

SPRING 2009

# The Atwood Log

The Quarterly Newsletter of The Chatham Historical Society

Chatham's

*Attic*



**Chatham Historical Society  
Special Exhibit  
June through October, 2009**



## From the Director/Curator

As of this writing I have been on the job for approximately three weeks as the new Director/Curator of the Chatham Historical Society and Atwood House Museum. With each passing day I am compelled to acknowledge the debt that I owe to all those who have preceded me.

The dedication and professionalism of the volunteers and the very fine work executed by Ms. Cynthia McCue becomes more evident, and subsequently deepens my appreciation for the accomplishments made. It reminds me of the immortal words of Sir Winston Churchill which, although we are not facing fascist hegemony in Chatham, still ring true for CHS - 'never was so much owed by so many to so few.'

There are many challenges facing this institution as we proceed into a murky economic climate and increasingly uncertain future. It is my intention to provide some measure of excitement, hope, and unity of purpose, as I embark on my tenure at this very special place in Chatham. We face some significant challenges in the years to come; not the least of which are to address preservation issues for the Atwood House, continue to build our membership and philanthropic base, and continue the process of making the Society a regional locus for education, erudition and inspiration. It will require not only the sum of my spirit and intellect, and that of our dedicated 'few' - but the entire community, from local merchants, fishermen, and school children to people with specialized skills and talents to help develop our increasingly multi-faceted programming. We stand poised on the cusp of a new era of proactive change, creativity and collaboration, that with diligence and open-minded consideration of new possibilities and unrealized potential, will move the Society from the 'periphery' to the 'center' of artistic, historical and public service activity in Chatham. It is my hope that the entire community will come to think of CHS as a place where they are always welcome, and their voices will be heard.

My passion is history - it fascinates me, compels me and drives me to understand the human condition and the multitudinous causal psychologies that motivate individuals to take action in the way that they did (and do), and consequently profoundly affect the course of events. Historically, English then American Expansionism was psychologically, then physically, a directly westward endeavor, with a better life being just over the next wave crest or mountain ridge. In contrast, economic recessions, although difficult to endure, tend to finally dissipate. What contributes to their dissipation? In a word - attitude. Uttering the word 'recession' is almost a self-fulfilling prophesy; people panic, lay off employees, and circle the wagons. How then is confidence restored? Hope always has an epicenter; and although in the midst of perceived tough times, we *must* not use the current fiscal climate as an excuse to not try to do great things - to simply succumb to the collective malaise of those who will not be strong and courageous. As a community of brave hearts and agile minds, we will continue to strive for that intangible quality that nourishes the human spirit and excites the intellect - ever striving - just a little further *westward*.

*Mark Wilkins, Executive Director/Curator*



*Photographs and artifacts relating to the Life Saving Service will be part of the Special Exhibit this summer*

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# 2009 Special Exhibit - Chatham's Attic

## June through October

A New Bedford newspaper dated August 14, 1949, covering Cape Cod happenings, announced an exhibit of "over 2,000 articles shown in the Old Atwood House Museum in Chatham." They have not been recently counted, but the number of artifacts in our collection must now well exceed that number!

It is rarely possible for a museum to exhibit its entire collection at one time. However, this year we will give our members, friends and visitors a glimpse of the scope of this fascinating historical collection. *Chatham's Attic* is a tribute to the foresight and generosity of many donors and volunteers, resident and non-resident alike.

The building additions to the Museum in 2004-05 and more recently the retrofitting of our basement storage areas have allowed Mary Ann Gray (Archives,) Janet Marjollet (Costumes & Textiles,) and Dwight Myer (Collections) and their committees to unpack, sort and catalog items stored in our attic for decades. We can now, assisted by computers, easily access items in the collection; all of which are stored in accordance with national museum standards. All of these largely volunteer efforts make it possible to honor Chatham's past and present to better serve all those who live and visit Chatham.

