



# Dorchester Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

Dorchester Historical Society, 195 Boston Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts 02125-1613  
www.dorchesterhistoricalsociety.org

Volume XIV, No. 2

(617) 265-7802

Fall 2008

### *A stitch in time: DHS exhibits needlework collection*

The Society hosted an opening for its exhibit: Threads of History, Exhibit of Needlework from, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in April at the Captain Lemuel Clap house. The exhibit, which is on-going, displays needlework from Dorchester's young women, beginning with a sampler from 1774 worked by Ann Clap and continuing into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with pieces made by Clap and Blake descendants, and by schoolgirls attending the famous school on Meeting House Hill: Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach's Academy, and also at Miss Glover's School.

Ann Clap, a descendant of Nicholas Clap who arrived in Dorchester in the 1630s, was born in 1761, daughter of Noah and Ann Clapp. From her writings, she is known to have been religious and devout. She lived in her father's house, which had been her grandfather's, on Boston Street, near the Five Corners (Edward Everett Square). After the house was destroyed by fire in 1784, Noah built another house southwest of the old one. Ann, who never married, died in 1787. Her sister Lucy was born in 1776 and died in 1804, having spent her life as a school teacher in the North School House in Dorchester and privately at home. Alexander H.



*Clementina Beech*

Everett and Edward Everett attended the school of Miss Clapp, and learned their alphabet in her father's bedroom.

Of the many schools for young women that sprang up in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Saunders and Beach Academy in Dorchester emerged as one of the most respectable. Today the school is especially remembered for the noteworthy silk embroideries created by the students under the supervision of Judith Foster Saunders and Clementina Beach. Examples are in the collections of the Winterthur Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Old Sturbridge Village, the Dorchester Historical Society and many others.

#### Dorchester Historical Society Board of Directors, 2008-2009

As a result of elections in May, the following Officers and Directors are now in office:

##### Officers

*Earl Taylor*, President

*Charles Tevnan*,

Vice President

*Robert Bayard Severy*,

Secretary

*Rosanne Foley*, Treasurer

##### Directors: (terms vary)

*Robin Allsop*

*Ruth Brown*

*Jim Cooke*

*Daniel Cushing*

*Larry Davidson*

*Paul DeLorey*

*Sean C. Denniston*

*Jeffrey Gonyeau*

*E. Sydney Hanlon*

*Janice Knight*

*Barbara Langis*

*Philip Lindsay*

*Karen L. MacNutt*

*Anne Schmalz*

*Michael Stella*

*Emy Thomas*

*Van-Lan Truong*

# *Underground history: Blakie gets its own 'Big Dig'*

Since October of 2007, professional and avocational archaeologists have been excavating a 1 x 4 meter trench in the front yard of the Elder James Blake House. In celebration of Massachusetts Archaeology Month, a month long effort during October to educate the public about below-ground cultural resources, the DHS received a permit from the state archaeologist to dig at the Blake House. The DHS intended to invite the community to participate in the history and preservation of this touchstone, as well as investigate research questions generated by the results of a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey of the grounds by Dr. Allen Gontz of the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

GPR sends electrical impulses into the ground which reflect the subterranean composition. These "reflections" can assist in identifying man-made or natural features or deposits, and in selecting a site to dig. The results of the GPR study indicated that a glacially created pond (ca. 18,000-14,000 years ago) lies directly below the front yard of the Blake House. The trench was strategically placed straddling what scientists believe is the original shoreline of Great Pond.

In 1630 when Dorchester was settled by Europeans, Richardson Park, where the Blake House now stands, was part of the Dorchester Common. The first meeting house was located in what is now Meaney Playground, just 200 feet south of the Blakie. The Dorchester Common extended to the south and west, far beyond the Dorchester North Burying Ground (established in 1634). The common area was selected because of its proximity to resources, including what soon became known as Great Pond.

