



HENNIKER HISTORIAN

JUNE 2021 NUMBER 84

50TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION

NEWSLETTER OF THE HENNIKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

Henniker Historical Society Board 2020-21

President: Marc McMurphy

Vice President/Newsletter: Ellen Reed

Treasurer: Ron Taylor

Secretary: Sue Fetzer

Members: Diane Carpenter, Deb Dow, Kristen MacLean,
Yolande Nicknair, Martha Taylor

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I cannot think of anyone who is not going to remember 2021. It was the 50th anniversary of the legendary rock group The Eagles. Time flies! Another iconic 50th anniversary celebration is also happening in 2021. The Henniker Historical Society is celebrating its 50th year of its existence.

In our lives today, especially during a pandemic, it is so easy to get wrapped up in the here and now. A 24-hour news cycle constantly reminds us of what we “need” to know or, even worse, what we “need” to worry about. A huge transformation is happening in society as the digital age moves from adolescence to young adulthood. Let me remind you that 15 years ago, the iPhone did not even exist.

About the only thing I can think of to help anchor us and retain a proper context to our lives is a comprehensive knowledge of history. What about our town and our society? How did we get to where we are today? These are important questions to ask if we want to understand where we are going. You can take one of our tours, or use our website to discover Henniker’s history.

Don’t just speed down the digital highway. It’s OK to park for a bit, or, even better, put it in reverse, travel back, and take a longer look at what has been flying by on the winds of time.

Sincerely,
Marc McMurphy, President

Thank You to Past Presidents

Many of people have worked hard to help the Henniker Historical Society grow into the fine institution it is today, but special thanks go to all of those who helped lead us forward over the past fifty years.

William Mandrey	1971-1976
Richard Hudson	1976-1982
Marian Chase	1982-1985
Richard Martin	1985-1992
Marian Chase	1992-1994
Jan Seavey & Patricia Proctor	1994-1995
Martha Taylor	1995-1998
Joyce Meyer	1998-2000
Nina Morse	2000-2002
Yolande Nicknair	2002-2003
Nina Morse	2003-2011
Peter Flynn	2011-2013
Kirk Spofford	2012-2016
Kristin McLean	2016-2020
Marc McMurphy	2020-current

Dr. William Mandrey, the Historical Society’s first president, was instrumental in convincing the town to preserve the Town Hall in the early 1970s. The building was completed in 1787 and is one of the few in New Hampshire still on its original site. Renovations were finished in 1976, but sadly, Dr. Madrey did not live to see their completion. He passed away in May of 1975.

Historical Marker Tours

On our website, our Downtown Historical Marker Tour is now available! Each of the six downtown markers has a designated QR code which you can simply print out from our website. You will need a QR scanning app on your phone. Scanning the code will bring up an audio telling you the story behind each marker. The two driving tours will be available in July. This is a fantastic way to learn more about the history of Henniker and help us commemorate our 50th year.

But Wait... There's More!

In addition to our self-guided historical marker tours, we will also be offering some special guided tours

First Murder Tour Saturday, August 14

On August 14, 1894, 21 yr old Arthur McLean took his girl, 14 yr old Nettie Belle Douglass for an evening ride that ended in a grisly death. Don't miss this opportunity to take a bus tour around town on the 127th anniversary of that deadly ride and hear the story and view the sites associated with Henniker's first murder! Seating is limited and will be open to members first. Check our website starting on July 1st to sign up. No fee, but donations are welcome.

CEMETERY TOURS

In September, we will be reprising our popular Center Cemetery Tour followed by a reservation only tour of the First Burial Yard in October. Hear the stories of Henniker residents who now reside in a couple of our most historic cemeteries. Dates are still to be determined, so be sure and check our website for more information.



VISIT US ON THE WEB:

www.hennikerhistory.org

email: hennikerhistoricalsociety@tds.net

Facebook

VISIT US AT ACADEMY HALL

51 Maple St

Henniker, NH 03242

603-428-6267

BUSINESS MEETINGS

Monthly board meetings are held the 2nd Thursday of each month at 9:00 am in Academy Hall. Members and prospective members are invited to attend

MEMBERSHIP

Your membership expiration is noted on your mailing label. If yours is about to expire please renew to continue to receive the newsletter and support us as we preserve Henniker history.

To renew, send \$25.00 per household, \$15 per individual or \$7.50 for seniors 65+ (checks can be made out to Henniker Historical Society) along with your name and address to:

Henniker Historical Society
PO Box 674
Henniker, NH 03242

Household: \$25
Individual: \$15
Senior (65+): \$7.50

Henniker Has Grown!