The exhibit is sub-divided into exhibit vignettes that explicate and explore Chatham Americana and patriotism, toys and leisure activities, the United States Life-Saving Service and the wreck of the *Wadena*, Chatham schools and the importance of education, Stalknecht paintings of weathervanes, and various other fascinating subjects. Included in the exhibit will be rarely seen paintings, costumes, children's toys, flags, shipwreck artifacts, botanical paintings by Marcia Norman, ceramic birds crafted by Ted Norman, photos of patriotic celebrations and the changing shoals, and much more! Come and explore!

**Mary Ann Fritsch**

*Works by artists and Society benefactors Ted and Marcia Norman will also be displayed as part of this exhibit*



*Two of the delightful toys on display this summer in the special exhibit*



*Works by Alice Stallknecht, other than her murals, will be part of the 2009 Special Exhibit. Two examples shown here are Franklin D. Roosevelt and a ship weathervane atop a shed*



*The Atwood House Museum opens for the 2009 Season on June 2.*

*The Grand Opening is Saturday, June 13 from 10 am to 4 pm. This occasion is an Open House at which all visitors receive free admission. Except during special events, hours continue to be 1 to 4 pm in June, September, and October and 10 am to 4 pm during July and August. The museum is also open Thursday evenings in July and August from 6 to 8 pm. The museum is closed Sundays, Mondays, and July 4.*



What is it about an attic anyway? The smell of old wood and dust hangs in the air, the light filters in through tiny windows - and there packed away in various crates and boxes, are the treasures of a lifetime; perhaps too private or sentimentally to display in the main portion of a house; or perhaps paradoxically deemed extraneous yet significant enough to save. In the Atwood house attic, the amalgam of many Chatham resident's 'treasures' were packed away - but not forgotten. In the new special exhibit for the summer of 2009 entitled: *Chatham's Attic*, many of these items will finally receive the appreciation they deserve. Through careful selection and artful presentation, these fascinating pieces of Chatham material culture are finally having their day in the sun—once almost forgotten; now remembered. — **M. Wilkins**



## Chatham and the Care of the Poor

When the Pilgrims first settled in New England, no almshouses were built for the care of the poor and indigent. Common belief held that conditions in this new land made elaborate provisions for the poor unnecessary. "Some of the poor did receive allotments for cultivation or pasturage from the common lands, and their outdoor [meaning outside of the poor house] relief was from the treasury or property of the town and their fuel from its woodlots. Some individuals were maintained and lodged in the houses of their townsmen. Some were helped by special gifts of food, clothing or money."<sup>1</sup> In 1629, a letter of instructions from England to the Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony admonished the citizens that they should take care that no idle person should be allowed to live among them. The letter suggested that if the settlements held to this plan as they "established themselves, with God's help, it will prevent a world of disorders and many grievous sins and sinners."<sup>2</sup>

By 1655, the colony had enacted additional laws that authorized each town to refuse admission to live in the town to persons from other towns in the colony. It provided that any persons brought into the town without the consent of the governing body would not be the town's responsibility. These people should be maintained by those individuals that were responsible for their

for more than three months without asking for assistance from the town would be considered town residents. The justices of the peace were given the authority to settle disputes between the



*Chatham's Poor Farm on Old Harbor Road, later Marion Lodge; the site is now part of the Holy Redeemer Catholic Church parking lot.*

sending and recipient towns as to the official residence of those requiring assistance. As the duties became more burdensome, towns were permitted to create special Boards of Overseers of the Poor to handle the problems.

By 1692, the law required the Overseers of the Poor (or the Selectmen) to take care that all children, youth, and other persons of able body living within the town "do not live idly or misspend their time in loitering, but they be brought up or employed in some honest calling which may be profitable to themselves and the public."<sup>3</sup> If any individual was fit and able to work, loitered and misspent their time, or wandered from place to place, or if they were convicted before one or more justices of the peace, they were to be sent to the house of correction. Upon arrival at the house of correction, "they to be whipped on the naked back by the master of the house, not exceeding ten lashes and be there kept at hard labor until he or she was discharged by the justice".<sup>4</sup> The overseers were also authorized to bind out children as apprentices. This not only included the children of paupers, but of all those parents who were, in the estimation of the judges, unable to support their own children (males to the age of twenty-one and females to the age of eighteen or marriage). That law was later amended to permit the towns to recover costs from any relatives capable of aiding in the support of the person to be taken care of. The amount of support was determined by the justices. In 1699 the state law also required any county without a house of correction to build one to take care of punishing "rogues, vagabonds, common beggars, and other lewd, idle or disorderly persons and also for setting the poor to work".<sup>5</sup>

