



Past Times

Published by The Little Compton Historical Society ~ Spring 2009

Share Your Toys! And your pictures and stories, too!

Mom always said to share your toys and now we are asking you, too. Please share your toys, your pictures of Little Compton children at play, and recollections of your favorite childhood pastimes with us this spring.

Our latest special exhibition, *Time to Play*, will explore how children spent their free time in Little Compton from the 17th to the 20th century. We will display the toys, games and photographs currently in our own collection, but we would also like to include community members' toys, images and memories in the exhibit and its accompanying pamphlet.

"We are especially interested in collecting toys that were in use prior to the 1950s. We hope to find photographs, paintings and sketches showing children at play in Little Compton from every era, and we need stories from people of all ages about their favorite childhood pastimes in Little Compton," said LCHS Managing Director, Marjory O'Toole. People are welcome to donate their items outright to the Historical Society or to loan them for the duration of the exhibit. Borrowed items will be displayed behind glass for their protection. Photographs can be scanned while you wait so it is not necessary to part with your family treasures.

Lois Almy was one of the first Little Compton residents to share her toys with us. In February, Miss Almy donated several beautiful dolls that were hers as a child

along with a wax doll that belonged to her aunt. She shared a few stories about playing house as a girl and attending parties at Mrs. Brownell's house. We've received donations and loans from others as well. To date they include a beautiful four foot high dollhouse from the Ingraham family, several antique items belonging to the Camara family, family photographs from Donald Gomez and approximately a dozen pastime stories.

In contrast to Miss Almy's donation of toys, LCHS' first story came in from one of our youngest supporters, 6th grader Andrea Desilets. Andrea wrote about how much she loves swimming in Little Compton and playing the piano as her favorite pastimes. Andrea, her sister Hanna and their friend Anne Gallagher are home school students who regularly volunteer with us and are serving as Junior Curators for the exhibition. Marjory continued, "We hope to collect a wide range of stories and photographs from young children living in the

community today to "old timers" who may have even moved to other locations. We are counting on the public to help spread the word in person and by e-mail so that we can collect as many stories as possible"

The students at Wilbor McMahon Schools have been invited to participate, and one lucky student will be

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*Lois Almy with a doll
her mother bought for her in 1924.*

Time to Play Special Exhibition

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*The Tilden Children
LCHS Collection*

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(401) 635-4035

SPRING HOURS

**Private Tours
and Programs**
By Appointment

Office Hours
Tuesday ~ Friday,
9 AM ~ 3 PM

Share Your Toys continued

randomly selected to win a reproduction wooden pogo stick. Sixth grade teacher Christine Kirchner has even decided to make the project a classroom assignment. The third grade has offered to participate as well. All children under 18 should get their parents permission before sending a story.

Exhibit volunteers are experimenting with e-mail as a way to collect as many childhood stories as possible, especially from people who may have moved away or only spend a portion of the year here. Everyone is invited to send their childhood memories and photographs electronically to lchistory@littlecompton.org. Stories can be anywhere from 25 to 800 words. Anyone unfamiliar with e-mail is encouraged to write and send their story the old fashioned way.

All of the stories and photographs will become part of the Historical Society's collection and will be stored in the museum archives. Exhibit volunteers will search through the submissions to select the most appropriate for the exhibition and the pamphlet.

As in past years, this summer's exhibition and related special events are being developed primarily by community volunteers. "New volunteers are always welcome and are necessary for our continued success," said Historical Society President, Bob Wolter. Bob is part of a team of volunteers now combing through thousands of photographs in the Historical Society's collection to find pictures of children at play.

How can someone who didn't grow up in Little Compton help? Everyone is welcome to interview "a Little Compton kid" whether they be a family member, friend or neighbor and send those stories of favorite pastimes to us. We are in need of editors, transcriptionists, typists (keyboardists), exhibit installers, exhibit guides, and Family Day volunteers.

Time to Play will open to the public on the Fourth of July during our annual Family Day celebration which is free and open to the public. Anyone interested in a sneak peak is invited to attend the Exhibit Preview Party scheduled for Friday, July 3. Tickets will be available in June. The exhibit will run through Columbus Day.

Questions or suggestions are always welcome. Call the Historical Society office at 635-4035.

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.