Henniker Population 1970: 2348

Henniker Population 2019: 5019



You Did Know Eric Von Schmidt!



Apparently, Eric Von Schmidt was a well-known musician about town back in the day and a number of our members had some fond memories about him, especially his music.

Thanks to Hilda and Dick Weiss, Ruth Zax, Naomi and Robert Praul, and Elizabeth Butters for sharing your stories. We have added them to the Von Schmidt file!

HISTORIC HOUSE PLAQUES AVAILABLE

As you travel around town, you may notice more houses sporting attractive white plaques bearing the approximate year of the building's construction. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to get one for your own home or building!

Go to our website (www.hennikerhistory.org) to the section on Historical Signs to find the form to order yours. We will conduct a house history search to verify the date of construction (or as close as possible) to make sure your date is correct. Makes a great gift!



SPECIAL THANKS

Over the past 50 years, we have had many, many volunteers cross our threshold. Each and every one of these generous people have left their mark in our quest to preserve Henniker's history. Be it writing topic specific booklets or books, compiling data, organizing our numerous files and artifacts or helping at one of many fund raisers, our volunteers have made it possible for us to continue our work. We couldn't do it without them.

We would like to give special thanks to a few specific people who have gone above and beyond through the years.

Martha Taylor, our town historian, has a vast treasure trove of knowledge of Henniker history and has put together numerous pamphlets and books on our story. She knows where all the bodies are buried – both literally and figuratively, and without her, so much history would be lost!

Ron Taylor, who has worked hard to keep both our financials and our building on solid footing, is usually the quiet voice behind the scenes. He deserves many thanks for his long service and for all he has done for the Society.

Bruce Elliott is a long-time member, who like Ron, is involved in less visible activities. However, it is through his generosity and willingness to print our newsletter, that we are able to have it beautiful color. He has been invaluable in the production of many of our publications and has made many valuable donations over the years.

Thank you to these special people and to ALL our hardworking and generous volunteers and members through the years.

New Historic Marker is Coming

Henniker currently has 23 historic markers placed around town and is about to get a 24th! Each marker commemorates a Henniker first or important person/event. The newest marker will be placed in front of the Thomas Brown house on Rush Rd. to honor Thomas Brown, a pioneer in Deaf-Mute education.

This month, Mr. Linsay Darnall, a representative from the National Association of the Deaf, will be coming to Henniker to visit the Thomas Brown house. Although we will not have the monument ready the Society will host a small reception for Mr. Darnall at the home of one of our board members.

50 Year History of the Henniker Historical Society and Museum

1971 – 2021

by Martha Taylor

In 1971 the first organizational meeting of the Henniker Historical Society was held at the Tucker Free Library. Thirty-two charter members were present at this meeting. At the next meeting eleven more people were accepted as charter members. These members continued to meet and operate from the library. Eventually the Society appropriated space in the basement of the library for storage of numerous donated artifacts and for use as a workroom. Renovations were later done to a section of the basement which was turned into our first museum.

The early members were very active. The first large project was planning Henniker's Old Home Day in 1973. They were very involved in the Bicentennial project of renovating Town Hall and spearheaded the design and painting of the mural in the Town Hall. They then wrote and published the book, *the Only Henniker on earth* in 1980.

Sometime in 1995 the Library Trustees indicated they needed more space for books. The Society found that NEC gave Alumni Hall back to the town, they negotiated a long-term lease on the building. After renaming it Academy Hall (after its first use in 1834) they and three hundred and twenty-five persons and businesses renovated it.

Since that time, the Society has strived to meet its purpose and goal of collecting and sharing Henniker's history. In the next few years, we wrote policies and procedures and were granted our designation as an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We continue to publish a quarterly newsletter, and many booklets, photos and Henniker related items to sell. We began our yearly Giving Campaign to help us to become financially stable and each year you have graciously given to us to be able to continue our mission.

The Society has repaired and added to the original nineteen Historical Markers. We now manage twenty-four markers and produced a walking tour brochure describing them. We revived the honor of presenting the Boston Post Cane to the oldest resident of Henniker. A yearly Cookie sale has been sponsored since 1993. This year, because of COVID-19 we cancelled it.

In 2008 we purchased our first computer. After several upgrades we are now able to use a cataloguing program especially for museums to scan all of our photographs, archival papers and artifacts. The goal is to be able to share these digitally with members and with the public. Visit our new inter-active WEB page, you can view and purchase all the Henniker related items we have for sale.

We are busy re-organizing our files to make them easier to retrieve information.

We have a display case in Town Hall that is filled with artifacts from our collection so that you may view some of the wonderful items that are at the Society, hoping that you may someday add to our collection. We have been writing and publishing about Henniker's history, including seventeen booklets and five books with many photos.

