



NEWS-LETTER

DEDHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY DEDHAM MA 02027-0215
Tel: 781-326-1385 – E-Mail: Society@DedhamHistorical.org – Web Site: DedhamHistorical.org

February 2009

**“The Fairbanks House:
New Discoveries at America’s Oldest Timber Frame House”
Lecture, March 12**



The Fairbanks House, c. 1900

Dr. Alex Service, Fairbanks House, Director and Curator of the Fairbanks House, will be the guest speaker on Thursday, March 12, 7:30 PM, at the Dedham Historical Society. Service will share the results of recent studies of the “old Fairbanks homestead,” including the 2002 work that reinforced the Fairbanks House’s claim to be the oldest standing timber frame building in North America.

The circa 1637-1641 house in Dedham was home to Puritan immigrants and eight generations of their descendants, until the house opened as a museum in 1904. It has long been celebrated as the best-preserved example of early English colonial architecture in New England, and it continues to reveal new insights to this day.

The cost of the lecture is \$5 per person, free to members.

Dr. Service has been Director/Curator of the Fairbanks House since April 2006. Her previous positions have been with Haley Sharpe Design, Limited, Williamsburg, Virginia as Research Development Coordinator, Historic Jamestowne Project, the Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center, Thermopolis, Wyoming as Director, the Fort Caspar Museum, Casper, Wyoming, and many others in related fields.

She holds a Ph.D. from the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, England, 1998; an M.A. from the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, England, and a B.A. in East Asian Studies from the University of California at Los Angeles.

She has authored numerous publications.

SOIRÉE SET FOR MAY 30

The social event of the year in Dedham, the Dedham Historical Society’s Annual Soirée, will take place May 30, at one of Dedham’s beautiful, large homes on Common Street.

The Worthington Committee is hard at work to make sure the event is as fabulous as ever, with some surprise features and opportunities. Mark the date on your calendar, now. Details will follow.

SUPERIOR COURT ALSO CELEBRATES 150TH ANNIVERSARY

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Massachusetts Superior Court, founded the same year as the Dedham Historical Society. Celebrations are being planned around the state. In Norfolk County, a committee has been diligently working to create programs to appeal to diverse members of the community. Sandra Waxman, our Librarian/Archivist is serving on the committee.

A number of events are planned, one being a recreation of the Sacco-Vanzetti Trial, scheduled for Tuesday, May 19, 2009. Many of the Society's records and photographs will be utilized in the Court's celebration.

CHARLES STEARNS OF DEDHAM

By Eleanor D. Palma



Charles Stearns in the Society's Library, c.1927.

Note the Federal shield-back chair (1790-1810) in the foreground, now on exhibit in the furniture room.

When the doorbell rings at the Dedham Historical Society, one never knows what new stories or interesting people will be on the other side. Such was the case in recent months when a gentleman, Chad Oliver, and his mother, Mrs. Helen Stearns Oliver, arrived from Maine to do some research on his mother's family. They were doing a "memory tour" of Dedham where Mrs. Oliver had lived as a girl. One of her fondest memories was rushing directly from school to visit her father, Charles Stearns, in his basement office at the Historical Society where he was the librarian, a position he held for twenty years until his untimely death in 1937.

Charles Stearns was born in Dedham, 30 November 1884, the only son of George C. Jr., and Mary Newell Morse Stearns. He married Edythe Pratt and they had three children, Phyllis, Helen and Richard. Charles had been an assistant librarian at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston before leaving to accept a position with the Dedham Finishing Company. Appointed to the position of librarian at the DHS on 1 March 1919, he used his many years of experience to continue the work of the Society.

A prolific writer, Stearns followed in the footsteps of his father George Jr. and his grandfather George Sr. Both men were writers of great ability as well as great lovers of nature. Many of their articles appeared from time to time in the Dedham Transcript. One of George Jr.'s most ambitious works was *Dedham Wild Flowers*. The series of articles was broad and complete as he delighted in tramping through the fields and woods of Dedham and then writing about his day's excursions. A keen observer, he would notice things that the casual passerby would not see.

