

# WHS Newsletter

The Marlow Historical Society  
P.O. Box 12, Marlow, NH 03456

Autumn 2013

## Quilt Raffle to benefit Marlow Church and Historical Society

Our heartfelt thanks go to the Marlow Quilters for creating this lovely "Tree of Life" quilt; they intend to donate half of the profits from the raffle to our Historical Society fund to renovate Murray Hall, and half to Marlow United Methodist Church for their continuing fund to re-roof the church building. Tickets are \$1.00 each or 6 for \$5.00, and may be purchased at *Christmas on the Pond*, on November 23, or from Maria Baril (446-2292), or Donna Chase (446-7733). The Grand Drawing will be on December 7th the night of the annual Christmas tree lighting at the Odd Fellows, so be sure to purchase tickets and tell your friends and neighbors about this great opportunity to benefit our community.



## Focus on Murray Hall

We have an under-utilized treasure in Murray Hall. That was the conclusion reached at our special meeting this summer, when we discussed our need to pursue a renovation plan for this former Universalist church, Grange, and now home to our Marlow Art Colony and seasonal used book store. We discussed the increasing accessibility issues with our current display space at the Chapel; many of those who most want to visit our archive and exhibits cannot do so, because of the "antique" and somewhat steep set of stairs. Consequently, we hope to move forward, step by step, to make Murray Hall ready to house both our collection and our workspace.

The first step was a close examination of the foundation, with the intent of making it sturdier. John Bolles, who has years of experience working with old buildings in the area tells us that our boards and beams are sound, and will provide us with an estimate for making the floor level and stable. We hope to renovate to the point that we can make provision for heat and plumbing someday, but to create a useable space for our seasonal needs right now.

Interested in learning more? Get involved by attending a board meeting, or contact Joanne Thomas or Joe Baril. Stay tuned for news on upcoming fundraising efforts to move us closer to making Murray Hall the real home of the Marlow Historical Society.



Come see this lovely quilt, hanging in the Chapel window!



## A Child's Christmas In Marlow

By Joseph N. Feuer

Back in the day before political correctness banished religious expression from the public square and separation of church and state was interpreted in a manner that sanitized the holidays in the public schools, and when John D. Perkins was just another local farmer in a pick up truck, Marlow knew how to celebrate Christmas.

Though almost seventy years have passed, my first Christmas in Marlow remains as vivid as yesterday. There was an air of anticipation in our two room school house (currently the Town Office). Every morning throughout December Mrs. Gill read us installments of Santa and the Magician which was serialized in the Keene Evening Sentinel. We listened in rapt anticipation of how Henry and Mr. Dilly would outwit the sneaky Wiggle Waggles and save Santa.

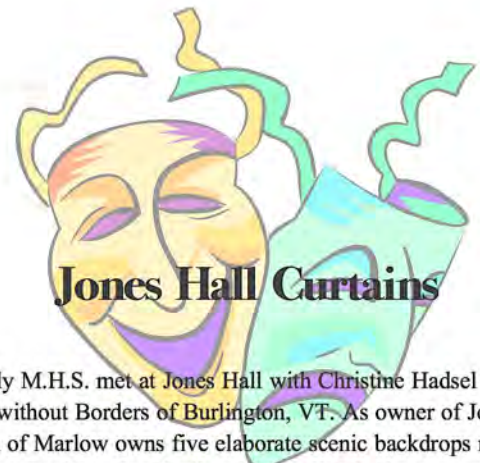
Every afternoon throughout December the lower grades would file into the "big room" for singing. Mrs. Gill played the piano to accompany standard favorites: Silent Night, Away In The Manger, Oh Little Town Of Bethlehem, Santa Claus Is Coming To Town, etc. In the "little room" we all drew names in order to exchange presents. And we practiced recitations.

While my family observed Chanukah at home, we nevertheless received gifts and got in the holiday spirit. Mrs. Gill was sensitive to the fact that I was of a different faith so my assigned recitations reflected the festive mood without religious overtones. While I still remember the first line of my recitation from that long ago first grade performance, I also remember the first line of Thelma Ramsey's piece which was all the more memorable because she lisped significantly.

In the "big room" Mrs. Brown's students prepared for a performance of Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" to be presented in several lengthy acts.

The Christmas pageant was held in the Grange Hall and was the highlight of the winter season. In preparation, the older boys were delegated the task of procuring a Christmas tree. A week or so before the event they trooped up the road with a hatchet in search of a suitable tree. Usually my uncle would donate a tree from his wood lot and the boys would chop it down and carry it back into town. In the Grange Hall they would set it up and decorate it with recycled ornaments and strings of popcorn. A little bit went a long way in the forties.

