

Old Sturbridge Village <osvnews@osv.org>

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Celebrating 75 Years Of More Than a Museum

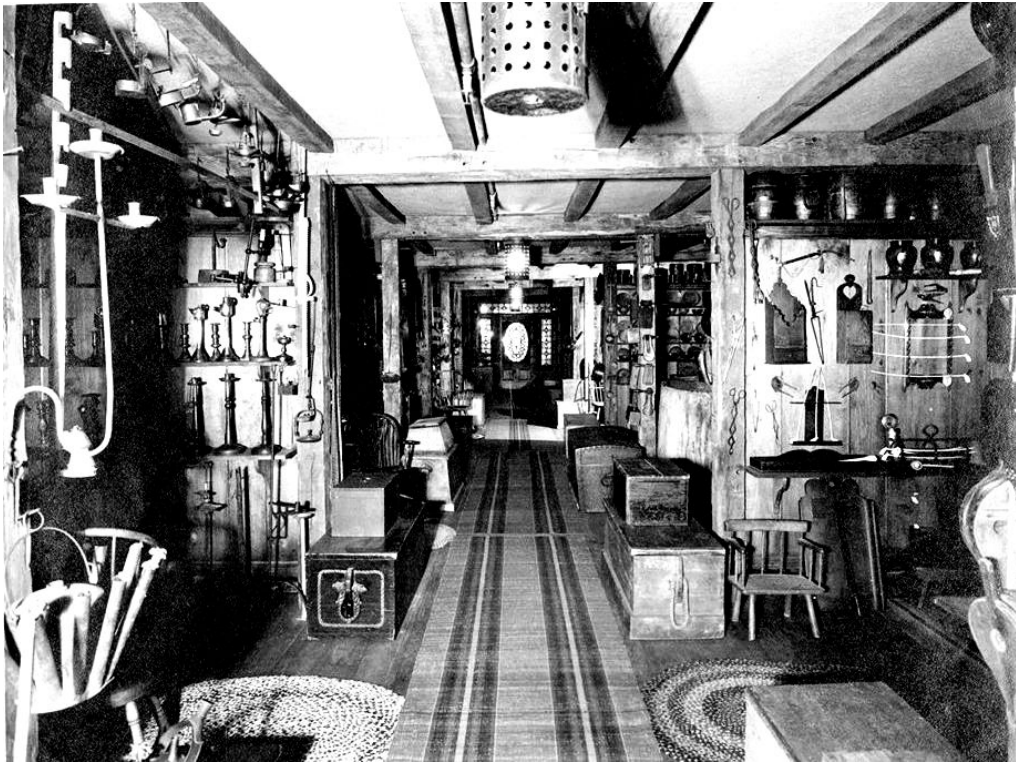
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Celebrating 75 Years of More Than A Museum

A Dream Evolves

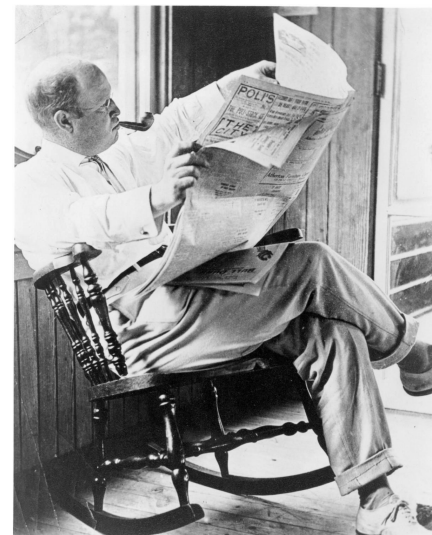
In the mid-1920s, Old Sturbridge Village founder A.B. Wells began collecting “primitive” antiques that showed how normal people lived a century before. He became enraptured with collecting these tools, everyday furnishings, and gadgets, and his collection grew rapidly.



