



# *the Lantern*

*shedding light on our past*

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June 2007



***Boat sailing on the Pumping Station  
pond, South Braintree, circa 1910***

BRAINTREE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
31 Tenney Road  
Braintree Massachusetts 02184-6512

# Braintree Historical Society

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The Braintree Historical Society is open Saturday - Wednesday from 10:00 A.M.- 4:30 P.M. est.

phone: 781-848-1640  
www.braintreehistorical.org

The Braintree Historical Society's *Lantern* is published quarterly and is mailed to all members of the Society. The *Lantern* is also available at the Gilbert Bean Museum located at 31 Tenney Road Braintree, MA. For back issues of the publication please phone 781-848-1640.

Braintree Historical Society is a qualified non-profit, charitable and educational organization under IRS code Sec. 501 (c)(3) and Mass. General Laws 180, 26A. Contributions are deductible on individual and business tax returns



## Mission Statement

*The Braintree Historical Society promotes an interest in local history through association, mutual encouragement, and study. Through historical research and education, it provides a means for members to become aware of the value of their American heritage and their community's part in its development. It further engages in creating and maintaining collections, preserving historical documents, relics and sites, and advancing knowledge of Braintree's famous son, Sylvanus Thayer.*

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## ***President's Letter***

Initially, I would like to apologize to you on behalf of the United States Postal Service who, by their blunder, misdirected the announcement of our Annual Meeting. It was fortunate that we were able to call or email as many members as possible to inform them of our predicament. The program, "Celebrating Town Meeting" was enthusiastically received by all in attendance.

The membership elected Mrs. Edith Weinberg to your Board of Directors. Edith and her husband Alan are very involved members of the Society. Edith is a leader, as demonstrated by her commitment to the Friends of the Thayer Public Library and their recent fundraising campaign to expand their parking facility. We welcome Edith and look forward to her stimulating our membership and fundraising campaigns.

The office of Treasurer has not been filled. We invite any member who has a background in bookkeeping or accounting and can devote four or five hours a week to please volunteer to assist us.

The Fan Association of North America (FANA) has responded to our request for a grant in the amount of two thousand dollars to support us in creating a new gallery at the Gilbert Bean Museum to display our extensive collection of fans. Some of these fans were made by the Allen Fan Company of East Braintree. Upon completion of this gallery we will be inviting you to an open house to view the display of fans, some of which have never been seen by the membership. Hopefully we will be able to convince FANA to hold their Annual Meeting next June in the Boston area.

Our Annual Appeal letter is now in your possession. As I stated in this request, your response is critical to maintaining the properties and programs of the Society. If this appeal is unsuccessful, serious cutbacks will occur.

We wish you a very pleasant and relaxing summer and look forward to seeing you at our next event, which will be Heritage Day on September 16, 2007. This is truly a family-oriented affair with food, beverages, and activities for all ages, especially the children, with games, pony rides, and much more. Please save this date and do not forget to invite your friends and neighbors as this is the Society's gift to the community at no cost. We will, however, accept donations from anyone who wishes to defray the expenses associated with this, our most popular event.

Paul Carr  
President

## **Summer Memories Taken from the Recollections of Nancy Nicosia**

I don't recall anyone in our neighborhood (Pond Street, Fairview, and Rose Avenues, in the 1930s) going on vacations. I do remember the weekends and the neighborhood get-togethers as great times. Mostly we would gather at someone's

house on Sunday afternoon. The men would play cards like Briscola, Scopa, or Tre Siete (three sevens). The winners were "Boss" over a pitcher of home-made wine or beer. The women sat around talking while keeping an eye on the children.

We'd play games like Hide and Seek, Red Light, Red Rover, Sugar Bowl, or Hop Scotch that we would chalk out on the street. If we weren't playing on Fairview Avenue in the street we'd play in the Noah Torrey Schoolyard. Sometimes we'd have a shish-ka-bob barbecue with Charlie Bluhanis doing chef duties. While the meat was cooking the men would play Bocce in the driveway.

Once in a while in the summertime - on a HOT Sunday - the families would pack a BIG Italian lunch and we would go to Nantasket Beach or to Robbins Pond in Bridgewater. We didn't all have cars, but those who did shared and made it possible for many of us to go. I remember Angelo Leo's big car all piled up. On warm summer evenings some of the mothers would sit outside talking. I can still sense that warm feeling of contentment as I sat by my mother's feet "just listening." There

was no pressure - no fast pace to our lives....

