



Past Times

Published by The Little Compton Historical Society ~ Winter '11/'12

Winter at the Wilbor House

Often on a busy summer day, when I talk with visitors about our work at the Historical Society, they end up asking me, "But, what do you do in the wintertime?" Six years ago, I wondered the same thing as I was about to start my new job as Managing Director. Would I be lonely in January? Would there be enough to do?

Today those old worries make me smile. It was pleasant surprise to me (and may still surprise our visitors) that there is seldom a lonely day and always more than enough to do at the Wilbor House.

Open Year-Round

The Historical Society operates all year round. From mid-October through June our business office hours are Tuesday through Friday from 9 AM to 3 PM. We offer tours, research appointments and school programs all throughout the year by appointment. We also fulfill the orders for our books that arrive via Amazon.com. (See page 6.) People frequently drop by to purchase items from our gift shop, drop off donations or loans for our collection or antique sale, or most often to volunteer.

Summer Preparations

Much of the winter is filled with the behind-the-scenes work needed to get ready for the summer. Committees meet to plan the Preview Party and Family Day. Collections volunteers photograph and add new items to our computer database. (Visit our on-line collection at littlecompton.org.) Building volunteers make minor

repairs and consult with professionals to oversee major ones. Researchers and exhibit planners work their way through the archives to find information, images and objects pertaining to the summer's theme.

The History of Little Compton

This coming summer the theme is once again *The History of Little Compton* and this winter Janet Lisle is moving into her fourth year of research and writing. Her new book, *The History of Little Compton, A Home by the Sea, 1820-1954*, will be available at the Preview Party on July 6. The book will be the historical society's major focus throughout the winter and spring. Janet will finish writing after the New Year and then the proofreading, editing, image selection and graphic design begins!

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Sneak Peek!

*History of Little Compton
A Home by the Sea, 1820-1954*
by Janet Lisle

Available July 7th

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548 West Main Road
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WANTED AS GIFTS OR LOANS!

Antique or Vintage Items

To be sold in our Antique Sale to benefit
the Historical Society.

Antique Items with Little Compton Histories

For possible inclusion in our permanent
collection. The Collections Committee will
review each item.

Digital Images of Family Photographs

Your clearly labeled photographs may help
us identify the hundreds of unidentified
photos in our collection.

Obituaries, Funeral and Memorial Service Programs, Copies of Eulogies

Help us document the lives of our
20th century residents by sharing
information about your loved ones with us.

Written Histories

Record your Little Compton memories
and we will archive them.

Corporate Members

Local businesses play an important role
in the preservation and presentation of
Little Compton's history. Additional
Corporate Members are always welcome.
Please call 635-4035 or complete the
membership form on page 8.

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SCHOOL PROGRAM SPONSORS

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Windy Hill Nurseries Inc.

WINTER HOURS

Office Hours
Tuesday ~ Friday
9 AM ~ 3 PM

**Tours, Educational
Programs & Research**
by appointment

On~Line Community Calendar

Wondering when next year's Tree Spree or Cider Social might be?

Visit the new on-line Little Compton Community Calendar.

http://www.keepandshare.com/calendar/show_month.php?i=1744457

Organizations interested in posting their dates should contact
lchistory@littlecompton.org for the password.

Winter at the Wilbur House *continued from page 1*

Moments in History

Local artists will also be stopping by the Wilbur House this winter to research and deliver the artwork they will create for *A Home by the Sea*. Janet will provide them with a list of key moments in Little Compton's history and they will interpret a historic event in their chosen art form. Every work of art will be included in the exhibition and approximately 20 will be selected by a jury for inclusion in the book. (If you would like to participate please see page 6.)

75th Anniversary

We'll also be preparing for our 75th Anniversary celebrations this year culminating with a special members event at historic Goosewing Farm. For more information on the Historical Society's early years please see page 5.

Fundraising

The winter is also a time for fundraising. The Annual Appeal goes out each December and we work on grants and special requests to make sure our projects are properly funded. This year our fundraising efforts will center on *The History of Little Compton* project and special repairs and maintenance for our center chimney and Peggotty. Donations are always welcome.

We're Here When You Need Us

So this winter as you are sorting your family photographs, cleaning out the attic or just longing for a good local history book, don't hesitate to call or stop by the Historical Society. Our staff and volunteers are ready to help.

