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Brimfield Historical Commission

A Message From the BHC

HAPPY LABOR DAY.

August was a busy month and no newsletter was produced but we are back this month with another interesting issue.

The Historical Commission continues to work hard protecting our community's history. Brimfield will soon have a new Town Flag flying. The inventory of town historical records is progressing nicely and a new project will hopefully expand on the documents that we manage and preserve for posterity.

The Commission would like to express our sincere thanks to Susan Overbey who has recently left the board for personal reasons. Her input and other contributions were instrumental in helping to make the last few years so successful. We also would like to welcome back Mark Conners who has been serving as an Associate Member. Mark has served many years on the Commission and has been instrumental in advancing several of our biggest projects.

As always, we encourage our readers to provide input. What topics do you enjoy? What types of information would you like to see included. You can either contact one of the members or reach us either through our Facebook page or the Historical Commission page on the Town's website.

Members

Sue DeBruin, Chairperson

Adrienne Bachand

Roseann Bergdoll

Mark Conners

Robert Corry

John Curtis

Michael DeFalco

Donating Historical Materials

If you have any historical documents or photographs pertaining to Brimfield history or her residents that you don't want or don't know what to do with, please consider donating them to the Brimfield Historical Commission. A large part of our mission is to promote and preserve Brimfield history and one important way to manage that is by insuring that items contributing to and documenting that history are kept and made available to future generations. If you share our love of town history and are considering making a donation, please contact a Commission member to discuss the process and answer any questions you might have.

If you do have historical items but don't wish to part with them, consider allowing the Historical Commission to make digital copies and then return the originals.

Brimfield Living History Profile

Thanks to Commission member Bob Corry for providing the following:.

Have you ever wondered about how people, just like you, lived here in Brimfield 300 years ago? or 258 years ago when the American Revolution took place? or 162 years ago when the Civil War began? Have you also wondered about the native people who lived here on this same land, hunting, fishing and cultivating corn, squash & beans for thousands of years before European contact? If so, you will especially enjoy this chapter of Brimfield Living History.

Today's guest is Richard Sullivan. Richard was born and raised on Paige Hill Road with his four sisters and has lived in Brimfield most of his life. When Richard was twelve years old, a friend took him to look at a large collection of Indian arrowheads, spearheads(points) and hand tools. He was fascinated to learn that the land that later became Brimfield and surrounding towns under British rule, had been the site of a central village of the Nipmuck Indian tribe, part of the Algonquin Indian Nation, that had lived here for thousands of years before contact with Europeans.

Prior to contact with Europeans in the seventeenth century the natives who inhabited this land were stone age people (no metal technology) who ingeniously fabricated primitive but effective tools for hunting, fishing, agriculture, preparing food, making clothing and construction of shelters from different types of stone. The natives had mastered how to ignite a fire to cook, warm themselves and their families during the winter and ward off predators. They also had devised a method for long term preservation of vegetables, which together with hunting, enabled them to ward off starvation mid-winter.

The oldest Indian artifact Richard Sullivan has found to date, a native arrowhead (point), was discovered in a plowed field off Brookfield Road and is believed to be eight thousand years old. There had been an Indian Fort two

miles north on Brookfield Road from Route 20 called "Quaboag Old Fort" protecting an Indian Village named Ashquoach which was in the uphill woodland north of Marsh Hill Road.

According to Don Duffy, author of 'The Quaboug and Nipmuck Indians', about 125 people typically lived together and functioned as a village growing crops (Corn, Beets, etc.), gathering edible plants and berries in the surrounding forest and marshes, fishing in streams and lakes and hunting game. These villages would move closer to lakes, streams or marsh areas in the late fall and to different nearby locations when the soil or game became depleted.

Richard Sullivan made the comment that 'the Natives were everywhere in this town because it seemed like no matter where he searched, he found arrowheads, spear points and other human shaped artifacts.'

Richard points out in his interview that concentrations of native artifacts will be found where the natives hunted, fished, cooked, camped in villages and made tools and weapons from stone. He would focus his artifact searches along the shorelines of stream beds, lake and ponds and open fields that had been recently plowed.

In this program he describes when and where he would focus his artifact searches after heavy rains or melting winter snow has washed away silt and mud. The viewer can expect to learn important tips for finding native artifacts yourself.

