

OUR Story

by Lucy Natkiel

Bright and early Thursday morning, October 8th, Carol Snow-Asher, Hank Amsden and I arrived at the Jennie D. Blake School for the official introduction, the “Ta Da!!!” of the Hill Historical Society’s project to introduce our town’s remarkable history into the curriculum.

Carol and I had approached the school’s principal, Jay Lewis, last spring to offer the Society’s resources and support. We felt that the story of Hill was slowly fading from the towns-people’s consciousness as each generation focused on new things, high speed this and that, a wider world. But our history, our *story* binds us together as a community, and it shouldn’t be forgotten.

We had originally envisioned a couple of presentations. Jay was the one who really saw the scope of what could develop, and said, “Why don’t we integrate the Town’s history into ALL grades?” Collectively, we lit up. In May, a group from the HHS met with the entire faculty, and they enthusiastically jumped on board.

As Carol and I worked, one piece tumbled into place after another. When we went for follow-up meetings with Jay, we had to apologize for practically crawling across his desk in our eagerness to show him what all we had come up with.

By October 8th, all was in place. We had set up the Interpretive Panels from the Meeting House in the school’s cafeteria in early September, and each day, the kids had been asked a different question to research; they knew a lot by the time we walked in. We were there to put it all in context, to make it personal, to light a fire.

Carol started things off by introducing the concept that history is *story*, and the history of Hill is *OUR story*. I followed with a quick overview of how our town’s development started out in a very similar way to the development of hundreds of New England towns, quite ordinary. But then something remarkable happened... and Hill became truly extraordinary. Unlike all of the other towns in the Merrimack watershed threatened with extinction from the flood control project of the 1940’s, Hill had pulled together and survived.

Then Hank brought it all home, with personal stories of the old village, the new village, his father, one of the prime movers behind the re-location, and of being a kid.

And the children “GOT IT!” Their energy filled the room and their faces lit up. They flocked around “Uncle Hank” to ask more questions. They wanted to know what would come next.

Using money from the memorial donations given in honor of John P. Chandler, the Society gave each child a loose-leaf binder with a copy of the town's story. This notebook, called "OUR Story", primarily draws from the photos and information on the Interpretive Panels. As the year progresses, the students will be able to add their own story to the town's, as they learn more, as they themselves grow and develop. Already, they understand that the Town's History is their history, and their history is the Town's.

For more colored photos and information about this event, check out the new "OUR Story" section on the HHS website www.hillhistoricalsociety.com