

## A Civil War Family

by Sarah Currie



Israel Sobrieski Fowler, c. 1890

Memorial Day has passed but we are always interested in learning more about the local veterans whose stories are a valuable connection between local, national, and international history. During a recent visit to Town Hall to carry out research, our volunteer David Primer accessed a valuable resource, a ledger set that details payments made to Civil War soldiers' families during the soldiers' enlistments. Using this ledger and sources at the

WHM, we found a glimpse into a 19th century soldier's life and family during the 1860s.

According to records at the WHM and the ledger, Israel Sobrieski Fowler enlisted in September 1862 as a "nine months man" and served in Company G of the 49th Massachusetts Regiment for about a year. The ledger tells us that Fowler's wife, Lydia, was only 17 at the time of Israel's enlistment and pregnant with their first child during his time in the army. Baby Charles Harold was born in February 1863 while his father was still serving. The ledger notes that the young Mrs. Fowler and her son received financial support of about \$2 per week (about \$40 today) from the town during Israel's enlistment. Fowler was only 22 when he enlisted and, though there is no narrative in the ledger, reading through the details of dates one wonders what kind of family support his young wife and son may have needed and how important the \$2 per week was to their survival.

Upon his return from the Civil War, Fowler built a life for himself in town. He is listed as a farmer in the

*Civil War Family continued on page 4*

## Williamstown Weather

by Paul Guillotte

New England weather can be predictably unpredictable and a few pages from a scrapbook in the WHM collection are evidence of this fact. A pair of Williamstown observers, Harriet Knell and her daughter, Mabel Knell, whose interests ranged from politics to planets, saved news clippings, photos, and other interesting pieces of information in numerous scrapbooks that were donated to the WHM in the 1990s. These scrapbooks are a font of useful information, containing tidbits on topics ranging from presidents to solar eclipses.

One weather related clipping in a Knell scrapbook described 1816 as the year Williamstown had no summer. That year monthly temperatures ranged from freezing to moderate, not ideal weather for a healthy growing season. Farmers in Williamstown had one of the worst growing seasons on record, threatening the future of local people and livestock. The cause of the 1816 anomaly was a volcanic explosion that affected weather all over the world.

Elsewhere in the scrapbooks one can find a letter from 1969 written by George W. Schryver from Williamstown entitled, *The Tornado of 1922*:

*On a humid day in July 1922, a severe thunder and windstorm struck Williamstown shortly after noon. It lasted only a few minutes, but when the air had cleared that section of*



**The tornado was so strong it blew this tree onto the Dewey house on Main Street.**

*Weather continued on page 4*

# A Glimpse into the Museum's Finances

By Tom Sheldon

The Museum's Board of Directors believe it is important for its friends, supporters and patrons to have a clear picture of the Museum's finances. Toward that aim of transparency, here are some basic facts about your museum.



Exterior of the WHM, 32 New Ashford Road, Rt. 7

The annual budget is surprisingly modest, about \$38,000. The primary expenses are:

- Staffing including Work Study students \$22,000
- Insurance and taxes (state and federal) \$7,150
- Utilities \$2,100
- Office expenses, cleaning and supplies \$1,350
- Newsletter printing and distribution \$1,200
- Website, hardware and software \$1,070

Other minor expenses include programs and lectures; legal and professional services; advertising; subscriptions and dues; and exhibits.

It is important to note that such a spare budget is only possible because of two important factors: our volunteers and the Town's help. An enormous amount of time is donated by docents, committee members, and other volunteers who are the backbone of the Museum. The Town provides key aid by not charging rent and by paying heat and electricity costs.

How do we meet those inescapable expenses? First and foremost, your membership donations account for more than 40 percent of museum income, roughly \$16,000 annually. Special fund-raising events, such as cabarets, auctions, and house tours add revenues, projected to be \$4,000 this year. The Museum has a small endowment that yields about \$3,000 a year, although the endowment shrank some during the renovations at South Center School. Finally, some supporters supplement their memberships with additional gifts that are critically important to the Museum's solvency. Our goal for such gifts in 2018 is \$15,000.

If you have questions about Museum finances, ideas for fund raising events, or an interest in helping, please contact Executive Director Sarah Currie or any member of the board.



