



# MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 50, No. 3

September 2014

## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

The dog days of August seem not to have appeared this year so it has been easier to keep the late summer weeds in control or just to enjoy the outdoors in Connecticut. The Mansfield Historical Society museum opening on June 1st was well attended and many people enjoyed chatting about quilts with fiber artist Catherine Smith and members of the Parish Piecers of the Storrs Congregational Church. Three new exhibits opened that day and they will remain on view through Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup>.

Thanks to Museum Director Ann Galonska and the many volunteers who have helped to make this museum season a success. A full list of acknowledgements appears on the back page of this newsletter.

The outside of the Museum building is looking much more inviting since the overgrown bushes have been cut down and the mulberry tree trimmed back. The World War I memorial plaque that was obscured by shrubbery is once again visible. New flags have been added to honor the veterans. Thank you to Mayor Elizabeth Paterson and Public Works Director John Carrington for their assistance in getting this work done.

We also had an attempted break-in last week and window panes were broken on the rear doors of both buildings. The break-in was unsuccessful, fortunately, and the necessary repairs have been made. The museum's security system would have been activated if the doors or windows had been breached.

Please join us on Friday, September 26<sup>th</sup> at our annual meeting at the First Congregational Church in Mansfield Center. After dinner, Connecticut State Archaeologist Brian Jones will present a program on the first colonists of New England who arrived many thousands of years before the Mayflower. Reservation forms are included with this newsletter.

On Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at the Buchanan Center, Richard Roberts and I will host a program on *Beginning Genealogy* from 1 to 4 PM. Jennifer Zinck will also present a program on *DNA and Your Family Tree* in November, date to be determined.

It is the time of year once again for membership renewals and you will find the 2015 renewal information in this issue. Please renew at your earliest convenience and spread the word to other members of the community who have not yet joined the Mansfield Historical Society. If we don't preserve Mansfield's history, who will?

Should you have any suggestions for the Historical Society and its museum, please contact Ann Galonska or me via mail, phone (860-429-6575) or e-mail ([mansfield.historical@snet.net](mailto:mansfield.historical@snet.net)).

*Keith Wilson, President*

## **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

### **Friday, September 26, 6:00 p.m.: ANNUAL MEETING - DINNER AND PROGRAM**

Brian D. Jones, the new Connecticut State Archaeologist, will present a program entitled, "From Africa to Connecticut: The First True Colonists of New England". This event will be held at the First Church in Christ (Congregational) in Mansfield Center.

### **Saturday, October 25, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.: INTRODUCTION TO GENEALOGY WORKSHOP**

The workshop will be held in the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library.

## ANNUAL MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 26

Our annual dinner meeting will be held on Friday, September 26, at the First Church of Christ in Mansfield Center (intersection of Rtes. 89 and 195).

This will be your opportunity to meet Brian D. Jones, the new Connecticut State Archaeologist. He succeeds Nicholas Bellantoni, who recently retired after holding the position of State Archaeologist since 1987.

Following dinner and a brief business meeting, Dr. Jones will present a program on the first true colonists of New England. The ancestors of modern Native Americans colonized New England about 13,000 years ago, but who were these people and how did they get here? Dr. Jones will summarize recent advances in our understanding of the diaspora of modern humans out of Africa beginning about 100,000 years ago. Archaeological and genetic data indicate that the human migration into Europe, Asia and the New World included intimate relationships with our cousins the Neanderthals and the mysterious "Denisovans." Jones will wrap up with a brief overview of what daily life was like here in Connecticut for the first people to arrive here, many thousands of years before the Mayflower.

Dr. Jones has been working in the archaeology field for over 24 years, most recently as Senior Archaeologist with Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc. in Storrs, Connecticut. His primary research focus is the archaeology of northeastern Native American cultures.

He received his undergraduate degree in Anthropology at Oberlin College in 1986. After living and traveling in Southeast Asia, he studied European prehistory at the University of Cologne, Germany. He returned to the U.S. in 1992 to complete his Ph.D. at the University of Connecticut. His dissertation explored human adaptation to the changing climate at the end of the last Ice Age.

