

Mill Pond

Known originally as Hubbard's Mill Pond, the Sheffield Mill Pond, is referred to by many as "Gilligan's Pond." It is labeled "Paper Mill Pond" on an 1858 map and is almost certainly the oldest mill site in Berkshire County. It dates from before 1735 when, on October 25th of that year, the town's proprietors determined that "the saw & grist mill shall be kept in proper order for use...." The pond's watershed is 26.1 square miles, beginning at 2,300 feet above sea level in neighboring Mt. Washington and its surface is 666 feet above sea level. Hubbard Brook, the water source, is most visible to the public as Smiley's Pond in South Egremont, where the outflow is known as Karner Brook. Over time its waters powered a range of mills including grist, lumber and planing, flour, plaster and paper in addition to aiding in the manufacture of vinegar, cider brandy and rye whiskey.



1858 map of Berkshire County showing Mill Pond



Modern topographical map

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| LATITUDE | 42.120369 |
| LONGITUDE | 73.362617 |

The site's darkest hour was 1796 when "pond fever" suddenly struck down as many as 60 residents living within a mile and a quarter of its shoreline. Early that summer the water was raised 18 inches, flooding vegetation along the shore. It was an unusually hot year, accompanied by frequent heavy rains, and the water level wildly fluctuated as it fed the mills. The result was the creation of a *miasma*, infested debris along the shore, which is thought to have caused the mysterious fever. One family alone lost five members from July through September and a walk today through the nearby Plain Cemetery demonstrates the extent of death that year. No other part of town was similarly affected.

Much later, in 1905 a flood washed the earthen dam away marking a hiatus for the Mill Pond that endured until 1938. On September 21st of that year, at 4:00 in the afternoon, the Great New England Hurricane, with winds of 186 miles per hour, accompanied by seven inches of rain, caused the Hubbard Brook to overflow its banks and flood the swampy basin of the ancient pond.



Spillway at Mill Pond

The storm was one of the most powerful and destructive hurricanes in recorded history, killing 682 people including 99 by drowning. Water was flowing in the nearby Housatonic River at 11,520 cubic feet per second, a record up to that time.

Serendipitously, it was then that William Gilligan, a local builder, saw the flooded basin and visualized the possibility of a renewed pond. Working with Matt Gilligan, his brother and business partner, they bought of the owner, James Carson, the flooded swamp, water rights and all the land he owned surrounding the once and future lake. The

following spring they arranged with contractor Rudolph Peter "Pete" Straleau to build a new dam of concrete. That structure still guards the outlet to the brook which eventually finds its way to the Housatonic River near Maple Avenue.

A comparison of the two accompanying photos shows the landscape before and after the 1905 dam loss. Both were taken from the same venue, Bears Den, an outcropping high above the area which was at that time a popular tourist destination.

According to observations by the Gilligans, if drained the pond would expose a meandering channel two miles long in the single mile of flooded lowland. It would be 17 feet wide and five feet deep.



Looking down at Mill Pond from Bear's Den, before 1905 flood.



Same view, after 1905 flood.

At a 1956 total draw down it took seven days for the water to drain into the original channel and 10 days to refill to the spillway at the dam which delivers about 500 gallons a minute to a renewed Hubbard Brook below. The last complete draw down was in 2001 for dam maintenance.

-James R. Miller

Message from the President

Greetings Dear Friends & Members of the most respected historical society in the Berkshires. Your FLB here to enlighten you on some goings on at the complex. The kitchen project at the Dan Raymond House is moving forward full steam ahead and I want to remind you it is happening mostly in part from proceeds of the tag sale a few years back. Rene, Lois and an army of volunteers worked very hard to raise \$12,000 to make it happen. The renovation will include a new sink, dishwasher (electric-not manual) counters, floor, and cabinets.