Memorial Day found my brother Joe with his white duck pants and my sister Mary and me with our newly-sewn dresses, waiting for the parade to arrive at the Pond Street Cemetery, seated upon the granite block wall. If we weren't waving our brand new American flags we were busy licking an ice cream cone purchased from Caruso's truck parked



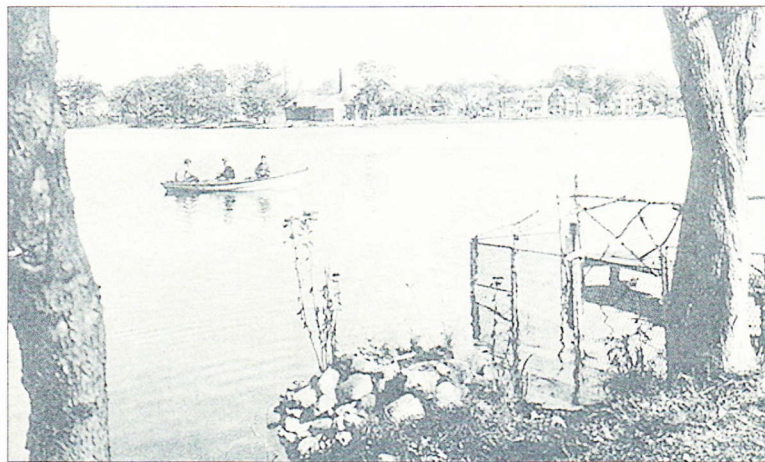
**South Braintree Square  
circa 1937**

nearby. There were no restrictions on the sale or use of fireworks. Regular stores sold them as well as special booths set up just for a few weeks. Simond's Taxi set up such a booth next door in front of a house where the Williamson family lived (long gone).

The only firework I was allowed to hold was a Roman Candle - after my father lit it, of course. We could hold "punk" that we always pretended to smoke. After one Fourth of July celebration I can remember having a really sore eye. A neighbor used sparkler wires to make spaghetti with holes. I was trying to scrape off the burned sparkler when a chunk flew into my eye. My mother was able to get it out, but Boy, wasn't it sore! Never did go to a doctor. I recovered with no after-effects.

Summer found me carefree. Girls' games included Hop Scotch, Jump Rope, and bouncing a ball to: "One, Two, Three, Allary, my first name is Mary. Don't you think I look cute, in my father's bathing suit?" For each game there was a catchy verse. Double Dutch ball was using both hands to bounce the ball either off the wall or on the hard top. Double

Dutch Jump Rope was for group play. Two kids stood at opposite ends of two jump ropes holding one of the ends in each hand. While they were swinging the ropes in opposite directions, the other kids took turns jumping in and out of the criss-crossing ropes without getting tangled and stepping on the ropes, which meant they were 'out' and took their turn swinging.



**View of Sunset Lake from Pond Street circa 1920**

Boys joined in to play Allies: either Popsie or Potsy. They also played a game with picture cards they collected with bubble gum. They would 'scale' their cards against a wall. The one who got his card closest to the wall won all the other cards in that particular throw. I especially remember my brother Joe's Cowboy and Indian cards. I still have my bag of allies in a bag my mother made for them from some leftover dress material.

Down at "the pond" (Sunset Lake) we sometimes brought lunch. I can still taste that home-made root beer that



**The Pumping Station**

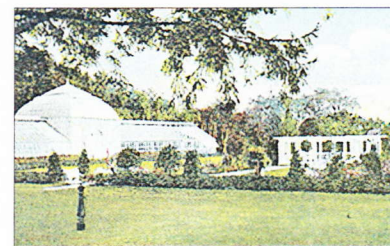
Nancy Tricomi Leo used to make and bring back of Tricomi's. There was always an adult in the water to make sure we didn't venture out too far. I never did learn to swim - didn't go there enough, I guess. The other side of the pond was known as "the pumping station." The few times I went there I recall a swampy area where the parking lot is now located.

On warm summer nights my sister Mary and I and a neighbor, Louise DelPico were allowed to go for a walk. Our favorite destination was to Ste. Anne's Shrine on Washington Street. We would pass the Dyer estate and the

Hollingsworth estate. When I think of how many times

we got a late start for our walk because we had chores to do at home first I have to smile. We would actually "run" our walk because we wanted to be back home by 7:15 PM to hear Myrt and Marge on the radio.

I saw my one and only professional baseball game when Ted Williams was a rookie. The town sponsored a bus



**Hollingsworth Estate gardens**

trip to Fenway Park. For twenty-five cents we got to see the game and the bus ride. Naturally, we met some boys there. My whole world was Braintree: these boys were from Roxbury. For all I knew that was on the moon. Talking about baseball teams, Braintree had the White Sox. Guiliano's Grocery sponsored a team uniform. It was worn by the second baseman. We usually went to root for him. They used to "pass the hat" for contributions. So many balls were hit over the Town Hall at French's Common that they soon painted a "foul line" on the roof.

The playground at French's Common was an active one. We had game competitions with other town playgrounds. Bean bags were "big" then. Claire Diauto and Mary DeBera were two instructors I

remember....

A great pastime was gazing up into a cloud-filled sky reading faces and pictures out of the cloud formations. It was especially nice on a warm summer's day as I lay on my back in the grass....

The first one of the kids in our group to spy a flock of birds flying overhead would call out, "flock o' birds, flock o' birds FIRST."

We believed it was good luck, and we'd get our wish besides. I was thinking that we don't see those huge flocks of birds anymore. Or could it be that I'm not looking anymore? On several occasions my cousins, my sister, a few friends, and I put on variety shows in my aunt's back yard. We charged two cents admission and gave it back in punch and cookies. In one show I was "The Lady in Red" complete with a red crepe paper dress that we pinned together. One of the friends took dancing lessons - she had real costumes....