EVENT SPONSORS

Arkins Construction Co., Inc.
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CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

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*Helen Mae
Brown at play.
Photograph by
O. E. Dubois
Courtesy of
Donald Gomez*



The Naked Quaker: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England

Lecture and Discussion
with author
Diane Rapaport



**Thursday,
June 18, 2009**

Friends Meeting House
223 West Main Road
7 PM

Fee: \$6 LCHS Members
\$8 Non-members
Pay at the door

Join attorney and author Diane Rapaport as she tells amazing but true stories taken from the pages of early New England court records, including the incredible story of a Barack Obama ancestor and a woman of "enthusiastical power" that took place at Little Compton's own John Irish Estate. Copies of the book are available for sale (\$16) at the Historical Society (and following the lecture) or for loan at the Brownell Library. It is not necessary to read the book to enjoy the lecture.



Exhibit Wish List

Antique or Vintage Toys of all Kinds
Toy Soldiers
Train Sets
Doll House Furniture
Tynitoy Dollhouse
Paintings of LC Children
Photographs of LC Children with Toys or Playing
Antique Children's Clothing

Wooden Chairs

Antique or vintage wooden chairs in good condition
for use in our reception room.

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.

Coming Soon! LCHS' Collection is Going On-Line

Explore our collection of thousands of Little Compton
objects, images and documents from the comfort of
your own home. Watch for details in the summer issue
of this newsletter.

*This project is made possible
through the generous support
of the 1772 Foundation.*


THE 1772 FOUNDATION
Preserving American Historical Treasures!

A Glimpse into “Every Day Life”

The Journal of Albert G. Tompkins, 1858 by Roger Guillemette

“Nothing of any consequence occurred during the day, the teacher switched one little boy, threaten to a good many more.” Those few words summarized the events of January 28th, 1858 — a day in the life of 19-year-old Albert Greene Tompkins. His well-preserved 48-page diary, Journal Of every day life Kept by Albert G. Tompkins, From January 1, 1858 was recently donated to the Little Compton Historical Society by Elizabeth Jenks Johnson and Richard H. Johnson.

Written earlier than the Society-owned diaries of Frances Gifford (1860-61) and Sarah Soule Wilbour (1882-86), Tompkins’ journal is true to its title, providing intriguing glimpses into the “every day life” of a Little Compton teenager during the winter and spring of 1858.

Albert Tompkins was the fourth child of Thomas Greene and Susan Lewis Bates Tompkins, born on August 30, 1838. Albert’s family lived on the western side of Quicksand Pond in modern-day Pequaw Honk, near the Westport border. Albert’s diary is notable for its extremely legible, almost elegant, cursive penmanship, accompanied by the decorative flourishes of that era. His spelling and grammar is quite proper, a clear indication of continued schooling through the advanced age of 19. He strives to be accurate in his language, noting that a visiting teacher, “Mr. Smiley is a very good grammarian, when the class was parsing he corrected a great many words that others would not have noticed.”

Somewhat unusual for a 19-year-old male, Albert apparently did not participate in the strenuous work of the family farm but was instead tasked with indoor chores. He writes that he “helped Mother wash a little” and several times noting that he “Staid at home and kept house for the folks to go to church.” Some of his hobbies would be unconventional today, such as knitting and crocheting mittens for his brother.

Albert’s world revolved around his academic pursuits of reading and writing, regular attendance at school and his enthusiastic participation in two debating societies—the Young American Debating Club and the Acoaxet Debating Society.

Debating was Albert’s passion and he enjoyed the procedural rules of order, taking great pains to detail each meeting’s events, such as “After debate, took a vote on the merits of the question...it was a unanimous vote on the negative, on the force of argument.” He once added as an afterthought, “It was an unlawful meeting.” Albert’s dedication was appreciated by his fellow debaters; in one entry, he exclaims “In the evening, went to the Young

American Debating Club meet at SR. Howland. I was elected Vice President of the same.”

The topics for debate were remarkable, particularly given the times and the isolation of the participants. One debate was “Ought Capital Punishment to be abolished” with the eventual vote “8 on the affirmative, 14 on the negative.” Another notable debate, particularly for 1858 “The question was—which claims the greatest sympathy—the African Slave or American Indian? The American Indian carried the day.”

Still in his teens, Albert’s journal reveals glimpses of his humorous side and a budding social life. Evenings at home were spent reading—he enjoyed “the newspaper that we are taking from New Bedford”—writing or playing board games, such as “checkers” and “backgamon.”

On more than one evening, Albert went out partying. “In the evening went to SR. Howland’s to a party...I enjoyed myself very much, had one of the very best of clam-chowders, got home at half past one.” Another time, Albert “went to a candy party...the candy was very good and we had a pretty good time considering the number of males to that of the females.”

