

Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Spring 2012

NEWSLETTER



Ken Story

WHITHER THE SARGENT HOTEL?

Grantham hosted a number of hotels and inns in its history, located throughout the town's various villages. For a number of these we know a fair amount of historical information, including owner, general if not precise location, years of operation, etc. However, only recently have we become aware of a hotel that appears to have been located in

Grantham Village, known both as the Grantham House and the Sargent Hotel.

The first clue that such a hotel existed came via the August 29, 1946 edition of *The Argus Champion*. The local news column that included a round-up of significant events occurring in the towns surrounding Newport included mention of Everett "Mike" Reney's purchase of Glenn Hudson's house in Grantham Village. This brief article goes on to say "Mr. Hudson plans to build a house across the street on the site of the old Sargent Hotel which burned over 70 years ago." Short as it was, this paragraph is important for two reasons: it notes the former location of the hotel (on the west side of Route 10, immediately north of the modern-day parking lot), but also gives an approximate date for its demise: given the publication date of 1946, subtracting seventy years puts the fire that burned the hotel at roughly 1876.

This information led us to consult several other sources from the decade after the Civil War to see what we could discover. The earliest was an 1868 New Hampshire business directory, which listed the prominent businesses in every town in the state, broken down by type. Under 'Hotels,' the only entry for Grantham is "Grantham House, David A. Sargent." In 1871, the same directory notes

for Grantham, "Hotel – Grantham House, John Young. Livery stable – David A. Sargent." In the following year, the same directory simply lists "Hotel – Grantham, John Young." Finally, in 1873, the listing again reads "Hotel – Grantham, John Young." One can only assume that – just as the *Argus* article claimed – by 1871 John Young had purchased the hotel and was the sole owner and proprietor.

So who was David A. Sargent? Fortunately, a search of the many online genealogy websites turned up further valuable information. According to an 1897 biography, David A. Sargent was a Grantham native, born here on January 5, 1829. Although he began his career "engaged in general farming," in 1862 he began operating the Grantham House and continued as owner and proprietor until 1868, when he sold his interest in the hotel. By 1870 he had relocated to Croydon where he opened another hotel (the large two-storey house located immediately south of the Morse House – now the home of the Croydon Historical Society – and directly across Route 10 from the Croydon Store) that could accommodate up to twenty guests. He ran this enterprise profitably through the end of the century, reportedly doing a considerable business with visitors to the newly created Corbin Park.

Unfortunately, we have not yet located a photograph of the Grantham House/Sargent Hotel. We assume that it was similar to the house he took over in Croydon, in that it was probably a larger home that had been converted into hotel, yet we do not know for sure. If any of our devoted readers knows any further information about this historic Grantham business – including a photograph – we would love to hear from you.

—Ken Story



Sap Buckets—Dunbar Hill Road, spring 2012

Photo by Rea Tober

THE WILDER THERMOMETER COMPANY: A CHAPTER OF FAMILY HISTORY

Just north of Peterborough, New Hampshire, where Route 202 crosses the Contoocook River, a low dam briefly slows the river's northward flow. Like many others across the state, this dam is a reminder of a time when



Charles Wilder, 1835-1900. Photo courtesy of Dwight Wilder.

water powered not just saw and grist mills, but the machinery of hundreds of small manufacturing firms. Water turned lathes and other equipment for wood shops crafting furniture, measuring scoops (one in Wilton still does!), and other useful products. Elsewhere, it provided the energy for sets of bellows, stoking forges for metal working and furnaces for glass making. At the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in

Manchester, the Merrimack River

powered thousands of looms and other machines in what was at one point the largest textile complex in the United States. The dam on the Contoocook was related to a more modest operation, but one that took the name of Peterborough to many quarters of the country, too. Between 1860 and 1904, it was the site of the Wilder Thermometer Company, founded and operated by my great-grandfather, Charles Wilder.

