

# Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Winter  
2017-2018

## NEWSLETTER



Ken Story

### GRANTHAM, PROSPERITY AND THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The early twentieth century brought considerable industrial and commercial development to Grantham. The lumber and grist mills in the village, Stockertown (East Grantham) and North Grantham employed a number of local men and brought sufficient traffic to Routes 10 and 114 to support small village centers in both Stockertown and North Grantham, in addition to Grantham Village. Both Stockertown and North Grantham hosted small general stores, and North Grantham had its own post office. In the village, no fewer than three separate stores surrounded the main intersection in the village, including two general stores and a drug store, and such other enterprises as at least one blacksmith shop and a printing press.

This growth was only exacerbated by the arrival of the Draper Corporation in 1916 and the construction of the company town in North Grantham that became known as Draperville. Located at the northwest corner of Eastman Pond, Draperville consisted of a number of residences that served as worker housing and a large mill facility that cut harvested timber into wood rectangles called 'blanks.' These blanks were then shipped to the main Draper mill facility in Hopedale, Massachusetts, where they were then crafted into wood bobbins used in the burgeoning textile mill industry. At the peak of its operation, Draperville employed as many as forty men, most of whom lived on-site and many of whom had families. The influx of young children that accompanied the establishment of Draperville doubled

the enrollment at the North Grantham School.

By 1922 this explosion (relatively speaking) in Grantham's population caught the attention of its new Methodist pastor, Reverend Ned Witham. The Ver-

mont native arrived with his wife Winona and a large family of his own to assume the clerical leadership of the Grantham Methodist Church. However, this was not his first pastorate; Reverend Witham brought with him a significant background in Methodism and what would become known as the Social Gospel.

The Social Gospel traces its origins to the mid-nineteenth century, when a number of Protestant leaders saw the evils of the oncoming industrial revolution (which many had seen first-hand in England) and believed in the active application of Christian ethics to help prevent economic inequality, crime, poverty and substandard public education. The Methodist Church was among the churches most active

in the spreading of the Social Gospel, both in the late nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. Methodist leaders actively supported the notion that their church should engage the community outside the walls of the church and take a leading role in addressing the social decay they feared was imminent.

Reverend Witham shared these views and robustly so – to the point that he believed in the construction of what would become known as the Community Building, which would be attached to the rear of the parsonage (now the home of Pam and Carl Hanson). A large,



Reverend Ned and Winnie Witham, 1923

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## INTRODUCTION:

Alec Hastings is an author of adult and children's books, a teacher and seemingly a jack of all trades and master of many. This is the second article he has contributed to the Grantham Historical Society's Newsletter. I met Alec as he and his brother Duncan came to Grantham to repair the Hastings Cemetery on Burpee Rd. I suggested that they contact the town to obtain permission to exercise their desire and I learned that they were doing this all over Vermont and New Hampshire.

I also suggested that he should contact the New Hampshire Old Graveyard Association to acquaint himself with the recommended procedures to stabilize and repair gravestones. They both are from Vermont and they performed a perfect stabilization of the cemetery gravestones along with cleaning and repair. Check out his stories on Facebook or visit the cemetery and see what a great job they did. Thank you, Alec and Duncan.'

—Rae Tober

## OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE

I tucked the copy of an 1892 map in my pocket. On it a black line located the now abandoned road up Leavitt Hill, and black squares marked homesteads belonging to the Leavitts. One square showed the homesite of my ancestor, Nathan J. Hastings, who lived until 1925, the last Civil War veteran in Grantham, New Hampshire. I was there to find his cellar hole, a farmstead where Hastings lived and died, where they plowed furrows for planting in the spring and cut hay with a sickle-bar mower under the blazing summer sun, where they raised their babes from the cradle and buried their elders in hilltop graveyards, and where I might also find—if I looked out of the corner of my eye—a ghost, a thing invisible I wasn't even looking for.

That part of me educated by Science does not believe in ghosts, but is there a part primeval which does believe, if not in ghosts, then in mysteries beyond our ken? That part—if it is real—itches for the unseen. Maybe that was why I wanted to walk a road other Hastings once walked, to glimpse a figure at the edge of a field and feel the hair rise on my neck when it vanished. I knew it wouldn't happen, but I didn't see the harm in fantasy.

