

Mil I Town Messenger

This newsletter is generously funded by McCrillis & Eldredge Insurance

Volume 4, Issue 4 November 2010

Jonas Stewart, stone carver

Brenda Curtis

While documenting the Pine Street West Cemetery, we discovered the work of a gravestone carver signed "J. Stewart." In our efforts to locate information about him, we came across a paper written by Mary Dexter of Cortland, NY. Mary has spent 25 years tracking down a carver she calls Coffin Man, after finding a gravestone in 1975 showing an image of an upright coffin. Who was this carver and where did he come from? Her quest took her across New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. She finally found the answers in Norwich, NY in 1998. He was J. W. Stewart. This Stewart (Coffin Man) was the son of the J. Stewart discovered in Pine Street West Cemetery. To date, the stone of Betsy

Hurd in Pine Street West is the only signed Stewart stone.

J. Stewart (or Jonas Stewart Sr.) of Pine Street West, was originally from Newton, MA where he married Mary Grimes. He apprenticed as a stone carver with the Park family in Groton, MA. In 1772 he struck off on his own, to begin a career and raise a family in New Hampshire, at either Charlestown or Claremont. He eventually settled in Claremont and had eight children, and two became stone carvers under his guidance. Jonas carved for 50 years and he and his sons, James G. and Jonas II are responsible for hundreds of stones all over New England. In July, Mary Dexter made the trip from Cortland, NY to Newport, NH to help us learn how to identify the Stewart's work.

We began in the Pine Street West Cemetery where at least one-third to one-half of the stones were carved by the Stewarts. She taught us about the distinctive formation of letters and the phases of Jonas' decorative art work.



Signature on Betsy Hurd Stone

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History in the making: team pinnacle... established 1999

ryan o'brien

Team Pinnacle is a loosely formed group of people and friends of differing ability and interests who enjoy various outdoor activities like cycling, running, snowshoeing, and back country skiing. "The Pinnacle" became the birthplace of Team Pinnacle in 1999 when PJ Lovely, Brian Currier, and Steve McKenney bumped into each other in the Newport Town Forest. Soon the idea for a mountain bike race was born

and that fall a fun ride was organized to test the proposed 3 mile race loop. This established an 11 year history of participating in and promoting racing. Since 1999 Team Pinnacle members have participated in fun rides, cross country mountain bike races, 24 hour races, Ironman triathlons, sprint triathlons, multi-sport adventure races, and charity rides. Team Pinnacle has promoted several races each year. 2000 marked the first year

of The Pinnacle mountain bike race and the first official race promoted by them. To support this effort, in 2001 the team began maintaining and expanding the Newport Town Forest trail network. Starting in 2003 The Pinnacle mountain bike race became part of the Eastern Fat Tire Association's (EFTA) New England Championship Series (NECS), a major force in New England moun-

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New Program Each Month!

Sugar River Bank
Community Room

7:00 pm

November 8
Aerial Views of Lake
Sunapee

December 6
Mysteries of the
Newport Opera
House

At the Opera House!

~ ~ ~

The following pro-
grams will take
place at the
Richards Free
Library

January 10
Old Time rules Will
Prevail: the Fiddle
Contest in NH and
New England

February 14
NH on Skis

March 14
Lafayette & the
Farewell Tour

The Inside Scoop

- Museum News
- NHS Gift Shop
- NHS Website

2010 museum season: a success!

Larry Cote

In September our regular Museum visitation schedule for the 2010 season ended. We still welcome visits by appointment-call Larry Cote (603-863-3105) or leave a message on the Museum's voice mail (603-863-1294.)

This season 64 visitors signed our guest book, and there were many who didn't. This speaks well for a local town Museum which is only open two days a week. Our thanks to everyone who donated items to the collection! We received 30 gifts, and they are all very much appreciated. Our volunteer log book lists 1,042 and ½ hours, and we know there were countless hours spent by members working on administrative tasks and research from home. Those of us who were able to be at the Museum had a great time - you just never know what treasure you will uncover when opening the next box or file. Often a research request uncovers facts about Newport people and places, deepening our knowledge of Newport's rich heritage. New displays are created each year, in an effort to share the many aspects of New-

port's history.

Featured this year was the art and life of Andre Champollion. The grandson of Austin Corbin II and great-grandson of Jean Francois Champollion (decipherer of the Rosetta Stone,) Champollion traveled the world extensively and painted what he saw. On display are seven of his oil paintings.



