

Brattleboro Reformer

Tuesday, August 11, 2009

History fair set in Newfane

By JAIME CONE

NEWFANE-- The Historical Society of Windham County will bring the best that 14 different historical societies have to offer to the town common in Newfane this Saturday.

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the societies will display the most interesting artifacts to come out of their history-rich towns in the first Windham County History Fair.

Newfane, founded in 1774 and rich in its own history, will set the scene for visitors to view old crafts such as canoe building, spinning and chair caning.

There will also be a walking tour of Newfane. The town's Selectboard Chairman Gary Katz and Daniel Brooks, president of the Historical Society of Windham County, will point out the various historical aspects of the town's many old buildings.

There are many quirky things about Newfane's history, said Katz, including that many of the town's landmarks, though hundreds of years old, were not always standing at their current sites.

"The original settlement was up [on Newfane Hill] originally," said Katz. "For defensive purposes, the town had to be on a high level."

When the decision was made to move the town, said Katz, the townspeople used an interesting method to painstakingly preserve the structures in the town.

"They took apart a number of buildings board by board, numbered the boards and put them together again," said Katz.

He said the Newfane Inn is one of those buildings.

One of his favorite stories, Katz said, is that of a Revolutionary War veteran who was engaged in a long-term battle with the government over his military pension, only to accidentally stab himself in the leg with a stick. He died of infection only days after he finally received word that he would get his money.

"The lives of these people are easy to grasp because their stories are so relatable," said Katz.

"It brings you back to realizing they were real people, too, though they lived in different times," agreed Brooks.

"You don't have to be a history buff to enjoy that 'wow, that building came off of Newfane Hill'," he added. "It's an interesting way to look at each building."

At the fair, there will be various table exhibits with history-related craft vendors, Brooks said.

In the afternoon, the Bills Band of Wardsboro, will play old-time tunes.

There will also be raffles, with the money raised going to the Historical Society of Windham County.

"It's so important to keep our history alive -- it's where we came from," he said. "Financially, we've been really stressed, and we don't want to compromise the high quality of care we've been taking to preserve the items in our museum."

Jaime Cone can be reached at jcone@reformer.com or 802-254-2311, ext. 277.

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Sunday, August 16, 2009

History on display

By CHRIS GAROFOLO

NEWFANE -- Windham County's past was on display over the weekend in an event full of historical memorabilia and hands-on learning exhibits.

Saturday marked the first annual History Fair on the Newfane Common, designed to bring together 14 different historical societies while raising extra money for the Historical Society of Windham County.

According to HSWC President Dan Brooks, the majority of towns have their own historical societies but the groups have never gathered in this fashion. He thought this would provide a great opportunity to highlight their displays and browse through what others have in their collections.

"We wanted to bring all the societies together in one spot to share our history," said Brooks. Many of the exhibits reviewed the town's special features, photographs and priceless objects from more than 200 years of history in southern Vermont.

"Local people love local history," said Brooks. "This is a fun way to support local historical societies."

In addition to the historical societies, the Vermont Historical Society had a display promoting the Vermont Women's History Project, a program designed to showcase the positive effect Vermont women have had on society.

The Estey Organ Museum and the Brookline Round School House also exhibited their history during the fair.

Even the craft vendors were history-related -- many of the demonstrators produced their work right in front of the guests.

Brookline's Chris Fitch showed off his woodworking skills using tools and techniques from the colonial era. Mike Kohout of West Dummerston brought his materials and explained to a crowd how to construct a birch bark canoe.

Rep. Carolyn Partridge, D-Windham, joined fellow representatives Richard Marek of Newfane and Tess Taylor, at the fair underneath the state's historical society set-up.

Partridge spent a majority of the day spinning wool from her flock of sheep with a wheel and drop spindle.

"I think it gives people a better appreciation from post-colonial days when people can see what it's like when they made their own clothes," she said.

Also displaying his craftwork was John Long, a Newfane artist who works with weathered wood from American barns to create his pieces.

A longtime acquaintance of Brooks, Long said he signed up for the fair after hearing the proposal.

"I think it's a really good idea, to bring all the historical societies together like this," he said. Long, who does a lot of craft shows around the region, said it's nice to do an educational, hands-on festival right in his own backyard.

The fair also featured two walking tours of historic Newfane village led by local historians and a large collection of ancient roads and old maps from Dave Allen of West Chesterfield, N.H.

Throughout the afternoon, the Bills Brothers Band from Wardsboro provided music.

Brooks hopes to have the fair become an annual event in Newfane, allowing guests to attend the festival, but also visit the county's historical society located just across the street.

During Saturday's event, he said so many new faces stopped in to explore the museum as well as the fair. "People are welcome to come by and visit us anytime," said Brooks.

Chris Garofolo can be reached at cgarofolo@reform-er.com or 802-254-2311 ext. 275.