As most of you know Paul and Al put in many hours in creating a most amazing tool museum that needs to be showcased to all interested parties. The Stone Store had a fabulous holiday season and I can't thank ALL of the MANY volunteers enough who made that happen. The Mark Dewey Research Center is a world class stop for anyone wanting to know what area of the universe they came from. Each of these could use some extra help, so consider coming aboard and being part of the team and as they say elsewhere; BE ALL YOU CAN BE. We sure would love to get a regular group to man the tool museum in the warmer months.



The aforementioned dwellings are why I used the word "COMPLEX" in the beginning of this letter. Many drive by and don't have a clue what sits smack dab in the middle of town. We also have a law office, education building & a fabulous smoke house. I am so proud to be involved with the society and ALL who are part of it. It takes all of us and more to keep the ship upright and moving forward.

Currently we are hosting an exhibit of "EXPO" projects from Mt. Everett Middle School. At the end of March on the 30th and 31st the Mt. Everett Culinary Program will once again hold a bake sale at the Old Stone Store. Through their generosity we were presented with a check for \$800 last year to go towards our scholarship fund. Along with over \$2000 raised by our golf tournament, we will be able to award three \$500 scholarships this year. One more good deed of note is our living history day with the 5th grade. If any of you have a talent or historical specialty you might like to share we would love to hear from you. Also don't forget our monthly programs at Dewey Hall. Joyce Hawkins our program chair works hard to provide a wide variety of very interesting topics. You will never be disappointed.

With that in mind I would like to remind any member that we need and want your help in any capacity, large or small. It is not like indentured work. Just do as much as you like. If it's a hot day and you don't feel like being flogged at the mast, it's OK. Volunteering is so appreciated and I realize everybody has something else they would really like to be doing. We are planning a signature fund raiser for the year and other smaller ones to keep us operating without a great deal of sweat. I don't like to put the touch on you every year, but that is what we need as does ANY organization. Call or contact us with anything you might like to participate in. At this point a grand historical BBQ is in the works, even bigger than the dry run last year. Saturday August 25th is the tentative date. Come see us in action and we will show you how to have fun with history, because we are making it every day!

No letter from me would be complete without reminding you what the best nation after the USA is: DONATION!! So if you have a few extra bucks not earmarked for anything better, consider keeping the history of our town and area alive for all those ahead.

Most Sincerely, Your Most Humble Servant AND FLB (fat little buddy) Tony Carlotto, the Prez.

PS: If you know of anybody who wants to join and is short on funds or skeptical of spending money hanging around with history nuts I will personally sponsor them. There is no risk except the fact that they will be hanging around with a bunch of truly nice folks. I hang around at tcolonial@aol.com and also run the complaint department. Contact me any time or hit me up when you see me at the post office or chicken wing bar. Or contact Jen at sheffieldhistoricalsociety@gmail.com and 229-2694. She is a most wonderful administrator!

upcoming events & exhibits

Mount Everett Middle School

EXPO

For three weekends in February (2/17-3/4 from 11am-4pm), the Mount Everett Middle School EXPO projects will be on display at the Old Stone Store. EXPO projects are the results of months of research and preparation, and is the largest project done by students during the year, letting them delve deeper into topics they are learning in class. Eighth grade students select a science project, study the topic by observation or experimentation, then create a display on the results of their research. Seventh grade students choose from a topic in ancient history and build a model that brings to life elements of ancient culture.



Students are challenged to create displays from common household items or simple craft materials, making them all the more imaginative and creative. Students are also asked to write a lab report and research paper that explains their work. At the exhibit reception on February 24 from 4-5 pm, the students have a chance to present their displays and answer questions. Come see these remarkable displays!

Sheffield Historical Society
**MOUNT EVERETT
 MIDDLE SCHOOL
 EXPO**

Projects on Display at the
 Old Stone Store
 137 Main St.

