



Historical Society of Cheshire County

*Collecting, Preserving, and Communicating the
History of Cheshire County*

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From Woodstove to the World: The Red Shed Rubber Toys Company



The Red Shed Farm Group of rubber toys.

Shortly after their honeymoon in May 1938, newlyweds Sydney and Mary Williams moved into a farmhouse in Peterborough, New Hampshire to begin their new lives together. The couple had met in 1936 while studying sculpture at the studio of George Demetrious in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Once at the farm, Sydney and Mary concentrated on their sculpture and on raising a young family.

In the mid-1940s, Mary Williams stumbled upon a new business venture. While looking for some realistic toy animals to go with her childhood painted wooden barn that she wanted to give to her eldest daughter, Mary produced her first toys.

The decision to produce toy animals was serendipitous. My mother, as a sculptor and lover of animals, was surrounded by cats, dogs, chickens, ducks, goats, horses and, later, peacocks. She wanted toy animals for her children that would be realistic, yet durable enough to survive. Her father, having spent his career in the rubber business, urged my parents to use rubber as a medium. Working in clay

and then creating a rubber animal from a rubber mold proved inexpensive and productive. The first toy animals were made in our kitchen using the oven in the wood stove to “bake” the molds. Their first rubber animals accompanied me to kindergarten at Miss Lindeman’s school in 1947. ~ Sydney M. Williams, son of Sydney and Mary Williams, 2011

The process of making rubber toys involved sculpting the toys in clay from which a plaster mold was then made. Mary Williams would then pour liquid rubber into the mold. After the rubber had set, the mold was opened and the excess rubber trimmed away before putting them in the kitchen stove to dry out. Once dry, the rubber animals were hand painted.

Interest in the rubber farm animal toys grew so quickly that Mary Williams had to hire a few assistants to help with the assembling of the toys. In the early 1950s, the Educational Equipment Company of NY placed an order for 2,000 toys and orders from all over the country came flooding in.

(Continued on page 2)

Historical Society of Cheshire County



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Red Shed Toys(Cont. from page 1):

Here in New Hampshire, the New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts featured the toys in their galleries.

In order to keep up with the demand, Sydney Williams became involved, assisting in sculpting prototypes and improving the process of reproducing toys with molds. More assistants were hired and the business moved out to the Williams' red shed next to the house. The business became known as the Red Shed Rubber Toys.

As the business continued to thrive through the mid-1950s the Williams family added to their products. To accompany their wooden Noah's Ark made by a neighbor, they created animals such as elephants, giraffes, lions, tigers, and doves as well as a Noah figure. A Community group set included a nurse, a fireman and a doctor. There were also a Farm group and a Family group.

Rubber fist puppets for children's theater & puppet shows and stick/cock horses were also added. Their most unusual order was for horses' heads, life-sized, from the Foxcroft School in Virginia. The students were tired of using papier mache puppets for their plays. Mr. Williams' special project was creating large rubber relief maps of the United States (each state is separate) intended for educational use. All the new animals and figures were meticulously formed, soft enough for children to handle, but firm enough to stand on their own. And easy to wipe down.



Red Shed rubber fist puppets

way to several countries around the world. Mary and Sydney Williams turned a family run business into a nationally known and highly regarded enterprise.

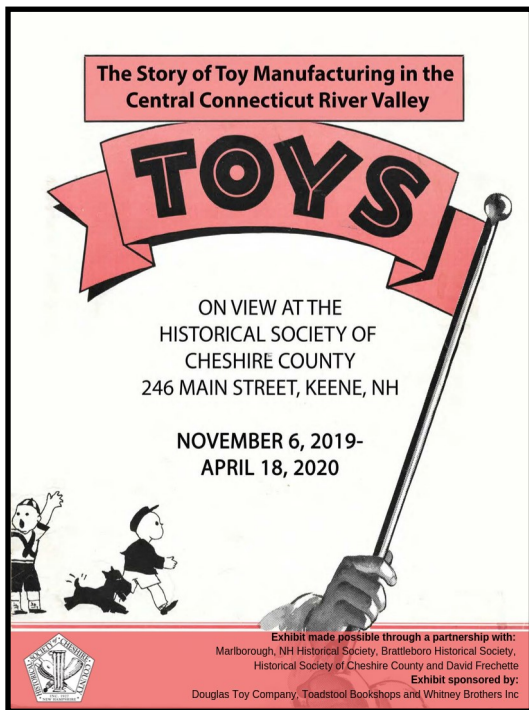
Fifty examples of Red Shed Rubber Toys are currently on display in the Historical Society of Cheshire County's feature exhibit *Toys: the Story of Toy Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley*. The historic toys exhibited span from the mid-1850s to present day and include approximately 25 manufacturers from New Hampshire and Vermont like Whitney Brothers, Douglas Toy Company, and Kingsbury Toy Company.

