

DOVER TIDINGS

Holiday 2009



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Editor

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The Dover Historical Society
invites you to a
Holiday Open House
Sunday, December 6, 2009
at the
Benjamin Caryl House
107 Dedham Street, Dover

Seasonal Music by Diane and Michael Jones
Period Refreshments

A Message from the President

The holiday season is once again upon us and in a matter of weeks we will be seeing one another at the Society's annual holiday open house. It's a warm and welcoming event that embodies the best traditions and sentiments of the season, and as we mingle and renew old friendships it is tempting to imagine the good Reverend Caryl smiling benevolently upon this outpouring of seasonal good fellowship. In truth, however, there is considerable doubt as to whether Reverend Caryl would have approved of such a gathering, or indeed recognized Christmas as a day apart from any other.

The Congregational Church to which Reverend Caryl belonged was the direct theological descendant of the early Puritans, for whom Christmas was an anathema. The holiday was considered inherently impure in that there was no scriptural evidence to indicate that Christ was actually born in December. It was generally acknowledged that the Roman Catholic Church had chosen the date some three centuries after the actual event, largely because of its coincidence with pagan celebrations of the winter solstice. Then too, the English holiday was rife with such manifestations of social disorder as wassailing, a custom in which revellers moved from house to house dispensing drink and frequently demanding payment in the form of food or yet more drink.

In 1659 the Massachusetts Bay Colony formally banned Christmas altogether, imposing a fine of five shillings upon all celebrants. The ban was lifted in 1681, but New England was slow to recognize the holiday. In his Christmas Day sermon in 1712 the Reverend Cotton Mather asked his congregation "can you in your conscience think that our Holy Savior is honored by mad mirth, by long eating, by hard drinking, by lewd gaming, by rude reveling? If you will yet go on and will do such things, I forewarn you that the burning wrath of God will break forth among you." By the time of Reverend Caryl's ordination in 1762 there was clearly a desire amongst his fellow clergymen to be more in step with the rest of their faith, but their feelings about Christmas remained decidedly mixed. On December 25th 1776 the Reverend Ezra Stiles, later President of Yale University, noted in his diary "this day the nativity of our blessed Savior is celebrated through three quarters of Christendom...but the true date is unknown.

On any day I can readily join with my fellow Christians in giving thanks to God for his unspeakable gift, and rejoice with them in the birth of a Savior. Tho' [if] it had been the will of Christ that the anniversary of his birth should have been celebrated, he would at least let us have known the day."

Elisha Lee

Caryl House

During the 18th century the Caryl House stood witness to an unprecedented clash of ideas. We imagine it was the East Chamber -- under-furnished and austere, and insulated from the hubbub of family life -- to which the Reverend Benjamin Caryl came to think and pray, to write and teach. There he could both cling to a world centered in religion and privately seek to reconcile the powerful cross-currents threatening to upend it. From the middle of the 18th century, fueled by the Enlightenment and later by the Revolution, more elitist European values gave way to democratic ones, liberal learning came to share the stage with utilitarian and practical influences, and the secular gained ground on the sacred. In the words of Frederick Rudolph, a scholar of the history of American higher education, these influences were so powerful as to "change "man's concept of God as well as his understanding of himself; there was no way to hold to scholastic thought once Copernicus, Newton and Locke had been unloosed."

Yet local researchers who have studied Reverend Caryl's sermons found him to be relatively resistant to these influences. He rarely addressed matters political in his sermons and lagged other Massachusetts clergymen in endorsing protests against the Crown. Learning this, I found myself speculating about how his educational experiences, as a student and a teacher, might have played a part in shaping the man and his views. Regionalism and sectarianism certainly contributed. The descendents of the Puritan colonists tended to hold to religious orthodoxy and they were concentrated in New England.

Benjamin Caryl came of age in the first half of the 18th century. He went to college relatively late in life, graduating in 1761 at the age of twenty-nine. He attended Harvard, an institution founded in 1636, long before the intellectual ferment of the 18th century. While Harvard was by no means frozen in time, religious orthodoxy lingered there longer than at younger colonial colleges like Yale (1701) and Princeton (1746). Even by mid-century the views to which he would have been exposed there were surprisingly in tune with what had propelled the 17th century English colonists. The Puritans were clear in why colleges were important: they would promote a society grounded in religious purpose and yield a learned clergy and a literate population, the latter so the flock might escape Satan, the great deluder. By the time Caryl got to Harvard this notion would have morphed into the ideal of the "Christian gentleman." But some things had not changed at all. The admission criteria continued to require the ability to read and write Latin and Greek and some familiarity with mathematics, and Commencement exercises continued to be conducted entirely in Latin. Within months of graduating, Caryl was ordained, married, taking up his call in Dover, and facing a future of jarring ideas with formal learning that was largely the product of a tradition in retreat.

While his training may not have fortified him well, his intellectual prowess most certainly did. He was said to be "an extraordinary genius and a good scholar." When a Harvard classmate named six men in the class as being "the most advantageous men to the Commonwealth," Benjamin Caryl was among them. But college attainment alone identifies him as a man of superior capacity.

Typically, college-going correlated with financial resources and social standing as well, but by any measure college graduates were rare birds and becoming one a competency-based distinction. At mid-18th century, it is estimated that all of the colonial colleges combined produced no more than a hundred graduates a year and that throughout the English colonies at the time of Independence there were no more than 2500 college graduates.

