



THE HISTORIAN



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WINTER, 2016



Jacob Thompson House 1811



Fuller House 1869

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings:

Again, the Historical Society has had an eventful fall and winter. The exterior painting and restoration of the Jacob Thompson house was completed before any bad weather. Bill Dominick and Tamara Cabey have been very busy with the interior. The painting contractor we hired has completely painted the first floor, including ceilings, walls and floors. All of the artifacts have been cleaned in preparation for the open house in the spring. We have installed new light dark-

ening shades in all of the rooms to prevent sun damage, to conserve heat and to act as a security measure.

Leona Brahen has our new website up and running and I hope we can use it as a conduit to our members and the general public for their feedback and ideas on our progress.

For the first time in a while, the Fuller House and garage are at full capacity, which the funding from this will support our day to day expenses.

The spring open house will take place on Sunday, May 22, 2016 from 1:00 to

4:00 p.m. Come see all the progress that has been made to the Museum, both inside and out.

I hope to see you there and we also might have some other very exciting news to share with you.

Dennis Swierad, President



Officers:

President – Dennis Swierad
Vice President – Tamara Cabey
Secretary – Leona Brahen
Treasurer – Kevin McNabb

Board Members:

Denis Duquette (2018)
William Dominick (2017)

Board Member Emeritus:

William Hatton
Emma Ladd Shepherd

Voting Positions:

Accessions Manager – Mary Swierad
Collections Manager – Mary Swierad
Building Restoration – Dennis Swierad
Editor/ Website – Leona Brahen
Historian – Dennis Swierad
Membership – Denis Duquette
Annual Meeting – Denis Duquette
Rental Manager – Tamara Cabey

Mission Statement

To obtain and preserve historical data and articles pertaining to the town of Monson, Massachusetts, and to encourage and develop the pursuit and expression of such interests in all suitable ways.

Visit us on the web at www.monsonhistoricalsociety.org

Email us on the web at info@monsonhistoricalsociety.comcastbiz.net

Do you need information about the history of Monson? Write, call or email us. We may be able to help.

THE MONSON ALMHOUSE AND PRIMARY SCHOOL

BY DENNIS SWIERAD

Today I would like to write a little about the earliest history of the creation and development of the area last known as the Monson Developmental Center.

The potato famine, which began about 1847 in Europe, was responsible, to a great extent, for large numbers of people migrating to the United States. These people were the poorest to come to our shores and required—and soon came to rely on—charity to exist. In 1851, about 10,267 people applied for aid at a cost to the state of \$212,000. This caused a great concern to our legislators and, thus, they voted to establish three institutions within the state to provide for the care of the poor.

On the 20th of May, 1852, the legislature authorized Gov. Boutwell to appoint a board of commissioners to

construct three almshouses for the accommodation of such persons who had no legal settlement within the state. These institutions, which were located in Monson, Bridgewater, and Tewksbury, were erected in 1853 and were opened for occupancy on May 1, 1854.

In the town of Monson, the commissioners purchased the 155 acre farm of Gideon Merrick and 20 adjoining acres from Mr. Fay at a cost of \$6,000. The historical society is fortunate to have a copy of the handwritten memoirs of the first superintendent, Samuel D. Brooks, M. D., and also some early reports of the inspectors of the State Almshouse and Primary School which it was later called. From these artifacts and other sources, I hope to give you a narrative of what it was like in such an institution in those days.

“As soon as we were comfortably settled in our quarters, I set about putting the institution in a condition to receive inmates. I purchased three horses and five yolk of oxen and hired a number of workers. Drainage and water control were a constant necessity in the beginning. We worked to construct deep drains in the rear of the buildings to take the water from the cellars and cut off the springs from the hills. Furniture, fixtures, dry goods and shoes were purchased which required several trips to Boston and Springfield.” Also, “farming implements were obtained. Officers-Teachers and general help engaged; and the institution organized for running by May 1, 1854.”

