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Peacham Historical Association

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A History of the Collections of the Peacham Historical Association

By Josette Anne Lyders

Introduction

Collecting anything seems to be a part of human nature, and it reflects the diverse aspects of our work and our lives. Collecting information and materials about the life of an entire town is a daunting task, but two women who loved Peacham dedicated themselves to doing this, one in the 19th century and the other in the early 20th century. As far as we know, between the town's settlement in 1776 and the year 1941, they were the only two individuals who made any systematic attempt at collecting a variety of historical information, genealogical records, and manuscripts related to the whole town of Peacham. Jane E. Cowles was born in Peacham in 1841 and lived in the town for many years. Jennie Chamberlain Watts, her cousin, was born in Barnet in 1869; she was a Radcliffe graduate with a master's degree, and her interest was in historical research and scholarship. Both women set about collecting Peacham town information with the intent to write a town history. By 1921, the residents of Peacham were eager to read the story of their past (Bogart 1948, 457-459; Rugg, Clement, and Eddy 1948, 475).

Peacham Historical Association Makes a Beginning

The Peacham Historical Association (PHA) approved a constitution and bylaws in 1921, five years after a group of twenty-two residents had gathered at Dr. Albert J. MacKay's home to set up such an organization, for the primary purpose of getting a town history written. The association needed and wanted the collections of Cowles and Watts in order to accomplish this, but PHA meeting minutes throughout 1921 show that there were impediments.

Jane Cowles died in 1916, and her relatives balked at turning over her collected papers to the town, for fear they would languish unused. Her work came into the possession of Jennie Watts for safekeeping and potential use in her own research on Peacham. Jennie Watts dedicated some twenty years of her life to collecting and to research in town and county records and other sources but she died in 1941 before she could write a history. Knowing she would not be able to write it, she left a bequest of \$10,000 plus all her research materials to the Vermont Historical Society (VHS), believing that organization could arrange to use her collected materials and engage a suitable historian to write the story of Peacham (Bogart 1948, 459-460; Rugg, Clement, and Eddy 1948, 475). The Peacham Historical Association itself had languished for twenty years between 1921 and 1941 because its own efforts at getting a history written had fallen apart. With the news from VHS in 1941 about the bequest and the collection of Peacham materials, there was renewed interest (Bogart 1948, 460).

Getting Peacham's Story Written

In 1942, PHA made plans with VHS to write a town history. Historian Ernest L. Bogart, a long-time Peacham summer resident, was engaged and the project was begun. Dr. Bogart's contract with VHS was to complete the writing within two years. When this proved impossible, he volunteered the remainder of the time, finishing a manuscript for publication in about three years. War time paper shortages and then illness of the author delayed the publication date until 1948. But at last, Peacham residents could read [Peacham: The Story of a Vermont Hill Town](#). It should be noted that another VHS book, [The People of Peacham](#), developed also from the research and collected genealogical materials of Jennie Watts, was finally published in 1965. Elsie Choate, a prominent Peacham resident, had offered in 1941 to work on the genealogy materials that came from Jennie Watts' research, to which Elsie herself and other townspeople added significantly (Watts and Choate 1965, v.). The cut-off date for inclusion of people was 1945, and the 20-years that elapsed before publication leave unanswered questions and a wish for updates and corrections in a future genealogy for Peacham.

PHA Makes a Fresh Start

In the years surrounding the writing and publication of Peacham's history, PHA's activity began to flourish. Annual meetings had interesting programs. The PHA meeting minutes show numerous donations, including family papers,

scrapbooks, account books, children's books, historic samplers, china and pewter ware, town maps, and other items (Bonfield 2008). Sadly, many of the gifts before 1959 were lost, because PHA had no building in town then and had been storing these materials at the Peacham Library. The library burned to the ground on January 28, 1959, as recorded in the Peacham Library Trustees= meeting minutes of January 30, 1959.