Finally, settling in a small town was a fortunate choice for Benjamin Caryl. Another legacy of the Puritan past in Massachusetts was an early commitment to preparatory schooling. The Massachusetts Law of 1647 decreed that every town of at least fifty families hire a schoolmaster who would teach the town's children to read and write and that all towns of at least 100 families should have a Latin grammar school master who will prepare students to attend Harvard College. As reported in *The History of Norfolk County*, in 1765 Dover (then known as the 4th Precinct of Dedham) consisted of forty-nine families and 105 children in town between the ages of five and fifteen attending the public schools. There was no high school, so young men seeking to advance their education needed to attend such schools in adjoining communities. Given its size, there was greater need in Dover and for a longer time for the traditional method of preparing for college entrance, viz. to be privately tutored by a learned member of the clergy. We know that the Rev. Caryl provided such services, as he had been taught a generation before. Potentially his protracted utility in this regard also contributed to continuity and stability in the face of intellectual and political cross-currents.

In preparing this little piece, I revisited several of my favorite secondary sources in the field of educational history, a bibliography of which is available upon request.

Barbara H. Palmer
Caryl House Curator

Fisher Barn

The lore of cranberries were presented to the early European New England visitors from very early on. The pilgrims had cranberries during the 1621 Thanksgiving along with squash, corn bread, succotash and wild turkey. There are conflicting reports regarding the presence of lobster, a food that was considered an undesirable item in those days. The native Americans showed the Pilgrims how to harvest and use the fruit, including meshing the fruit into dried meat and animal fat for improved taste. It wasn't long before this important fruit was used for sauces, baking, preserving along with a potent antidote to scurvy with a high vitamin C content.

In retrospect, it was inevitable that cranberries would be associated with Thanksgiving and Christmas in the new colonies. Bright and shiny red color with winter availability made the fruit a staple for holiday decorations and a presence on holiday dinner tables.

A cranberry rake was a tool that most local families relied on in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is an open ended box on a pole with the bottom side sporting rake teeth designed to skim along the surface of a bog to collect the fruit. Fine examples of local cranberry rakes that date back to an era between 1800 to 1900 are on display at the Fisher Barn. This tool and many like it help us comprehend how the early settlers of Dover lived and worked in a self reliant manner.

Barn Notes:

Recent fund raisers have helped off-set the cost of structural work that needed to be done to preserve the Barn for future generations. However, there is more work to be done. Please consider donating to our cause or call to see how your time can help.

Bob Kelleher, a long time Dover resident and supporter of the Dover Historical Society, has passed away. Bob's interest and passion for the Fisher Barn was one of his many personal attributes that will be missed.

Jack Hoehlein

Fisher Barn Curator

Sawin Museum

All Scouts WANTED!!!!

The Dover Historical Society is committed to providing educational and, hopefully, fun experiences for Dover's youth. We have programs to meet with the younger children from Chickering School on an annual basis. However, we very much want to connect with older students, as well.

We recently welcomed a Cub Scout pack at Sawin Museum, after they visited the Dover Soldier's Memorial. Since the smaller size of the group lent itself to a more intimate learning experience, and allowed for more participation by the individual children, we are extending an invitation to the other scout groups in town to do the same for each pack, to provide private tours of Sawin Museum. This includes, Cub Scouts, Brownies, Girl and Boy Scouts....

Do you, or your children, know where the original center of town was? Are they aware of the industrial history of the town in the 1800's? Do they know about a month long crime wave that plagued the town and resulted in the loss of a major landmark? Do they know about our local Native American history? Do you live on an old Indian trail?Come in and discover things about their hometown that you, and they, may not be aware of....We have new exhibits related to Dover citizens' involvement in the Revolution, the Civil War, and World Wars I and II. There is an exhibit on local Native American artifacts. Another new exhibit is related to Dover's agrarian history, and complements the collection at Fisher Barn and Caryll House. Yet another, also, provides an insight

into objects used in daily life in the past, which are no longer used, and have been replaced by Ipods, and other advanced technology and materials.

The main exhibit, *The Life and Works of Amelia Peabody*, already has some familiarity with the children, since most have been to Powisset Farm, either with their classes, or due to their families' involvement with the CSA. However, the exhibit provides them with a more enhanced history of Amelia Peabody and how her legacy of conservation has preserved Dover's rural character, and what the town might be like if she hadn't loved Dover as much as she did.

The various age differences between the levels of scouts, also, lends itself to a variable learning experience. Please consider that we may, also, have opportunities for community involvement experiences for your scouts, so, please feel free to discuss this with us.

We, also, invite scout parents to attend the tour, if possible. You may be surprised by this gem in Dover center. So, if your children, grandchildren, or neighbors, are involved in the scouting community, please consider this offer, as an opportunity to share a learning experience with your children, and to broaden your own knowledge and understanding of this beautiful town we share..... A free, close to home, quality time experience!!!!!!

It is suggested that a minimum of one hour for the Sawin Museum tour be allowed, but an extra 15 to 30 minutes would provide more time for questions and answers. If you are interested in this educational experience, please contact us to arrange a tour at info@doverhistoricalsociety.org

Fay Bacher

Sawin Museum Curator

Save the Date...

The Kickoff Meeting

for the Dover Historical Society's 2010 Old Home Day will be held Wednesday, Jan. 20th at 7:15 PM in the Community Room of the Dover Library. Plans for the Old Home Day scheduled for Sunday Oct. 3, 2010 will be discussed.

All those who have worked on previous Old Home Committees as well as those interested in participating in this year's Old Home Day are invited to attend.

Volunteer opportunities include Craft Fair and Antique Craft Fair organization, publicity, fundraising, event set up/ take down, and event planning. Please join us to use your skills and explore opportunities whether you can volunteer for just a few hours on the day of the event or make a longer term commitment. Please contact Heathr Hodgson at 508-785-1977.