3 weekends!
 February 17
 thru
 March 4
11am-4pm
 Exhibit reception
 Saturday, Feb. 24
 4pm-5pm

Free and open to
 the public.

www.sheffieldhistory.org • sheffieldhistoricalsociety@gmail.com • 413-228-2884

March 9

Canoe Building with
 Hilary Russell
 7:30 pm
 Dewey Hall

March 30 & 31

Mt. Everett Culinary
 Bake Sale
 9am-12pm
 Old Stone Store

March 17 - May 13

“Hats!” Exhibit
 Weekends 11am-4pm
 Old Stone Store

Recent Programs & Exhibits

Making American Currency

February 9, 2018



The very first American paper money, made by Paul Revere, was printed on paper produced by Stephen Crane in 1770. That money financed the American Revolution. Since then, the Crane Company has been supplying the United States government with durable cotton paper on which its currency is printed from its Dalton, MA factory. We were happy to welcome Doug Crane to Dewey Hall on Friday, February 9th to talk about the history of his family's business. Doug Crane served as vice president of the company for 30 years, retiring in 2013.



The 1862 "Legal Tender Act" authorized the printing of the first official US paper currency, "greenbacks," to fund the Civil War and pay soldiers.



A big part of the company's longevity as the sole paper supplier to the US treasury is its embrace of security technology. In 1844 it began with embedding silk threads into banknote paper, and over the years they have developed advanced security threads, watermarks, and most recently a micro-optic lens array that lets you see a hidden image when the bill is tilted.

Inside the Crane paper factory, early 20th C. The cotton used in the paper comes from rags and remnants from the clothing industry. The company still uses recycled cotton.

see a hidden image when the bill is tilted.

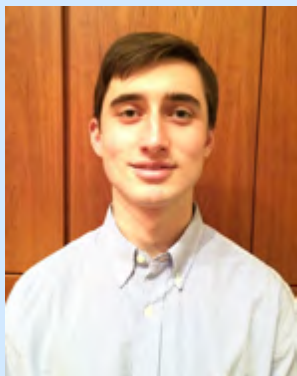
What's It?

January 12, 2018

The return of our "What's It?" night drew an enthusiastic crowd. Attendees competed to see who could identify the most antique items, all of which were very unusual and obscure. Some of those attendees brought their own items, hoping to stump the audience. An accompanying exhibit gave visitors the chance to guess what some of the society's other unusual antiques are.



Interning at the Mark Dewey Research Center



Ellis Waldman

During the second half of my senior year of high school, the winter and spring of 2017, I had the opportunity to intern at the Mark Dewey Research Center. I knew that interning off campus would allow me to gain valuable real-world skills so I took advantage of the opportunity and got the proper paperwork in order to make the internship happen with the help of Paul O'Brien.

When I showed up at the MDRC the first day I was greeted by Jim Miller and K.C. Clow, two excellent gentlemen who welcomed me into the building and explained my objectives for the next few months. The experience was broken up into three distinct "projects": research my own family tree with the help of Ancestry.com, create a short presentation on old tax records, and do some minor work updating the MDRC website (markdeweyresearchcenter.weebly.com).

Through these projects I learned that one of my great grandfathers fought in the Spanish American War, while another side of my family had deep roots in medieval England.

The presentation on tax records, currently available on the [website](#), analyzed some of Sheffield's earliest tax records and focused on information that can be gained from looking at historic documents. The finances of everyone's favorite historic resident of Sheffield, Col. John Ashley, were analyzed and then cross referenced. To confirm the data, I went to the Registry of Deeds in Great Barrington and found the deed to the first property that Col. Ashley bought in Berkshire County. Updating the website also turned out to be interesting because I had to learn the website platform's format.

Overall, looking back on the experience from almost half a year past, it was one of the most unique and interesting things that I added to my high school experience. It was a fun, educational, interesting experience that definitely prepared me for continuing my education here at Union College and will be something that I will remember for a very long time.

