

# DOVER TIDINGS

Winter 2015  
Volume XV, No. 3



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Editor

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## *The President's Letter*

Much of the fun that is to be found in local historical societies lies in the odd collection of artifacts that accumulate over the course of a century or more. The obviously significant items tend to be well documented, but the more obscure ones are a veritable treasure trove for the curious researcher. Among these is a rather large wall clock that has stood in the corner of the basement of the Sawin Museum since the early 1960's. The dial bears the name A. C. Rice and the date 1857. All that was known of its history is that it was given to the Society by George Ryder, longtime supervisor of the town landfill, and was said to have been made by his grandfather. The somewhat ungainly configuration of the clock suggests that A. C. Rice was not a professional clock maker, and yet the overall complexity of its design (three separate dials showing the date, the hour and the day) clearly required the skills of a competent machinist.

Armed with these few clues, I set out to see what else could be discovered about the clock and its maker. The donor, George Maxon Ryder, was born October 22, 1884 in Coventry, Rhode Island to Walter W. and Hattie (Matteson) Ryder, and died on July 28, 1972 here in Dover. Walter W. Ryder was born on October 31, 1854 to George W. Rider (the spelling

appears to have changed from one generation to the next) and Lois Ann Rice of Coventry, RI. Inasmuch as neither of George Ryder's grandfathers bore the name Rice it seemed unlikely that either was the maker of the clock, however his paternal grandmother's last name suggested that the connection might lie in that direction.

George W. Rider was born in 1824, probably in Coventry. On January 9, 1846, he and Lois Ann Rice were married at the Newman Congregational Church in Seekonk, MA. He died on October 22, 1907. Both are buried with a son, Everett Rider, in Hopkins Hollow Cemetery in Coventry. Inasmuch as she was married in 1846, it seems likely that Lois Rice would have been born between 1820 and 1830. While married in Seekonk, MA I could find no record of her birth in that town. There was, however, a Thomas Rice who married Lucinda Lane on October 6, 1845, also at the Newman Congregational Church.

At this point I decided to focus upon death records. As noted, George W. and Lois (Rice) Rider are buried in Hopkins Hollow Cemetery, in Coventry RI, along with a son Everett, who apparently died as a child in 1840. Three more of their sons are buried with spouses elsewhere in the cemetery. Given the concentration of Rider family members buried at Hopkins Hollow Cemetery, I looked for members of the Rice family as well and found a total of 28 individuals including Thomas Rice (1780-1863) and his wife Lowis [sic] Nichols (1787-1823). Also buried there is Amos C. Rice (1819-1880).

The 1850 Federal Census lists Amos C. Rice residing in Hopkinton, Washington County, RI in the home of James & Sarah Baker. His age is given as 31 and his occupation is only partially legible but may read "overseer weaver". The 1860 Federal Census lists him residing in the same household and gives his occupation as "master spinner". A listing of local deaths published on the website of the Hopkinton, RI Historical Society lists "Amos Clarke Rice, died 10 May 1880, age 61 years: male, white, single, mechanic. Born in Coventry, RI s/o Thomas and Lois Rice. COD heart disease."

I have not yet found evidence proving that Lois Rice Rider was a daughter of Thomas and Lois Rice, however the similarity of names and the fact that all of the parties involved are buried in the same cemetery make the connection highly probable. Based upon the evidence assembled to date, it appears that Amos Clarke Rice, an unmarried brother of Lois A. Rice and thus a *great uncle* rather than grandfather to the donor, made the clock. While born in Coventry, Amos spent most of his life in Hopkinton where he was in all probability employed by one of the several textile mills in that community. At the time that the clock was made he would have been 38 years old.

Michael Poisson, the horologist presently restoring the clock, observed that it appears to have been made entirely by Mr. Rice using parts copied from other timepieces, and that he would necessarily have had access to a machine shop. Was the clock built in the tool room of a textile mill? We may never know the full circumstances of its creation, but Amos Rice's handiwork is currently being restored to its original grandeur. No reproducible photograph exists and since the clock is currently in dozens of pieces, we will all have to wait to see it until after the restoration is complete. Then it will be placed in a suitably important space in the first floor of the Sawin Museum where it can receive the attention and appreciation that it deserves.

