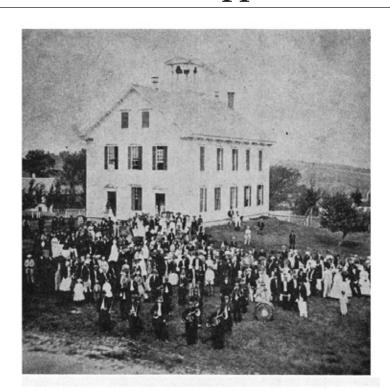
#### Historic Amherst

# Mont Vernon's Appleton Academy – McCollom Institute



Appleton Academy in Mont Vernon, N.H.: Alumni gathering August 1868 with band in front (from stereopticon slide). Notice the panoramic vista afforded by the scarcity of trees.

By Katrina Holman

Most 7th - 12th graders of Amherst and Mont Vernon now attend the public middle and high schools located in Amherst. What kind of schooling could they have had, had they lived in the second half of the 19th century?

From the Report of the Amherst Superintending School Committee for year ending March 1853: "It is now fully demonstrated that a high school can be sustained in Amherst. ... [But three things are needed:] 1. A school house that can accommodate 100 scholars; 75 attended the last term [in Amherst Village]. 2. A good apparatus. 3. Board in good families at a reasonable rate. Some came to town last autumn and winter, desirous to attend the High school, but finding no chance to board, except in a tavern, returned. This ought not so to be.

"There should be more interest with the inhabitants to secure such a school. It is the richest temporal blessing within our reach. A good High school or Academy would be worth more than a Railroad to every farm, or a Steam Mill in the corner of every barnyard. ... It is a shame ! that rich old Amherst, the proud old Hillsborough County seat, has so long slumbered over this subject! ... Enough have had burning funds in Steam Mills and sinking funds in Railroads. Let us now have swimming funds in a high literary insti-

Why that strident tone? Could it be because neighboring Mont Vernon ALREADY had an ACADE-MY?! There's a hint in the next report (March 1854): "The number of scholars in attendance has not been as large as in former years ... the older pupils having resorted to Academies in other towns." You know the outcome: The Brick School House was built in Amherst, opened with hoopla in fall of 1854, housing a proper high school which was willing to accept students from other Amherst districts and even out-of-

#### Appleton Academy

town for a fee.

Mont Vernon's citizens too were grappling with how to provide a better "higher" education to their children. The opportunity for a permanent high school came when the Center district voted in 1848 to build a new school house. Funds were raised by private subscription to install an academy on the second floor and Appleton Academy of Mont Vernon opened there in the fall of 1850 with 28 female and 21 male students, a mere half dozen of them from outside of Mt. V. It would reach its peak enrollment of 101 in its third year.

Does the name sound familiar but in a different context? New Ipswich Academy, incorporated in 1789 as the second academy in New Hampshire, was renamed Appleton Academy in the summer of 1853, after its late benefactor Samuel Appleton (1766-1853) of Beacon Hill, Boston who was born in New Ipswich; its new building was completed in 1854. New Ipswich had the name longer, until it closed in 1968, but Mont Vernon had it earlier. Mont Vernon's Appleton Academy was incorporated with that name in June 1850. The Mont Vernon town history suggests that it was named preemptively or presumptively, in hopes of securing a donation from

Hon. William Appleton (1786-1862) of Beacon Hill, Boston, who had often visited Mt. V. when his mother (who died aged 87 in 1842 as Widow Gould) and three sisters resided there. The tactic worked eventually. He donated a library of about 700 volumes (worth \$500) in 1853, and \$100 cash in 1855. Samuel, William's cousin, gave \$500 towards the new building, around 1853, the largest single donation at that time. These sums were trifles for these

very rich and munificent men. The first visiting committee, a kind of advisory board of twentyone notables from several towns, included Amherst's Rev. J. G. Davis and newspaper publisher Edward D. Boylston. (Rev. Davis served Amherst as chairman of its school board many years between 1852 and 1884.)

#### From Appleton Scholar to Amherst Teacher

In the 1851 fall term, there were 33 "gentlemen" students, among them 13 from Mt. V. and 5 from Amherst, plus 34 "ladies," of whom 24 were local. Among the 3 young ladies from Amherst was Sophia E. Phelps, aged 15. Another Amherst girl, Jane M.W. Jones attended the winter and spring terms of 1851/52. Miss Jones was then hired at age 17 to teach the one-room school in Amherst's District No. 6 for the next winter term; when she left after three weeks due to ill health, Miss Phelps, all of 16 years old, was her replacement. Sophia was off to a good start, as the school committee report noted: "Miss Phelps is a good scholar, a pleasant and winning teacher." She was hired again summer 1853 at District No. 2, again as a replacement; then in winter 1854/55 at the new school house of District No. 14; and continued to teach in various rural Amherst school houses until about 1861. She went on to become the first woman in Amherst to serve

on the school board, an elected position which she held for nearly 20years, starting in 1886.

