

Those not from Massachusetts may be surprised to know that the state mandates that each town conduct an annual census. Alternately called the "Annual Street List," this census predates the Federal Census by two hundred years.

Non-responders to the census

To the Editor of THE EAGLE:—

It is amusing that people become disturbed when threatened with the loss of voting privileges, yet they resent the three or four minutes required to complete and return their census forms. In Sheffield, the town census is taken annually. The town is small enough, the Board of Registrars conscientious enough, so that we make about 400 follow-up phone calls to our census non-responders.

They fail to realize that not only do they jeopardize their voting rights, they increase substantially the cost of conducting the census. These figures are vital to the calculation of our state aid, projections of population changes for towns and schools, and establishing voting districts.

They are also our sources for updating dog records. I get calls nearly every day from angry residents who have received dog licensing violations because the dog died some months ago, yet a reference to their census form (if indeed they returned it at all!) shows that *THEY* failed to remove the dog from their forms. We even included a special informational insert this year with the forms, and they still failed to make the necessary dog corrections for the computer.

Some think they are staging a silent protest to being counted, but it amounts to the proverbial cutting off of the nose to spite the face and affects all of us — right in the pocketbook.

NATALIE H. FUNK
Sheffield Town Clerk
Ashley Falls

Natalie Funk letter
to the editor,
Berkshire Eagle,
August 29, 1986

The annual census mostly is used to maintain the state's juror lists, and as the mass.gov site touts, "Massachusetts is the only state in the country to have a mandatory annual municipal census, and as a result, is widely believed to have the best, most complete, and most representative Master Juror List in the nation."

It also helps the state determine the need of veterans and seniors, maintain voter rolls and determine residency for in-state college students.

LOST TO FIRE!
Click here to read
about the burning
of the 1890 Census

Conducting the census was initially tasked to the US Marshals. The first nine censuses (1790-1870) presented challenges due to westward expansion, unprecedented immigration, and population growth. The US Marshal Service struggled to perform their regular duties and conduct the census, so, for the 1880 census, Congress established the Census Office and hired hundreds of specially-trained enumerators.

This was cumbersome and nuanced work. The 1890 instructions to enumerators had detailed examples of how to be as accurate as possible: "Call no man a 'factory hand' or a 'mill operative.' State the kind of a mill or factory. The better form of expression would be, 'works in cotton mill,' 'works in paper mill,' etc." The instructions were sometimes humorous: "Use the word huckster in all cases where it applies."

Until 1960, there was no self-enumeration, where the respondent fills out and mails in the questionnaire. Before then it was up to enumerators to visit each home. As we see in the 1890 instructions, "It will be found in the vast majority of cases that the persons called upon to give information will do so without objection or delay. No people in the world are so favorably disposed toward the work of the census as the people of the United States. With the high degree of popular intelligence here existing, the importance of

statistical information is very generally appreciated; and if the enumerator enters upon his work in a right spirit, he will generally meet with a favorable and even cordial response." By completing our forms early this census, we can reduce the number of home visits census workers must make.

Message from the President

Dear Society Friends,

As I write this letter from the Prez, I have one week remaining in my term as president of a fabulous group of folks and a beautiful complex of buildings and property. We wouldn't be able to maintain all of this without the help of our generous friends and members. I needn't remind anyone of the present situation on the planet. So far the society has been going forward as close to normal as possible. We have secured funds to keep our wonderful administrator Jen going with her usual hours of work. This has kept us in a position to keep our mission of historical preservation and education as good as ever. The Mark Dewey Research Center has been our heartbeat with world class service unrivaled by none!

One thing we miss dearly is the ability to have our Great Old Stone Store in operation. It is a source of society revenue that is sorely missed. On the upside is the fact that during this down time we were able to have the floors refinished at the store. Our board meetings are now done with "Zoom" and those have been working well. One of the best things of a society is the social aspect of people working together and we eagerly await for happy days to be here again, especially being able to have the store hopping again. Another sad note is losing the ability to present our monthly programs and exhibits. We will keep our chin up and in time this will come to pass.

