyn, who is a volunteer at the Archives and currently pursuing a Master’s Degree in Library and Information Science at Simmons College, was able to use the materials in our Bradford collection to provide an in-depth and fascinating look at Charlotte’s life and experiences.

Cataloging work continues on our collections and volunteers and visitors are always welcome. The Drew Archives is located in the Wright Building at 147 St. George Street, and is open weekdays from 9 am-1 pm.
Editor’s Note: The DRHS issues “dateboards” to roughly five houses per year. The purpose of a dateboard is to authenticate, using specific research standards, the construction date of a home and to place any historical information available about that home on file in our archives. One home has just been dateboard this Fall that has a singular historical distinction.

The William Sherburn house is, perhaps, a unique house in the early history of Duxbury. Why is it so rare? It is not because of the architecture, the style or the size of the house. The house is not unusual in and of itself. It was just a humble dwelling in its infancy. It was not built by a man of wealth or prominence. The builder was an unskilled man of limited means. It is remarkable in that, to the best of my knowledge, there is no other dateboarded house in Duxbury having been built by an African-American.

The current proud owner of this charming dwelling located at 1112 Tremont Street, is Sarie Booy. The original structure is now mostly hidden in the revisions, architectural changes and modernization done to it over the years. The dwelling has evolved into a charming, warm and inviting home.

Although the Hingham Vital Records show Sherburn was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts and his father’s name was Peter, I was unable to verify this. His death was recorded on September 6, 1862 and stated William was buried in Duxbury. Based upon the date he died and his age at that time, I was able to approximate his date of birth to be about June 17, 1814.

Sherburn married first, Hannah W. Fuller, in Duxbury, April 17, 1840. They had two daughters, Hannah, born November 13, 1840 and Ann M., born August 26, 1844. Hannah died of consumption on April 19, 1845 at age 23.

He married second, Mary Ann Williams in Duxbury, April 28, 1849. They had three more children, Henry F., born about 1851, Otis, born about 1855 and Emma E., born about 1857.

Sherburn was listed in the Duxbury Records as a laborer and a “free man of color.” The 1850 Census states he is a “worker.” The Duxbury Annual Report for the year 1858 revealed he no longer owned any real estate, was still a resident of Duxbury and was levied a poll tax in the amount of $1.67. This confirms, as a freeman under Massachusetts law, he shared the same voting rights as other Duxbury residents. At this time, the right to vote was denied to many black men, not only in the South, but in some northern states as well.

William bought his 45 square rods of Duxbury land from Barker Hunt on October 13, 1840. On May 11, 1842, he sold his land “together with the dwelling I now occupy and all buildings situated thereon,” to Benjamin Barstow, Samuel Knowles and Nathaniel Ford for $300. This indicates the subject house was built between 1840 and 1842.

He had married his first wife, Hannah, on April 17, 1840. Given the date of birth of their first daughter, Hannah was either pregnant when he married her, or she became pregnant immediately after. At the time, they must have been either renting a small house or living with a family by whom William was employed. Because Barker Hunt sold him his small lot, and because Barker owned the old “Hunt House” abutting the subject property on the south side, he may have been a servant working for

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With the busiest of seasons finally winding down, it is a good time to look back on all that we did this Summer and Fall. We set a challenging schedule this year, but one that we hoped would lead to excellent educational opportunities and some fun gatherings.

We started off the season with an opening reception for the Exhibits at the Potter Gallery. “Seldom Seen Treasures, Seldom Heard Tales” brought together some of the Society’s most precious and rarely exhibited artifacts. The opening was attended by nearly 100 people, and visitors continued to enjoy the display over the Summer.

We opened the museum houses for public tours the weekend of the July 4th. This year we welcomed Brenda Nudd as our newest employee. As Head of Docents, she was in charge of the day-to-day operations of the house tours at the King Caesar House. We are grateful to have her on board and for everything she did to make things run smoothly.

The King Caesar Summer Barn Lecture Series was a huge hit, with standing-room only for most of the lectures.

This year’s Clark’s Island picnic was another great success, with well over 100 people spending a lovely summer day at Cedarfield. In recognition of the Island’s prominent place in Pilgrim history, the Society welcomed the Shallop Elizabeth Tilley, a replica of a vessel built in Plymouth in 1629. The replica is owned by the Pilgrim John Howland Society of Plymouth. A big thank you goes out again this year to the Society caretakers at Cedarfield, Peter and Ninky Savage, as well as Chuck Leonard and the Duxbury Bay Maritime School, who graciously gave us the use of the Peter S. Barker launch and a driver.

After an eight-year hiatus, the Sea Captain’s Chowder supper was resurrected in October in celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Bradford House. Selden Tease, as Chair, did an outstanding job organizing her committee and putting on a very successful event.

