

The 2011 Annual Town Report Covers

The front cover of this year's Annual Report features an oil painting of the Larsen stone apple storage barn. The painting was done by Stow resident **Madeleine Grace Arsenault, age 9.**

The back cover images were made by Stow resident **Lewis Halprin.** On the top of the back cover is an early picture of the sundial that was placed on the stone apple barn. Farmer Peter Larsen never had anything to do with the sundial since it was placed on the stone apple barn after his death, as part of the original Center School construction. But the sundial is very familiar to several generations of kids who have attended Center School and have passed this special clock twice each school day. Probably none of them could determine what time it was by this sundial, didn't know the Roman numerals that the clock used, nor could they interpret the Latin proverb featured on the face of the sundial. But the sundial has still become the primary identifying feature of Center School that all those kids (many now parents themselves) remember well.

Incidentally, that Roman phrase that is featured on the bottom of the sundial translates into "Learn as if you were going to live forever, live as if you were going to die tomorrow" and is a favorite motto used on many sundials. But the sundial on the Center School's stone building originally had a second motto, written in English across the top of the sundial which read "Count only sunny hours." At some point, an unknown person for an unknown reason painted out that motto. Fortunately, a photo was taken of the sundial before the English motto was painted out and is the one that is shown on the back cover.

On the bottom of the back cover is a drawing of the Peter A. Larsen farm, which was purchased after his death in order to build the original Center School. The drawing shows in exact placement and scale, all the buildings on this very versatile farm and the purpose of each building.

At a typical Stow farm, the farmer does a little bit of everything, but the Larsen farm was more than that, with Peter not only growing apples, tending cows for milk and raising chickens for their eggs. He was also a skilled blacksmith and was the town's constable and first police chief. His skills with the many stones found abundantly in the farm fields of Stow were used by Peter to build not only stone fences but a complete stone barn in an innovative way that preserved the apples and other produce that he grew for a much longer time than normal, and without needing any refrigeration. The inside back cover provides an in-depth history of the farm and is a fascinating read of an important part of Stow's history.

The covers of this year's Annual Report feature one story in Stow's history. Stow is full of similar history, enough to fill this complete book and more with stories of Stow's past. If you take the time to investigate just a little below the surface of almost any corner in Stow, you will probably find something historically interesting.

Good hunting.
Lewis Halprin

Some History of the Peter Larsen Farm

By Lewis Halprin (information provided by Dianne Siergiej and John Makey)

Peter A. Larsen had his farm on Great Road on the site that is now the Center Elementary School. Peter worked as a farmer, chief of police and part time blacksmith, a trade in which he had trained in his native Denmark. He immigrated to the United States in 1891, but returned to Denmark to marry in 1897. He and his wife Anna settled in Stow before 1900 working as a blacksmith on Wheeler Road. It is believed he purchased the farm about 1908. The farmhouse, dated from around 1830, originally belonged to the Whitmarsh family. In the U. S. Census of 1900, Peter A. Larsen, age 28, is listed as a blacksmith. In 1920 and 1930, he is recorded as a farmer.

Arlene Peck, Peter's grand-daughter, described the farmstead as including a group of attached, interconnected buildings located to the east of the stone building. The farmhouse was sited close to the street, behind a meticulously kept flower garden. Adjoining the house was a shed, vehicle shelter and large dairy barn, which housed 25 or more cows and a workhorse. Northwest of this cluster of buildings and south of the stone building was a second, large barn which accommodated farm equipment and a chicken coop with chicken yard. A farm stand was located near the street on the grassy knoll. Vegetables, fruit, milk and eggs were sold to the public, which included customers from Boston, neighboring towns and local residents.

The blacksmith shop, a rectangular, gable-roofed, two-story frame building, was moved from the Town of Maynard to the southwest corner of the Larsen property in 1914. It had a large sliding door on its south side big enough to allow a wagon to enter and a pedestrian door on the east side. The shop contained a large forge with a high chimney. A road led from the shop south to Great Road to accommodate the blacksmith shop customers.

A 64' x 31' 2-story stone building further back on the farm property is believed to have been built by Peter Larsen before 1930 as an apple storage/work room. It is comprised of thick, fieldstone walls with clapboard-sheathed gables and an asphalt-shingled roof with a roof ventilator, and used stone-building techniques unique to Denmark farmers. It was an undivided, utilitarian space without interior finishes. A large sliding door on the southeast corner of the building allowed a horse-drawn wagon to park and unload apples to the main floor where they were sorted and crated. A pedestrian door, which accessed the work area, was also located in this area. Apple crates were constructed on the ground floor using lumber stored in the attic, which was accessed by a wooden stairway located near the center of the building. A hatch to access the attic centered the south gable (the sundial was added in 1954 covering up this hatch). Crates were filled with apples, loaded onto a large wooden wheelbarrow and moved down a concrete ramp to the storage cellar located behind heavy, wooden doors and beneath the northern end of the building. This arrangement of storing apples was very effective and considered unique in the days before modern refrigeration.

After the death of Peter and then Anna Larsen, the Town of Stow purchased their farm on December 28, 1953 for the purpose of building an elementary school. The vote to purchase the property passed by only one vote. The property at that time consisted of a house valued at \$800, a barn valued at \$500, a shed valued at \$50, a shop valued at \$350, a storage barn valued at \$850, a barn valued at \$300, and 19 acres of land valued at \$1,000. The cattle, farm implements and items in the blacksmith shop were sold by auction. The farmhouse was sold for \$5 and moved next door to 419 Great Road (at a cost of \$3000) by Hap Priest as a wedding present for his daughter. The Town authorized the demolition of the rest of the buildings except for the blacksmith shop and apple storage barn, which they considered historic and were to be retained. In 2009, the Town authorized the removal of the blacksmith shop and the stone apple barn in order to provide for expansion of the Center Elementary School. The blacksmith shop has been moved to Shelburne farm and the stone apple storage barn has been demolished.