“The first inmate to arrive May 1st was from Ware or vicinity, Daniel Wilcox, a demented love cracked man



1862 State Alms House Monson, MA
Lithograph by J. H. Buofford's Boston

about 40 years old. The numbers from this beginning rapidly increased, and in a short time, we had several hundred men, women and children of every variety of mental and physical condition. In the course of the summer, arraignments were put in by which the contents of the closet vaults, sinks and bathing tubs were conducted upon the north lot. By this method a large proportion, several acres, was irrigated with fertilizer, thus enriching the soil so that the season following, large crops of vegetables, including several thousand cabbages of immense size, and several tons of carrots.”

A portion of a letter from Gov. Washburn June 16, 1854 stated, “I have made an order for the removal of 200 paupers to your establishment, among them are some 150 boys or children. I have made this order hoping you will see fit to provide them a suitable school. I suppose they will be forwarded on Monday.”

“Inspired by the large accessions to our school and, especially by the principles of reform suggested by the Governor’s letter, the institution was then and there christened The Monson State Farm School.”

“In June and November fifty children were transported from Rainsford Island Hospital to us in a diseased condition.”

“On December 31st or eight months from the open-



*S. D. Brooks
Superintendent of the
State Farm School
Monson, Mass.
Sept. 1, 1856*

ing, our first report was made, we had in the institution 615 of whom 356 were children under 15 years, and 175 of them were in the school. There were 343 admissions in the hospital, 14 of these were lying in cases: 1 amputation of the leg above the knee, 6 fractures, 3 fever and 2 small pox cases. In the new year 1855, there were in the institution 77 cases of measles, 30 of mumps, 20 of chicken pox and 29 of whooping cough besides many other contagious diseases. Our own precious dear child Jane Eliza had the whooping cough followed by the measles resulting in lung complications from which she died on the 25th of February aged twenty three months and two days.”

“Due to the urgent necessity for better conveniences in the domestic department, the legislature made a special appropriation of \$12,400. We began as soon as frost was out

of the ground to create a brick building 24 feet from the east wing connecting the same from the main dining room by a covered passageway two stories high and 45x70 feet and containing 12 rooms, a kitchen bakery, laundry, drying room, store room, engine steam boiler and pump room for grinding feed and shelling corn by steam power. A brick ice house was built during the season with rooms for keeping meats and milk.”

“The year ending 1855 there were among the farm products 1,951 bushels of potatoes, 31 tons of turnips, 21 ½ tons of carrots, 16 tons of pumpkins, 4,070 pounds of squashes and 7000 cabbages. Also in 1855 there were 132 deaths, 36 of them Marasmus, 33 of Phthisis and 13 of old age.”

“In 1856 as the dry season approached, the water supply began to fail and a large reservoir well was excavated in the yard which held some 1,500 gallons and capable of supplying 500 gallons an hour. It was connected by a 4 inch iron pipe with a pump in the boiler room by which an abundance of pure water was distributed by steam power throughout the establishment to our hearts content.”

“As usual the institution has attracted large numbers of visitors from home and abroad- some out of curiosity

and others for information and in the interest of humanity.

Horace Greely and the Editor of the Agricultural department of the N.Y. Tribune, whose name I have forgotten, were at one time our guests."

"September 30, 1857 at the time of making the Annual Report of that year. there were 455 children and 183 adults, total 638 in the Institution. Nearly all of the children were at an age to attend school."

"Business generally was depressed during the year 1857, especially manufacturing which threw large numbers out of employment. Consequently, in anticipation of a large increase of inmates, the Governor ordered that provisions be made for the accommodation of 1,200 during the ensuing winter 1858. In obedience to this order, two or three hundred iron bedsteads and several bails of blankets were purchased and arrangements generally were made to meet this expected increase. As soon as cold weather came, our numbers began to rapidly increase and continued till our number reached 1,150 by mid winter. The crowded condition of the institute together with its constant addition of new elements occasioned a good deal of sickness and increased our death list. There were 76 cases of measles, 165 of scarlet fever, 85 of pneumonia and acute bronchitis, 18 of pleurisy, 25 of mumps, 17 of bario-loid, 22 births and more or less some of every other kind of illness flesh is heir to, to the

number of one thousand."