## *Let us Gather to Honor our Friend*

Sunday, July 22, 2018

2 to 4 p.m.

at the WHM

Please join us on Sunday, July 22, 2018 from 2 to 4 p.m. for a special event honoring the late Nancy Burstein, the former director and curator of the Williamstown House of Local History and Williamstown Historical Museum. All are invited to join us to celebrate Nancy's life and honor her good work and friendship.

The afternoon will provide an opportunity for friends and family to gather and remember Nancy and her impact on the Museum and her friends. A memorial dedication of the Children's Room in Nancy's name will be followed by refreshments and a time to connect. We look forward to seeing all of Nancy's friends and colleagues at this memorial.

Nancy's family will be in attendance and the WHM is grateful to the Bursteins for sponsoring this memorial event. During the event, summer refreshments will be served.



A day in the oat field, c. 1910, possibly near Bee Hill Road

## President's Remarks



Summer field in South Williamstown on Hancock Road near the Second Congregational Church, date unknown

### *Williamstown Hay Day!*

**Sunday, August 19, 2018  
11 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Dear Member of the Williamstown Historical Museum,

I am writing to let you know of an exciting event planned for later this Summer. The Williamstown Historical Museum will be holding *Williamstown Hay Day*, a family-friendly fund-raising old-time country fair, at its new location, the South Center School. The event will be held on Sunday, August 19 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$10 for a family and \$5 for individuals.

At this special summer event there will be games, contests, a petting zoo, local farmers and vendors displaying and selling their products, and an enticing silent auction. Local organizations will also be on hand, providing information about their good work. We are excited to be hosting this small version of a country fair.

I hope you will attend *Hay Day* and I also ask for your financial support. As this is a fund-raising event, we are hoping funds received will support the continuing programs of the Museum and keep Williamstown's history alive. Board members have donated to this fundraiser and ask you to contribute as well. Donations in any amount will be gratefully accepted. I hope we can count on your financial assistance, as we continue to make plans.

We are also looking for items or services that could be included in our silent auction, and, of course, there are plenty of volunteer opportunities. Please call the Museum at 413-458-2160 with your pledge or to donate an item or service for the silent auction by Monday, August 6, 2018. Monetary donations may be mailed to the Williamstown Historical Museum at 32 New Ashford Road, Williamstown, MA 01267.

Thank you so much for your consideration, and I hope to see you at *Williamstown Hay Day* on August 19, 2018.

Patrick Quinn  
Chair, Program Committee



**Kathy Thompson  
WHM President**

Dear Members and Friends,

I hope you all had a good winter. At the Museum we are happy to be back on summer hours and ready to welcome visitors from near and far. You will find news of our summer plans throughout this newsletter. A highlight will be *Williamstown Hay Day*, on Sunday, August 19, 2018 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. It will be a day to celebrate the agricultural fairs of the past and raise important funds for our future. Please add this occasion to your calendar now!

Highlights of this past spring include receipt of a grant from The Fund for Williamstown to be used for important new recording equipment. Our monthly lectures have continued to be popular, with a favorite being "Williamstown Round Table," featuring six longtime community residents talking about growing up in Williamstown.

We thank you for your continued membership contributions, which provide a substantial part of our operating funds. Read the article in this issue to learn more about our finances and needs. Encourage your friends to join too! We are currently making sure that newcomers to Williamstown receive a packet of information about the Museum and its resources.

Wishing you a summer full of good times with family and friends and visits to the Williamstown Historical Museum,

Kathy Thompson  
WHM Board President

### **Bring your House Guests to the WHM this Summer!**

**Do you have visitors this summer and want them to have a memorable experience in Williamstown? Bring them to the WHM, Williamstown's History Center!**

**Summer Special Exhibit:  
*From Trash to Treasure...  
and Recent Acquisitions***

**Summer Hours:  
Wednesday - Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Saturdays and Sundays, 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.**



## Civil War Family, continued

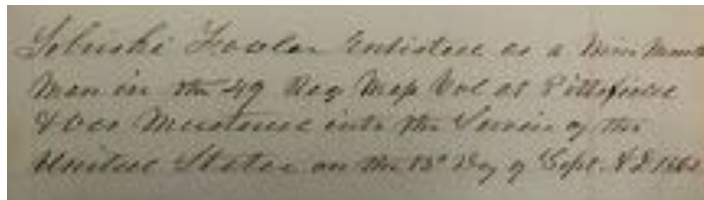


**Lydia Fowler c. 1900**

raised six children before Mrs. Fowler died in 1907, at the age of 61. When Mr. Fowler died at the age of 80 in 1922, stores in town closed during his funeral.

