

# DOVER TIDINGS

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The Dover Historical Society, P.O. Box 534, Dover, Massachusetts 02030

## *The President's Letter*



*Arthur Wickson Plowing a Vegetable Garden off Dedham Street April 9, 1937*

**H**istorians are retrospective by nature. History, after all, is the study of the past in the hope that the lessons learned will better inform the future. For 125 years the Dover Historical Society has collected, preserved, and exhibited the history of our much loved and still somewhat rural community. Over the past seven months, however, history seems to have left the safety of the past to merge strangely with the present and cast a profound shadow of uncertainty over the future. In early March of this year, members of our board were happily immersed in a re-imagining of the Sawin Museum's second floor and looking forward to an Annual Meeting

featuring Dr. David Landon's recent excavations at Plymouth. Within weeks our Annual Meeting was indefinitely postponed, our monthly board meetings ceased, and it became clear that neither the Sawin Museum nor the Caryl Farm would be opening for the foreseeable future.

***It is frustrating, however, when our discoveries and accomplishments cannot easily be shared with the audience for which they are ultimately intended***

While the world struggles to adapt to the realities of COVID-19, the work of the Society must necessarily go on. Like the vegetable garden in the photograph above, our properties and our collections require regular care if our efforts are to continue, and, like Mr. Wickson, we have the benefit of a strong team, dedicated volunteers who do these things because we love doing them. While unable to meet as a full group, we have been able to continue functioning in smaller groups, subject to appropriate safety protocols and common sense. The Sawin Museum has been given a much-needed painting; we have received a number of significant donations including an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Cairns helmet used by the Dover Fire Department, and some original desks from the East District School House on Strawberry Hill Street. The Caryl Farm has been re-arranged to illustrate four distinct periods in the life of our first minister's family, and our Hodgson chicken coop has been restored to its original function. It is frustrating, however, when our discoveries and accomplishments cannot easily be shared with the audience for which they are ultimately intended.

How can the lessons of the recent past and present inform an uncertain future? This question has afforded a good deal of enjoyable discussion amongst board members over the past months as the Society has necessarily shifted from the re-imagining of our museum and collections to a broader assessment of our entire organization and business model. As we are, for the time being, unable to welcome visitors, we have begun an initiative through which we will bring some of the more interesting and significant items in our collection to the public via *Dover Tidings*, a separate periodic e-newsletter, and an increased presence on both our Facebook page (Dover Historical Society) and Instagram (@doverhistoricalsociety). I hope that those of you who have not viewed our Facebook and Instagram pages will do so, and that those of you who know us only in the digital realm will choose to become members.

In the final measure, our ability to continue our work is directly dependent upon the financial support of our community. I thank you for your past loyalty and hope that you will find us worthy of continued support.

Elisha Lee  
*President*

## A Rare and Interesting View: Papers from a Civil War Field Desk

Last winter was busy at the Sawin Museum, preparing for the annual Spring re-opening. We pulled everything out of the Civil War display case, a full floor-to-ceiling cabinet with three shelves, and I painted the interior cobalt blue. I was working with Stuart Swiny, the Curator, and with his knowledge of history and considerable gift (and patience) for teaching, we began cleaning and re-displaying the artifacts.

We have a cavalry bridle with a strong bit, and a photograph of an excellent sculpture by Amelia Peabody of the last surviving officer of the *USS Monitor*, the Union ironclad warship that dueled with the Confederate *CSS Virginia* at the Battle of Hampton Roads in 1862. Those items interested me. I did not know much about the Civil War, so the weaponry, canteens and maps did not prompt my imagination and I was struggling to contribute to a meaningful display.



*Field desk in the Sawin Museum. All the documents visible in the photograph belong to the desk. The Civil War canteen carried by a Dover soldier and other period items were added for purposes of verisimilitude.*

The bottom of the case was monopolized by an old wooden box. I asked Stuart about it, hoping we could rethink our use of space. As we looked at it our interest quickly grew. The box is an officer's field desk, dry and

worn from hard use. We cleaned, conditioned, and buffed it to a slight sheen. There are still pen and ink parchment labels glued to a few compartments, including a drawer labelled “Foolsap,” which was a paper slightly longer than the 8 1/2’ x 11” size that we use today.

