



Summer 2025

Collections Update

Mahalia Dean

Our collection here at the Shelburne Historical Society is vast and varied. Recently we had the opportunity to show off selected items at the Smithsonian's Voices and Votes exhibit while it was on display at Mohawk Trail Regional School. We loaned out the wooden Shelburne ballot box, donated in 1996 by the Town, and our two photocopies of Shelburne's independence vote from June 26, 1776. These photocopies were taken by Herbert Ashworth from the town's archives and were donated from the collection of John W. Hoyt in 1983. It is an honor to have been included in this special exhibit, and we hope that visitors felt pride in our local history.

Speaking of local pride, Mahalia recently found two forms which highlight Shelburne's place in the annals of American history. Deep in the archives, we have a store of papers from the Wells family, dating from the 18th -early 19th centuries. Within this collection are forms from 1791 & 1795 which appoint William Wells as "Ensign of a Company in the second Regiment second Brigade and fourth Division of Militia in this Commonwealth." The 1791 form is signed by John Hancock, and the 1795 form is signed by Samuel Adams – our respective governors at the time.

From original signatures of Founding Fathers to the Smithsonian, the SHS' collection is a source of pride in our community. What will we uncover next?

Message Form the President

While progress has been made in several areas, the future of the Society is far from rosy. Progress has been made with respect to putting the museum's acquisition on our computer and on our website. Removal of the knob and tube wiring nears completion. Renewal of our insurance is now a possibility. Restoration of the building's classroom windows continues at its slow pace.. But little progress has been made in recruiting younger members to the board of trustees. as well as new volunteers. This need clouds our future.

Special Event

Ghosts in the Attic: A Shelburne Fall Legacy in Letters

Presented by: Susanna Minton Graham

Sunday August 10, 2025 - 1:00 PM

Shelburne Historical Society Museum

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Four generations of the Merrill family worked as stonemasons in Shelburne Falls, designing and building numerous structures in Franklin County, including the foundation of Arms Academy, the fire tower on Mt. Massamet, and many area bridges. This presentation is based on over 2000 Merrill family letters and other research.



In Memory of Donald Upton



Every town needs a civic-minded individual such as Donald Upton. Donald was born on October 24, 1927. Aside from two years in the service, in Panama, he was a life-long resident of Shelburne. From an early age, Donald was involved in numerous organizations. At Arms Academy, he served for three years on the Arms Academy Student Association and was its president during his senior year. In

his senior year, Donald was captain of the school's basketball team. After graduating from Arms Academy, he served in the army and then attended pharmacy school. Upon graduation, he entered employment at Baker's pharmacy in 1952. Soon after marriage to Kathleen Patch, Donald quickly became active in a host of community organizations. He was elected selectman in 1967 and 1970. In 1968, he served on the town's bicentennial committee. He was active as a trustee on the Buckland-Shelburne Community house and for several years was its president. He also was president of the Arms Academy Alumni Association. In 1991, he served as president of the Shelburne Historical Society and later remained on its board of trustees. He was active in Trinity Church and was a senior past master in the local Masonic lodge. There were few organizations of which Donald was not a member. After his retirement from Baker's Pharmacy in 1992, he, along with his wife, purchased Sawyer's News. From 2006, until the store's sale, Donald used the store's counter as a podium to give voice and to provide advice on local affairs. Always considerate, always polite, and always empathic to the needs of the community, Donald Upton remained an exemplar of a civic-minded citizen.



The Shelburne Hotel

Ashworth Collection

ORIGINALITY

The Arms Sentinel: Vol. 9 No. 15, May 17, 1940

Originality is a very rare quality. Many people can draw "Pinocchio" as well as he is in the movies, but it has no value. The person who wins fame is the one who has the original idea.

Many people don't know the meaning of the word "originality", or else they disregard it. People who copy everything are merely harming themselves. Later on in life they may be called upon to do something original. Then where will they be?

The most admired people are those who have ideas and carry them out. They probably never tried to copy things when they were young, so now they are able to be original.

Even in school we can start being original. There is no use in copying now, because sooner or later, we will be found out.

When someone is out in the world and copies to make money, no one calls it "copying". It is called plagiarism, which is a polite word for stealing.

The way to develop the trait of originality is to start right now! The next time that you are asked to write a theme or draw a freehand drawing, be original!

