



Springfield Historical Society, Inc. News
Dedicated to Preserving Springfield, NH's History Since 1984, Beginning our 25th
Year!

January, 2009

President's Message:

The Springfield Historical Society is proud to feature Mr. Gary Robinson, outstanding guitarist and resident of Springfield, in performance at our next meeting on Thursday, January 8th at 7:00 p.m. in the lower level of the Libbie Cass Memorial Library. Gary has lived in town on Messer Hill Road for the last 25 years with his wife Joan and three children. During the 1970's, Gary studied in Milan, Italy for three years with Maestro Miguel Abloniz. Gary also taught at the University in Lugano, Switzerland and returns annually to concertize in the Lugano region. Gary has served on the faculty at Colby Sawyer College for the last 33 years and also teaches privately in his home.

Among the performers with whom Gary has shared the stage are John Sebastian, Leo Kocke, Livingston Taylor, Judy Collins, Dave Van Rock, Mose Allison, Darius Brubeck and Mary Travis. He has also performed with the White Mountain Festival Orchestra and numerous chamber ensembles. His performances have taken him to college campuses throughout the northeast including Colby College, Bates, Tufts, Harvard, Brown, University of Connecticut, University of Massachusetts, University of Rhode Island, Mount Ida, Emerson, Babson, and St. Anselms.

Gary will treat us to a variety of musical venues from his broad repertoire which spans from Bach to the Beatles and will include Flamenco, Bosa Nova and Latin jazz. Admission is free and all are welcome to attend this night of outstanding musical entertainment. Refreshments will follow the program.

Museum News:

Thanks to Julie Slack, our curator, whose exhibit for July and August at the museum was "Woman's Work" and the help of Ed Belfield "chief of the hosts and hostesses, the museum had a successful summer. There were visitors over 8 Saturdays. Thanks to the hosts and hostesses, Ed Belfield, Peter Neilson, Walt Belfield, Janet Lebrecht, and Trudy Heath.

Officer and Board Changes:

Julie Slack has volunteered to be the Vice-President. We have created a Program Committee to plan the yearly programs and all that it includes. Working on the committee are Trudy Heath, Donna Denniston, Nancy Bower, and Cindy Lawson.

Scholarship Information: Criteria for the Springfield Historical Scholarship

1. Must be a Springfield resident.
2. Must have been accepted at an approved school for further education.
3. Must be current student or past high school graduate. Graduates of Kearsarge.
4. Preference may be given to students whose family members belong to Springfield Historical Society.
5. A letter of application must be written. Applications are due by April 30th,
6. Applications may be obtained from and returned to the following: Julie Slack, 355 Shad Hill Rd. Springfield, NH 03124; Trudy Heath, PO Box 297, Springfield, NH, 03124, Donna Denniston, PO Box 367, Springfield,, NH, 02834, or the Guidance Dept., Kearsarge Regional High School.
7. Presentation will be made at Senior Night, Kearsarge Regional High School.

If you wish to donate to the yearly scholarship fund, please see the last page of the newsletter. Your contributions will .be appreciated.

The Ice Storm of 1998

January 7, 1998 is a date many Springfield people will not forget! It is seemingly to revisit what happened ten years ago, before 2008 comes to an end. Donna Denniston wrote a wonderful article giving us the feeling of what went on in our area at the time. We will begin with her overview and then have the memories of others who also experienced the storm.

Ice storms, a result of freezing rain, are an infrequent but natural part of winter life in northern New England. Springfield residents know the awesome experience of waking up to see the dazzling spectacle of early morning sun sparkling on the icy boughs of trees decked in their winter splendor.

The ice storm that began on Wednesday night, January 7th, 1998, and lasted for two and a half days was destined to be a far different and devastating phenomenon....As the storm raged, residents in our area were forced to live like pioneers without water, electricity or phones. Springfield residents responded to the disaster with their usual Yankee ingenuity stoking up their wood stoves for much needed warmth and cooking meals on their stoves' piping hot surfaces. Oil lamps, a staple in every Yankee home provided light through the long dark winter nights...

Throughout the storm, neighbors reached out to neighbors and there was an incredible sense of community. Regarding our utilities however, every day we were promised that power would be restored and every night we went to bed still without electricity or phones. This went on for over a week...For Donna the hardest thing to bear throughout our week-long ordeal was the unrelenting sound of snapping branches and falling trees which seemed even more horrific in the dark of night. Donna said that at early morning they awoke and like helpless witnesses to a massacre, were forced to watch the further devastation of their woodlands....For weeks and months that followed were filled with the sounds of chain saws and chippers as the clean up efforts ensued...From their front porch, Brandt and she silently stood and surveyed the devastation and she couldn't stop the tears that flowed down her cheeks...Today she is left with haunting memories as vivid and real as if the storm were here today. Mother Nature has a way of leaving lasting impressions...

