

# Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Summer 2013

## NEWSLETTER



Ken Story

### THE HISTORY OF GRANTHAM: A FEW TIDBITS

As we wrap up the work on the history of our town, part of the fun of this project has been the pleasant surprises we've discovered along the way. Names previously unfamiliar, villages once inhabited but now abandoned, even events involving national figures that had faded into the past have come to light. They are all part of the story of our town and how we lived.

The name Abel Stevens is not familiar to most Grantham residents, but he could easily be considered the founder of Grantham. Hailing from Plainfield, Connecticut, Stevens moved to the western side of Grantham Mountain (what was West Grantham, now the eastern section of Plainfield) by the mid-1770s. He brought with him his wife Ruth (nee Spalding) and proceeded to have several children here. The appearance of his name in the town's early records is frequent and in many positions of responsibility. In addition to serving as an officer in the Continental Army during the Revolution, he hosted a number of early town meetings in his home, long before the town could boast of a 'town hall.' He served the town as a Selectman before and after the Revolution, and in a number of other positions, including school board, treasurer and road supervisor. While he left Grantham, probably by 1790, to join a number of family members who had settled in Royalton, Vermont, the mark he left upon the fledgling days of the town's existence is indelible. One of the challenges of the book will be to flesh out his role here and give him his rightful place in the town's history.

The brass plaque at the entrance to Leavitt Hill Road, placed by a number of the Leavitt family heirs, clearly indicates the historical presence of that family further up the road, around Leavitt Pond. However, what has been surprising to learn is the speed with which

that family – and all who lived around Leavitt Pond – abandoned it between the mid-19th century and 1890. Town records indicate that the school building at Leavitt Pond provided the education of as many as fifty students around 1850, virtually all members of the Leavitt family. Maps from the same era indicate at least twenty residences scattered around the pond. And yet, the map of 1892 reveals that there are no residences located on Leavitt Pond. Where did they go? And why? The mass exodus from rural northern New England in the late 19th century is well-documented and Grantham was certainly no exception, but to have an entire neighborhood abandoned is unusual, particularly one occupied by virtually a single family. We'll have much more to say about the Leavitt Hill neighborhood in the book, including what happened to it.

Thanks to our founder and past president Allen Walker, an incident that occurred in Grantham involving someone of national import has survived for posterity.

Sometime in the second decade of the twentieth century, a car carrying General John "Blackjack" Pershing was driving up Route 10, heading for Dartmouth, when the car struck a young woman crossing the road. Unfortunately, she died in the accident; it is unclear if any charges were filed. We're still tracking down the identity of the young woman and any other details of the accident, but surely there is a record somewhere, almost certainly in the Sullivan County records. Given General Pershing's distinguished role in the nation's military history, it will be interesting to note this event and the fact that it occurred here.

There is much more to tell, of course – many more stories, incidents, and broad themes of how our town grew. We are in the process of weaving this tapestry now and are anxious to share it with all of you. Please stay tuned!

—Ken Story

**The Historical Society is very grateful to the Grantham branch of Lake Sunapee Bank for their generous donation in support of this issue of our newsletter.**



# FOWLER MILL REVISITED

“Grantham does not have large rivers coursing through town. Therefore, the town has not been left with empty and all but abandoned buildings adjacent to riverbanks” such as can be seen in many communities in New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup> One natural resource that Grantham did have was a number of brooks and small streams that, when harnessed, could power a sawmill or gristmill. Another resource was an abundance of timber. White pine, sugar maple, spruce, and other deciduous and evergreen trees grew abundantly within the boundaries of Grantham.

One of the early mills in Grantham was located in the village; this mill became a very active center in the heart of town, beginning in 1810 and continuing production until 1910. The mill officially closed in 1920. The mill building survived for many years along with the mill house and a carriage shop. The partial walls of the foundations can still be seen as you drive along Route 10 S.



*Fowler Mill pond height (at arrow)  
Photo by Rae Tober.*

When I first became actively involved with the Historical Society, one day I heard the words Fowler Mill. “Okay, guys, where is Fowler Mill and do not tell me it is on Fowler property because that doesn’t help me one bit on location!” I learned that Fowler Mill was one of the oldest mills in Grantham and was located on the Sugar River just south of the Union Church, adjacent to Allen Walker’s Route 10 S property. On a perfect photo-taking day, I ventured to the river and discovered

extensive and unusual ruins on both sides of the North Branch of the Sugar River. I spent the next hour or so taking photos from both sides of the river.

About this time, I was reading a back issue of the New Hampshire Archeological Society’s *New Hampshire Archeologist* (Volume 50 Number 1, 2010) which was devoted to an archeological study of a water-powered sawmills in Wakefield, NH. The professional team of Sheila Charles, Victoria Bunker, and Dennis Howe, Project advisors, along with draftsmen, people who took measurements, photographers, researchers, and editors had compiled an extensive report.