As I buttoned my collar against the cold and turned up

the road, the thought of ghosts brought to mind a story my brother Duncan told me. Years ago, a friend named Bill visited Duncan's cabin on Bailey Hill, a half mile off the dirt road in Turkey Hollow. The cabin sat in a meadow near stone foundations overtaken by brambles.



*Nathan Hastings—North Grantham*

Duncan and Bill strummed dulcimers and basked in the glow of a warm summer evening. Then came a visitation, the commingled sounds of a barn dance—a fiddle tune, laughter, the voice of a square dance caller, clinking glasses—all fading in and out like a radio station not quite tuned in. Soon, the visitation faded and was gone.

Days later, old Eben Lewis chugged his tractor up the logging road to the cabin and

plowed a garden plot. When the job was done, he and Duncan visited. My brother pointed to the foundations and asked if Eben knew anything about them. He did. The stonework was all that remained of a farmstead. He knew the people who had lived there and milked their cows and put up their hay. They held some awful good dances in the barn. Was this the ghostly answer to the mystery of the fiddle tunes Duncan and Bill heard? Did they have a joint hallucination? Well, it was the

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# THE VERMONT FIDDLER

On Thursday, October 26 at 7:00 pm, the Grantham Historical Society annual fall program attendants were the recipients of a wonderful evening of music, storytelling, and laughter.

Adam Boyce from Reading, Vermont, presented a program on The Old Vermont Country Fiddler. Adam took the role of Charles Ross Taggart and his wife set the scene to 1936.

It did not take long for the audience to explode into laughter and loud applause, not once but many times over. His packaging for the evening consisted of music, storytelling and skits. People who did not attend this program missed a wonderful and entertaining evening.

Who was this fiddler, where did he come from? Why the general title of "Vermont fiddler" and why is he so well known? How about Adam Boyce himself?<sup>1</sup>

Here is the answer from *New Hampshire Humanities Council*:



*Vermont Fiddler—Adam Boyce as Taggart*

## “THE OLD COUNTRY FIDDLER”: CHARLES ROSS TAGGART TRAVELING ENTERTAINER

“Musical humorist Charles Ross Taggart grew up in Topsham, Vermont, going on to perform in various lyceum and Chautauqua circuits all across the country for over 40 years, starting in 1895. A fiddler, piano player, comedian, singer, and ventriloquist, he made at least 40 recordings on various labels, as well as appearing in an early talking movie four years before Al Jolson starred in *The Jazz Singer*. Adam Boyce portrays Mr. Taggart near the end of Taggart’s career, c. 1936, sharing recollections of his life, with some live fiddling and humorous sketches interspersed in this living history program.”

The Chautauqua of this time was the Bureau of Chicago; Taggart recorded monologues with Victor, Edison and Columbia companies and appeared in the early “talkies”. He is regarded as an “innovator in the entertainment industry. A man with his mimicry stories and fiddling who helped Americans forget their troubles when they needed it the most.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1927, *The Vermonter* “The State Magazine” featured a lengthy story about Charles Ross Taggart.

If you have a smart phone, computer or a pad device, you

can find “YouTube” (Adam Boyce fiddler) and listen to several presentations of Adam Boyce as C. R. Taggart and of Taggart himself on the old 33 1/3 rpm records.

“Adam Boyce, a 10th generation Vermonter and lifelong student of history, has been a popular *Humanities to Go* presenter since 2005. Beginning in 1991, when Boyce started dancing, fiddling, calling and playing the piano, he has made a study of nearly every aspect of traditional New England

dancing and music history. Boyce has also been a regular on fiddle contest circuits as a judge, piano accompanist, and as a competitor.”<sup>1</sup>

One comment from the evening: I had been talking with Adam and his wife and he stated that audiences do not clap as loud as they use to. After the program I mentioned this to him and he responded with “I was wrong—what a wonderful audience,

I think I will take them to my next program!”

A evening’s program with music, storytelling, laughter and refreshments—what can be better than that on a cold windy night?

