

Newsletter

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<http://www.waylandhistoricalsociety.org/>

Vol. 32, No. 4, Mar-Apr 2009

Founded in 1954

John Heckscher, Editor

The Grout-Heard House is open to the public on Tuesdays and Fridays, 9:30 – Noon

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

If you have been reading the local papers lately, you probably don't know about all the planned changes to the residential and public buildings that make up the Wayland Center Historic District. The Wayland Historic District Commission (WHDC) has been hard at work for the past several months to lessen the impact of road widening and installing lights that some town officials deem necessary to accommodate the proposed Town Center development. The proposed changes to the Historic District will destroy the essence of old-time Wayland and the remnants that remain of its rustic character. I am disconcerted that so many unwanted changes can be foisted on building owners in the Historic District without their consent to accommodate the needs of a private development. Why, one of the proposals for changes at the 126/27 intersection had the control box for the lights sitting immediately to the left of the Grout-Heard House driveway! The WHDC needs your support. Their hearing will continue on March 26, 2009 at 8:15 at the Town Building. Plans of the changes can be found either on-line at the Town of Wayland Planning Board website or at the Wayland Public Library.

SILK WORMS IN MASSACHUSETTS? ...AND IN WAYLAND??

Having been asked to monitor the Draper Room during a recent Museum Open House, I was busily admiring the portraits, furniture and china when I spied a small, oval cylinder lying on the desk under the portraits of James and Eveline Draper. Upon sliding open the cover, I discovered several white, cotton-like objects along with a handwritten note which reads: "Cocoons of the Silk – Worm with sample of Floss , or raw silk as wound from cocoons. The worms were raised in E. Sudbury at James Drapers in 1826. Fed on Mulberry leaves . This case belonged to Mrs. Nabby A. Draper." I was intrigued.

A bit of on-line research revealed that there was indeed a silk industry that flourished briefly in Massachusetts during the 1830s. Silk was an expensive import to the United States, and from the earliest colonial days there had been efforts to establish a silk industry in America: early colonists of Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia attempted sericulture, or silk production. Sericulture also was attempted in New England, starting around 1660, but was not very successful since traditional mulberry tree varieties – the only food silk worms eat – could not survive cold New England winters. But in 1826 a more robust species of mulberry tree, *morus multicaulis*, introduced from China, seemed to promise success. In 1828, in an effort to promote domestic production, the federal government published a 220-page pamphlet, "Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury – Growth and Manufacture of Silk", and in 1835 the government of Massachusetts offered a bounty of 50¢ per pound on silk production [An Act to Encourage the Reeling and Throwing of Silk, Chapter CXXX, Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, p. 483, April 7, 1835].

In 1832 Samuel Whitmarsh wanted to start a silk plant in Florence, Massachusetts (a suburb of Worcester) and planted many acres of *multicaulis* mulberry trees. But silk making is time-consuming and difficult: it is challenging to keep silk worms free from disease, fed, and willing to spin the silk-bearing cocoons. Whitmarsh never was able to make much silk, so in 1838 he decided to sell the trees he had planted. In articles and advertisements, he promoted the *multicaulis* mulberry as the “best possible mulberry tree”, raving about the tree's rapid growth and huge leaves. He claimed that everyone would make money making silk with these trees. His publicity worked and he began a fad: *morus multicaulis* became wildly popular and its price exploded. In 1835 it had sold for just ten cents a tree, but by winter, 1838, one tree cost nearly a dollar. People bought and sold trees just to make a profit. Thousands of farmers, particularly in New England, prepared land for mulberry trees, tearing out other crops. But soon people began to realize that Whitmarsh's claims were wildly unrealistic and just as quickly the price dropped. By fall 1839, the price was lower than before Whitmarsh started the craze, leaving many mulberry speculators bankrupt. In the end, hard winters (1840-42) and a mulberry tree blight (1844) killed off the domestic silk industry, the many failures and great disappointments causing so complete a feeling of revulsion that silk culture was practically abandoned throughout the states.

