



THE NURSE HOMESTEAD

Newsletter of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society • SUMMER 2006

VOLUME XXX • NUMBER II

INSIDE THIS ISSUE —

- Witchcraft trial re-transcription* 1
- School of archaeology at RNH* 2
- The strawberries are coming* 2
- Birds of the Homestead* 3
- Cub Scouts visit RNH* 3
- Voices from the past* 4
- Notes from the president's quill* 5
- Salem Towne performance* 5
- DALC honors Gen. Glover* 5
- Special projects fund* back panel

Don't believe everything you read in the (Salem witchcraft) papers

by Pat Bridgman

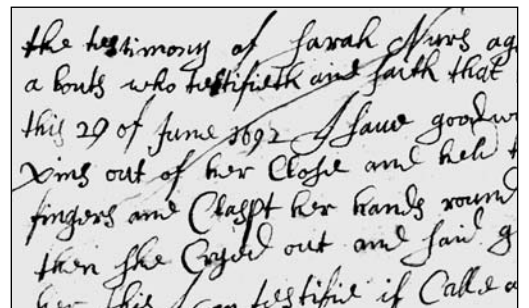
- The grand jury considered Tituba's case in ... a) May 1692 b) May 1693
- Which creatures told Tituba to serve them? a) a red rat and a black rat b) a red cat and a black cat
- Jerson Toothaker ... a) was accused by Mary Warren b) never existed

If you've studied the court transcripts, you know that the correct answer to all three questions is "a". And you would be wrong.

Documents from the witch trials were first transcribed during the 1800s by a "Mr. Munsell." In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) added more documents to this standard set, but didn't correct any of Munsell's mistakes. In 1977 Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum published the WPA work – warts and all – as *The Salem Witchcraft Papers (SWP)*. Since then, many errors and omissions have come to light. Some of these, such as missing words and misspellings, are relatively minor. Others are more problematic. The examination of Giles Corey, for example, was left out of SWP altogether.

But even minor errors are intolerable to serious scholars like Bernie Rosenthal. In 1998, Rosenthal realized that he had inadvertently used an incorrect date in his book *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692*. His solution: to launch a full-blown, academically reliable re-transcription of all 850-plus documents.

Rosenthal, a professor of English at SUNY-Binghamton, recruited an international team of historians and linguists. Among them are two descendants of the witchcraft hysteria's victims: Dick Trask, Danvers Archivist and a descendent of Mary Esty, is putting the documents in chronolog-



Just one sample of the difficult-to-read handwriting in the aged manuscripts of the witchcraft trials

ical order for the first time. Margo Burns, technology integration specialist for the Manchester (N.H.) Public School District and a descendent of Rebecca Nurse, serves as project manager along with her re-transcription duties.

As the project unfolded, Rosenthal collaborated with Ben Ray of the University of Virginia to post the team's findings on the Internet. Ray oversees *The Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive* at <http://www.salemwitchtrials.org/home.html>. [see "Witchcraft trials website" RNH Newsletter, Vol. XXX, No. 1, page 2.]

Cambridge University Press plans to publish the re-transcription, along with essays on linguistics, the history of witchcraft, the methodology of dating, etc., in 2007.

continued on page 4



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 25-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
Every day Noon to 4:30 PM
September and October
Sat. and Sun. Noon to 4:30 PM

Newsletter editor: Jackson C. Tingle
Design and layout: Thomas Macy

Digging in Danvers:

The 2006 field school of archaeology

by Glenn Mairo

On a visit to the Danvers Archival Center in early 2000, I examined a collection of stone artifacts from the plowed fields of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead. To learn more about them, I went to the world-renowned Peabody Museum of Archaeology at Phillips Academy - Andover. Honorary Curator Gene Winter helped me identify the artifacts as projectile points and scrapers from as early as 5,000 years ago. Some of these items now reside in a case in the Endecott Shop.



Meeting Gene opened a glorious new world to me. I joined the Massachusetts Archaeological Society that year and now chair its Northeast Chapter. The pre-history of Essex County, specifically the Homestead, has become an abiding interest.

