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December 2 , 2012

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

You are all invited to our annual Christmas party. Again, this year it will be held at Havenwood in Concord. The festivities start at 1:00 pm in the Great Room. There will be a Yankee Swap featuring ornaments (a \$5 limit, please) and a pot luck meal. This is a good time and we hope many of you will come.

We have had a year that can only be described as spectacular!!!! The Society is not only alive and well, we are growing and improving by leaps and bounds. While our membership numbers have remained about the same, many of our new members have become very active in our activities. This has greatly helped to spread the work around and made many of our functions possible. We are always looking for new members that share our love of the Concord Coaches and the Abbot & Downing Company and want to help us share that love and spread the word.

Financially, we are doing very well. We were in a position this year to spend some money on several much needed improvements to the barn/museum and to purchase a trailer to transport our coaches to events. One of our major sources of income was the selling of coupon books in conjunction with the BonTon store in Concord. This effort, spearheaded by Cynthia Maimone raised over \$1,100.. Another source of income was the presentations made by Peter & Verna James and by Brian Erickson & Dottie Brown. These brought in over \$600 and our raffle with seven wonderful prizes brought in more than \$500. In addition, efforts by our members brought in \$300 in exhibit awards from the Hopkinton Fair. These things as well as profits from the gift shop and the money in the donation boxes have put us on good financial footing.

In the early spring we looked into purchasing a trailer to use to transport our coaches. For many years, we have been borrowing different trailers which was an imposition on the lenders and a lot of extra work as the coach had to be loaded and unloaded and the trailer returned each time. We found a trailer that suited our needs and set it up with an electric winch to assist in loading and unloading. It is outfitted with frames to hold our "Abbot-Downing Society" banners for when we put it in parades and is on display and a custom made aluminum tool box to hold the wheel chocks and small tools. The trailer is good looking, works and tows well and something we can be proud of.

The trailer was put to good use several times, the first being to take Coach XIV (now known as "Lucy") to the open house at Tom Prescott's in Concord when he opened up his museum

containing his big (really big) 12 passenger coach to the public. We had a nice setup with some items from the gift shop and a display of albums with many historical photos of Abbot & Downing and the Concord Coaches. The public was very enthusiastic and we received many compliments. This is very rewarding for those who work hard at making these events possible.

In June, we received a tip from Maggie Ford, president of the New London Historical Society, that the coach owned by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth might be looking for a new home. We quickly followed up on this lead and in October several members took our trailer to Lebanon to pick up this most generous gift, a beautiful L. Downing & Sons coach from about 1852. It has been conserved rather than restored and it appears just as it would have when it was taken out of service. It is a nine passenger hotel style and was last used to transport people from the depot in Norwich, Vermont to Hanover and Dartmouth College. We have named this coach "Grace". Lucy was Lewis Downing's wife's name and Grace was J. Stephens Abbot's wife's name. A little foolishness to lighten things up.



The new coach donated by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth on our new trailer

August was a busy month for members of the Society. We had been working on plans for some renovations and upgrades to the barn and the time had come to carry them out. In the plans were three new displays showing some of the work processes that went into the coach manufacture. These were a blacksmith shop with all the tools that would have been required to fabricate all the iron work that is on a coach. The iron work was a major part of the coach construction and many blacksmiths were employed. The second area was the

woodworking shop. This includes a pattern maker's lathe from prior to 1850 and a machine for chopping the mortises used in the coach body. Also, there is an original workbench from the Abbot & Downing shops with displays of the curved coach body panels. The final area is Maria Putnam's work room. This attempts to replicate the area where Maria, their only woman employee among the 350 to 400 employees in the latter part of the 19th century sewed the interiors and light leather work on the coaches and carriages. It shows Maria and her showing machine. (We are still looking for an original old sewing machine with a very large balance wheel like Maria used.) Also featured is a "Champion Hair Picker" generously donated by Anthony J. Watson of Hampton, NH. A hair picker is similar to a carding machine and is used to clean, straighten, and prepare the horse mane and tail hair used in the coach cushions. It is in perfect working order and a very unusual piece.

