

Williamstown Historical Museum

Newsletter

Williamstown, Massachusetts

September, 2017

Opening is Well Attended

By Sarah Currie, Executive Director

Thank you for your support of the WHM during our grand opening weekend. The celebration kicked off on Saturday, June 24 with the Annual Meeting followed by a lecture presented by Dustin Griffin titled *Enemies of the State: Political Divisions in Early Williamstown* at Sweetwood of Williamstown.

The opening day celebration at the Museum on June 25 was well attended by over 150 members and town residents (photos on pages 4 and 5). Entertainment was provided by Rosin the Beaux, playing traditional music throughout the day. Treats were donated by Wild Oats, Williams College, The Store at Five Corners, and the A-Frame Bakery. Beverages and "historic punch" from the House of Local History were donated by board members (look for a recipe for the punch on page 6). Thank you to everyone who made the day such a success!

WHM summer and fall hours are underway and docents are happy to welcome you Wednesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 12 noon to 4 p.m. You may also make an appointment to visit us during our off hours.



Former Williamstown Town Manager Peter Fohlin speaks at the ribbon cutting for the Williamstown Historical Museum Grand Opening on June 25. Kathy Thompson, Board President, center, and Sarah Currie, Executive Director, stand by.

Mike Miller and His Williamstown History Email Group

By Nancy Burstein

It is hard to imagine that anyone reading this is unfamiliar with Williamstown's Mike Miller and the unique email group he has created as a forum both for stories of historical interest and as a platform for those who grew up in Williamstown to connect and share memories. This column describes how Mike developed his interest in local history developed and how he came to begin the group.

Mike was born in Williamstown in 1942 and was very close to his paternal grandparents (the Welch/Miller family) who lived at 64 Water Street (now 95-97), in one of the original regulation houses constructed in the 1770s.

As a child he had little interest in the history of the house or town. He was ten years old during Williamstown's Bicentennial celebration and recalls only a big parade and the construction of the 1753 House in Field Park. In 1963 he joined the Navy, and spent the next eight years gaining education and a direction in life. Later, his connection with Williamstown took a back seat as he was "on the road" for his job with the Mosler Safe Co. of Albany, returning to Williamstown only for weekends and vacations.

Mike's awareness and interest in local history began around 1974-75, when his grandparents died and his father was eager to sell the old home on Water Street. They put together a tag sale of the contents of the home, and for the first time, at age 33, Mike began to realize that "there was quite a bit of local and family history tucked away in the attic and many storage areas created during the process of enlarging and re-modeling the house over



Mike Miller continued on page 2

Mike Miller: Continued

the years.” He cites as an example discovering that the sealed, unused door with four separate locks leading from a bedroom to the front porch was there because that portion of the building had been a jeweler’s shop before being incorporated into the main house. “I guess that was the first time I realized the importance of preserving items that were connected to the past,” he states, and he is grateful that at the last minute he managed to identify and retain some of the various documents and items that might have some historical value to his family.

Sadly, he had no knowledge of the Williamstown House of Local History at that time, recalling only that there were historical items upstairs in the library, but the stairs going up to those rooms were always roped off. Ironically, now those recollections of his have become a part of the record of the history of the museum, reflecting its place in town during the mid 1970s.

By the time Mike’s father died in 1998, both his interest in town history and knowledge of the House of Local History had increased to the point that he and his brother Jim decided that, in lieu of flowers, donations in memory of his father should be sent to the House of Local History. (Thank you, Mike and Jim!) Mike identifies this gesture as his initial attempt to foster the cause of retaining local history, although at that point he still had never visited the museum spaces.

Fast forward to 2005 when Mike acquired his first computer, given to him by a friend who had upgraded her own system. At his brother’s urging, Mike signed up with a dial-up internet provider, created an email account, and learned to send and receive messages.

Mike had always been intrigued by viewing “Before and After” photos and married this interest with his deep Williamstown connection and newly-acquired computer skills to come up with the idea of emailing portions of older local photos to Williamstown friends and have them guess the hometown structure, object, or scene they were viewing.

In January-February 2009, with about 21 email addresses of old friends and family with memories of Williamstown, he sent out his first photo quiz entitled “Do You Remember?”, following this up with comments he received on the photo and a current picture he took from approximately the same spot as the original.

The idea blossomed with the favorable reception his early mailings received, as well as with the advent of faster internet service in his hometown area, and his

purchase of an on-sale digital camera that enabled him to download images directly to his computer, by-passing film, printing, and copying costs.