Chatham had not erected an almshouse by the year 1724. This was evidenced by the fact that in open town meeting, a committee of two men was appointed to be sure that "Nic'los Eldredge

HOSEA B. WAREHOUSE Co.  
Publishers Stationery Law Stationery  
Boston New York  
Form 1401

Office of the Overseers of the Poor,  
*Chatham Mass., Dec 28<sup>th</sup> 1913*

TO THE OVERSEERS OF THE POOR OF  
*Warwick Mass.*

Gentlemen:

Your notice, dated *Dec 17<sup>th</sup>* informing us that  
[Name] *is*  
is an expense as a pauper in your *Town* and alleging that  
the legal settlement is in this *Town* is received.

Upon due inquiry, we find no evidence that this *Town*  
is the place of lawful settlement of said pauper. We therefore  
decline removing said pauper or paying any expense that has  
arisen, or may arise, for support.

For and in behalf of the Overseers of the Poor of the *Town of Chatham*  
Your obedient servant,  
*Augustus L. Hardy* One of said Overseers.

We base our denial upon the following reasons:—  
*That the said pauper is the wife of [NAME]*

### Form used for inter-town correspondence regarding the poor

coming into the town. For example, if a town member brought a maid into the town from another residence, the Selectmen were empowered to require security for them or could forbid them to enter. Newcomers could be warned to leave at any time up until they had been admitted as inhabitants to the town. In 1659, a new law stipulated that any family or person who lived in a town

<sup>1</sup> Cummings, John. *Poor – laws of Massachusetts and New York*. New York: Macmillan & Co., 1895. p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Cummings, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Cummings, p. 28.

and his wife be kept to work for an honest livelihood.”<sup>6</sup> Although it is not documented anywhere, Deyo’s History of Barnstable County states that “it had been tradition prior to the establishment of a proper house, that the labor and maintenance of those not willing or able to work were sold at auction to whomever would relieve the town of the expense and care of such persons”.<sup>6</sup> It was not until some time later that an almshouse was constructed on lands in the western part of the town. That house and land was sold in 1878 and another old building moved to the land on Old Harbor Road. This site is now the parking lot for the Holy Redeemer Church. The building served as a poor house until 1903, at which point the house was rented. The poor were then for the most part cared for in their own homes with the aid of contributions from the town. The names of those receiving aid along with the amount and the items purchased were published in each of the town annual reports up until 1910, when a law was enacted forbidding their names to be made public.

Chapter 412

An Act Relative to Annual and Other Reports of City and Town Officials

Be it enacted, etc, as follows:

Section 1. No city or town, and no department or official of any town in this commonwealth, shall publish in any annual or other report for general distribution to the public, or to the citizens of any city or town, the names of persons assisted in any way by the poor department of any city or town, or the names of any persons receiving aid under the provisions of chapter 79 of the Revised Laws and acts in amendment thereof and in addition thereto, residing in such city or town. Approved April 16, 1910.

In the Historical Society archives are copies of the Overseers of the Poor’s published reports from 1845 to 1910 that include the names of people receiving assistance. In the report for 1885, the Overseers wrote:

“The close of the year reminds us that we are called upon to present a report of our ministrations for the relief of the poor. In dealing with pauperism great care needs to be exercised lest the evil be increased. Charity is a duty and charitable organization is a necessity.

The alms house is in good repair and the grounds and enclosures in good condition and nothing is left undone to make the asylum of our poor a pleasant and comfortable home.”

