

CORNET'S CHRONICLE

PARSONS FAMILY ASSOCIATION, INC.

www.parsonsfamilyassn.org

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Deanna Parsons-Simons, Editor

Spring 2016

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Greetings Cousins

As thoughts of spring and lawn clean-up are near, "Save the Date" for this year's Parsons Family Association reunion. We will gather for our 94th reunion of the Parsons Family and their descendants of Cornet Joseph Parsons and Mary Bliss on **Saturday, July 23, 2016 in Old Deerfield, Massachusetts.**



A tour will take place from 10am-12pm. This tour will highlight a few of the historical homes in town. We have had relatives live and work in Deerfield. As a special interest to the family - Cornet Joseph's son, Joseph Parsons "Esquire Joseph" was an owner of both grist and sawmills at Deerfield and Northampton, as well as a Judge of the County Court and a one of the earliest lawyers in Western Massachusetts. Tickets can be ordered along with your reunion reservation on our traditional mailing slip.

This quaint town is a perfect setting for historical gatherings. Following the tour, we will have lunch at the Deerfield Inn's Terrace room at 12:30pm. Fill out your RSVP at the end of chronicle and mail it back in to reserve your spot. We hope you will be able to attend.

Friday night's Director's Meeting will be held from 5:30pm-9:30pm at the Deerfield Inn, in Champys' meeting room.

As the seasons change, so too have the officers at Historic Northampton. (Site of our beloved Parsons Home) The historical committee has accepted the resignation of Nancy Rexford as acting director of Historic Northampton. However, we are pleased to announce Kim Graham, (our acting treasurer), has been nominated and has accepted the position of this societies' treasurer opening. We wish her well and applaud her tireless efforts to keep the Parsons Home front and center in the organizations plans to continue improvements.

Please consider supporting PFA by recruiting a cousin to join our association. Spreading the good word of this organization and the efforts to keep all things Parsons alive and well both literally and figuratively will be essential to the longevity of the Parsons Family Association.

Looking forward to seeing all of you in July. Please email me with any questions or concerns.

Deanna Parsons Simons
President, Parsons Family Association
Deanna.simons@cornell.edu

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Upon much research looking for the best investment rates, I have opened a statement savings account to segregate investing funds from operating funds. This is where funds will reside when CD's mature. Recently, a CD matured and the rates are dismal -- so when rates improve I'll invest them appropriately. I have also set up online banking to make it easier to monitor the bank accounts and do reconciliations.

We need to set up a membership committee to increase our membership base. I have spoken to Deanna and we will address this issue at the next board meeting. Any ideas are welcome and if you'd like to be on this committee, please contact Deanna or I. My initial idea (highlighted below) is to use yellow pages to send out letters, perhaps we could access town registers, churches, etc. Deanna's idea is to contact cousins and verbally recruit them.

"We are looking to expand our membership base so please mail me yellow book pages from your area for Parsons' or Parsons Relatives with other surnames. I would like to send a newsletter and see if we *can increase the membership by 10-20%* this year. I need your help in order to meet this goal."

PFA is actively looking for interesting genealogic stories or articles (past and present) to be published in the Parsons Profile or Historic Profile sections of the newsletter. Please contact Kim Graham to get your article, history, or obituaries published. If you have any questions, please contact me at 413-475-2499 or kbqbandits@gmail.com.

**Respectfully Submitted,
Kim Graham, Treasurer**

BREAKING NEWS:

March 18, 2016: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: Kiki Smith (ksmith@smith.edu)
Historic Northampton Appoints New Co-Executive Directors

The Board of Trustees of Historic Northampton is pleased to announce the appointment of Laurie Sanders and Elizabeth Sharpe as Co-Executive Directors, starting May 1.

Sanders is a naturalist, writer and the former host of *Field Notes*, a weekly natural history series that aired on WFCR for a decade. In 2014 she completed an ecological assessment of all of Northampton's city-owned conservation areas, which include more than 30 properties and over 2,500 acres. She has prepared similar assessments for private clients, working not only in Massachusetts, but also in Idaho and the Adirondacks. She first came to Northampton in 1983 as a Smith College student and now lives in Westhampton with her husband and daughter. This past fall she gave a six-part lecture series, *Rediscovering Northampton: Local History Through and Ecological Lens*. She offered the series to attract new members for Historic Northampton to meet a \$25,000 membership challenge grant. The series was a success, generating great enthusiasm about the subject, and a significant jump in membership and donations. She brings a wealth of fundraising and programming experience to the position, writing grants for her own work and as co-chair of the private capital campaign for the Westhampton Public Library.