Bardwell's Ferry Bridge: A brief History

As Researched by: Jerry Hoyt



The origins of Bardwell's ferry and later of the Bardwell Ferry's Bridge start with Gideon Bardwell, Jr. Perhaps, with an eye to a possible ferry route, Gideon settled

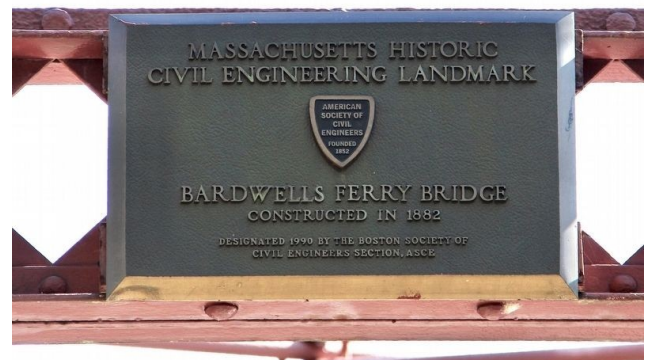
in the southernmost part of Shelburne in 1778. He soon began a ferry service across the Deerfield River between Shelburne and Broomshire, Conway. It is not known the exact year the ferry service began. The earliest town record that mentions "Gideon Bardwell Ferry" was in 1784. This service was continued by his son, Joel, and later his grandson Orsamus. This ferry service operated for nearly 85 years. Fees for ferry service varied from 3 to 5 cents for passengers, 12 cents for cattle and 19 cents for sheep.

The advent of the railroad and increased traffic doomed Bardwell's ferry. In 1867, the Troy and Greenfield Railroad constructed a railroad bridge five miles west of Bardwell's Ferry. In the same year, a railroad station also was built. An Increase of traffic on Bardwell's Ferry Road resulted. Realizing that a ferry service no longer sufficed, Orsamus pressed for construction of a bridge. In 1868, a wooden covered bridge was completed. Hartwell and Sprague of Northampton were the contractors. This bridge soon fell victim to a storm. In 1873, The bridge's destruction led to a boundary dispute between Shelburne and Conway over which town was financially responsible for its repair. In November 1873, Shelburne petitioned the legislature to compel Conway to pay its share of the cost for repair of the bridge. In April 1875, the legislature approved Shelburne's petition. Eventually, Conway complied, and the bridge was rebuilt. Unfortunately, a storm in January 1882 blew the bridge off its abutment. The two towns promptly responded, and in March of that year authorized the Corrugated Metal Company of East Berlin, Connecticut to construct a 198-foot-long lenticular truss bridge. The estimated cost was \$17,000. George G. Merrill, a stone mason from Shelburne, agreed to build



the stone abutments and piers. The bridge was carried to the site by railroad car and was installed and in service by July 1882. The bridge is 40 feet above the Deerfield River and is one of only 8 lenticular truss

bridges in Massachusetts as well as one of the longest in the United States. Damage caused by flooding in July 2023 led the state to close the bridge in August. Two months later the Department of Transportation approved \$6. million to repair the bridge. At the time of this writing, the bridge remains closed.



The historical significance of Bardwell's bridge is two-fold. Ironically, the bridge's construction highlights the importance of the railroad. Without the construction of the Troy and Greenfield Railroad, it is unlikely that construction of the bridge would have occurred when and where it did. The second historical significance of the bridge was its innovative use of a lenticular truss design as well as the length of its span.



Ramblings from the Archives

The History of a Needle

A small piece of steel was carried into a factory and after going through different processes it became this small, gold-eyed needle that I am going to write about.

It was put in a neat paper with similar companions and carried to a large store with many others. Its small house was quite dark and it was very much afraid. A little girl came into the store and bought the paper. She carried it home to her mother who opened it and distributed the needles to different places in her cushion, thus it was restored to light again. After looking around at its dwelling place, its bright eye discovered a woman busy sewing. It was first used to make garments for a poor little girl. A few days later the girl came running into the room where her mother was at work, and said she must have her dress mended right away as she would be late to school. Her mother took the needle and quickly mended it so that she was in time for school.

Her brother was the next to bring work for the needle. He cut his finger and had to have it sewed up. Both times the needle was very useful and received its due reward. By mistake it was left on a dress when it was finished, and was carried to a new home in a dress-maker's shop. Here it was kept at work most of the time and disliked it because it was too busy a life. It tried to think of some way in which to escape, but failed. But by good luck it was again transferred most mysteriously into the hands of its first owner. It was used only at long intervals and felt quite proud of its high position.

This lady started a sewing school soon after and gave our friend to a little girl to

use. With its usual brightness it discovered that the dress she had on to be the one that it had help to make the first time it was used. The girl, after finding that this was the needle that had been so useful in making garments for her, put it in a needle-book. The prison was new and it liked it, but slipped out while she was sewing in the barn and made its way through the hay mow.

Many years later, the girl then quite an old lady, on visiting this house where she used to live saw something shiny on the barn floor. She picked it up and it proved to be her treasure, the needle. It was very rusty, all but its eye and slightly bent.

Moral—Do not be discouraged hereafter when hunting for a lost article, if reminded of the old adage: "It is like looking for a needle in a hay-mow," for you see needles lost in hay-mows are sometimes found.

Arm Student April 1889