In that same year the number of individuals supported were 15, with 10 of those still in residence by the end of the year. The average cost per inmate was \$127.34 and 18 citizens received aid outside of the poor house. Additional monies were spent for funeral expenses, and medical costs. Other years’ records indicate money was sent to the towns of Harwich, Dennis, Barnstable, Boston, New Bedford, Cambridge and Wellfleet to cover the expenses of individuals whose legal settlement was considered to be Chatham. In addition to these expenses, Chatham sent support for its citizens housed in Worcester Hospital, Taunton

Lunatic Asylum, and the State Reform School.

Copies of the Selectmen’s correspondence include letters that illustrate the disputes that occurred between Chatham and other towns regarding the residence of individuals requiring aid. In 1910, Joshua Nickerson, as Overseer of the Poor, wrote to the Overseer of the Poor of Harwich in reply to his request for funds,

“As we understand the settlement law, a married woman who with her family is domiciled in a town for a period of five years gains a settlement provided her husband has not gained a settlement in any town.... However we will investigate and report at some future date.”

In another letter to Mr. Hardy of Boston,

“The care of [name] which the overseers of Boston claim was acknowledged by Chatham in 1904 was investigated January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1905 by the Overseers of Poor of Chatham and it was then found that he had no settlement in Chatham and has not acquired any since; therefore Chatham does not acknowledge Boston’s claim in the case of [name].”

The almshouse remained empty for several years (1904-1907) and the town rented the building until 1912. During that period Chatham continued to appropriate approximately \$2000 per



***View of Chatham in 1886 from the belfry of the Methodist Church. In this view we can see the Old Baptist Church, now the Masonic Building on Old Harbor Road; further up is the Old Alms House (Poor Farm), now the parking lot of Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, and further still the Granville Seminary where Bank of America is now located. In the foreground in the center is what was Washington Hall, home of J. Howard Nickerson, and next to it the former parsonage of the Congregational Church, now an antique shop. Also in the foreground is the Soldier’s Monument with its old original pump.***

year for the expenses of the poor outside of the almshouse. The Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1913 town meeting included a warrant (Article 9) to sell the alms house. The warrant was passed and the following year in the Auditor’s report the sale of the Almshouse was reported for \$1,100. At that point the budget includes an amount labeled the “Town’s Poor” with most of the people cared for in their own homes. In some cases they were sent to an appropriate state institution.

*Mary Ann Gray, Archivist*

<sup>6</sup>Deyo, Simeon L. History of Barnstable County. (location)H.W. Blake(yr.) pg. 581.

## Shop Talk

Dot Gross and I have scoured the world, well actually: the internet, Boston and Lincoln, Rhode Island gift shows, the Women's Apparel Show in Marlboro, Massachusetts, trade publications, company reps and local craftsmen, looking for exciting, affordable, USA made (when possible), museum appropriate items and books. We can't wait to share our new finds with you!

The tote shown in the photo is printed with a nautical chart of Chatham Harbor and surrounding areas. It is a beefy tote with shoulder length straps, available for just \$26. A new bowl, copied from our pantry, may soon be added. Clear glass etched mugs with the museum's "Wild Rover" are another exciting product. Much jewelry this year captures the image of the starfish - silver, gold, large, small, diamond encrusted or plain, we have them all. Victorian dolls, "Chatham Critter" finger puppets and pirate games are new to delight the children on our lists. A new line of hand-painted ornaments and bowls are in production. The motifs will be of Chatham Light and blue hydrangeas.

This summer's featured title at our shop is serious fun: AMERICA'S KITCHENS, by Nancy Carlisle, et al. Reviewed on a scale of 1 to 10, this book is an 11. It's at once informative and entertaining, rich with photos, historic magazine ads, drawings, and research. Just as the Atwood House kitchen hearth provided for Chatham families over four centuries, AMERICA'S KITCHENS illustrates and describes the cultural history of America's most central gathering place. Perhaps you have been struck by the absence of conveniences in the Atwood House

kitchen as compared to modern kitchens or have abiding memories of your own great grandmother's kitchen as you prepare meals in your own kitchen today. This book has a place in your library and is a quality gift for family and friends whether you love history, would like a reference book about period kitchens, or simply love cooking and eating - recently published for \$34.95. Call the CHS office to order your copy (508)945-2493 or email us (new email address) at [info@chathamhistorical.org](mailto:info@chathamhistorical.org).