Sharpe is an historian, writer, educator and museum consultant who lives in Amherst. She is the author of *In the Shadow of the Dam: The Aftermath of the Mill River Flood of 1874*. She has family roots in this area which sparked her research on Connecticut Valley history, architecture, history of technology and material culture for her PhD in History from the University of Delaware. She is the former director of education at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Since she moved back to the Connecticut Valley, she has consulted for museums, written the history of the Mill River Flood, taught history and public history at UMass and Greenfield Community College in person and online. Most recently she has taught *Social Responsibility in Museums* at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She has been board president of the Amherst Historical Society and the Swift River Historical Society. The experience and expertise of both offer a powerful combination of talents, ideas and connections for this next phase of the museum's development.



They succeed Nancy Rexford, the Board Treasurer who, for 14 months, volunteered her time as Acting Executive Director. Please see our tribute to Nancy on the museum's website: www.historicnorthampton.org

Board president Kiki Smith says that the Board is excited by the appointment of Sanders and Sharpe. Stan Sherer, Vice President, is looking forward to working with Sanders and Sharpe on developing new programs and connections with the City of Northampton.

Tribute to Nancy Rexford:

The Board of Trustees of Historic Northampton celebrates the dedication and success of Nancy Rexford, who served as Acting Director since October, 2014. She had already been serving as the Treasurer of the museum since 2013. When the previous part time Director, Nan Wolverton, took a full time position, in October 2014, Nancy offered to take on this position for a year with no recompense. Working with the essential Marie Panik, a working board and multiple volunteers, she accomplished what we had feared was impossible.

As treasurer, Nancy revised our bylaws to make them coherent and legal and undertook a thorough investigation of the museum's financial history. Nancy knew all too well how dire our circumstances were and what challenges we faced. But even she could not have foreseen all the further problems we were to encounter when she began her directorship.

Nearly every week she commuted to Northampton from Danvers, working more than full time to oversee the direction of the museum. She cleaned out neglected rooms, recognized deteriorating sills, roofs and windows, and secured two large CPA grants for the rehabilitation and restoration of the campus buildings.

With her husband, she donned hazmat suits to strip out the rotting and vermin-infested insulation under the Parsons house first floor. She insulated heating ducts and filled holes in foundations with steel wool to keep out rats and mice. She cleaned out years of accumulated dirt and silt in the Shepherd basement and climbed on the Damon roof to find the source of leaks. Last summer, she initiated the public archeological dig behind Parsons House. This past year she has spearheaded the founding of the Meadow City Historians, open to all people researching any aspect related to Northampton. This January, with the help of volunteers, she oversaw the emptying of the front Damon basement, the cleaning and accessioning of all the furniture and materials, the sealing up of the basement from moisture, the installation of high-quality dehumidifiers, and the return of objects in an efficient and organized way.

She re-established relationships with families long associated with the museum and won over new donors impressed with her dedication to the survival of the collections and buildings. Her efforts were directed towards the long-term survival of the museum, building relationships in the city for the development of projects that would make the organization more relevant to a wide audience.

Thanks to Nancy's efforts and her insistence to cut costs, including any salary for herself, the museum operates today on a balanced budget and has increased its membership from less than 121 to 498 in 14 months.

Rexford had worked at Historic Northampton from 1975 to 1984 as its Curator of costume, later Assistant Director and Registrar. As she describes her work then, we can see how she applied these same principles and skills over the past two years here:

Finding an entirely disorganized and uncatalogued costume collection strewn through the closets and attics of three houses, I collected it, sorted it by type, identified it, deaccessioned the inferior, designed storage for it, catalogued it, supervised volunteers who worked on it and did some simple conservation. The collection is recognized nationwide as a valuable and accessible resource for scholars. As Assistant Director, I was involved in long-range planning, budgeting, policy-writing, educational programs, grant-writing, designing publications, etc.

During this time, she put together research materials that were the basis of her development as the foremost scholar of American women's dress in the country. After she moved to Danvers, MA, in the 1980's, she received two grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities to write what was to be a multi-volume history, Women's Clothing in America, 1795-1930. This exceptional volume on shoes was published in 2000 and won the Costume Society of America's annual prize that year for excellence in scholarship.

Over the past 30 years, she has consulted for over 70 museums and historical societies around the United States, curated multiple exhibits, and published articles, many focused on various approaches to the study of dress history.