A really big excursion for me was to Quincy Square. We would go by bus or train. We used both. My mother and I were subject to motion sickness. Didn't stop us. Every week the life insurance premiums were due. One policy premium was five cents; the other, ten cents. Got to weigh in free at the Granite Trust building. Anyway, the bus ride was ten cents and the train ride was fourteen cents. We took the train quite often. You see, Ma preferred the train because it had a restroom - just in case.

We got off the train or bus at one end of Quincy Square and worked our way



**The Braintree White Sox  
1930**

foam, now that I think about it. Banana splits were twenty-nine cents - then went up to thirty-nine cents. Inside the Kresge front door was an ice cream box that was kept cold with dry ice. You could buy an ice cream sandwich or one of those triple-scoop, odd-shaped cones for ten cents.

Labor Day meant the end of summer fun and the beginning of a new school year. We made big decisions about what we would wear on the first day. Ma was back at the sewing machine.

## **Membership**

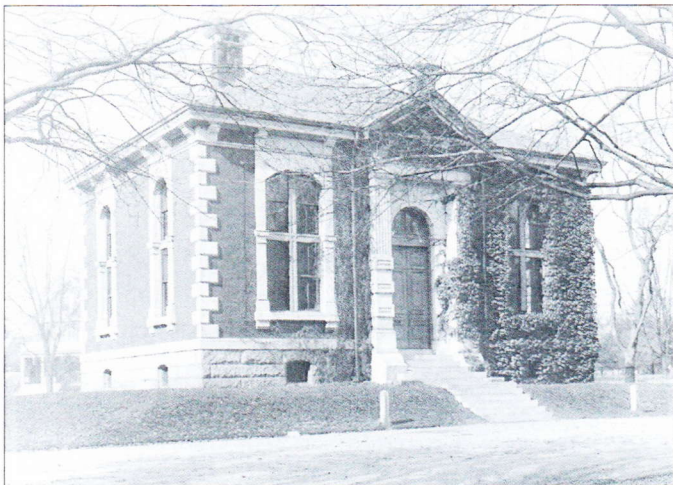
***We welcome the following new members to the Society:***

Karen & Ron De Napoli, Donald R. Griffin, Mr. & Mrs. Joseph F. Powers, Grace E. Butler, Aantre Kennedy, Luella M. Erwin, Robert Mackenrod, Jr., Eleanor R. Sullivan, Sarah Sawyer, Mary Moore

## ***In Quest of Bequests***

Like most non-profits, the Braintree Historical Society depends on contributions as well as membership dues. One way you can support our many programs is by remembering us in your will. In that way you create a legacy that will live on after you. Please consider making a bequest to sustain the operations of the Society.

## ***Braintree's Oldest Surviving Public Building***



My first visit to the Thayer Public Library in South Braintree was in the very late thirties, when I was a Braintree High School student. At that time I lived in East Braintree, where we had a branch library located in a storefront on Quincy Avenue next to the Gas Company building. It was a small, friendly facility, featuring, as I recall, a great many fiction books; but it was not strong in resources for High School students.

At Braintree High School, located at that time on Washington Street at the foot of West Street, we did have a well-stocked library, furnishing us with a generous supply of reference books, atlases, and encyclopedias.

I had not really felt any great need to further explore Braintree's library facilities, but one day a friend of mine who lived on Academy Street suggested that we walk down to the Thayer Public Library in South Braintree. She wanted to show me the wealth of materials housed there.

Delighted to know that there was another source in Braintree to augment my knowledge of classical music, American history, and horses, to say nothing of other subjects deemed important by my High School teachers, I happily joined my friend in the short walk down Washington

Street to South Braintree. As we approached the Thayer Library building, it seemed so imposing that I felt slightly intimidated; but my friend, bubbling over with enthusiasm and familiarity, confidently led me up the dignified granite stairs. After pulling open the double exterior doors, we were met with two or three additional stairs, and another set of doors. Pulling these open, we found ourselves in front of the main desk of the library. To the left was the main reading room with a large table and several chairs. To the right was the Trustee's Room, with a closed door. Both of these rooms had large marble fireplaces located against the rear interior wall.

A smiling librarian was seated behind a huge desk where books were checked out and returned.



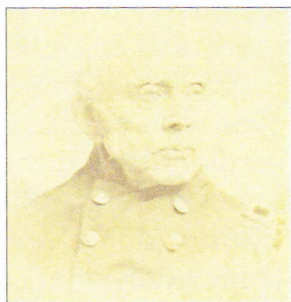
***The interior of the Thayer Public Library circa 1950***

My friend led me to the card catalogue, which contained cards showing the location of all the books, according to the author, the title, and the subject. Using this essential tool, it was easy to determine that the books we were interested in would be found in the upper stacks. To reach them, we had to climb a circular steel staircase to reach our goal. We thought this challenge was great fun, but now that I am a senior citizen I wonder what the elderly folks of that time thought about scaling the heights on this open steel staircase to find their desired volumes!

After taking our books to the main desk and checking them out with the librarian, we could take them into the reading room, if we wished, or directly out the two sets of

doors and home.

I was unaware at that time that the library was the result of a bequest to the town from General Sylvanus Thayer (1785-1872), and that it was dedicated in 1874.