The silk worm story might have ended here, but for a strange twist of fate. In 1869, Professor L. Trouvelot, an American naturalist who had emigrated from France in 1852 when Louis Napoleon rose to power, brought eggs of the gypsy moth, *Lymantria dispar*, from France to Medford, Massachusetts. Trouvelot had hoped to produce a commercial source of silk by developing a hardy race of silk-producing insects, crossing the gypsy moth with the silk worm moth, in order to control wilt disease (or flancheria), which was then causing severe problems in some silk worm industries. Trouvelot also may have been influenced knowing that because confederate cotton was unavailable during and shortly after the Civil War, the Union States had been seeking a new source of fiber. Unfortunately, during the course of his experiments some of the gypsy moths escaped from his house. Trouvelot was quite upset about this and he “publicly” announced it, although it is not clear that he contacted any government officials. Trouvelot’s loss of interest in entomology must have occurred shortly after the time of the escape, since there is no record of any further work by him, suggesting that he must have realized the potential severity of the incident. Within about 10 years the insect population had reached defoliating densities near Trouvelot’s home in Medford, and his neighbors naturally were quite displeased with the insect’s presence. It may be of interest to note that Trouvelot decided to return to live in France at about the same time that the insect populations were exploding in Medford. Since its introduction into the Boston area over a century ago, the gypsy moth has greatly expanded its range and has become one of North America's most serious forest pests, defoliating large areas of canopy every year.

It seems unlikely that James Draper had any involvement in the Whitmarsh scam since his cocoons were collected well prior to the mid-1830s. Nevertheless, their presence in the Draper room further confirms that James Draper was a man of many wide interests and activities.

John Heckscher

HISTORY OF NEW ENGLAND STONE WALLS

On Tuesday, April 7th at 7:30 pm Professor Robert M. Thorson will talk about the history of New England stone walls, with an emphasis on eastern Massachusetts. Thorson will describe the historic and technological stages that led to the phenomenon now considered to be the signature landform of rural New England. The talk will be followed by a question and answer period and general discussion. Copies of his three books will be available for purchase, signing, and inscribing. This program is co-sponsored by the Wayland Public Library. Location: Raytheon Room.

COCHITUATE OPEN HOUSE

Join us on Sunday, April 19 from 2-3 pm for a tour of one of Cochituate's oldest houses, the Isaac Damon house at 357 Commonwealth Road. It was built around 1765 and remained in the Damon family for almost 200 years. Currently the Yankee Craftsman store is located in the barn behind the house. Please park in the lot of the Celebration International church across the street. Following the open house, we will reconvene at the Grout-Heard house for an exhibit and a talk on the Damon family by Pauline DiCesare. Refreshments will be served

THE STORY OF WAYLAND'S PUBLIC LIBRARY

Did you know that Wayland's Public Library is the second oldest in the United States? Although it was founded more than 160 years ago, did you know private subscription libraries thrived in our town almost as early as Revolutionary days? Wayland's former library director, Louise Brown, will recount our Library's history at the Wayland Historical Society's Annual Meeting, May 12 at 7:30 pm in the Grout-Heard House Museum. Her talk will follow a brief business meeting where annual reports will be read and officers for the coming year will be elected.

Louise joined our Public Library in 1966 as a part-time cataloger. She was named assistant director nine years later and in 1977, became library director serving twenty-six years in that position. Although officially retired, she still finds time to volunteer her talents on library projects such as the Long-Range Plan, the Disaster Preparedness Plan, and grant applications.

Wayland library documents will be on exhibit. Refreshments will be served. The public is invited.

TO ALL WHO HAVE YET TO PAY DUES FOR 2008/2009:

The reminder letter sent out in January brought forth positive responses with checks enclosed. The response might have been even greater if the Membership Chair had enclosed the return envelopes as promised. Each category of dues was printed on the envelope so that conscientious members would not have had to guess at what they owed! My apologies for that and the numerous errors in the text itself. Our fiscal year ends on April 30 so it is not too late to pay this year's dues now. For those who need this information: a single membership is \$15; family- \$25; contributing- \$50; and patron- \$100.

2009 DATES TO REMEMBER

Date-Time-Place	Event
Tuesday, April 7 th , 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. Wayland Public Library	History of New England Stone Walls Professor Robert M. Thorson
Sunday, April 19 th , 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Isaac Damon House, 357 Commonwealth Road	Cochituate House Tour/Exhibit/Talk Pauline DiCesare
Tuesday, May 12 th , 7:30 p.m. Grout-Heard House, Wayland Center	ANNUAL MEETING plus Exhibit: History of the Wayland Public Library

Thank you for supporting the Grout-Heard House Museum!