It is my fate, perhaps, to be constantly on the lookout for unique (odd?) ways to publicize the Danvers Alarm List Company's stewardship of RNH. Last year, during a rare moment of repose (sanity?), the thought of a formal archaeological survey of the Homestead entered my mind. I met with the Archaeology Museum's director, Malinda Blustain, and her staff and made this proposal: the creation of a field school of archaeology at Phillips-Andover that would involve work at RNH. The folks from the Museum liked the idea, so our next stop was Phillips-Andover's administration. They enthusiastically endorsed the proposal and agreed to offer "Introduction to Archaeology" as part of their 2006 summer session—a year earlier than I had hoped.

The course, open to the Academy's summer students only, will cover basic theory and methodology. Students will participate in "hands-on exercises involving the Peabody's archaeological collection." Between June 27 and August 2 they will spend four days a week digging test pits at the Homestead. Professionally trained archaeologists will supervise all aspects of the course; I will serve as project coordinator for the work at RNH.

Field school activities at the Homestead will take place during regular operating

hours, offering visitors a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to see history unfold before their eyes. All areas under excavation will be staked for easy identification and safety, and at the conclusion of the field school all excavated areas will be back-filled. Any artifacts that are found will remain the property of the Danvers Alarm List Co.

Having a field school of archaeology at RNH under the aegis of Phillips-Andover brings prestige to both organizations and should attract a new group of visitors and supporters. It should facilitate financial grant applications in the coming years, as well. The past may yet become the key to the future of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead.

With luck, the field school will continue for years. In the same vein, I am looking into the use of ground-penetrating radar and dendrochronology (determining the age of wood by counting tree rings) of beams at the Nurse House.

As I recently related to a dear friend and associate, almost everything I am involved with these days emanates from or is enhanced by my involvement with the Nurse Homestead and the Danvers Alarm List Company. It has been my pleasure to serve and I hope to continue for years to come.

The strawberries are coming!

by Jackson Tingle

As spring approaches and the ground begins to thaw, minds here at the Homestead turn to our annual Strawberry Festival. This event has been a tradition for over 30 years and is our main fundraising effort.

As always, we will offer our famous strawberry shortcake, and the Tavern will be up and running, complete with Joe Froggers. For those unfamiliar with the Joe Frogger, this substantial molasses cookie dates back to the Colonial Period and has become almost as big a draw as the shortcake.

This year, we are restructuring the festival to give visitors a more organized experience. The gate opens at 10 a.m. on what we hope will be a sunny June 24th.

To start the day off, our own Ruth Canonico will perform her wonderful *Twice Told Tales* in the Meetinghouse. Ruth's demonstration of colonial games, activities and story-telling is always a delight for children of all ages. Another returning favorite, Poor Richard's Penny (*see their*

web site at www.poorrichardspenny.com) will serenade guests with stately instrumentals, lively dance tunes, and ballads of the 18th century.

Without giving too much away, we are also in negotiations with a famous local theater group. More on that in the near future.



Visitors to last year's Strawberry Festival talk with DALC member Martha Driscoll as she spins wool on the great wheel.

I am pleased to announce that in addition to all these wonderful entertainers and educators, "Trapper John" Enos will join us for the

first time this year. A friend of DALC member Glenn Mairo and a regular on the property, Enos is a true New Hampshire "mountain man." He'll be bringing trade era jewelry, hawks, bows and arrows, and atlats. (The atlatl is a Paleolithic weapon similar to a spear.)

In an effort to preserve the quality of our fair, we have also revamped our crafter list. Not to worry: Our old favorites will be back, and we look forward to having a number of new purveyors of antiques and handcrafted wares.

DALC has scheduled tactical maneuvers at noon and 2:30 p.m. We are inviting many of our fellow re-enactors, both Colonial and British, and look forward to putting on an excellent show.

If you'd like to volunteer to help out, or if you have any questions about the Strawberry Festival, please contact me at chaloff_13@hotmail.com. I hope to see all of you there!

The birds at the Nurse Homestead

by Robert Osgood

Here at the Homestead, we are blessed with open fields, woodlands, wetlands, soft and hardwood groves, streams, and low brush, including berry bushes. All foster a wonderful variety of birds. On the morning of May 1, 2005, I was sitting on the easterly deck of the well structure. Sheltered from the cool westerly breeze and absorbing the early morning sun, I noticed out of the corner of my eye something moving about twenty feet up. To my amazement, gliding over the dirt lane came a turkey vulture coasting on the warm thermal air currents. What a sight – and so close! Over the next two days, the birds could be seen soaring over woodlands and both fields.