We look forward to sharing this wonderful museum and our shop with you. New items will arrive throughout the season. All proceeds go to the fine work of this museum. Member purchases receive a 10% discount. Come and join us as a shop volunteer and especially as a customer.

*Dot Gross and Barbara Newberry*



## The Cypress of Rome

I was working in my yard last weekend performing all the myriad tasks that one does at this time of year: pruning hedges and roses, raking, mulching and plethora of assorted rituals we perform to our properties when it occurred to me that I was performing an ancient possession ritual - the origins for which were derived from Roman law. This was none other than the seminal theory of *res nullius*; or that to work or modify the land was the only way to possess it.<sup>1</sup> This theory rested on the premise that land was the property of all mankind until put to some (generally agricultural) use. Europeans co-opted this principle and applied it to England during the first Enclosure Movement, which was an effort by the Gentry from between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries to appropriate common lands and erect fences or walls along the perimeter and thus 'enclose' them. The land was subsequently used principally as grazing land for sheep - the woolen trade being the staple of the English economy. Ostensibly the Gentry appropriated such lands to bolster the national economy, but it also made them rich, while depriving peasants of common lands. Importantly, and consistent with *res nullius*, the Gentry further rationalized their possession of these (enclosed) lands, by using them to raise sheep.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century age of exploration and colonization, lands were 'appropriated' by permutations of *res nullius*. John Locke wrote that before (European) civilization,



all lands were like America.<sup>2</sup> Implicit in this statement was that America was vacant and devoid of any culture, politics or people. Moreover, during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries possession rituals became even more simple and cursory - such as breaking a branch or carving "In the name of King James we claim this island." The Spanish would often land only long enough to plant a cruciform (their iteration of a claim) before setting sail again. During the Great Migration of the 1620s and 1630s Puritans and Separatists (Pilgrims) co-opted agricultural techniques (intercropping of corn, beans and squash) from Native Peoples to survive. Ideologies of land possession taken from Roman law, English monoculture, and an emerging interest by Europeans in botany and gardening in general during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, contributed to the definition of the recreational gardeners of today.

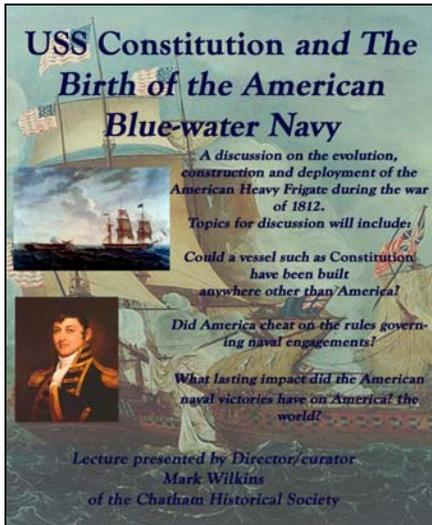
In conclusion, even after paying our taxes, making our mortgage payments and ultimately being 'paid off,' we still continue with this vestigial ritual of possession down through the centuries - we simply do not know how to do anything else! The collective psychology of our ancestry compels us to this day. So the next time you don gardening gloves to prune a rosebush, or to admire a well-manicured garden or grounds in Chatham - or anywhere else in America, see if you can - *ever so faintly* - detect the bittersweet tang of the Cypress of Rome.

<sup>1</sup> Canny, Nicholas. The Oxford History of the British Empire. Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1988. p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Canny, p. 43.

# Coming Events for May and June

## Chatham Maritime Festival Day - May 9



Chatham Maritime Festival Day is Saturday, May 9, with events planned at the Chatham Community Center during the day. Society Director/Curator Mark Wilkins will be offering a lecture from 2 to 3 pm at the Atwood House Museum titled *USS Constitution and The Birth of the American Blue-water Navy*. Maritime Month is celebrated in many places on Cape Cod during the month of May.