Jones was the Supervisor of Field Archaeology at the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation between 1998 and 2004, after which he worked at Archaeological and Historical Services. In 2008, he took the position of Associate Director of UMass Archaeological Services in Amherst. He has also taught as an adjunct in the Anthropology Department at UConn since 2004.

We hope you will join us on September 26 for this interesting program.

**RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR THE DINNER.** Please send in the enclosed reservation form or call the museum (860-429-6575) by **September 20** to reserve your spot.

Those who wish to attend the program only should arrive by 7:30 p.m. Admission is free.

## INTRODUCTION TO GENEALOGY WORKSHOP ON OCTOBER 25

Have you ever watched TLC's popular TV program "Who Do You Think You Are"? On this show, professional genealogists help celebrities discover their family heritage, often uncovering connections to important historical people or events. However you don't have to be a professional genealogist to discover your own family history.

On Saturday, October 25, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., the Mansfield Historical Society will offer an Introduction to Genealogy Workshop in the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library. The presenters are Richard C. Roberts, former head of the History and Genealogy Unit of the Connecticut State Library and a Tri-Chair of the New England Regional Genealogy Conference (NERGC), and Keith Wilson, a genealogist with more than 30 years of family research experience. The workshop will cover the basics of genealogy, including how to get started, finding the who-what-when-where, and what to do with the information once you have it.

With the advent of the Internet, many genealogy resources are now available online. The auditorium has WI-FI access and attendees are welcome to bring a laptop for hands-on research if time permits. All will receive an extensive packet of information to get them started on their genealogy quest.

The cost of the workshop is \$5.00 for MHS members; \$10.00 for the general public. A registration form is enclosed in this newsletter. For more information, please contact Richard Roberts, 860-429-8751, [Rroberts1861@Charter.net](mailto:Rroberts1861@Charter.net). The registration deadline is October 20.

## THERE'S STILL TIME! THE MUSEUM IS OPEN THROUGH SEPTEMBER 28

The museum opened on Sunday, June 1 with a successful opening day event. Visitors enjoyed viewing the new exhibits and the Old Town Hall building was buzzing with activity. It was a delightful afternoon for all who attended.

On one side of the Old Town Hall, members of the Parish Piecers, a quilting service group at the Storrs Congregational Church, demonstrated some of the techniques used to make quilts today. They showed how to cut pieces using templates and rotary blades and how to join them together with a sewing

machine. They also had a hands-on quilt activity for children and displayed many examples of their quilt projects, including quilted clothing.

On the other side of the room, quilt artist Catherine Smith displayed some of her 2014 work and explained her improvisational process to visitors. She often incorporates photograph images into her fiber art and hand quilts all of her pieces. The contemporary quilts made by Catherine Smith and the members of the Parish Piecers provided an interesting contrast to the antique quilts displayed on the walls.



*Front of museum with bushes removed, both WWI and WWII plaques now visible*

Since the opening, the museum has been a busy place with a steady stream of visitors. Researchers utilizing the archives have also enjoyed our much improved library and office space. Quin Harper, now entering his senior year at E.O. Smith High School, continued to volunteer at the museum this summer. With his help we made great progress in cataloging new accessions.

If you have not already done so, we urge you to visit the museum before it closes for the season on Sunday, September 28. Don't miss our new exhibits! There are 38 beautiful quilts on display – many of them Mansfield pieces – that range in date from the early 1800s to the 1950s. Local artist Scott Rhoades has also loaned some of his oil paintings of Mansfield's historic houses and barns. In addition, there is an exhibit about Mansfield native, Charles Emory Smith. Born in Gurleyville in 1842, Smith became an influential newspaper publisher and served as ambassador to Russia from 1890 to 1892 and then as Postmaster General from 1897 to 1909.

