



# Swansea Historical Society Newsletter

## The Preservationist

Founded

1941

SWANSEA, MASSACHUSETTS

[swanseahistoricalsociety.org](http://swanseahistoricalsociety.org)

WINTER 2026

### “Take a Step Back in Time” at the Luther Store

The Swansea Historical Society's “Take a Step Back in Time” event held at the Luther Store on December 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> was a huge success!

The event was designed to help visitors take a step back in time and see what a 1880s store looked like. It was also a sneak peak of the Luther Store which has been closed for over 5 years for repairs and restoration. The Luther Store is now ready to greet the public.

Visitors could view toys from the 1800s, children's clothing, a collection of 1800s clocks and much more.

There were many items available for purchase including Christmas ornaments from the 1800s, candy that would have been sold at the Luther Store, baked goods, small crafts and SHS memorabilia.

Approximately 300 visitors crossed the threshold of the Luther Store on Saturday. They enjoyed the items on display and most were happy just to step inside the building that has intrigued them for years. Once the awe wore off, the shopping commenced.

#### Special Luther Store Section

To celebrate the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Swansea Historical Society, we are including a special section in this newsletter about the history of the Luther Store, including some photos from its move from the corner to its current location.



Over 200 people braved the cold and snow on Sunday to visit. As on Saturday, most were happy just to take a peak inside.

Thank you to all who attended and supported the Swansea Historical Society and its efforts to preserve this cherished piece of Swansea history.

“Take a Step Back in Time” was a very successful fundraiser as we sold out of many items.

A grand opening of the Luther Store will be held in the spring of 2026. This will coincide with the 85th Anniversary of the Swansea Historical Society.

*See you in the spring!*



*See page 2 for more photos from the Open House*

### Swansea Historical Monthly Presentations

In October, Swansea Historical Society President Cheryl Bogle and Vice President Karen Bowen began monthly presentations on local history. The presentations are held at the Swansea Senior/Community Center.

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, the presentation was on Swansea's Historical Cemeteries. The talk covered the first cemetery established and continued on covering the condition of our historical cemeteries today and laws that protect them. The talk was well attended.

November's presentation was on St. Michael's Church & Ocean Grove History. This talk was also well attended and many memories were shared.

December's presentation was on Swansea's Historic Districts. We shared many photos from our archives. We had a smaller crowd, most likely due to the frigid weather.

January's presentation will cover local taverns and historic homes that are not located in historic districts.

### Swansea Historical Society Turns 85 in 2026!

The Swansea Historical Society will be celebrating our 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2026!

As part of the year-long celebration, we will be having a few events sponsored by the Swansea Cultural Council. These will include:

Tea with Mrs. Gordon 1908

Women of 1776

Victorian Gothic Tales by Candlelight

Also in the planning stages are a talk on Canard and White Star Ocean Liners, a Cigar Night and two food events, including a pot luck dinner and a sit-down dinner, all to celebrate our 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We hope  
you can  
join us!

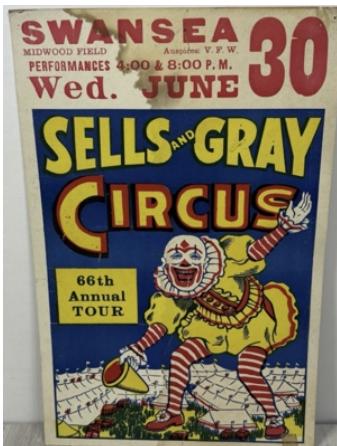


# A Circus Comes to Swansea

by Russell Easterbrooks

Sells & Gray circus, also called "Sells & Gray United Shows" came to Swansea during 1972. Named after Great William Sells and James H. Gray, this traveling circus was very popular from 1960-1978. Colorful date specific posters were screen printed and sent to the sponsor well in advance of set-up crews who arrived in town 2 days ahead of the circus. These posters were used as local advertising, and numbers issued were dependent on the size of the town. A town the size of Swansea may have been issued 10-15 posters, making surviving posters very rare. Sponsors were needed to invite the circus to your town, in this case "Auspices; V.F.W."

