President's Message

The Springfield Historical Society will meet at the Town Hall on Tuesday, October 10th, 6:00 p.m., for a special Potluck Dinner and regular fall meeting. Our speaker will be Millard Hunter, a native of Albany, N.Y. Presently he and his wife Lou are residents of Sutton. He is a 1950 graduate of Union College, Schenectady, NY. After graduation from Union he spent 35 years in marketing with the International Nickel Company serving in various posts in the US. He retires from US Nickel in 1987. Since then he has been engrossed in his hobby of researching details of the Civil War...its politics, battles, soldiers and commanders. His interest was peaked by the book "A Stillness at Appomattox" by Bruce Catton. Since reading the book he has traveled over the most important battlefields of the war and attended and participated in many seminars conducted on the site of particular battles. Millard has an extremely fine grasp of the details of the Civil War. His presentation will feature "New Hampshire Units in the Civil War"

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM
from Muriel Tinkham, Museum Curator
The Springfield Historical Museum has two lovely new display cases as a result of a generous donation by Nancy Bower on behalf of the Belfield family. The cases were made by Sherman Heath and feature beautiful sturdy oak bases. We invite you to come over to the museum to see them! Our museum facility committee has recommended the expansion and improvement of our current facility and will be moving ahead with their work on this.

OFFICERS ELECTED FOR 2000-2001
President: Patsy Caswell
Vice President: Bob Nulsen
Secretary: Donna Denniston
Treasurer: Keith Cutting - 3 years
Board: Janet Roberts - 3 years
    Muriel Tinkham - 2 years
    Dickie Hopper - 1 year

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE MADE:
Meetings will be held quarterly the 2nd week in January, April, July and October, the day to be announced in advance in the newspapers, newsletter and town bulletin board.

DUES NOTICE:
Society dues were "due" as of July 1st. Have you paid yours yet? We need your support!!! Individual dues are a mere $10 a year and will guarantee that you continue to receive our newsletter and that the wonderful work of our society in preserving our town's history will go on as well. Mail your check to The Springfield Historical Society, PO Box 6, Springfield, NH 03284

Springfield's Home front in the 1860's
by Patsy Caswell

We are pleased to have Millard Hunter speak on the topic of Springfield and New Hampshire's men in the Civil War at our Tuesday, October 10th meeting. In anticipation of this, I began searching for events that happened on the home front during this time. The following is what life was like in the 1860's when Springfield's men went off to the War of the Rebellion.

With the exception of Jane Patton's house in West Springfield, the houses we know in the village were probably there in the 1860's. Some houses and barns have been torn down over the years. Going from the meeting house to the store, there was a large house on the left not too far from Nichol's Hill Corner. There were three mill ponds progressing down the left side of the road in front of the house and a blacksmith shop or mill by the home now owned by Allie Wheeler. The store was owned by Daniel Adams during those years. The building has been enlarged and remodeled over the years. The store was an important center of town when people had to rely on horse and buggy for transportation. Of course the roads were not paved and there was a large boulder in the road near the intersection of what is now Main St. and the George Hill Road.

The town hall and meeting house played an important role in the lives of the Springfield people. It had been moved down from the cemetery a few years before to its present
location. In 1860, the minister money ($35.96) was divided among the various denominations using the church, the Universalists, Christian Methodists and the Calvinist Baptists.

The Springfield Union Meeting House Society, a men's group, was organized about the time that the building was relocated. It was made up of pew owners, one pew, one vote. They met once a year. The tax on each pew was 25 cents, but in 1865, it was raised to 50 cents. If they needed more money, the society would levy another tax!

The society's main concern was the soldiers in 1862. "They" [I imagine the ladies of the church] sent packages to the soldiers with mittens, feetings, soap, shirts, bandages, sheets, drawers, pillow cases, quilts, papers of corn starch and towels. Later in 1862 the Concord Soldier's Aid Society asked for help again and sent cloth to the local church society. "After many tears were shed on it, the ladies took it home to work it up." [Let's hope they had one of those new fangled treadle machines and didn't have to do their stitching by hand!]

Financially the town of 1021 population [1860 census] was in debt due to paying for soldiers to enlist, and for the poor farm and county poor expenses. Yet there was discussion in 1864 of painting the building. The church would paint the second floor and the town the first. This did not happen, but the church did get new stoves and pew. The following year, they shingled the west side of the church roof and repaired the doorstep for $55.00.

Beginning in 1862, the selectmen held several special meetings in regard to furnishing soldiers for the "War of the Great Rebellion". The selectmen had to borrow money on the credit of the town. There was a committee to encourage enlistment's. By 1863 the town paid $300.00 to each drafted man, his substitute, or volunteers who were mustered into the service. Each year of the war, there was a quota to fill and Charles McDaniel was appointed to do so in August of 1864. He was not to exceed nineteen thousand dollars. By September the next year the selectmen voted to pay citizens who enlisted one thousand dollars each as bounty, but by December of that year, the agent could enlist no more than twelve for the total sum of five thousand dollars. Each man who enrolled got $300.00 bounty to furnish a substitute for three years and to anyone enlisting in Hancock's Corps as a veteran who would count in Springfield's quota. By the last year of the war, 1865, only three men were necessary to make up the quota. The town went into debt to pay for the war effort by $36,405.37. According to Charles McDaniel, 92 men from Springfield served in the War of the Rebellion. One of the stories passed down over the generations in town is that Richard Heath, mustered out in October 1862, with the (black?) measles. His three brothers, Linton, Henry and Charles were exposed and all three brothers became blind. The oldest town people still remember blind Charles, the peddler.