I truly believe that we are weathering the storm very well and this could not have happened without the help of so many, in fact so many that if I mentioned each and every one with their deeds, it would take a small bible. I couldn't sign off by not reminding you all one more time that the best nation is DONATION!

Most sincerely, Your Prez and fat little buddy, Tony Carlotto

Special thanks our outgoing officers for their dedicated work over the years:

**Tony Carlotto, President
Tammy Blackwell, Vice President
Lois Levinsohn, Treasurer**



Though his time as president has come to a close, Tony will always be the SHS BBQ Pit Master.

Click [HERE](#) to watch the 2020 SHS Annual Meeting

Join us in welcoming the new Sheffield Historical Society board members

Paul O'Brien, President

Kathy Staropoli, Vice President

Barbara Carr, Board Member

Robert Brigham, Board Member

MEMORIAL DAY

This year's Memorial Day rememberances had to be different than in years past due to COVID-19, but the town government and community made sure that we found ways to honor the service members who are no longer with us. In addition to a Wave Parade, many in the community began the day in personal prayer or contemplation and at dusk place a light in their front yards to honor those soldiers we have lost.



[Click here to watch a short video of the 2020 Sheffield Memorial Day Wave Parade, filmed by Joanne Duval](#)



ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Life In Times COVID-19

Join us in chronicling the experiences of people in our community during these historic times. If you'd like to participate, the process is simple, all you need is a smartphone, tablet or computer that you can plug a microphone or phone headphones into. The interview generally takes 15-30 minutes. We'll be conducting these oral history interviews throughout the summer, so email or call us now if you'd like to set up a time, or wait and reply to future emails about the project.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2020

Graduation ceremonies for the class of 2020, both at Mt. Everett and around the world, have looked different than in years past due to COVID-19. Because Mt. Everett's graduation ceremony was limited to a few family members per graduate, the community could not come out as they would have to congratulate them. That's why it is even more important this year to honor the accomplishments of these recent grads. We at the SHS want to congratulate Angus Kerr, our dedicated intern for the past three years, who just graduated from Mt. Everett.

Angus started interning at the Mark Dewey Research Center in his sophomore year. He has helped us digitize archival material in the research center, including scanning hundreds of pages of handwritten Sheffield tax records from the late 1700's. The scanned tax records are available to anyone on the Mark Dewey Research center website. He also scanned all of the SHS newsletters from the 1990's to present, which I recommend perusing through to reminisce about the Society and some of the members who are no longer with us. His work assisting Jim Miller in labeling and organizing research files has made the MDRC efficient and able to respond quicker to genealogy requests. In addition to his steadfast work at the MDRC, including during summers, Angus has helped out at historical society special events over the years.



Angus Kerr, SHS
intern, Class of 2020

"Angus is a tireless worker who has dedicated himself to helping the society digitize our vast collection of tax records, without his assistance this important work would not have taken place as quickly as it has. Hats off to Angus for his work on the town's tax records from 1780-1793—they are online and ready for researchers to dive into, and good luck to Angus!"

—Paul O'Brien

Angus's academic accomplishments and extracurricular activities are just as impressive as his work at the Sheffield Historical Society. He has been on the honor roll throughout his time at Mt. Everett, played in the Golden Eagle marching band, served in school government, was a participant in the American Legion Boys State civics program, and regularly writes articles for the "New Marlborough 5 Village News." We are honored to have awarded him the 2020 Sheffield Historical Society Scholarship and wish him the best as he goes on to attend the University of Amsterdam's prestigious Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics College.

[Click here view the 1700's Sheffield Tax Records on the Mark Dewey Research Center website](#)

Virtual Tour

Virtual tours of the Dan Raymond House are in the works for early July.