Elisha Lee  
President

### ***Progress Report: 2014-2015***

In February's membership mailing, we listed three goals: 1) build the parson's privy; 2) renovate the Sawin Museum interior space and exhibits; 3) create a new exhibit space at the Caryl Community Center.

The first completed and easiest to achieve was the new exhibit at the Caryl Community Center (CCC). The Caryl Management Advisory Committee offered the Society a 23' x 11' wall space just to the right of the Springdale

Avenue entrance. We were pleased to have this much space to mount an exhibit, and the subject matter was obvious since Dick Vara, author of *Dover Days Gone By*, (edited, updated and published by the Society in 2010), had left to us his watercolor drawings illustrating his perception of the people and activities of Dover 150 years ago. Although the drawings have been published at a small scale in black and white, this wall was ideal to present the fine full-sized illustrations to the public. In collaboration with the Caryl Management Advisory Committee, the Society obtained frames and signage that met code requirements. The exhibit comprises twelve horizontal watercolors arranged in two groups of six, with three vertical frames of text giving a brief explanation of each scene. The Town cooperated in mounting of the exhibit that was completed in the spring.



The second project brought to fruition was the parson's privy, which had been described at length in the fall issue of *Dover Tidings* (p. 4 – 6). The work was undertaken by resident traditional carpenter Mark Oteri with cooperation by Project Manager, Stuart Swiny. The completed privy was unveiled and celebrated with a Champagne reception in June at the Caryl House Garden Party.



Our third and most complicated project, namely the renovation of the Sawin Museum interior and creation of new exhibits, is still a work in progress, although substantial progress has already been made. In the last issue of *Dover Tidings*, Curator Stuart Swiny gave a detailed account of changes to

the basement. These changes, while still receiving final touches, are so substantial and significant that we no longer refer to the space as the basement. It has become the “Lower Level” and is a very popular place for both children and adults to visit. Lori Carbone and Eileen White worked exhibit magic once the basic construction and flooring were completed, and although work is still ongoing, in the past year the Lower Level exhibits have transformed the place.

On the main level, significant advances have been made there as well. The cases now contain artifacts and explanations of Dover’s history from Pre-contact Native American artifacts to 20<sup>th</sup> century manufacturing and development. Ben and Eudora Sawin, whose generosity made the Sawin Memorial Building possible, are at long last acknowledged with a display on the wall above the desk said to have belonged to him. A new “William’s Tavern Corner” is nearing completion and features the Williams Tavern sign once hanging outside the Tavern and then in our lobby, as well as a Chippendale chair which was rescued from the devastating fire of 1908 that completely destroyed the Tavern and all its outbuildings.

Late last year, the Society received an extraordinary treasure in the form of the above mentioned Chippendale chair. Members of the Smith family who lived across the street at the time had managed to pull several items from the fire, among them the chair and an intriguing “frog mug”. These had been used by the family since that time, the chair having been reupholstered for them. In contemplating what should finally happen to two of these items, our generous, though sadly anonymous, donor decided they should be returned to Dover and contacted the Historical Society. It did not take long for arrangements to be made to transfer the items from their previous home in northern Virginia to their original and final home in Dover.

We first contacted furniture restorer, Mark Yesko, of Natick, to help us date and then reupholster the chair. Upon taking it apart, he noted it had been repaired so frequently and with so many different materials over a long period of time that it was impossible to provide a definitive date. That being said, however, the horsehair and hay used for stuffing as well as the various woods reinforcing the frame, point to an early to mid-1800s date. In 1799, John Williams acquired the Tavern, which was originally built by Daniel Whiting in 1761. Williams greatly expanded the property and its activities. According to Dover historian, Dick Vara, “Gala dances and parties were held in the ballroom, and guests were entertained in the large

dining rooms on the ground floor. ...In 1818 Williams' son-in-law, Isaac Howe, became proprietor. Under Howe's management the tavern continued to serve the people of Dover and remained a successful business" well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It would not be surprising, therefore, that the old chair would have received many repairs during those years of active use.

