On March 18, 1929, Keene resident Charles L. Barrett conducted a presentation for the Historical Society of Cheshire County’s membership. Barrett’s talk, entitled “Main Street in the 1870s,” recalled the homes along Main Street and stories of his neighbors where he grew up as a child in the 1870s.

“Here I wish to mention a character who played a part in the lives of the young people who lived in the neighborhood. Some of you may remember old Aunt Phoebe Simmons, a colored woman who lived for many years in the family of Jonathan Robinson, as well as in the family of his father before him... At heart Aunt Phoebe was pure gold, as I knew from her watchful and loving care for the comfort and well-being of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. Aunt Phoebe at her worst was better than most of us at our best.”

Who is this woman captured in the memories of a man looking back on his childhood some fifty years later? Federal census records reveal that Phoebe Simmons worked as a domestic servant for the Robinson family for 50+ years until her death in 1886. When the family moved from Surry to Keene in the 1850s, Phoebe moved with them. This indicates a close relationship with the Robinsons, one that carried her through multiple generations of family service.

Phoebe Simmons is one of hundreds of individuals identified in an extensive research project: Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region. The project was established in 2020 as a citizen archivist initiative. The Historical Society of Cheshire County and the Monadnock Center for History and Culture collaborated to train members of the community to locate and analyze primary sources in order to identify and research individuals and families of color between 1730 and 1930.

Over the course of two years, twenty-five citizen archivists have collected data from 38 towns in the Monadnock Region. Their work has included a complete study of census records from 1790 to 1930, town histories, and county histories. As a citizen archivist locates a person of color within a town, that individual is added to the database. To date, they have identified over 3,000 individuals and families of African descent in the Monadnock Region.

(Continued on Page 2)
primary source, such as the 1850 census, they complete a Google form which then populates a master spreadsheet. By the close of 2022, volunteers had already submitted just under 1800 entries and had recovered the names of 458 individuals of color residing in the region. An additional 200+ names remain anonymous and have yet to be identified.

Leading the project are Historical Society Director of Education Jennifer Carroll and Monadnock Center Executive Director Michelle Stahl. For Carroll, “this project hopes to expand our understanding of African-American and Indigenous history in southwest New Hampshire.” The end goal is to have a new body of research that can be used by scholars and students alike. The Historical Society hopes to create new educational events, school resources, and learning opportunities based on its findings. Already, some interesting and significant topics are presenting themselves including patterns of settlement into (and out of) the region and the lives of veterans of color serving in the American Revolution, Civil War and World War I.

In 2023, stories will be shared on a soon-to-be-released website, BIPOC Monadnock, thanks to support from C&S Wholesale Grocers and the Putnam Foundation. In the meantime, the Society’s citizen archivists will continue to pore through primary sources located in historical societies, libraries, and town halls to learn more about our region’s 275+ year African-American history.

Digitized copies of the Keene Sentinel, now accessible via the Society’s homepage, will be useful as well. On Dec 29, 1886, for instance, the newspaper announced the death of Phoebe Simmons. The notice provides us some more clues to her life. “She was born in Rockingham, VT, in 1800 and was given by Mrs. Margaret Baxter of Surry to her granddaughter, Mrs. Jonathan Robinson sixty years ago, since which time she has remained in the family.” What this notice reveals is that Phoebe Simmons was enslaved at a young age and later, at about 23 years of age, she was given to another family member as a wedding present.

While many of us grew up learning that slavery existed only in the south, it did, in fact, exist in New Hampshire and into the Monadnock Region. Records provide evidence of slavery in Cheshire County as early as the 1730s and 1740s and as late as the 1850s. In fact the project has now identified enslaved persons of color living in Alstead, Chesterfield, Franconia, Gilmanton, Greenfield, Hinsdale, Keene, New Ipswich, Peterborough, Rindge, Surry, Stoddard, Sullivan, Swanzey, Walpole, Westmoreland, and Winchester.

According to the 1820 Federal US census, there were no persons enslaved in New Hampshire at that time. And yet, Phoebe Simmons was an enslaved woman of color residing in Surry in the 1820s. The Recovering Black History project seeks to learn more about her life and that of many others in the next few years. The website bipocmonadnock.org is slated to be released by summer 2023.
A Shout Out for our 2023 Sponsors!

It’s not too late to become a sponsor for 2023.
For information, contact Rick Swanson 603-352-1895, rswanson@hsccnh.org.