In the town the air was electrified with anticipation. In final preparation we held rehearsals in the Grange Hall. This was no light matter; with just two small wood stoves and insulation that must have dated back to the Civil War the place was a bear to heat. (continued, pg 4)



Recently M.H.S. met at Jones Hall with Christine Hadsel of Curtains without Borders of Burlington, VT. As owner of Jones Hall, the Town of Marlow owns five elaborate scenic backdrops mounted on frames. Thanks to Joe Baril and Allan Blank, these curtains are safely stored on a huge rack high above the stage.

The four curtains which have not been restored are a seascape, a lake scene, a western scene with mountains, and an interior. The one partially restored, which you may have seen, is a European plaza, probably a scene from the Netherlands. We know that Keene's Nicholas Isaak did this scene. The origin of the others is a mystery. Ms. Hadsel states that they were painted around 1900 in a style of which she has never seen the like. They are lovely! They are unusual and have great historic value. We would be happy to hear from anyone who knows anything about them.

Such curtains were painted in two ways. At one time, a limner, or travelling painter who specialized in individual and family portraits might agree to paint a scenic curtain. Then came men who specialized in painted curtains. After such curtains became popular, they began to be studio-painted in the larger cities such as New York and Chicago. A salesman would present small pictures for the town fathers to choose from. Then a whole crew would arrive with the rolled canvases to set up the heavy, complex system of rigging pulleys.

These stage-wide curtains had been stored above the stage along with "teasers" (side wings) and part of the original grand curtain on frayed ropes and a complex rigging and counterweighted pulley system. We were looking into the possibility of applying for a State of NH LCHIP (moose plate) grant to restore and conserve these artifacts of Marlow history and make them useful again as backdrops for future productions. When we learned that the Town was also applying for an LCHIP Grant pertaining to Jones Hall, we put our intention on hold for another year so we would not be competing for the same money.

The timing of an LCHIP Grant application to restore these curtains is still under discussion. Right now, because they are in storage high above the stage, it's impossible to see all five curtains fully. While we are considering applying for a grant, we need to weigh this against our Murray Hall (Grange) restoration project.

When the Curtains without Borders crew arrives, they will need community help in opening and conserving these fragile old canvas curtains. What do you think about the practical and historic importance of these artifacts? Would you be willing to help with the restoration project?



## Saving a Piece of History

This windlass, from the old slaughterhouse off Lewis Road, near St. Pierre's gravel pit, has been donated to the Society by Dr. Arthur Cohen. The building is near collapse and it was vital to rescue this important artifact while it is still intact.

Victor Reno, who lives nearby, has shed some light on the history of the slaughterhouse. He reminisces:

*When I was a young boy (in the 1950's) the farm on the hill, formerly owned by the Lewis family, had been bought by the Livesey family and they operated it as a farm, with livestock including sheep and pigs. They also sugared the extensive sugar maple groves and hayed the fields (now planted with pine trees—sadly). The Liveseys had two young boys around my age and we all played together and helped out on the farm. There was a large barn attached to the house, as well as a separate sugar house with a slaughter house section in the north end of the building. This slaughter house included a huge wooden wheel that turned a large wooden shaft where the dead animals were hoisted to be bled and carved up. Consequently I got to observe the slaughtering of the animals which involved hoisting them on the huge wooden shaft which was turned by several of the men rotating the giant wheel. It was fascinating and disgusting at the same time.*

We are grateful to Dr. Cohen for his foresight and generosity. Removing the wheel was a delicate operation, and we thank Lyle Handy, Lyle Handy Jr., and Joe Baril for taking charge of it. It is being stored securely until the Society can provide adequate housing for it. Do you know anything more about this slaughterhouse? If so, contact your Society!



## Kudos!

Many thanks to member Susan Rock, who took it upon herself to open our seasonal booksale during this summer's Farmer's Market. She freshened up our book tables, had new bookcases built, and weeded out some of the more ancient books and tapes to make way for new donations. Thanks to her efforts, many visitors to the farmer's market enjoyed a happy hour browsing through our sale, and we made over seventy dollars in sales and donations. What would we do without creative members like Sue?