This smaller circus was ideal for smaller towns and traveled with 14 trucks displaying colorful advertising. The circus presented two shows, and was in town just a single day. Then the circus moved to the next town, usually less than 70 miles away.



These travel cards are not as rare as the posters for collectors, who also collect used ticket stubs.

Collectors search for posters like mine, and often bring \$80.00 to \$250.00 depending on condition. This circus only came to Swansea one time in 1972. Sells & Gray came twice to the neighboring town of Rehoboth in 1972, and 1974.

| SELLS & GRAY<br>3 RING<br>CIRCUS  |                        |       |
|---|------------------------|-------|
| Permanent Address: P. O. Drawer 1270, Winter Park, Fla. 32789<br>1972 SEASON<br>Route Card No. 10 |                        |       |
| Date  | Town & State           | Miles |
| Previous mileage 6135<br>19th Week  |                        |       |
| July 16   | North Haven Conn.      | 53    |
| 17  | Hampden Mass.          | 47    |
| 18  | Norwich Conn.          | 46    |
| 19  | Torrington Conn.       | 75    |
| 20  | Thomaston Conn.        | 18    |
| 21  | Windsor Locks Conn.    | 40    |
| 22  | Scotland Conn.         | 48    |
| 20th Week   |                        |       |
| 23  | Mansfield Mass.        | 58    |
| 24  | Swansea Mass.          | 36    |
| 25  | Milford Mass.          | 52    |
| 26  | Dracut (Lowell) Mass.  | 48    |
| 27  | Dover New Hampshire    | 70    |
| 28  | Laconia New Hampshire  | 50    |
| 29  | Franklin New Hampshire | 15    |
| Total mileage 6791<br>Avoid to send mail in Saturdays and Sunday towns.                           |                        |       |

My poster's date 06/30 is different than the travel card date of 07/24. This is a mystery as research is ongoing.

Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. circus came to Swansea during 1977 for 4 days, 06/23 - 06/26. This was a larger, rail-based circus. Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. offered larger, more elaborate shows, suitable for longer engagements in one location.

*Note: This article is the opinion of the author and not The Swansea Historical Society. It is published with his permission.*

## George and Martha Washington Love Story

To celebrate Valentine's Day, The Swansea Historical Society will host an event centering around George and Martha Washington's love story on Wednesday, February 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. at the Swansea Community Center.

The event will include a short reading from the book "Mount Vernon Love Story."

We will also be holding a drawing for baskets containing Valentine items like chocolate roses, peppermint bark, gourmet cookies, bottles of wine, boxes of chocolates, a photo of Mount Vernon, paperback books, a \$50 gift card to a local

florist and more.

Tickets are \$2 each or 6 for \$10. Tickets may be purchased at the event, in advance from SHS board members or by printing and filling out the ticket(s) on the last page of this newsletter (print as many copies as you'd like) and mailing them to the SHS, checks payable to the "Swansea Historical Society." The drawing for the baskets will be held at the event.

Please contact Cheryl Bogle at 508-496-9564/integracrete2@gmail.com or Karen Bowen at treasurershsma@gmail.com with any questions about the event.



Please visit our website at [swanseahistoricalsociety.org](http://swanseahistoricalsociety.org) and click on the "Store" link to see our available items for purchase.

Monetary donations are always accepted! Please mail checks to:

Swansea Historical Society  
PO Box 723  
Swansea, MA 02777

## Upcoming Events

Please visit our website for event details  
[swanseahistoricalsociety.org](http://swanseahistoricalsociety.org)

### February 11<sup>th</sup>

11:00 a.m.

Basket ticket drawing during the event  
George and Martha Washington - A Love story.

### Spring Reopening

We hope to have the store open every weekend from 10 a.m. To 2 p.m.