Educational programs scheduled include *A History of Whitney Brothers* with David Stabler and Mike Jablonski on Wednesday, February 12, 2020 at 7:00 pm and the showing of Peter Frechette's documentary film *Kingsbury Toy Company* on Wednesday, March 18, 2020 at 7:00 pm. These are free public events and attendees are encouraged to share their personal memories of locally-produced toys.

The exhibit *Toys* is on view now through Saturday, April 18, 2020 during normal business hours. This is a collaboration between the Historical Society of Cheshire County, the Brattleboro Historical Society, Marlborough Historical Society and many individuals with personal links to toy manufacturing history. It is sponsored by Douglas Toy Company, Whitney Brothers, and Toadstool Books.



Mary Williams in her studio, c. 1950



Toys: The Story of Toy Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley

The *Toys* exhibit at the Historical Society of Cheshire County will be in place through April 18, 2020. Over 200 toys from 25 different manufacturers are on display. In addition, the Wilkins and Kingsbury Toys from the Historical Society's collection are now on permanent display in new cases in the main foyer.

Exhibit-related programming is described below.

The History of Whitney Brothers Company

Wed. February, 12, 2020

7:00-8:00 pm

Historical Society of Cheshire County, 246 Main Street, Keene.

Whitney Brothers Company of Keene, NH, has been making educational toys and school furnishings for 116 years. Learn about the company's history from its early days in Marlborough, NH, to its present day success. Guest speakers include former president of the company David Stabler and current president Mike Jablonski. The public is invited to attend this free event and share their fond memories of the company.



Kingsbury Toy Company A Documentary Film

Wed., March 18, 2020

7:00-8:00 pm

Historical Society of Cheshire County, 246 Main Street, Keene

See the 30-minute documentary film by Peter Frechette on the history of Kingsbury Toys, manufactured in Keene, NH between the 1890s and 1940s. Share your favorite Kingsbury Company stories over popcorn and good company on Wednesday, March 18, 2020 at 7:00 pm at the Historical Society of Cheshire County.



The Historical Society Welcomes Mary E. Jensen PhD as Project Manager for the Jonathan Daniels Center

Mary E. Jensen PhD is the new project manager for the Historical Society's Jonathan Daniels Center for Social Responsibility. Prior to this, Mary served as the sustainability director at Keene State College where she helped develop and integrate sustainability-related knowledge and practices into campus operations and educational programs. Mary worked at the Keene Recycling Center, where, in addition to sorting and baling materials, she became a trained heavy-equipment operator. Mary also worked for the Keene Sentinel as an advertising sales representative for many years. In addition, Mary works for a variety of music festivals managing volunteer crews. She is a board member of the Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition and a volunteer at Maplewood Nursing Home and the Keene Senior Center. She received her PhD from the University of New Hampshire, Master's degree from Norwich University and B.A. degree from Keene State College. Mary lives in West Chesterfield with her husband, their cat and an assorted cast of guest canines.

Mary says, "This exciting new center is a wonderful opportunity to remember and honor native son Jonathan Daniels. I am privileged to have been chosen by the Historical Society and the Jonathan Daniels Center Committee to help bring their vision to life. I look forward to working with them and other members of the Keene community to create a lasting memorial that also encourages reflection of, and continued work towards, the social responsibility that defined Jonathan Daniels' work."

Charitable IRA Distributions Can Offer Tax Benefits

If you are over 70 ½, a charitable IRA gift can count towards your required minimum distribution (RMD). A contribution to the Historical Society of Cheshire County can be a Qualified Charitable Distribution, which allows the contribution to be excluded from your gross income and allows you to be generous.

The new tax law tries to simplify the process of tax deductions. By using Qualified Charitable Distributions, retirees will be allowed to donate directly to charities from their IRAs without having to itemize them after passing 70 ½ in age.

To do so, you can instruct your IRA advisor to send some or all of the money from your required minimum distribution directly to the Historical Society of Cheshire County without first taking it as income. The mailing address of the Historical Society of Cheshire County is: P.O. Box 803, Keene, NH 03431. The tax ID number is 02-6007201.

For more information, contact Development Director Rick Swanson, 603-352-1895, devdir@hscenh.org.