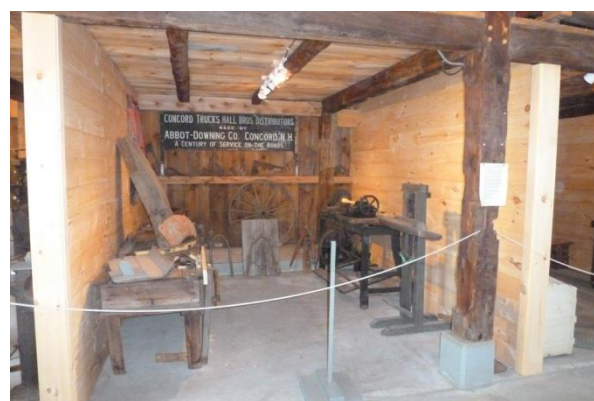
We also created a new gift shop with display cases and cabinets. It is well lit and the items for sale are well laid out.



The Blacksmith Shop



Maria Putnam's Work Room



The Woodworking Shop



The Gift Shop

The old "temporary" lighting put in place many years ago has all been replaced by new wiring and fixtures and all brought up to code under the direction of our vice president, Alice Pickett, a licensed master electrician. The center aisle is lit by ten carriage house style lights and the displays have track lighting to highlight different portions of the individual exhibits. Many visitors commented on what a big improvement it was.

Many members worked on constructing the new walls and providing meals to those who did the carpentry. We worked in the afternoons and into the early evening to allow as many as possible to help. There is something to do for everyone. You don't need special skills.

It was a mad rush to get ready for the fair and we were still putting the last touches on it on Thursday morning, opening day, but many members pitched in and we made it. It was certainly worth all that went into it.

While we were renovating the barn/museum, we had a couple of events to fit in. The first was a two day trip with coach "Lucy" to the "Hillsborough Living History Days". We had a nice display with some gift shop items, the raffle items and of course, the main attraction, our 1847 L. Downing & Sons coach. This event draws people who have an interest in history and they really appreciate seeing the beautiful yellow coach. We gave two presentations on "Abbot & Downing and the Concord Coach" in the community building that weekend.

The second big event came the last Sunday in August. For almost two years the Society has been working with the Concord School Board on the naming of one of Concord's new schools. The name chosen is "The Abbot-Downing School". It is located in Concord's South End, the area where many of the Abbot-Downing employees lived. The School Board has done a great job of carrying out the theme from the stagecoach images made with tiles on the hallway walls to the copper stagecoach weathervane. For the ribbon cutting, the Society brought the yellow coach and Brian Erickson brought his team of black horses to deliver the VIPs to the front of the school. Pat Maimone rode as "shotgun" rider to protect the passengers. It was very impressive.



Alice Pickett with the new lighting and display areas in the barn



Brian Erickson and Pat Maimone delivering the VIPs

The fair was a big success and many visitors commented on the improvements and new displays. Overall the fair attendance was down and many of the vendors indicated that they did not do as well as in some years past, but our exhibit was visited by large numbers and the donation boxes yielded almost twice what they have in past years.

We still have some work to do putting finishing touches on the work in the barn and building a couple more walls to close off a private storage/dressing area and a secure area near the gift shop for supplies. There is also the need to add some lighting on the outside to illuminate the entrances. One maintenance project is to finish putting on the battens on the outside of the barn and to redo the battens on the east side which are coming loose. We hope to get an early start on these things in the spring. When we get ready to start, it will be announced in the monthly letter, so please think about coming and helping. Many hands make the jobs go quickly.

After the fair was over , the next two events were the Audi Gala in Concord and the Warner Fall Foliage Festival. Both of these events draw good numbers of people who look forward to seeing the coach and who ask lots of questions. It is a fun time for all and it is good to see that people are interested.

The October meeting at the barn/museum was to put things away for the winter and to cover up all the coaches and carriages to keep them clean until spring. At the November 4th meeting we made one last visit to the barn so that everyone could check out the new coach.

It is hoped that many of you will come to the Christmas party. If you are new to the group, come and meet the other members.

On a closing note, this was a year to remember. There were so many exciting things happening within the Society. We are alive and well and growing. Our mission to spread the word about Abbot & Downing and the Concord Coaches is being carried out.

Thank you to all who helped make this year a resounding success for the Society. We are always looking for ideas to improve the Society and our activities.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. And speaking of the new year, please fill out the dues announcement and send in your dues. We look forward to seeing you in the new year.



Our prize winning displays at the Hopkinton Fair. On the left, the display outside the Barn/Museum and on the right, the grange/community building display



The Raffle Table at the Fair



The Stagecoach Weathervane on the Abbot-Downing School in Concord, New Hampshire



The gift shop and display cabinets at the barn/museum



The Champion Hair Picker