This museum is alive and well thanks to Nancy. All of the Board, members, volunteers and supporters know how determined she has been to save and honor the collections, the houses and the whole history of Northampton. Thanks to her heroic leadership, we have a sound financial footing and we can continue her work to build Historic Northampton into a community-centered organization.

HISTORIC PROFILE:

This is the history of the ball park in Conway, Massachusetts. My great grandparents, C. Lyman Parsons owed approximately 600 acres of farm land, and woods. Charles Lyman Parsons believed in recreational areas for public use and the welfare and health of individuals. He was also active in local politics and preservation and loved baseball. Thus, he donated for \$1.00 approximately 5 acres to the Town of Conway for the building of a ball field. I have attached a copy of the deed transferring the property as well as recent photos from 2011. Also attached are photos of the most recent flood and other uses of the field such as the hockey rink, the festival of the hills (various activities).

The town received a grant to improve the ball field and make it handicap accessible. Over the years the ground compacted (minimal aeration) and had many water issues such as flooding and standing water. The area up to 554 foot line flooded, and the remainder of field and hillside funneled water into this area and downtown. (see flood photo)

Also, attached are the schematics of what the ball field looks like now. To illustrate other uses I've attached pictures of the flood and hockey and festival of the hills activities. Please enjoy as I am very proud of my ancestors. An extreme case of flooding happened in 2011 when Hurricane Irene occurred. The schematic below is the new and improved handicap accessible outcome. The area is really beautiful and oh so inviting if I may say so.



In Memoriam



C. LYMAN PARSONS

C. Lyman Parsons, County Leader, Succumbs At 90

CONWAY — C. Lyman Parsons, one of Franklin County's leading farmers and civic authorities for many decades, died unexpectedly this morning at the South Deerfield Road family homestead where he was born 90 years ago.

Dean of county dairymen and a deputy sheriff 47 years, Parsons had been active up to the time of his death. He once said: "When a man retires, he might as well say, 'I'm done.'"

The third Charles Parsons to operate the 390-acre dairy-to-bacco plantation since grandfather Capt. Parsons purchased it in 1837, Lyman installed modern loose housing dairy facilities three years ago. His Grass Hill Farm was among Western Massachusetts' most modern, carrying Holstein stock only the past half-century.

Mr. Parsons had a record of municipal and county government service seldom equalled in this area. He served as town clerk 36 years before retiring in 1955. He had succeeded his father in 1919. In addition, he was a selectman 1903-12, a school committeeman one year, assessor for 18 years, moderator for a few years and chairman of Field Memorial Library trustees the past several years.

He and Sheriff Michael Carroll were deputized together in January, 1911, and both have served since, compiling records outstanding in Massachusetts court and police history. His most recent active duty was at the three-week superior court session in Greenfield during May.

Mr. Parsons was born Feb. 10, 1868, son of Charles L. and Helen (Wicham) Parsons, in the 16-room house in which his father was born in 1838, the year after

Capt. Parsons bought the place. He attended local schools as well as Arms and Deerfield Academies.

He had been farming since eight years old, when his grandfather taught him to milk. He was the only boy among four children.

He married the former Laura Wilson Wing on Oct. 18, 1893. She died in 1951 after they had observed their 57th anniversary.

His 68-year affiliation with Morning Sun Lodge of Masons here was among the longest records in lodge history. He served as lodge master more than 50 years ago. In addition, he was a member of the OES, United Church and Farm Bureau.

Of four children born to Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, two survive: Sidney Wing Parsons, treasurer of Greenfield Savings Bank, and Charles Edward Parsons, South Deerfield electrical contractor. Howard Joel Parsons died in 1946 and another in infancy.

Mr. Parsons also leaves three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren one sister, Mrs. Sylvia Sanderson of Chicago and several nieces and nephews.

Funeral services will be Saturday at 2 p.m. at the United Church. Rev. George F. Camp, former pastor, and Rev. Willard Norman, pastor, will officiate. Burial will be in Pine Grove Cemetery.

Visiting hours will be Friday from 7 to 9 p.m. at the McCarthy Funeral Home, Greenfield.