-Ellis Waldman
Mt. Everett Class of 2017
Union College Class of 2021
Mechanical Engineering

| Name | Assessed | Value | Rate | Total | |
|---------------------|----------|--------|--------|-------|-----|
| Col. Ashley | 1 | 322:10 | 119:14 | 23 | 212 |
| Whitley Jr | 1 | 159:0 | 7:12 | | 233 |
| Austin Job | 1 | 029:8 | 044:9 | | 043 |
| Austin Nathan Capt. | 1 | 135:18 | 032:3 | | 169 |
| Austin Waly Jr | 1 | | | | |
| Austin John | 1 | 010:16 | 006:15 | | 015 |
| Austin Anthony Jr | 1 | 027:18 | 007:16 | 10 | 045 |
| Austin Gad | 1/2 | 028:10 | 004:1 | | 039 |
| Austin Anthony Jr | 2 | 075:12 | 025:13 | | 101 |
| Austin Augustin | 1 | | | | |
| Austin Elijah | 1 | 002:8 | | | 002 |
| Adams James | | 010:16 | | | 010 |
| Allen Elizabeth | 1 | | | | |
| Austin Sam Jr | 1 | 025:16 | 009:7 | | 036 |
| Austin Sam Jr | 1 | | 04:15 | | 004 |
| Austin Sam Jr | 1 | 011:8 | 010:0 | | 027 |

1762 Assessors list showing Col. John Ashley's property
[Click here to see Ellis' project on the MDRC website](#)

Do you know a student who'd like to intern here at the Society? We welcome anyone from high school age onwards. Email Jen Owens for more information: sheffieldhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

From Our Collection...

Beaver Top Hat

This beaver felt top hat and hat box date from the early 19th C. Beaver hats have been popular since the 16th C. With beavers hunted to near-extinction in Europe, colonial North Americans seized upon the opportunity and an economically crucial beaver pelt industry grew. This new supply harkened a resurgence of popularity of the beaver hat in the 18th & early 19th centuries in Europe and America. Yet, soon Americans had also decimated their beaver populations. Silk replaced beaver felt as the material of choice for top hats from the 1840's until today.

"Hats!" an exhibit of our collection of hats, hatters' tools, and photos will be on display in the Old Stone Store, from March 17 through May 13th.

To make felt, the beaver's underhairs were shaved, and the loose short hairs were then mixed with a hatter's bow. The resulting matted fabric was beaten and boiled repeatedly. The felt was then placed over a hat mold and pressed and steamed into shape. The hat maker then brushed the outside surface to a sheen.



Felt came in various grades: those made exclusively from beaver were designated *castor*; those made from a mixture of beaver and other fur was referred to as *demi-castor*, and those made from rabbit or camel hair were known as *dauphin*. Felt source and quality along with hat style were markers of one's class—or aspirations to a certain class. Work hats and common hats were made from plain wool felt.

A process called "carroting" allowed hatters to pass off cheaper grades and types of fur. Before furs could be felted, the keratin which coats each hair has to be broken down. To do this a hatter would soak it in a solution of salts of mercury and nitric acid. This solution was orange in color, hence the term "carrot."

Abraham Lincoln made the stovepipe hat popular in the 1850's & 60's. The



stovepipe is taller and wider than a top hat. He would store documents in the hat as he traveled. Lincoln's hats were made of silk, not beaver. At 6'4", when wearing a stovepipe hat, he would tower over most people.

A hatter regularly inhaling mercury fumes would develop tremors called "hatters' shakes," affecting the eyes, limbs and speech. In advanced stages, hallucinations and other psychotic symptoms developed—resulting in the phrase, "mad as a hatter." While fashion had caused this malady, changes in fashion would make the process of "carroting" obsolete by the Civil War. The silk top hat virtually put the beaver pelt industry out of business by then. It is rare to find a top hat made of beaver that was made after the 1860's. In the

Click here to see how beaver felt cowboy hats are made.

late 20th C. beaver hats regained some popularity, especially in cowboy hats, though hat wearing in general in America dropped drastically after the 1940's.

*The
Sheffield
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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

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