Ironically, in the summer of 1958, PHA had been given a building-an 1820 school house-by Dr. and Mrs. Lewis S. Pilcher, M.D. It was given as a memorial to Dr. Ernest L. Bogart, Mrs. Pilcher's father, who had spent several summers there writing Peacham's history (Birdsall, 1995). The old school house, however, needed considerable repair and was not ready for occupancy until the summer of 1959, too late to have had PHA historical items moved there from the library before the tragic library fire destroyed them. The PHA annual meeting on August 4, 1959 showcased the new "Peacham Historical House," and members were excited once again. Donations began to pour in, and attendance at annual meetings grew. PHA developed a physical and an action-filled presence in town.

Overview of PHA Holdings

There are three elements of the association's holdings that illuminate the scope and the accessibility of the PHA collections: (1) Historical Sites and Office Space; (2) the newsletter and the Web site; (3) books of Peacham history.

(1) Historical Sites and Office Space. From a parlor gathering of 22 in 1916 to the sophisticated organization of over 200 members in 2010, PHA has collected not only archives and artifacts but also properties.

a. (1924) Bayley Hazen road marker. Dedicated in 1924, the handsome stone marker is on the roadside near Elkins Tavern. Its 32-page illustrated booklet honoring the dedication celebration contains an essay by Waldo Glover, *A Peacham Pioneer*, revealing a perspective on Peacham history at the time. It shows that PHA was one of the marker's two original sponsors eager to reflect on important aspects of their town's past.

b. (1958) Peacham Historical House. Located part way up Church Street, this 1820 building was the second schoolhouse in Peacham Corner. It is now the PHA museum, open on summer Sunday afternoons, when, since 1997, it has also hosted exhibits of Peacham artists and others with connections to Peacham. One will find here three rooms of exhibits: the main room with changing displays of artifacts and items from the archives as well as changing art exhibits; the middle room featuring early Peacham store and post-office installations; and the industries room housing hundreds of artifacts of the farms and trades in Peacham's past.

c. (1981, 1990) The PHA Office and Vault (in the Old Town Office building). This is located in Peacham Corner across the main street from Peacham Library. From 1959 to 1981, the collections of PHA resided unorganized in less-than-favorable conditions, mainly at the Peacham Historical House, which was and is unused and unheated six months or more out of each year. Photos, manuscripts, and other documents were moved to the Old Town Office building for storage in 1981. In 1990, when the Town Clerk's office moved to its current quarters, the town vault downstairs in the Old Town Office as well as the room upstairs became available to PHA for more storage and office space.

d. (1997) Blacksmith Shop. PHA purchased the old 1820 brick building on Church Street December 31, 1997, for \$5,000 from the George Kempton family. Soon Peacham resident Dick Hovey began an amazing four-year restoration effort that caught the spirit and enthusiasm of the whole town, resulting in grand contributions of historical study, physical restoration work, major funding, and gifts of hundreds of blacksmith tools. A dedication ceremony was held on July 21, 2001.

e. (2008) Peacham Hollow School House. Located in East Peacham, this 1858 building was donated to PHA by the Thomas Del Prete family in June, 2008. A community effort culminating in a lucrative "yard sale" in September, 2009 generally made the building accessible for potential restoration and future use by PHA. An article by Anna Rubin on page 3 of The Peacham Patriot, vol.23 (Winter) 2008 gives fascinating details.

(2) Newsletter. The Peacham Patriot began in November, 1979, under PHA President Edmund A. Brown. Despite its irregular publication schedule, the Peacham newsletter is a most significant historical archive, amply revealing the collections and the work of PHA. Important in-depth articles stand side-by-side with news notes about PHA activities, acquisitions, and events. The Peacham Patriot has a mailing list of well over 200 people according to its current interim editor, Jutta Scott.

Web Site. Trustee Karin Van Orman established www.peachamhistorical.org in 2008, and in the spring of 2009, Terry Miller became PHA's new Web master. The site offers access to membership, historical information about the association, current information about officers and events, and presentation of plans and certain archival items. It holds great potential for expansion to inform viewers about PHA's collections.