1880 census and, according to other records at the WHM, he became a respected member of the town, serving as Superintendent of Roads and as a Selectman. Fowler was a Commander of the E. P. Hopkins Post of the Grand Army of the Republic for several years and was a charter member of the Williams Lodge of the Masons.

Fowler and his wife, Lydia,



**Excerpt from page of Civil War dependent payments ledger at Town Hall**

With a small amount of information, from several primary sources, we are able to uncover stories that add to the history of Williamstown. This brief overview of the life of a significant veteran in town inspires questions, investigation, and deeper thought about the realities of peoples' experiences in the past and how they compare to one's experiences today. Imagining and recognizing the hardship, challenges, and fortitude of veterans and their families inspires respect and greater understanding of the past and puts current life into perspective.

Our town is fortunate to have access to primary sources in multiple local collections. Staff and volunteers at the WHM are available to help you make your own discoveries about the resources in our own collection or at places like the Town Hall. Please email with your questions: [info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org](mailto:info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org).



**Israel Sobrieski Fowler and his son Charles c. 1920**

## Weather, continued

Main Street lying between Spring Street and Cole Avenue was a shambles resembling the battle-torn forests of France. Wires were down and streets were impassable.

A noon train arrived at the Williamstown station just as the storm broke and the passengers had to wait for the storm to pass. A number of dignitaries were in the group, arriving to attend the Institute of Politics conducted by Williams College in the interest of world peace, three years after World War One.

The Honorable Elihu Root, once Secretary of State, was in the number. A few days later, when speaking at a dinner meeting, he alluded to the tornado which greeted him on arrival. He said that as he rode through the village to reach his hotel he wondered if the tornado did not *augur* [bode] well for the peace efforts that were being made. Events of the past forty-five years seem to have provided the answer.

Together with the dozens of other scrapbooks in our collection, the Knell scrapbooks provide a window into the past that helps us identify what was important to the people who compiled them. Through these scrapbooks one may gain an awareness of the contemporary trends, ideals, and culture of the time in which they were created.

Based on their prominence in the scrapbook, it is clear that significant weather events clearly made an im-



**The Dewey house, Main and Southworth Streets, lost several trees in the tornado**

pact on the Knells. One could surmise that these memorable phenomena were recorded because they affected many residents in town, perhaps because their lives were tied so closely to the land or because the weather had significant consequences for residents in other ways. Whatever their meaning, the many entries in the scrapbooks in the WHM collection are fascinating and sometimes surprising and unexpected. Please visit the Museum to take a look at the scrapbook collection!



**Mabel Knell with her dog, Buddy c. 1984**

# Williamstown Veterans Through the Years

By Paul Guillotte

Williamstown residents have a rich history in military service, whether enlisted, commissioned, volunteered or drafted. The Kennedy Collection, a set of American Legion records at the WHM, is a useful source of information about Williamstown veterans. Within these records we find that some Williamstown families had multiple members serve in the military representing several generations.

The Sylvesters had seven members in three wars. Inez and Paul (Vietnam), John and Ted (WWII), Lee and Bob (Korea) and George (Vietnam).

Coach Theodore R. Sylvester wrote to the editor of *The Berkshire Eagle*, in an undated clipping:

*Beginning in 1945 and at regular intervals up to 1965, our seven children enlisted in the U.S. armed services. Four chose the Navy, two the Marines and one the Army. Our six sons went first, followed by our daughter, a Navy nurse. At present we have three in the reserves, two in the Pittsfield branch of the Seabees and one a lieutenant colonel in the Marine reserves. My wife and I are proud that they all had a chance to serve their country.*

Three Torrey brothers served in the armed forces, as did three Guillotte brothers: Bob and George (WWII), and Paul (Korea). George's son, Paul, served during Vietnam.

Jack Quinn (WWII) was a tail gunner on four planes (two of which he exited in the air). He lost his desire to fly later in life but always maintained an interest in flight.