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS,

That I Charles Parsons of Conway

In the Company of Friends

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IN CONSIDERATION OF

IN CONSIDERATION OF *One* _____
The Town of Conway aforesaid

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the receipts returned is hereby acknowledged, do hereby give, grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said Town of Conway a certain tract of land, situate in Conway, adjacent and bounded and described as follows, to-wit:

Beginning at the southeast of the North Center School House lot, said corner being on the west side of the highway North 8 1/2 West four rods and fourteen links from the Southwest corner of Mrs. Garthams N. Adams dwelling house - running southerly on the west side of said highway seven rods to a stone monument. Thence easterly six rods and eleven links to a stone monument. Thence northerly and parallel with the west side of the foundation for the hall on the premises five rods, seven links to the highway; thence westerly on said highway and said School House lot to the place of beginning. Also to pass and repair over my land to maintain and keep in repair the sewer and head gate of the same, due care being taken not to injure the crops or other property.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the above grained premises, with all the pertinences thereto belonging, to the said *John of Conway, then successors* and appoints in perpetuity.

And I hereby ~~the said~~ for myself ~~and my~~ and my ~~heirs, executors and administrators, do~~ and my heirs, executors and administrators, do ~~across with the said~~ across with the said ~~John of Conway have~~ John of Conway have ~~and assigned, that~~ and assigned, that ~~he~~ he ~~lawfully asked to see~~ lawfully asked to see ~~people of the~~ people of the ~~— a fore granted permission that they are~~ — a fore granted permission that they are ~~free from all imbecillities.~~ free from all imbecillities.

Done *at* have good right to sell and convey the same to the said *Town of Conway* *their successors*
 And the *of* will, and *my* heirs, executors and administrators well warrant and defend the same
 in the said *Town of Conway* *their successors*
 heirs and assigns forever, against the lawful claims and demands of all persons.

~~And the children of Israel~~

11/24/2017 11:24 AM 11/24/2017 11:24 AM

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, *20* the said *Charles Parsons [Signed Name]*

In token of ^{rights of all rights and also after} ^{as fully power and intended} ^{In the presence of} ^{witnesses}
 I have ^{my} ^{hand} ^{and} ^{the} ^{legally} ^{day of} ^{June}
 In the year of our Lord ^{one thousand eight hundred and eighty} ^{five}
 by the ^{power} ^{and} ^{delivered} ^{(a} ^{presence of}
 Charles Parsons Jr } Charles ^{his} Parsons ^{dear}
 Charles B. Bennett } ^{man}

FRANKLIN M. *Franklin M. Jones* 140 J
Then personally appeared On above named

I have acknowledged the foregoing above handwritten to be
 true free and doing before me,
 Charles Parsons By Position of the Parish.

WALFORD, as
Represented *James Galt* 118 ✓
Received and acknowledged.
Witness
Edwin Stratton Register's



Ball field pictures: Ball field view from church looking down; 2011 Hurricane Irene Flood; Festival of the Hills postcard, log splitting, skillet toss, craft tent; Winter hockey & ice skating use

The Below data outlines The Town of Conway's thought process. There are other documents and resources available to the public by connecting to the website: www.townofconway.com

Project overview:

- The existing ball field located along Rt. 116 is the town's primary recreation area. It is enjoyed by residents for many of the following activities: Youth Baseball, Youth Soccer, Festival of the Hills, Tennis, Basketball, Ultimate Frisbee, Ice Skating Rink, Women's Softball, Family Picnics, Child Playscape, General Enjoyment

Current State Issues

- Redesign of Rt. 116 redirected water into the recreation area through several culverts
- Gradient across soccer playing area is approximately 3 feet
- Both soccer and baseball playing area is frequently submerged under standing water in the Southeast corner
- Rolling gradient across area to the north of the soccer field makes it un-usable for many other activities and creates virtual catch basins for water to collect
- Years of low maintenance and lack of annual aerating has caused the existing soil to become compacted and therefore water does not drain into the soil
- Park has little "flow" between recreation areas
- Parking is limited and not to current handicap accessible standards
- Driveway entrance onto Rt. 116 is not to current standards and is a significant safety hazard
- 2 of the past 5 Festival of the Hills have had to deal with significant mud and standing water due to poor drainage

Goals of Project:

- Correct drainage issues for field and minimize impact of heavy rains into town center
- Improve recreation areas for the residents of Conway both with and without children
- Improve usability of town fields for the Festival of the Hills and the 250th Celebration
- Utilize Rose Field in a manner to get maximum enjoyment and still reserve the right to utilize it for other purposes in the future
- Improve the overall appearance and charm of the downtown area

Recreation Field Scope of Work:

- Install underground drainage system, tie Rt. 116 culverts into existing town system, install large water storage tank to compensate for "flash flooding" conditions that have been experienced over the past several years
- Re-grade the playing fields and terrace the end of the field to create a second "flat" area for other activities
- Relocate the basketball and play structure to accommodate new topography required for drainage issue
- Improve parking, driveway and handicap accessibility
- Create a family picnic area and outdoor pavilion to be used for parties, concerts, etc.
- Enhance the riverfront enjoyment with a walking trail and riverfront sitting area