It was at this point that Mike became a familiar figure at Williamstown Historical Museum (the former Williamstown House of Local History), looking through photo binders to find interesting images that could be the subjects of the “Then and Now” theme, digitally photographing them, and then going out to photograph the current scenes that matched those in the historical photographs. Eventually he had created more than 100 “Where in Williamstown?” image pairings, as this series has come to be called, as well as many “50, 65, and 100 Years Ago” reports, and now 18 in the “Williamstown: Reflections and Echoes” series, a collection of more lengthy stories.

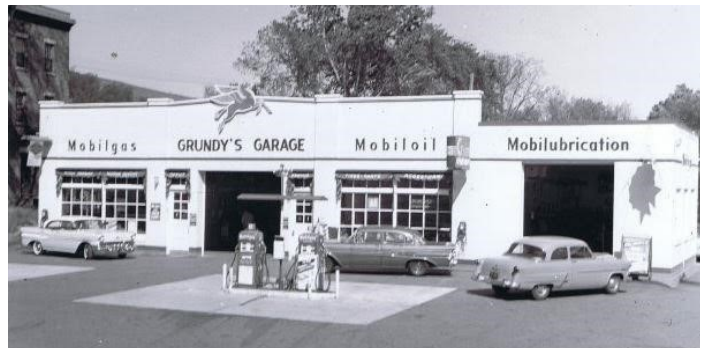


Photo of Grundy's Garage on Water Street, used in Mike's October, 2010 edition of *55 Years Ago in Williamstown*.

As output proliferated, membership in the email group grew exponentially. What began as a group of 21 interested recipients in February 2009 had climbed to 144 by November of that year, to 384 by January of 2014, and 476 in March of 2017. This growth occurred despite the fact that Mike never solicited for new members. It happened solely through word of mouth and the forwarding of the email stories from members to their friends and families who followed up by contacting Mike and asking to be added to the list of recipients.

Mike estimates he spends around two to three hours a day on the stories. To this add the time for his 130-mile round trip to Williamstown and the time involved taking the present-day photos. His hope is that in addition to providing information about things that members recall, the stories will increase knowledge of things not known. This has certainly occurred for Mike, himself. He says, “I know I have learned more about my hometown in the past nine years, than during the approximately 30 years when I was actually a resident.” His hope for the group is to keep the stories interesting enough to keep members involved with their responses and comments, which add much to the stories.

If by some chance you are not aware of this wonderful resource and would like to become a member and receive email stories as they are released, email Mike at fibbermcgee64@nycap.rr.com.



2010 photo of Mike Miller with Walt Klinger, Revolutionary period reenactor, in Field Park

When asked whether there was anything particular about himself that he would like mentioned in this profile, Mike's reply was, "simply that without the material preserved in the WHM and Williams College Archives, this group would never have had the opportunity to learn about the great history of a wonderful hometown." While this statement is certainly true, without the time, effort, and creativity of Mike Miller this wonderful forum for townspeople to connect, learn about town history, and share memories would not exist. Thank you, Mike!

The author was Director of the Williamstown Historical Museum and its predecessor, the Williamstown House of Local History for many years before retiring to Petersburg, N.Y. several years ago. The subject of this profile is a native of Williamstown, now retired and living in Middle Grove, N.Y. He commutes to perform his various volunteer duties for WHM.



Welch-Miller Home, circa 1973. Located at 95-97 Water Street, the building now houses Umlauf & Dunn, PC. Photo taken by Mike Miller

**Sign up for Mike Miller's History Email Group
by emailing him at:
fibbermcgee64@nycap.rr.com**

President's Remarks

By Kathy Thompson

Dear Williamstown Historical Museum Family,

As I look back upon my first year as WHM President, two words come to mind, "accomplishment" and "gratitude." The transformation of The Little Red Schoolhouse into our new home is spectacular. Recent comments



**Kathy Thompson
WHM President**

in our guestbook include:
"Great Memories"
"Very educational"
"Our local history well preserved"
"Wonderful and so informative"
"Fantastic"

We could not have provided such a wonderful building full of outstanding exhibits without your financial support and volunteer commitment. Thank you to our very talented Board of Directors, docents, volunteers and our Executive Director. Without you we would never have our warm and inviting new home.

To continue reaching out to our community and beyond we are always in need of more volunteers. Might you consider giving a bit of your time to the museum? To quote Gandhi, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." The benefits of volunteering include that it:

1. Boosts your self esteem.
2. Expands your connections.
3. Makes you feel good.
4. Contributes to a longer life.
5. Gives you purpose.
6. Combats stress.
7. Sets a good example.
8. Teaches new skills.