Charles was born in 1837. The earliest Wilders had come to America in the 1630's, during the so-called "Great Migration" of Puritans fleeing England's persecution of religious dissenters; on his mother's side of the family, the lineage stretched back to the Plymouth Colony. Charles grew up in Peterborough, where he attended local schools. In the late 1850's, barely out of his teens, he served a year as principal of the Peterborough Academy, the town's only secondary school. His diary for that year still exists, recording work, family events, and local celebrations, as well as other signs of the times, such as travelling on "the cars," as railroads were called, with the town's Fourth of July speaker, Gideon Welles, later Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy.

In 1860, apparently having decided that education was not his calling, he both acquired the rights to several patents, and established a firm to manufacture thermometers and barometers. He set up operations in an existing building, formerly a textile mill, beside the river at what was called North Factory. Quite soon, the company began to acquire a reputation for both the quality and the range of its product line. At some point in the 1870's, the company developed a relationship as supplier to the United States Signal Service, a branch of the Army which had recently been charged with col-

lecting and transmitting regular weather information from its network of posts and forts across the length and breadth of the nation. Among the weather stations it established in that same decade was one on top of Mount Washington, the precursor of today's Mount Washington Observatory. Over time, the Peterborough facility grew to fill several buildings, while a series of homes for family members, Charles' brothers and later his sons, were built along the side lane branching off the main road, which crossed the river next to the factory.

The company's product ultimately included not just instruments for institutional use, but a variety of specialized thermometers for purposes such as maple sugaring, candy making, and ceramics. In keeping with the styles of the Victorian era, home thermometers could be ornate, such as a two-foot tall model in a rosewood frame, or a smaller desk top model in a cast-iron stand. One existing specimen is a triple: it displays Fahrenheit, Centigrade (now called Celsius), and the lesser-known Reaumer scales of measurement. Another had the ability to record both daily high and low temperatures, with small steel pins in the tube that could be reset by means of a magnet. One of the company's most memorable orders was for

four elaborate, oversized thermometers, eight feet tall, to be installed at one of the main entrances to the New York State Capitol Building in Albany, New York. The glass tubes for all of these were made at the Peterborough site. Since glass has a somewhat variable rate of expansion, each tube, once blown, filled with mercury



Wilder Thermometer Co. North Peterborough, NH
Photo courtesy of Dwight Wilder.

or another fluid, and sealed, needed to be calibrated, at freezing point and a higher, standard reading. At each of these points, the tube was etched with a file. The measurement between the points was then used to adjust a cutting tool that engraved all of the intermediate marks on a metal plate. The resulting scale was thus customized to that particular tube. They were accurate, too: two

A SNAPSHOT OF GRANTHAM – 1880

FROM: *THE NEW HAMPSHIRE REGISTER AND BUSINESS DIRECTORY FOR 1880*

The current directory published by the Grantham Chamber of Commerce has a precedent in the business directories of the late 19th century. Thanks to Barb Kresse of the Croydon Historical Society, we have a picture of the “manufacturies” as they were called and the professional services available in 1880 to the 608 people who lived in Grantham.

GRANTHAM Sullivan Pop 608 N.W. fr 0, 40; N fr. Newport 10 RRS – Newport 10 miles, on C and C R.R. Daily stage. Lebanon 14 miles on No. R.R., semiweekly stage.

OFFICERS Clerk Rufus Hall Treas. J.H. Goss Selectmen L.D. Dunbar, D.S. Hastings, Wm. Wallace, Supt. L.B. Hayward

Postmasters – L.D. Dunbar; North M.P. Burpee

Justices – S.C. Sargent, O.B. Buswell, L.D. Dunbar, E.G. Eastman, Rufus Hall

Churches – Chris. East _____; Meth, North _____ Winsor; Union, F.M. Pickles

Insurance agent – S.C. Sargent Lawyer - Geo. Davis

Manufacturers – Baskets, J. Young; lumbar, North Peabody & Son, Abram Merrill;

Shingles, C. Walker, Jno. Clark

Mechanics – Blacksmith, John Hammond, J.W. Spiller; coopers, Wm. Howe, B.F. Goss;

masons D.S. Hastings, J.T. Weeks; painters T. Weeks, Abijah Powers; wheelwright Silas

Cowan

Merchants – L.D. Dunbar, S.F. Hood; clocks and watches S.C. Sargent Physicians – Geo. E.