Funding and Grant Sources:

- There are several significant sources of funding available for this project. Massachusetts has 2 grant programs with high probability of award for the program and the Select Board is currently working with MEMA on a flood mitigation program that includes drainage correction to mitigate flooding
- These programs REQUIRE design and permitting to be complete before submitting applications
- Grants are reimbursement programs and require funding by town via bond or other short-term borrowing sources prior to payment
- The program will only proceed once grants have been awarded for a significant percent of the program. The burden on the town would be for the unfunded portion and the interest on the short term lending required to initially fund the project prior to the grant reimbursement.

Summary:

- Parks, Recreation and Trails committee has developed a preliminary plan for improving the drainage and improving the town recreation areas and charm
- The project will require a significant commitment from the town
- There is a high likelihood that a large portion of the ultimate project would be funded by identified grants and would not proceed until awarded
- Application for the grants REQUIRE design and permitting be complete prior to applying
- Funding is therefore required to complete the design and permitting phase ASAP
- 250th Celebration represents an achievable goal for completion of the project

Historic Northampton Parsons Board Member Report by Kim Graham:

As an acting member of the Historic Northampton Board representing the Parsons Family Association, I am reporting following:

First, I would like to report that I have been nominated as Historic Northampton Treasurer. I look forward to carrying on the exemplary work Nancy Rexford was doing. She set the bar high and balanced a budget that was to say the least "challenging". It will be interesting to do accounting for membership driven, grant funding non-profit organization.

The spring cleanup was significantly easier this year due to the extensive landscaping completed in fall 2015. Don Graham, (my husband) the landscape artist, has continued prune and refine the grounds and it looks awesome. Maria Panik of Historic Northampton commented "it looks like a park". Don also succeeded in moving the shed with his tractor by sliding the shed on long boards and a good dose of "Yankee ingenuity". *A job well done* as the shed was saved and is being leveled and is now out of the standing water. The moving of the shed was believed to be impossible without damaging it and a new shed would have cost about \$2500 dollars. Now we can invest that savings in other projects and improvements. He met Laurie Sanders while moving the shed and she commented "*he is worth his weight in gold*". I could not have achieved the overhaul of the grounds without him in such a short time span.

The Parson' House attic has been cleaned out by Nancy Rexford and her husband Charles. The furniture will be cleaned and marked appropriately. There is a fine black dust from the roof repair which is in the cleaned up.

The Parsons' House will be having the dirt removed around the foundations and proper water proofing will be performed "similar to the Shepard House" to provide proper grading around the entire house. Dirt is above the sills in many areas.

I would like to start the "Curb Appeal Project" on the front of the Parsons Homestead. Please send any ideas you may care to share. I also am looking to see if we have local members who would like to volunteer some time and help with this project. We have been given the go ahead to "Beautify" the Parsons Homestead.

The house is being readied for use and proper storage in the future, perhaps educational seminars, meetings, forums, music, etc. I personally would like to see an "oral history" initiative and archives set up in the Parsons House. It would be interesting to have a studio funded to provide this service for people to come and relax and record their heritages...

Comments – ideas – what do you think?

Historic Northampton is very pleased to report that the City of Northampton's Community Preservation Committee has voted to award another **\$38,420** to continue making repairs on the Parsons House. The grant will allow us to replace the remaining knob and tube wiring (which is a serious fire hazard), to repair the framing of the NE ell (now part of the resident's apartment) and the resident's porch, and to take care of several areas where windows, trim and grading need attention. The work will be done in 2016 by Kris Thomson and Alicia Spence, the same team that has been working on the house in 2015.

The greater part of the work funded by last year's CPC grant has now been completed. The sills and posts are replaced, the back wall tied back into the frame, we have foundations under the kitchen, and the 1981 basement has a vapor barrier and interior wall where moisture used to be a problem. The knob and tube wiring has been replaced in the basement, and the storm windows are installed. Now we are beginning to turn our thoughts to cleaning up the very dusty interior and how best to interpret the building in the near term.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED WORK in PARSONS HOUSE

The next tiers of maintenance issues are in process: Replacing knob and tube wiring (safety issue); replacing sills and posts near the side porch; and repairing rotted windows and porch elements

PARSONS HOUSE: Replace knob and tube wiring (this is worth repeating)

