



THE NURSE HOMESTEAD

Newsletter of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society • WINTER 2004

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Rain doesn't dampen 30th anniversary weekend

The Danvers Alarm List Company and the 2nd Massachusetts Regiment celebrated their thirtieth anniversaries of reenactment of the Colonial and American Revolution period at the Nurse Homestead on the third weekend of September.

You would have expected the intense rain of Saturday to have ruined the event, but seasoned reenactors always find a way to enjoy the situation. Everyone gathered in the Great Room of the Nurse House for shelter and before long a genuine Colonial Tavern atmosphere developed. The men gathered around the tables, someone produced a Colonial era deck of cards, and they began to learn how to play card games of the times. Shrub, a Colonial era drink, was shared. The smell of the food cooking and of the wood fire burning bright and merry added to the authentic atmosphere. The fierce rain storm was completely forgotten as people enjoyed, and marveled in, the unexpected tavern experience. By late afternoon the rains had lifted and preparations were under way for the Colonial wedding of two reenactors, and the ensuing celebration.

Sunday was sunny and allowed the men of the company to "reenlist" for the "duration." Alarm List Company 1st Lieutenant Henry Rutkowski and others were vociferous in their objections to receiving only paper scrip upon reenlistment instead of "hard" money as promised. DALCo 2nd Lieutenant Don Hayes reminded the men that they were fighting for their rights as free men, not money. Part of the reenlistment activities included the issuing of new coats and other items. Later in the day a squad of British Regular Troops appeared and were chased by the Colonial Troops into the woods behind the cemetery where the Brits surrendered.



Having survived Saturday's downpour, the troops march out in Sunday's beautiful weather, to face the British soldiers who invaded the peace of the Nurse Homestead.

"Modern cooking" of the 18th century

by Niamh Dolan

The weekend of September 18th, 2004 saw the hearths of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead being used to full capacity. Although the weekend started off particularly wet, which caused many of the men to be driven indoors, the women of the Danvers Alarm List Company enjoyed a chance to cook with the "modern conveniences" of the 18th century such as a fireplace and beehive oven. With such a rare opportunity the ladies endeavored to create the most authentic meals from the Revolutionary period while enjoying the freedom to try recipes not suitable for a camp life style.

The ladies spent much time leading up to the event researching recipes and appropri-

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the
Rebecca Nurse Homestead
Preservation Society

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation, conservation, and programming of the Nurse Homestead, a 27-acre historic site in Danvers, Massachusetts.

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead
149 Pine Street
Danvers, Massachusetts 01923
978-774-8799
www.rebeccanurse.org

Hours of operation:
June 15 through Labor Day
Tues. through Sun. 1 PM to 4:30 PM
September and October
Sat. and Sun. 1 PM to 4:30 PM

18th century cooking — from page 1

ate ingredients and produced a fine sampling of 18th century fare which included pumpkin soup, fish chowder, 18th century salad, along with a few fine roasted fowl and a beautifully turned piece of roast beef.

The beehive oven was also utilized and a fine pork and apple pie was produced along with some baked and stuffed pumpkins. Many of the ingredients used for the various dishes were picked from the homestead garden, which created a more realistic feel to the food preparation on the anniversary weekend. Although many of the outdoor events of the weekend were curtailed by the weather, the DALCo ladies enjoyed a very rare opportunity to live like their 18th Century counterparts.

(Editor's Note: the flavor of the food was superb! The DALCo women are talented at choosing recipes, preparing the food from scratch and cooking it over a wood fire.)

A recipe used for the anniversary weekend:

Anniversary Weekend Fish Chowder

- 3 Tbsp cooking oil
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 cup chopped carrot
- 1 cup water
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1/4 tsp chopped basil
- 1 Tbsp parsley
- 2 lb fish fillets cut into small pieces

Heat cooking oil in oven and brown onion and carrots. Add water, salt, thyme, basil, and parsley. Cover and cook for 20 minutes. Add fish and cook 10 minutes or until fish is done.



New members participate in the RNH anniversary weekend

by Martha Driscoll

As two of the newest members of the Danvers Alarm List Company, my daughter Thera and I were very excited to be able to participate in the Company's 30th anniversary weekend this September. After joining the organization in July, we worked hard putting together our clothing. Accuracy is important, and with the guidance of experienced members of the Company, we were able to sew or borrow appropriate articles of clothing for the event.

We were in high spirits when we arrived at the Homestead on Saturday despite a steady rain. Having never participated in any kind of living history event before, we didn't know quite what to expect. We were eager to help out in any way and especially looked forward to assisting with the cooking in the two fireplaces.

We were soon immersed in the preparation of the noon meal. I was placed in charge of the reflector oven and the two chickens roasting in it. My job was to turn the birds on their spit every quarter hour and ensure that the fire remained hot. One of Thera's tasks, along with a number of other kitchen duties, was to fry some battered cucumbers in the spider, a long legged frying pan that is placed over hot coals.

When it came time to eat, we learned our first lesson in belonging to a reenactment group... reenactors bring their own utensil and plate. We scrounged a bowl and a cup from the shelf of the lean-to kitchen and adhering to the adage "fingers came be-

fore forks" enjoyed the wonderful meal that everyone worked so hard to prepare.