If you were ill, Dr. Valentine Manahan would have been your physician in Springfield (1851-1866). There was a diphtheria epidemic during the fall of 1863. Dr. D. P. Goodhue was serving with the navy in the war and arrived in town later.

There were three post offices in town, one in East Springfield on the 4th NH Turnpike, another in Springfield village and the third in the West Springfield store. Daniel Adams was the postmaster as well as the store keeper. This position was passed down to future store owners for about one hundred years. The mail was brought to town by horse and wagon from Andover. This was a very difficult trip in mud season. Two of the main roads between the villages at that time were the King’s Highway and what we now call Cemetery Road which went down to the meeting house where it is now located.

Every home had a barn, horse and other animals. Some farmed more extensively than others. As people began leaving town after the war in the "go west young man" era, farmers staying in town would begin buying up the abandoned farms to add to their acreage. They often cultivated or hayed the fields and let the abandoned houses fall down. Each family tried to be as self-sufficient as possible, preserving food in salt or brine in crocks or drying certain meats, nuts and vegetables. They also stored potatoes and other cold crop foods in their unheated cellars. The mason canning jar was patented in 1858, so some of the women may have been canning. It was necessary to "put by" as much food as possible, cut enough cords of wood hopefully a year ahead of time, and fill the barns with hay to get through the winter...and on top of this, send their men to war.

Sullivan County published a map in 1860 based on the 1850 census. It showed 14 school districts in town, but each school did not necessarily hold sessions in each district. For instance, in 1861 districts 4, 7, and 14 did not hold sessions. By 1864 #14 was back in session but not #4 or #7. There were 20 teachers for the 2 sessions in 1863 and they would have boarded with families in the district if they were not residents of the town or lived too far away from the school. The highest enrollment of students in town was 420 pupils in 1864. Attendance was poor, averaging 222 during the year. District #1 (Centre School) was still up by the cemetery and on the "unfit" list. (This was later replaced by the building that is now the historical museum.) About the time of the war, there was an increase in women teachers. There were both summer and winter sessions.

There were a series of mills lining the brooks throughout Springfield where you could get your corn etc. ground into flour; grist mills, cider mills, shingle and saw mills. If you look along the brooks today, you can see the remains of these old mills. As early as 1843, the Station Mill Co., a grist mill, was opposite the town hall and meeting house. It went through several ownership's before it was sold and moved away in 1870.

Every home had to prepare for winter. There was no central heat. The homes were probably banked with sawdust, branches of fir trees or whatever else Yankee ingenuity though up. It would be necessary to keep the stoves going in the house. Some houses were lucky enough to have a hand
pump inside. The pipes, in those days, were usually iron. It would have been rare to have a heated bedroom unless it was over the kitchen and a register was cut through from one to the other... It was a long cold walk to the outhouse, so there was probably a chamber pot under your bed. The mattress would be a feather bed in winter, if you were lucky! Note that many houses and barns in NH are connected by a series of sheds. This way one could get to the out house or barn without going outdoors. These out buildings would not be heated. Huge snow rollers pulled by horses or oxen kept the road open, and families would have a sleigh. When the ice on lakes such as Station Pond (Lake Kolelemook) became thick, it had to be cut and hauled off to everyone’s icehouse. This would last until the next ice cutting season.

Life was not always all work and no play. Photography had even reached Springfield and families that could afford to do so, began having pictures of family members taken. Some of these still exist in 2000. The families would get together for card parties or roll back the rug for dances with a fiddle player or two. The children were all packed together in one of the double beds until it was time for the families to go home or all stay over night. The cider, now hard, made them jolly and they were not worried about designated drivers.

These are only a few examples of what life in Springfield would have been like during the years of the War of the Great Rebellion. As you read this, you have probably thought of other examples. No matter what, the 1860’s were difficult years for Springfield trying to support their men in the service and wondering who would make it home. After the war ended in 1865, life changed again for the residents of our town. Some of the men did not come home, and some saw greener pastures and headed west. The railroad that went along route 4 rather than what later became our 4A, made that a faster way to get from Concord to Vermont and the turnpike became less traveled. Taverns closed and families moved away. Springfield also lost “Heath’s Gore” where quite a few people lived, to Grantham. Yet those who remained in town kept the town going and paid off their huge debt for their contribution to the “War of the Great Rebellion”.

[Thank you, Patsy, for another great contribution to our newsletter and to our history of Springfield!]