

LISBON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MOMENTS IN HISTORY – JULY 2022

LYMAN'S HISTORIC PAINTED CURTAINS ARE CONSERVED



We must preface this special Moments in History by thanking the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, for awarding a Conservation License Plate Grant (Moose Plate Grant) to the Lisbon Area Historical Society in the amount of \$14,867, for conservation of three historic painted stage curtains owned by the Town of Lyman.

The Moose Plate Grant funds preservation of publicly owned artistic and cultural resources. The Town of Lyman gave permission to the Lisbon Area Historical Society to apply for the grant and coordinate all the work necessary for conservation and subsequent public display of the historic painted curtains. This is an excellent example of how our nonprofit organization works to meet its mission to serve Lisbon, Lyman, and Landaff and help preserve and promote each town's history.

We also give a huge thank you to the talented conservation team at Curtains Without Borders, a Burlington, Vermont nonprofit that has found and restored all known painted curtains in Vermont, 190 of them. The organization is trying to do the same in New Hampshire, Maine, and across the country.

New England Wire Technologies provided their truck and employees to help remove two of the curtains from the upstairs of the Lyman Grange Hall and the curtain stored with our collection in Lisbon and transport them to the Lisbon Town Hall and then help set up tables. The Lisbon Lions Club supplied additional tables. The Town of Lisbon gave free use of the Lisbon Town Hall, a perfect space to work on the huge curtains. Volunteers from Lisbon, Lyman, and Landaff provided snacks and water and helped the conservation team set up, work on the curtains, and clean up the town hall.

A little background will explain the significance of painted stage curtains. Near the end of the 1880s and until about 1940, town and Grange halls decorated their stages with curtains painted by scenic artists. Themes were romantic or bucolic landscapes, and others had scenes with advertisements. These beautiful works of art were installed in the most-visited places in the town, especially in northern New England where the public congregated for Grange and town meetings, public, and private events. The curtains featuring advertisements were often in Grange halls, because the curtain would pay for itself by the different businesses purchasing an ad for the curtain. Curtains in town halls were usually paid for by the residents of the town.

Lyman Grange #237 was formed in 1900, and the Lyman Grange Hall was built in 1901 across from the Lyman Town Hall. Three painted stage curtains had been hanging in the upstairs of the Lyman Grange Hall since the 1930s. The Grange organization was vital to community, and the Lyman Grange Hall was frequently used for a variety of purposes. Due to lifestyle changes over the years, the Lyman Grange, like many others, eventually became inactive and dissolved. The building has sat unused due to its lack of indoor plumbing and accessibility.

The building is listed on the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places, and there is hope that there can be a purpose for the historic building in the future.

The painted curtains were in poor condition and vulnerable due to the environment in the old building. In 2010, Lisbon Area Historical Society volunteers and Chris Hadsel, Founder and Director of Curtains Without Borders received permission from the Town of Lyman to “rescue” the curtains. They were removed from their pulleys and hardware, vacuumed, and archivally wrapped and stored in hopes of receiving a grant for future conservation. One of the curtains, named the Musicians Curtain, has colorful balloons that advertise twenty-one Lisbon businesses, and that curtain is on permanent loan with the Lisbon Area Historical Society. These painted curtains are remembered by many who attended functions at the Lyman Grange Hall.

In 2019, Lisbon Area Historical Society applied for the Moose Plate Grant and was awarded the funds to restore the three publicly owned artifacts. Due to Covid, the work was delayed until June of 2022.

The grant requires that the conserved curtains be available to the public. Lyman does not have a space large enough, and neither did Lisbon at the time. We did not have an ideal plan at first, but we had the funds and were at the point where we decided we would have a temporary frame on which to display each curtain in a large public space during special occasions. Then everything changed, when the Lisbon Area Historical Society purchased the historic former Lisbon Congregational Church Parish House at 9 Depot Street. There would be room in our new museum to display all three curtains, and now was the time to start the project.