Jack Quinn, at left, with his WWII bomber jacket

Marshall Hannock, a graduate of Williams College, was a member of Chambers' Raiders, 25<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. He received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. Capt. Cecil Harvey received the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster for meritorious service in Germany in February and March of 1945. Some who served received the Bronze Star posthumously like PFC Tristan Whitney Hayes who served in the Army in Quang Tri Province in September 1968. Private Arthur "Bug" LaCrosse of Hall Street earned his nickname after becoming a target for German bombs while driving a Jeep on his return from a reconnaissance trip at the Fifth Army front in Italy.

Specialist 2<sup>nd</sup> Class  
Anita Raymond Hanlon  
served from 1943 to 1945 in  
the Navy and trained naval  
aviators.



The Kennedy Collection, compiled by J. Michael "Mike" Kennedy, is extensive. It has four volumes on WWII alone. The WHM is grateful for Mike's work compiling the stories that serve as an incredible testament to the quality and character of local veterans who risked their lives in time of war.

Anita Hanlon was a trainer of US Navy aviators and the mother of three veterans.

If you would like to search for a veteran, the WHM can provide you with resources within the Kennedy Collection and in our other archives.

In the near future, the WHM plans to record oral histories of area veterans with Mike's input.



American Legion members march on Spring Street on Memorial Day in 2008.

## Docents Needed!

You are invited to learn more about being a docent at the WHM. Volunteering at the WHM is a great way to learn more about the history of Williamstown and give back to your community at the same time. If you have a couple of hours free each week or month our Executive Director, Sarah Currie, would be happy to talk to you about volunteer opportunities at the WHM. Please contact Sarah for more information.

413-458-2160 or

[sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org](mailto:sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org)



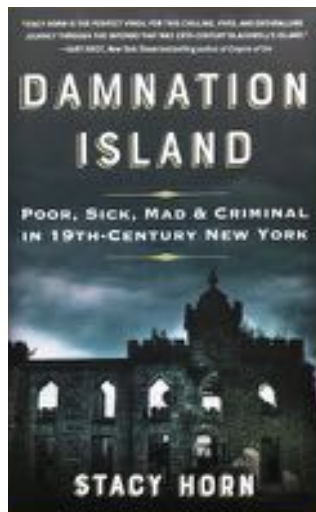
## WHM Research Resources Used in Recent Publications

The Williamstown Historical Museum maintains an archive of research resources that are frequently used by residents and others located out of town. Recently, two researchers used material from our collection in their work.

Susan O'Brien, a member of The Sinclair Lewis Society, published the results of her research on Lewis' Thorvale Farm on Oblong Road in *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. In her piece titled *Fresh Pastures* she notes that, "By the time Lewis came to the Berkshires, he was the highly celebrated author of nineteen novels, numerous short stories and essays, and five plays; six of his most famous novels had been made into major films. He was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and a wealthy man." Ms. O'Brien quotes one extensive document prepared by Pius M. Gagnon, O. Carm., of the Carmelite Brothers, who would eventually own Thorvale Farm, "During the first two years of his stay at Thorvale Farm, Sinclair Lewis farmed the land, but during his last year there he did not. Lewis rather enjoyed the role of farmer and liked to look upon himself as 'The Squire of Oblong Road.'" To learn more or for a link to the article please contact the Williamstown Historical Museum.

Another writer, Stacy Horn, authored a work of nonfiction titled *Damnation Island*. In her book about Roosevelt Island, the former Blackwell's, where two prisons, a number of hospitals, an almshouse, and a lunatic asylum were located, Horn used an interesting item from the WHM archive: A local resident, Reverend William Redfield Stocking, served as a superintendent of the workhouse from 1886 to 1889 and, using the manuscript for Stocking's autobiography from the WHM collection, Ms. Horn was able to build an entire chapter around Stocking's time at the workhouse. In her letter to the Museum, thanking us for our assistance, she writes that Stocking's manuscript, "...was such a treasure. It was one of the few inside looks that wasn't written for an annual report, and so it was more personal and honest."