For more information about volunteering at the WHM, please contact Executive Director Sarah Currie, at sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org or call 413-458-2160.

**Williamstown
Historical
Museum**

NAME(S) _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ CELL _____

JOIN or RENEW your MEMBERSHIP

Mail to: Williamstown Historical Museum
32 New Ashford Road
Williamstown, MA 01267

ENCLOSED is my membership contribution for:

_____ \$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$250 _____ \$500 _____ Other

My EMAIL is: _____

WHM Grand Opening, June 25, 2017



Visitors view the Veteran's room: Brian O'Grady, Juliet Flynt, and Cynthia Payne



Rosin the Beaux, L to R, Linda Burlak, fiddle; Pat Dunlavey, guitar; Alan Dunlavey, percussion; Lawrence Smith, bass (standing); Bruce Wheat, guitar; Deb Burns, whistles



Norm Burdick and Peter Fohlin



WHM board member Susan Schneski and Jean Donati



WHM board member Gene Lepesqueur helps visitors park



Anne Lamb Tiffany



Board members Carole Dolan, Donna Chenail, and Cynthia Payne prepare the punch



Visitors in the Research Room: Rita Gardner, David Loomis, and Rutledge Currie



Board member Tom Bleezarde and Bob Greenberg



Visitors in the Veterans Room



Visitors enjoying musical entertainment in the Research Room



At the ribbon Cutting, former Williamstown Town Manager Peter Fohlin; WHM President Kathy Thompson; and WHM Executive Director Sarah Currie, welcome guests



Sarah Currie and Dustin Griffin



Mary O'Connor, Sigrid McWilliams and Sam Edgerton



In the Children's Discovery Room, the Aricks model some of the costumes Mrs. Arick sewed



Lars Oleson



WHM Executive Director, Sarah Currie, and intern Mairead Poulin



Sue Bernardy, Juliet Flynt, and board member Linda Conway stand near the plaque for the Flynt Research Room

History Book Group Organizational Meeting

The WHM is working on starting a history book group! This group will choose books covering any and all aspects of history. Local history will certainly be part of the mix! The organizational meeting will be held on Thursday, October 5 at 4 p.m. so we may exchange ideas on how to proceed. If you would like to participate in this "historic" project, RSVP to Sarah at:

sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org.

Williamstown House of Local History Historic Punch Recipe

This tea recipe was created by Rita Hoar, former museum president, and was served at many House of Local History events. The punch was served at this year's Grand Opening of the Williamstown Historical Museum.

3 quarts strong tea (16 bags)
2 cups sugar, or less
1 large frozen orange juice (defrosted)
2 cups lemon juice (bottled is OK)
1 large can pineapple juice
3 quarts ginger ale

- Mix sugar into hot tea to dissolve.
- When cool, add all juices.
- Do not add ginger ale until ready to serve.
- Just before serving, add ginger ale.
- An ice ring of lemonade is a nice addition.
- Ice cubes help to cool.
- Serves 45 or more depending on cup size.

Excerpted from the Transcript, March 6, 1900

To Increase his business, George Walker, who lives at the foot of Berlin mountain and conducts a large farm in that vicinity reports that he will carry on the fruit business on a larger scale this year than ever before. He now has about 18 acres of land which he has devoted entirely to fruit growing and he expects to increase his strawberry bed by three acres. He will have six acres of strawberry beds to pick from next summer.

Mr. Walker was very unfortunate in his fruit growing last year, as most of his fruit was destroyed early in the season by heavy hail storms.

You can find this and other news clippings in our research room at the WHM.

Upcoming WHM Programs:

Back to School:

A Historical Look at Education in Williamstown
Saturday, September 30, 11 a.m.

Milne Public Library
1095 Main Street

Former school principal and enthusiastic community presence, Jane Allen, will present a lecture on schools in Williamstown. Both a walk down memory lane and an informative presentation, this lecture is not to be missed.

The History of the Botsford House

Saturday, November 11, 11 a.m.
Williamstown Community Preschool
(in the old Methodist Church), 777 Main Street

Homeowner, Cynthia Payne, will present a history of one of the striking homes of Main Street. After the lecture refreshments will be served at the Botsford House and a tour of the first floor will be led by Cynthia.

More information about these and other upcoming lectures can be found on the WHM website.

Digital Research Resources Available at the WHM!

The Williamstown Historical Museum has several digital research resources available to users who visit the WHM. In addition to our PastPerfect online catalog, where visitors can access our collection on and off site, we offer genealogical and other research tools. Generous support from the Milne Public Library and Friends of the Milne Public Library allows us to use the library edition of Ancestry.com. We also subscribe to NewspaperArchive.com. Staff and docents are available to get you started on your research today!



