

Franklin NH Historical Society News

October 2017

One of the duties of any historical society is to not only protect and preserve documents, photos, and ephemera of the past, but also to take a position to save historical buildings. Such was the attempt recently to educate the Franklin city council to the promise the city made to the previous owner of the historic Odell Park Cottage. A vote was to be taken as to whether to demolish the porches of the cottage as having become a "safety issue" after years of no maintenance, and a refusal to accept volunteer labor to do the necessary work at either no or little cost to the city. Of particular interest to the Society, which is housed in the building affectionately and with historic accuracy called the "Webster/Tay House", is the fact that Rufus Tay, a merchant who was responsible for constructing the three story addition onto the original Webster home, had a daughter named Lucy who married Herman Odell. Mr. Odell owned and ran, in the latter part of the 19th century, what is now commonly remembered as the Daniel Webster Inn (razed in 1973) on North Main Street, but was for a few short years called simply "The Odell". Odell Park is also named for this family, and it was Lucy who built the cottage on the island as a caretaker's home, establishing a trust to maintain that structure, along with the Odell Arch, in the future. Unfortunately, in today's environment of low interest rates, the fund's principal has grown in the decades since, but the portion to be used for maintenance has been small, and used by the city only to pay for heat and electricity. Consequently, the leaks in the porch roof and deterioration of the side porch have been allowed to grow worse each year, resulting in what Director Alpers of Franklin's Parks and Recreation Department has termed an unsafe condition. Despite pleas from the Society's president to directly address the safety concerns rather than raze the porches entirely, the vote taken was unanimously in favor to demolish. Another piece of the historic fabric of Franklin to be gone, with little motivation to restore at a later date.

The best defense against further loss of Franklin's historic identity is a knowledge and appreciation of the architectural treasures Franklin's forefathers left behind. In that regard, the Society presents as its next program on Thursday, October 5th, (at 7 pm, at the Society's home at Webster Place) a program entitled "(Some of) Franklin's Historic Homes". Owners of some notable dwellings will talk about what efforts they made to trace the origins of their homes, previous owners names, photos showing changes over the decades, and offer interesting and oft times amusing stories the house engendered. Light refreshments will be available after the talk and before the regular business meeting (to which ALL are encouraged to stay and attend), and the program, as always, is free of charge. Directions and additional information may be obtained from the Society's website. franklinnhhistoricalsociety.org or just Google "Franklin NH Historical Society". In this case especially, appreciation of history really does "begin at home".

The Society once again believes it to be of utmost importance to sincerely thank those who have donated material to our expanding collections. Therefore, the Society recognizes the following for their generous and thoughtful contributions: Deb Brown, for adding more Shepard material to that found in John S. Shepard III's home after his death and already donated, involving stamps collected by his father for the High School stamp club, and multiple diaries of his great-grandmother as well as his father's diary while attending Harvard; Nita Tomaszewski, for a small box of greeting cards with the image of the city's Episcopal Church and a plaque given to her mother to honor her 25 years of service to the same Church; Shelley Williams, for a framed copy of the famous panoramic photo taken at the 1932 dedication of the Webster Bust; Annette Cain, for a postcard and two interior snapshots of the old St. Paul's Catholic Church; Carol Hodgdon, for Franklin High School yearbooks from 1967-2002, reunion information from the FHS class of 1970, and 1935-1942 Valentine's Day cards (acquired by Joan and Porter Young); Donna and Roy Gilbreth, for a small intact medicine bottle from the F.H. Chapman Pharmacy, found in the yard of their property on Prospect Street, and four color slides of the May 1st 1986 Grevior Furniture Store fire; and finally, to Judy Palfrey who left maps of Franklin and Webster Lake and a small medicine bottle from the Main Street Pharmacy at the president's home. Thank you, one and all. The Society, and therefore everyone in Franklin, is blessed by your giving spirit. History, and the memories and lessons learned from its understanding and appreciation, has an inestimable value. Please consider joining the Society in preserving the history which impacts us all. Any questions, donations, or to arrange an appointment to visit the museum (now closed for the season), you may call Leigh Webb at 934-8222.

[This month's image is a scanned photo taken from a 1913 newspaper, hence the lack of quality and definition. The subject of the picture is one of the historic homes to be discussed at the upcoming meeting. And what in the photo looks particularly familiar? Come to this month's meeting and find out!]