In a very recent conversation Richard Sullivan cautioned that Brimfield has changed a lot in the half century since his youth. Many of the farmers' fields, lake and stream shores and backland forested areas he was pretty much free to search back then have been developed into private homes with lawns today.

He emphasizes that private property restrictions must be adhered to especially where land is posted, 'No Trespassing.' Many local landowners, including farmers, will give their permission if asked beforehand.

Richard brought many authenticated native artifacts to his interview. and displayed each according to its age and function. It would be a great idea to watch his interview to be introduced to the size, shape and function of the various Indian tools and weapons.

If you would like to see this video interview program or any of the other nine video interview programs available, each focusing on the life and experiences of a prominent person who grew up here, go to the Sherman Room in our town library.

There is a computer station with a large screen and earphones for your use. The librarian on duty will set up this video program or any Living History program you choose and show you how to view it.

Richard Sullivan would be happy to provide live presentations to local, civic, educational, elder or youth groups where he would display native artifacts and provide details of how and where he conducted his searches. He can be reached at his email address: yr1tlpony@yahoo.com

The Blacksmith Shop

Over the years, Brimfield had a number of blacksmith shops. The longest lasting finally ended in 1951. The following newspaper article is from July 26, 1951.

Blacksmith Shop In Brimfield Is No More

Brimfield – The razing of the “blacksmith shop”, one of Brimfield’s landmarks, has stirred the memories of the older inhabitants who remembered Mr. Edward Potter. According to the Brimfield history, Mr. Potter came to Brimfield in 1842 and served as apprentice under Nathan F. Robinson, of whom he bought the shop in 1852. The Mr. Robinson mentioned evidently was Fisher Robinson, grandfather of the late Charles W. Robinson but it is not known who preceded him.

Following Mr. Potter was Mr. Bert Campbell who left the “shop” to his son Warren, but with his death comes the passing of a familiar landmark. Now that horses are no longer necessary, neither are blacksmith shops.

(Editor’s Note: Nathan Fisher Robinson was born in Brimfield on July 9, 1807. One of his children was Henry, a soldier in the 23rd Regiment of Mass Volunteers during the Civil War. He died at Newburne, N.C. of typhoid fever on April 25th, 1863. His name is inscribed on the Civil War monument, as one of the 18 men from Brimfield who died in the War. His son was Charles W. Robinson, who, in later years, ran a general store in town.)



Frank Cook – Edward Potter – Cheney Newton



Preserving Town Records

Several members of the Historical Commission and a town resident have been volunteering several hours every week for the past year to inventory and preserve the historical records in the Town Hall. This project is in cooperation with the Town Clerk, Debra Fagerstrom. Each item is reviewed and added to a database, tracking the date of the item, a description, its condition and assorted other metadata. The item is then stored in archival sleeves, folders and boxes as appropriate. Archival supplies have been purchased, initially through funds supplied by the Historical Commission, and more recently through an allocation of \$1500 voted by the Select Board.

Many of the documents are from the 1800s and some from as far back as the 1700s. They include School Registers and expenses, inventories of the Town Poor Farm, vital records, town reports, the layout of new town roads and Civil War enrollment lists. This collection highlights significant portions of the town's history.

Brimfield Town Flag

In a previous newsletter we talked about the Town Flag that was designed in 2002 by Nicolas Niemiro. Unfortunately, over the years, it has gone missing but we are happy to say that a new copy of the original flag has been produced. The Historical Commission will be working with the Select Board to plan a presentation to the Town

Brimfield (photos of the Flea Market)

This is a book by Angelo Dounoucos and John de St. Jorre. The following is a description from Amazon.com

“Brimfield” is a photographic and written essay about the number one flea market in the world. This was how the Travel Channel described the Brimfield Antique and Collectible Shows that transform this small New England town into a teeming bazaar. Five thousand dealers and hundreds of thousands of collectors converge on Brimfield, in central Massachusetts, three times a year to indulge their passion for collecting rare, beautiful, and bizarre objects. Brimfield caters for all tastes and for all budgets. Founded in 1959, the Shows have become a revered institution in the world of antiques and collectibles, a place where dreams become real, where lasting friendships are made, and where the dealers re-affirm their professional and personal ties. But, above all, Brimfield is about seeking and finding an object of desire.