Marjory O'Toole, Managing Director

Volunteer Docents & Receptionists Needed for the 2012 Season

High School & College Students,
Teachers, Retirees, and
Others Welcome

Individual training provided.

Call 401-635-4035

Email lchistory@littlecompton.org



Textile consultant, Blair Walker, sorts World War I uniforms for the collection.

Explore the Collection On-Line

Images and information on over 13,000 Little Compton items are available at your fingertips, 24 hours a day.

Visit littlecompton.org

Select On-Line Collection

You may browse or conduct a keyword search.

Suggested Keywords: sled, toy, creche, fur, sleigh, skate, coat, wool



One of the more modern ice skates in the collection. See the others at littlecompton.org Keyword: skate



How the LCHS Came to Be

Excerpts from the Society's Early Minutes

Before the LCHS

Like many of Little Compton's organizations, the Little Compton Historical Society evolved from The Village Improvement Society, a multi-purpose community organization dedicated to improving all aspects of life in Little Compton from beautification to public health. "In the summer of 1934 Miss Ruth Parks, president of the Little Compton Village Improvement Society and Mrs. J. Edward Newton, its treasurer, conceived the idea of forming an organization "for the collection, preservation and dissemination of historical information concerning the town and its inhabitants including its connection with the Plymouth Colony and the part it played in the colonial wars as well as in events of more recent date." The first meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Newton at which "highly interesting local reminiscences were given by some of the older inhabitants." At their second meeting "it was voted to constitute as a department of the Village Improvement Society" and they planned for their first annual meeting. The annual meeting of the association was held on August 13, 1935. Attendees amicably proposed that the two organizations become independent and they created the Little Compton Historical Association. Membership dues were 50 cents per year.

Little Compton Historical Association

The newly formed Little Compton Historical Association had no place to call its own but began its work in earnest. Meetings were held at the school, the Community House, The Brownell House (owned by the Village Improvement Society) and private homes. The association focused on presenting speakers (often

discussing the Sakonnet Indians, Benjamin Church and other founding fathers) and collecting items, though there was no real place to store them. Their first major project was the 1936 RI Tercentenary Celebration, but their primary concern was finding a home for themselves and their objects. Minutes from the time reference the need for storage areas, glass cases, and the construction of an artifact cupboard at the Brownell House which they would consider their headquarters "for the present."



What Might Have Been.

The Little Compton Historical Society was almost located in "Awashonks," the childhood home of America's first Egyptologist. The deal fell through and the house was demolished.

Hoping for a Headquarters

It wasn't long before a seemingly ideal offer came their way. On March 9, 1937, "the very generous offer of Miss Theodora Wilbour of the so-called Charles Edwin Wilbour property situated on the Swamp Road, for Headquarters of the Historical Association was discussed at length, and after a visit for inspection by the

Committee and further discussion a motion was made and seconded and it was VOTED: to accept Miss Wilbour's offer subject to the approval by the Committee of Deed of Property to be forwarded to them by Miss Wilbour, and that appreciation be expressed to Miss Wilbour for her interest in and generosity to our Association." An enthusiastic member gave the first \$100 donation for building repairs that night.

The property, known as "Awashonks" was the former home of Sarah Soule Wilbour, a local activist and historian, and her son Charles Edwin Wilbour, America's first Egyptologist. It was located on the corner of West Main and Swamp Roads in an excellent location for visitors and included not only the home but

Continued on page 7

The History of Little Compton A Home by the Sea, 1820~1954

By Janet Lisle

Available July 6, 2012

A Sneak Peek

Chapter Eight: Murder and Mayhem

At 7 a.m. on a Saturday morning in early December 1882, Albert Seabury, 53, who owed a farm on Windmill Hill, set out with his oxcart and team to gather seaweed from the shore of the Sakonnet River. Two hours later, he had not returned. His wife, waiting breakfast for him, sent their 16-year-old son Willie to discover what was causing the delay. The boy found his father facedown in the sand, his head brutally bludgeoned and a bloody pitchfork sticking up nearby. He was dead but the only just; the body was still warm. As the tide was coming in, Willie pulled his father farther up the shore and ran for help. This small act of compassion disturbed a murder scene that might have provided answers to a case that would soon become a tangle of mysteries.