Toward the end of Dr. Brook's narrative, he makes a profound observation which even today is applicable. "We regard pauperism a hereditary disease and one learned early in our experience in dealing with it that there were higher and noble conditions that should govern us and ends to be attained than simply their physical care." Dr. Brooks was terminated in 1858 for reasons unknown and, at the time, many prominent citizens of Monson and Palmer wrote letters of support for him, and many were published in the local papers.

The annual reports through the 1860's and 1870's reflect the same sort of problems and accomplishments faced by Dr. Brooks. An article in the report of 1869 has several humorous anecdotes such as "On the 22nd of October 1869 a man sixty years of age was brought with a permit from the overseers of the poor, *dead*. I could find no statute authorizing me to receive dead men, and no law enjoining on me to bury the dead of any who might choose to bring them, having enough of the work of our own; and I therefore, concluded to let those so dead to every principle of humanity, bury their own dead." Also this story is transcribed. "John Farrell, an Irishman by birth, 23 years of age, was brought to this institution, January 17, 1868, from the town of Holyoke, with a broken leg and frozen feet, which injuries

were received while in a state of intoxication. Subsequently, a part of one foot was amputated, and he remained in the hospital till his discharge, with the single exception of absconding from the Almshouse, going to Palmer, getting drunk, fighting with the officers in charge on his return, and remaining in the lock-up till he was over his drunken spree."

The legislature of 1872, by an act which took effect on the first day of May, 1872, abolished the Almshouse at Monson and it became the State Primary School. In 1895 and 1896, the Monson institution was closed and the main wooden building torn down. The history of the opening of The Massachusetts Hospital for Epileptics in 1898, then the creation of Monson State Hospital and finally the change to Monson Developmental Center, will have to wait for another time.

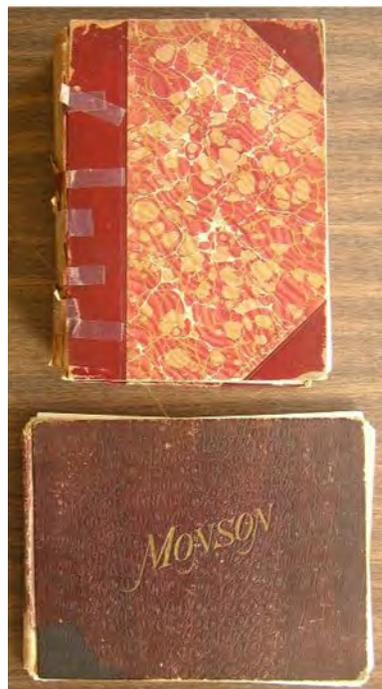
Bibliography:

History of Monson 1960 – Monson Historical Society, Inc.
Sixteenth Annual Report of The Inspectors of the State Almshouse and Primary School at Monson. October, 1869
www.hampdencountyhistory.com – The State Primary School, Monson, Massachusetts
www.poorhousestory.com – Almshouse and State Primary School in Monson, MA – Historical Notes
History of The Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers. Complete in Two Volumes. Vol. II 1879
Memoirs of Samuel D. Brooks, M.D.

NEW ACQUISITIONS



A.D. Ellis Mills, Inc. tag; Town of Monson Police Department war on drugs booklet – 1970; Monson High School Class of 1929 Yearbook; Monson Academy Catalogue 1892-1893; Monson High School Class Day Program 1924



*A History of Hampden County Massachusetts Volume III 1902
Monson Illustrated 1884*



*U. S. Air Force Women's Summer Uniform,
War Song Book 1918, Handmade knitting bag
for Grange Contest*

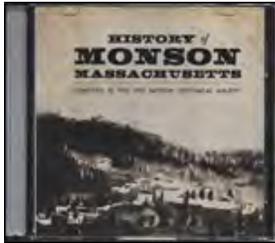
ITEMS FOR SALE

1960 History of Monson Book CD

The history of Monson, written in 1960 for the Bicentennial of the formation of the town, is now available in PDF format on a CD.