Dan Raymond built his brick home in the mid-1770s and it was purchased by the Sheffield Historical Society two centuries later in 1977. It became the society's headquarters and house museum in the early 1980s, with rooms furnished to reflect its history. Over the past 40 years docents have told of the building's lineage and guided visitors through furnished rooms without the benefit of any written labels. The story behind the house, and the furniture and objects it holds, deserved to be told. Kathy and Tom Tetro stepped up to tackle this daunting project and the resulting labels not only tell the history of the objects and the building, but also put them in context of life today. What do Ikea, Martha Stewart, and "helicopter moms" have to do with antique furniture? Reading the labels you quickly find out how history resonates with today through objects such as these.



During 2019, guided, encouraged and tutored by Jim Miller, the Mark Dewey Research Center's historian, Kathy began researching the Dan Raymond house and the people who have lived in it over the years. While she set out to create uniform labels indicating what the object is, when it was made, style, and what materials it is made of, her research unearthed so many interesting things that longer labels were called for. Kathy set about writing, heading back the MDRC for more research when one clue led to another, while Tom handled designing the labels and how to display them.



Each room and most of the objects and furniture in them have a label explaining what they used for and what life was like for those who used them. The set of labels in the center hallway tell the life-narratives of Dan Raymond and the home's 16 subsequent owners. If you attended our 2019 holiday party you may have seen some of the labels, though several have been added since then. Originally, we planned to expand our hours to welcome the public to tour the Dan Raymond House this spring and summer.

Unfortunately, those plans are on hold for now, so in the meantime we will be presenting a series of virtual tours. Keep an eye out for emails announcing them, as well as other virtual tours we will be presenting, including of our antique lighting exhibit and the new domestic arts permanent exhibit in the Dan Raymond House borning room.

From Our Collection...

Williams Perfect Sweaterblock

Looking through our collection for items that seemed like they had a story behind them, this contraption jumped out at me. The directions found on its label revealed what it was and how it's used, "After the knitted garment has been carefully washed, absorb the excess moisture by rolling in a Turkish towel. Raise the arms of the sweaterblock to a vertical position and slip sweater on. Lower the arms and keep them outstretched sideways while drying. Any chest-line may be acquired by stuffing towels between the garment and the block."



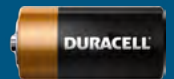
So who was this inventor named Williams? A search brought me to the 1939 patent for the contraption, filed by Rachel Williams of New Rochelle, NY. Interesting. A female inventor during the Great Depression. A little more digging unearthed a second patent from 1944 for a pin cushion that looked like a straw hat, with the innovation being that it was made of balsa wood so that pins would not be lost inside as they often were in stuffed pin cushions.

Not much is known of Rachel Williams. She was born in Lowell, MA in 1908. From the census and town directories we know she was living with her husband Fred Williams, Jr. and son Fred, III in New Rochelle from at least 1934 to 1955. In the 1940 census her occupation is listed as "business owner of wooden novelties." The town directory lists her as owner of the Sweaterblock Company until the 1950's.

In historical research, often in order to find out about a woman, you need to look into her husband. Fred Williams, Jr. started his electrical engineering career working under his father, who was vice-president of the P.R. Mallory Co.. In 1925 inventor Samuel Ruben paired up with the company. He would run the research and development end and P.R. Mallory would manufacture and market his inventions. Need for a smaller and more dependable battery during WWII led Ruben to invent the AAA and button batteries. In 1964 the company renamed itself Duracell and went on to mass-produce Ruben's batteries.

Fred was one of two original employees at the Ruben Lab and was listed on several of its patents. While he was working on inventions at the lab, Rachel was at home working on her own inventions and building a business, all while taking care of a baby. Undoubtedly, with a spouse working in the battery industry, Rachel would have known that patenting her inventions was wise and prudent. Though the Sweaterblock is not as ubiquitous as the Duracell battery, examples of them abound on antiques websites, so she must have had some success in business.

[Click here to read about the invention of the Duracell battery](#)



*The
Sheffield
Historical Society*



Dan Raymond House

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Tuesday 10:00 am-4:00 pm

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Old Stone Store

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Weekends 11:00 am-4:00 pm

413-229-2287

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

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