Belmont’s Heritage and Preservation Fair takes place Saturday

VICKI DONOVAN’S 4TH GRADE STUDENTS FROM BELMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL in front of the public library displaying their pictures of the town’s storied past. From left to right are Adam Ribeiro, Lilly Vaughn, Emile DeFrancesco, Tyler Flanagan, and Nick Pucci. A Heritage and Preservation Fair will take place Saturday at various locations throughout the town. (PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA FRAWLEY)
By JIM CLARK
jclark@citizen.com

BELMONT—Belmont's long and fascinating history--begun when the village was founded almost 150 years ago--will be celebrated Saturday during a day-long Heritage and Preservation Fair, which takes place at various locations throughout the center of the town.

It's part of National Preservation Month, established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Park Service. Both organizations work to designate the nation's historic places worthy of preservation, and are assisted by local preservation groups, state historical societies, as well as business and civic organizations throughout the country.

This year's Heritage and Preservation Fair in Belmont comes on the heels of the recent announcement that the town bandstand, originally built in 1908, has been designated by the New Hampshire Historic Resources Council to be placed on the State Register of Historic Places. This follows the same designation given to the old Belmont Mill last year, and to the Province Road Meeting House (owned by the Belmont Historical Society) in 2003.

The venerable town bandstand is located directly behind the town library and near the old Northway Bank building on Main St. A $60,000 renovation of the bandstand was completed in the fall of 2014. On Saturday, a state register marker will be unveiled at the bandstand.

On Saturday, several other locations will be spotlighted at the Heritage and Preservation Fair. The public library will open at 9 a.m. and library director Eileen Gilbert will be on hand with a number of town exhibits and artifacts on display. The library has genealogy computer software for use by town citizens and classes are conducted on a regular basis.

At 10:30 a.m., Board of Selectmen chairman Ruth Mooney will deliver welcoming remarks in front of the library. Also attending the day-long event will be District 7 State Senator Andrew Hosmer, and Belmont's State Representative Mike Sylvia.

Volunteers will be on hand at other nearby locations providing information including the Tioga River Pavilion, and the old covered bridge. There will be multiple outdoor kiosks featuring photos. Maps measuring walking distances will be distributed at the library and at other locations.

The Corner Meeting House on Fuller Street next to the police station will be a hub of activity throughout the day. Refreshments will be served and the meeting house will feature displays from the Belmont Historical Society, the BRATT/Winni-Trail, Friends of the Library, Friends of the Bandstand, and the Save The Gale School Committee.

Starting at 11:15, presentations will be delivered by speakers with tips on research and stories of old Belmont landmarks including the Mill building and the Gale School.
Panelists will include architectural historian and preservation consultant Mae Williams of Center Harbor; Richard Kipphut, preservation advocate and staff member at Plymouth State University's Lamson Library; and Diane Marden, founder of the Belmont Heritage website and outspoken leader of the effort to save the Old Gale School from demolition. Also speaking will be town historian Wallace Rhodes, currently vice-chairman of the town Heritage Commission, who compiled "Reminiscences of a New Hampshire Town" for its 1969 centennial celebration 47 years ago.

Last fall, Rhodes went to Belmont Elementary School and spoke to 4th grade students in Vicki Donovan's class. Donovan is also member of the Belmont Heritage Commission. Rhodes told the youngsters a number of stories about "the old days." Those stories inspired the students to draw pictures and write their own stories about Belmont's past.

The students drew pictures depicting the town's long-gone train station, the saw mill, the Dover Bridge, as well as the Veterans Memorial and the old Belmont Mill. The students' artwork will be on display at both the library and Corner Meeting House on Saturday.

Organizing sponsors for Saturday's Heritage and Preservation Fair are the Belmont Library, the Belmont Heritage Commission, local historical preservation enthusiasts Linda Frawley, Christine Fogg, Donna Hepp, Brian Loanes, Ken Knowlton, and various other town government employees and citizens.

Community partners include the Belknap County Restorative Justice Program, the Belmont Parks and Recreation Department, Friends of the Bandstand, the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

All town citizens and visitors from other towns are welcome to take a tour through the center of Belmont during Saturday's event and learn more about the town's colorful and memorable history.