One day upon arriving at school, he “did not go in when the rest did but as I saw C.P. Brownell coming I thought I would wait for her. She came up and we stopped and talked awhile ‘out side the door’ about mater of things in general.”

School played a major role in Albert’s life and he usually enjoyed the schoolwork. One of the more curious—and sadistic—school events involved a half-dead skunk discovered near the schoolhouse. Albert wrote: “Found a skunk, AM recess, out side the school-House that had been partly killed the night before and had been beaten some more in the morning but was not dead then some of the boys got a string, the string not being very strong at the first attempt to drag him along the string broke, they got hold of it again and drag him along a little ways, the bell than rang for school and we were oblige to leave him. Daddy (a sarcastic reference to the school master) did not like it to think that his boys would play with such a gentleman. After got through school, Daddy wanted some boy to volunteer to carry off the skunk. One boy made a proposal to carry it off if he would put a string around his



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Time To Play

Children's Pastimes Through the Years

Special Exhibition: July 3, 2009 — October 12, 2009

Yankee Doodle Picnic

Exhibit Preview Party

Be the First to See
the 2009 Special Exhibition
Time to Play

Picnic-Style Supper ★ Open Wine, Beer & Soft Drink Bar
★ Unveiling of the Online Collection & eStore ★
Silent Auction of Reproductions from the Collection



LCHS Collection

The Wilbor House
Friday, July 3, 2009
6~8 PM
\$25



*Bullock Family
LCHS Collection*

Annual Family Day Celebration

Saturday, July 4, 2009
12~4 PM

Summer Exhibition — *Time to Play*
Wilbor House Tours ★ Children's Games
★ Activities for All Ages ★
Entertainment ★ Complimentary Refreshments

Thank You!

We are grateful for the generosity of these major supporters.

The Little Compton Municipal Trust	For security system upgrades
Mr. & Mrs. William J. Middendorf	For security system upgrades
Newport Restoration Foundation Doris Duke Fund for Historic Preservation	For repairs and maintenance to the Friends Meeting House
Carter Family Charitable Trust	For the <i>Time to Play</i> exhibition and Family Day 2009
1772 Foundation	For the on-line collection and repairs to the 19 th century barn
The Society of Colonial Wars	For colonial educational programs



Photo by O.E. Dubois
Courtesy of Donald Gomez



Glimpse continued from page 4

neck. After school, one of the boys took him up by the tail and throw him a little ways and the funk flew and it smelt pretty strong. They then pelted him with stones awhile then left him.”

Corporal punishment was ever-present in the classroom and Albert recounts many incidents: “At the school the teacher was rather cross, called one schollar up to whip but did not whip him but what was worse he scared him out of seven years growth.” (Note the use of “scholar” instead of “pupil”—a Little Compton linguistic peculiarity.)

It becomes evident as the winter progresses that Albert’s health is not good, often staying home from school or his debating pursuits because he has “not felt very smart today” and he increasingly refers to making or purchasing “medicin.” “Stayed at home from school in the forenoon to make me some medicin.” “A medicin pedlar caled and I bought a bottle of medicin of him.” “Have not felt very smart to day. Been reading a little that is about I have done except to eat my meals.” On the journal’s final page, April 8, 1858, Albert’s father “fetched home Susan & Mary (his sisters) who had been away to school all winter...I had an orange, apple and some dates.” Then, a cryptic entry...“So ends the battle.”

Three months later, on July 15, 1858, Albert Tompkins died, just a few days shy of his twentieth birthday. In the Old Commons Cemetery, a simple gravestone stands as a monument to a life ended much too young. Or, in Albert’s own words, a reminder that “sad things happen in the best of families.”



Dick Menoche and John Lint repairing a gate.

Handy Men and Women Wanted

The “To-Do” list at the Little Compton Historical Society is never-ending and always challenging. If you are handy, and would enjoy working with members of our Building & Grounds Committee on small to medium projects, please contact Dick Menoche at 635-4035.

Docents Needed

Interested in local history?

Enjoy meeting new people?

Contact 635-4035 or 1chistory@littlecompton.org

Making Ends Meet

As a non-profit organization, our goal is to raise the money we need to cover our basic expenses as well as the special projects we've planned for the year. Over the last few years our annual expenses have hovered right around \$150,000. But, we've been busy—and special projects like digitizing the collection and re-shingling our historic buildings have added tens of thousands of dollars to our bottom line. Some years we make a little extra and put it away in the reserves. In other years, if we fall a little short, we can pull from the reserves to make up the difference.

