

**APRIL 4<sup>th</sup> HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING:** Our program will be presented by John Richardson who will share with us part of his extensive collection of local military memorabilia. Refreshments will be served by Ruth and Grant Hirst.

**DIRECTOR/OFFICER MEETING UPDATE:** Following our February meeting the Board of Directors and the Officers of the Historical Society, as directed by the membership, held their first joint meeting to look at the issues raised at that meeting. They began by reviewing, with Grant Hirst, the insurance issues and then worked on updating the bylaws. Grant has done a great deal of research and put much thought as to the types of insurance that are available to the Society. He was very helpful and we owe him a huge thanks for this service. Director's/Officer's next meeting will be March 15<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm. A report with recommendations will be made to the Society at the May meeting.

**RECENT ACQUISITION:** At our March meeting we received some papers and pictures from an unknown donor. The materials were left at the Library and brought to the Society by Denny Lentz.

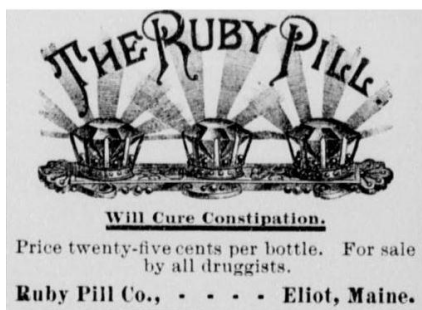
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY FUNDRAISER – APRIL 9, 2016:**

**ANTIQUE APPRAISALS**

APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup> 9AM-2PM AT THE METHODIST CHURCH, ROUTE 236

HAP MOORE, licensed appraiser and auctioneer of antiques and personal property and LEE HOROWITZ, an expert in jewelry, coins, currency, precious metals and stamps. 3 items per person. Cost: 1 item for \$10, 2 for \$15, or 3 for \$20.

The Fundraising Committee is looking for cooks to make finger sandwiches and desserts. Please contact Cindy Lentz -748-0040 - if you are willing to cook!



**AREA PROGRAMS OF NOTE:**

- APRIL 20<sup>th</sup> : Thom Hindle, Curator of the Woodman Museum in Dover will speak at the Portsmouth Athenaeum, 9 Market Square, Portsmouth. 7PM. Reservations required. Call 603-431-2538.



Witch hazel tree on Beech Road. A sign of the coming of Spring!

**INVESTIGATING HISTORY:** It began with an email from Brittany Williams to the Historical Society website. She was looking at a house for sale on Pleasant Street and said that she thought it might have a “secret room”. She described this room as being “behind a closet and up a ladder behind the kitchen”; got “thinking about that little room with ladder/stairs from the kitchen closet and being a history teacher – started to put dates and location together.” She questioned if it might have been a home on the “underground railroad” during the Civil War period and asked if the Historical Society had any information on this house.

I was intrigued and so wrote her back, having remembered hearing about Eliot being part of the Underground Railroad route and that there was a house in Eliot that housed fugitives. Perhaps there are others who have heard the same story and if so will share what they know.

There was a strong anti-slavery sentiment in Eliot which led to the formation of our Anti-Slavery Society in 1844 and we know that Moses and Hannah Farmer, who later lived in Eliot, opened their home in Dover, NH to escaping slaves in the 1840's. In 1995 the Historical Society had a Reconnaissance Survey done which documented homes that were 50 years old or over. Julie Johnson, who

oversees our collection, checked the cards that had been made for this project. The cards contain pictures of the homes along with information submitted by homeowners and members of the Society but she found no anecdotal evidence in them. I found a book published in 1898 "The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom: A Comprehensive History" by Wibert H. Siebert which says that at Salem, Mass. the coast route "parted company with the New Hampshire route and ran on through Ipswich, Newburyport, and Exeter to **Eliot, Maine** and perhaps farther". In his book "The Underground Railroad in Maine and New Hampshire" he also writes that 'some of the fugitives who got to Newburyport, Massachusetts, seem to have gone up through eastern New Hampshire into Maine and found shelter at Eliot. Perhaps others came in there as stowaways. We lose track of them at Eliot, but may surmise that they were piloted to the station at Durham, New Hampshire. \* [page 34]

Was it possible that this house, built in the 1840's, with its own access to the river and boat house, was a part of that historic period of our Nation's history?

For many of the "safe houses" hiding places were essential. False walls were built into attics; secret chambers were included as floor plans; there were fake closets, and trap doors. Could the "secret room" that Brittany saw be such a hiding place?

Both Brittany and I were concerned that with the sale of the house the features that were found might be destroyed and so we thought it a good idea to attempt to document the "secret room" in this house. And so Thursday, March 3rd, four in the afternoon found me at 234 Pleasant Street checking out the house with realtor Peter Deely, Brittany and her daughter Feona.



This house was the life-long home of the late Alberta Remick who died in 2012 at the age of 93. Her family came to live here in 1914. Alberta was born on May 16, 1919, the daughter of Albert S. and Altie A. (Huntress) Remick. She graduated from Eliot High School with the class of 1936.

Not far from the house is the cemetery of her ancestor Christian Remick and so if we researched the land I wouldn't be surprised to learn it was part of Christian's original grant. The house originally had two chimneys - one in the front and one in the back of the house. In the upstairs bedroom to the left, as you face the house you can see the place in the floor where the front chimney once came up through. Downstairs, on the other side of the kitchen wall and in the dining room there are fireplaces that have been blocked off.

The "secret room" that Brittany had mentioned is upstairs off from a large open room. A door leads to what looks like a large closet and in the back is a door which leads to the attic of the ell over the kitchen. The doorway is wide enough and tall enough for a person to go through. It appears there was some shelving there at one time. The "room" is wallpapered although there are no windows in it. It is approximately 4 feet wide and 6-8 feet long; certainly not large enough to be a bedroom.





Down in the kitchen is a door to a stairway leading upstairs to the attic. Turning to the left at the top of the stairs you can see the door to that “secret room” from this attic space.



*Kitchen door on the right leads to the stairway that goes to the attic over the ell. The other door leads to the cellar.*



Viewed from the outside there is no indication that this “secret room” exists since there is no window in it. Also, from the outside it appears that the attic of the kitchen ell is too low for a person to be able to stand up in.

The door in the kitchen, the stairway to the attic, and the small door to the “secret room” are clearly visible, so could it have been used as a hiding place? Probably not. More than likely it was just a large closet with a way to get to the attic above the kitchen ell. The odd thing is that there is a stairway to get to the attic, so why the small door in the odd shaped room? We may never know.

At the present time we have found no documentation that this home was a “safe house” for the Underground Railroad. It is an interesting thought though. More research, of course, could yield something. For example, the Society has recently received the collection of Edward Vetter, who spent his life gathering information about the town and its places and history and perhaps his papers might contain some information on this house. Further research into the deeds for this property could also yield some significant information by looking at the historical owners of the property during the 1810-1850 period. Perhaps one might have had ties to the anti-slavery movement and if so it might be significant.

So, at the end of the day, although it doesn’t appear that this home was part of the Underground Railroad it certainly made for an interesting week of investigation!

You just never know what query will come through our Website and where we will be led in thinking about our town’s history. We owe our webmaster, Eric Christian a huge “thank you” for making our presence known and providing us with opportunities to keep gathering information and documenting our history!