



Epsom Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Catch up to the Past

October 2004



NEXT MEETING

October 8th 7:00 pm

SCENIC THEATRE

Pittsfield, NH

The Epsom Historical Association will meet at the Scenic Theatre in Pittsfield for a special program on *History and Theatre: the staging of '1776'*. The Pittsfield Players are mounting this musical in November, and its story is that of the events in Independence Hall surrounding the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The characters of John Adams, Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson come to life, along with the signers from other states, as Sherman Edwards blends the historic events into fun and entertaining theatre.

What is of interest and discussion for the meeting is just what is actually historical and what has been added to make it enjoyable theatre. '1776' is a period piece, therefore attention to creating the look of the interior of Independence Hall and clothing accurately the actors, becomes a herculean task. Adding to the drama are many fascinating props and set pieces which add realism and historic accuracy to the production. Just how close the Players production comes to realizing the look and feel of July 4th 1776 makes for a most interesting evening.

The evening will include guest Sharon Burnston discussing the making of the period costumes, herself an author of several books on the subject, and an Epsom resident. Also on the program will be a musical number from the production and a walk through the set for '1776'. Don't miss this fun and entertaining program!

A LETTER BY ENOCH WORTHEN EASTMAN

Enoch was born in Deerfield April 15, 1810 and died in Iowa in 1885. He was the son of John Eastman and Mary Worthen James. The Eastmans lived near the Epsom/Deerfield line and attended church in Epsom. Enoch's brother, Lowell Eastman, was a resident of Epsom.

In the fall of 1869, while living in California, he received a copy of the local paper, "The Suncook Valley Times" which caused him to pause and reflect on his youth, and prompted him to write the paper a letter. The paper focused on historical events and people, and this excerpted letter of Enoch Eastman gives a first hand account of events in Epsom.

We think you will enjoy this glimpse from the past which appears on the reverse side of this newsletter.

And now, when I begin to tire at evening and feel the weight of the finger of time upon the physical man, along come this gem of the Suncook Valley (Suncook Valley Times), and hunts me out in the far-off west, and takes me back to the land and days of my youth, tells of the people and events of by-gone years, and imagination enlivens youthful blood and I am a boy again, sitting in that same old Academy, hearing our old friends, Joy and Curtis, expound the ablative and vocative, and solve the square and the cubit.

It tells too of the Harvey's, Knowlton's, of the Heaths, Hazelton's. Curtis' and McClary's, and of the old New Hampshire Turnpike, which by the way was voted a free road in Northwood. But the writer had forgot all about gates. Well, there was a gate right in the road. It stood at Yeaton's Tavern, at the closing of the "North road" in Epsom. Afterwards it was moved south, about a mile on to ____ hill, where it was tended by the "colored people" Catoe and Daily.

Both of the men, Catoe and Daily, were Revolutionary pensioners for services in the war to establish a government in which they "had no rights, which a white man was bound to respect." Lady Catoe afterwards moved to Exeter and became a pensioner under Col. Benton's Widow bill, the same bill by which the Widow Michael McClary of Epsom also became a pensioner.

And thereby hangs a tale that is nearby them. Mr. Curtis, before referred to, was the successor in Epsom of Rev. Mr. Hazelton (Hazeltime), settled for life at the expense of the town. Ministers, like women, were supposed not to enjoy the right of elective franchise. Nevertheless Mr. Curtis voted, and not only voted, but he cast a *Federal* ballot and I believe the only one of of the kind cast in town. At any rate it was federal. Afterwards in discussing the vote over some good liquor, the way such things were always done in those good old times, Gen. McClary said Curtis was a d____d federal, that he had rather have old Hazelton's bones dug up from behind the meeting house and put up in the pulpit to preach, than to have Curtis there. Well, the evening wore away and the night and the liquor too; and the talk, for it was only talk, was forgotten.

But someone was kind enough to tell Mr. Curtis what Gen. McClary thought of his patriotism.

Afterwards when Thanksgiving was approaching, Gen. McClary sent a turkey to Mr. Curtis. But still remembering the election, Mr. Curtis declined to receive it, and returned it by the bearer with a note saying: "Sir. I have on numerous occasions received favors from you, for which I have been thankful. But

such has been your expression about me of late, that should I receive this, I have reason to fear it might contain something destructive to live. I therefore decline to accept it."

The result was that at the next "Town Meeting" it was voted that Mr. Curtis might preach in the meeting house "*half the time*," and his support was curtailed to the society. Other denominations occupied the meeting house every other Sunday, and occasionally Elder Ebenezer Knowlton, of Catamount, who had a voice like an archangel, would come down and preach so loud in the meeting house, that it disturbed the sinners over across the road in the school house, where Mr. Curtis was preaching, I was there and *saw and heard*.

Soon after this the patriarch Cato went dead, and was quietly buried in the graveyard back of the meetinghouse, where he and the Rev. Mr. Hazelton still repose, without a chisled slab to tell of the spot.

The next week Gen. McClary died, the funeral service was held in the old meeting house. People came from afar. Large delegations from Concord and Pittsfield were there. Mr. Curtis preached the funeral sermon from the singular text "Without any order." I was but a boy, scarcely in my teens, but I remember it well. The thread of the discourse was that all without any order go to the grave; the rich, the poor, the young, the old, the high, the low.

"The grave is the common lot of all. All go down on one common level in the grave. Last week the poor African, to-day Gen. McClary." And as he came near the close, the speaker said it was customary to extol the dead, but he could not do so. "You all knew the deceased. If I should speak of his patriotism you all know that. Should I tell you he was at the battle of Bunker Hill, so also was the poor African who died last week He closed by reading that beautiful hymn of Dr. Watts, two lines of which ran thus: *The true, the wise, the reverend head Must lie as low as ours.*

Probably no funeral sermon in New Hampshire ever created such an excitement. The Concord people said they guessed the speaker remembered the *Turkey*, and I expect he did.

The result was, figuratively speaking, that Gen. McClary rolled over in his coffin. A division soon sprang up in the church and society, and Mr. Curtis soon after left Epsom and went to Hanover in Mass., and from there to Pittsfield.

The moral to all this is, that when a man presents a minister with a turkery, *his better way is to eat it.*

Fraternally yours, E.W. Eastman

Enoch W. Eastman