Thanks to Campbell Yaw, of CSY Designs right here in Dover, after much effort, a fabric of suitable design and color was obtained. Not only would this material have been appropriate at any time during the chair's history, it is sufficiently sturdy for our continued use. The chair is now a primary feature in our "Tavern Corner" which, while not yet completed, already provides a hint of life in a rural 19<sup>th</sup> century public house.



Williams Tavern Chippendale Chair

On the second floor, what has been achieved is no less impressive, but much less visible. A backlog of cataloguing has been computerized, our high school intern, Fiona Gray, has completed a digital listing of all of our publications, and plans are being made to recreate the available exhibit spaces. The goal is to have everything ready for a grand unveiling at the Sawin Museum's Opening Celebration in April. Watch for future information as spring approaches.

Of course all of this progress would not be possible without some bumps along the way. Unfortunately such close scrutiny of the building revealed

some major work that will have to be undertaken on the roof, hopefully before winter sets in. This will require a significant expenditure, which, while not anticipated, is still not surprising since the building, is 120 years old. Although relatively recent repairs to the roof had been made, they were inadequate. The Board has determined that this work cannot be deferred and we will, once again, have to rely on the generosity of our membership to help finance these additional expenses – hopefully without the need to curtail our programs or other projects at the Caryl House and Fisher Barn.

Pam Kunkemueller  
*Dover Tidings* Editor

### ***Keeping Room/Kitchen***

The keeping room or kitchen would be a very busy place at this time of year because of the need to bring in the harvest and store all the root vegetables in the cold cellar on the dirt floor to supply food for the winter. Herbs and spices would be cut and placed on drying racks in the kitchen to be used for both winter cooking and medicine.

Some of the kitchen cooking tools you would notice in the keeping room are skillets and spiders. A skillet is a long handled fry pan while a spider is a frying pan cast with three integral legs. The reason for the legs being attached to the fry pan is so that it could be placed inside the fireplace. This allowed it to stand on top of the embers allowing an exchange of oxygen to keep the fire going. Likewise, a skillet would likely be placed either at the edge of the coals to keep warm or on a separate trivet to cook.

When women were cooking, it was a very dangerous job. What with their long dresses and the need to move dishes around the fire to keep them warm or stirring pots on cranes over the fire, one could easily pick up an ember on the dress and catch fire. This unfortunately happened all too often, but evidently not seriously in our house. Like all of the houses of the time, the Caryl House is of wood construction, so we are very fortunate to have this wooden frame survive all these years without evidence of a fire as so many in Town did not.

The Caryl House and Fisher Barn were both very busy on November 8 as designated sites on this year's Library House Tour. The smells and scents of Christmas drifted throughout the house with the mixture of evergreens and holly, oranges and lemons, herbs such as rosemary and spices of cinnamon and clove to recreate a festive Victorian holiday celebration. The Powisset Garden Club did a great job of decorating in the style of this period. Several of the long-time Caryl House docents were in costume and on hand for the Tour. There was a docent in each room so that the folks touring could have their questions answered regardless of which room they were in which everyone seemed to appreciate.

Visitors enjoyed refreshments in the Fisher Barn, and many said they had never been in there before. We were thrilled to hear from a considerable number of people that the Caryl House was the gem of the tour this year. Thank you Friends of the Dover Library for selecting the Caryl House and Fisher Barn as part of this year's Library House Tour.

Then on December 6, we had a great Christmas celebration again representative of the Victorian period with Diane Taraz on guitar and dulcimer singing songs and telling stories about their origins. All the attendees joined in singing and enjoyed goodies of the period. It is very interesting to see how holiday celebrations have changed over the years. The Caryl House is very much a living historical site. It is also gratifying to see how many visitors came from long distances to appreciate Dover's historical gem.