The brutal killing of Albert Seabury was one of the most heinous crimes ever committed in Little Compton. That the killer or killers were never brought to justice, fixed the case in the minds of town residents for generations to come. The murder investigation that followed was covered in explicit detail by newspapers around the region. *The Providence Journal* took a special interest, for the story was deliciously slow-moving and riveted readers everywhere. Over a period of weeks, evidence trickled in, both formally and through backdoor gossip. Neighbors were interviewed, bitter family feuds came to light, dark warnings were issued, children testified. By the end, everyone in town had an opinion but no charges were proved. Years later, it's still tempting to try to solve case.



Seaweed gathering in Little Compton. Early Little Compton residents strongly protected their rights to gather seaweed, a necessary fertilizer and insulator. Property deeds would often include seaweed rights.

Save the Dates

The History of Little Compton

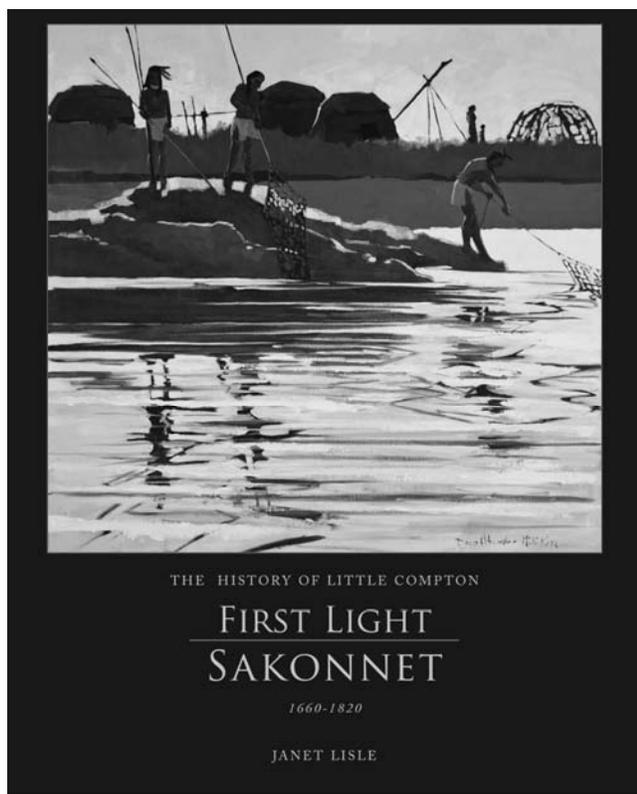
Exhibit Preview Party Friday, July 6
Family Day Saturday, July 7

Find our Books on Amazon.com

All of the Historical Society's publications are now available on Amazon.com

Search for them today!

Or stop by the Wilbur House Museum Shop,
Wilbur's General Store, Sakonnet Vineyards
or Partner's Village Store



The History of Little Compton

First Light: Sakonnet

1660-1820

By Janet Lisle

Sakonnet Point Perspectives

By James Garman & Michelle Styger

L is for Little Compton

By Piper Hawes

Little Compton Families

By B.F. Wilbour

Terra Nova Vida Nova

The Portuguese in Little Compton

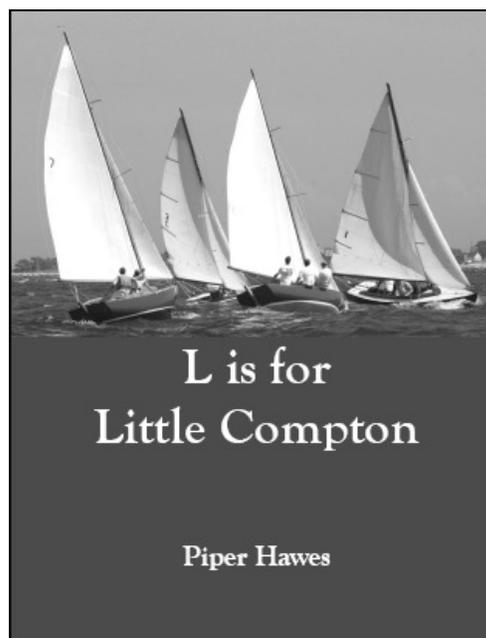
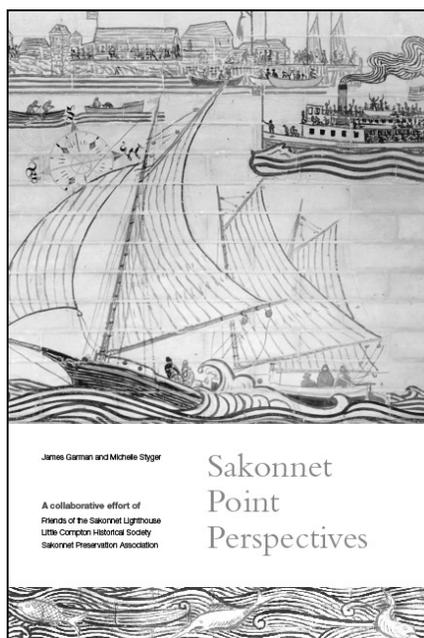
Edited by Juanita Goulart