Hatch, _____ Perkins, W.C. Kempton



A popular patent medication in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Advertisement from the Horton Farm Collection.

RAILROADS (R.R.S. STANDS FOR RAILROAD STATION)

“C and C R.R.” refers to the Claremont and Concord Railroad which was chartered in 1848 with construction beginning the same year. By September 1849, the first section to Warner was opened. It was subsequently extended to Bradford and then to Claremont. The company went bankrupt in 1852 and merged with other rail lines in the area. The merged lines are still in business as a freight transfer company.

In the 1849 Gazetteer of New Hampshire, the following information about the “No. R.R.” is found for the Northern Railroad:” Incorporated December 1844. This road commences at Concord, where it unites with the Concord Road, running upon or near the bank of the Merrimac, to Franklin, and thence leaving the river, and passing through Andover, Grafton, Canaan and Lebanon, to the west bank of Connecticut River, where it unites with the Vermont Central road. The road was open to the public use December 1847.” The northern terminus of this line was in White River Junction, Vt. It was later purchased by the Boston and Maine Railroad which ran the line until the 1960s. The old rail bed was later developed into the Northern Rail Trail to be used for recreational purposes.

SUPERINTENDANT

“Supt.” refers to the Superintendent of schools. In 1874, there were seven school houses in Grantham. The Superintendent and his committee oversaw each one

and reported annually to the town at Town Meeting. The Historical Society has a complete set of Town Reports which include each Superintendent’s report over the years as well as individual reports by various committee members in the late 19th century. They attended to the physical state of the building, the subjects mastered by the students and rated the success of the teachers.

POSTMASTER

Postmaster “North” – postmaster of the North Grantham post office. M.P. Burpee was appointed in 1880.

CHURCHES

“Chris.East” refers to the Baptist Church which existed for about forty years in the late 19th century. It was located on the site of the current Cote and Reney on Route 114. Pastors for this church during its active life were Rev. Mr. Palmer, Rev. J.W. Osborne and Rev. Clark Symonds according to Dunbar’s 1885 History of Grantham.” North” refers to the North Grantham church whose minister at the time was Thomas Winsor (1879-1880). He was minister for both North Grantham and Croyden in 1880-1881. F.M. Pickles was minister of the Union (Village) Church from 1878 to 1880. It was not unusual for pastors to serve two churches in the same town or in two nearby towns at the same time.

Continued on page 4

SNAPSHOT *Continued from page 3*

PHYSICIANS

Willard Clough Kempton was born in Croydon in 1840, attended Kimball Union Academy and Dartmouth Medical School in the class of 1872. He was in the Civil War, first in the 15th NH Volunteers as a hospital steward and then in the 7th US Heavy Artillery of the 2nd NH Regiment. He practiced in Grantham from 1879 to 1889. He also practiced in Missouri, Kansas and Sanford, Maine. In addition to practicing as a physician, he also ran the local drug store which was located on Route 10 South, north of the current Story home and just before the turn onto Route 114. Ken Story reports that parts of the foundation of this building still exist near his home. The building was moved after 1910 to create a residence further south on Route 10. It is likely that Dr. Kempton's armamentarium of medications were mostly of the patent type.

Dr. Hatch was the town treasurer in 1880 and 1881; no other information

has been found about him nor was any located about Dr. Perkins. It is interesting to note that the physicians were listed under "Merchants".