Parsons House was probably first wired after Anna Catharine Bliss moved here in 1910 with a minimal number of ungrounded two-prong outlets served by knob and tube wiring. Over the years, some sections were upgraded, especially near the west ell, which was used as an office in the 1970s. Over the years, as people required more electrical equipment, wiring was added and extended, resulting in arrangements like this:



As soon as our contractor Kris Thomson saw this, he brought in an electrician and an inspector to review the entire house and he reports that it is critical to replace the wiring in Parsons House. OK, it's pretty ugly, but is it actually dangerous? According to a nice little article published on Angie's List (www.angieslist.com/articles/knob-and-tube-electrical-wiring-safe.htm):

One of the most common problems with this kind of wiring is its insulation, which is made of rubber instead of plastic. Over time, the rubber degrades, exposing bare wires to air and moisture, in turn increasing the chance of a short or a fire.

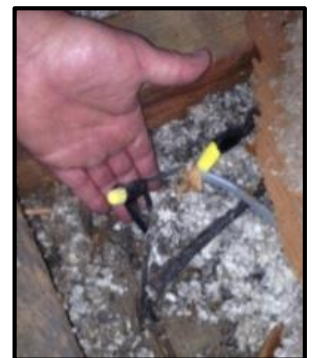
Extra circuits are also a problem because basic knob and tube installations only allowed for 12 circuits in a home. Often, homeowners who needed extra circuits would pay contractors to add new circuits at the panel or simply splice into an existing wire. Both of these modifications run the risk of overloading the system. We definitely have overloads and damaged insulation:



But the article goes on:

The 2008 National Electric Code addressed some issues with knob and tube wiring, most notably its high heat dissipation that poses a fire hazard when combined with fiberglass insulation. As a result, the NEC now requires that knob and tube wiring not be in "hollow spaces of walls, ceilings and attics where such spaces are insulated by loose, rolled or foamed-in-place insulating material that envelops the conductors."

When Kris and his experts dug around in the attic, they found these junctions embedded in the insulation. The one at right is particularly bad because the joins aren't even in a box.



As a first step, we have already replaced all the knob and tube wiring that could be accessed from the basement. That horrifying spider web of decaying insulation and electrical tape now looks like this:

But we need to extend the good work into the living spaces and attic above. We have invested so much in Parsons House, it would be very sad to lose all of it to another bit of deferred maintenance.

In addition to these structural repairs, we add some smaller ones that should not be allowed to get worse. These include replacing three windows and fixing the bases of the columns on the little porch over the east parlor side door. The bottoms of the porch posts have already been replaced, but the modern lumber used in the repair has not held up very well. The window sashes are also modern, installed about 1980.

Like the posts, the lumber they are made of has not held up to exposure to the weather. At some time in the 1990s, the decision was made to remove the storm windows and use interior storms. This looked pretty, but interior storms promote mold growth on the inside of the window sashes and offer zero protection from the weather on the outside. The 2014 CPC grant is paying for storm windows for all the buildings, so this kind of deterioration will not continue.

HISTORIC NORTHAMPTON UPDATE:

Historic Northampton names co-directors

By **STEPHANIE McFEETERS** @mcfeeters; Thursday, March 31, 2016

NORTHAMPTON — After several years of financial uncertainty, Historic Northampton has balanced its budget and tapped two new co-executive directors, who hope to breathe life into the 111-year-old organization housed on Bridge Street. Laurie Sanders, a naturalist, and Elizabeth Sharpe, a historian, will begin their new roles May 1, and are approaching the job with complementary perspectives. As they explain it, one is enamored with all things living, the other fascinated by the dead. In rethinking the organization's presence in Northampton, the two will focus on "intersections between the natural world and human history," Sanders said, such as how this area's original stream patterns mapped later street layouts and the ways in which past vegetation contrasts with the modern realities of climate change.

Sanders, of Westhampton, formerly hosted the weekly series "Field Notes," about natural history on radio station WFCR, and last fall gave a six-part lecture series on Northampton's ecology to help Historic Northampton garner donations and new members. **Sharpe**, of Amherst, formerly served as director of education at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and is the author of "In the Shadow of the Dam: The Aftermath of the Mill River Flood of 1874."

The women have worked together in the past — Sanders produced a radio piece on Sharpe's Mill River research — and said they are looking forward to collaborating again. "Two heads are better than one," Sanders quipped. Sharpe and Sanders will work part-time and make approximately \$15,000 a year, board vice president Stan Sherer said. They succeed the organization's board treasurer Nancy Rexford, who has volunteered as acting executive director for over a year. It's due to Rexford's hard, unpaid labor, Sherer said, that Historic Northampton is in the stable financial position it's in now — crediting her with a "heroic rescuing of the museum." Board president Kiki Smith concurred, saying that Rexford's passion sustained the rest of the board.