Andre Chéronnet
Champollion

Born in France, he became an American citizen in 1904, but felt obligated to enter the First World War to help defend France. He was killed at Bois le Pretre on March 23, 1915.

Other highlights of this year's exhibits include an interesting kitchenalia display, created by Dottie Collins. The utensils show that the principals of food preparation have remained essentially the same over the years, although today's tools are electrified. The array of aprons and table cloths showed another side of how "times have changed."

Also featured was a typical bank office, with blotters and ink wells, ledger book entries, and a change counter- one item today's children have never seen.

We look forward to the 2011 Museum season with renewed vigor. The planned purchase of the Nettleton house will allow us to expand the number and variety of museum displays, and make them more accessible to the public.

Historical society gift shop

Jackie Cote



NHS is pleased to announce our 2010 hand-painted ornament. We are featuring "Skating on the Common" a long and true tradition in Newport. As shown in this photo, the background for this scene is the Baptist Church at the north end of the common. The price remains \$11.00, boxed and bubble wrapped. As a reminder, the first ornament in this series, the Pier Bridge, was retired last year. We

have less than 20 left, and when they are sold it will no longer be available. If you are collecting the whole series of Newport ornaments, you need to purchase this one soon. We also offer a set of eight ornaments nested in one box, a perfect gift! In celebration of Newport's 250th anniversary, which begins in January 2011, we will issue a special one year ornament: a scene of the upper east side of Main Street from the Common behind the Soldiers Monument, complete with fireworks! These will be available in 2011. NHS Gift shop items can be purchased on Fridays (9-6) and Saturdays (9-11:30) in the lobby of the Sugar River Bank from November 5 through December 18 (skipping Thanksgiving weekend.) Ornaments and cemetery foil impressions can be purchased at the LAC Gallery of

Gifts, November 12 through December 18. Thanks to Brenda Curtis for creating the foil impressions, Al and Mary Lou McGuire for making the frames, and Cathryn Baird, Dottie Collins and Pris Hagebusch for helping to put them together!



The purchase of any item can be arranged by calling the NHS Museum (603.863.1294) or Jackie Cote (603.863.3105)

Jonas Stewart, stone carver

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Pumpkin Head

His design phases include:

Phase 1: Pumpkin Head, 1770-1785

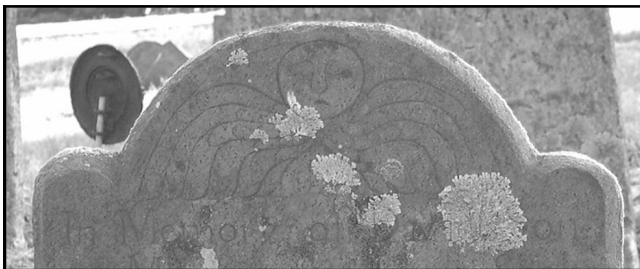
Phase 2: Winged Cherub, 1785-1795

Phase 3: Winged Body, 1795-1805

Phase 4: Urn & Willow, 1805-1820

Phase 5: VIP Stones, throughout

Later we went through the boxes of information Mary had collected over the years. She showed us many examples of Jonas' work, information gathered from proprietor and probate records, and maps. Next we went in search of Jonas Stewart's early work in Charlestown, NH. The Forest Hill Cemetery contains images of winged effigies, pumpkin heads and cherubs. One interesting stone was clearly carved for a minister, although the inscription had been ground off and the stone finally used for a young woman. This effort shows Stewart reused stones in order not to waste his work. He has been criticized for his primitive



Winged Cherub

artwork, compared to the Park family from Groton, but probably adjusted his carving standards to what the rural population could afford. The details in his work, however, are far beyond many contemporary carvers of the time.

From Charlestown we drove to Trinity Church in Cornish, NH, and a graveyard that has much of his work as well as that of his son James. This picturesque graveyard with a white picket fence, holds a treasury of his stones and was well worth the stop. Here Mary showed us what she believes is a Masonic influence, identified over her years of studying the Coffin Man's work.

Off again, this time to the Union Cemetery in West Claremont, we found the oldest stone credited to him in this area, dated

1769. Although he carved the Pine Street West cemetery stone of Mary Wilcox, who died in 1768, it is believed that this stone was post dated and erected after Benjamin and Eleanor Bragg gave the land for the cemetery to the town in 1771. Union Cemetery contains as well many more effigies, pumpkin heads and the beginnings of his 4th phase, some very primitive urns. These primitive urns were most likely requested by clients after coming into vogue in Boston in the early 1800's. Stewart, not knowing what an urn looked like,



Winged Body

worked from oral description. Over time they became more elaborate and looked more like urns as we know them today. Union Cemetery is considered his "home" cemetery since he lived not far from it and was an active member of the Union Church, directly across the road.