## May 17 Lecture - Attic Treasures

**A**ttic Treasures is the title of the next lecture in the “Afternoons at the Atwood House Museum” lecture series, scheduled at the museum on Sunday, May 17. Auctioneer and appraiser Keith Klinger will be the speaker for this program. Mr. Klinger has been the appraiser at our annual Appraisal Day several times. He will be discussing current market trends, antique asset management, antiques as hidden 401Ks, estate planning, importance of identifying and insuring antiques, and there will be an open forum for questions and answers.

An auctioneer and appraiser for over 30 years, Mr. Klinger is qualified to appraise 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> century American or European antiques in all categories excluding jewelry and stamps. He services all points in New England, as well as New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. He is state licensed, insured, and bonded and has offices and a gallery here on Cape Cod in North Harwich.

## June 6 - Antiques Appraisal Day

**F**or those of us who watch Antiques Road Show on PBS, with curiosity along with a mixture of amazement and intrigue, the annual Appraisal Day at the Chatham Historical Society is a must attend occasion. This year’s event will be held from 10 am to 1 pm on Saturday, June 6, 2009, in the Mural Barn. The donation will again be \$5 per item. Members and friends are invited to bring their items for appraisal by professional appraiser Keith Klinger who is also our speaker at the lecture on May 17. Keith brings

his extensive knowledge of antiques, as well as a sense of humor, to his comments about the articles brought in for this program.

Plan now to come to the Atwood House Museum, bring your special items, share stories with other antique lovers, and leave with knowledge you did not have before. Here is your opportunity to discover new information about your family treasures and perhaps discover the original use of some unique piece of the past.

As is the policy whenever events are held at the museum, the museum shop will be open, and is restocked with many wonderful new items for the 2009 season.



Someone brought items like these to an Appraisal Day - what will you bring?

## May is Preservation Month

Chatham’s Sixth Annual Preservation Awards events will be held during the month of May, also National Preservation Month. A proclamation announcing Chatham’s participation in Preservation Month was signed by the Selectmen at the April 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. The Awards Events are organized and sponsored by the Chatham Historical Commission, the Chatham Historical Society, the Chatham Historic Business District Commission, and the Chatham Garden Club.

Six houses in Chatham will be recognized this year for preservation of the streetscape; all six will also be a part of this year’s House Tour on Saturday, May 16 from 2 to 4 pm. Information about the tour may be obtained by calling the Chatham Historical Society at 508-945-2493 or by checking the Chatham Town Web Site.

A forum - *Dating Your Old House* will be offered in the Town Hall Meeting Room on Friday, May 15 from 3 to 4 pm. Speakers will address use of available data bases, recognizing architectural styles, and studying construction techniques.



One of the houses on the 2009 tour

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Chatham Historical Society is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, decorative arts, artifacts, archives, and places of historical interest relating to the history of Chatham and vicinity; and in so doing provide a record of our cultures and the people of our past and thereby inform and educate succeeding generations.

347 Stage Harbor Road  
PO Box 381  
Chatham, MA 02633

On the Web: [www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org)

## Mark Your Calendars

Coming up at The Chatham Historical  
Society & Atwood House Museum

### Afternoons at the Atwood Lecture Series

**Sunday, May 17, 2009**

**Keith Klinger:** *Attic Treasures*

2 pm at The Atwood House Museum, 347 Stage Harbor Road.

Donations appreciated.

### Other Events

**Saturday, May 9, 2009 - 2 to 3 pm**

**Mark Wilkins:** Chatham Maritime Day Lecture

*USS Constitution and the Birth of the American Blue-water Navy*

**Friday, May 15, 2009 - 3 to 4 pm**

Forum: *Dating Your Old House* at Town Hall in the Meeting Room

**Saturday, May 16, 2009 - 2 to 4 pm**

Preservation House Tour, Museum Shop Open 1 to 4 pm

**Saturday, June 6, 2009 10 am to 1 pm**

Antiques Appraisal Day, with professional appraiser

Donation \$5 per item

**Saturday, June 13, 2009 10 am to 4 pm**

**Grand Opening Day - Atwood House Museum**

Open House - Admission Free to all



*Look for this delightful painting in  
the 2009 "Attic Treasures" Exhibit*