We enjoyed the weekend immensely. Thanks to the guidance of our patient and capable teachers,

Laura Abraham-Miller and Niamh Dolan, we were kept busy and made to feel as though we were contributing to the interpretation and not merely in the way. After watching the Alarm List Company over the years in parades, at the Strawberry Festival, and on chilly Patriot's Day mornings, we are glad we finally decided to take the plunge and experience 18th century life ourselves.



Thera Driscoll hard at work during her first event



The kitchen at the Nurse Homestead comes alive with the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the 18th century

Homestead security enhancements completed

by Henry Rutkowski

For the second time in twenty years our security and fire alarm system was destroyed by lightning in June. This was the same storm that temporarily silenced Bob and Josie's parrot (see our last issue). There was a silver lining in that storm cloud, however. The old system was just that — *old*, and outdated, and somewhat tired as well. With the insurance coverage, we could replace the original system with one that is totally computerized. This also gave us the opportunity to extend coverage to the Dairy Shed, which we use as a meeting room, and add a telephone there.

Installation began in August and included replacing some of the detectors that are scattered throughout the buildings. The work was done by Essex Alarm and Security of Beverly. The new equipment includes "addressable" smoke detectors and dual tech motion detectors. It can be controlled by more than one terminal in different buildings rather than just one. This way any security or fire problem can be identified more quickly.

A few words from the president...

By Bill Clemens

I am pleased to note that we have received much positive feedback from the Preservation Society members about the new format of the newsletter. It's always nice to know that decisions we make are on track and well received. All too often we operate in a virtual vacuum and it isn't apparent if we have chosen the correct path to follow.

With this in mind I would like to reiterate to every member of the Society, that your questions, comments, concerns and suggestions are always welcome. I am working towards much better communication between those of us that deal with the day-to-day management of the Nurse property and you, the Preservation Society members, that have either genealogical, emotional or other ties of interest to the Homestead.

I would urge any of you that have entertained a thought to send us a letter, note or e-mail, to please follow through. Your input could make the difference in our thought process if we are pondering on which side of an issue to take action.

I am also hopeful that this interaction could also lead to more active participation

on the part of the membership. Although your monetary support is necessary and always appreciated, sometimes an extra pair of hands would be most helpful. And please don't think we are only looking for brute muscle power. I'm sure there are any number of talents out there in the membership that we could put to use for the benefit of the Homestead.

A few hours a month may not seem like much to any given individual, but it can be a treasure to us. And combine that with three, six, twelve or any number of people and now you are talking about a priceless resource to the organization. I would be thrilled to have a reason to create a coordinator or liaison position on the Management Committee to oversee the volunteer efforts of a group of members.

But this won't happen until you come forward and let us know you are interested. All e-mails sent to president@rebeccanurse.org come directly to me as does any U.S.P.S. mail sent to the Pine Street address. If you send it, I will read it. And if you volunteer, I will put you to work.

Alarm List at Minuteman NP

On Saturday, September 4th, Danvers Alarm List Company was invited to demonstrate their 18th century knowledge at the Hartwell Tavern, an interpretive site along the Battle Road at Minuteman National Park in Lincoln. Members demonstrated a musket manual devised by Salem Colonel Timothy Pickering in 1774, described militia clothing and military equipment, and even gave their views of the independence movement in historical "persona."



DALCo members John Mroszczyk, Tom Macy, and Bill Buttmer discuss preparations for the next presentation at the Hartwell Tavern.

Reviving an ancient craft: spinning flax at the Nurse Homestead

by Martha Driscoll

At the recent Preservation Society open house, I had the pleasure of spinning flax in the Great Hall of the Rebecca Nurse house. When spun and woven, the fibers of the flax plant produce linen, a wonderfully soft and absorbent fabric that was used widely in the 17th and 18th centuries.



The Saxony Wheel in the Nurse Homestead

Linen production was a common occupation on farms of the colonial period. Farmers would grow, process, spin, and weave flax, mostly for their own use, but money could also be earned by selling cloth, raw flax, yarn, and flax seed. Women could earn money by spinning and weaving for others.

Spinning schools appeared in Boston in the early 18th century, and spinning bees were organized to inspire linen production with friendly competition. In 1753 the General Court passed an act to encourage the production of linen, stating the need to employ the poor. Later, when taxes were placed on imported textiles, spinning and weaving locally grown flax became an act of patriotism.

At the Homestead, I was spinning flax on my modern spinning wheel, which works exactly like the antique Saxony wheel in the corner of the room. The Saxony spinning wheel is capable of continuous spinning. Unlike the Great Wheel, which was used to spin wool off the end of a steel spindle, the Saxony wheel utilizes a foot treadle which

turns a flyer and bobbin. This mechanism both spins the flax and simultaneously draws the thread in and winds it on the bobbin, allowing the spinner to produce several hundred yards of thread on a single bobbin.

Flax is typically spun from a distaff that is fixed to the spinning wheel. After the flax fiber is combed, the longest fibers are arranged on the distaff, allowing the spinner to draw just a few strands at a time and produce a very fine thread. I was spinning tow flax from a handful of fiber. Tow consists of the shorter fibers that are left over after the combing process. Since tow fibers are about 1 to 2 inches in length, they do not have to be dressed on a distaff, but can be spun from a handful very much like wool. When woven, the courser thread produces tow cloth, a material that appeared in many inventories of the 18th century.

Textile production was an important part of everyday life in the 18th century, and I look forward to interpreting textile production at the Homestead in the future.

www.rebeccanurse.org

Danvers, Massachusetts 01923

149 Pine Street

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society



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