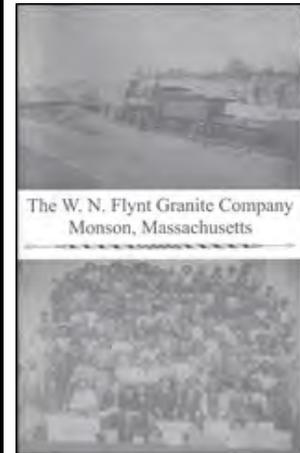
If you are currently a member of the Monson Historical Society, the fee to obtain the CD is \$15.00. For non-members, the fee is \$20.00 which includes 1 year free membership and our quarterly newsletter "The Historian". Shipping costs for the CD are included in the fee.

Please indicate whether you are a member or not and mail your request to:



Monson History CD
Monson Historical Society, Inc.
1 Green Street, Suite 1
Monson, MA 01057

Please include your email address
Make your check payable to:
Monson Historical Society, Inc.



Also available is the 12-page booklet about the W.N. Flynt Granite Co. Cost is \$3.00 which includes shipping.

MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kevin McNabb Treasurer

I have been a Monson resident since 1981. I earned an MBA from WNEU in 1986, and worked nearly 30 years at Bay state Health as an accountant. I have always enjoyed gardening, history and maps. For the last 15 years, I have served as treasurer for our neighborhood Lake Association, and also volunteer as treasurer for the Monson Historical Society. My wife and I are both retired for 7 years now. We are active with the gym and pool year round, and enjoy trips, the beach, and grandchildren.

Leona Brahen Secretary, Editor and Website

After the Tornado, I realized that it was time to give back to my community that had demonstrated such wonderful acts of charity. It was at that time that I got involved with the Re-planting Monson Tree Committee and have served as its Secretary since its inception in 2011. I so enjoyed my service on this Committee that I sought out another opportunity to serve and share the skills that I had acquired over my 30 years of working in the corporate environment. The Historical Society has always interested me and I thought that it would be the perfect opportunity to combine both my skills and my love of history in general.

Welcome New Member

Debbie Hockla-Kaba – Stafford Springs, CT

**** ARE YOU UP TO DATE ON YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES?? ****

Membership renewals occur on May 1st of each year. If you receive our newsletter through postal mail, please check the date on your mailing label. Current memberships should read “5/1/2016” or later. If your label reads “5/1/2015”, you need to renew for another year. If it reads, “5/1/2014”, you need to renew for 2 years to be up-to-date.

For those who receive our newsletter via e-mail, please check the subject matter. If it reads “Monson Historical Society Newsletter”, your membership is current. If it reads “Monson Historical Society Newsletter/Renewal”, you will need to update your membership. Please read the text in your e-mail for renewal instructions.

Please consider taking the time today to complete the membership form and mail it back, along with your check, to the address listed on the form. Your membership will be updated through 5/1/2016.

******Also note that we have reduced our “Life Membership” rate in half from \$500 to \$250!******

If you receive the newsletter via e-mail, please be aware that all newsletters will be forwarded from this e-mail address, DCDuquette@msn.com, with the subject matter regarding Monson Historical Society.

MONSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address _____ Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail Address (for newsletter) _____

Please indicate a membership category & enclose a check made out to “Monson Historical Society, Inc.”

(Note: Membership renewal is May 1st of each year)

___ **Individual** (under age 18) \$5⁰⁰ ___ **Individual** (age 18 & over) \$10⁰⁰ ___ **Family** \$20⁰⁰

(NEW REDUCED RATE!!) ___ **Life Membership** \$250⁰⁰ **(NEW REDUCED RATE!!)**

Return to: Membership - One Green Street, Suite One - Monson, MA 01057

*And as always, we **Thank You** for your continued support of the Monson Historical Society!*