



# The Crier

of the

## Glocester

### Heritage Society

Glocester Heritage Society  
 Job Armstrong Store  
 1181 Putnam Pike  
 P.O. Box 269  
 Chepachet, RI 02814



401.568.1866  
[www.glocesterheritagesociety.org](http://www.glocesterheritagesociety.org)  
[info@glocesterheritagesociety.org](mailto:info@glocesterheritagesociety.org)

Incorporated 1967.

Volume One

2004

Issue: Winter

The Glocester Heritage Society identifies, acquires, holds, arranges, restores, maintains, and preserves for posterity buildings, tracts of land and objects of historical, educational, architectural, cultural, and other similar interests of outstanding value within the Town of Glocester, RI.

### Success!

## GHS is Granted \$80,000 Award to Restore Dr. Reuben Mason House

Champlin Foundation Recognizes Need to Preserve an Invaluable Historical Treasure

President Rose LaVoie announces that, based on this significant award, GHS will assume stewardship of the House from the Chepachet Cemetery Association.

President Rose LaVoie's vision for GHS in 2004:  
 Page two.

More stories about the Dr. Reuben Mason House on page three.

2004 Calendar of Events on page four.

*Candlelight Shopping*



See page five for review of this December holiday celebration of town, business, and community.



**Peddlers' Faire**

Please turn to page five for details of this November heritage day of food and crafts.



### **The Glocester Heritage Society Archives Need YOU!**

If you are available to help organize files, sort items, categorize objects, or word process, please contact our Archivist, Edna Kent.

# The Crier

*Dear Gloucester Heritage Society Members,*

*The Society is embarking on a very ambitious undertaking: the restoration of the Dr. Reuben Mason House on Route 44 and the subsequent establishment of a Dorr Rebellion Museum. With your help and dedication to the preservation of our heritage, I am sure we can accomplish this goal.*

*The Champlin Foundation has started on toward our objective of \$400,000 by giving us a generous grant of \$80,000 to repair the exterior of the Dr. Reuben Mason House.*

*Preserve RD told us that we --- the GHS --- have to show we care enough to financially support this project. Please join me in dedicating ourselves in the upcoming year to this project by donating as much as you can to show your support.*

*Now we have to embrace a vision of what we want Gloucester to look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Together we can accomplish this magnificent undertaking. Our fund drive begins in March; please assist us in this ambitious yet achievable endeavor. Without support from you, the community, projects to safeguard our heritage are at risk.*

*Yours in preservation,*

*Rose La Voie*



## Board of Directors

*President*  
Rose LaVoie

*Vice President*  
Steve Hanley

*Treasurer*  
Cecelia Blicher

*Recording Secretary*  
Carole Fry

*Corresponding Secretary*  
Pauline Anderson

*Parliamentarian*  
Bradley L. Steere

## Standing Committees

*Archives*  
Edna Kent

*Building*  
John Doucette

*By Laws*  
Leon Gagnon, Harry Anderson, Frank Stevenson

*Communications*  
Dottie Leach

*Finance*  
Cecelia Blicher

*Grants*  
Harry Anderson

*Membership*  
Frank Stevenson

*Publicity*  
Dottie Leach, Cecelia Blicher

*Newsletter*  
Carolyn Fortuna

*Ways and Means*  
Glennis and Henry Beltram

*Website*  
Jill Stevenson

# The Crier

## The Dr. Reuben Mason House Revealed

### The Dr. Reuben Mason House: A First Walk-Through

by Steve Hanley, Vice President

On December 20, Edna Kent, John Doucette, Frank Stevenson, and I took a look at the Dr. Reuben Mason House. After poking around on the first and second floors, up in the attic and down in the basement, Frank Stevenson summed up the feelings for the entourage when he said, "It's really not as bad as I had feared."

And, in fact, for a building that has been around for over 200 years, it is in remarkably good condition. It has not suffered wholesale changes to its fundamental look. Many original doors and floors remain intact. And much of the original molding and woodwork remain unscathed, save for multiple coats of paint.

An inspection of the basement did reveal a number of floor joist and beams that suffer from dry rot, and much work will need to be done to address these structural issues. Yet the foundation and the center chimney are in good repair, for the most part, so major foundation repair will not be necessary.