MANUFACTURERS

Of the six listed businesses, additional information was found on only Chester Walker. He was said to have a shingle mill on the "upper waters of Stone Brook on the Mountain" as well as the one he purchased from Samuel Currier on the road to East Grantham (now Route 114).

OTHERS

Many of the other names under "Manufacturers", "Mechanics" and "Merchants" are somewhat familiar from research done for The History of Grantham or other historical investigations. The one name that is new is that of "Baskets – J. Young". We would be happy to hear from anyone with information about this artisan (?) and his products. Even better would be to find an example of his work in a Grantham attic, shed, cellar or barn.

—Pat Andrews

WILDER FAMILY *Continued from page 2*

different models I own, each over a century old, both consistently show the same temperature as our modern digital thermometer's display.

Charles Wilder died in 1900, having seen his venture grow into a prosperous and respected local enterprise. In his will, he directed his sons, John and Frank, to continue to operate the company for at least two more years. They did so, but in 1904 they accepted an offer to sell the company to a larger firm of instrument makers, the W. and L.E. Gurley Company of Troy, New York. Along with all of the machinery and inventory, Gurley also acquired the rights to the "Wilder" brand name. This last item was clearly an asset, as it continued to be used well into the 1920's, with "Troy, New York" taking the place of "Peterboro, NH" below the company name on face plates. It is not clear exactly when Gurley stopped making Wilder thermometers, ending a lineage of more than seventy years. As an aside, it was my grandfather, John M. Wilder, who oversaw the physical move of the company to Troy, also moving there with his wife and two young children. As a result, when their third child – my father – was born, it was in Troy, not Peterborough, although

the family maintained links with the latter town for many years afterward.

A number of Wilder thermometers and at least one barometer have been passed down through the family, including those mentioned above. Others have turned up in antique shops from time to time, sometimes very moderately priced, occasionally with a hefty price tag for larger, more elaborate and ornate models. Richard T. Potter of Onset, MA, known as the "Thermometer Man" with an entry in the Guinness Book of Records for the world's largest collection, had a number of Wilder instruments among his array of over 5,000 thermometers, most of which now reside in the National Weather Museum at Pennsylvania State University. Who knows? Perhaps on a kitchen wall or in the corner of a barn somewhere in Grantham, another Wilder thermometer still hangs, dutifully tracking winter cold and summer's heat, and everything in between.

—Dwight Wilder

We welcome Dwight Wilder, last fall's Theodore Roosevelt, as a contributor to our Newsletter.

HELP NEEDED!

APPRAISAL DAY EVENT

September 16, 2012
noon to 3 PM

Our lunch counter at last year's Appraisal Day was very popular and a great fund-raiser for the Historical Society. We would like to repeat it for this year's event so the donation of soups, desserts and kitchen help would be greatly appreciated.

We could also use helpers to keep the flow of appraisals moving along. If you can offer your services or food donations again, thank you. If you are a newcomer who wants to contribute, even better! Please email Kathi Osgood at kgood246@gmail.com to let her know how you would like to help out. As always, our thanks for your participation.



NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THANKS to all the new and renewing members for their 2012 membership dues. In addition, we also have volunteers to thank for errands and other forms of help over the past three months:

- Belated thanks to Mike Clavin of Rum Brook Market for selling our 2011 calendars for the Christmas holidays
- Sue Thomas for picking up our newsletters from Speedy Printing in Concord
- Paul Osgood for installing a new gutter on our porch to avoid ice on the porch floor
- Renee Gustafson for spending many Fridays copying documents from the Horton Farm Collection as well as additions to our Archives
- Rae Tober for assistance in updating the Guide to the Archives
- Francis and Barbara Mutney for their written recollections of the Grantham Fire Department and early school transportation; and Pat Masone for information about the Bicentennial quilt and the Five Watters Radio Club. These are all contributions to *The History of Grantham*.