## Did You Know?

*Did you know that on March 9, 1940, a Special Meeting voted to buy a Chevrolet truck from C.H. Mosher for \$50.00? This was built into a Fire Truck by the department, especially B.F. Strickland. A party was held in 1941 and a fly rod was given to B.F. Strickland for all his work on the Chevy Fire Truck.*

*Did you know that in 1884 Marlow was well-lit by street lamps in the evenings? Who, we wonder, was the old lamp lighter of long, long ago?*

*March 5, 1889 -- "The largest tree in town was cut last week. It was a pine tree standing on P. T. Fox's land. The average diameter on the stump was about four feet; diameter 63 feet from the ground, 23 inches; 13 1/2 feet from the ground, 30 inches; 101 feet from the ground, 9 inches; whole length from the ground to the tip-top, 117 1/2 feet. The tree was cut into eight logs, and drawn to E. B. Gee's mill. According to the calipers it will saw out 2080 feet of lumber."*

## Marlow on Stage

Did you know that many otherwise quiet and unassuming Marlow residents have distinguished themselves on the stage?

The Davis clan, for example, is a local theater dynasty. Leon Davis (Tony and Ricky's grandfather) starred in *Just Country Folks* (comparable to Swanzy's *Old Homestead*) in 1932, again in 1946 when the town turned out "to do something special for the boys coming home from the war", and finally in 1961 for Marlow's 200th Anniversary. The 1964 version of the play featured his son Gordon, as well as Ivan Huntley, and Nelda and Ronald Gorges. Richard and Lois Davis, Leon's son and daughter, had important roles in *The Meddlesome Maid* in 1940, and again in *Silas Smidge from Turnip Ridge* in 1947. *Everybody's Crazy*, a comedy in three acts, was staged in 1950 and featured three generations of the Davis family: Leon and

his wife Bertha, Lois, Richard and Gordon, and grandson Bobby. The cast also included Ronald and Nelda Gorges, and Frances Strickland.



The 1982 production of *A Ready-Made Family* introduced new talent: Gerry Plotts (as seen here), Susan Berge, Sharon Davis and Barbara White. An even younger group of thespians, Michelle Davis, Randy Plotts, and Tim Strickland debuted in 1983's *The Campbells Are Coming* (directed by Sharon Davis,) and starred again in *Surprise*, a farce

in two acts, in 1984. In 1985 The Marlow Players presented its "Renowned Company of Superlative Players in the Grand Dramatic Spectacle *Dirty Works at the Crossroads*," directed by Sharon Davis and Gerry Plotts, and introducing a new young actress, Beth Plotts.

Our archives include programs, newspaper articles and many photos illustrating this golden era of Marlow theater.



Marlow Historical Society  
P.O. Box 12, Rte 123  
Marlow, NH 03456  
<http://marlowhistoricalsociety.org>  
Hours: May - October  
3rd Sunday of the month and by  
appointment

#### Contact Information

Marlow Historical Society Officers 2013-2014

President Joanne Thomas 446-7421  
Vice President Maria Baril 446-2292  
Secretary Jacqui Fay 446-3602  
Treasurer Joe Baril 446-2292

#### Board Members

Gen Ells 446-7161  
Loisanne Foster 446-7163  
Lynne Bailey 446-3450

Board Meetings are held  
the first Thursday evening of the month at  
the Methodist Chapel on  
Forest Road  
all members are welcome!

## " A Child's Christmas" continued from page two

Finally the big night arrived. The hall, including the balcony, was packed to capacity. With no TV yet, I believe that just about every family in town was present whether they had children in school or not. At this point body heat alone made the place comfortable despite the cold night outside. Under the tree stacks of presents were heaped drawing every child's eager glances.

The presentations were memorable. Mrs. Brown's actors gave a stellar performance. As this was the first play I ever attended, I have always judged starring roles against Donald Whippie's interpretation of young Scrooge in that presentation on that long ago night.

Afterwards, right on cue, accompanied by sleigh bells, Santa arrived and oranges and presents were distributed. Everyone got at least three presents: from the drawing, from the teachers, and from the PTA. And then it was over and, filled with the excitement of the evening and Christmas candy, we departed with presents and the exhilaration of Christmas vacation before us.

While this experience was repeated through the next three years, the level of dramatic offerings declined with the departure of Mrs. Brown who was replaced by Mr. Abbot the following year. Sadly, Mr. Abbot lacked the dramatic imagination and enthusiasm of his predecessor.

Mr. Abbot also took a different view of intercultural relations, for when I arrived in the "big room" and Christmas approached he hung me with the most religious recitation he could find. Though Mrs. Gill tried to intercede on my behalf, his mind was made up in the matter stating that I "shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth". My dad was outraged and I refused to memorize any part of it. I did not even bother to attend the pageant and shortly left the school for good with mixed feelings. Still, on cold winter nights, if I listen, I can almost hear the muffled clank of worn tire chains on a snow covered road of long ago.