All in all, the first inspection left us feeling optimistic. For once, things are not as bad as they could be. But, the house is at a point where further deterioration could happen quickly. We are fortunate to be able to address the existing issues now, before they become major defects.

This should be fun!

### The Dr. Reuben Mason House: Origins and Promise

excerpted from research by Edna Kent,  
Glocester Historian

It is impossible to know the exact age of the Dr. Reuben Mason House, at the foot of Acotes Hill in Chepachet. We do know the homestead was sold in 1756 by Joseph Pettingell to his son, John, and sold again in 1765 to Richard Bartlett, who lived in the house until 1774.

Important to our story, it was sold to a physician, Dr. Reuben Mason.

Dr. Mason was to become the surgeon to General William West's Brigade in the early battles of the American Revolutionary War, when militia trained on the plains north of Chepachet, Rhode Island. Our very own Gloucester Light Infantry may trace its heritage back to those same citizen soldiers who practiced warfare nearby.



From 1774, Dr. Mason administered to the medical needs of families of Gloucester until he died, just before the turn of the century in 1799.

We presume that much of his medical practice took place in the home, of which much recent notoriety falls, where he resided with his wife and three children – sons, James (also a physician) and Stephen, and daughters, Dorcas and Sophia.

After Reuben Mason died, the house was divided, according to Rhode Island law, with the children receiving a 2/3 share and his widow a 1/3 share. His wife occupied the "north" room, with privileges to the kitchen, milk cellar, and various other parts of the house. It is believed that James continued to practice medicine there until his mother died. Ultimately, the house became the sole property of Sophia and her husband, George Arnold, who sold it to Thomas Owen in March, 1805.

During the Dorr Rebellion in 1842, the Reuben Mason House was designated by the State Militia to be a field hospital, in all probability for the state troops who were marching from Greenville, Scituate, and Woonsocket. Thankfully, Thomas Dorr sought to avoid bloodshed as a result of his campaign, and, so, no troops or rebels were actually in need of medical attention during the uprising.

Dr. Mason always referred to his residence as his "mansion house." For the times, it was indeed a large and especially comfortable home, so the designation of "mansion" may not have been at all exaggerated. Upon its restoration, the house will be used by the Gloucester Heritage Society as a museum to commemorate the Dorr Rebellion – the forerunner of the enfranchisement movement that has made America the model of a representative democracy for the world.

If you would like to be one of the first contributors to the "Dr. Reuben Mason House Restoration Fund," please send your check to the attention of the GHS today. We appreciate your commitment!

# The Crier

The Champlin Foundation has funded initial renovations to the exterior of the Dr. Reuben Mason House.



The Champlin Foundations make direct grants for capital needs to tax exempt organizations, **substantially all in Rhode Island**. Typical capital needs are the purchase of equipment, construction, renovations, and purchases of real property.



## What criteria did GHS meet that so many others do not?

They expected us to have a reasonable "track" record, which in most cases required a minimum of three years operations. GHS was incorporated in 1967.

Champlin examines other funding sources, operating funds available and many other factors. Our commitment to seek additional funding from members and other grant sources was crucial in their decision-making.

We needed to describe our fund raising plans, and it was helpful that we had other fund raising results in the past, such as the Evans Schoolhouse and the Job Armstrong House.

We needed to articulate what we would do if your fund raising is not totally successful — what parts of the project you will proceed with and their cost. We knew from preliminary studies that the exterior had to be the first concern, and subsequent plans for interior renovations to create the Dorr Rebellion Museum must be secondary. We were also able to provide evidence that we would be able to pay for increased operating costs. GHS has a solid record of meeting budgets and projected cost increases.

## Champlin Foundation (con't)

All in all, the GHS has proven it is a viable community organization that sets and meets goals. Congratulations to our resident grant-writer, **Harry Anderson**, for his diligence on this newest and most ambitious GHS project yet.

\*\*\*\*\*

## What Else is on the Horizon for the GHS in 2004?

Harry Anderson is writing a grant to the RI Historic and Preservation Commission to match Champlin Foundation funding for the Dr. Reuben Mason House.

A comprehensive fund drive to support the Dr. Reuben Mason House renovation and eventual creation of the Governor Thomas Dorr Museum will begin in March. Please be ready to assist us in this vital endeavor to save the gateway to Chepachet Historic District.