Time to Play

Edited by Juanita Goulart

The Life and Art of Sydney Burleigh

By Janet Lisle



A Call to Artists

Sakonnet Area artists are invited to interpret moments in Little Compton's history for the "Home by the Sea" book and temporary exhibition scheduled for summer 2012.

All contributing artists will be featured in the exhibition. A smaller number of works, selected by a jury, will also be featured as full color illustrations in *The History of Little Compton, A Home by the Sea, 1820-1954* by Janet Lisle to be published in July 2012.



All artwork must be submitted by April 2 for consideration by the jury. After that date, additional pieces for the exhibition will be accepted until June 1.

For a complete description of the project, please e-mail lchistory@littlecompton.org and request an Artists' Invitation.

A Violent Binding

Sculpture submitted by Victoria McGeoch in 2010 and featured in the first volume of Little Compton History, First Light: Sakonnet, 1660-1820.

How the LCHS Came to Be *continued from page 7*

also the studio of Charles Edwin Wilbour's son-in-law, painter Edwin Blashfield. It was filled with family portraits, fine colonial antiques and even Egyptian artifacts. It was a very desirable location for the new Historical Association.

By June the deed of gift for "Awashonks" had not yet arrived and the Historical Association members were anxious. They voted to begin communications with Miss Wilbour's lawyer "in order to hasten matters if possible" The following month they were still hopeful that the house would be theirs and began looking into insurance and an inventory of the items inside the home.

The Association held their full annual meeting on July 9, 1937 and discussed the offer of the house with their membership. "Mrs. Withington moved "that we accept the offer with thanks." But withdrew the motion after further discussion." There was much more to the story. Miss Wilbour had still not sent the deed and had a reputation for capricious behavior with other museums.

After discussion that was never written into the minutes, Mr. Walter Renolds motion was accepted instead. "It is

resolved by the Little Compton Historical Association at its meeting on July 9th 1937, has heard with profound gratitude of the generous offer of Miss Wilbour of her house and that of her ancestors and that the matter be referred to the Executive Committee with the power to accept at its discretion." In the end the offer fell through, simply disappearing from the minutes of the organization, and Miss Wilbour had the house torn down.

Incorporation

The thought of becoming property owners prompted discussions of incorporation and a motion to incorporate was passed at the July 1937 annual meeting. In a series of prompt follow-up meetings, the organization changed its name to the Little Compton Historical Society "in keeping with other similar bodies." The Certificate of Incorporation was accepted July 23, 1937 along with a seven page list of members and the Historical Society as we know it was born. It was still without a home, but began studious researching and preserving the histories and genealogical information we rely on today.

LCHS Membership

- Event Sponsor \$250 & up
- Program Sponsor \$150
- Supporting \$100
- Corporate \$75
- Contributing \$50
- Family \$30
- Individual \$20
- My Company will match my membership or gift. Completed matching form enclosed.

Please make checks payable to:

Little Compton Historical Society
PO Box 577, Little Compton, RI 02837

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Membership

With Benefits from Coast to Coast

Join or Renew Today!

LCHS participates in the
Time Travelers

reciprocal membership program.

Your Historical Society membership card provides you with **FREE or Discounted Admission to 250 historic sites all across the country!**

For a complete list of participating sites log onto
www.mohistory.org/content/membershipservices/timetravelers.aspx
or call LCHS at 635-4035.

As always you'll enjoy local membership benefits including free admission to the Wilbor House and our special exhibitions, invitations to special events and advance registration for our most popular programs. Most importantly, your membership gift helps preserve Little Compton's rich history for generations.

Members receive \$3 off every copy of *Sakonnet Point Perspectives*



LCHS Celebrates 75 Years!



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