

Senior Pranks

As you may have discovered driving by the Old Stone Store recently, our current exhibit is on the Red Lion Inn's April Fool's Day banners, as well as on the general history of the holiday. Yet April 1st is not the only time of year known for pranks. Rivaling April Fool's is the end of the school year when High School Seniors try to make it into the annals of school lore with an impish last hurrah right before graduation. Perhaps you remember one of those pranks from when you or your kids were in school. Perhaps you were even a prankster yourself.



Hoffman's meteorite outside the Home-Ec room--1983

From the SBRSD article by Ed Davis on Hoffman's Meteorite

lay on the Mt. Everett Regional School lawn, a few yards from the main entrance. That is until a few members of the class of '67 made it disappear one night. Assistant principal James Shiminski knew the pranksters could not have gotten very far with it, due to its considerable weight. He figured they must have buried it somewhere close by on school grounds. So, after a school committee meeting the following evening, he and Principal Albert Trocchi poked and dug around the lawn until they found the missing meteorite.

At an assembly the next morning they had the likely culprits, the senior boys, line up on the gym floor in full view of the whole school in the bleachers. When the meteorite was rolled out on a dolly in front of them, Principal Trocchi triumphantly declared, "We just wanted the senior class to know that they cannot outsmart the administration."

Mt. Everett seniors have pulled their fair share of pranks over the years. Looking into the topic, I came upon an article by Ed Davis on the Southern Berkshire Regional School District website. I will link to the full article at the end, which I urge you to read, as this telling hardly does it justice. The article tells the tale of the very first senior prank in 1967, Hoffman's Meteorite, as well as subsequent senior pranks from the 60s-80s that it inspired.

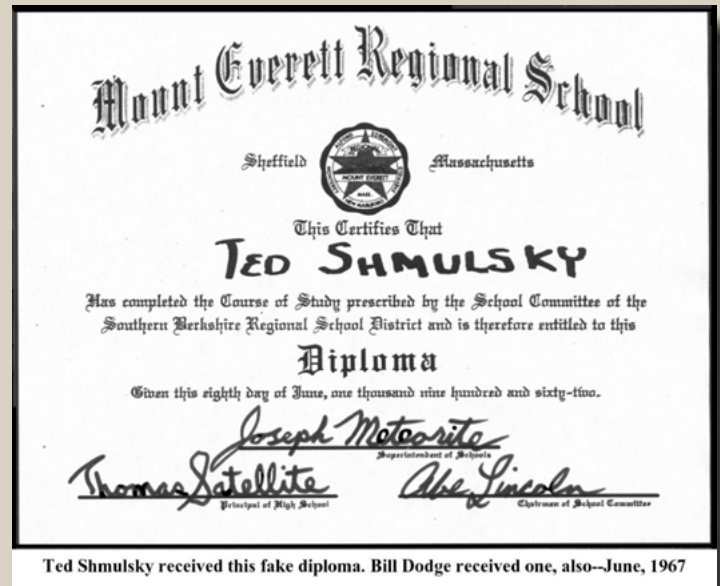
In 1955 Henry Hoffman donated a meteorite to the school. For eleven years the 300 lb space rock

Of course, all denied any involvement at the assembly. By graduation, presumably the administration had a better idea of ‘whodunnit.’ The principal and assistant principal had phony diplomas made up for Bill Dodge and Ted Shmulsky, signed in marker by Joseph Meteorite, Thomas Satellite and Abe Lincoln.

After the ceremony the young graduates confronted Principal Trocchi asking where their real diplomas were. “Buried in there somewhere,” he replied pointing at the school. The diplomas were actually stuck behind the fake ones. As Davis writes, “In the Old Testament, there is an eye for an eye principle. At Mount Everett there was a prank for a prank principle.”

In the 1980s Ted Shmulsky purportedly gave an account of the prank in the school newsletter. He fingered Bill Dodge, who, in response, put the blame back on him. In 2014

Dodge elaborated more on the details behind the prank. Apparently the administration did have the pranksters’ identities right. It *was* the two of them who did the deed. Despite each of them at one point recounting the tale, both pranksters always denied any involvement in it!



Ted Shmulsky received this fake diploma. Bill Dodge received one, also--June, 1967

**Click [HERE](#)
to read
Ed Davis' article**

In 1977 senior pranksters parked a motorcycle on top of the school chimney. At graduation, keynote speaker James Shiminski quipped, “I’m delighted to see that Evil Knievel made it here. The only thing is, there’s a two-hour parking limit in that chimney and the chief just tagged it.”