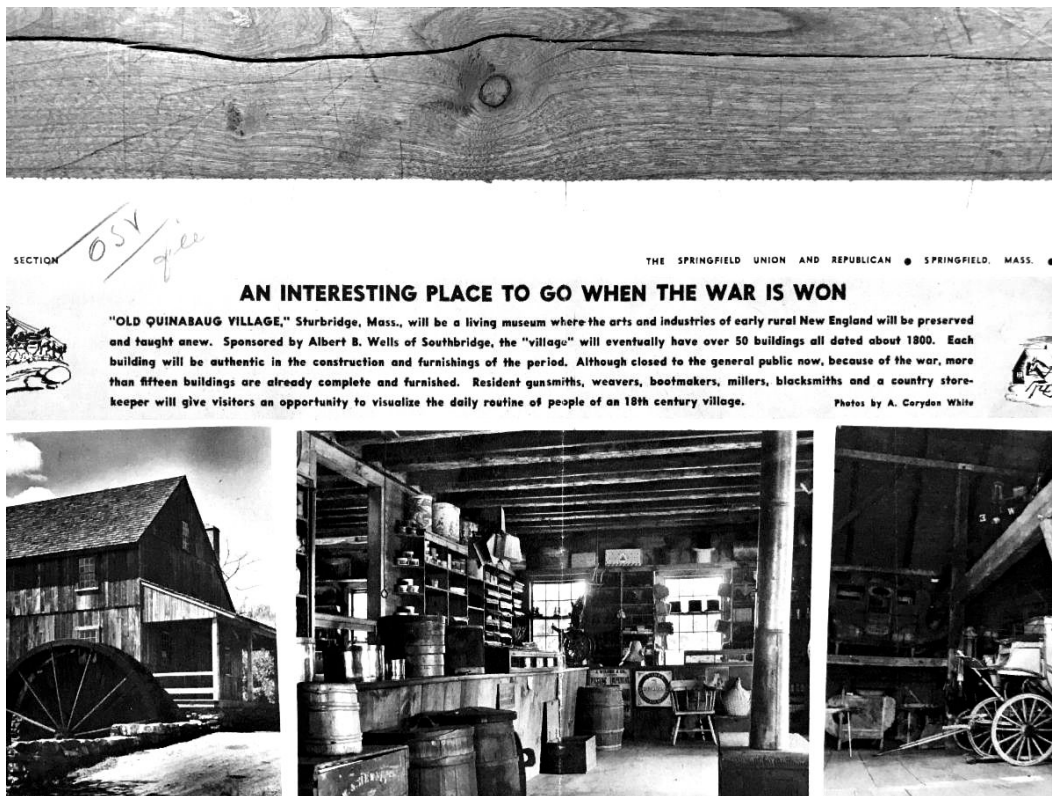
Above: a portion of Wells' massive collection of antiques

A.B. dreamed of having a gallery to display his collection. In 1936, his son, George, convinced him to move beyond his hobby of collecting and his dream of a gallery and to work towards creating "a live village, one with different shops operating." That same year, A.B. and his brother, J. Cheney Wells, bought the "Charles Ballard Farm" (previously known as the Wight Family Farm) that would become the site of Old Sturbridge Village.

Over the next decade, our founders were busy planning, landscaping, building, relocating historical structures, and transferring A.B.'s collection of antiques. Their work was met with significant natural and artificial turmoil, including a hurricane that did severe damage in 1938, the final years of the Great Depression, and, of course, World War II. They pressed on despite the challenges and were hopeful about the future, even promoting the Village to look forward to visiting after the war was won.



A.B. Wells in the 1920s



Above: This advertisement ran in The Springfield Union and Republican in November 1943, encouraging the public to come to visit Old Sturbridge Village (originally called Quinebaug Village) after the war

Bringing the Dream To Life 75 Years Ago Today



On this day in 1946, Old Sturbridge Village opened to the public for the first time and welcomed eighty-one visitors. The Fitch House, Miner Grant Store, the Richardson House, the Grist Mill, and some other buildings were on site, but there were no farm animals, demonstrations of domestic arts, or gardens yet. Many now-familiar buildings were not yet a part of the Village, including the Center Meetinghouse and Salem Towne House. Those 1946 visitors would have seen some buildings no longer here, like the George Stone Blacksmith Shop that was destroyed by a fire in 1956.



Above: A bird's eye view of the Village from 1948

For the first couple of years, guests could drive their cars through the museum grounds. Following World War II rationing, there was pent-up demand for many products, including automobiles. Americans embraced a driving culture and thoroughly enjoyed their new cars. Driving through the Village was relatively short-lived, however, due to rising popularity and attendance numbers. Auto touring ended in 1949.



Above: Guests in the Village before 1949

The Village grew quickly over the subsequent years, and indeed, it is still evolving today! While many things have changed in the last 75 years, our joy of hosting visitors and our commitment to historic preservation, public history, and education have not.

We are excited to be celebrating our 75th anniversary over the course of the next year through special programs and events, a new exhibition, the opening of our Cabinetmaking Shop, commemorative Village-made wares, and so much more. We hope you will join us as we celebrate where we have been and what comes next.

Stay tuned for more information as our 75th year unfolds!