

Volume 1 | Issue 1
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Brimfield Historical Commission

Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Brimfield Historical Commission Newsletter. The town's Historical Commission has been very active in recent years, as evidenced by the Gazebo on the Common and the book, *101 Things To Know About Brimfield*. However, these examples are just the most visible projects. Many smaller efforts have also been completed and others are in the works. The purpose of this newsletter is two-fold: to share those efforts with the Brimfield community and engage their support; and to provide glimpses into the town's amazing (almost) 300-year history through the wealth of historical documents housed at the Library, Hitchcock Academy and the Town Hall. The newsletter will be available on the Historical Commission Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/BrimfieldHistoricalCommission>) and the Town website (<https://www.brimfieldma.org/historical-commission>). Please share your thoughts, interests, and suggestions for future newsletter content.

Members

Sue DeBruin, Chairperson
Adrienne Bachand
Roseann Bergdoll
Robert Corry
John Curtis
Michael DeFalco
Sue Overbey
Mark Conners, Associate Member

Meetings

Our monthly meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at 6:00 PM at Hitchcock Academy. Meetings are taped for viewing on local cable access. The public is welcome to attend.

Gazebo on the Common

After many years of hard work by the Historical Commission, a little bit of frustration and a great deal of coordination with local and state officials, contractors, and residents, the Gazebo on the Common was finally dedicated on August 24, 2022.



101 Things To Know About Brimfield

The Historical Commission book, *101 Things To Know About Brimfield*, is still available for \$15 at the following locations – Hitchcock Academy, Brimfield Library and the Apple Barn. The book provides a brief history of the people, places and things that have shaped Brimfield's almost 300 years of existence. Learn about the Brimfield woman who became the "Mother of Oregon", Massachusetts' only Horse Cemetery and the doctor who was elected to the Balloon Hall of Fame. Did you know General William Eaton of Barbary pirate fame lived in Brimfield? Or that the real name of the Brimfield Library is the Danielson-Lincoln Memorial Library? Be entertained, informed and educated. It's a great read and makes a wonderful gift for family and friends.

*Japanese Farming Experts
Visits Brimfield*



This is from an article in the September 10, 1959 edition of the Palmer paper.

“While the Soviet leaders usually find their way to Iowa to study farming procedure, it was the Ralph Hall chicken breeding farm in Brimfield which attracted an interesting group of Japanese agricultural scientists last Thursday.

“Forming the Agricultural Development in Cold and Cool Regions team from Hokkaido, Japan, the visitors currently are on a tour of the nation to study agricultural programs in climatic regions which simulate that of Hokkaido, which is situated in Northern Japan. The program is in conjunction with the International Cooperation Administration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the the Land Grant Colleges cooperating.

“American technical leader assigned to the group is Luther Banda of Amherst, retired professor at University of Massachusetts, School of Agriculture. “With the assistance of two interpreters, the Japanese team obtained a real insight into the operations of the Hall farm, which was selected for the tour because of it being one of the most modern and progressive of its kind in the entire New England area.

Mr. Hall, assisted by Prof. Banda, conducted an inspection of the incubation room and both lectured on the procedures followed and demonstrated the proper method of candling eggs, inspection of the eggs. It was pointed out that about 250,000 chicks had been bred thus far this year at the Hall farm.”

Tabitha Moffat Brown Stamp

Early last year, the Brimfield Historical Commission sent a request to the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee in Washington, D.C. requesting that they consider issuing a postage stamp to commemorate Tabitha Moffat Brown. As many of you may know, Tabitha was a Brimfield native, born in 1780 to the town doctor and his wife. She married Clark Brown, the minister at the Congregational Church. Later in life, a widow in her late 60s, she traveled the Oregon Trail with 2 of her children and their families, braving snowstorms, Native American attacks and near starvation. After reaching Oregon, she started a school for children which became Pacific University and her contributions to Oregon led the state legislature to pass a resolution declaring her “The Mother of Oregon”. (For those interested in further information on the life of Tabitha, please read her section in *101 Things To Know About Brimfield*.) Because of her prominence in Oregon, our Commission reached out to the Tabitha Moffat Brown – David Hill Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Aloha, Oregon and requested that they join us in this endeavor. They were very active in contacting descendants of Tabitha as well as Pacific University administrators to engage their support as well. The stamp Advisory Committee took up our request at their quarterly meeting but unfortunately did not approve it for 2023. Together with our allies in Oregon, we will continue to work towards getting Tabitha the recognition she deserves.

World War I Library Service

From the Brimfield Library Annual Report for the Year ending December 31, 1917 as written by Librarian, Mary Anna Tarbell

“One of the questions asked of libraries by the Free Public Library Commission for its annual report was, ‘What war service has the library rendered?’

“The trustees and librarian of the Brimfield library organized the local campaign for money for libraries for the boys in camps all over the country and in the navy, and, with efficient helpers, were most successful in raising funds during ‘Camp Library Week.’ The ready response throughout the town showed the value our townspeople place on reading privileges.