The organization ended fiscal year 2015 with a balanced budget. With the exception of two years in the mid-1990s, this is the first time the organization has done so since 1988, according to information provided by Sherer. Its direct operating funds of about \$115,000 consist primarily of membership dues and contributions. Through Rexford's efforts, Historic Northampton gained 500 new members and contribution income grew from \$5,000 to \$44,000 in a year. Among the organization's fundraising efforts was a membership challenge grant, in which it solicited donations to match an anonymous \$25,000 gift. The organization also acquired more than \$300,000 in Community Preservation Act grant money, which will fund repairs to its Parsons, Shepherd and Damon houses. Heating and insulating upgrades have in turn reduced energy costs. "We are very careful about what we take on, what kind of expenses, but things have really been stabilized," Sherer said. Now, Smith said, "We have to try to pull ourselves out of just-survival mode to long-term planning."

And first on the new co-executive directors' agenda is a strategic plan. This will involve long-range financial planning, including developing new revenue streams and building an endowment. This is something they plan to do with community input, Sharpe said, noting that it's "not something were going to make up for ourselves." Sherer, who joined the board five years ago, said he is looking forward to the co-executive directors' creative thinking. "It always seemed to me that Historic Northampton was a semi-invisible institution in Northampton," Sherer said, noting that many people he met were not aware of the organization or had yet to visit it, and his objective was to "bring the place alive" and draw new people in. "I wanted the place to become both an intellectual and artistic center where history and the present become connected and made important," he said. Recent lecture series have done well at attracting new audiences, Sherer added.

This emphasis on outreach resonates with Sanders and Sharpe. To them, Historic Northampton is much more than just a museum or dusty research center. For many years, Sanders said, the organization had an academic and scholarly focus. But recently it has focused more on broadening its reach to other areas of the community, an effort the two new directors hope to continue. "It will be an evolution," Sanders said. "But I think in the last year and a half the organization has really pulled a lot of pieces together and is now on a different trajectory."

Northampton's history, they said, extends beyond the city proper, to the Hill towns and other outposts along the Connecticut River, as well as south through slavery. In thinking of areas of focus, the two women plan to look not only at the city's roots but also at its abolitionist history, the state hospital, the work of local pacifist Frances Crowe and the rainbow crosswalk downtown, among other things. They envision a wide range of programs, including hosting old-fashioned games in the yard and wine-and-cheese functions with local agricultural products.

Through the years, Smith said, board members have realized that however exciting particular exhibits may seem to them, the projects can at times cost a lot and reach few people, meaning focusing more on events might make sense. Smith said she is excited by the different skills the two directors bring to the table, noting Sanders' background in fundraising and natural history knowledge, as well as Sharpe's "awareness of trends and vibrancy in collections." A tour through Northampton led by the two of them, Smith proposed, could be a fascinating way to look at both the city's natural and human past.

Sharpe is particularly excited about the potential of refurbishing the Parsons House, built in 1719. "What went past its front door?" Sharpe asked, describing a potential exhibit that explores Northampton through the decades from that vantage point. "Historic Northampton isn't just a bunch of buildings on Bridge Street," Sharpe said. "It's the whole town, it's the whole city."

Stephanie McFeeters can be reached at smcfeeters@gazettenet.com.



Elizabeth Sharpe, of Amherst, and Laurie Sanders, of Westhampton, are the newly appointed co-executive directors of Historic Northampton. CAROL LOLLIS

Criteria for a Successful Organization:

1. Capable and interested officers interested in the promotion and growth of the association.
2. A healthy, growing membership.
3. A sound financial structure.
4. Worthwhile projects.
 - a. Every association should have one major project, and one minor project.
 - b. Interesting and informative programs.

Every association should have at least one major project, and one minor project going at all times.

The last one we did was the Bench at Historic Northampton and before that a monument. Here are a few of ideas which spring to mind:

- Possibility of getting an official Coat-of-Arms for our Parsons Family Association.
- Start a PFA sponsored ancestral DNA study.
- Photographing Parsons Building and getting their history documented; there are three I know of offhand in Florence, Northampton, and Greenfield.
- Indexing cemeteries: A fellow in Conway Mass is doing this and we can get any Parsons cousins' data condensed in electronic book or other format and members can contribute from their regions.
- Compile a profile of Parsons with their Professions and Hobbies (make them come to life again).
- Photograph and document cousins' hobbies for posterity: carving, quilting, painting, etc. Kim is working on her Great Uncle Darwin's carvings (priceless mementos of past talent).
- Join your local Historical Association and promote your Parsons related heritage.

