

# Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Fall 2013

## NEWSLETTER



Ken Story

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

With the arrival of fall's beautiful colors our thoughts turn to pumpkins and scarecrows and Halloween. At the Grantham Historical Society, our thoughts also turn to the roads that wind through our beautiful community, that allow us to travel to and from our homes and workplaces every day, and which are truly the spine of our town's history. Our roads were the means by which the town was settled and the marks they have left on the land ever since continue to tell the story of how people built and farmed, and lived.

The earliest known road in Grantham actually connected the first center of town, now located in the eastern section of Plainfield, with the Connecticut River. Built by the 1770s, the road ended on the western slope of the mountain and did not initially continue eastward. By the last decade of the 18th century the road was extended up over the mountain and down the eastern slope (modern day Mountain Road/Miller Pond Road) and connected Grantham with Springfield to the east. The original road way largely followed the modern road west of old Route 10 and then continued roughly southeast, following what is now Burpee Hill Road. It continued southward, through land now part of the Eastman development, and continued over Howe Hill and down toward Springfield. Given the town's current boundaries, this was the town's first road.

By 1800 the road that is now Route 10 extended northward from the Croydon line at least as far as Grantham Village. However, by the 1820s it extended further north, where it intersected the Springfield Road, and before long connected Grantham with the western section of Enfield and Lebanon (which by 1847 was a terminus for the Northern Railroad and on its way to becoming a major regional industrial and commercial center).

However, the construction of the Croydon Turnpike in 1803 would have the most immediate impact on the growth pattern of the town. Extending from Lempster all the way north to Lebanon, it was built as a private toll road and was considered the main overland route between the central part of the state and the Upper Valley area when it was first laid out. Running along the eastern slope of Grantham Mountain, it intersected the Springfield Road just west of the modern western end of Mountain Road, creating an intersection that became known as Four Corners, the town's second village center. The neighborhood that grew around the intersection included two taverns, a church, a school, several houses and a cemetery.

Not long thereafter the presence of the turnpike also made land to the south of the Four Corners attractive for settlement. This, coupled with the gradual growth of Grantham Village around the mill there led to the construction of a road connecting the turnpike with the village (the now-abandoned Hartshorn Road, which connected to the modern Dunbar Hill Road), eventually creating the settlement known as Dunbar Hill, which became the town's third village center. Here was located another church, along with a school, a blacksmith shop, and a number of houses and farms.

By the mid-nineteenth century the town's focus clearly turned away from farming and toward industry, a decision made largely because of the growth of the grist and sawmill in Grantham Village. The growth of Lebanon to the north and Newport to the south effectively made Route 10 the main traffic thoroughfare for north-south traffic through town, and sent

the Croydon Turnpike – and both the Four Corners and Dunbar Hill settlements – into decline. A second, smaller town center grew in North Grantham, at the intersection

**Thanks from the  
Historical Society to  
the Sugar River Bank,  
Grantham branch, for  
their financial support  
of the Fall edition of our  
newsletter**



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# GRANTHAM TRAMP HOUSES

*In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, unemployed men traveled throughout New England, sometimes doing odd jobs in exchange for a meal or bed. The first story reveals information about the sites of tramp houses in Grantham. Local families also put up traveling vendors on their way through Grantham. The second relates the story of an itinerant repair man who had a scare.*

They were not called homeless at the turn of the century, but a small segment of the male population seeking greener pastures or just wanderlust, roamed from city to city on foot and via railroad box-cars. Some often left the urban area to tramp along the country's more rural roads and came to be known as "tramps".

It was up to each small town to offer two free meals, supper and breakfast, and a night's lodging to those who asked for it, provided they checked in before 4 p.m. and applicants usually sought out the selectmen, the

'town fathers', to ask for alms. It was understood that any stay was to be only of 24 hours duration.

Grantham's early town reports show that selectmen often housed the men in their own homes and were reimbursed by the town at the end of the year at fifty cents or a dollar per person.

After World War I the volume of transients increased, and Selectman George Hastings built a tramp house in his cow pasture in North Grantham where the travelers could rest and eat.