**General  
Sylvanus Thayer**

How did this come about? Going back in time to 1866 just after the close of the Civil War, Thayer, who had retired to Braintree, the town of his birth, realized that he should begin to designate the disposition of his personal wealth. Never married, and with no children, his thoughts turned to the Town of Braintree as a possible recipient of part of his resources. He saw the need for a public library and proposed an idea to the town: if the town would contribute \$10,000, he would supply the rest of the money needed to build a library. In addition, he would loan \$10,000 to the town and he would give \$10,000 outright for a foundation fund, the income of which would be used to support the library.

The first reaction of the townspeople was favorable. They voted to accept the proposition on terms satisfactory to a committee of five to be appointed by the Moderator. Unfortunately some kind of misunderstanding developed between the appointed committee and General Thayer. As a result it was voted in 1867 to rescind the first favorable vote. Eventually the difficulties were resolved; and in 1870 the town voted to accept the library proposition.

Private individuals contributed money toward the purchase of a piece of land near the Town House in South Braintree. Architects Hammatt and Joseph Billings carefully prepared the building plans under the personal supervision of General Thayer. Regrettably, Thayer died on September 2, 1872, just as the plans

were completed, but before the building contracts had been made. Although the death of Thayer imposed new responsibilities upon the committee appointed to confer with him, progress continued. Building contracts were finalized in 1873, and the building was completed in the spring of 1874. It opened for use in September 1874 with Mrs. Abbie Arnold serving as the first librarian. Over the years the building was gradually "modernized," with steam heat added in 1888, town water connected in 1894, and electricity furnished in 1896, a great improvement over the oil lamps.

Eventually, the building became inadequate for the town, and a Building Committee was appointed to see about a new location for the main library. The town was able to acquire land across Washington Street from Town Hall, and a new building was dedicated on November 3, 1953. The original library building was turned over to the Braintree Water Department for their office facilities.

Time marches on. Now we have yet a third main library building across from Town Hall, and the Braintree Water Department has moved out of the original library building, having found more spacious quarters in the former Noah Torrey School on Pond Street.

The original brick-faced building with its granite quoins and trim around the windows and main entrance stands waiting for further use. It was and continues to be an outstanding ornament and contribution to the Historic District of the Town, and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is our town's oldest surviving public building. It will be interesting to see how Braintree will find a future use for this special building, while respecting its history.

Marjorie Maxham  
Librarian/Archivist



***The Medical History of  
Braintree  
by Sophie Blunt  
(1875-1962, taken from  
our files)***

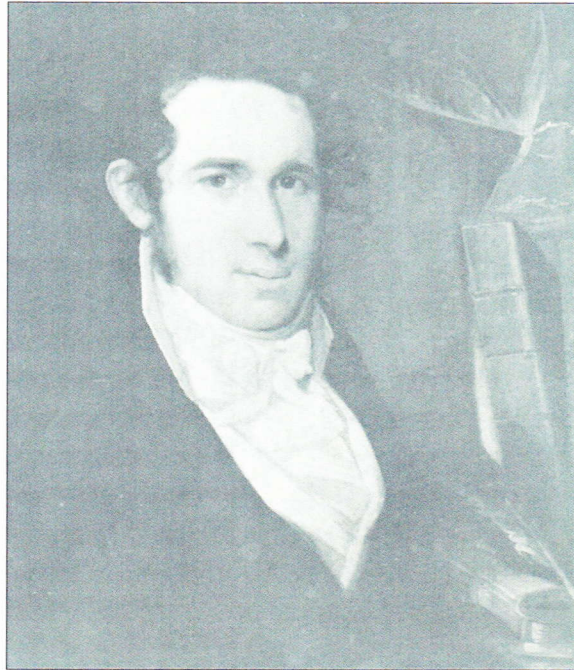
The vital records of very early Braintree make no mention of doctors. Weren't the early settlers ever ill? Yes, I suppose so. But they might have gone to Boston for doctors and medicine. Still, I doubt it. Braintree was a day's trip by ox cart from Boston.

I looked at the tombstones of those early days. There were not many such tombstones - the burying racket in tombstones had not yet begun. Perhaps few died because in Braintree the climate was clement. Old Braintree homes were less drafty than homes built later and the surrounding woods and meadows supplied an abundance of medicinal herbs. This is where the filled bags of herbs in kitchens and attics came in. All the early settlers knew about herbs. They had brought herbs with them from England where Gypsies had known and told them so much about these plants. Also they had stayed a while in thrifty Holland.

Neither the vital records of the town nor the tombstones tell of this herb lore. But their diaries do. Thank God for those early diaries. These were a sort of safety valve for the pent-up emotions and desires of those outwardly composed people. Their diaries told not only of suppressed desires but also of the intimate doings of the

day. Here we find their medicinal lore and their use of the herbs in which Braintree families had such faith.