Maybe we can compile and publish a companion book to complement Gerald's book that would contain information about cemeteries that contain remains of Parsons Ancestors. Each page could be devoted to a single individual, would have a photograph of the headstones, and if possible a photograph of the person and or family, and a paragraph or two about their life (ie: hobbies, interests, and occupations). This process could start with each member's immediate family and work back as far as possible, but only with their Parsons line. I'm sure that if the association did all of the digital art and editorial work, we could find a publisher that would print on demand small quantities, say 5-10 books at a time. That way we could add to the volume every now and then, keeping it current.

The price of on-demand publishing is highly variable, but you should look at this example: <http://www.i3output.com/solutions-services/oce-10000/?gelid=CNrUuuPhhMICFVjgfgodtjlAwQ>.

OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT:	Deanna Parsons Simons	Deanna.simons@cornell.edu
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT:	Laura Pisano Parsons	lpisano@westfield.ma.edu
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT:	Aralna Heath	whitestarris@gmail.com
THIRD VICE PRESIDENT:	James Parsons	Jparsons9@stny.rr.com
SECRETARY:	Trisa Parsons Palacio	Dialtrisa2cnn@yahoo.com
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HISTORIAN:	Gary Parsons	parsons@pfawr.org
ASSISTANT HISTORIAN:	Phillip Parsons, Esq.	crisandphil@yahoo.com
WEBSITE:	Karen V. Williams	k.vorbeck.williams@gmail.com

DIRECTORS: (listed alphabetically)

Nancy Armstrong; Dr. Kenneth T. Doran; Martha Parsons Ethier; Aralna Brown Heath;
Bob Heath; Kim Graham; Lydia C. Omasta; Phillip G. Parsons Esq.; Cris Parsons;

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS MEETING RESERVATIONS:

Place: Champy's at the Deerfield Inn, 81 Old Main Street, Deerfield, MA, 01342
Time: 5:30pm
Date: July 22, 2016; Friday
Type: Ordering off limited menu with selections of beef, chicken, fish, & vegetarian
RSVP: Kim Graham, 48 Parsons Rd, Conway, MA. 01341
PFA, PO Box 603, Conway, MA 01341

kbgbandits@gmail.com; kbgraham@admin.umass.edu; cell (413) 475-2499; w (413) 545-3374

NAMES: _____

REUNION RESERVATIONS: *** **PLEASE RSVP BY: SUNDAY, JULY 10, 2016** ***

Place: Deerfield Inn, 81 Old Main Street, Deerfield, MA, 01342
Tour Time: 10:00am – Noon
Meal Time: 12:30 PM in Terrace Room
Date: Saturday, July 23, 2016
Price: \$25.00
Type: **Finely catered buffet provided by Champy's. (*Appetizers, salad & assorted entrée's: braised beef, chicken marsala, roasted vegetables*)**
RSVP: Kim Graham, 48 Parsons Rd, Conway, MA. 01341
PFA, PO Box 603, Conway, MA 01341

kbgbandits@gmail.com; kbgraham@admin.umass.edu; cell(413) 475-2499; w(413) 545-3374

REUNION RESERVATIONS: **No. of Adults** _____ **No. of Children** _____

NAMES:

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO THE PARSONS FAMILY ASSOCIATION



☐ **New Member/** ☐ **Renewal Application**

Newsletter Format Preference: *check one*

☐ **Hard Copy**

☐ **Email Address:** _____

**Parsons Family Association
P.O Box 603,
Conway, MA 01341**

Membership Rates (per family)
Life Membership \$200.00
Regular Membership (Annually) \$10.00
Sustaining Membership (Annually) \$25.00

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Descendants of:	

Membership (circle choice):	Life \$200	Regular \$10	Sustaining \$25	BOOK ORDERS \$75 + \$5 = \$80 <i>Donation/Multi-book purchase price \$65+\$5 = \$70</i>
PFA Computer - Website Fund: \$	Maintenance Fund for Parsons Homestead \$	Special Gifts or Donations: \$		<i>Special Projects / House Fund:</i> \$

Now might be a good time to get one for your Family, Friends or donate one to your local Library or Historical and Genealogical Societies – *please call for special discount for donations.* Massachusetts residence must add a 6.25% sales tax.

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PARSONS**

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