The Third Annual AutumnFest was a fun day despite the chilly wind. We welcomed back the Hobby Knoll Clydesdales, 22nd Massachusetts Civil War reenactors, and Draco the Dragon. A new addition this year was “The Gloucester Hornpipe and Clog Society.” Their nautical music was a fabulous fit. For the third year in a row, Michelle Manware won the pie contest with her “Dux-Berry” pie.

It is always a pleasure to work with the many dedicated volunteers who step up to run a lot of these events. I truly appreciate the help. Without those volunteers, these events would never happen, so thank you for giving your time and energy to the Society.

(William H. Sherburn continued from page 5)

Hunt. Whatever the case may have been, when he bought his quarter acre of land, it was with the intent to build a house for himself and his family.

A man of modest means, Sherburn built a very small house. The original house, now hidden within the current house by additions, was a very humble dwelling at best. Therefore, the dwelling could easily have been erected between October 13, 1840 when he bought his land and November 13th, 1840 when his first child was born. If it was not constructed by that time, there was certainly ample time to complete such a small dwelling prior to January 1841. It would therefore seem most reasonable that the house was built in 1840.

He sold his house in 1842. However, the records prove he was still residing in Duxbury until at least March 1, 1859. There is a strong possibility that he continued living in the house he built and rented it from the new owners. Records show that Sherburn had moved to Hingham by 1860.

Of all the date-boarded houses in Duxbury to date, the William H. Sherburn house stands out as being the only one now documented as having been built by a “man of color.”
A side note here about seeking and acquiring. Frances Fogg has the instincts of a bloodhound and the determination of a bulldog. When she tracked down something she wanted for the house, she didn’t rest until it was given or willed to the Society. Her research was phenomenal. There was an inside joke that she dumped someone out of a bed she wanted. She didn’t actually, but the bed was installed within days of that person’s death.

When she could not attend an auction of Knapp family things – the Knapps had lived in King Caesar House – she sent two of us to the event with a check and a list of items we were to purchase without fail. The first item sold for three times the amount of the check as did all the other things on the list. We were sure had Frances gone she would have come home with everything she wanted.

Her task at the Bradford House was different in that it required months of sorting what was already there, then repairing and conserving furnishings, plus putting the house in order with exact duplicates of original wall papers and paints.

While involved with these two houses, Mrs. Fogg was also working with Rosamund Gifford to secure Miss Gifford’s extensive collection of Duxbury related furniture. This writer was also much involved, joining Mrs. Fogg crawling under tables to inspect identifying marks, making detailed notes and taking pictures. The condition of much of the furniture was not good. Miss Gifford said she would leave $100,000 to put the collection in order.

When the Nathaniel Winsor Jr. House came on the market in the mid 1990s, Mrs. Fogg rang alarm bells and began the charge to obtain it for the Society, but the time was not right. Several years later it became apparent if the Society did not purchase the house, its future could be dire. Society President Judy Hall responded with dispatch and launched a campaign — in the midst of which Rosamund Gifford died. Those of us who thought we had tied down her bequest of the Duxbury collection and money to conserve it were dismayed to learn that Miss Gifford had never put any of this in her will.

After Miss Gifford’s funeral at the First Parish Church, Mrs. Fogg asked me, “Which one is the lawyer?” I indicated a very tall gentleman. Undaunted, Frances, with me in tow, marched over to the stranger. She looked up him towering above her, said who she was, and then pointing a finger up at him, said, “Rosamund promised us $100,000. We need that money and we need it now!” The check was received within the week — and eventually all the furniture arrived as well.

The Society’s campaign succeeded and the Nathaniel Winsor, Jr. house became another Duxbury treasure for the community to enjoy, to use and to learn from. Much credit for their preservation goes to the gallant little lady who celebrated her 100th birthday on October 7, 2008.
Upcoming Events

December 12
Christmas at the King Caesar House, Members Cocktail Party, 6-8 p.m.

December 13
Book Signing, “Duxbury...Past and Present.” Pick up a copy of the Society’s exciting new publication and meet the authors. King Caesar House, 1-3 p.m.

December 13-14
Christmas at the King Caesar House Tours and Holiday Boutique, Saturday 12-6 p.m., Sunday 12-4 p.m. Adults $10, Students/Seniors $5, children under 6 free.

January 27
Annual Meeting, Sun Tavern, 500 Congress Street, 6:30 p.m.

“The Lamplighter” is published quarterly by The Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.

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Library
Drew Archival Library, 147 St. George St., Duxbury Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and by appointment

Museums
King Caesar House, 120 King Caesar Road, Duxbury Open July-Labor Day, Wed-Sun 1-4 p.m.

Capt. Gershom Bradford House
931 Tremont Street, Duxbury Open July-Labor Day, Sun 1-4 p.m.