Your Membership Dues Served 13,214 People in 2019

Even with construction at the Ball Mansion (headquarters), the Historical Society managed to serve more people than ever with over 170 programs in 2019. The Society actively sought opportunities to conduct programs off-site. Lectures, films, and workshops were moved to spaces such as libraries, service clubs, and the Keene State College campus. The Walldogs walking tours brought the Society's programming onto the streets of downtown Keene. Remarkably, 8,442 people were engaged off-site.

Educational outreach activities for kindergarteners through college-age students increased dramatically, reaching 3,786 youths under the age of 18 years. An additional 800 students were served onsite at Historical Society properties in 2019.

Already, there are 53 programs scheduled for 2020. which will be supported in large part by your membership dues.



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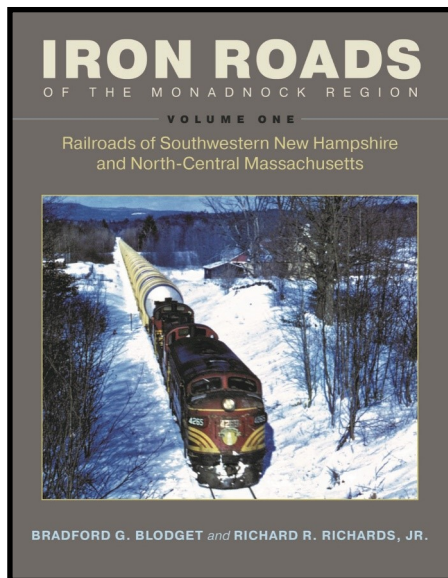
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Iron Roads of the Monadnock Region **Railroad Book Receives Rave Reviews**

A two-volume history of the railroads of the Monadnock Region arrived just in time for the holidays. **Iron Roads of the Monadnock Region: Railroads of Southwestern New Hampshire and North-Central Massachusetts** by Bradford G. Blodget and Richard R. Richards is now available online at our website, hscnh.org, and in person at our museum store and bookstores throughout the region.

Here's what Rick Kfoury said in a book review in the Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society's January-February 2020 newsletter: "136 long years of legend and toil, of steam and diesel, of legends, stories, and history. Surely, to document such a defining era would be a task surmountable only by the premier railroad historians of our era. After seven long years, it is finally finished."

Aaron Aleithe wrote: "Congratulations to the Society and the authors Blodget and Richards Jr. on a masterpiece work of railroad

history. I have collected railroad books over the past 30 years; these volumes rank as some of the best work I have come upon. As a previous resident of Massachusetts I spent the mid and late 1980's photographing regional railroads and the remains of what was once the Monadnock region's railroad history. I could have only wished for these resource guides back in those days exploring the region by paper map. Today, our hobby is dominated by endless 'picture books' which offer little to connect the railroad with the history of the region. Again, my thanks for taking on this project and publishing these extraordinary volumes."

John E. McNamara commented: "I just received my books today. Everything about them is fantastic – the selection of photographs, the layout, the photo and document reproduction, and the print quality – are first rate! I never knew so many great photographs of the Monadnock region existed. I especially liked that both old time and (relatively) modern periods were covered along with excellent maps that tied everything together. These books serve as examples of what great books can be. Thanks for all the efforts that went into creating them."

Kudos to authors Blodget and Richards, as well as the team at Bauhan Publishing.

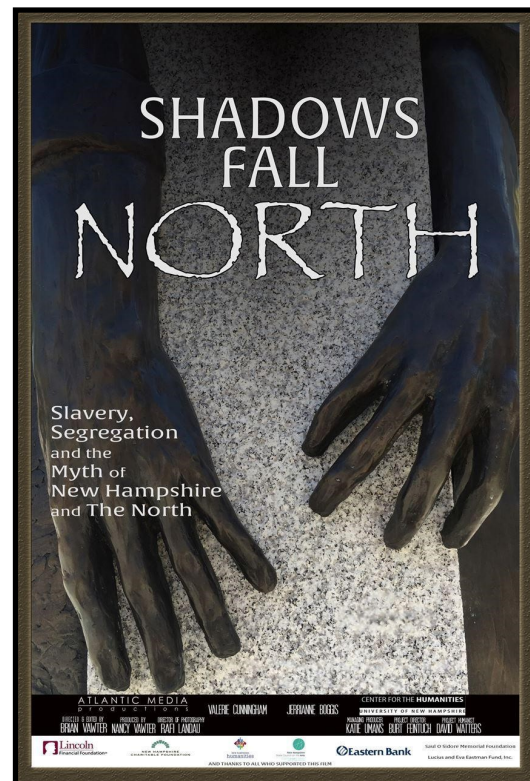
Shadows Fall North **film and discussion**

Friday, February 28, 2020.
1:30-4:00 pm

Keene State College, Science Building, Room 101

Many towns in New Hampshire have been home to Africans and African-Americans for more than 350 years, but their stories have often been left out of the official narrative. This 2016 documentary film chronicles the efforts of two community scholars and activists, Valerie Cunningham and JerriAnne Boggis, to bring to light stories of Africans and African-Americans in New Hampshire, from slavery to the Civil Rights era. The program is a collaboration between the Historical Society of Cheshire County and Keene State College's Continuing Education Department and Office of Multicultural Student Support & Success. *Shadows Fall North* was produced by the University of New Hampshire's Center for Humanities in collaboration with Atlantic Media Productions and the NH Black Heritage Trail in Portsmouth, NH.