**The museum is open on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. through the end of September. We hope to see you there!**

*In 1985, the Mansfield Historical Society published a booklet, **The Mansfield Poor House: A Forgotten Institution, 1861-1922**. It is based on a memoir written by Dorothy Jenner Gardiner, along with materials from a family scrapbook and information from the Town records. The booklet chronicles the history of the Poor House and describes daily life therein. It also profiles some of its indigent residents that included elderly, infirm and mentally disabled individuals. It's a fascinating study of how Mansfield cared for its poor before there was public welfare.*

*The Mansfield Poor House was established in 1861 when Robert A. Barrows contracted with the Town to care for Mansfield's paupers at his farm on Maple Road. Following his death in 1876, his son-in-law, William H. Gardiner, became the contractor and assumed management of the Poor House. It remained under the care of the Gardiner family until it closed in 1922. Mansfield's Poor House was considered a model for such institutions and the Barrows and Gardiner families were well-known for their compassionate care of their charges.*

*Recently a 1905 Hartford Courant article surfaced that identified two more residents of the Mansfield Poor House. Andrew Pierce and his sister, Ann Elizabeth, spent the final years of their life there. Some research in our archives and the Town records helped to flesh out their story.*



*The Mansfield Poor House in 1909*

### **ANDREW PIERCE: YANKEE FARMER**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Andrew Pierce and his pair of oxen were a familiar sight in downtown Willimantic. He appeared there on an almost daily basis. The elderly farmer was an eccentric who captured the imagination of the public.

Pierce and his oxen were the subject of a popular postcard entitled "Yankee Farmer, Willimantic, Conn." It was published by Hiram N. Fenn about 1900. The Mansfield Historical Society owns several copies of this postcard – some black

and white and some hand-colored – as well as a photograph of Andrew Pierce with his dog. The common postcard often appears for sale on eBay.

Despite the title of Hiram Fenn's postcard, Pierce's farm was actually in South Mansfield. It stood on the main road leading from Mansfield to Willimantic (now Route 195) where it was a very visible symbol of poverty. It was located where the Natchaug Hospital now stands.



*Yankee Farmer postcard by Hiram Fenn, c. 1900*

There is another photograph of Andrew Pierce's farm in the collection of the Connecticut Historical Society. The photographer, Fred E. Turner, wrote on its back: "A Tragedy of New England / Andrew Pierce and his house Mansfield Conn. / once a prosperous farm / Everything in the photo / has been obliterated, / man, house & oxen / sheds walls fences are / gone within a comparatively short time." The photograph can be viewed online at [www.cthistoryonline.org](http://www.cthistoryonline.org) (type Andrew Pierce in the search bar).

The story begins in Plainfield, Connecticut where Andrew Alanson Pierce was born on July 14, 1823. His parents were James and Elizabeth (Fuller) Pierce. His sister, Ann Elizabeth was born two years later. In 1851, the father, James Pierce, passed away at the age of 85. He was some thirty years older than his spouse. Thereafter Andrew took charge of caring for his widowed mother and maiden sister.

In 1859 Andrew Pierce relocated to Mansfield with his mother and sister. He purchased a farm from Ebenezer R. Gurley, a local silk merchant who dabbled in land speculation. The property was comprised of 143 acres with a house and outbuildings. The farm had previously belonged to John Brown and J. W. Lyon.

During his first years in Mansfield, Andrew Pierce prospered. He was able to pay off his mortgage in 1860. He also purchased additional farm

land, amassing some 200 acres. But then, for some reason unknown, there was a reversal of fortune.

Perhaps it was the death of his mother in 1885 that triggered the downward spiral. In the following years, Pierce only tilled a few of his acres - just enough to provide for himself, his sister and the livestock. The house and barn fell into disrepair as he spent his days trekking back and forth to Willimantic, always accompanied by his pair of oxen. The wagon they drew was described as "as much a wreck as his house" but the oxen were well cared for and always had gleaming coats.

The Hartford Courant article, dated February 28, 1905, describes the condition of the Pierce property: "Their house slowly rotted down over their aged heads, but they refused to repair it themselves or allow others to. If the roof leaked, Pierce would get a piece of discarded tin roofing and cover the leak; the same general idea was carried out on other parts of the old house until it became uninhabitable..."

Finally in 1903, the Town of Mansfield appointed a conservator for Andrew Pierce and his sister and they were moved to the Mansfield Poor House. The farm and Andrew's beloved oxen were sold to pay for their support.

According to the newspaper account, the old man rebelled against going to the Poor House and on his first day there, he escaped through a window and walked back to Willimantic. It took him "a long time to become reconciled to parting with the old ruin of a house and the pair of oxen." Eventually Pierce did adjust to his new circumstances but he still made frequent trips to Willimantic, walking both ways. It was a distance of approximately eight miles from the Mansfield Poor House on Maple Road to downtown Willimantic.