Please come and see this Dover treasure on Dedham Street in the spring when it reopens. The Caryl House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. All are welcome to volunteer, learn about and relate the history of the Caryl House and Fisher Barn as well as the social and agricultural history of Dover.

Janet Comiskey- Giannini  
Curator, Benjamin Caryl House

### ***Photography Credits***

Pam Kunkemueller, p.4  
Stuart Swiny, p. 4, 6, 10  
Unknown photographer, p. 11

## *Sawin*

The elegant little brick building sitting on a wooded hillock just east of Dover center is a well-known landmark. Indeed, it has looked across the Old Training Field at the Town House for over a century as proclaimed by the relief inscription on the large marble plaque set above the entrance portico:

SAWIN MEMORIAL BUILDING 1906
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But who was this Sawin in whose memory it was built, and for what purpose? Thereby hangs an interesting and typically New England tale. To begin with, it appears that the building was not intended to commemorate a single individual, but instead a married couple, Benjamin and Eudora Sawin. Not only did they provide the means for its construction, but also donated the sizable wedge of land on which it stands. This worthy act of philanthropy, for the most part overlooked by the citizens of Dover, is in fact a significant factor in providing the dignified rural character for which the town is renowned.

Despite this generous act and the fact that the building bears their name, strangely enough, no likeness of the couple was displayed and no mention of the man and his deeds, or details concerning his wife, could be seen therein, until recently, that is.

The tale begins with the arrival of young Benjamin (Ben) Nelson Sawin born in Natick in 1823, who came to work on his father's farm on Claybrook Road which included extensive frontage along the Charles River. Ben was obviously an unusually energetic and capable individual who warranted no less than seven pages in R. H. Vara's informative *Dover Days Gone By: An Illustrated History*<sup>1</sup>. His diaries are "filled with the colorful and pungent everyday language of farming" noting that he "chored and jobbed around", "made sausages" or "lotted out wood"<sup>2</sup>. His activities

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<sup>1</sup> . Dover Historical Society, 2010, Final edition, edited by E. K. Tritsch.

<sup>2</sup> . Vara, 2010: p. 132.

connected with farming were seemingly endless, but he was also deeply engaged in town affairs and held many positions including that of Cemetery Commissioner which even involved on occasion, digging graves. He is also mentioned by other writers, especially in connection with pig slaughtering<sup>3</sup>

A man of his time, interested in the modernization of agricultural practices writ large, he also ran a successful insurance agency as well as an ice business in winter, soon becoming a well-off farmer. He married late for the time at 40, and had two children. It was during this period that Ben demonstrated his remarkable philanthropy by developing, at considerable time, effort and cost what became known as “Sawin’s Grove”, a wonderful sounding amusement park cum-recreation area on a peninsula he owned on the Charles River<sup>4</sup>. Life was hard in those days and he lost his son and daughter at tragically young ages, followed a few years later by his wife. A man of strong opinions and faith he continued his activities undaunted, and a few years later at seventy married the handsome fifty-two year old Eudora Shumway.

The couple was apparently interested in local history and its preservation and as a result was instrumental in establishing the Dover Historical and Natural History Society in 1895. Upon Ben’s death in 1905, five years after Eudora’s, he bequeathed almost the totality of their possessions to the Society on the specific understanding that a memorial building be erected for its use. So it is only fitting that, at long last, the Sawin’s grace the walls of the first floor along with the portraits of other notable Doverites.