I thought—our mills in Grantham were never as numerous, but along with the ruins on Route 114, they are as interesting. I decided to call the Archeological Society to ask if Grantham’s mills might be of value and could be studied as well. Eventually I found the right people and Dennis Howe,

member of the Wakefield team and an industrial archeologist, agreed to come and take a look at the Fowler mill ruins. Craig McArt and I joined Dennis on Friday afternoon, April 17, and were surprised by his opinion. The mill site has old wooden



*Fowler Mill in the 1960s*

*GHS collection*

beams, probably from the last sawmill, a sluice or spillway, and a raceway, among other interesting features. Dennis was very impressed by our ruins and said they were worth studying. In addition to their intrinsic interest to Grantham, they could be used as an example to show other mill enthusiasts what to look for in evaluating a mill ruin. He recommended that we submit an application, called a Historical Archaeology Site Form, to the NH Division of Historic Resources. This study would not threaten ownership of the property because the mill ruins are located in the river bed and are covered by their own state laws.

The next step is to form a mill committee to study and complete an extensive set of documents to be submitted to the state. If accepted, the Fowler Mill, in addition to other Grantham mills (e.g. the Spiller dam on Route 10 S, mills on Miller Pond Road and the Reney mill site on Route 114),



*Spillway on west side of river  
Photo by Rae Tober.*

*Continued on page 4*

# NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## OUR THANKS TO:

- Dennis Howe for his generous free consultation on the Fowler Mill site and donation of copies of his two books and an article to our library
- Rae Tober for her donation of 19th century school magazines and a Civil War broadside
- Grantham Garden Club for planting and caring for the flowers in our dooryard
- Renee Gustafson for her dedicated efforts with our perennial bed and Memorial Garden for three seasons each year
- NH Humanities Council and Adair Mulligan for the program at our Annual Meeting
- To Kathi Osgood and Dwight Wilder for continuing for another term on the Executive Committee



**COME ONE! COME ALL!**

Join the newest GHS project—documenting the Mills & Ruins of Grantham. Check the Fowler Mill Revisited article on page 2 for info and call or email us. These are exciting times!



**CAN'T WAIT!**

**Saturday, August 24th**—Eastman Hospitality & Entertainment and GHS will hold an....

**Antique Appraisal Day from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Center at Eastman.** The public is invited. One appraisal for \$5 and three for \$12.

**Daniel Olmstead of Antiques & Auctions**, Newfields, NH is returning. His dialog as he examines an antique is both interesting and enlightening. Join us and have fun!

**CONGRATS!**

Our Grantham history/Fourth of July contest prize of \$25.00 was won by Samuel Hastings. He is eight years old and will enter the third grade in the fall. The runner up was John Murphy, a six year old up-and-coming first-grader. Thanks for their participation.

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE CHECK ONE:**

New member     Annual renewal

**Annual dues: (check one)**

Individual (\$15.)

Family (\$25.)

Patron/business/institution (\$50.)

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

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

# MILL *Continued from page 2*



*Raceway to Sugar River  
Photo by Rae Tober.*

would be recognized as historic heritage sites, to be preserved for the education, inspiration, pleasure, and enrichment of the citizens of New Hampshire. (RSA 227-C)

We will need interested people who don't mind getting their feet wet along with photographers, people to hold tapes, take notes, deal with maps, and carpenters to build whatever apparatus or tools we would need to measure and to complete and submit the application forms. This will be a major undertaking and we, of the Grantham Historical Society, need your participation. You do not have to be a member of the Society to join us. Please email your name and how you can help to us at [granthamhistory@gmail.com](mailto:granthamhistory@gmail.com). If you do not have email, please call and leave your name and phone number at 603-863-9701; and I will give you a call. Our hours are 1-4 PM on Fridays. Thank you and hope I hear from you soon. These are exciting times! My feeling about this project is that Grantham does not have much visibility in the state and this could "put us on the map". It would be another reason why we enjoy living and working in Grantham.

—Rae Tober

<sup>1</sup> "Grantham mills" by Bob Champagne

# CELLAR HOLES

The original settlers of Grantham put down roots in the area of the "Four Corners" on Grantham Mountain around 1767. After the migration downhill, the original location was never resettled and many of the remains of the homes are still visible in the form of cellar holes. The 1850 town map shows the location of these homes and the names of the occupants.

