

Border Wars

The initial settlement of Sheffield was not as simple as surveying land and purchasing it from the Native Americans living there. In our current exhibit, “Where the Berkshires Began,” we tell the story of those early years, the forming of the town into the place we know it today. But ownership of homesteads in this fertile land along the Housatonic was hardly secure. Robert Livingston laid claim to the western section of Sheffield, declaring it to be part of the land granted to his grandfather by the king of England and known as Livingston Manor. Robert Livingston the Elder, had come to New York in the late 1600’s, taking with him from Scotland the title of Lord Livingston. In 1749, Robert inherited the title of Lord along with the manor, which stretched from the Taconic Mountain range west to the Hudson river. He was one of the richest men in New York.

The Livingstons did not improve and farm the land that made up the manor themselves. Tenant farmers did that, paying the Livingstons rent for the right to fell the heavily wooded land and toil for years to establish farms that could sustain their families. Livingston had encouraged his tenants to settle western Sheffield, to clear the land along

what is now Undermountain Rd. (Rt. 41) and begin farming so they could pay him a portion of their wheat crop in rent. Thomas Ingersoll, who more than likely had selfish motives of acquiring the disputed land, incited the tenant farmers into action, easily convincing them to throw off the shackles of old-world feudalism by claiming the land was in Massachusetts, not New York. If they were

not paying him rent, Livingston believed, then they were squatters who rightfully should be evicted. He often complained of, “that wicked varlet David Ingersoll and his parcel of rascal Banditty.”

New York’s boundary with Massachusetts and Connecticut was supposedly 20 miles west of the Hudson. When Sheffield was first settled in the 1720’s, the border dispute had been go-

ing on for decades, but the Massachusetts government divvied up and sold parcels nonetheless. Even the westernmost part of Sheffield was clearly past that 20-mile mark, so the settlers wrote to the Massachusetts colonial government imploring it to defend them against the claims of Robert Livingston. They explained that they were, “very uneasy at the present heavy rents they are obliged to pay to



Robert Livingston, 3rd Lord of Livingston Manor (1708-1790)

(continued on p. 2)

said Livingston...and being sensible that the lands are eastward of the utmost extent of his patent and within the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, are very desirous of the protection of said government." Tenants of Livingston had been living in the eastern side of the Taconics since 1692, though, so that fact along with his deeds to the land do suggest that Livingston was probably the



rightful owner. Nevertheless, it was contrary to a burgeoning sense of American independence for one man to own such a large amount of land--over 250 square miles--with others working it like vassals.

In 1752 Livingston came to the foothills of the Taconics to meet with the 20 families who were claiming they were not his tenants. A committee from Sheffield was present and urged the claimants to wait until the border lines were determined, and in the meantime to continue paying Livingston rent. Livingston went home to New York satisfied. A mere week later, that same committee from Sheffield was surveying the disputed land and erecting fences so to take formal possession of it. Over the next few years, Massachusetts and New York tried to negotiate peace between the settlers and the lord.

Yet the two sides continued to quarrel. Livingston, with his posse, carried away the wheat crop of Josiah Loomis, one of the tenants. The town of Sheffield retaliated by arresting and detaining two of the men in Livingston's posse. The border rent wars were certainly heating up, but the rest of the story will have to wait until the next newsletter. In the meantime, check out "Where the Berkshires Began," open weekends at the Old Stone Store, 11am-4pm. It runs through Labor Day so you have time to come see it if you have not done so already.

Where the Berkshires Began



Former First Lady Laura Bush and friend Lois Betts at the reception for "Where the Berkshires Began."

[Click here to read an article on the exhibit from the *Berkshire Eagle*](#)

The Sheffield Historical Society Lifetime Achievement Award

It's a tradition at our annual member's meeting to honor members who have gone above and beyond in their service to the Society over the years. This year the awards were presented to Marcia Brolli and Roger and Virginia Drury.



In addition to serving as president and board member in the past, Marcia today performs one of the most important jobs in the Society. As volunteer coordinator, she keeps the Old Stone Store staffed every weekend throughout the year. She arranges the staff schedule, recruits new volunteers, and reminds those working each weekend of their upcoming shift. Without her we would not be able to have the Old Stone Store open year-round for people to enjoy our exhibits and gift shop.