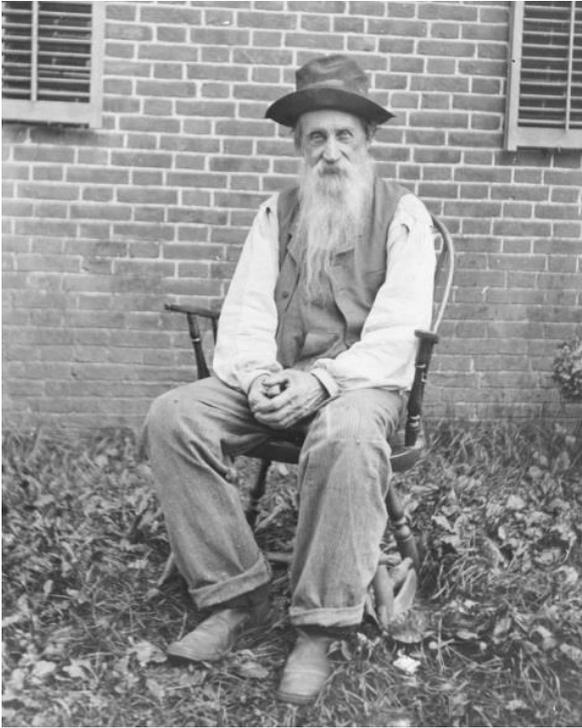


<sup>3</sup>. A. J. Jones. *In Dover on the Charles. A Contribution to New England Folk-Lore*. The Milne Printery, 1906, p. 54; F. Smith. *Dover Farms*. The Historical and Natural History Society, 1914, note p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>. Vara 2010: 134-137.

Beneath the couple can be seen a delightful photograph of Ben directing the loading of a hay wagon and a sketch and plan from Richard Vara's book showing details of Sawin's Grove. Certainly this is a small, but sincere, tribute to a couple who gave so much to others, to the town of Dover in general and the Historical Society in particular.

Felicia Hoffman, the Dover Town Clerk, recently showed me a photograph she had discovered in the Town safe. Reproduced here, it shows an old,



bearded man in traditional farmer's garb sitting on a rocking chair. "Ben Sawin" was handwritten on the back, in ballpoint pen. The print is clearly a copy of an old photograph. Unfortunately, Ms. Hoffman has not been able to determine who wrote the name. Had it been the original and the writing old, the identification would pose little problem. Is this indeed Ben Sawin, of whom, as far as I know, only one studio portrait exists? I feel that a comparison of both faces fails to provide a

convincing identification of the somewhat disheveled old man, but, for what it is worth, his clothes and general appearance are similar to those of Ben at seventy-nine in the hay and wagon scene.

I would be delighted if we could prove that this is indeed Benjamin Sawin. Opinions welcome.

Stuart Swiny  
Curator, Sawin Museum

## ***Preservation Award and House Markers***

Is there a house in Town which you especially admire? During the last five years, four homes and one individual have been recognized for outstanding preservation efforts. These include 1 Pegan Lane, 8 Haven Street, 2 Main Street, 95 Centre Street, and Sara Molyneaux. Please send your recommendation with the address of the home and the name of the homeowner for the Sixth Annual Preservation Award to the Dover Historical Society, Box 534, Dover or [doverhistoricalsociety.org](http://doverhistoricalsociety.org). The award will be presented at the annual meeting in March.

As you walk or drive around Town, you can observe markers bearing the construction dates of some of our older homes. In order to increase awareness of Dover's heritage, the Dover Historical Society and the Dover Historical Commission cooperate in a voluntary program, which allows owners of homes built prior to 1929 to apply for a house marker for their homes. A link to the application may be found under News and Events at [doverhistoricalsociety.org](http://doverhistoricalsociety.org). Selected by the Commission, the 1929 cutoff date reflects the fact that housing development almost came to a halt in 1929 due to the depression, and few houses were built during the next decade. Most house markers show only the construction date, but the two most recent markers give the name of the original owner as well as the date. We will help you through every step of the process, so please consider adding markers to appropriate homes.

Priscilla Pit Jones  
Secretary

## ***Save the Date***

### **Annual Meeting**

**Wednesday March 23, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Lecture by Dr. Sean Rafferty,  
Department of Anthropology, University at Albany**

***Excavating an Iroquois Site in New York:  
A Former Bostonian's Adventures in Archeology***

**Dover Town Library, Lower Level**



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