The GHS by-laws have been revised and approved. A copy will be posted on the GHS website presently.

Vice-president Steve Hanley and newsletter editor Carolyn Fortuna are writing a Preserve RI/ Citizens Bank mini-grant to provide display cases for artifacts in the Job Armstrong Store. If awarded, the grant will be augmented by donated carpentry services Ponagansett High School students.

Carole Fry and Frank Stevenson have been scanning old photographs into the GHS computer.

Glocester Manton Library has requested use of the Evans Schoolhouse grounds for the summer 2004 Trinity Repertory Theater Shakespeare production.

The 2004 calendar of events is as follows:

- 🌀 Elephant Day, Saturday, May 22nd
- 🌀 Heritage Day, Sunday, August 15th
- 🌀 Peddlars' Faire, Saturday, Nov. 13th

# The Crier

## Looking Back to the Last Quarter

### Peddlers' Faire: November 15

The autumn festival of leaves had vanished, but in its place was a radiant monochrome celebration of another kind: pre-holiday shopping with an historical twist. Centered in the Job Armstrong Store (JAS) but supported by the Masonic Lodge, Chepachet Volunteer Fire Department, and assorted local vendors and businesses, the Peddlars' Faire, an annual commemoration of heritage, was another success for the membership of GHS.

GHS offered The Taste of Gloucester cookbook, Dorr Rebellion postcards, GHS tee shirts, notepaper, tote bags, and more for sale. Our talented artisans painted on glass, exhibited original photographs, hand-sewed seasonal artifacts, decorated hat boxes, and tie-dyed clothing, to name just a few. The visitor response was overwhelmingly positive! Thank you to all the crafts persons who featured their wares with us. GHS netted about \$500 for its budget this day.

### Candlelight Shopping: December 4, 11, 18

Orion watched from his guardian post above. The sidewalk beheld gently beamed luminaries. A horse-drawn carriage rambled by with bells a-jingling. It would have been easy, standing outside the Job Armstrong Store, with its period lantern casting shadows and its newly painted multi-paned window frames sparkling, to pretend that one was removed a hundred years past.

Whether it was a gingerbread house contest, a stained glass demonstration, a penny social, a talking Christmas tree, or roaming carolers, bundled visitors found a cordial and considerate welcome from GHS in conjunction with our community partners, Gloucester Business Association (GBA). And so, it seemed, did some clever artisans anticipate that fine atmosphere: seven GHS Peddlars' Faire vendors sought another spot in the Store for Candlelight Shopping, and so a tradition of history and commerce was reborn.

Of course, gentle seasonal favorites from local musician/ students of Virginia Sindelar added a special dimension to the evening, as did Gloucester Historian, Edna Kent's animated conversations about Old Gloucester. Passing by, the Gloucester Light Infantry heralded us in colonial uniform. Kevin Kitson and our friends at Christy's passed out complimentary cookies and eggnog. Whether crisp, misty, or star-studded evening, Candlelight Shopping was truly an event to remember. We thank all our members for supporting this relatively new and now quite popular addition to the GHS calendar. Also, we're proud of the vendors who celebrated along with us in the Job Armstrong Store. Thanks to all.

### *We couldn't do it without you!*

*The Gloucester Heritage Society relies heavily on the kindness and generosity of its members and friends. Please allow us to extend a special "Thank You" to the following people for contributions during final quarter, 2003.*

Katherine Horscht donated a school bell for the Evans Schoolhouse ... Raymond Crowell donated three school desks and a map, circa 1860, that originally hung in the Evans Schoolhouse.... Senator Fogarty's office has awarded a \$500 grant to fund restoration and framing of that map.... Atlas Flooring donated all services in conjunction with the Evans Schoolhouse.... A geography primer, circa 1837, was received from Rose Evans McManus, along with a generous donation to the Schoolhouse fund... The Ryan Family has donated an outhouse and tool shed for the Evans Schoolhouse grounds. A plaque acknowledging their gift is planned for the site... Skip LaVoie donated services to reroute a draining problem on the JAS property... Mark and Kathy Rechter purchased the original appointment certificate of Fred Garrity at the estate auction in Harmony and have donated it to GHS.... Bob and Dot Cole have donated items as well this quarter to GHS... Brian Smith and Henry Duquette have restored the Chepachet Cornet Band drum... Glennis and Henry Beltram donated slate Gloucester bounds marker... The *Roger Williams Association* donated three genealogy books regarding the Roger Williams – Sayles family.... Thanks to you all!