The large number of stones carved by Jonas Stewart reveals a very busy carver for his time, one sought after from New Hampshire to New York. Pine Street West is famous because it contains the only known stone signed by him.

Despite all this information, the Stewart mystery has not yet ended. Although this man spent his life carving headstones for others, the only family stones found to date belong to his two grandchildren, buried in the Old Burying Ground behind the Fiske Library in Claremont. The graves of Stewart, his wife Mary and their eight children have yet to be found. Our excursion with Mary Dexter taught us much about the man, his family, and his work, and the search continues to discover what happened to the rest of this family.



Urn and Willow

Newport Historical Society Membership Form

Date: _____ New Membership _____ Renewal _____

Name(s): _____

Address/City/State/Zip: _____

Email: _____ Telephone: _____

Personal Membership Type: _____ Individual (\$15) _____ Family (\$25) _____ Junior (\$1)

Corporate/Business: _____ Bronze(\$25) _____ Silver (\$50) _____ Gold (\$75) _____ Platinum(\$100) _____ Diamond(\$100+)

Here's my additional donation to the: Museum \$ _____ Operating \$ _____ Building \$ _____ Cemetery \$ _____

Payment Method: _____ Cash _____ Check (Newport Historical Society) Total Enclosed \$ _____

Please mail to: Newport Historical Society PO Box 413 Newport, NH 03773

The Mill Town Messenger is published quarterly by the Newport Historical Society, P O Box 413, Newport, NH 03773. Contributors to this issue: Ryan O'Brien, Larry Cote, Jackie Cote, Brenda Curtis, and Mary Lou McGuire, editor.

Team pinnacle

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tain bike racing. Also in 2003 the first generation of the official Team-Pinnacle.org website was launched. In 2004 Team Pinnacle started a new double duathlon running and biking race called the Pinnacle Challenge. The Team Pinnacle website received a major overhaul in 2005 and was re-launched as the website design you see today. Following previous successes, in 2006 Team Pinnacle started a new trail running race called the Six in the Stix. Also that year, in recognition of and to solidify the synergy of the Team Pinnacle brand, the first Jersey and

Shorts order was placed. In 2008 the Six in the Stix joined four other local trail running races to form the Western NH Trail Running Series (WNHTRS). 2009 marked the beginning of a partnership between Team Pinnacle and Claremont Cycle Depot Bike Club (CCDBC) to promote local races and cycling. Since then Team Pinnacle has raced under and with the support of the CCDBC brand name. In addition to this strategic partnership, Team Pinnacle has partnered with the Newport Recreation Department and other local organizations to promote local racing, and their combined efforts have raised over \$50,000.00 to benefit

local charities and the community. Team Pinnacle continues today many of the traditions of the past by diligently maintaining the Town Forest, expanding the trail network, promoting many outdoor activities for fun and for time, supporting community organizations and charity events, and most important of all, encouraging people of all abilities and ages to get out and have fun in the beautiful landscape we call home.

Thanks to PJ Lovely and Brian Currier for help with this article.

Newport historical society website

Mary Lou McGuire

Just a reminder to visit the NHS website (newportnhhistory.org) to check out some recently added features!

Research & Genealogy Tools

A valuable research tool has been created by NHS members: a searchable index to the Newport section (pp200-309) of The History of Cheshire and Sullivan Counties, New Hampshire, 1886. This entry was written by J. W. Parmelee, and contains information not available in Wheeler's History of Newport. Until now, the information has been relatively inaccessible due to the lack of an index. Other resources on this page are transcriptions of Pine Street West Cemetery gravestones, a variety of vital records from 1849-1859, a Guide to the History of Your House, and directions for searching deeds at the Sullivan County Register of Deeds website.

The NHS Gift Shop is now online!

You can easily place an order for any items in our gift shop by printing an order form and sending it along with your payment. We offer over twenty items for purchase, including books, hand painted ornaments and our "Uniquely Newport" gravestone art.

Historical Society Information

Our home page provides information on NHS meeting dates, upcoming programs, professional affiliations, and contact information. You can also access meeting agendas and minutes, quarterly newsletters, our constitution, a list of committee members, and current projects.

Streets, Roadways and Byways
of
Newport, New Hampshire