Many towns have cellar holes, but Grantham has old cellar holes with names of families such as Bean, Currier, Chase, Leavitt, Batchelder and others. To further confirm the date of these cellar holes, the 1790, 1800 and 1850 censuses of Grantham list the members of the households. Then there are the cemeteries - Mountain cemetery located off the Mountain Road (now called Miller Pond Road) and the Leavitt Cemetery located off Leavitt Hill Road - which can add information such as birth and death dates. After a while the owners of the cellar holes seem as real as Joseph Bean's wife

Elizabeth. The Joseph Bean cellar hole can be found off the Croydon

Turnpike by looking for the daylilies growing in the dooryard. Existence back then was hard - people became jacks of many trades. Women made soap, butter, candles, sold eggs and made money in any other way they could to support their existence. What

does that say about Elizabeth Bean planting flowers in her dooryard?

So, use the 1850 map as a guide and hike Grantham's old roads! Miller Pond Road to the Croydon Turnpike is a good place to start and Lily Pond is a pretty spot to stop for lunch. Leavitt Hill Road is another area with many cellar holes, remains of a school, a cemetery and the beautiful Leavitt Pond. Maps are available at the Grantham Historical Society.

—Renee Gustafson



Grantham Four Corners  
From 1850 Grantham NH Map  
Drawn by Craig McArt 2012  
Grantham Historical Society  
1850 map of Four Corners Credit: Craig McArt



*Elizabeth Bean's dooryard  
Photo by Renee Gustafson*

*This brief history of Grantham was found in the GHS archives. It was published in a newsletter called The Community Builder put out by the Community House regularly during the 1920s. We do not have the continuation of the article as the next issue is missing. The photographs reflect Grantham in the 1920s. Does anyone know why there was an elephant on the Community House lawn?*

## HISTORIC SKETCH OF GRANTHAM, NH

*By the Eighth Grade of the Grantham Village School*

**COMMUNITY BUILDER, VOL. I No.4 MAY 1926**

In 1793 the town was divided into school districts, and twelve pounds was voted to maintain the schools in town.

The first vote cast in Grantham for President of the Colony of New Hampshire and for Senators was in 1784.

The votes for President were, for Woodbury Langdon, twenty; for George Atkinson, one. In 1787, Samuel Duncan was chosen agent to the General Court, and a committee of three was chosen to give him instructions.

From 1790 until 1840 the town was classed with Proctertown, afterward called Springfield, for election of representative to the General Court, and a representative was chosen on alternate years from each town. It appears that afterward Grantham was united with Cornish for the same purpose.

About the year 1800 Grantham and Croydon got into a dispute about the boundary line, each town claiming the same territory. After a long controversy, the selectmen of Grantham appealed to the General Court for a committee to establish the line. The petition was granted but the committee failed to settle the dispute, and a second committee was appointed in 1807 who effected the settlement by dividing the territory in question, giving each town a part. The first public house kept in town was on top of the mountain in 1802, and as rum was an indispensable article in a hotel at that time, the selectmen gave the proprietor, John Quimby, a license to sell spirituous liquors, and to entertain travelers in a public manner as the law directs.

During the War of 1812 this town furnished its share of soldiers. It was voted by the town to "make up the detached militia, ten dollars per month, including that they got from government, to each private, from the

time they were called into actual service and the non-commissioned officers were to receive as much from the town as the privates".

The town has no railroad but gave a thousand dollars for the building of the Sugar River Railroad, ten miles distant.

When the Civil War came on, Grantham sent sixty-four men; she paid liberal bounties and as a result, the town came out in debt about twenty-five thousand dollars.

There was a Methodist Church in Grantham as early as 1800. Isaac Newell, Ezra Buswell and Jacob Perkins were its stewards. The meetings were held in private homes or schoolhouses, and when these would not accommodate the people, the meetings were held in barns. In 1820, a meetinghouse was built on Dunbar Hill and the one on the mountain was dedicated. In 1855 the church

was moved from Dunbar Hill to the Village.

This town has furnished two state senators, Hon. Oliver B. Buswell and Hon. John P. Chellis. Leander F. Dodge, president of the Citizens National Bank in Newport, was born and resided here until 1868.

There is very little manufacturing being carried on, because the water power has not been developed.

*—To be continued next issue...*



*Community Center*

*GHS Achives*



*Children's Day, 1926, Union Church*

*GHS Achives*

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2013

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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.*

Email: [granthamhistory@gmail.com](mailto:granthamhistory@gmail.com)

Website: [www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org)

## 2013 CALENDAR

August 24, 2013

ANTIQUES APPRAISAL DAY

Sponsored by Eastman  
Hospitality and GHS

Location: Center at Eastman

Thursday, October 10, 2013

CHARLES WIBEL:

Talk on saving ephemera  
7 PM, Town Hall (lower level)



Udo Currier and woodsmen GHS Collection