Patsy Heath Caswell remembers that they were in Springfield the week of January 7th and 8th for the historical society meeting. Needless to say it was cancelled. Fortunately, we had our Board Meeting on Tuesday, January 6th, so all was not lost. John and I had to take one of our pets with a health concern to the vets in Elkins in the afternoon of the 7th. On the way back just past Little Lake Sunapee, as we began

climbing Rt. 114 to home and Lake Kolelemook, I noticed that ice was beginning to form on the trees. As we all remember, it got worse instead of better. During the night we lost electricity, but not the telephone service at that time. This meant no heat and no water. The wood stove was last seen in 1947, and the wood furnace in 1990! The first thing I remember the next morning was what sounded like rifle shots in the woods outside our house. Of course it wasn't that. It was the sound of the branches and trunks of the trees breaking. It was a very sad sound and sight. Not knowing the lack of electricity would last as long as it did, we tried to stay at the NH house. We went down to the mill pond across from the SHS Museum and filled containers with water. (It seldom freezes under the little bridge.) We closed the doors to the glassed-in porch, and got out the woolen blankets from storage, flashlights, an oil lamp, sandwiches, and books to read! But no heat! I remember looking at the Wednesday paper and saying that the days are getting longer by a minute! By the next morning, pioneering as the first Heaths had done in Springfield was no longer fun. Fred Duford suggested getting a generator, but we are not very mechanical or handy. My cousin, Robbie Heath, came by and suggested that mom and her two cats come to his house on 4A where he lives with Aunt Marilyn. At this time, my mother was still wintering in NH, so she stayed with them until the crisis was over. John and I (cowards!) ran away, back to Newport, RI. We heard that conditions were better in Grantham than New London, so we went that way to get on to 89 South. It was a good choice because 89 was in good shape and south of Sutton the conditions were not as bad as up in the hill towns of Springfield and New London. We got back to RI without a problem.

Dot and the late Dick Eldeen were living on Nichols Hill at the time of the storm. She also mentioned that New London was declared a disaster area with trees blocking the roads. One could only get through with police approval...The National Guard was on duty clearing roads and helping people with water and candles. Dot had a friend who lived alone on the other side of town and the police chief went to her house and got her so that she could come and stay with the Eldeens. She had no power and no heat. On Saturday the sun came out and the woods looked like a fairyland with the sun glistening on every ice covered part of the trees, but what havoc the weight of the ice had done to so many beautiful trees. The tops were snapped off and many flattened on the ground from the weight of the ice. By 4pm Saturday, the power came on and off again a couple of times. They were able to keep warm with a dependable wood burning stove and lanterns to use. All the food in the freezer spoiled. Dot believes it was Sunday the 11th that they decided to try to go to Cricenti's for groceries. New London was still without power. They decided they would have the best chance to get to New London by going down to the Georges Mills exit to Route 89. When they turned to get on Route 11 there was a line of cars waiting to get through the police barrier. The driver's license of each car was being checked to be sure you were local and had a good reason to get through. While they were waiting in line, they saw a convoy of the yellow company repair trucks coming north on 89. Everyone in line started flashing the car lights and blowing the horns and the trucks returned the greeting. It was a wonderful moment and as Dot was remembering the episode, she still got teary-eyed. She said that they were just so grateful to have those guys coming from other states to help the people of the area get the power lines repaired.

Julie Slack reports that they had just moved to Springfield during the previous year. She remembers no sheetrock on the walls and no electricity for at least three days.

Janet Booker was in Massachusetts taking care of her precious two-year-old granddaughter, Katie, when she got the call from her husband, Jay, telling her that freezing rain was predicted and she should start home soon rather than late afternoon.

Even though she did not want to change her babysitting plans, she had driven the two hour trip enough times over icy roads not to take a chance.

As Janet traveled Route 93 and 89, it seemed like the warning had been false. The roads were quite passable. As she reached Messer Hill Road the sun was setting on the horizon, and she found the road covered with ice, but her Subaru had no trouble with the hill. Opening the front door, she could feel the blast of warm, welcoming heat from the woodstove in the family room. What surprised her was to see several thick construction quality electric cords snaking the entire length of the family room.

