



## **DORCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Presents at the William Clapp House**

**195 Boston Street**

**Dorchester, MA 02125**

**October 19, 2008, 2:00 p.m.**

**Patrick T. Collins, Assistant Archivist, City of Boston Archives**

### **“TOWN DEMOCRACY AND THE DORCHESTER ANNEXATION”**

This year is the 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary of representative town government in America, created in October 1633 at what is now the Meaney Playground (“the Affie”) at the corner of Pleasant, Pond, and East Cottage Streets. As stated in the Dorchester Town records, there was “*An agreement made by the whole consent and vote of the Plantation made Mooneday 8<sup>th</sup> of October, 1633.*” These words stand as bookends around the two-hundred and forty year history of the Town of Dorchester. The “agreement” refers to the formation of a system of self-government, first devised by the settlers of Dorchester, “to order the town’s affairs.” The Town Meeting and Town Selectmen played a role in all aspects of life and society over the course of Dorchester’s history: from public schools, to the Revolution, to the Town’s eventual annexation to Boston. This system of government not only provides a window on the history of the Town of Dorchester, but in a sense *is the history* of the Town.

But then why was this self-governing municipality eventually annexed to Boston in 1870? “The climax was reached ... when Dorchester itself was swallowed up by Boston ...”. Historian William Dana Orcutt used these vivid and potent words to describe Dorchester’s fate. Reading Orcutt, and other narratives of the path to annexation, gives one the impression that Dorchester was continually at the mercy of her larger, more powerful neighbor. There is a common theme that over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Boston hungrily “swallowed up” as much of Dorchester as it could and eventually finished her off in the epic struggle of 1868-1869. Is this actually the case? Is this how history really happened? Did the Town simply spend the 19<sup>th</sup> century doing her best to “postpone” and “delay” the inevitable day when she would be engulfed by Boston?

Using the archival records of the Town, City of Boston Assistant Archivist Patrick Collins will explore how the Town Meeting encompasses all of Dorchester’s history as an autonomous municipality and also the extent to which the Town of Dorchester and her people themselves had a hand to play in annexation.

*Patrick T. Collins is an Assistant Archivist at the City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division. He is a graduate of Fordham University in New York City and Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Mr. Collins was hired by the City Archives in November 2007 under a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The grant in part supports a project to process selective collections in the Boston City Archives and create electronic finding aids accessible via the Internet. In the course of his work at the City Archives Mr. Collins has processed several collections including the Records of the Town of Dorchester. Mr. Collins is a native of Longmeadow, Massachusetts. He currently lives in Brighton.*