—Rae Tober



*CR Taggart listens to a recording of his music*

## CORNER OF MY EYE

*Continued from page 2*

1970s. But then again, who knows? Maybe more mysteries surround us than we know.

I thought of Duncan now as I walked up Leavitt Hill with ghosts on my mind. I thought about my own ghost story. Dad had just died, and my brothers and I had taken our mother to Lake Carmi. The cottage was humble but cozy, a place with good memories, and Dad figured in many. Finally, we all went to bed. The water lapping the shore soothed the ache of missing him, and I drifted off. When I opened my eyes in the dark, I was wide awake. A figure stood in the doorway. It was Dad, or so I thought. The vision lasted seconds only and vanished. Did I see a ghost? No doubt it was a figment conjured by a wish to see my father one last time. No doubt.

I turned my attention to Leavitt Hill again. The snow crunching underfoot was the only sound. The whizzing and roaring of cars and trucks at the start of the walk had faded away. I thought I might see a ghost here too, even if only one of my own manufacture. I felt the past all around me. Once, this road had been well traveled. Stone walls still marked the way. I could hear the clop, clop of horses' hooves from a hundred years ago with me up on a wagon seat, driving a team. Maybe I would meet Nathan and his wife Laura on their way home from the village. As it turned out, I didn't—or if I did, I didn't know it—but I did find the cellar hole where they farmed and perhaps where Laura died when her youngest daughters, Laura and Lencie, were twelve and six.

I passed more foundations on my way up the hill. The map confirmed the next one as the site of the one-room schoolhouse where fifty-five young scholars once dipped nib pens or quills into ink wells, wrote their compositions, and then—at the end of the school day—raced barefoot

and yelling up or down Leavitt Hill to their parents' farms and their evening chores. What a lot of young Leavitts! I walked on and wondered how many teachers it took to keep so many Leavitts in line. Probably it took only one and the help of the older girls.

At the top of the hill, I spied an unnatural shape out of the corner of my eye. I traipsed off the road into deeper snow and brushed off a bronze plaque which told me the hill was in a trust dedicated to the memory of Wilfred Hastings. It wasn't a ghost sighting, but it was the past again, commingling with the present. Some weeks later I learned more about Wilfred from his sister Marjerie. Among other interesting stories, she told me he completed his pilot's training in the U.S. Air Force during World War II. After the war he bought a small Cessna plane and began flying on his own. Younger sister Marjerie wanted desperately to learn, so he gave her lessons. When she took her licensing test in the early 1970s, her examiner didn't pull any punches. As they headed back to the airport, he asked her to tell him when she saw the landing strip. She did, and he turned off the engine! She had to do an emergency or "dead-stick" landing. Fortunately, she had practiced this many times and did it flawlessly. No doubt she was thanking Wilfred for all his help.

Near Wilfred's plaque I saw another cellar hole. More stone walls led away from the road and into the woods. A break in one wall must have been the gate to a barnyard because the rectangle of stone beyond was too large to be anything but a barn foundation. I returned to the road and walked another twenty yards to a horse-drawn hay loader, abandoned, no doubt, when farmers began baling hay in the 1940s or 50s. There, at the very top of the hill, I looked south out through the skeletal hardwoods to hills far, far

away. The Leavitts had picked a pretty spot to live. The south-facing slope dropped away gently, and a hundred years ago the snow must have melted early when the hillside was bare of trees, all sheep pasture and hayfield open to the equinoctial sun. I lingered, for it happened to be clear that day and almost warm in the brilliant light. I munched my sandwich and thought about the people who once stood where I stood and looked out on that same view, where sheep grazed in the glowing pasture below as the sun set behind the barn. Then, I turned back the way I had come.

I didn't find the Leavitt's graveyard, but I will another day. The Hastings and Leavitts knew each other well, well enough in at least one case for marriage to follow. Marjerie remembered her grandfather Frank Hastings walking up Leavitt Hill with a scythe to trim the grass growing up around the Leavitt gravestones. I never did see a ghost that day, but about halfway down the hill, thinking about Frank, I came close. Once again, I saw something out of the corner of my eye. It was a dark, human head staring at me from ground level, or so I thought in the split second before I turned and stared at the monster directly. I saw then it was not a human head. Was it Darth Vader? I strode into the woods to confront my fear and solve the mystery. A prankster had placed a cracked motorcycle helmet atop a rock and faced it toward the road, hoping, no doubt, for a reaction like mine. Are there ghosts? I don't know. I do know that I agree with what William Faulkner said: "The past is not dead. Actually, it's not even past." I know this to be true every time I ride shank's mare along old wagon roads past forgotten farms and pastures overgrown with trees. The past is all around us.

