

Becket Town Hall

557 Main Street

42° 16'37.24"N 73° 03'30.38"W elevation 1516 feet

The Town of Becket has had five meeting house/town halls since 1765. Originally the town fathers met in the meeting house so designated by the then colonial government on the site of the First Meeting House Monument [\[Colonial Training Ground\]](#). In 1890 after an arsonist destroyed the second building, the third town hall building was built next to the First Congregational Church on YMCA Road. Now called Guild Hall [\[Guild Hall\]](#) town meetings were held here from 1891 to 1940.

After 1940 when the new Becket Consolidated School opened in the village town meetings were held at the safer and larger school until 1990. At the same time the structure built to house the town fire trucks on Washington Street, had a second story where the selectmen met and town records were stored. It is the building adjacent to the former St. Matthews church and is now a private residence which is being restored to resemble its original design. Government was being modernized and in 1971, it became apparent that a more spacious and efficient space was needed. A building committee was formed. They presented a plan at the annual town meeting, but it was rejected as being too costly. In 1980, our first woman was elected to the Board of Selectmen. A new form of government was realized in 1988 when what was to become a town administrator/select board style of government hired a circuit rider. The building inspector condemned the old fire station in 1990. The town offices and records were moved to the school basement until finally, in 1991-2 the present town hall building plan was approved and built at 557 Main Street. It was designed to contain rooms for all government offices, a police station, an Historical Commission office, a room for the Recreation Committee to store equipment, a community room, Council on Aging space, and eventually a kitchen downstairs for community use.

On January 1, 1993 the town offices moved to their new home at 557 Main Street, ending a decades-long mission to find suitable offices for the town's budding government. When the original 1939 section of the Becket-Washington Consolidated School was demolished in 2001, to make room for the new school building and renovation project, the cupola was saved. The Historical Commission placed it in storage for three years until a permanent home was found atop the new town hall. The eight-sided wooden cupola is approximately ten feet tall with a gorgeous copper roof.

UPDATE: In Fall 2021 the cupola was removed from Town Hall for repairs. At the May 2023 Annual Town meeting the voters approved a \$28,164 Community Preservation Act grant sponsored by the Historical Commission to restore the cupola and return it to the roof of Town Hall.



Please visit Town Hall to see the Historical Commission's displays and artifacts including historic Brewster, Dewey, Harris and Day portraits, the wooden Dewey Tavern sign dating back to 1776, the scale and weights used by the Sealer of Weights and Measure ensuring consumers were getting a fair deal, Ballou signature quilt and display cases with smaller items on both levels.



Community Room Portraits

Becket's growing, historical collection of portraits is now prominently displayed in the Community Room. There are Becket residents representing each of Becket's first three centuries, from the 1700s through the 1900s.

Abel Dewey and Lydia Birchard

Captain **ABEL DEWEY (1752-1825)** was born in November 1752, possibly in the Hartford, Connecticut area. As a young teenager he learned the blacksmith trade in Hartford. He worked nights for himself making scythes, which he peddled from a cart up the Connecticut River Valley. After selling his stock he hired out to James Birchard, a Becket farmer.



On June 15, 1775 Abel married **LYDIA BIRCHARD (1758-1833)**. She was born on May 13 in Becket, the daughter of James (1736-1825) and Abigail King (1732 – 1794). Abel and Lydia had nine children, all born in Becket; 4 of them were similarly married in Becket while 3 of the children died at a young age.



Captain Abel began the Revolutionary War era as a Loyalist, supporting the British crown. However, he and his fellow Loyalist, Ensign James Birchard, 1st Lieutenant in the Colonial Army, declared their allegiance to the United States of America in oaths recorded February 6, 1777 in Becket's *Town Book*.

Abel Dewey was one of 58 "Subscribers" who petitioned the General Court and in 1798 established a permanent fund to support the church ministry. They were incorporated as "The First Congregational Society in the Town of Becket", enabling them to utilize this voluntary fund rather than the previous method of required taxation, which was seen as unfair to inhabitants who belonged to another church or chose not to support the ministry. Thus, they initiated the method still used today to fund churches throughout the United States.

Abel Dewey and family were active members of the Becket community. They were farmers, proprietors of the Dewey Tavern [Please see the wooden sign dating back to 1776 in the Becket Room.], road builders and owners of real estate in both Becket and Lenox.

Abel died on April 19, 1825, at the age of 72; Lydia died on June 21, 1833, at the age of 75. They are buried along with other family members in the Becket Center Cemetery.