#### McCollom Building

Mont Vernon's Appleton Academy erected a new building in 1853, 40x60 feet with an upstairs hall of 12-foot posts. Many citizens contributed again and again to pay shortfalls in teacher's salaries and debts, until 1871 when George W. McCollom (1814-1878) of New York City, who was born on a farm situated partly in Mt. V. and partly in New Boston, gave the school an endowment of \$10K in memory of his late wife nee Mary Ann Stevens (died 1865 aged 47), a native of Mt. V. whose mother was a sister of Wm Appleton. Hence it was renamed McCollom Institute. (A proviso of the endowment was that the town should contribute \$300 yearly for five years to the academy.) Average attendance rose from 36 in 1871/72 to 86 in 1873/74, when the average age of students was 18 years and 4

Over the years, it was customary for the academy's principal to serve on the superintending committee of the town's public schools. When the institute closed ca. 1900, the trustees did not treat the property as private investment but rather as a resource for the good of the community. For example, from 1939 to 1946 the trustees assisted local boys and girls going to colleges or other institutions of higher learning with \$50 yearly. More details of its story can be found in two books, both called History of Mont Vernon, New Hampshire (1907 and 1958).

The building still stands, with the piazza and porte-cochere added around 1871, though no longer a school. In 1892, one of its rooms housed Mt. Vernon's first public library, the nucleus of the present town library built in 1909.



McCollom Building today houses Mont Vernon's police department and town clerk's office. It was built in 1853 for private co-ed Appleton Academy. which was renamed McCollom Institute in 1871 and lasted until ca. 1900. It housed private Stearns prep school for boys 1906-1937; became a public grammar school in 1947, and was gifted to the town in 1990.

# **Amherst Events**

Saturday, September 18

## Antiques on the Green -15th Annual Show

This event sponsored by the Historical Society of Amherst will take place on the Amherst Village Common, rain or shine, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on September 18. Admission fee is \$5 (\$4 with ad from newspaper). Society members are free. Proceeds are used to support the preservation of local artifacts, the study of Amherst history and a scholarship which is awarded annually to a graduating high school senior from Amherst.

The Friends of the Amherst Town Library Book Sale will be on Saturday, September 18 at the Amherst Congregational Church from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with a member preview from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. With the exception of special books, prices range from \$.50 to \$1.00 with a \$5.00 "Bag of Books" starting at 1:15 p.m. Proceeds from the sale go to support adult and children's programming, museum passes, and a special gift to the library each year.

Friday, September 24

### Amherst Celebrates 250th Anniversary

Our kick-off event will take place on Friday, 7 p.m. when we gather to share an evening of Contra dancing with families and friends at the Wilkins School in Amherst. Our leader is the renowned caller, Frank Woodward.

#### Saturday, September 25

On Saturday, a full day of events geared to both adults and children will begin at 9 o'clock in the morning on the common. The day is jam packed with music, food, magic show, horsedrawn wagon rides, farm animals, Mark Twain and ends with a ham and bean supper. Full list of events included on page 3.

Sunday, September 26

#### **Amherst Mansions Tour**

Lucky ticket-holders are looking forward to touring the historic Kendall, Means, and French mansions on Sunday, September 26. For those who want to tour just one—but not all—of these impressive houses, a limited number of single-tour tickets are available. Pick the mansion that you've never toured before, always wanted to see the most, or simply can't get enough of and order a ticket for \$15. Your ticket buys you a docent-guided tour, a commemorative program, and a free membership to the Historical Society of Amherst. All proceeds will go toward the restoration of the historic cobblestone watering trough near the town hall. Contact mansiontours@hsanh.org or visit the society's booth on the common on Saturday, September 25.

 $\underline{\text{1 - 3 pm}} \sim \text{Olde Burying Ground Tour (Behind Amherst Town}$ 

Tours leave from just inside the cemetery entrance every 15 minutes between 1:00 - 3:00. This event is sponsored by the Captain Josiah Crosby Chapter DAR and is free of charge.

All Day ~ A Self-Guided Walking Tour of Amherst Village. The Historical Society's new 2010 Walking Tours of Amherst Village book is available for purchase for \$15 at the Historical Society's Booth on the Green on Saturday, September 25th and Sunday, September 26th.

Food Vendors on September 26th

SHARE - popcorn and soft drinks **Amherst Juniors-desserts** 

Boy Scouts-hotdogs and hamburgers

Moultons - TBA

All served on the Common, near electricity output, close to Middle Street.



# **Cemetery Tours**

Come learn about Amherst history in the Cemetery! Daughters of the American Revolution Captain Josiah Crosby Chapter will sponsor free tours of the old Burying Ground behind Town Hall. Interpreters will give short talks about selected persons buried in the cemetery who were either on the 1760 Amherst Tax List or were Veterans of the American Revolution. Tours leave from the table just inside the cemetery entrance every 15 minutes between 1:00 - 3:00 and will take about an

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