It wasn't only Peter Rabbit who had to take chamomile tea after eating too much. Hear what the old Braintree *Materia Medica* says: "a tea of chamomile flowers is a febrifuge for mittent and



***The Honorable Ebenezer Thayer  
(1721-1794), father of Dr.  
Stephen Thayer***

intermittent fevers." No wonder Braintree people were well when you read in this medical book about the many diseases wild cherry bark will cure. And cherry trees abounded in Braintree. And friendly neighbors were always running in with suggested remedies for those who were ill - catnip for special fevers and hard tack for cholera infantum according to the early death notices. Maybe too strong doses were given. Every household had cut up senna and figs laid down in stone crocks and every Spring came purging and sulfur and molasses for worms.

Mother gathered sassafras and dandelion roots, yellow dock, and checker berries every Spring and concocted brews with potato yeast. She made infusions and decoctions and extracts and tinctures, and from open crocks on the back of the stove, children were dosed every morning as needed when they came into the kitchen. Flax seed tea was used for lung troubles and milkweed for scrofula and worms. Peach bark and leaves were also used for worms. Beet juice was given to weaklings

While some herbs were gathered as they first came into leaf, others were gathered later in the summer, according as they had found best by experience. They were

put in bags or bundled; and the medical herbs were hung in the attic and the savory ones in the kitchen.

When trees were chopped down and sawed into boards for home building, cuts and bruises were common. Open jars of jam were allowed to gather mold in the cellar and this mold was applied to cuts and injuries to prevent inflammation and to promote healing (this anticipated the discovery of penicillin - a mold - and its infection-killing properties by 300 years).

The sap from spruce trees was saved and pressed into pencil-like sticks and these were used to stop the bleeding from cuts and to seal various wounds and promote healing. The first doctor in Braintree of whom I could find any record was Dr. Stephen Thayer, one of the Hon. Ebenezer Thayer's numerous brood. Stephen Thayer was born in 1770 and died in 1841. Of him I know little.

Dr. Noah Torrey came to Braintree in 1847. He was a graduate of Dartmouth College and had studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He evidently found it hard sledding to earn a living so he became the Town Clerk and Treasurer. Later he taught for four years at the Hollis Institute in Braintree. Good old healthy Braintree. Dr. Torrey served on the Town School Board for twenty years. A public school building was even named after him. He bought from my aunt Julia (Mrs. Elias Hayward) the little drug store and post



**Dr. Noah Torrey  
(1818-1897)**

office in South Braintree Square. This was the beginning of the Torrey Drug Store.

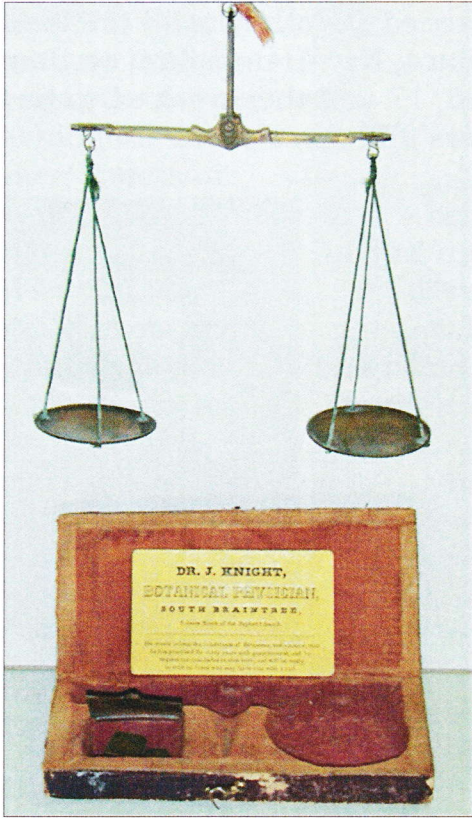
To Braintree proper in 1863 came Dr. T. Haven Dearing from Scituate. He brought his family with him. He had served two years as a surgeon in the Civil War. By this time there were more people in Braintree. The railroad had been put through and there were several factories in South Braintree - the Morrison Mill and the Ambler and Hobart Grist Mill and a flax mill. Like Dr. Torrey, Dr. Dearing was elected to the School Board. His son, Henry Dearing, followed in his footsteps.

Then came Dr. Herbert Guild. He did not serve on the School Board like the other doctors but he did serve on the Board of Health. It was thought proper to have a plumber and an undertaker serve with Dr. Guild on the board. A Dr. Chester Gould came to Braintree and married a Braintree girl, Sara Shaw. Very soon afterward they went to California to live.

During those early years many of the inhabitants of Braintree were Puritans and therefore non-conformists. They did not choose to go to Braintree doctors but instead went to Dr. Forsythe and Dr. Fifield in Weymouth, and to Dr. Babbitt in Randolph. It was Dr. Babbitt who advised the drinking of the Monatiquot spring water instead of regular water during a typhoid epidemic in Braintree. His daughter, Mimmie, lived in what is now known as Braintree Highlands but which she called "Mayflower Park" because mayflowers were so thick in the fields. If any patient in Braintree needed her doctor father, she would hitch up her horse and drive to Randolph to give her father the message. There were no telephones then.

Now doctors in Braintree are as numerous as the sands of the sea. Lo and behold the inhabitants of Braintree have fallen upon evil days. They have forsaken the herb cures of their forefathers.