“At the same time the librarian received offers of books for the soldiers, and began a selection of those which could be spared from our library and available elsewhere. The library will welcome for the camps, books of fiction, poetry, essays, biography, history, travel, technical and scientific books, French study books, religious and ethical books and recent magazines, provided that the material is spirited, interesting and up-to-date; for it is continually reported that all the soldiers are eager for reading matter and many desire books for study and advancement.

Burning of the Brimfield Hotel

From THE BRIMFIELD BUGLE, the Journal of the Hitchcock Free High School. May, 1891

Little did Brimfield think, as the sun rose upon its little village that fated morning of Nov. 24, 1890, what was in store for it; of the misfortune coming upon it before many hours. The usual quiet and stillness pervaded the streets. The school bell summoned the students to their duties, the little commotion caused by the arrival and departure of the stage had ceased and quiet reigned throughout the village. What a contrast there was soon to be! What excitement as compared with the present tranquility!

About half past nine a person in the street happened to glance toward the hotel and to his amazement observed what he made out to be smoke coming from the roof. The alarm was soon spread through the street and the bell began ringing in that manner which always spreads so much excitement.

Meanwhile many of the students of the HFHS had observed the smoke. No more study for them. The teachers understood what was the matter and classes were quickly called from their rooms and in an orderly manner the school was dismissed. All rushed across the street to the hotel, whose roof was by this time enveloped in one black cloud from which angry red tongues of flame soon began to leap. People came rushing from all directions and the crowd swelled to a great number. Nothing will collect a crowd so quickly as a fire and I doubt if Brimfield's streets had ever before seen such a crowd collect in a shorter time. But all these people did not remain idle. They went to work immediately with a will and tried to save as much of the furnishings as possible. They had a good chance, too, for as the fire caught from a chimney at the top of the building it did not burn very fast, but worked down slowly.

Where every moment is so precious, things are not always handled with the greatest of care. Various articles of furniture made their exit through the upper story windows causing danger below. Occasionally some came crashing down the stairs making the confusion still greater. But all the effort was not without its good result, for a large amount of furniture and other furnishings began to collect in the street around the Soldiers Monument. Almost everything of value was stripped from the two lower stories and a good deal from the upper.

After the building got to burning, the wind carried a number of cinders towards the school house. Perceiving the danger a number of students went upon the roof with water and quickly had a line, mostly of scholars, extending from the brook – the nearness of which was fortunate to the school house – up a ladder to the second story porch and from there through the belfry to the roof. The way the water came up to that roof, some of the time, was surprising for all worked in a most creditable manner, the girls taking hold and giving their aid which was not at all small or anything to be laughed at.

The day being cold, the spilled water soon gave to the steps, ladder and almost everything it came in contact with a slippery coating of ice, making it very difficult and not wholly without danger to climb around. But the roof was

kept wet until the danger was over and the schoolhouse was saved. The students of the HFHS had loyally and faithfully done their duty to the old schoolhouse.

Meanwhile the buildings of William Janes on the west side of the hotel had been in danger, but through the means of some labor escaped. After getting as much from the interior of the building as smoke and flame would permit, nothing more could be done, and everybody had to be content to stand and watch the rapid work of destruction. The proprietor, John L. Bacon, had gone away that morning and only reached home to find his property in flames.

The Palmer and Wales fire engines were telephoned for, but it was soon seen that their services would not be needed and the former was stopped at Foskett's Mill. The Wales engine came up in a time so short as to be boasted of for quite a while afterwards, but was not brought into service.

By eleven o'clock there remained little except a mass of smouldering ruins which did not die out for a week afterwards. Never before had the village of Brimfield witnessed such a fire. Now it looked bare and forsaken indeed with nothing but an unsightly mass of ruins where a few hours before had stood the hotel.

Very few country villages are provided with such an excellent accommodation to travellers and it has been sorely missed. Then also it offered an excellent opportunity to students of the HFHS, especially those coming from out of town and wishing to find a good boarding place near school. The past winter was pretty dull for the town without its usual number of sleighing parties and social gatherings at the hotel.

A large number of the citizens have realized the importance of having some sort of a hotel and a new movement has been on foot lately for rebuilding. Recently the citizens of the town held a meeting at the town hall to consider the matter. The result was the appointment of a committee to investigate and report at a future meeting. That meeting has not yet been called, so we know nothing of their doings; but we hope a definite plan will soon be agreed upon and definite movement be made, for a hotel is something we cannot get along without. It will be a great benefit to the town and if built, we trust will receive the hearty patronage of all.

Genealogy Research Tip

If you are looking for information on deceased relatives, a great place to start is [Find-A-Grave](#). It identifies the burial location of several hundred million individuals around the world, thanks to the efforts of volunteers who visit cemeteries and record the information. In many cases, photos of gravestones and genealogy data are also included. The website contains over 3500 people buried in the Brimfield Cemetery.