Our proximity to the Atlantic coast sometimes sends wayward migratory birds our way. This most often occurs when our famous New England storms blow the traveling birds off their course. Once, a flock of bobolinks sought shelter from a savage storm on our front field. Even a homing pigeon, exhausted from battling strong air currents during a 500-mile race, landed on the property. The disoriented bird was quickly captured and returned to its owner in the adjacent town of Peabody.

Robins appear very early in spring while blue jays and pairs of cardinals become more abundant as the season progresses. We also play host to several varieties of sparrow that are always around dusting themselves in the

garden and uprooting our lettuce and cabbage seedlings. Toward summer, numerous varieties of birds move in, including finches, blackbirds, chimney swifts, swallows, woodpeckers, red pole, Baltimore orioles, pine siskins, nuthatches, titmice, teals, black ducks, mallards, killdeer, whooping cranes, Canadian geese, and mourning doves. One bird we do not have is the hummingbird. We have the flowers they like, but no luck.

Several years ago, on a summer's evening, we watched the food chain in progress over our back field. There were a lot of mosquitoes in the air – and I mean a lot! There were also a great number of dragonflies darting around knocking the mosquitoes out of the air. Unfortunately for them, numerous bats and redwing blackbirds were waiting to pick off the dining dragonflies. We also see many types of predatory birds, including a broad variety of hawks. Redtail, sharp spined, shined, broad winged, and even peregrine falcons have all alighted here for a meal.

Winter brings its own birds. Two years ago, a snowy owl wintered in the tall pines surrounding the graveyard. Just after Christmas, I was looking out the kitchen window and to my surprise there was a Cooper's hawk perched on the kitchen garden fence eating his latest catch – a chickadee likely caught at our nearby birdfeeder. For several days, the hawk remained on the



property but never ventured as close.

The most surprising bird-related event I've ever seen here at the Homestead occurred last summer. While working in the garden, I heard the familiar clamor of crows when they see a predator. I moved to get a broader view of the sky and saw a hawk circling around looking over the fields for a meal. A group of crows followed the hawk, attempting to drive him away. But one crow was persistently more aggressive than the rest and, well, the hawk tolerated the harassment for a long time, then WHAM! No more crow. The hawk, finally tired of the pestering, just picked the crow off with its talons, let it drop, and continued circling.

Well, you probably won't believe this but it's midnight, and as I sit here with my blue-faced Amazon parrot glaring at me, our owl has returned... sitting just outside the window on the black locust tree, hooting. Good night.

Cub Scouts visit the Homestead in December

by Kathy Morano, veteran RNH tour guide

I was reminded of Art Linkletter's program, "Kids Say the Darndest Things," when I was called in to give a special group tour to two dens of cub scouts and their parents on Saturday, December 3rd.

It was difficult for me to talk about the things I normally mention on a tour because the boys were just bursting with questions after every sentence. At the end of the slideshow, they wanted to know what kind of witchcraft Rebecca practiced. Upon hearing from me that she was innocent, one exclaimed, "Then how did she get convicted?" Someone else asked me to explain how you die by hanging and another wanted to know if the Devil really existed.

Over at the house, they all oohed and aahed at the size of the main fireplace. Before I could speak, one of them asked what those holes were in the fireplace – meaning the beehive ovens. Looking around, another asked where they went to

the bathroom. An explanation of outhouses and chamber pots led to lots of "ughs". A flurry of questions followed about wild animals and Native American raids. "When they



The boys in front of the Great Hall hearth

fought the Indians, who won?" "Could a wolf get in the house?" "How about an Indian?"

After I told them about the fusil, (a musket used on horseback) hanging on the summer beam, and how Francis Nurse marched

to Lexington and Concord with the Danvers militia, one boy raised his hand and wanted me to tell him the causes of the Civil War. Another child suspiciously wondered how come I knew so much about Rebecca Nurse. With all those questions coming at me, the tour could have easily lasted another hour or so. Nevertheless, the parents finally decided enough was enough. At that point, they all gathered in front of the fireplace for a group picture then reluctantly headed home.