William Jennys

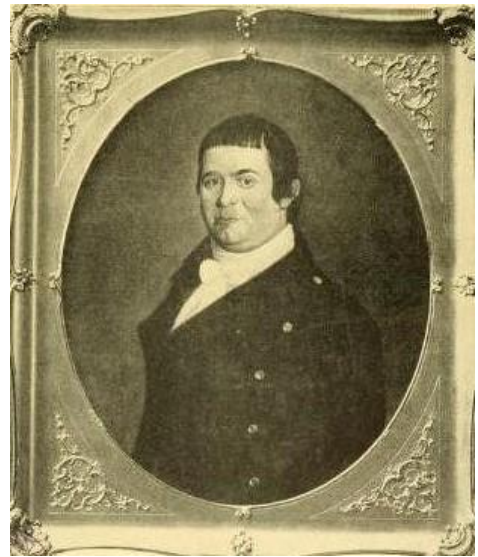
The Dewey portraits were painted in 1801 by artist William Jennys (1774-1859), an itinerant portrait painter. William Jennys was painting portraits in the vicinity of New Milford, Connecticut in the mid-1790s, then New York City, and after 1800 in the Connecticut River Valley into Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and later in the southern states. It appears his painting career lasted from 1792 to 1808.

Inscribed on the reverse of the canvases: "WM Jennys Pinxt March 6th 1801/ A. Dewey Ae 49" and "WM Jennys Pinxt March 6th 1801/ Lydia Dewey ae 43."

The Historical Commission was able to bring the Abel and Lydia Dewey portraits back to Becket in 2017. Thanks to the support of the townspeople and local officials, the two portraits were purchased from the Dewey descendants for a total of \$3,500 financed through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Community Preservation Act. Charles Flint volunteered his expertise, appraising and preparing the portraits.

Dr. Oliver Brewster and Jerusha Badger

Dr. Oliver Brewster (1760-1812) was born in Lebanon, CT, son of Deacon Wadsworth Brewster and Jerusha Newcomb. He was a direct Mayflower descendant on his paternal side to Elder William Brewster, ruling elder of the Pilgrim Church and on his maternal side a third generation descendent of Governor William Bradford, both Founding Father's of the Plymouth Colony in 1620. "He was a godly man, and in the absence of a pastor [in Becket], his solemn counsels to his patients, and his fervent prayers with and for them were blessed to their good. He was a faithful physician and successful, particularly in acute diseases." [FindaGrave.com]



The Brewster family consisted of many physicians through the years. Dr. Oliver Brewster was the first physician in Becket and served as a surgeon in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. According to the book, A Bicentennial History of Becket: Oliver was a Deacon of the First Church, who also held many civic positions including as a fence viewer; on a committee of 3 "for supplying the pulpit"; and represented Becket in the exchange of deeds to build a new meeting house across the road [at the location of the present First Congregational Church.]



Jerusha Badger (1759-1841) daughter of Henry E. Badger and Mary Langdon was born and married in Partridgefield [now Peru, MA] to Dr. Oliver Ellsworth Brewster in 1781. They were the parents of 10 children, 3 of whom died young and are buried in the Becket Center Cemetery along with their parents and adult sister Ruby Brewster Ladd.

Jerusha's brother, the Rev. Joseph Badger of the Blandford First Church, filled in as the pastor in Becket for years while the town struggled with how to support the local pastor.

The woman in the third Brewster portrait is believed to be one of Dr. Oliver Brewster's sister-in-laws, married to one of his brothers either: 1) Lovice Badger Brewster [1761-1822, sister of Jerusha and wife of Dr. Joseph Wadsworth Brewster who studied in Becket with his brother] or 2) Theodosia Lyman Brewster [1775-1851, wife of Deacon Jasper Brewster.]



Oliver and Jerusha bought the Davis farm a quarter mile west of the meeting house in Becket Center, today's Y.M.C.A. Road [at intersection with Hamilton Road.] Dr. Brewster built a federal style colonial house, one of the finest dwellings in Becket at the time [[Dr. Oliver Brewster House](#)].

The copies of the Brewster portraits were generously donated by descendants of the Brewster family.

Charity Emeline Wadsworth and Nathan Wait Harris

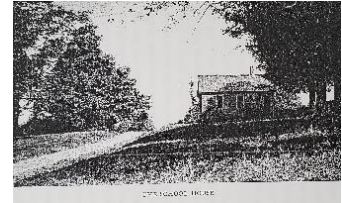
Charity Emeline Wadsworth (1816-1897) and her husband were both lifelong residents of Becket. Her great-grandfather Wait was among the first to settle in Becket. She was the daughter of Deacon Joseph Wadsworth (1784-1862), who served in the Revolutionary War, and Lydia Harris (1792-1836). He was a successful farmer with considerable property. He owned the first piano and first carriage in Becket. C. Emeline was one of their 9 children, she and all 5 of her adult surviving sisters were sent away to some academy or seminary for their advanced education as there were no colleges for women at the time. She was a great reader who kept herself abreast of the times. Her parents also lived their entire lives in Becket and were among six Wadsworth generations buried in the Becket Center Cemetery.