Programs have been less successful in recent years, but our Annual Meeting dinners with special speakers have been well attended. Unfortunately, in 2020 we had to cancel the event. As soon as possible we will again be meeting in person.

To better describe the Society and what we do, in 2017 we began using *Henniker Historical Society and Museum* to fully describe ourselves.

Volunteers are always welcome.



1997 The New Museum Opens

Howard Proctor, Martha Taylor, Bill Ballanger, Richard Hudson, Lorraine Aucoin, Richard Martin, Jan Seavey, Patricia Proctor



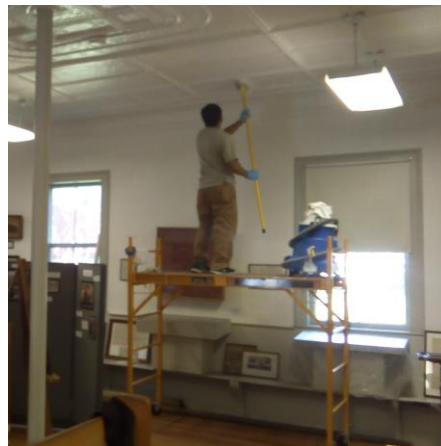
Old Home Day 2000



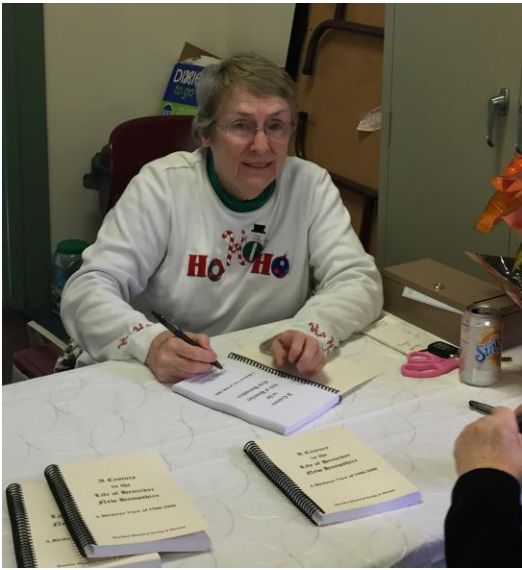
2008 Refurbished two painted stage curtains



2009 Installed 3 more historic markers



Clean-up after the 2016 Blowback



2018 Martha Taylor signing her book, "A Century in the Life of Henniker, NH"



2019 Awarding the Boston Post Cane to Lois Fitch



2019 Henniker First Murder Tour with White Birch



2020 Center Cemetery Tour



Kristen MacLean and Marshall Connor doing research at HHS



Rotating display at the Town Hall

From the past comes an understanding of our future.

Many things have occurred in the past 50 years and we would need a book to publish them all! In fact, we *have* published over 20 books and pamphlets relating to Henniker's history (check out our website to purchase!). This timeline and the following photos are provided to give you a sample of our activities and accomplishments over the past five decades of preserving Henniker's history!

1971: Nov.7 organizational meeting of the HHS held at Tucker Free Library

1972: Charter members organized

1973: First big event: Henniker Old Home Day

1976: Renovation of the Town Hall

1980: Publication of the continuation of Henniker's history, "The Only Henniker On Earth"

1985: Confirmed church bell was a Revere Bell

1991: Historical markers refurbished and self-guided tour pamphlet created

1992: Hosted the National Covered Bridge Association and began proper storage techniques for textiles

1993: First cookie sale fundraiser

1995: Officially agreed to maintain the nineteen historic markers then in existence; began publication of the Henniker Historian newsletter

1996: Began the annual Giving Campaign to help finance HHS activities

1997: HHS moved from the library into Academy Hall, opened research room and museum, revived the presentation of the Boston Post Cane to oldest Henniker resident.

1999: Restoration of the Academy Hall cupola

2001: Received a donated computer

2002: Rehung the Bicentennial Quilt in a dust-free case in the museum

2005: Replaced old asphalt walkway with brick and granite walkway

2008: Erected three more historical markers; stage curtain restored and hung in museum

2009: Restored two painted stage curtains

2012: The building was painted

2013: First of our Old Timers Panel Discussion held.