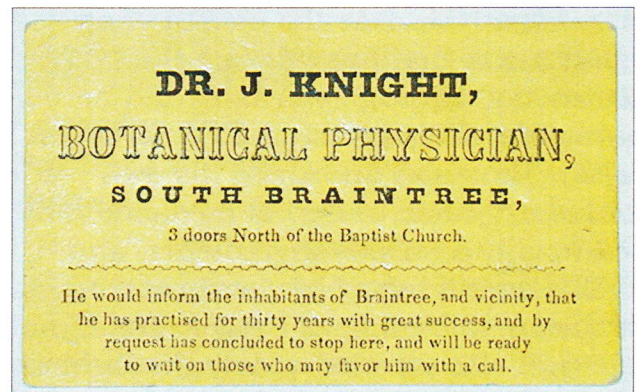
## An Important New Acquisition



The Braintree Historical Society has received an exciting new addition to its collection of Braintree medical memorabilia. This new donation, a hand-held physician's scale from the early to mid 1800s once belonged to Dr. Jonathan Knight. It comes to us from Patricia Collins of Goldendale, Washington, and her niece, Carolyn Riise of Inyokern, California (both direct descendants of Dr. Knight). The donors even made the trip all the way from the West Coast to visit the museum and personally present the scales on June 13, 2007.

The small, hand-held, brass scale is only 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches long and was presented in its original orange velvet-lined, leather covered box. In addition to a space for the scales, the box contains a small compartment with a brass door that holds four of the original brass weights. This type of scale, known as an equal arm balance, has been in use since ancient times. It consists of two pans, which are

suspended from each end of a horizontal beam. A hand-held hinge at the center of the beam allows each side to move up or down based on the amount of weight in the pan. Items are weighed by placing a weight of established value in one pan while the other is filled with enough goods to achieve an even balance (indicated when a brass pointer at the center of the beam lines up vertically with the hand-held hinge). By the early eighteenth century, equal arm balances had become precise and sensitive enough to be in common use among physicians, apothecaries, and chemists who prepared their own medications. These specialized medical/scientific scales are generally characterized by their small size and delicately proportioned central beam and pans, which are usually made from brass or sometimes glass.



Of equal historical interest is one of the doctor's original yellow cardboard business cards, which dates to about the mid-1800s and was presented with the scales. It reads:

*Dr. J. Knight,  
Botanical Physician,  
South Braintree,  
3 doors North of the Baptist Church.*

*He would inform the inhabitants of  
Braintree, and vicinity, that he has  
practiced for thirty years with great  
success, and by request has concluded to  
stop here, and will be ready to wait on  
those who may favor him with a call.*

Dr. Knight's business card advertises

his services as a “botanical physician” meaning that his remedies were chiefly derived from plants and herbs. Although the practice of herbal medicine is itself centuries old, it rose to particular prominence during the early 1800s through the efforts of Samuel Thomson (1769-1843), the founder of the so-called “Thomsonian System” of medicine. At this time disease and its treatment was still poorly understood; and conventional medicine largely consisted of bloodletting and purging, treatments that often did the patient more harm than good. Although Thomson himself had no medical training, he became interested in herbal medicine after a course of conventional treatment nearly killed his wife.

He became a vigorous opponent of the medical establishment, believing instead that cold was the source of all ailments and that by restoring the body’s natural heat through warming and herbal treatments, the patient could recover full health. Thomson developed his own particular system of herbal medicine that used readily available ingredients; and in 1822 he published his landmark *New Guide to Health; or Botanic Family Physician*. He traveled widely throughout New England and became extremely rich and successful by trading off of a general public mistrust of conventional medicine and by selling “patent rights” to his own medicines. By 1840, he had sold over 100,000 patents and his system had numerous followers. It is not known whether Dr. Knight was a follower of Thomson or had one of his patents, but he was certainly practicing at a time when herbal medicine had achieved a renewed prominence.

Dr. Jonathan Knight was born in Westmoreland, New Hampshire, on October 25, 1790. He was the eldest of the four sons of Jonathan Knight of Lancaster, Massachusetts, and Betsey (Dudley) Knight of Acton, Massachusetts.

This was the second marriage for his father, who had three daughters from a previous marriage. Jonathan Knight, Jr. later married Dorothy Joslin (1796-1873) of Stoddard, New Hampshire, on January 14, 1816/17 and they went on to have five daughters and three sons.

When and where Jonathan Knight, Jr. received his medical training is not known and the family seems to have moved frequently. For a while they lived in Tunbridge, Vermont, where several of their children were born, then relocated to