In 1979 Seniors snuck into the school one night and moved enough desks from classrooms to fill the library from floor to ceiling. On a chalkboard was written: “Disruptive, not destructive.” As Ed Davis writes, “In fact it was disruptive for custodians...A prank that is never seen except by custodians is mostly a disappointing, wasted prank.”

Message from the President

Dear Friends,

No newsletter would be complete without a message from the Prez. Unfortunately there is no place for my usual bit of humor. As you are already aware, we had to postpone a few things and will continue to monitor the dire situation our planet is facing. It will be remembered for centuries like global pandemics of past times. With all the technology of our times we seem no better off than those who faced plagues, yellow fever, influenza and the like. All I can say is to please heed all warnings and information AND continue to love and help each other.

Most Sincerely,
Tony Carlotto

History tells us that we've weathered epidemics before by supporting one another, developing new remedies, and heeding medical advice. We hope that the perspective if history gives you some solace in these difficult times.

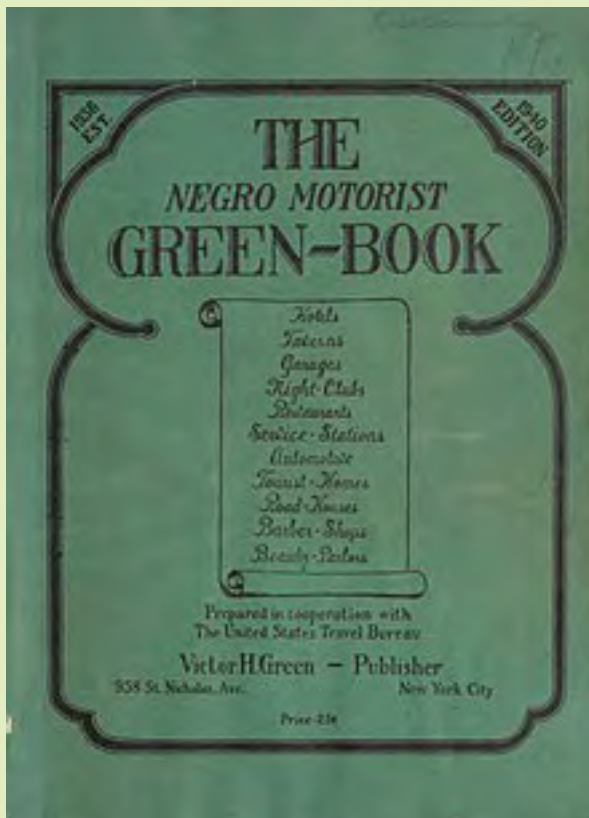
Click [HERE](#) to read a 1932 oration from the Massachusetts Medical Society on how the people of this state dealt with smallpox from the very founding of the colony. Massachusetts led the way in America in the practice of quarantine, inoculation and vaccination during the 18th & 19th centuries.

Click [HERE](#) to read a 1991 article, "The Spanish Influenza of 1918 and Berkshire County" from Westfield State University

Click [HERE](#) to read Carole Owens' recent article in the *Berkshire Edge* on epidemics in the Berkshires.

THE GREEN BOOK

The GREEN BOOK was a travel and vacation guide serving the nation's Black community from the middle 1930's to the late 1960's. It was an aid for navigating the roadways in the emerging automotive era in a segregated society. Updated annually, it listed overnight accommodations, restaurants and various services, alphabetically by state and city. It had a circulation of nearly two million before publication ceased. Its connection to Sheffield? More about that later.



1940 edition of *The Green Book*

The GREEN BOOK was named for Victor Hugo Green (1892-1960) a U.S. Postal worker who, without a high school education and while keeping his job, edited and published the BOOK. At a time of “WHITE ONLY” Coca Cola machines, and a country filled with “SUNDOWN TOWNS” which Blacks had to vacate by nightfall, it was a necessary traveling tool.

The BOOK was recently the subject of a movie based on a true story of piano virtuoso Don Shirley in the South in the 1960's starring Mahershala Ali and more recently a history by Candacy Taylor, appropriately titled *Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America*.