Premier Sponsor
Mascoma Bank

Major Sponsors
John G. Burk & Associates, CPAs
C&S Wholesale Grocers
Frazier & Son Furniture
Nickate Property

Patron Sponsors
Bergeron Construction Company
Emile J. Legere Management Company
Ingram Construction Corporation
Norton and Abert, P.C.
Pinney Plumbing and Heating
RiverMead

Business Members
Clear Solutions
Fenton Family Dealerships
GemGraphics
Good Fortune
Granita Enoteca
Green Energy Options
Oster and Wheeler, P.C.
Prime Roast
Thai Garden Restaurant
True North Networks

Supporters
Berkley and Veller Greenwood Country Realtors
Blais and Associates Realtors
The Pub Restaurant and Caterers
Daniel V. Scully Architects
The Toadstool Bookshop
Weller and Michal Architects
Yankee Publishing

The Historical Society also received the following memorial gifts and bequest in 2022:

- A gift in memory of Pat Haley by Tom Haley
- A gift in honor of Bob Evans by Joyce Curll
- A generous bequest from Robert C. Nichols

Legacy gifts can make a big difference! Estate planning can help bring you peace of mind, knowing that your loved ones and the organizations you treasure will be provided for.

The David R. Proper Legacy Society is a group of supporters who have ensured the long-term health of the Society by naming the Historical Society of Cheshire County as a future beneficiary of their will or trust. David R. Proper was a school-teacher, author, librarian, historian, and a member of the Historical Society of Cheshire County for 65 years.

For information about how to remember the Historical Society in your will or trust, go to hsccnh.org/support/planned-giving/ or contact Rick Swanson, Development Director, rswanson@hsccnh.org.

Two Conversations Art Exhibit Opening
Friday, February 10, 2023
4:00 to 6:00 pm
Historical Society of Cheshire County Exhibit Hall
Refreshments will be served.

The Historical Society of Cheshire County is pleased to host an art installation by fiber artist Sharon Myers and printmaker Erika Radich. As friends and colleagues, “we have had many varied conversations over the years, but this one has a different quality and a unique manifestation,” according to Myers. Entitled Two Conversations, the show expresses two vivid and colorful conversations between friends during the COVID-19 pandemic, manifested through their art.

The show runs from February 10, 2023 through April 22, 2023 during regular business hours at the Historical Society of Cheshire County, 246 Main Street, Keene, NH. An interactive component of the show will invite the public to participate in the conversation by engaging with fabric swatches.

Remembering Baker Moore and the Brooks Family
A program of the Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region Initiative
February 22, 2023
6:00 pm
Historical Society of Cheshire County Exhibit Hall

On Wednesday, February 22nd at 6:00 pm, hear about people whose stories shed a light on a diverse history of the Monadnock Region. The Historical Society of Cheshire County welcomes Michelle Stahl, Executive Director of the Monadnock Center for History and Culture, and archeologist Gail Golec to speak about their research on Baker Moore of Peterborough and the Brooks family of Walpole.

The Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region initiative is a project of the Historical Society of Cheshire County and the Monadnock Center for History and Culture. The project is sponsored by C&S Wholesale Grocers and The Putnam Foundation.

To register to attend, visit the Historical Society’s website (www.hsccnh.org). The program is free and open to the public, but space is limited.

The Historical Society of Cheshire County is pleased to host an art installation by fiber artist Sharon Myers and printmaker Erika Radich. As friends and colleagues, “we have had many varied conversations over the years, but this one has a different quality and a unique manifestation,” according to Myers. Entitled Two Conversations, the show expresses two vivid and colorful conversations between friends during the COVID-19 pandemic, manifested through their art.

The show runs from February 10, 2023 through April 22, 2023 during regular business hours at the Historical Society of Cheshire County, 246 Main Street, Keene, NH. An interactive component of the show will invite the public to participate in the conversation by engaging with fabric swatches.

Remembering Baker Moore and the Brooks Family
A program of the Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region Initiative
February 22, 2023
6:00 pm
Historical Society of Cheshire County Exhibit Hall

On Wednesday, February 22nd at 6:00 pm, hear about people whose stories shed a light on a diverse history of the Monadnock Region. The Historical Society of Cheshire County welcomes Michelle Stahl, Executive Director of the Monadnock Center for History and Culture, and archeologist Gail Golec to speak about their research on Baker Moore of Peterborough and the Brooks family of Walpole.

The Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region initiative is a project of the Historical Society of Cheshire County and the Monadnock Center for History and Culture. The project is sponsored by C&S Wholesale Grocers and The Putnam Foundation.

To register to attend, visit the Historical Society’s website (www.hsccnh.org). The program is free and open to the public, but space is limited.
Monadnock Historical Societies Forum
Roundtable Meeting
Thursday, February 9, 2023
9:30 am to 12:00 pm

The Historical Society of Cheshire County will host the Roundtable meeting of the Monadnock Historical Societies Forum on Thursday, February 9th, beginning at 9:30 am in the Exhibit Hall.

Remembering Jim Rousmaniere

Jim Rousmaniere conducted research at the Historical Society of Cheshire County for years in his role as editor of The Keene Sentinel, but he had little knowledge of the management and operation of the organization prior to joining its board of trustees in 2014, a year after retiring from the Sentinel. He immediately became a key advisor and cheerleader for the Society. Jim served on the board for eight years, serving as vice president for two years and as president of the board from 2017-2019.

During his time on the board, he became involved in all aspects of the operation, from raking leaves and cutting brush to serving as president. As president he skillfully guided the business of the board. Jim was a strategic thinker, always contemplating the most effective ways to preserve and present the history of the region. He served on the collections committee to help ensure the preservation and safety of the collections. He also worked hands-on with the artifacts, helping to move antique furniture from one collection storage facility to another. During that project he was surprised and moved when he realized he was transporting the desk at which John Prentiss composed the first issue of the Sentinel in 1799; Jim posed for a photo standing at the desk.

Jim especially enjoyed sharing the history of Cheshire County through educational programming. He shared brewing history at the Wyman Tavern Brew Fest and churned butter with kids at an agricultural history event. Jim also researched and presented programs on brick manufacture, water use, and architectural history in the region.

He became a friend, mentor, and advisor to many of us at the Society. Jim Rousmaniere’s guidance, insight, hard work and constant encouragement will be deeply missed at the Historical Society of Cheshire County.

The Historical Society of Cheshire County is honored and grateful to have received gifts from the following people in memory of James Rousmaniere:

Janice and Louis Albano
Jonathan Avery
Cheryl Belair and Stephen Bragdon
Elizabeth Brown and Peter Howe
John Burk
H. Meade Cadot, Jr.
Ann Clarkeston
Rick and Jan Cohen
Thomas and Elke Hanna
Jennifer Joseph
Christopher and Marie Käuffer
Ronne Mandelker and Andrew Braiterman
Craig and Sylvia McBeth
Nancy and Bruce Montgomery
Michael Plotczyk
Erika Radich and Len Fleischer
Alan and Kim Rumrill
Rick Swanson
Richard Whitney and Sandra Sherman

Janice and Louis Albano, Jonathan Avery, Cheryl Belair and Stephen Bragdon, Elizabeth Brown and Peter Howe, John Burk, H. Meade Cadot, Jr., Ann Clarkeston, Rick and Jan Cohen, Thomas and Elke Hanna, Jennifer Joseph, Christopher and Marie Käuffer, Ronne Mandelker and Andrew Braiterman, Craig and Sylvia McBeth, Nancy and Bruce Montgomery, Michael Plotczyk, Erika Radich and Len Fleischer, Alan and Kim Rumrill, Rick Swanson, Richard Whitney and Sandra Sherman

SEARCHING FOR A VENUE TO HOST YOUR NEXT EVENT?

Call or email for pricing and availability
Historical Society of Cheshire County
246 Main Street | Keene NH
Kathy at 603.352.1895 or email hssc@hscnh.org
www.hscnh.org

OUR FACILITIES ARE CONVENIENTLY LOCATED ON MAIN STREET IN KEENE NH WITH AMPLE ON-SITE FREE PARKING

Monadnock Originals
Characters from New Hampshire’s Dirt Row
Alan F. Rumill

Special pre-publication offer good through 4/1/2023 (additional shipping fees apply) $18.99

Always the educator:
Left: Jim shares history of the Keene Sentinel at the Sentinel Walldogs Mural (June 2019)
Right: Jim speaks extemporaneously from the back of a truck while moving artifacts to the Bruder House (2019)

Remembering Jim Rousmaniere