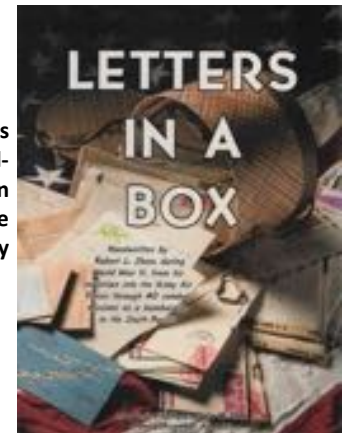
Staff and volunteers at the Museum are happy to carry out and facilitate research for people looking for information on all topics related to Williamstown.



**Stacy Horn's book, *Damnation Island*, features a chapter on a local resident who served as the Superintendent of the workhouse on Blackwell's Island from 1886-1889.**



**A full house prepares to enjoy Sheila Stone's May 26 lecture on *Letters in a Box*, the book containing letters her husband, Robert Stone, wrote to his family during his enlistment as a WWII bombardier.**



**A video of Sheila Stone's lecture is now available online, thanks to WilliNet. Please visit the Williamstown Historical Museum website for more information. A copy of the book may be viewed at the Museum as well.**

### *Spring and Summer Programs 2018*

**Sunday, July 22, 2 to 4 p.m.**—Celebration of Nancy Burstein and dedication of Children's Discovery Room

**Sunday, August 19, 11 a.m. to 4p.m.**—*Williamstown Hay Day*: A community event and fundraiser. Learn more about this event on page 3.

**Summer Special Exhibit, June to August**—*From Trash to Treasure and Recent Acquisitions*

Visit the WHM website to view videos of past programs, courtesy of WilliNet.

[www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org)



**The history of Williamstown hay farming continues. Jeff Young bales hay along Hancock Road in 2008.**

# WHM Summer Special Exhibit

## *From Trash to Treasure... and Recent Acquisitions*

June to August 2018

At the WHM

What do a travel trunk from Cole Porter, spectacles from a local farmer, a popcorn machine from the Walden Movie Theatre on Spring Street, and smelling salts from the former Hopkins Funeral Home have in common? These items and their stories are all a part of the summer special exhibit at the WHM: *From Trash to Treasure and Recent Acquisitions*.

This examination of some of the lesser known pieces of the WHM collection focuses on objects and ephemera that are unique to the WHM collection and help round out the story of Williamstown. Many of the pieces featured were close to being discarded and lost indefinitely, but were, fortunately, saved by savvy local history loving donors and given to the Museum. Visit the WHM's summer special exhibit to learn more about everything from a collection of 1960s-era Eddie's Supermarket food stamp voucher tokens, centuries-old projectile points, a beautiful hay rake, and other intriguing objects that will broaden your understanding of Williamstown's history.



1960s era Eddie's Supermarket food stamp tokens can be seen in the WHM summer special exhibit.



One of these spectacular trunks belonged to Cole Porter and you can learn more about the curious story of its journey to the WHM at the Summer Special Exhibit.

## History Book Group

Regular meeting time  
first Thursday of each month, 1 p.m.  
at the Williamstown Historical Museum

You are invited to join a History Book Group! At its next meeting the group will discuss the second half of *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes. All are invited to join the group on Thursday, July 12, 2018, at 1 p.m. at the WHM. Please feel free to attend even if you have not yet read the book. If you have questions, please contact Sarah Currie at:

[sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org](mailto:sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org).

## Williamstown Historical Museum

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

JOIN or RENEW your MEMBERSHIP  
or make a donation to the  
Williamstown Hay Day Fundraiser

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

ENCLOSED is my contribution for:

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

To Join or Make a Donation Online:  
[www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org)

# Williamstown Historical Museum

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01247

32 New Ashford Road, Williamstown, MA 01267

April - November Hours:

Wednesday - Friday, 10 - 2

Saturday - Sunday, 12 - 4



This object arrived in our collection several years ago after being found in the barn of a donor on Chestnut Street. Although the object's true use is unknown, it may have been a kind of skutching knife. The donor suggested a possible use of the tool was hinted at in a quote from *The Hoosac Valley* by Grace Greylock Niles, p. 436: "Every farmer up to the opening of the War of 1812 also sowed a small flax field a few rods square and produced his household linen. The flax was allowed to rot slightly in the field, after which it was prepared by a hand-break, or swingle knife for the hetchel." If you think you know what this tool was used for, please contact the WHM at **413-458-2160** or **[info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org](mailto:info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org)**.