Research questions for the Blake House dig address not only the land-use history, but provide for the collection of geological data that will contribute to an environmental reconstruction of this

area. Archaeologists are currently digging in dense layers of fill deposits rich in artifacts and fire-by-products, such as coal, slag, and furnace scales (scraped from the insides of 19th century stoves). The artifacts are typical of everyday discarded trash items including broken plates, bottles (complete with labels), bones, a toothbrush made of a deer leg bone and boar bristles, toys, buttons, shoes and textiles. Digging will continue until the Great Pond level is reached and no more artifacts are found. The date recovered will tell us about the filling and preparation for the relocation of the Blake House as well as the filling of the pond.

If you're interested in becoming an archaeologist for a day, call Ellen Berkland at 617-474-9307 or 617-635-3850. The dig will continue through October, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Fridays, weather permitting.

## *Program Schedule*

All programs are held at the Wm. Clapp House unless otherwise noted. Members will receive details about the programs in the mail prior to the date.

◆ 2 p.m. Sunday, October 19

### **DORCHESTER AS AN AUTONOMOUS MUNICIPALITY**

City of Boston assistant archivist Patrick Collins will explore how the Town Meeting encompassed all of Dorchester's history as an autonomous municipality.

◆ 6:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7, reception;  
9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 8,  
**Fourth Annual Tide Mill Conference**

◆ 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 16, **Thaddeus Mason Harris** at First Parish Church

◆ 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7,  
**Holiday Open House**

◆ 2 p.m. Jan. 18, **Antiques Appraisal Day**



EDITOR: Earl Taylor

PHOTO EDITOR/PAGE DESIGN:  
Barbara Langis

COPY EDITOR/PAGE DESIGN:  
Peggy Mullen

# Planning improvements to the Clapp Family Farmstead

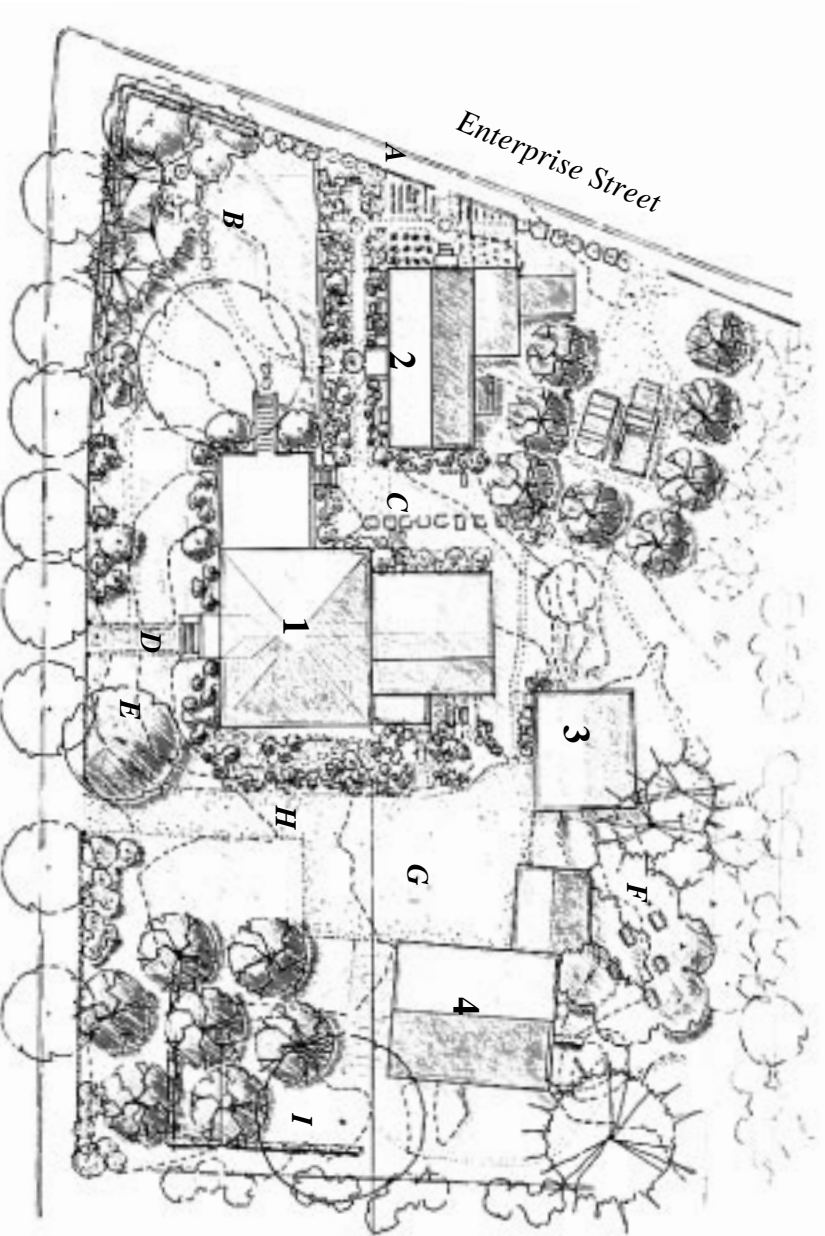
The Dorchester Historical Society has been working with John Goff, of