(3) Books of Peacham History. PHA has published major works in addition to providing archival resources for others. It has done a paperback and a hardcover reprint of Bogart's Peacham: The Story of a Hill Town, as well as the currently available "printing on demand" version of the book. It published The Peacham Anthology, a 300-page collection of articles about Peacham's past compiled by Lynn Bonfield in 2003. Then, in 2007, Historic Homes of Peacham compiled and edited by Jutta Scott was published. This is a large volume of historic and current photographs along with descriptions of 100 houses in Peacham built before 1900. The book was honored by the Vermont Historical Society in 2008 with the "Award of Excellence" in the category of publications. There are other books written by PHA members, and although not published by PHA, each made use of PHA collections. Roxana's Children: The Biography of a Nineteenth Century Vermont Family, by Lynn Bonfield and Mary Morrison was published in 1995. Then, Peacham Academy: 1795-1971, by Lorna Quimby came out in 2005. A booklet, Peacham Library, 1810-2010: An Historical Chronology, by Josette Lyders, was published in 2010. PHA also maintains a cataloged collection of over a thousand books and booklets related to Peacham or in some way of importance to its history.

Development and Organization of the Collections

The archives and artifacts held by Peacham Historical Association are impressive for so small a town and for an all-volunteer organization. The PHA minutes note a formal effort to take charge of its collections in 1973, with the establishment of an acquisitions committee. Then, in 1979, under the leadership of PHA President Edmund A. Brown, efforts to store, describe, and make materials available for use and display gained a great impetus. He initiated two watershed programs. The first was the launching of The Peacham Patriot newsletter in November, 1979 to raise awareness of historical activity and collections. The second was the hiring of two professional archivists, Lynn Bonfield and Karen Lewis, to organize the substantial collection of documents, letters, family papers, photographs, maps, and ephemera that had been gathering since 1959 in the Peacham Historical House.

Lynn and Karen worked through the summers of 1980 and 1981 to sort, label, and file in special archival boxes the wealth of materials that had been suffering in less than satisfactory conditions in the Peacham Historical House and elsewhere. Fortunately for Peacham, Lynn and Karen found the town enjoyable and soon became summer residents. They also taught other residents how such organization and care of historical materials should be done. One of their interested learners was Lorna Quimby, who had just become Peacham Town Clerk in March of 1981. Lorna, born and raised in Peacham, was a natural for the town office work and all of its historical counterparts. Lorna, Lynn, and Karen have worked continually since then along with the help of many other dedicated Peacham residents, to move the town's historical efforts forward.

Under Lorna Quimby's direction as PHA president from 1994-2004 and then as archivist/curator for PHA, office accession records and formal files took shape. Lists of archival holdings were developed by Lynn Bonfield. In 2001, the daunting project of automating the cataloging of the entire collection began. Computer expert Diana Senturia worked with Lorna and the PHA board of trustees to obtain and install on the PHA computers PastPerfect, an historical database program used by many historical associations to record and describe each item in their collections. It has been a massive undertaking, patiently attended by Diana, Lorna, Kristen O'Hare, Jean Richardson, and currently Barbara Tillman, a faithful volunteer who works weekly with Lorna all year to enter the information into the database. Copies of the electronic database information are held at the office and in places off-site in case of an unthinkable disaster of loss.

Updates to the policies of the association have had an impact on the direction and control of the collections. In 1997, the PHA bylaws were revised and PHA became a tax-exempt organization (See the article in The Peacham Patriot, November 1997, p.8). In 2009, a five-year strategic plan was adopted, with a revision in August, 2010. Also in 2009, PHA was selected by the Museum Assessment Project of the American Association of Museums to study the PHA collections and work on policies (See the "President's Page," The Peacham Patriot, Winter, 2009, p.4). On July 27, 2010, PHA completed and adopted a 27-page Collections Management Policy. Every aspect of the work with the collections is described and includes changes in titles and detailed responsibilities for committees and staff. Implementing the new procedures will take time, especially considering that the huge amount of work awaits an all-volunteer, part-time staff.