At this time, I was also constructing an exhibit on the other side of the room. I needed to acquaint myself with our inventory, so I emptied the Museum’s storage closet and opened every carton. So many interesting items, including this desk, have been donated to the Museum by Dover citizens over the past 100 years. Re-organizing the closet I found a box of papers labelled “Military Orders from Civil War Field Desk.” There were more than a hundred hand-written pages, the content too much to absorb at first glance. I took the box home to study, and within days the COVID-19 Pandemic was declared, and the Museum was closed indefinitely.



*At Left: A typical field desk in use at Culpeper, Virginia. Sitting on the right is Dr. Charles Irwin, surgeon with the 72nd New York Infantry (Photograph ref. LC-DIG-cwpb-00917, Library of Congress)*

*Below: Detail of the field desk on a table at the back of the tent*

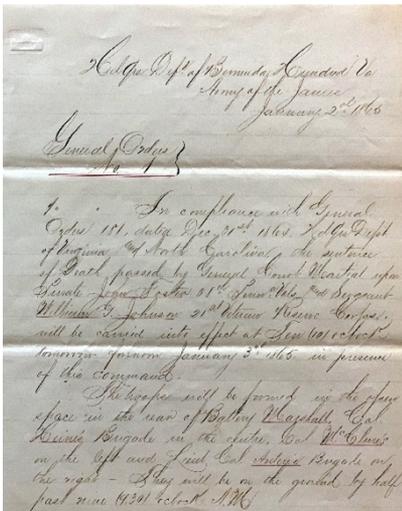
George A. Hicks, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, writing and signing for Major General Edward Ferrero, sent most of the Orders filed in this desk from the headquarters of the Army of the James at Bermuda Hundred, Virginia (on the James River about 25 miles southeast of Richmond). Probably used by one of the



Regimental Adjutants of the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, a name scratched into one of its drawers suggests that the desk was made by an imprisoned Union deserter while the regiment was stationed in Alexandria during the last year of the war, 1864 -1865 (See article by Elisha Lee concerning the making of the desk in forthcoming issue of *Dover Tidings*).

About half of the papers list prisoners, along with their offenses, their findings of “Guilty,” and their punishments. Some of these are heavy, including a few soldiers ordered “to death by musketry”, to be shot by men in their own Division. They were to be buried by those same men without honor.

Some soldiers were to be shamed in front of their Division by marching back and forth with heavy blocks of wood on their backs; sometimes accompanied by a drummer, sometimes carrying a sign. The Court Martial Orders highlight the mistakes and bad decisions that were made by so many soldiers; soldiers who fell asleep during night watch, ran away, or disobeyed orders.



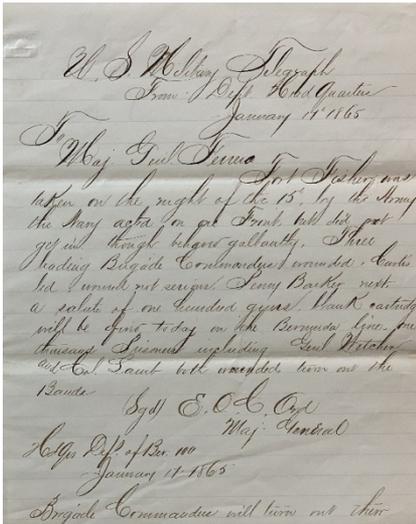
*The Sentence of Death passed by General Court Martial upon two soldiers to be executed in the presence of their own Brigades, at ten o'clock forenoon, January 3, 1865.*

Major General Ferrero had a respected career as a Union Army General, except for “one of the great scandals of the Civil War,” the time he and General James Ledlie remained in “the bombproof”, drinking together while their troops were decimated in the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg, Virginia on July 30, 1864. In my mind, however, I hear him on a “normal” day, dictating memo after memo to George Hicks. It is hard to imagine him making the decision to hide and drink while the men in his charge were massacred.