# Dr. Reuben Mason House: In the News

## Grant gives Historic Society boost in effort to save Reuben Mason House

Wednesday, December 31, 2003

By SETH McLAUGHLIN  
Journal Staff Writer

**GLOCESTER** -- Many homes fall victim to history's hands. As time moves forward their foundations weaken, their paint peels like dead skin and their roofs start to sag closer to collapse. As time moves on the architectural relics of the past can become eyesores in the present. And soon the homes are gone.

The Reuben Mason House on Putnam Pike in Chepachet shows its age, but, if all goes as planned, it could get a facelift and avoid becoming nothing more than another entry in a dusty historical book.

This potential eyesore is being resuscitated thanks to the continued efforts of the Gloucester Historic Society. Recently the group was awarded \$80,000 from the Champlin Foundations, which give grants to nonprofit groups for capital needs. The grant is a small piece of the \$400,000 that the historical society says it needs to restore the structure at the footstep of Acotes Hill.

"It is the impetus we needed to move forward," said Rose LaVoie, president of the historical society.

"You'll find that this town really cares about its heritage. They always have," LaVoie said. "People relate to the old ... I think they feel it is part of their heritage, their past."

The historical society hopes to make the house into a museum about the Thomas Dorr rebellion of 1842 -- a battle that made the extension of voting rights a dominant issue in Rhode Island. The move to preserve the building gained steam last summer when Chepachet Cemetery Association granted the historical society a 99-year lease on the house. The lease allowed the group to seek the grant from the Champlin Foundations.

The aging home has obvious wrinkles.

Yesterday afternoon, as a cold drizzle and brisk wind started to intensify, a few white paint chips dropped off the back of the house. Beneath a corroded doorbell at the front entrance, the torn pages of a pair of old phone books flapped in the wind. To the right of the steps a plastic bag blew by some boards above the foundation that needed repair.

But supporters of the project say the stories behind the building's blemishes are more than enough to save it.

"The Reuben Mason house sort of anchors the easternmost end of Chepachet Village," said Edward Sanderson, executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Historical Society. "So it very much marks the original limits of the built-up part of Chepachet Village."

"The sense of our communities [in Rhode Island] are in these buildings," Sanderson said.

The 2 1/2-story center chimney colonial was built around 1745. It has had many owners, including Reuben Mason, who served as a surgeon in General William West's brigade during the Revolutionary War.

The house also played a significant part in Thomas Dorr's rebellion in 1842 against Rhode Island's limit of suffrage. Dorr's lawyer was from the area and a large number of people who supported Dorr worked on the local farms, according to Edna Kent, a Gloucester historian. As a result the house was designated as the military hospital for Dorr's supporters.

Kent said Benjamin Keach, who was one of Dorr's supporters and possibly occupied the house during the rebellion, gave the opposition forces a hardy welcome.

"He was more than frank with the troops coming into the village," she said. "Keach declared openly he was suffrage to the backbone and he could give a hoot who knew it."

The houses's physical attributes hold stories.

Some of the home's floorboards were supposed to be shipped to the king of England.

"One piece of history is the wide floor boards," Kent said. "Some of the board's are 24 inches across. Those wide boards only were to be sent to the king. When they weren't and the king's troops went around and found the king's boards, they would confiscate them."

To avoid drawing the attention of the king's troops, people would hide the boards in the upper floors of their homes. When the war ended, the boards "came down ... because they were free to do what they wanted."

LaVoie, the president of the historical society, said fundraising and grant-writing efforts would continue for the Reuben Mason House.

"We can't go back as much as we'd like to," LaVoie said. "But at least we can save what we have left ... that's our battle cry."

---

## Doctor Reuben Mason House: Building Description

By John Doucette

The building is a two-story gable end house typical of the colonial style of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The structure is two rooms deep by three rooms in length and contains a central chimney. A one and one-half story ell addition is attached to the east end of the building. The building construction consists of a heavy timber frame (post and beam) structure founded on a stone masonry foundation with a full basement. The frame is comprised of hand-hewn timbers providing the support for the walls, floors and roof as well as forming the building shape.