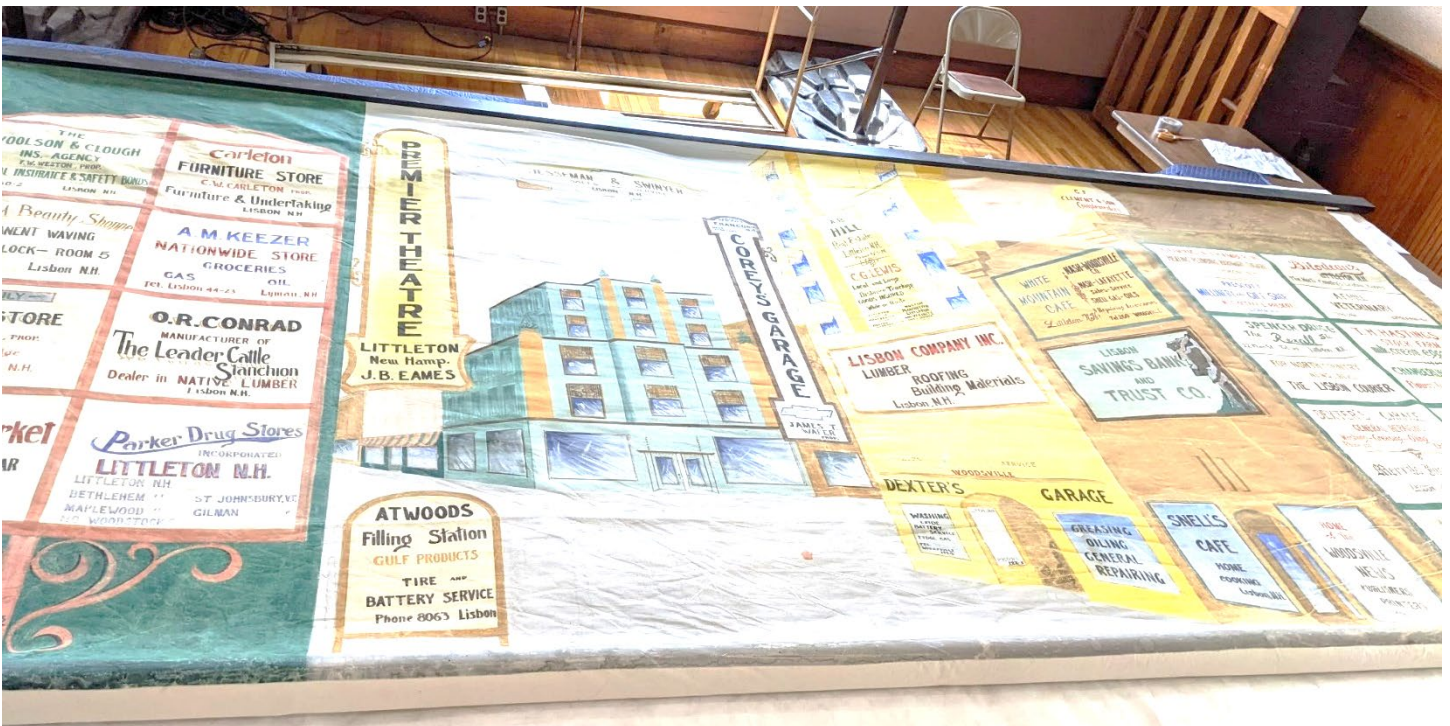
The Musicians Curtain is pictured above after its recent restoration. A 10' ladder was used to capture the 16'x8' curtain as it was out on the workspace at the Lisbon Town Hall. The Musicians Curtain has advertisements for 21 Lisbon businesses. Part of that curtain was badly damaged with tears and even shredding and loss of fabric, because it had been exposed to the elements due to a broken window behind the stage in the Lyman Grange Hall. It was still very colorful and is even more vibrant now, after being patched and thoughtfully in-painted by conservators. It is difficult to detect where the brilliant conservation work was done on the curtain.