A Glimpse of the Archives

Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons are the times Curator Lorna Quimby is available for the public to walk in to the office and request information from the archives. As mentioned earlier, the Old Town Office research room upstairs became storage for the PHA archives soon after the completion of the organizational work of Lynn Bonfield and Karen Lewis in 1981. Town Clerk Lorna Quimby then donated her Saturdays, and literally reconfigured and replastered the walls, painted

the room, and arranged for the wide-board floors to be sanded and polished (Brown, 1982). The old town vault, dating from the mid 20th century, had remained in the building when the Town Clerk's office moved to new quarters in 1990, and, according to the PHA meeting minutes of October, 1989, Lorna urged PHA to rent the vault for much more secure storage for the historical archives.

PHA has grown by leaps and bounds under Lorna's leadership. An article by Lynn Bonfield in The Peacham Patriot about the collections in 1991 noted a total of 62 archival boxes. Metal shelving in the vault today holds nearly 300 archival boxes containing photographs, manuscripts, letters, diaries, genealogical materials, and printed files (pamphlets, brochures, etc.). The contents have accumulated through the years, sometimes in groups upon the closing of an estate, such as the collection of three generations of family papers, letters, photographs, and records purchased by PHA from the Hooker estate in 1988, but more often they have come by donation. A few examples are the 1995 gift of Blanchard family letters found in a South Peacham home when the home was being renovated (Quimby and O'Hare 1999); the 2001 donation of a set of original papers relating to some of the earliest settlers and families of the Town of Peacham as recorded in the fall 2001 issue of The Peacham Patriot, p.7; and the 2009 gift of the Bickford/Kinerson papers-the records of five generations of the two families as described in the winter, 2009 issue of The Peacham Patriot, p.5-6. In addition, there are historical maps of town dating back to 1789. Page 10 of the October, 1989 issue of The Peacham Patriot presents a list of the maps, and the PHA Web site actually shows examples of historic maps. The huge archive of Peacham Academy (which closed in 1971), was given to PHA by the academy's alumni association in 2008.

Increasingly severe limitations of space as well as safety questions for archives, artifacts, office work, and access for the public are very real problems. The inconvenience to the public with regard to access is still far outweighed, however, by the helpfulness of the PHA curator and the welcoming at the Web site.

A Word About the Artifacts

Many historical tools and furnishings are kept in the industries room of the Peacham Historical House and in the blacksmith shop. There is an unusual collection of butter molds, prints, and tools, the work of John Hand Varnum, one of Peacham's outstanding tradesmen of the 20th century. Twenty-one of the items in this collection are listed in The Peacham Patriot of Summer, 2000, p.8-9. All of the PHA textiles collection as well as the association's paintings must be kept in the crowded but more "climate-controlled" PHA office area. Until a new place is found, many of the 47 paintings and over two dozen priceless historic quilts are there in specially-built shelving and boxes.

Projects That Have Made Extensive Use of The PHA Collections

Although fragile and irreplaceable historic items and documents must be stored away for safekeeping, they have been made abundantly useful over the past 30 years in PHA. A look at five major Peacham historical projects demonstrates the growth, extensiveness, and use of the collections.

(1) Peacham Historical House Exhibits. For each of the past sixteen summers, Lorna Quimby explored a theme and prepared an exhibit using the PHA archives and artifacts. Shown in the main room of the historical house, the displays have drawn visitors from near and far on summer Sunday afternoons and on Fall Foliage Day. Some examples have been "By Her Own Hand" (1995), "Medicine Show" (1998), "When Sheep Ruled Vermont" (2008), and "The Peacham Library Bicentennial" (2010). The level of detail in the exhibits, the scores of photographs, and the skill of the curator and her assistants show the breadth of the PHA collections.

