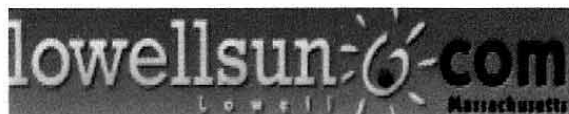


Worth a Thousand Words - Lowell Sun Online



Worth a Thousand Words

Late Pelham woman's photo collection depicts town's history

By John Collins, jcollins@lowellsun.com

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PELHAM – The slight grin. The nameless face. Barring new information, the photo caption for this mystery woman might forever read: "Pelham's Mona Lisa?"

Unless somebody out there recognizes her, that is.

The Pelham Historical Society is seeking public input not just on the possible identity of the smiling woman in the polka-dot dress. They also hope to gather names and/or background information on other individuals, buildings and landscapes that are depicted in the once-private photo collection of longtime Pelham resident and historian Joyce Mason.

Mason was born in Lowell and raised in Chelmsford, but spent most of her life in Pelham, where she raised a family with husband Hubert, a former Pelham firefighter. Mason worked as a Pelham police dispatcher and municipal court clerk. Known as a tireless community volunteer, she also was an enthusiastic member of the Pelham Historical Society.

After her death last year at 78, Mason's family donated to the Pelham Historical Society one of her most prized possessions: a collection of 74 glass-plate negatives that contained box-camera images of Pelham scenery, buildings and people taken in the 1890s through 1920s.

Historical Society members were elated with the donation, according to Pelham historian William Hayes. But they soon learned of a catch: Converting the glass negatives to paper and digital photos would be an expensive undertaking, requiring the work of a highly specialized photo lab.

Eastern Photographic Services in Lowell was found to have the equipment and skills required to make paper prints and digital copies. Because the work was to be done for the Historical Society, the owner of Eastern Photo, Bruce Lepore, offered to do the work at a 50 percent discount.

Even with the discount, however, the reproduction and framing of the 74 photos was beyond the historical society's resources, according to Hayes.

Enter former Pelham Municipal Court Judge Albert Lynch. A founding member of the Pelham Historical Society, Lynch had contacted Hayes shortly after Mason's death, "indicating that he wanted to do something to honor Joyce, who had served him and the town as the Pelham Municipal Court clerk from 1982 to 1992," said Hayes. "Judge Lynch stepped forward to assume the entire expense (of developing the historic photos)."

Last month, Eastern Photo completed the photo-conversion process, and returned the glass negatives to the Pelham Historical Society. Days later, Historical Society Webmaster Karen Genoter posted the entire Joyce Mason collection online at www.pelhamnhhistory.org.

Town historians are now seeking public input to compose caption information for the photos, said Hayes, as many of the black-and-white shots contain unidentified buildings, locations and people.

"Many of the photos are easy to recognize. others pose their own little mystery," Hayes said. "The public is invited to comment on each online photo. When enough information has been gathered, a paragraph will be prepared and placed online, providing information on each photograph."

Paper copies of the photos in the Joyce Mason Collection can be viewed in the Ruth Sherburne Sturrit Art Gallery in the Historical Society Building (also known as the former Pelham Public Library) on Main Street.