ALLEN WALKER

In early March, Allen Walker, our president emeritus, moved to Summercrest in Newport with the assistance of Ebba and Craig McArt and his family. He leaves his home in Grantham where he grew up and lived after retiring from his career in New Jersey. Allen would welcome hearing from his friends in Grantham. His mailing address is: Summercrest, 169 Summer Street, Newport, NH 03773.

ADDITIONS TO OUR COLLECTIONS

Three new items have been added to the GHS collection recently: a carriage jack bearing a label from O.J. Faunce Grantham, and cost (\$0.25), a DVD demonstrating the creation of a building beam from a felled tree and a 1973 study done by Hanslin Associates for development of Gray Ledges, then owned by Carol Sturgis. We have found that O.J. Faunce was the pastor of the Methodist Church from 1910 to 1915. The only other time his name has come to light is as the buyer for the old Estey organ from the North Grantham church when it was sold. We have found no information to date regarding his business of selling carriage jacks.

With the addition of the Lebanon and Cornish town histories (both 2 volumes), our collection of histories from surrounding towns is almost complete.. The Plainfield and Enfield histories will be purchased shortly. All of the histories are available for researchers to use at GHS.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

ANNUAL MEETING – THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2012

Our annual meeting is planned for May 24, 2012 at the Town Hall (lower level) and will be preceded by a potluck supper at 6 PM. A very brief business meeting will be held at 7 PM, followed by a talk on the Abbot- Downing Coach Company, builders of the famous “Concord coach,” most familiar to many



of us from the Lone Ranger and other westerns in the early days of television. Peter James, who lives in Grantham, will give an illustrated talk about the history of the Abbot-Downing Company of Concord, NH. Much information about the history of the company is available at <http://theconcordcoach.tripod.com>.

FALL PROGRAM – SEPT.16, 2012

Our Second Annual Appraisal Day will be held on Sunday, September 16, 2012 at the Town Hall (lower level) from noon to 3 PM. Please see the note on page 4 of this issue. Details will appear in our summer issue of the Newsletter.

THE HISTORY OF GRANTHAM—UPDATE

We continue to come across interesting bits of Grantham history as we do research for our book that are either unfamiliar or for which little information can be found. In each issue of the newsletter, we will publish some of these in hopes that our readers may have some answers. Thanks to Bob Osgood who responded to the questions about a house photo and school transportation in our last issue. He believes the house is on Stoney Brook Road but in Springfield. The final photo in A Brief History of Grantham, written for our 2005 trolley tour, shows a school bus at the intersection of Dunbar Hill Road and Route 10. Bob says the bus was owned by Ken Barton which he ran to Lebanon. Thanks, Bob. We also received information on the location of Whitney Hall.

NEW QUESTIONS—Have answers? Email us, drop us a note or visit us on a Friday afternoon at the Historical Society.

- Any further information on O.J. Faunce? See above
- Who were the Grantham Giants?
- Where was Fox Hollow located? (We already have one response but want to see what others remember.)
- The North Grantham Church published three issues of a newsletter: “*The Grantham Register*” in December 1892, and “*Harvest Home*” in December 1883 and 1884. We have a copy of the 1883 issue. Does anyone know where copies of the other two issues might be found?

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2012

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The Grantham Historical Society and Town Archives are open on Friday afternoons from 1 to 4 PM or by appointment. The building is located at 34 Dunbar Hill Road.

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2012 CALENDAR

Thurs., May 24, 2012

GHS ANNUAL MEETING
Program "Abbott and Downing's Concord Coaches"
Town Hall (lower level)
Potluck supper at 6 PM
Meeting & program at 7 PM

Weds., July 4, 2012

OLD HOME DAY
Look for our table!

Sun., Sept. 16, 2012

2ND ANNUAL APPRAISAL DAY
Town Hall (lower level)
Noon to 3 PM
Lunch available for purchase

Thurs., Oct. 25, 2012
NH HUMANITIES COUNCIL
PROGRAM TBD
7 PM

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