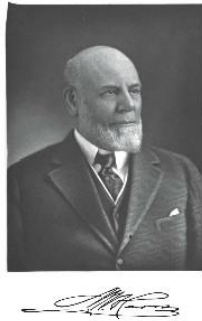
It was two young Wadsworth men, Xenophon and Stephen, who transported the Paul Revere bell from Boston to Becket, a 125-mile trek. A short time after the raising of the bell one of them accidentally cracked the bell while ringing it for Sunday service. It was later repaired and is still in use today at the First Congregational Church in Becket Center.



Nathan Wait Harris (1811-1900) was one of 10 children born in Becket to Nathan Harris (1784-1851) and Huldah Broga (1787-1869). Shortly after his marriage to C. Emeline he bought a farm near his in-laws and grew it to 240 acres during their 31 years there. The local school, still standing today, was across the road from the barn. He would have his sons tend to the animals during their recess or lunchtime. He was a good farmer who prided himself on his productive and attractive farm. He had a large dairy and made butter, using the large family dog to operate a treadmill to churn the cream. He was a civic man of good judgement and integrity who served as Becket's treasurer and selectman, and as a Baptist Deacon. After retiring and moving "into town," possibly to the present McNerney Road in North Becket from the present Captain Whitney Road, East Becket, Nathan Wait became a shoemaker.



The lineages of Charity Emeline Wadsworth and Nathan Wait Harris demonstrate their strong roots from the 1700s to present day Becket residents including the surnames King, Alford, Broga, Wait, and Ballou.



C. Emeline and Nathan Wait Harris were the parents of four children including **Norman Wait Harris** (1846-1916), banker, and philanthropist, who in 1882 founded the banking house of N.W. Harris & Co. in Chicago, Illinois. Norman Wait Harris always remembered his native Becket and established a scholarship fund offering a \$5 per week stipend for each Becket boy or girl interested in furthering their high school or college education. In 1916 there were more than 20 students who benefitted from his wisdom and support. He also created trust funds for the First Congregational Church and the Baptist Church.

His paternal grandmother Huldah Broga, great-grandmother Lucy Fox, Aunt Mary Harris Ballou and two uncles, Lyman and James who died young, are buried in the Harris Family Cemetery in East Becket near the original 240-acre Harris farmstead. It was the first family cemetery in Becket. Huldah's husband Nathan died while visiting his brother and is buried at Locke, Cayuga County, New York.

Ralph Elmer Clarkson

American painter Ralph Elmer Clarkson (1861-1942) was born in Massachusetts. He was primarily known for his portraits in the Chicago area and created the oil on canvas portraits between 1897 and 1899, from photographs. The portraits of Nathan Wait Harris and Charity Emeline Wadsworth had been displayed at the Harris Trust & Savings Bank in Chicago until generously donated to the people of Becket by their Harris descendants, Thomas B. Harris, Trustee.

The Harris portraits were generously donated by Thomas B. Harris and the Harris Family Trust, to the Historical Commission in 2022.

Helen Frances Day

Helen Frances Day was born in Boston, MA on June 1, 1911. She was the daughter of James Francis Day and Mary Evelyn Smith.

Helen graduated from Pittsfield Schools and Berkshire Business College. She married Carl McNerney Flynn, a lifelong Becket resident, in 1941. It was the first marriage for both. At the time she was living in Lanesboro and was a stenographer/clerk at the Registry of Deeds office.

After their marriage they resided in Becket. According to the 1950 U.S. Federal Census, they lived in a house on the State Road (Main Street) near the cemetery, with more than 3 acres of land. At this time Helen was keeping house, did not work outside the home, was not looking for work and did not have a business. Later Helen and her husband operated a real-estate agency specializing in country residences. She died on March 22, 1999. The couple did not have any children.



Carl McNerney Flynn was the son of Thomas and Katherine McNerney Flynn. He was a lifelong Becket resident born in 1898. He was educated at Westfield High School and Yale University.

As a 21-year-old Carl worked at a paper mill. Starting in 1922 he worked as a civil engineer for the state Department of Public Works. According to the 1940 U.S. Federal Census he worked all 52 weeks the previous year earning \$2,760. He was a member of the Becket Finance Committee and a military veteran. He died in 1976 at the age of 78 after a long illness.

James Francis Day

Francis Day (1863-1942) was an American painter, who studied in the Art Students League in New York and then in Paris at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He won recognition as an accomplished painter of intimate family scenes, Belle Epoque genre and portraits. In 1927 he painted this portrait of his then 16-year-old daughter Helen Frances Day. The painting is oil on artist board in its original gold leaf carved frame.

He signed his paintings Francis Day without James.



The Helen Francis Day portrait was graciously donated by Charles and Joy Flint to the Becket Historical Commission in 2021. Charlie is a retired local art and antiques dealer, writer, lecturer, art expert, appraiser, and researcher of local history. He also volunteered his expertise to appraise the Dewey portraits for the Historical Commission when they were purchased in 2017.



For further information email the Becket Historical Commission:

historical@townofbecket.org