

News from the Stow Historical Society

*A newsletter for all friends of Stow history.
Please feel free to pass it along to others who might be interested!*

March 2012

Stow History: Defining Its Guardians



Each spring third-graders march down Great Road to Town Hall for a town history program presented by the Stow Historical Society and the Ancient Documents Committee.

The kids are attentive to the history but they're crazy about the end-of-program opportunity for – literally – hands-on experiences with antiques like Lew Halprin's coffee grinder and hearing tube and Dwight Sipler's old manual typewriter.

When it comes to Stow history, two things are clear: The first is that our town's history is safeguarded by several groups of volunteers – among them the Stow Historical **Commission** and the Stow Historical **Society**.

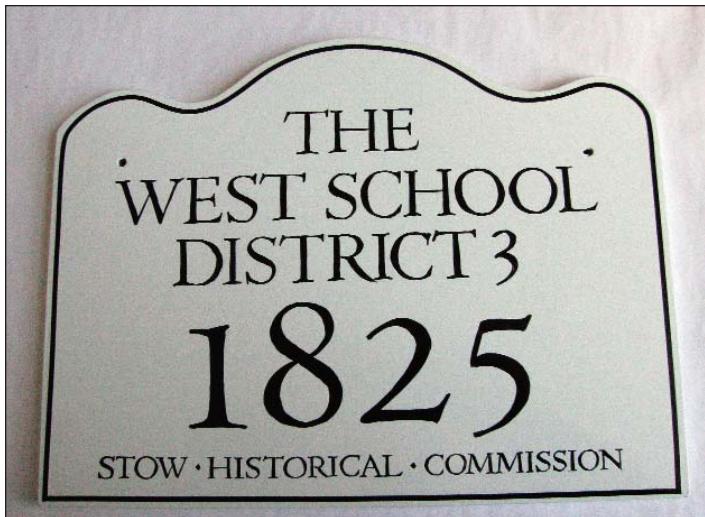
The second is that lots of people get them confused and aren't sure what the distinction is.

In a nutshell, the differences are these:

■ **The Stow Historical Commission is a town board** with members appointed by the Board of Selectmen. As mandated by state law, the Historical Commission is charged with developing an inventory “for the identification and protection of the historic properties in the town, including areas, buildings, monuments, sites, burial grounds and structures.”

■ **The Stow Historical Society is a private organization open to anyone interested in Stow's history**, concerned with fostering an awareness of the town's long and eventful story through educational programs, preservation of artifacts and publication of books and articles.

Other groups concerned with Stow history should be mentioned, although this article is intended to focus on the distinction between the SHC and SHS. The **Ancient Documents Committee** is also a town board but one whose members are appointed by the Town Moderator. The “Ancients” are responsible for the acquisition, cataloguing and preservation of historical records housed in the Town Vault in the Town Building. **The Stow Minuteman Company** was formed in 1965 to commemorate the role of the town's Minutemen in 1775. They take part in 10 to 12 events each year, including parades in Stow and other towns, school programs, encampments recreating camp life and their annual 10-mile march to Concord on Patriot's Day.



Currently underway is a program sponsored by the Historical Commission to make historic markers available to owners of structures in the town. A form for requesting a sign can be downloaded from the Historical Commission page on the Stow town website – <http://www.stow-ma.gov>.

In its early years, members researched Stow topics, developed memoirs and “white papers” and presented talks about aspects of Stow history. In recent years, its emphasis has been on education and awareness, including “Stow history tours” and events like the annual third-grade program at Town Hall. The Society marked its 50th anniversary last November.

The SHS has sponsored publication of several books about the town: Ethel Childs’ comprehensive *History of Stow* in 1983, Francis Warren’s *Recollections of Stow* in 1990 and Ralph Fuller’s *Stow Things* in 2009. Additionally, SHS members Lew Halprin and Barbara Sippler produced the commercially published book *Images of America: Stow* in 1999 and Halprin and the late Alan Kattelle published two histories of Lake Boon.

The Historical Society and the Historical Commission jointly sponsor a number of programs throughout the year – most notably the West School Museum program series presented each summer and Skip Warren’s tour of the Lower Village Cemetery last fall. Recent West School programs have included art and photo exhibits focused on Stow history, oral history interviews, “visits” by writers Louisa May Alcott and Laura Ingalls Wilders, and Stow-focused arts and crafts programs.

One of a number of Stow artists and artisans to take part, potter Ted Carvalho gave lessons in pottery-making during a “Skills in Our Town Program” at the West School Museum in October, 2011.

The Historical Commission, as a town committee, has a range of responsibilities. One is making recommendations regarding the impact of construction and renovation proposals on historic structures and the town’s historical integrity – proposed renovations at the First Parish Church, for example, must receive an okay from the SHC in terms of their impact on the historic building.

Front and center on the SHC’s agenda at present is the ongoing inventory of the town’s 250 or so historic structures – not just a listing of historic buildings but a description with photographs of each’s history and characteristics and cultural importance. The new historic inventory will create a digital resource to be available to anyone on the town website.

The Stow Historical Society was established in 1961 by interested citizens with the goal of researching, preserving and educating about our town’s history.