Andrew Pierce passed away on February 26, 1905 at the age of 81. His sister, who had lived with him his entire life, died the next day. They were buried side by side in the Old Willimantic Cemetery – together in life and together in death.

## **TOWN CLERK'S DESK RETURNS HOME**

The Town has turned over a large oak partner's desk to the care of the Historical Society. It first belonged to Judge Llewellyn Storrs who served as Judge of Probate from 1900 to 1937 and as Town Clerk from 1922 to 1938. Successive Town Clerks used it until 1975. It last served as the desk of Grant Meitzler, the Assistant Town Engineer. For over a century, the desk was at the center of Town business. It has now returned to the Old Town Hall building where it was originally located.

## MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FOR 2014-2015

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

Student (\$10) \_\_\_\_\_  
Individual (\$20) \_\_\_\_\_  
Family (\$30) \_\_\_\_\_  
Sustaining (\$50) \_\_\_\_\_

Small Business (\$75) \_\_\_\_\_  
Contributing (\$100) \_\_\_\_\_  
Patron (\$150) \_\_\_\_\_  
Corporate (\$250) \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to make an additional contribution of \_\_\_\_\_ to support the Historical Society.

*Please make checks payable to The Mansfield Historical Society. Mail membership form and check to: Mansfield Historical Society / PO Box 145 / Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268.*

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### RESERVATION FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER Friday, September 26, 2014

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ places for dinner. Enclosed is a check made out to "Mansfield Historical Society" in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ at \$17.00 per person. Send to Mansfield Historical Society, PO Box 145, Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268.

**Menu:** Vegetable Lasagna with salad and garlic bread. The meal also includes appetizers and dessert.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**RESERVATION DEADLINE is September 20, 2014**

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### REGISTRATION – INTRODUCTION TO GENEALOGY WORKSHOP Saturday, October 25, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m., Buchanan Auditorium, Mansfield Public Library

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Number attending @ \$5/MHS Member \_\_\_\_\_ \$10/Non-member: \_\_\_\_\_ Total enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to "Mansfield Historical Society." Mail to: Richard C. Roberts, 596 Gurleyville Rd., Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268-1408. For more information, contact Richard Roberts, 860-429-8751, [Rroberts1861@Charter.net](mailto:Rroberts1861@Charter.net). **REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 20.**

**Mansfield Historical Society**  
**P. O. Box 145**  
**Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268-0145**

**Web site: [www.mansfieldct-history.org](http://www.mansfieldct-history.org)**  
**E-mail: [mansfield.historical@snet.net](mailto:mansfield.historical@snet.net)**

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**PLEASE SUPPORT THE MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY. REMEMBER TO PAY YOUR DUES!**

**We especially want to recognize the following people who helped make this year's museum season a success:**

- Lisa Ferriere, Sharry Goldman, Norma Gingras, Stephen Feathers, Quin Harper, Alice Kolega, Cynara Stites, Marty Yutzey and Keith Wilson who assisted with exhibit prep.
- Keith Wilson, Anne Bennett and Jamie Lang-Rodean who coordinated and completed the office re-organization project and helped prepare the museum for its opening.
- Janet Atkins, Anne Bennett, Norma Gingras, Marty Yutzey, Nancy Rucker, Vicki Daniels, Merton Wolff, Juanita Hall, and Ann Galonska who loaned their heirloom quilts.
- Members of the Parish Piecers of the Storrs Congregational Church who demonstrated modern quilting techniques and organized a hands-on activity at our opening event.
- Fiber artist Catherine Smith who displayed her contemporary quilts and described her techniques at our opening.
- Joan DeBella who has coordinated the refreshments for all our programs this year and also the opening event. Many thanks also to all who provided the goodies.
- Pam Roberts who recruited and scheduled the museum hosts for the summer.
- Our members who volunteered to host at the museum during our open hours.
- Members of the Garden Gate Club who have maintained our gardens throughout the summer.

**We truly appreciate the contributions of everyone who helped. THANK YOU TO ALL ON A JOB WELL DONE!**