### May 9, 2026

Tea with Mrs. Gordon

### July 11, 2026

Women in History 1776

### October 25, 2026

Gothic tales by candlelight

### October 2026

Pumpkin Patch Event

### Christmas 2026

at the Luther Store

## SHS Officers & Board

President - Cheryl Bogle  
Vice President - Karen Bowen  
Treasurer (acting) - Karen Bowen  
Acting Secretary - Brandon Travers

Patricia Redfearn Diane Luther Silvia  
Ruth Ann Liggett Robert Alford II  
J. Whitney Bowen II Kathleen LeBlanc

# The History of the Luther Store

Joseph Gardner Luther, Jr., September 22, 1837 to January 13, 1925, willed the Luther store and grounds to the seven remaining Luther descendants.

In 1936, Luther descendants were no longer able to take care of the building and offered it to the town of Swansea to be used as a museum or monument. The building was accepted at a town meeting.

In early 1937, the building was put on the demolition list by the Town of Swansea, owners of the building, due to several automobile accidents at the corner, some fatal. These accidents were recurring because the Luther Store was a visual obstruction located too close to the corner.

In 1937, the Luther descendants approached Marian Reilly for help to stop demolition. At a 1938 town meeting, the Town of Swansea voted to turn the Luther Store over to the Swansea Historical Society once it was established. Due to language in the deed, the founder and president of the Swansea Historical Society, Marian Reilly, would not accept the store and land unless the language in the deed was changed.



*The Luther Store, 1937, prior to the move.  
Photo donated by Leonard Maker*

In the deed, it stated if the Swansea Historical Society did not keep the building up to the town specifications, the ownership will revert back to the Town of Swansea for demolition.

Marian would not accept these terms. She paid for a lawyer out of her own pocket and took the Town of Swansea to court. It was 11 years before the Town of Swansea finally decided they would sign over the deed with no stipulations.

Marian Reilly filed paperwork to establish the Swansea Historical Society in 1938. The Swansea Historical Society was established January 1941, 85 years ago this month.

Mrs. Lane from the Cedar Lane Dairy donated the land so the building could be moved back.

Marian Reilly, being a Luther on her mother's side, contacted Maude Parlin, an architect from Fall River, and Grace Hartley Howe, wife of President Roosevelt's assistant, Louis McHenry Howe and first female postmaster. She served in Fall River. Grace Hartley Howe and Maude Parlin worked

together to get Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds to save the building.

In the meantime...

They were successful in getting the WPA to save the Luther Store. Terms of the agreement: The WPA funds would pay for the foundation and moving the building back away from the corner as long as, 1) the building was used as a museum, 2) a historical society was established and, 3) they held their meetings in the building.

Marian Reilly paid for the new roof on the store, paid for all repairs to the building due to the move. She also paid for structural repairs to the first floor. There were two donations made at that time. Two gentlemen gave \$1,000 each to be used for the repairs of the store. The second floor was not used until 1968 because there were no funds to fix the structural issues. It was used for storage only.

The Swansea Historical Society became the legal owners of the Luther Store June 1952. The town voted to hand the store over to the Swansea Historical Society.



*Luther Store with Cooper's shed in front,  
with wagon, 4 men*



*The land donated by Mrs. Lane of Cedar Lane Dairy.  
Photo donated by Leonard Maker*



Luther's Corner facing east on Old Warren Road



Luther's Corner facing west on Old Warren Road



Strapped for move



Mrs Maude Parlin, Mrs. Louis McHenry Howe, Daniel Wetherell and unknown man in hat with Luther Tavern in distance



Cooper Shop next to store, Mrs. Parlin, Mrs. Louis McHenry Howe, Mr. Francis Gardner & unknown man in hat



New foundation in progress, Cooper's shed in rear yard



Mrs. Louis McHenry Howe in doorway



Mrs. Maude Parlin, Mrs. Louis McHenry Howe and Daniel Wetherell

Swansea Historical Society Valentine's Day Drawing 2/11/26

\$2 each  
6 for \$10

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail check & ticket(s) to: P.O. Box 723, Swansea, MA 02777



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