2015: Return of the Natives: Our second panel discussion featuring long-time residents

Wifi comes to Academy Hall

Historic Marker display set up in Museum and a revolving display is set up in Town Hall

2016: Research room named "Martha Taylor Research Room" to honor her for her many years of service

2016-17: Furnace blowback closed Academy Hall for 8 months for intensive professional cleaning

2017: Phrase "and Museum" officially becomes part of our name

2018: Continuation of the story of Henniker's history with publication of "A Century in the Life of Henniker, NH: A Birdseye view of 1900-2000" by Martha Taylor

Began the process of digitizing photos using PastPerfect software and cataloguing all our collections

Design of new web page

2019: Martha Taylor named Town Historian by the town of Henniker;

First Murder in Henniker tours held in conjunction with publication of book, “The Untimely Death of Nettie Belle Douglass” by Ellen Reed.

2020: President Kristen MacLean represented HHS on TV show, *The Holzer Files*

Collaborated with the Henniker Beautification Alliance to refurbish Hall and Rush Rd. memorial plaques.

Pandemic closes down the Academy Hall, although a few stalwart members eventually return to continue reorganizing all of our files, archives, and objects.

The Annual meeting was canceled although ballots for new officers were sent out by mail.

In October, a tour of the Center Cemetery was held and over 120 masked people attended.

2021: 50th Anniversary

HHS reopens for people wearing masks.

New logo designed

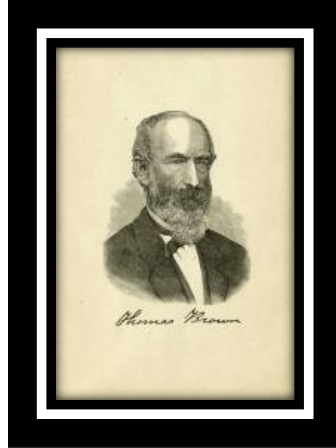
Historic House Plaques available for purchase

Driving, walking, and virtual Historic Marker tours created

Ordered the Thomas Brown historical marker



Henniker Notables: Thomas Brown



Despite his ordinary name Thomas Brown became an extraordinary citizen of Henniker. He was born in Henniker on Rush Road to Nahum and Abiah Brown on July 25, 1804. His father, Nahum, was deaf and Thomas was also born deaf and unable to speak. In the early 1800's, father and son, were the first deaf mutes in Henniker. Nahum was a farmer and Thomas worked on the farm until he was 18. The Town of Henniker provided financial assistance to Thomas which allowed him to attend the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in Hartford, Connecticut. The school, still in operation, is now known as the American School for the Deaf.

Thomas resided at the Asylum for 2 years learning cabinetry and was a pupil for 5 years studying under Professors Thomas Gallaudet and Lamont LeClerc. He was described as one of the "earliest and most intelligent pupils." He returned to Henniker to care for his parents, marrying Mary Smith, also a deaf mute from Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts whom he had met at the asylum. They went on to have two children, a hearing daughter who died young and a deaf-mute son.

Thomas was a tall, slender man with a powerful build. He was active in Henniker politics and trusted by friends in the community. He was an organizer and found inspiration in promoting his alma mater. He became a fierce activist for the deaf. During the summer he offered his farm for summer retreats. The Brown farm, consisting of 127 acres, was divided into many lots, each named in honor of a mentor, such as the Gaudet lot, the LeClerc lot, the Peet lot.

The retreats spawned the New England Gallaudet Association for the Deaf (NEGAD). The bylaws of the association were drafted in the Henniker house where he was elected the first president. The Association's goal was to "promote the intellectual, social, moral temporal and spiritual welfare of our mute community..." NEGAD, under Brown's leadership, would begin publishing one of the first newspapers for Deaf people, *The Gallaudet Guide and Deaf Mute Companion*. Brown convened the first convention of NEGAD in 1857 in the Legislative Hall of the New Hampshire Statehouse in Concord with Gallaudet and LeClerc in attendance. Several other states modeled their deaf associations after Brown's NEGAD. With NEGAD and the other state organizations as predecessors, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) was organized in 1880. Again, Thomas Brown was a member of NAD's first National Executive Committee.

Mary Brown died in 1862 and Thomas married Sophia Summer, a hearing woman, in 1864. In his later years, he spoke at many gatherings including in 1866, the 50th Anniversary of the 'dawn of education' of American deaf mutes. Thomas Brown, age 81, died in Henniker on March 23, 1886 with his wife and son by his side and is buried in the Old Center Henniker Cemetery. On this gravestone are the words "The mute Cincinnatus of American." Cincinnatus refers to the Roman General who "gave up everything to serve the republic." In 1887, the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb counted 44 Henniker alumni, including Thomas Brown, an extraordinary Henniker notable.

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PO Box 674
Henniker, NH 03242

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HENNIKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY TURNS 50!

In our 50 years, we've never had an official logo, so to celebrate this milestone anniversary, we decided it was high time we got one. So here it is, our new logo! This particular version is for use during our anniversary year and will be slightly modified for general use after that.