As challenging as the tour had been for me, it turned out to be a lot of fun. I left with the hope that all the eagerness and enthusiasm shown that day would be the beginning of a life-long love of history and an appreciation for preserving our historical heritage. Thank goodness we have a site as fine as the Nurse Homestead which can bring history alive for the child in all of us.

It's about time: Putting the documents in order

Having created a chronology for March 1692 in his book, *The Devil Hath Been Raised*, Dick Trask was a natural choice for this part of the re-transcription effort.

"We addressed only formal legal documents," he says, "not ecclesiastical records or personal recollections. These included 20-odd documents that were out there but hadn't been collected plus about 30 newly discovered documents."

The project team read the original paper wherever possible, using ultraviolet light and high-power magnifying loupes to reveal the documents' secrets.

Trask's assignment seemed pretty straightforward. It wasn't. Some 40%–45% of the documents had no dates. "We thought we could date this material by looking at the context," he says. "Then we discovered that the same material sometimes appears more than once."

Changes in ink and handwriting often indicate where material was added to documents at a later date. The team became expert in recognizing various scribes' hands.

"Stephen Sewell was appointed court clerk on June 1, 1692," Trask says. "Wherever we see his handwriting, we know it was produced after that." The handwriting also offers some tantalizing insights. "Thomas Putnam, the father and husband of two of the accusers, probably wrote more depositions than anyone else," Trask says. "I'd say that's a conflict of interest."

Now that the project is winding down, Trask looks back on some of its more memorable moments: "There's nothing more interesting or emotional than looking at the original documents. I couldn't have gotten any closer to my ancestor, Mary Esty. I looked at her petition to the court following her condemnation. Rather than pleading for her own life, she asked that no more innocent blood be shed. Such courage! Such faith! It makes me feel very insignificant."



Voices from the past:

An interview with Margo Burns, Nurse descendant and associate editor of the Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project

RNH: How did you get involved in the re-transcription project?

Burns: I took a course in linguistics and the law in grad school. We transcribed old legal cases and I got dibs on the Salem material. Later on, when I was researching Rebecca Nurse, I found Bernie Rosenthal on the Internet. He took a leap of faith and brought me on board as project manager. Next thing I knew, I was up to my ears in digital documents and having a blast.

RNH: What is your role as project manager?

Burns: I coordinate the efforts of 17 brilliant, driven people scattered across the globe. It's



Margo Burns during a visit to her ancestors' homestead
photo by Perry Smith/UNH Magazine

like herding cats. One of my responsibilities was to distribute documents to the team. We went through two complete rounds, looking at every single document. The way I shuffled the deck it's conceivable that some documents

were viewed by six sets of eyes. I'm now putting together the final draft for submission to the publisher in August.

RNH: You also did your share of transcribing. What was your biggest challenge?

Burns: Reading older handwriting. You come across a lot of different styles in nearly 900 manuscripts and it was hard to go from one to the next. So we grouped the documents by author whenever we could. If you're doing all Samuel Parris, you get used to it and you're better able to transcribe it accurately. At the same time, a third of the documents have more than one person's handwriting. You could have three people signing an arrest warrant on different dates.

RNH: What did you learn about 17th century handwriting?

Burns: There were different writing styles for English and Latin and for different professions. Some scribes used their own shorthand. When Samuel Parris says "this is a true account taken from my characters

at the time," he means he's working from shorthand to generate an account in Standard English. Handwriting became simplified and more legible by the 1700s when the victims' families sought compensation. Some writing samples were puzzling until we realized that the scribe was in his 60s, not his 30s, and had an old fashioned style.

RNH: What about Tituba's rats/cats?

Burns: In Jonathan Corwin's examination of Tituba the lower case "c" looks like a lower case "r" does today. Munsell mistakenly read "rats" instead of "cats." The error survived for well over a century.

RNH: And Jerson Toothaker?