The film is free and open to the public.





Kingsbury and Wilkins Toys Now on Display in Main Foyer

The Kingsbury and Wilkins Toy Collection is now installed in new cabinets on the main floor of the Historical Society. The cabinets, built by Cox Woodworking with lighting installed by Amer Electric, provide enhanced viewing of the toys and the installation in the main foyer makes the exhibit more accessible to all audiences. Funding for the exhibit was provided by Ellen and Ed Frechette.

Look for other artifacts in the permanent exhibit to be installed in the coming months. In the meantime, come in during regular business hours to enjoy this exceptional collection of Cheshire County historical artifacts.



New Pavilion at the Bruder House

The Historical Society of Cheshire County's newest facility, the Bruder House, has a new timber-frame pavilion. The pavilion connects the Bruder House to a chimney and hearth on a brick terrace. On a brisk day in November 2019, about twenty volunteers from Bensonwood raised the pavilion. On January 24, 2020, a team from The Melanson Company arrived to install the metal roof.

The new pavilion will provide an area for people to gather, outside but sheltered from the elements, to learn about the region's heritage and be surrounded by its history. The pavilion will be used for hearth cooking demonstrations, summer camp activities, and special events such as 18th Century Village Days and the Wyman Tavern Brew Fest.



Volunteers from Bensonwood erected the timber-frame pavilion over two days in November 2019.



Melanson employees install the roof on the pavilion on January 24, 2020.

Construction of the pavilion has been made possible in large part by a lead gift from the Aliber Family Gift Fund, and grants from the Kingsbury Fund and the Madelaine G. von Weber Trust. Generous gifts were received from members of the community. Many thanks to Bob and Dita Englund, the Faulkner Family Fund, Roger and Nancy Hansen, Neil and Peter Jenness, Margaret Langford, Steve and Jane Larmon, Marie Royce Ruffle, Richard Scaramelli, Richard Talbot, and Pam and Ken Walton. Donations of labor and materials were made by Bensonwood, Barney Sherwin Trucking Service, Eastern Architectural Representatives, Firestone Building Products, Hamblet Electric, Ingram Construction, and The Melanson Company.

In Grateful Recognition of our 2020 Sponsors and Business Members Thank you!

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Thanks to the following companies who donated labor or materials for our capital projects:

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Many Thanks to our 2020 Wyman Tavern Keepers

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If you would like to be a 2020 Wyman Tavern Keeper, please contact the Historical Society of Cheshire at 603-352-1895, or go to the website, www.hscnh.org to donate.

A \$300 donation underwrites the cost to maintain the Wyman Tavern for one week. Tavern Keepers receive free admission to the Wyman Tavern for themselves and their guests and the satisfaction of knowing that their donation is helping to maintain the Historical Society's largest artifact: The Wyman Tavern.

Thank you!



Historical Society of Cheshire County
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603-352-1895 – www.hsccnh.org
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Wed.: 9 am - 9 pm
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Calendar: Complete List of Events at Historical Society Website: www.hsccnh.org

February 2020

Wednesday, February 12, 7:00 pm, Exhibit Hall,
History of Whitney Brothers.

Thursday, February 13, 9:00 am, Exhibit Hall,
Monadnock Historical Societies Forum Roundtable

Friday, February 28, 1:30 pm, KSC Science
Center, Room 101, *Shadows Fall North*: film and
Discussion

March 2020

Sunday, March 8, Time/Place TBA
International Women's Day Potluck

Wednesday, March 18, 7:00 pm, Exhibit Hall,
Kingsbury Toy Company documentary film.

April 2020

Wednesday, April 8, 7:00 pm, Exhibit Hall,
Historical Society Annual Meeting and program:
Votes for Women: A History of Women's Suffrage

Saturday. April 18, 12:00 pm. Fuller Park, 312
Washington Street, Keene, NH, *Holi Festival*.

Saturday, April 25, 2020. 10:00am-3:00pm.
Exhibit Hall, Model Railroad Pop Up Exhibit