Jay was surprised that Janet had no trouble getting up the hill because a big tree had fallen down across the road and he was afraid that she would not make it in. Janet said that the tree wasn't there so they decided that the Road Agent had cleared it away. Jay had the generator running the refrigerator and freezer knowing that the electricity could go off if the freezing rain kept up.

As they ran the cord down the cellar stairs to plug in the gas hot water heater and well pump, of all nights Janet wondered why her daughter, Kim and husband, Justin, wanted to come up this night, but soon she was distracted with the process of preparing supper and straightening up with candlelight.

Meanwhile, Kim and Justin were on their way up 89 from Boston. As they turned onto the Otterville Road, they could see two policemen at the entrance of Little Lake Sunapee Road. Kim called out the window asking if they could get through? They were told to watch out for any lines down. They were hesitant, but continued. They crept along on rutted, crusty snow when suddenly they saw a black line across the road. They were nervous, but decided to chance moving the car over the wire. Nothing happened and Justin decided it was a phone line, Kim sighed with relief when they pulled up at the front of the Messer Hill home.

The next morning Messer Hill Road was impassable. The slenderest of stems and branches were curled down with frozen bands as thick as a man's thumb. A night of freezing rain had left every birch and maple sapling along the road side weighed down in a mass of arcs reaching fully across the travel way. Scooby Doo, Janet's Great Dane, bounded down through the maze with glee as they went on foot to survey nature's glorious display.

At breakfast a little later, Janet finally asked Kim, "What possessed you to come home to Springfield in such weather?"

" We just had to come. I couldn't wait any longer and I wanted to tell you in person and not on the phone." said Kim. "We are going to have a baby!"

How happy Janet and Jay were to learn that they were having a second grand child!

Janet remembers that it was eerie to travel Route 11 to Newport for groceries and gasoline for the generator and realize that the area surrounding New London and Springfield had escaped the storm unscathed. We would reenter our world on the hill as if we lived in a cocoon of ice.

Day after day went by ---- seven of them. Finally the exhausted electric crews reached Messer Hill Road. Jay and Janet stood in the road and watched as the crane lifted the line man to the transformer. Using a long wooden stick he isolated the power somehow and soon a new transformer was in place. A moment later they whooped and hollered as they saw the porch light come on. They could roll up the long electric cords and gratefully shut off the constant whirring of the generator. Now they had to face clean up of the yard. It took 16 pickup truck loads of broken branches carted away to the brush dump at the transfer station to return the area to lawn. They survived an unbelievable storm that no one in Springfield would soon forget.

Trudy Heath had a house full of family during the ice storm aftermath. She remembers how the town officials and volunteers stepped up to the plate. Bill Sullivan

was a selectman at the time who took over and took charge of contacting residents, making sure that they were not in need. The fire department was open 24 hours a day manned by firemen and volunteers with food and water available. They also checked houses and helped in any way they could.

In March after the worst was over, Springfield had a "We survived the Ice Storm Dinner." It was a pot luck community supper to show gratitude to all who had helped throughout the ice storm.

The damage to the forests can still be seen ten years later, but the ice storm of 1998 brought out the true community spirit of Springfield residents.

Thank you to all who participated in our living history of Springfield's ice storm of 1998, Donna Denniston, Julie Slack, Dot Eldeen Janet Booker, and Trudy Heath--Patsy Heath Caswell.

Springfield Historical Society Membership, July 1, 2008- June 30, 2009

Officers for 2008-2009:

President, PatsyHeath Caswell

Board: Janet Booker 3 yrs.

Vice-President, Julie Slack

Cynthia Lawson 2 yrs.

Secretary, Donna Denniston

Cynthia Brandt, 1 yr.

Treasurer, Brandt Denniston

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE DUES DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 31, 2008.

We appreciate your membership, and we do not want to lose you!

Type of Membership

Individual \$15.00_____

Family 2 or more \$25.00_____

Lifetime per person \$125.00_____

Business Your Discretion _____

Name _____

Winter Address if different

Street/PO Box _____

City/Town:_____

State/Zip_____

E-Mail Address_____

Telephone_____

Donations

Gift_____ Scholarship Donation_____

Memorial Donation in whose memory?_____Amount_____

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MAIL REQUESTS TO BOOKS, Springfield Historical Society, PO BOX 6,
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Charles McDaniel. A History of Springfield, \$10.00 plus postage _____
A Collection of Springfield Stories, \$15.00 plus postage _____
A Pictorial History of Springfield, \$15.00, plus postage _____
Or both of the last two for \$25.00 _____