(2) Ghost Walks. Since they began in 1997 under the direction of PHA member Deanne Alex, the Ghost Walks have intrigued visitors twice each season. Since 2001, PHA Vice President Dart Thalman has been coordinating the highly popular events in which talented residents impersonate the character of earlier Peacham residents who have passed on. They do this with the help of photos, letters, diaries, and other materials that Lorna brings out from the archives for them to study and use for further inquiry. The results have been fabulous performances interpreting over 100 "ghosts". The events have garnered three statewide honors. In summer, 1998, Vermont Life magazine published a 5-page article written by Nathaniel Tripp extolling the Peacham Ghost Walks. In 1999, the Ghost Walks were selected as one of Vermont's "Top Ten Summer Events" in the ninth annual Vermont Chamber of Commerce competition recognizing summer events (Quimby 1999). On January 5, 2001, the Ghost Walks were featured on WCAX-TV's "Across the Fence" program with a reprise of their "ghost" roles of summer 2000 by Harry Chandler and Jean Law (Grey 2000).

(3) Quilt and Textile Programs. PHA has in its collections a significant representation of textiles including jackets, hats, gowns, uniforms, and the biggest category, over two dozen historical quilts. Since 1998, there have been eight important

events devoted to quilts and textiles in Peacham. All events have been directly or indirectly involved with the PHA collections. Lynn Bonfield presented at the 1998 Peacham Library Annual Meeting "Quilting in a 19th Century Peacham Family." In 1999, at the PHA Annual Meeting, Celia Oliver, textile curator of Shelburne Museum, gave a presentation on the usefulness and decorativeness of quilts in the 19th Century. This was followed a few days later by two big events at the Peacham Congregational Church: "PHA Quilt Day," with sixty local area historical quilts on display, and "quiltsearch," a project to document 76 local quilts that would become part of a Vermont registry containing at the time, listings for over 5300 historical quilts (Bonfield 2000). As noted in the PHA minutes for the August 9, 2005 Annual Meeting, Lynne Z. Bassett, textiles consultant, and Lorna Quimby presented "The Hidden History of Costumes and Quilts." In May, 2006, a heartwarming, romantic exhibit: "A Bride Adorned For Her Husband," celebrated the history of wedding dress. Described in the event brochure, the fifty garments on display lighted up the Peacham Congregational Church sanctuary, and downstairs, a mock wedding reception went on all day! Then, in April, 2009, the biggest single quilt bonanza came to PHA in the form of a donation by Maxine Martin Long: 19 historic quilts from her family's collection. These were featured in a PHA exhibit of quilts on July 19, 2009 at the Congregational Church (Scott 2009).

(4) Blacksmith Shop Restoration. Between 1998 and 2001, the town of Peacham and interested businesses from out of town rose to the occasion and donated to PHA untold hours of labor, materials, tools and furnishings needed to bring Ashbel Goodenough's blacksmith shop back to full operation. A program of archaeological digs around the shop revealed more artifacts and clues as to the way things were done in 1820s smithery. As recorded in the PHA meeting minutes for August 16, 2000, Kristen O'Hare, PHA student assistant, cataloged nearly 300 artifacts for the blacksmith shop. According to restorer Dick Hovey, highlights among these artifacts are three wooden forges and the shop's huge original bellows (Hovey 2000). The PHA minutes for the August 18, 1999 meeting recorded that PHA received an award from the Vermont Museum Alliance "for outstanding development of the blacksmith shop." The dedication speech given by State Historian Paul Gillies (reprinted in The Peacham Patriot, Fall, 2001, p. 1-3), was a deeply moving masterpiece to make both Dick Hovey and all of Peacham proud of their historical awareness and reclamation. PHA arranges to bring the blacksmith shop to life in demonstrations by current Peacham blacksmith Joe Miller each year primarily on July 4 and on Fall Foliage Day.