—Alec Hastings

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Continued from page 1*

wood frame, two-story building, it housed classrooms and offices, and a large room on the second story that served as both a recreational space for basketball and other sports, and as a performance space for theater and musical productions, with a stage at one end. Various classes were offered here for young people, including wood shop, sewing, general home economics, and of course religious teaching. While a number of adults participated in various events, the goal was to provide positive, constructive and educational outlets for the town's young people, giving them a place to go and things to do that would hopefully keep them out of trouble and direct them toward personal growth and self-improvement. Records and photographs from the time reveal that the facility was actively used and became a true social center for the town. Included in the social activities sponsored at the Community Building were summer picnics that took place on the ledges behind it. Two barbeque pits were hacked into the flagstone – one for beef, the other for pork – and large, day-long cook-

outs drew residents from all corners.

Unfortunately, the boom did not last. The hardwood supply around Draperville was exhausted by 1926 and the company town closed its doors, moving its operations to Beebe River (near Campton) where it had already purchased property and was operating another facility. Many of the Draperville residents followed the company there, but others moved elsewhere in search of work. Grantham's population was cut in half, and the demand for the Community Building disappeared. It gradually fell into disuse and suffered serious structural damage to its roof when the snow load caused it to partially collapse in 1961. Due to safety concerns, it was demolished in 1966.

The building may be gone, but the legacy of Reverend Witham and his vision for the health and welfare of the town touched many residents, a number of whom were children at the time. His belief in the future of Grantham – and especially its children – lives on in them and their families.

—Ken Story



**NEW DISPLAY!**  
 Check out our Artifact Display in the glass case at the Dunbar Free Library.  
*The display was organized by the Friday afternoon crew of GHS at GHS and Town Archives on Dunbar Hill Road.*

**THE GOOD OLD DAYS**  
 The days of 1902 were known as the "Good Old Days". Here are some of the statistics:

- A. The average life expectancy was forty-seven.
- B. Only 14 percent of the homes had a bathtub.
- C. There were only 8,000 cars and only 144 miles of paved roads.
- D. Only 8 percent of homes had a telephone and a 3-minute call from Denver to New York City cost eleven dollars.
- E. The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.

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## It is better to give.

Your membership fees and end-of-year donations will help the Grantham Historical Society develop programs, exhibits and educational materials for anyone interested in the history of Grantham. All donations are tax-deductible and include receipt of our newsletter.

Please mail to:  
 Grantham Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 540  
 Grantham, NH 03753

*Thank you for your support.*

## Membership and Annual Dues Form

Grantham Historical Society

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
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**PLEASE CHECK ONE:**

New member    Annual renewal

**Annual dues: (check one)**

- Individual (\$15.)
- Family (\$25.)
- Patron/business/institution (\$50.)

Extra contribution \_\_\_\_\_

Total check amount \_\_\_\_\_

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### TOWN ARCHIVIST

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*The Grantham Historical Society and Town Archives are open on Friday afternoons from 1:00-4:00 PM or by appointment.*

*The building is located at 34 Dunbar Hill Road.*

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## THE GOOD OLD DAYS

- F. The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.
- G. The average wage in the US was 22 cents an hour.
- H. The average US worker made between \$200-400 per year.
- I. Sugar cost four cents a pound. Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen. Coffee cost fifteen cents a pound.
- J. Our flag had 45 stars, Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Hawaii and Alaska had not been admitted to the Union.
- K. Crosswords puzzles, canned beer, and iced tea hadn't been invented, or not even dial telephones.
- L. There was no Mother's or Father's Day.
- M. Only 6 percent of all Americans had graduated from high school.
- N. There were only about 230 reported murders in the entire US.

*(Source: MISTupid.com The Online Knowledge Magazine 2017)*

