

Franklin Historical Society, for August, 2025

It is definitely summer, even if retailers are already hawking back-to-school sales. Thankfully, there have been respites from the oppressive heat that reminds us of the whims of nature, and, as many believe, the missteps of mankind. Fortunately the interior of the Webster/Tay has remained tolerably temperate, so that the August meeting, with nighttime temperatures, should be relatively comfortable. Since Veterans are already moving in to the new apartments into which the Webster Memorial Infirmary and Nursery, and Henry Memorial School, were converted by Easterseals, the August program will be devoted to a **Brief overview history of the Daniel Webster Farm**, including the Lower Village of Salisbury, the Elms farm, the Home for Orphans and School of Industry (the orphanage's full name), the Sisters of Holy Cross organization, a treatment center for addiction, and now, the Easterseals Veteran's Campus. The presentation will begin **at 7 pm, Thursday, August 7th, in the Society's Webster/Tay meeting room, at 21 Holy Cross Road**. All are welcome, and as always there is no admission charge.



Light refreshments will be served between the program and the Society's regular business meeting, to which attendees, members and non-members, are encouraged to attend.

Membership news:

As you enter the property, you may notice that the original signs pointing the way to the Webster Place Cemetery and your Franklin Historical Society, have been restored! The Society wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Dan and Brent Fife, who gave the Society permission to erect the new post on their side of Holy Cross Road (so as not to interfere with any proposed Easterseals signage), and to David Liberatore, without whose help the post could not have been raised and anchored. THANK YOU!

Open hours continue on Saturdays through Labor Day, 10 am to 2 pm. Although, with rain, and parking at a premium with construction crews working full tilt even on the weekend to get the center ready for occupancy, visitor numbers remain low, those who do stop in have been effusive with their praise of our knowledge and

exhibits. Even if only one person visits and walks away with a new appreciation for the history that surrounds them, the effort is absolutely worthwhile.

The roster of current members is now ready for distribution, and will be attached to a future email. In an effort to thwart gmail from rejecting the Society's messages, a couple of different approaches will be tried to reach *all* members. If you are a gmail user, please confirm receipt of this newsletter by return reply. If the Society does not receive notification that these accounts bounced the newsletter back, then the Society will believe that delivery was completed. If this rejection is sporadic, then members are asked to check their spam folders to see if the newsletter was, for whatever reason, sent there instead of the inbox. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

A Tale of the Bell: Stories have circulated for decades regarding the fate of the Stevens Mill bell, taken from the tower of the once Walter Aiken Mill (acquired by M.T. Stevens in 1904) on Bow Street (see photo below).



The Society was contacted by the Henry Ford Museum in Michigan, inquiring as to the history of the mill that housed it. In the exchange of emails, the Society was pleased to get information on exactly what happened to the bell after the mill closed in 1970. The popular story around town was that it was loaned to the Smithsonian for a time, and then disappeared. It did go to

the Smithsonian, and was displayed as part of their “Communities in a Changing Nation” exhibit. Sometime in the mid 1980s, it was returned to the American Textile Museum in Lowell, MA. When that museum closed in 2016, it sought other organizations which would benefit from such pieces added to their collections. The Henry Ford acquired it and other assets from Lowell the following year, and the bell has been in Michigan ever since. As a side note, the bell may have been manufactured by the same foundry in Troy, NY, that recast the bell (that originally had come from the Revere Foundry in Massachusetts, but damaged in the 1902 fire) that now resides in the Congregational-Christian Church tower.

And now Franklin, and the Henry Ford, have the complete story.

Recent (amazing) donations to the Society’s collections: A very sincere than you is extended to the following for their incredible gifts—to **Brent Shepard** who gave his mother’s wedding gown, and allowed the Society to scan his parent’s wedding photo. This donation has inspired our textile curator to consider mounting a rotating display of Franklin wedding dresses in the very near future; and to **Mabel Wheeler of Concord** who parted with a cradle that had been in her family for some 80 years, and had anecdotally been coupled with Daniel Webster. Had an infant Daniel been rocked in this very cradle? Unfounded family lore? Maybe, but a great story nonetheless!



Mark your calendars and spread the word, that as well as every Saturday, the Society’s museum will have an open house *all three days* of the Labor Day Weekend. at the usual hours of 10 am to 2 pm. If you are a member, come learn how to be a docent and lead tours. Member or not (and we’ll be happy to tell you *how* to become a member), if you have family visiting, make an outing of it and revel in the fascinating history of *your* city. The Society has so much to offer. Come experience it for yourself.