Sheffield's connection to the GREEN BOOK? It was William and Hattie Bailey, a couple from Norfolk, CT with Sheffield family connections. They purchased a farm with cabins on Berkshire School Road and offered accommodations to traveling Blacks. The operation, which eventually included a house on Salisbury Road, provided lodging and fresh farm goods. The couple apparently had no children but raised a nephew, Andrew Nicholas

Bailey, Jr, (1923-1985) who lived in Sheffield most of his life. Andrew served in WW II in New Guinea and the Philippines, receiving the Victory Medal and the Bronze Star.

He died from disease contracted during the war, leaving his wife, Eloise Barbara Lovella Dare and three sons, Thomas, Ronald and Peter from a previous marriage. Relatives are still in Sheffield, in the families Croslear, Darling, Davis, Freeman, Hickey, Jackson, Johnson and related families.

— James R. Miller

***The Green Book* was not just for travel in the South, [CLICK HERE](#) to learn more about its use in New England**

**New England
Historical Society**

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UPDATES

The Old Stone Store will be closed until April 4. That closure might be extended.



The Mt. Everett Culinary Easter Bake Sale at the Old Stone Store has been canceled. We hope to hold a Mother's Day Bake Sale, though that depends on if the school closing is extended.



We postponed our March program on lime kilns. We plan to reschedule that talk by Mike King to early summer and will keep you posted. There is a chance that we will also postpone our April program by Lynn & Elisabeth Wood on how property records of homes reveal the stories of the people who lived in them.

Virtual Exhibit Fooled You! An Exhibit of Red Lion Inn April Fool's Banners

The Berkshire's own Red Lion Inn has been embracing April Fool's Day for the past 15 years by hanging prank banners across its front facade. Only a select few know ahead of time what the banner will say, a secret kept until the banners are hung at the wee hours of April 1st each year. Our current exhibit is on those banners, so don't be alarmed if you see them hanging on the Old Stone Store.



Due to public health advisories the Old Stone Store is closed until April 5 (and possibly longer). You can view this exhibit online.

[CLICK HERE](#) for our VIRTUAL EXHIBIT Page

From Our Collection...

Parlor Stove

During the Victorian era and into the early 1900's, no parlor would be fashionable without an ornate parlor stove such as this one. These stoves were created during the golden age of cast iron, and their elaborate decorative design was meant to evoke luxury. Parlor stoves were smaller than and used in conjunction with a typical kitchen cast iron heating stove. They gave extra comfort during a game of cards, a sing-along, or other Victorian amusements.

This parlor stove will be a centerpiece of our new permanent kitchen and domestic arts exhibit in the Dan Raymond House. The Barnum Tool Museum in the barn also will be updated with signage and a self-guided tour by this summer.

Embossed on the stove are the words "Manhattan No. 105." In 1905 the Manhattan Stove Company of New York City purchased Edward Munsell's parlor stove company. His business was failing, and this sell-off of the stove production arm of his company was meant to infuse money into the other part of it that produced and sold mica. Mica was used as the "glass" of the stove windows used to look in at the fire, a feature common in the decorative parlor stoves he produced.



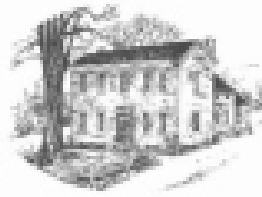
[Click here to view Munsell's letter to the Edison Machine Works](#)

[Click here learn more about the early cast iron stove industry in NYC](#)

His 1889 letter to the Edison Machine Works reveals a possible reason why his business was faltering. He beseeched the influential company to lobby their senators to oppose a bill on mica tariffs. Munsell feared that the tariffs would give the domestic mica miners who supplied his company "the power to get any price they pleased." Mica was hard to come by at the time, and the expansion of its use in electric insulators made it even more valuable and scarce.

Within two years of selling the stove arm of his company, with one of his partners recently deceased, and the other quite ill, the pressure of running the company got to be too much. In the early hours of April 26, 1908 Munsell jumped to his death from his residence in the Hotel Van Dyke on 72nd St. in Manhattan. He was only 56 years old. The article in the paper cited insomnia as the cause behind his suicide. His wife had been reading to him to help him sleep, and when she left the room to get him a glass of milk as he asked of her, he ended his life. When I began researching our parlor stove, I never expected such a tragic story behind it.

*The
Sheffield
Historical Society*



Dan Raymond House

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Office Hours

Tuesday 10:00 am-4:00 pm

Friday 10:00 am-4:00 pm

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Old Stone Store

On the Green in Sheffield

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