The curtain was painted by Lucretia Rogers (1910-1977) in her Granite State Studio in Plymouth, N.H., c. 1935 based on the businesses advertised: S. D. Morgan & Son, John Garbarino Fruit, G. A. Clark & Son Pontiac, Goudie's Hardware, Dexter's Garage, Corey's Spa, Thomas Café, Lisbon Company, Clough's Hardware, Butson's Market, Merrill's Insurance, Parker's Department Store, Jordan's 5 & 10 Store, Carleton Furniture and Undertaking, Marcou's Market, Bang's Rexall Store, The Lisbon Courier, Boynton Oil Company, Your Chevrolet Dealer, Woolson & Clough Insurance, and Lisbon Savings Bank & Trust Co. Other businesses are Lyman's

Neighborhood Store, C. A. McKenney Jeweler, Littleton. and James Rowe, Cattle, Horses, Farm Equip., Woodsville.



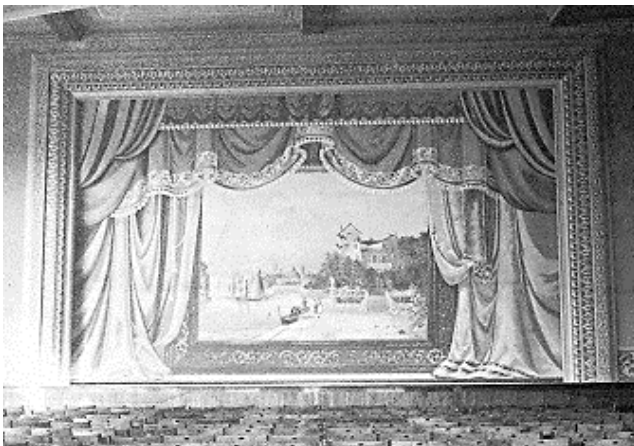
Another great photo taken from 10' above the workspace at Lisbon Town Hall, shows a member of the conservation team working on Lyman's Grand Drape. The drape is 16'x8' and depicts a romantic European scene bordered with painted billowing green and gold drapes. It was painted c. 1930s by Marion Fracher (1911-1972) in her stage scenery studio in Wentworth, New Hampshire. Of the three curtains conserved, this was the least damaged.



The conserved Advertising Curtain was also photographed on its workspace at Lisbon Town Hall. It is a perfect example of a Grange curtain that paid for itself through business advertisements. A curtain such as this reached

many prospective customers while being placed in the often-visited Grange Hall. This curtain was also painted in the 1930s by Marion Fracher in her studio in Wentworth, New Hampshire. Lisbon businesses with featured details are: Butson's Market Groceries for Particular People; Dexter's Garage Washing, Greasing, Oiling, General Repairing; Atwood's Filling Station Gulf Products, Tires, Battery Service; Snell's Café Home Cooking; Parker's Dry Goods for Low Prices; Merrill's Insurance; Woolson & Clough General Insurance and Safety Bonds; Carleton's Furniture and Undertaking; Wilfred Beauty Shoppe Permanent Waving; Family Drug Store; Jesseman & Swinyer Chevrolet Sales and Service; Gowing & Chamberlin Heating Plumbing, Hardware, Tinware; Lisbon Savings Bank & Trust Co.; T. H. Hastings Stock Farm Milk, Cream, Eggs, Wood; Lisbon Company Lumber, Roofing, Building Materials; O. R. Conrad Manufacturer of The Leader Cattle Stanchion and Dealer in Native Lumber; Lisbon Courier North Country News; and Prescott Millinery and Gift Shop. Lyman businesses are W. H. Stephens Jr. Trucking and Carpenter; A. M. Keezer Nationwide Store Groceries Gas and Oil (Lyman and Lisbon). Other area businesses are: Parkers Drug Stores, Bethlehem, Maplewood, North Woodstock, St. Johnsbury (VT), Gilman (VT); Premier Theatre, Littleton; Corey's Garage, Franconia; A. B. Hill Real Estate, Littleton; C. G. Lewis, local and long distance trucking; White Mt. Café, Littleton; Nash-Woodsville Co., Nash-Lafayette Sales Service, Shell Gas, Oils, Accessories, Woodsville; Woodsville News, publishing, printers; Bilodeau's Bakery, Littleton; A. F. Hill, Veterinary, Littleton; Spencer Drug, Littleton; Chamberlin's Greenhouse, Woodsville; Downing's Garage, Littleton; Houle's Electric, farm electric plants and batteries, Littleton; Fosgate's Greenhouse, Littleton. The blimp at the top of the curtain advertises Jesseman & Swinyer in Lisbon, the precursor to Jesseman Chevrolet. Blimps were often featured on advertising curtains, and sometimes milk bottles were drawn to advertise dairies.