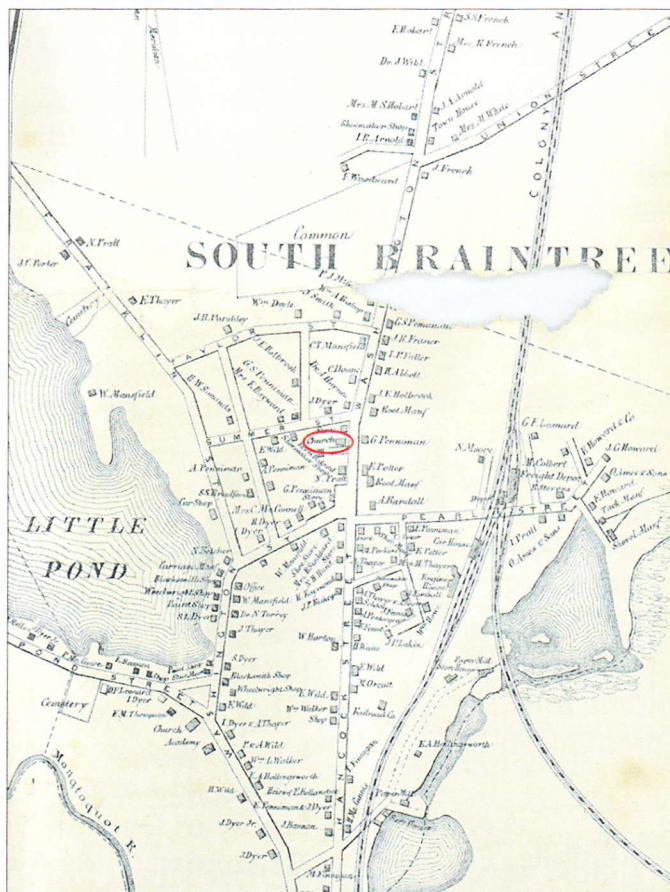
**Dr. Jonathan Knight  
(1790-1879)**

Boston (probably some time during the 1840s). According to the family history provided by the donors of the scale, it was during the 1850s that Dr. Jonathan Knight set up his medical practice in Braintree. At the time he was living here with the family of his eldest son, John Dudley Knight. It is at this point that the details of the family’s life become a bit fuzzy. John Dudley Knight had married a Mary Elizabeth Earle on June 8, 1848; and their first child had apparently been born and died in South Braintree on March 28, 1850. However, we can find no record of this child in either the Braintree town records or in our own archive. Their second child was born in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, on July 5, 1853. Also, Dr. Jonathan Knight’s name does not appear anywhere in the 1854 Braintree poll tax records (the only surviving record from the 1850s currently in our archive).

The only tantalizing clue we have to help us pin down their possible whereabouts in the town comes from Dr. Knight’s business card, which states that his office

was located “3 doors north of the Baptist Church.” Braintree’s original First Baptist Church was built in 1842 near the corner of Washington and Summer Streets in South Braintree Square (around present-day 875 Washington Street). This church is certainly the same Baptist Church that is referred to as a landmark on the doctor’s business card. The Baptists used this church until 1874, when they sold the building to the Methodists, who continued to use it as a church until it burned in 1883. The Methodists built a new church on the same site a year later, and in 1894 the Baptists built a new First Baptist Church building on the corner of Washington Street and Sampson Avenue (there is still a Baptist church on that site at present-day 594 Washington Street). The location of the original First Baptist Church appears on an 1856 property map of South Braintree from our archive. Perhaps the doctor was temporarily renting space in the storefront next door, or in one of the houses just north of the church; it certainly was not uncommon for nineteenth-century doctors to have to travel frequently between towns in search of business.

Until we find more evidence, we simply cannot be sure. At any rate, the Knight family did not settle here. According to the information provided by the donors, John Dudley Knight worked as a machinist and railway engineer in Boston before joining the California Gold Rush in



**1856 property map showing the location of the First Baptist Church in South Braintree**

1854 and 1855. He then relocated his wife and children to Illinois and then Indiana until 1883, when he took them further west to the Dakota Territories. During the early 1870s, Dr. Jonathan Knight and his wife are recorded as living in Manchester, New Hampshire, with their youngest son, Albert. Dr. Jonathan Knight died in Manchester on May 1, 1879.

The Braintree Historical Society is delighted to have received this latest addition to our historical collections because its intriguing story raises as many questions as it answers. We know quite a bit

about Braintree’s long-standing resident families who have lived here for many generations, but it is pieces like this that remind us that what we know is always only half the story. Nineteenth-century people traveled further and more frequently than we sometimes imagine; and the stories of those who were just passing through have also contributed to, and further enriched, our town’s history. We hope to be able to discover more about the Knight family, but until then we are happy that we have been given the opportunity to record, preserve, and share this piece’s unique history at our museum.

*I would like to thank Carolyn Riise and Patricia Collins for their help with the genealogical details presented here.*

Jennifer Potts  
Curator

## Watson Museum & Research Center

General interior and exterior maintenance continues here at Watson. The 3"50 naval gun and mount, and 3000 pound Danforth anchor have been painted a Navy Gray, which nicely sets off the building. The present rear support leg for the anchor stock will be changed to steel tripod unit. The K1USN radio station antenna is now complete and the electrical cable will soon be installed. Radio club members will be visiting the ex-USS Forrestall in Newport, RI to remove radios and associated equipment for installation in the Watson radio room.



I have noticed an increase in emails, phone calls, and visitor requests for information. Donations of books, photographs, documents, manuscripts, and artifacts continues. Two items in particular I acquired from the Castle Storage Co. (formerly Ashmont Discount) on Quincy Avenue are a two-ton Mosler safe, and a one-ton vault. Both are currently being restored. Another unique acquisition is a 3' x 8' Civil War diorama of the battle site at Gettysburg, PA (July 1, 2, & 3, 1863). It shows, in minute detail, the Union & Confederate forces in battle positions with their soldiers, cannons, wagons, horses, etc. and also shows collateral damage to surrounding property. This will be a great learning tool for those interested in Civil War history.