(5) Peacham Historic District. In December 2003, the Peacham Corner Historic District became a reality and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. It took four years of in-depth study and description led by a team that included Deanne Alex, Mary Elizabeth Brown, Lynn Bonfield, Beatrice DeRocco Ring, Barbara Grey and Jutta Scott. Their study prospered with Lorna Quimby's help in the PHA archives. Fifty-seven buildings in the Corner needed historical and current photographs, dates, and architectural descriptions. Bound volumes recording the completed and successful project, The National Register of Historic Places for Peacham Corner District (2003), are now in the PHA archives and also at Peacham Library. As a result of this project, PHA also took part in a statewide effort: "The Landscape Change Program of the University of Vermont," whose mission is "to preserve and present images of Vermont landscapes as they were and as they are." Within its massive collection of photographs, the UVM program has 316 historical photos of Peacham, 121 of which were contributed by PHA. All the images are on The Internet Web site www.uvm.edu/landscape. (Scott 2004)

Conclusion

What can be found in the PHA collections could be the foundation for many more books and events on aspects of past life in Peacham. This author has been humbled not only by extensively studying the association's collections, but also by having personal conversations with those PHA leaders who devote so much effort to keeping the Peacham story alive.

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President's Page

Josette Lyder's article underscores the richness and scope of PHA's research collections, but she also puts into sharp focus the need to find larger, secure and environmentally more appropriate space for storing and protecting the remarkable and growing historical collections relating to Peacham's past.

At the present time, PHA stores its manuscript and archival collections in the Old Town Office. On the first floor, PHA uses the Old Town Vault to store its most valuable collections, including letters and diaries, personal papers, archives of town organizations, ephemera, historical photographs, prints, maps, broadsides, posters and other works on paper. PHA uses the entire area on the second floor for work space, storage of textiles, paintings, and other historical materials, and reference library.

The current collections facility is inadequate for several reasons:

- Severe overcrowding in the storage and work areas;
- Lack of space to accession, process, and use materials;
- Lack of climate control for collections, which require control of temperature and humidity for long-term preservation;
- Lack of seating space for even just one researcher;
- Difficulty in moving collections inside the building, between floors and spaces as well as exterior to interior;
- Inaccessibility for handicapped volunteers and users;
- Lack of fire protection and security systems; and
- In violation of access and fire codes.

Over the past several years, PHA's Board has explored a number of options to address the problems in its current research office. In January 2010, the Board established a new Research Facility Committees that I chair and that includes PHA Board member John Coffin, former Board member and active volunteer Diana Senturia, and two community members, Robert Fuehrer and Lynne Lawson. The charge to the Committee is to develop functional requirements for a new PHA collections facility and to evaluate potential options for moving the collections from the Old Town Office. The Committee built on the work of the Board and committees in town that have grappled with finding appropriate space and evaluated several options.

On October 4, 2010, the Committee recommended to the PHA Board the consideration of a phased strategy centered on the expanded use of, addition to, and eventual construction of a new structure on land adjacent to the Historical House. As currently envisioned, this stepwise approach would allow PHA to proceed in stages beginning with limited renovations of the backside, and potentially of the existing bathroom at the Historical House, followed by the building of a small "ell" off the rear of the building, and culminating in building a new barn-like, connected, facility with fireproof, secure space for storing collections. Recognizing that many issues relating to renovating part of the Historical House and building new space need to be explored, the Committee asked an architect with expertise in historic preservation to help in the initial feasibility study. The Committee has met with John Rahill from Black River Design, Architects, and he has agreed to assist in the initial assessment of obstacles and challenges. The PHA Board will consider his proposal about next steps at its December meeting.

PHA is dedicated to preserving and protecting Peacham's heritage for today and tomorrow, and its Board members recognize that this goal can only be achieved through providing secure space with stable environmental conditions for the collections and adequate working space to accommodate staff and researchers.