When the curtains are ready for viewing, there will be a reception for the grand reveal. The Musicians Curtain will hang on the wall of the Jesseman Room in our new museum in the Parish House. The other two curtains will be displayed in the same room on each side of a large, custom-made frame that can be rolled into place as needed. This will fulfill the grant's requirement that there is access to the public artifacts. The Town of Lyman is in agreement that the curtains will be displayed in our new museum, where there is ample room. At any time in the future, should Lyman have space for the Advertising Curtain and Grand Drape, they can be rolled up and moved to Lyman with the display frame.



We do not know what became of the beautiful grand drape (pictured at left) that once adorned the stage in the Lisbon Town Hall and Opera House. The drape was painted with a scene of Venice and bordered by paintings of billowing drapes. It was painted in 1902 by a scenic artist in Manchester, N.H., and purchased by the Town of Lisbon for \$486, a very large expenditure at that time.



The Grand Drapes in the Landaff Town Hall/ Mount Hope Grange Hall was painted in 1929 by Anderson Scenic Company of Buffalo, New York and cost the Town of Landaff \$129.49, including shipping by train. This grand drape is a combination Town and Grange drape, because it has painted in the bottom center medallion the Grange emblem "P of H" (Patrons of Husbandry). It is painted with a generic country scene, probably meant to portray the Connecticut River. This grand drape was restored in 2008 by Curtains Without Borders for \$2,000 through grant funding from New Hampshire Electric Co-op, the

fee for application given in memory of Landaff native and longtime Mount Hope Grange member, Pauline Allbee Eaton (1918-2007).

You can learn more about Curtains Without Borders on their website www.curtainswithoutborders.org and view a United States map with all the curtains the group has found and/or conserved. You can click on any state on the map and see the locations of curtains in the state, click on the dots, and view the curtains.

In our area, other curtains conserved by Curtains Without Borders are an advertising curtain hanging in the Monroe Historical Society/Grange Hall, a curtain with a harbor scene hanging in Pike Hall, a grand drape depicting the Old North Bridge in Concord, MA hanging in Alumni Hall in Haverhill, an advertising curtain hanging in the Orford Town Hall, and a grand drape depicting a scene off Boston Light hanging in the Lyme Academy Building in Lyme Center. The only two curtains to our north are advertising curtains in the Tillotson Center in Colebrook and the Aurora Grange in Pittsburg.

Do you know of any painted stage curtains that still exist and are in need of conservation? If so, please let us know! Email us at lisbonareahistoricalociety@gmail.com or give us a call at 603-838-2003.

We hope you appreciate receiving these monthly Moments in History. We welcome your comments as well as suggestions for topics for future Moments. Please feel free to share any of our Moments in History with relatives and friends and have them email us if they would like to receive them in the future at info@lisbonareahistory.org. For more about us and to read past Moments in History, go to www.lisbonareahistory.org. We are also on Facebook. Thank you.