The center of the house contains a large stone and brick masonry chimney extending from the basement floor out above the roof ridge. Evidence of four fireplaces exists in the main building. The exterior and interior wall framing is comprised of wood studs, which are non-load bearing. The exterior walls were sheathed with wood planks and covered with wood clapboard siding while the interior walls were finished with plaster placed over wood accordion lathing nailed to the wall studs.

The house contains a front entry stairway and a second stairway in the rear of the ell addition. Typical of central-chimney homes and the period, both stairways are narrow with steep risers. The original floor construction consists of wide plank wood floorboards.

The proposed rehabilitation of the house will include the restoration of the building exterior, the building interior, the structural framing system as well as updating the mechanical systems. The project objective provides for the preservation of an early building in Chepachet and includes the conversion of the residential dwelling into a museum commemorating the Dorr Rebellion. A caretakersquarters will be established on the second floor.

# The Crier

## 2004 Goals for the Evans' Schoolhouse



Take a stroll on a mild winter afternoon behind the Gloucester Town Hall, and you'll come to a broad and welcoming parcel of land. On it is a one-room schoolhouse, dedicated by the GHS in June, 2003. This schoolhouse dates back to 1867. Daniel Evans built it with two entrance/exit doors separating gender.

The schoolhouse was located in Gloucester District #2, on Evans Road in East Gloucester. Mr. Evans hired the teachers for the school and provided them with room and board. After seventy years of service, the building was returned to the heirs of the original owner.

Of course, as with any complex project, the Evans Schoolhouse renovation still has some unfinished tasks. Goals for 2004 include:

- ☞ Pathways
- ☞ Landscaping
- ☞ Signage from Route 44
- ☞ Relocation of a period outhouse
- ☞ Educational presentations

Please contact Harry Anderson if you can offer assistance.

*The spring, 2004 issue of The Crier is scheduled for release in early April.*

*If you have a story about the GHS, its events, its people, or topics of local historic interest, please feel free to submit it by March 15, 2004 to [c4tuna@aol.com](mailto:c4tuna@aol.com). Thanks!*

What's happening downcity at...

## *the* Rhode Island Historical Society

As part

of our ongoing mission to expand local interest in and knowledge of Rhode Island heritage, the Gloucester Heritage Society is proud to partner with the Rhode Island Historical Society.

A nonprofit membership organization funded in part by an annual legislative grant, the RIHS has been collecting, preserving, and sharing the Ocean State's rich history since 1822. The Society maintains its Research Library and John Brown House museum in Providence and operates the Museum of Work & Culture in Woonsocket. The Society manages the Goff Institute for Ingenuity and Enterprise Studies, publishes the historical journal Rhode Island History, and presents public programs including lectures, workshops, and tours.

Now available at the RIHS Library is the website AncestryPlus: online accessibility to more than 1.2 billion names, more than 3,000 databases, primary source documents and images and a variety of genealogical research features – with new databases added daily.

It includes Gale's Passenger & Immigration Lists Index and digital images of the U.S. Federal Census between the years 1790 and 1920; UK & Ireland Parish and Probate Records; and the UK Census.



# The Crier

---

GLOCESTER HERITAGE SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 269  
CHEPACHET, RI 02814



---

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

General Meeting, with presentation by the <i>Dr. Reuben Mason House Steering Committee</i> .	Monday, 01.19.04, 7 p.m.
General Meeting, with presentation by Edna Kent on the <i>GHS Archives: Status and Goals</i> .	Monday, 02.16.04, at 7 p.m.
General Meeting, with kick-off of the <i>Dr. Reuben Mason House and Dorr Rebellion Museum Fund Raiser</i> .	Monday, 03.15.04. at 7 p.m.



Are you able to receive this quarterly newsletter via e-mail? It would save the GHS publishing and postage costs. If so, please e-mail the newsletter editor at [c4tuna@aol.com](mailto:c4tuna@aol.com)

## Membership Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to the **Gloucester Heritage Society**.

**Single: \$15 Family: \$25 Seniors/ Students: \$10 Contributing: \$50 Patron: \$100 Benefactor: \$250 Life: \$300**