The other half of the papers are both mundane and intriguing; the “middle ground” between the horrific and the heroic. There are Orders to the Commander to transfer

a soldier to the “U.S. Colored Troops” and announcements of appointments and assignments, whiskey sales and fife lessons.

Amongst these papers there are a few moments of celebration. A telegraph from Major General Ord on December 18, 1864, calls for “Three cheers for General Thomas’ Army” for “A great victory has been gained.” The



*Celebratory telegram  
January 17, 1865*

a famous friendship developed between Lamb and Curtis, whom Lamb called “my friend the Enemy.”

I transcribed the pages onto a document on my laptop in chronological order. Deciphering the scrolled handwriting and researching names to verify the spelling was a slow process. Now, as I sit with my morning coffee, I find myself thinking of war news, Commands and Orders. When I have to sign something, Civil War names appear in my mind, scratched out in pen and ink handwriting. I have spent so much time with these papers; a Pandemic project.

Stuart is teaching me that museum exhibits become meaningful when they tell a story. After a month of not going there I unlocked the Museum and went upstairs. A map of Bermuda Hundred, Virginia interested me now as I could see where the desk had been. The canteens, the heavy cannon balls, and the sutler tokens were all part of daily life during this war, and I am excited to complete this exhibit.

The papers, for me, pull this unique Civil War display together. They tell the story of the war as it happened around the field desk. It is a rare and interesting view into history that can be found in our Civil War display case at the Sawin Museum, just as soon as we safely re-open during this global Pandemic. History within history.

Lori Carbone  
Associate Curator, Sawin Museum

## Basket with Leaf on Rock

Exactly 400 years ago this month the Mayflower sailed into Cape Cod Bay changing the history of our region forever. We know and hear much about the Pilgrims and their settlement at Plymouth, but generally pay less attention to the Indigenous People who had already been living here for at least 12,000 years. And it is indeed ironical that one of the reasons for the Pilgrim's success was that the local population had been devastated by an epidemic introduced by European trappers and explorers shortly before 1620, resulting in little competition for land.



The Sawin Museum is fortunate to own several rare “splint baskets” made by either the Massachusett or Nipmuck tribes who inhabited this general area. Basket weaving from long wooden slivers of brown and black ash as well as white oak was a tradition recorded from the 1600s onwards. The dyes and paints used were prepared from plants and the block stamp decoration was inspired by traditional designs on clothing or pottery with individual symbols representing animals and plants, people, tribes and places. Some designs on baskets are interpreted as representing historical events, the meaning of which is usually controversial. Illustrated here is a basket with a seven-inch square base and a rounded rim showing encircling splints dyed blue with poke cherry juice. The red stamped designs were made from cranberry juice. This basket, purchased by the Chickering family in the early 1800s probably from the neighboring

Nipmucks, was woven when the latter had lost most of their land to English settlers and were reduced to basket making as their main source of income.

To end on a positive note it should be remembered that the neighboring Natick Praying Indians, converted to Christianity by the Rev. John Eliot in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, have, despite many vicissitudes, managed to preserve their culture and recently celebrated a wedding in their South Natick church, the first in 300 years<sup>1</sup>.

Stuart Swiny  
Curator, Sawin Museum

## An Influential Town

*If you're running for office ... you must be from Dover*

**F**or a stretch of years between 1960 through 1978 Dover was a Mecca for some very significant politicians. They either lived in town or had Dover connections.

<b>Leverett Saltonstall</b> 1939 – 1945 Governor of Massachusetts 1945 – 1967 United States Senator	<b>Francis Sargent</b> 1967 – 1971 Lieutenant Governor 1969 – 1975 Governor of Massachusetts
<b>Jack Quinlan</b> 1965 – 1975 State Senator	<b>Charles Long</b> 1964 - 1978 State Representative

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Check out our website: [www.doverhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.doverhistoricalsociety.org)

Please note that our museums are temporarily closed due to COVID-19

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 8 in the *Boston Sunday Globe* November 15, 2015