Linda Conway, Donna Chenail, Joe and Brie Bergeron, Barb and David Primmer, Susan Clarke, Andy Burr, and Ann McCallum march while Kathy Thompson and Patrick Quinn drive for the WHM in Williamstown's 2017 Fourth of July Parade

Thank You, WHM Docents!

Current WHM Docents:

Peggy Neyland Altman	Susan Schneski
Ginny Granger	Ginny Sheldon
Pat Greenberg	Kay Sherman
Mary Lovvorn	Richard Shotwell
Cynthia Payne	Kathy Thompson
David Primmer	Rita Watson
Edith Schwartz	Larry Wright

The Williamstown Historical Museum counts on volunteers to keep its doors open to the public and help our community members connect to history. We are grateful to have a strong cadre of docents who help keep the museum running, and invite you to become a part of the team. WHM docents typically work two-hour shifts each week and help greet visitors. Docents carry out useful projects, filing news clippings, conducting research, planning exhibits and programs, and assist with collections cataloging. Do you enjoy history? Do you have a passion for, or an interest in genealogy? We have jobs for all skill levels, interests and talents. We invite you to volunteer your time to help our town's history center! Our hours of operation during the summer and fall run from 10 to 2 Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and 12 to 4 on Saturday and Sunday. Do you have two hours a week to contribute your talents to the WHM? We also invite volunteers to contribute on an occasional basis, serving on committees or carrying out special projects. To learn more, please contact Sarah at sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org or 413-458-2160.



Volunteers Cynthia Payne and Susan Schneski work in the Research Room with summer intern Eleanor Johnston

WHM Lectures Online!

Thanks to a valuable partnership with WilliNet, we are able to share our lectures with the community online and on television. Visit our website to view recent lectures:

<http://www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org/programs-events/videos-of-recent-lectures/>

Thank you, WilliNet!

Left Hay Rake for Auto

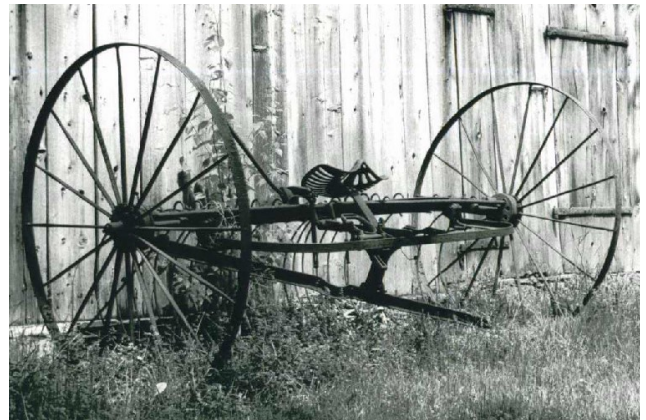
And Said, When Accused, That He Would Do it Every time

An Attempt of several friends of a well known farmer to have a little sport at his expense because he left a hay rake, with his horse, standing in the middle of the hayfield while he went for an automobile ride, has failed, because the farmer admits point blank that was just what he did and that he will do it in the future every time he gets the opportunity.

It seems that he was raking hay in a field near the main road when an intimate friend came along in his auto and called over to him to come for a ride. No sooner had the invitation been extended than the farmer yelled, "Whoa," and dropping the lines over Dobbin's back, left rake, horse, and all in the middle of the field, jumped in the automobile and took a spin to North Adams and back.

Upon returning, the farmer thanked his friend for the ride and said it was more fun than raking hay and then walked slowly back to his rake muttering as he observed first the rake and then the fast disappearing automobile, "I like my horse rake, but O, you automobile."

- *Transcript article from July, 1909*



Hay rake from Hopkins Forest, photographed by Regina Rouse.

Share Your Knowledge!

Have you attended one of the WHM lectures? Some of our recent lecture topics have included a history of the Masons and Eastern Star, political divisions in early Williamstown and haunted places in and near town. Would you like to share your talents and knowledge? WHM Programs Committee Chairperson, Patrick Quinn, invites anyone interested in presenting a program or lecture on some aspect of Williamstown history or a significant Williamstown place or person, to contact him. Presenting a program for the WHM is a great way to share your ideas and research and connect with other local history enthusiasts! You may reach Patrick via the Williamstown Historical Museum at info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org.

Williamstown Historical Museum

32 New Ashford Road, Williamstown, MA 01267



Do you recognize any of these players on Coach Ted Sylvester's WHS team? The photo is undated.
Email or call with your answers: sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org or 413-458-2160.