Historic Preservation and Design, to formulate a plan for the buildings on the headquarters property on Boston Street.

In addition, the Society engaged the landscape firm Cavanaugh Stewart Design Associates to coordinate a plan for the grounds on the same property.

The proposed conceptual design reproduced here shows the outdoor spaces that are planned for the better interpretation of Dorchester's agricultural history. Each part of the landscape is designed to provide a "gallery" space that will reinforce the interpretive exhibits inside the buildings. Informative signs will allow the visitor to proceed throughout the grounds in a self-guided tour.

The last draft of the facilities plan is nearly finished and will be communicated through a future issue of the newsletter.



- 1- WM. CLAPP HOUSE
- 2- LEMUEL CLAP HOUSE
- 3- CARRIAGE HOUSE
- 4 - BARN

- A. DOOR YARD GARDENS
- B. TANNERY THICKET
- C. SHRUB WALK
- D. TRUSTEES PATHWAY
- E. COMMEMORATIVE TREE
- F. PICNIC & LEARNING GROVE
- G. CLAPP COURTYARD
- H. SMALL FRUITS & PERENNIALS
- I. ORCHARD

# *Funny money: Raising cash with a smile*

## Fundraising efforts to restore the Clapp Family barn continues

The Society had a wonderfully entertaining evening at the IBEW Hall in May when "Jimmy Tingle presented his show Jimmy Tingle for President - The Funniest Campaign in History," as part of the Society's fundraising efforts to save the Clapp Family barn.

The Clapp Family barn, one of only a few barns left in Boston, sits opposite the William Clapp House. It stands as a symbol of the town's agricultural heritage.

Dorchester's farms supplied Boston's appetites over a long history - perhaps most notably during the occupation of the city by British troops at the start of the Revolutionary War. In the next century, several of Dorchester's landed gentlemen joined to form the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. One of them, Marshall Pinckney Wilder, furnished the original plantings for the Boston Public Garden from his personal greenhouse.

The Clapp family's story can be followed from the settlement of Dorchester in 1630 through the centuries, from subsistence farming to the development of extensive orchards made up of fruits that were hybridized on the estate. The barn is an artifact from earlier times that serves to evoke history better than words can ever do.

The Clapps developed land in the north of Dorchester on Boston Street, the causeway street that led to what was then Calf Pasture, and is now South Boston. Over the decades the Clapps farmed their own land, placed



*DHS needs more money to fix the barn roof, with the hope of stabilizing the structure for future restoration.*

a grist mill on the South Bay powered by the action of the tide, developed a successful leather-tanning business, and later expanded to horticulture and the development of fine pears, including the Clap's Favorite.

The barn also serves as a symbol for all the families who developed new varieties of edible and ornamental plants. Many well-known varieties were developed in Dorchester, including the Downer cherry, the Andrew pear, Frederick Clapp pear, Harris pear and the President Wilder strawberry.

The Clapp Family Barn needs lots of work, but for now our goal is to repair the roof in an effort to stabilize the structure and save the treasures it houses - the horse stalls, the hay loft, some early 19th century farm implements, the Clapp family horse-drawn trap and many other wonderful examples of our agricultural heritage.



**Dorchester Historical Society**

195 Boston Street  
Dorchester, Massachusetts 02125-1613