Burns: This is another error that dates from Munsell. His transcript reads, "Mary Warren ag't Jerson Toothaker." But Jerson does not appear elsewhere in the transcripts or in any genealogy. The context tells us that the deposition was actually against Mary Ireson and Mary Toothaker. In the hand of those days, an upper case "I" could look like an upper case "J", with a large loop above and below the line. "Ireson" became "Jerson." Another researcher found this error first, but we found it, too.

RNH: What was your favorite document?

Burns: The testimony of Sarah Nurse, Rebecca's daughter-in-law, in which she says she saw Sarah Bibber jab herself with a pin and scream that Rebecca Nurse was doing it. This is one of the very few documents where someone cried fraud. It was risky to do so. I'm very proud of my ancestor. [a close-up from the Sarah Nurse document Margo mentions is shown on page one.]

RNH: Will the re-transcription change the way people see Salem?

Burns: I don't know about that, but it should change how people trust secondary sources. You have to go to primary sources. Of course our book will be a secondary source, too, but it will be a very good guide to the primary source.

For more information on the witch hunt, visit Burns' website, "17th Century Colonial New England," at <http://www.17thc.us>

Notes from the president's quill...

by Bill Clemens



It is with great pleasure that I note that this edition of the newsletter is the second of volume thirty! This is certainly no little achievement for a group of people who donate their time to this great endeavor called the Rebecca Nurse Homestead. I want to thank each and every one of the members for writing the articles, editing the text, formatting the layout and assembling it all. I also want to thank all those who print, label, stamp, and mail each edition. Oh and most impressive, they do it on a quarterly basis – something I just won't give up.

While I'm on the subject of volunteering, I once again would like to issue a plea for help to all Homestead Preservation Society members. June is fast approaching and that means it's time for our annual fundraising Colonial Field Day and Muster event also known as Strawberry Festival. The Management Committee has been making some changes that will help bring more excitement to this long-running activity. One major objective is to free up the DALC members so they can perform more living history demonstrations – a request made by many patrons. We have already found groups to run the Balch Tavern and manage

parking/traffic control but we are always looking for more help. We would like to incorporate more volunteers in our Friday hulling/setup day, at the admissions gate, at the strawberry hut, and in breakdown and cleanup. Most of these efforts don't even require a full day's commitment.

Jackson Tingle is coordinating this year's event. If you can find the time to help us, contact Jackson at chaloff_13@hotmail.com or myself to get more information. You'll be surprised how much fun it can be and what a friendly and interesting group we are.

Finally, be on the lookout for articles and notices about what's going on at the Homestead this year. Several new and exciting activities are planned for 2006. A military muster day is slated for September 16 at the property. We are inviting a number of our sister units from the Northern Department of the Continental Line as well as some British units of the Boston Garrison to join us for training, tacticals and living history demonstrations. In upcoming articles, Glenn Mairo, our Endecott Shop manager, will be promoting both his annual Atlatl event (to be held on September 23-24) and a school of archaeology which will operate in partnership with Phillips Academy. We are also pursuing future performances of "Cry Innocent" by the History Alive! theater group from Gordon College. So, keep your eyes peeled and your calendar open. You wouldn't want to miss any of these.

Bill Clemens
978-777-3423
president@rebeccanurse.org

DALC members participate in Glover remembrance

"The setting sun, and music at the close, as the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last, writ in remembrance more than things long past."

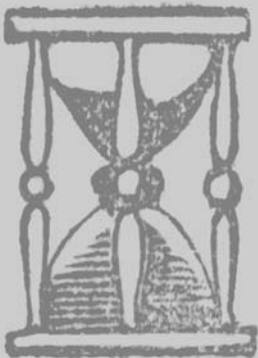
— Shakespeare

On the unseasonably warm evening of January 28, DALC members joined with Glover's Regiment of Marblehead to honor the memory of General John Glover (1732-1797). In 1776, Glover was colonel of the 14th Continental Regiment, famous for assisting Colonel Israel Hutchinson's Danvers men in ferrying Washington and his troops across the Delaware River before and after the battle of Trenton. In 1777, Glover received a brigadier general's commission, and served as a brigade commander until the end of the war, when he retired to his home in Marblehead.