Paul O'Brien and Catherine Miller present the Lifetime Achievement Award to Marcia



Old Stone Store volunteers honor Marcia at the annual Member's Meeting

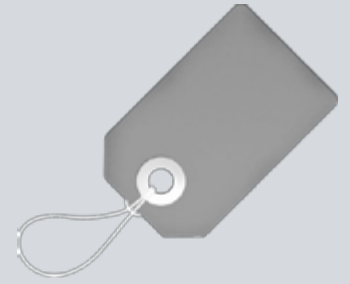


The posthumous award given to Roger and Virginia Drury was accepted by their son Geoff Drury on their behalf. Roger and Virginia were one of the earliest members of the Society. The Mark Dewey Research Center owes its existence to the Drury's, who saw the Society's role in the community to be one of preserving the documents and objects from the past—as well as documenting history as it unfolded.



Geoff Drury accepts award on behalf of his parents

Society Happenings



Silent Auction & Tag Sale

Despite challenges from mother nature - tornado warnings, heavy rain and wind - on July 2, the Sheffield Historical Society's Silent Auction and Tag Sale had great weather during the event, lots of shoppers and excellent results. Over \$9,700 was raised and that money will be used to begin work on updating the kitchen in the Dan Raymond house and, if there are remaining funds, adding an accessible restroom. Thank you to the many volunteers and donors who made it possible and our supportive community who found outstanding merchandise and services at attractive prices.

-Rene Wood

Didn't get a chance to check out our Silent Auction & Tag Sale? Our Antiques & Collectibles Flea Market in August gives you another chance to discover some great finds.

Sheffield Historical Society



FLEA MARKET

Saturday
August 13
(rain date 8/14)
9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Historical Society Grounds

For further information:
www.sheffieldhistory.org
sheffieldhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
 413-229-2694

If you are interested in being a vendor contact:
 413-717-8190

7th Annual Mumbet Walk to Freedom

Sunday
August 21st
2016

10:00 - 11:30 am

Ashley House
Cooper Hill Road
Ashley Falls, MA



Join us for the 7th annual "Mumbet Walk to Freedom" commemorating Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman, the enslaved African woman who successfully sued for her freedom in 1781 and set the stage for the emancipation of all slaves in Massachusetts by 1783.

We start at 10 am in front of the Ashley House and walk the 4 miles to the Sedgwick House on Main Street in Sheffield. Theodore Sedgwick was the lawyer who successfully took on her case. At 11:30 in front of the Sedgwick House Rep. Smitty Pignatelli will read a proclamation honoring Mumbet. After that there will be refreshments at the Old Stone Store and a viewing of the exhibit "Where the Berkshires Began".

In conclusion Tammy Denease will re-enact the story of Mumbet

For More Information and to Sign Up call
(413) 229-0490

Commemorate Mumbet's walk to freedom. Walk with us or enjoy other festivities honoring the first slave to successfully sue for her freedom.

Organized by the Ashley Property Committee in collaboration with the Sheffield Historical Society

*For more information and to sign up to walk call
413-229-0490*

from our collection

Trundle Bed

Trundle beds, like this one that resides in the second floor bedroom of the Dan Raymond House, trace their origins back to Medieval Europe. Medieval trundle beds were used by servants who slept in the same room as their lords and ladies, their beds being pulled out at night and positioned at the foot of the “big bed.” In America, beds were the most expensive item a person would own, often the bed would be the first thing that firefighters would pull out of a burning house. Therefore a child would not get his or her own bed. Small children would sleep in a trundle like this one, pulled out on its metal wheels from under the big bed where either their parents or older siblings slept.



The word trundle means “roller” or “caster”-- a bed on wheels that is slid under a larger bed



This rope trundle bed is probably from the early 1800's, because after the 1840s mattresses with metal springs at their core replaced rope beds. Rope beds had to be tightened each night, hence the phrase “sleep tight.” The bed was acquired by the Society in 1983, and now can be found in the second floor bedroom of the Dan Raymond House.

*The
Sheffield
Historical Society*



Dan Raymond House

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Office Hours

Sunday 9:00 am-1:00 pm

Sheffield Historical Society

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Visit us on Facebook

Mark Dewey Research Center

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mdrc@sheffieldhistory.org

413-229-3682

Office Hours

Monday 1:30 pm-4:00 pm

Friday 1:30pm-4:00 pm

or by appointment

Old Stone Store

On the Green in Sheffield

Weekends 11:00 am-4:00 pm

413-229-2287

The Sheffield Historical Society invites the support of you and your friends through membership.

Name(s) _____ E-Mail _____

Address _____

Please check: New Renew

Individual (\$15 - \$50) Family(\$51 - \$100) Patron (\$101 - \$500) Sponsor (\$501 - \$1,000)

Please make checks payable to: The Sheffield Historical Society. Send to : P.O. Box 747, Sheffield , MA 01257