Out of respect for our members and donors, we are committed to asking only for what we really need. The next few years may be challenging, but we are optimistic that when faced with real needs our Little Compton community will continue their generous support.

A Variety of Income Sources Help Keep the Historical Society Strong

Memberships & Corporate Sponsorships

Memberships provide an important source of unrestricted income that we can use for our most pressing needs. We currently have 650 active memberships representing approximately 1750 individuals. Membership income reached an all time high in 2008. Corporate Members sometimes increase their gifts to Sponsorship levels and are recognized at the events they support. Membership renewals are sent out annually. New members are always welcome and membership forms are available in every issue of the newsletter.

Donations

Donations are gratefully accepted throughout the year but are specifically requested at the end of each calendar year during our Annual Appeal. Some supporters give both a membership and an annual appeal gift. Others prefer to choose one or the other. *Individual donations are the Historical Society's most important source of unrestricted annual income.* The unrestricted funds that both Donations and Memberships provide are essential to our daily operations. Among other things, they ensure that our staff members are fairly compensated, that the utility and insurance bills are paid, and that the newsletter is printed. These needs are not our most exciting, but they are absolutely necessary to keep the doors open and to keep our mission moving forward. Donors may also choose to restrict their gifts to special projects.

In-Kind Donations

Donations of items or services often benefit the Historical Society just as much as cash gifts. Donating food or prizes for Family Day or complimentary professional services are great ways to support LCHS. Like cash gifts, in-kind donations are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. We recognize in-kind donations in the same way we recognize monetary donations.

Grants

Over the years LCHS has been very fortunate to compete for and receive a variety of grants. Grants most often provide restricted funds that must be used for special projects. Recently grants have been critical to the completion of our Collections Documentation and Digitization Project and repairs and re-shingling on our buildings. Grants are a great way to bring in funds from beyond our local community. Both state and federal

funds have made a positive impact at LCHS in recent years. In the future we will continue to seek grants to assist us with special projects, but grants are never a substitute for strong community support.

Earned Income

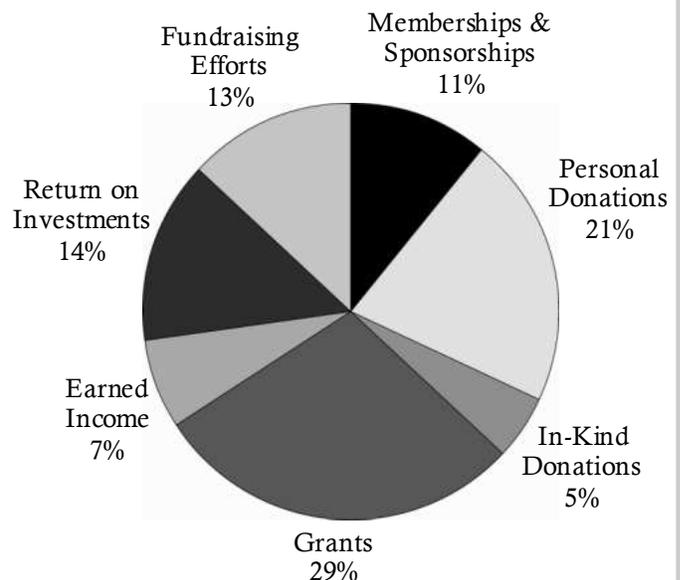
Tours, lectures, summer camps, educational programs, facility rentals and museum shop sales are some of the ways the Historical Society earns its own income.

Fundraising Efforts

Fundraising efforts can take many forms, from art auctions, to exhibit preview parties to house tours. In addition to providing an important source of necessary income, fundraising events are very often wonderful opportunities for our supporters to get together, socialize and enjoy the Historical Society's unique offerings.

Return on Investments

LCHS is fortunate to have both a small endowment and a larger reserve fund that functions as an endowment. Our Board Members monitor our investments carefully and are very cautious about drawing principal from these funds. Endowment gifts are always welcome and are perhaps the best way to give the Historical Society a lasting gift.



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 Is Now Even Better!

There's never been a better time to become a member of the Little Compton Historical Society or to renew your existing membership.

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.



Time To Play
Special Exhibition 2009
Opening Weekend
July 3-4, 2009



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