Watson was also mentioned recently in two newspaper articles. The first, an interview in the June 1, 2007 *Bourne Enterprise*, concerned a 1990 case of an unknown Massachusetts Civil War soldier buried in the Bourne National Cemetery with full military honors. His partial remains and associated items (Mass.

uniform buttons) were discovered during a construction project and then brought to me for identification. I narrowed it down to two possible soldiers, then to possibly one for DNA testing.

The second article appeared in the June 15, 2007 edition of the *Patriot Ledger* and recounts the wartime experiences of an 82-year-old Braintree resident, Tania (Prechenko) Willis. Tania is originally from Moldavia, Russia and was a teenager during the June 22, 1941 German invasion (operation Barbarossa). Her town was occupied by German Security Forces, who forced her to register before sending her to Germany as slave labor. She worked in a cannon factory, at a gas mask company, and then finally as an unpaid maid to a prominent German family in Garmisch-Parkern (southern Germany). The head of this household, a German Colonel, was very strict but fair, but his wife was very abusive to Tania. When the allies invaded, the Colonel was captured and his medals were "liberated" and presented to Tania as a souevnir. She later met an American soldier whom she married and became a War Bride. Tania donated the German Colonel's medals to Watson. I hope to have Tania give a talk at Watson in the near future. She is quite a lady and has many stories to tell about her wartime experiences. Copies of both articles are available online or here at Watson.

We are still awaiting word on the completion of the Watson signs, and then hopefully we can announce a target date for the Grand Opening. I know that once we receive the proper news media coverage, Watson will really "come alive" and will be a credit to the Braintree Historical Society and the Town of Braintree.

Jim Fahey  
Director

## **Donations**

### ***Annual Appeal***

1 anonymous, Benjamin Fehan, Jane Fogg, Paul Carr, Blaine Banker, Sallyanne Galvin, William Hickey, Mary Ellen Kilmer, Irene MacKillop, Richard & Shyla Settles, Jennifer Caldelari, Conrad & Dorothy Fenick, Edith Corcoran, David & Sonya Shaw, Donald Porter, Marie Canavan, Michael Perfetti, Albertine Boardman, Harold Bausemer, Sheila Wentworth, Vincent Martino, George St. Andre, Irving Adler, Margaret Jenkins, Carolyn & John Jensen, Alan Flowers, Robert P. Hubbard, Geraldine O'Rourke, John Martino, John A. Dennehy, James Fahey, Barbara Opie, Dudley W. Letson III, Braintree Lumber Co., Frederick & Maureen Thayer, Barbara Medici, Ann O'Sullivan, Dennis Battles, Richmond Hardware, Ann & Dick Stoye, Leo & Walt's Sunoco, Ervina Marstin, Steven & Barbara Bailey, Carol Andrews, Priscilla & Robert Campbell, David Oliva, Jeffrey Kunz, Philip Thayer, Linda Laitine, Barney Landry, Elizabeth Lewis, Susan Lee, Judith Chambers, Lois H. Percival, Donald Penniman, James Keelon, Robert Keigan, Penny Miller, June Shaw

### ***In Appreciation of Ruth Powell***

Nancy Nicosia

### ***In Memory of Joseph Kazanowski & Malcolm Walker***

Dr. & Mrs. Vincent Pattavina

### ***Memorial Donations by the Braintree Chapter #4042 of AARP***

Virginia Wheeler, Charles Johnson, Son of Alexander & Anora Yaworsky

### ***Acquisitions Fund***

David Parr

### ***Watson Research Center Project***

Joseph Sullivan

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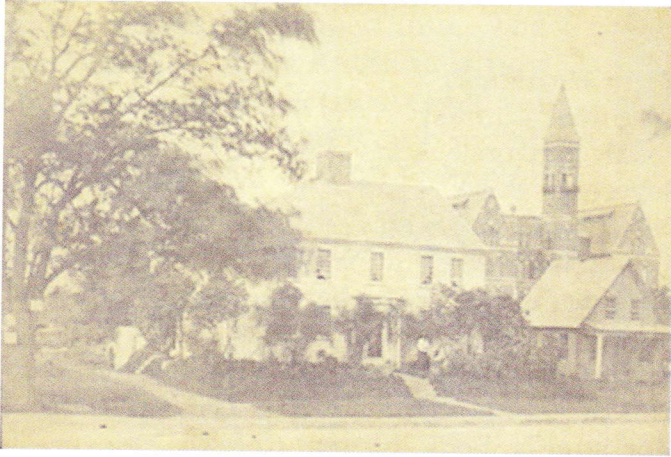
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*Please support local businesses who are  
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Historical Society!*

# Then and Now

Images of Old Braintree from  
the past and present.



Corner of Washington Street & Central  
Avenue, South Braintree  
circa 1890



Corner of Washington Street & Central  
Avenue, South Braintree  
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