In a ceremony that has been repeated yearly since 1975 on the anniversary of Glover's death, reenactors marched by lantern light through the streets of Marblehead, accompanied by approximately 30 town residents, to historic Burial Hill. After climbing one side of the hill and down the other, participants gathered at Glover's tomb, which sits in a quiet hollow between the ancient cemetery and Redd's Pond. After remarks by Glover's Regiment captain Robert Erbetta, three musket volleys were fired, made even more dramatic in the darkness by 15-foot flashes of flame from each muzzle. When the noise and smoke had cleared, DALC member Tom Macy, in the persona of Rev. Enos Hitchcock (Hitchcock was one of the chaplains for Glover's Regiment in 1776) read prayers and a short selection from a funeral sermon. The evening concluded with a march back through town.

Many reenactors describe moments when the dividing line between the 21st century and the 18th century seems to melt away. In the darkness of Marblehead's Burial Hill, members of DALC and Glover's Regiment enjoyed just such an experience.

"Salem Towne" to be performed at RNH



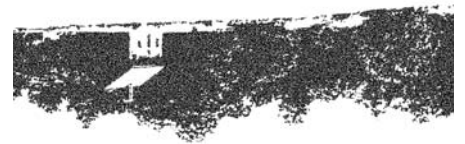
"Salem Towne," a song cycle based on the events of 1692, will be performed at the Meetinghouse with a live cast and professional orchestra. This work, composed by singer/songwriter Linda Towne Clifford, features a dozen original songs and dialogue based on transcripts of the witchcraft trials. Tickets will be available on the day of the performance. There is limited seating in our Meetinghouse so come early!

Saturday, May 13 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Sunday, May 14 at 1 p.m.

\$15 for adults; \$10 for students/seniors

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society
149 Pine Street
Danvers, Massachusetts 01923
www.rebeccanurse.org

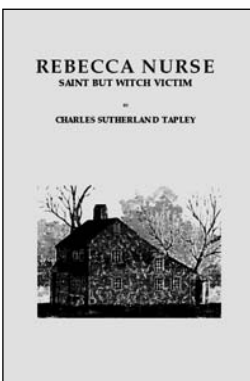
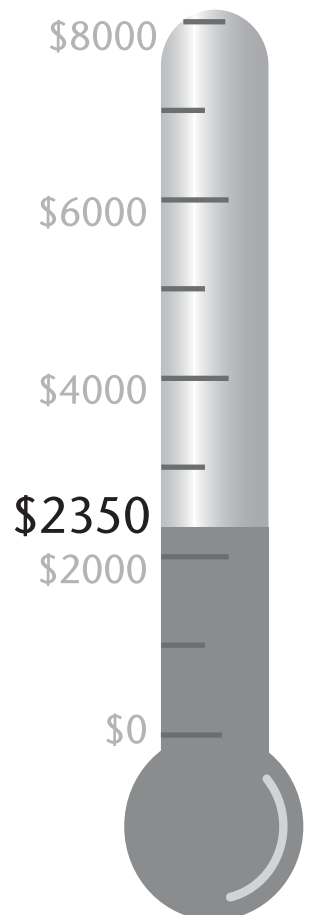


Special projects fund update

Help us reach our \$8000 goal for two major RNH 2006 projects

Lining the chimneys of the Nurse House will accomplish two objectives. First, it will preserve the original brickwork for generations to come. Secondly, it will allow us to use the fireplaces for the reasons they were built, for COOKING! As part of our ongoing commitment to living history, we would love to offer frequent hearth cooking demonstrations, as well as cooking classes to both children and adults. Lining the chimneys would allow us to do this safely, without causing damage to the brickwork or endangering the house to fire.

Reroofing the Endecott Barn will keep the 1681 Endecott House frame intact, and allow our gift shop to continue providing an important service to our visitors, as well as a valuable source of income for the Homestead.



Each donation of \$100 receives a thank-you gift of Tapley's book *Rebecca Nurse: Saint but Witch Victim*.

Each donation of \$250 or more receives a thank-you gift of the newly-issued DVD of *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*.

Danvers Alarm List Co. has 503(c) designation from the IRS, so every donation is tax deductible.

Please send your donation to: Special Projects Fund
Rebecca Nurse Homestead, 149 Pine Street,
Danvers MA 01923