Carrie Ellen Thresher Memorial Gift Awarded to Sarah Fitzhugh

The Peacham Historical Association at its Annual Meeting on August 4, 2009 awarded the Carrie Ellen Thresher Memorial Gift to graduating senior Sarah Fitzhugh in recognition of her contributions to the Peacham community and in Carrie Ellen Thresher's memory. Established in 2002, this annual gift to a graduating senior encourages high school students to take an active role in our

town and is designed to further the students' education. Carrie Thresher was an important person in the Peacham community. She felt that it was essential to take an interest in and give back to our town. The annual gift recognizes her strong interest in community service.

Peacham in the Civil War

Next April will mark the 150th Anniversary of the start of the Civil War. As Ernest Bogart noted in his history of Peacham: "The outbreak of the Civil War deeply stirred the people of Peacham..." In recognition of the effect of the Civil War on Peacham, PHA is planning a series of programs and a new publication: *Peacham in the Civil War*. The publication will bring together letters, diaries and photographs of Peacham soldiers and explore the impact of the war on the home front. For the next five years, each issue of *The Peacham Patriot* will feature the story of one of the soldiers. PHA will also develop special exhibits and events for the commemoration of the Civil War Sesquicentennial. If you are interested in participating in planning for the commemoration, or have Civil War letters, and other memorabilia to share, please contact Jutta R. Scott (scottjutta2@gmail.com or 802 592-3262). Our initial effort is preparing an accurate list of all the Peacham soldiers that served in the Union. The list will be available on the PHA web site peachamhistorical.org by early spring 2011.

With Grateful Thanks



Diana Senturia donated the ca. 1880 photograph (left) of the house then belonging to Nancy Craig Graham in South Peacham. Nancy's husband, James Graham, died in 1876, and she continued to live in South Peacham for the next decade. She sold the house to Truman Martin in 1887. Later it was the home of Delmar and Donna Petrie. The house still stands today. The photograph was taken by village photographer Carlyle Goodrich. Born in in neighboring Plainfield, he worked as a stereopticon photographer from roughly 1877 to 1881. He took numerous photographs in Peacham, and several of these are included in *Historic Homes of Peacham*; additional stereoscopic Goodrich photographs are held in the PHA collections; still others are found in the collections at the Vermont Historical Society.

1860 Diary of Alice Watts

The 1860 Diary of Alice Watts, edited by Lynn A. Bonfield, was published in the 2010 Winter/Spring issue of *VERMONT HISTORY*. Copies can be read at the PHA, Peacham Library, and Vermont History Center in Barre.

Setting pen to paper in her first diary entry, fifteen-year-old Alice wrote that she hoped "my diary will be a constant companion for the present year (Providence permitting) and I expect to find much pleasure in writing upon its now unsoiled pages." She penned this while a student at Castleton Seminary, near Middlebury, but within a month she was summoned back to her native Peacham where her mother, Roxana, needed her labor in the farm house. She started the 1860 spring term at Peacham Academy and describes her classes, friends, singing school, and the burgeoning literary society. Her main struggle, well outlined in her diary, was whether she could commit to being a Christian. Her diary is full of views on "house

work," making her "tired to night"; the beauty of the evening as "the moon is enchanting"; and conflicts with parents, especially "scolding and fretting with mother." Fifteen-year old girls haven't changed so much.

For today's readers, Alice's most prescient entry was made on November 6: "Election Day. 'Abe' will get it." On the following day she recorded events surrounding the election of Abraham Lincoln: "Rejoicing at St. Johnsbury. Light from a bonfire and noise of cannon." The later, according to the *CALEDEDONIAN* was from the celebration in Danville, seven miles away. The 1860 diary was the first of nine extant kept by Alice Watts.

PHA Board 2010-2011

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The Peacham Patriot, published twice each year, is a benefit of membership in the PHA. The editor is Jutta Scott, with assistance from Mel Reis and Lorna Quimby.