Charles Stearns was likewise a lover of the outdoors. Some of the articles which he wrote for the Transcript reflect this, such as: *History and Tradition of the Charles River*, *The Famous Suffolk Resolve* and *A Trip to Mt. Washington*. His daughter Helen relates how he would take the family hiking to the boathouse on the Charles River where they could swim or spend the

day canoeing, settling for a picnic lunch by the river. Other days they would walk through the town forest, especially on a Sunday or holiday. A winter day might find the family skating on Wigwam Pond where Charles was adept at making figure eights. His love of the outdoors also encompassed the joy he had in his vegetable garden at his home on Richards Street.

Wintertime was the time of year, as remembered by his daughter Helen, when they would sit by the fireplace and her father would read to them as he did on many evenings from one of his collection of books which were piled on his roll top desk and lined the walls of his room. On Christmas Eve there would be a special treat, the reading of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. One Christmas there was also a special gift. A two story dollhouse which Charles made, complete with furniture, even a Santa coming out of the chimney. Dad was behind the dollhouse making Santa move by pulling on his pipe. One summer when the children were recuperating from the whooping cough in Ocean Point, Maine, Charles, still in Dedham, wrote wonderful letters to his family. "Oh how we missed him but were comforted by the letters knowing he loved and missed us," said Helen.

As important as his family and his work at the DHS were, Charles Stearns was active in the town of Dedham. He served as a member of the Tercentenary Committee where he worked with the chairman, Dr. Arthur M. Worthington. He was clerk of the First Parish Unitarian Church and an active member of the Constellation Lodge, A. F. and A. M. His interest in all things concerning Dedham is evidenced in the following series of letters from the Dedham Transcript.

Sirs: I notice that the paving in front of the Central Fire Station is in very bad condition and needs attention. I also note that at the last Annual Town Meeting some six months ago, the town appropriated \$200 for this work.

If I entered a florist's shop, which had in bold letters on the window, "Flowers telegraphed to all parts of the world," and calmly asked them to wire a sweet bunch of roses to the North Pole, they would probably put me down as a little dippy. On the same score I may be considered a little out in asking as to the whereabouts of that \$200. C. S.

Dear Sir: In the issue of your paper, Nov. 25 somebody, over the signature of C. S., tells of the pavement in front of the Central Fire Station as being in poor condition, and inquires to the whereabouts of the \$200 appropriated for that work. Now, if the gentleman had communicated to the chief of the Fire Department he could have received the information without any of the rigidity of the North Pole and without fear of anybody putting him down as being a little dippy.

Henry J. Harrigan, Chief of Fire Department

Dear Mr. Editor: I made the statement in my letter, which appeared in the Transcript of the 25th, that the paving in front of the Central Fire Station was in bad condition. It would seem that no work had been done there recently, so I raised the query on regard to the matter. I am now raising the same query.

Mr. Harrigan writes, in your paper of Dec. 9th: "If the gentleman had communicated with the Chief of the Fire Dept. he could have received the information." The fact is, I did not know at that time with whom to communicate, and, furthermore, I did not consider it necessary to make an absolutely personal inquiry, as it is not at all a personal matter, but a town matter.

"However, I should like now to merely ask the Chief of the Fire Department if he would kindly favor me and the rest of the citizens of the town, with the facts as to how much work has been done there since last April: how much of the \$200 appropriated has been used for this purpose; and if, perchance, nothing has been done, why the delay?"

Charles Stearns, Dedham, Dec. 13, 1911."

Charles Stearns: a writer of ability, a lover of nature, a lover of all things historical and a good citizen of the town of Dedham. He was a man of many interests and talents. His daughter Helen sums it all up when she said, "He was a gentle and loving father."

2008 ANNUAL APPEAL CONTRIBUTORS

Our sincere thanks to all who helped us meet our financial obligations for the year 2008. It is only through such help that we are able to do so much of that to which we aspire. It is important to note that many other individuals and organizations have made significant contributions throughout the year to specific projects of the Society. They have been gratefully acknowledged at the time of the gift.

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NEW ACQUISITIONS

In the March 2002 issue of the *News-Letter*, Ron Frazier wrote a special feature on Frans J. R. Gyllenberg and Alfred Henry Swanson, who were silversmiths and had a metalworking shop on Van Brunt Avenue in Dedham. The two lived in Dedham, and were considered highly important artists of the Arts and Crafts movement. In January, we were fortunate to obtain, through the Collections Fund a wide rim on cylindrical column chamberstick, joined to a lobed and ribbed base with ring handle, approximately 3 1/2" high, made by the two Dedham residents.



Gyllenberg & Swanson Chamberstick