The Depression days brought more strangers to town and another tramp house across the river behind Reney's Store on Route 10 became



*Bouldervale Farm's "tramp room" window (upper). Photo by Rae Tober.*

a temporary haven. Raymond "Stub" Reney, a part-time police officer, usually was in charge of its operation and one year earned 29 dollars for the 29 tramps.

In 1934, a tiny building at the intersection of the East Grantham Road and Spiller Road was deeded to the town by Glenn Hudson and that became the last tramp house operated by the town. The men,

with a voucher from the selectmen, could buy food at Reney's Store. This facility had a wood stove for cooking and heat and a small spring for fresh water.

FDR's CCC camps took many of the younger men off the highways and World War II with its demand for all available manpower marked the end of the town's liability for tramp care.

In 1974, the Hugh Reney's purchased the tramp house from the town to annex the land to their property, and the building was razed. Only the cement foundation is still there.

—Ella Reney

## THE UMBRELLA MAN Those Were the Days, My Friend

*Connie Howard found this story in 2012 while sorting through old papers found in the Bouldervale Farm 'archives'. It was copied from a type-written paper assumed to be based on memories of Dennis or Amah Howard.*

Last summer I stood beside the Croydon Turnpike in Grantham among the bushes, brambles and golden rod with the shadow of Croydon and Grantham Mts. cast upon me. At the side of the road was the remains of a cellar hole, trees, white birch and black cherry were growing in it and some of them were more than a foot through. It was here that I began to re-live the story that my Grandfather (William Howard) had told me, and my mind drifted back to more than a hundred years ago.

At Daniel Stone's home<sup>1</sup> one late summer afternoon, Esther, his wife glanced out the open door looking down the turnpike and noticed a figure approaching in the distance. Soon a heavy step was on the threshold and announced the arrival of the "umbrella man." He came once a year to repair the umbrellas, put new cords in the clock, splice rope, and do general tinkering. He related the news of their neighbors as he ate supper with them. He had had a busy day and retired early to the open attic to rest.

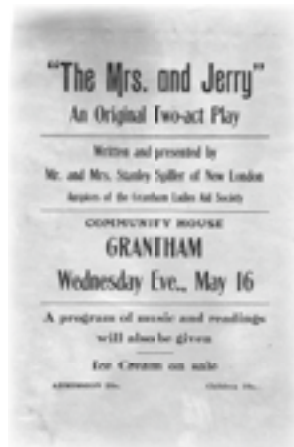
He lay on the straw tick as the shadows thickened recounting the events of the day when suddenly he was aroused by voices below. He listened intently and soon he heard these words, "we'll lay him out tonight." What? Who? Who's going to be laid out? Now fully awake he surveyed his surroundings – a window at the gable end – only about 8 or 9 feet to

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# ADDITIONS TO THE GHS COLLECTIONS

Since our last newsletter, a number of Grantham-related objects and papers have been donated to our Collections. Many thanks to the Grantham people who remember us.

- Three posters from 1930s or 40s advertising community events – a play, a baked bean supper and a dance; highest entrance fee was 25 cents
- A door from Allen Walker's house which he told us came from the East Grantham Baptist Church; possibly the only remaining artifact of the church left in Grantham; donated by Mr. and Mrs. Dan Signor who purchased Allen's house
- Seven interesting tools found and donated by Mike Wentzell from the Dunbar house barn
- A box of papers relating to the Joseph Goss Hardware Store, also donated by the Signors. The old building behind Allen Walker's house was the 19th century store. Papers include vendor promotions for inventory items, patent medicine ads and personal papers
- Ephemera donated by Connie Howard including a 1942 Towle High School yearbook with photos of students from Grantham
- Two copies of the 40th anniversary Eastman calendar (2010)
- A copy of *Wild Bird Guests: How to Entertain Them* by Ernest Harold Baynes (1st edition); he was the naturalist at Corbin Park



Play poster — GHS Archives.

The GHS Library has also received a number of books on history-related topics. All books in our Library are available for borrowing.

- ~ Jager, R. and G. Jager New Hampshire – *An Illustrated History of the Granite State* 1983
- ~ McClinton, Katharine M. *Antiques of American Childhood* MCMLXX
- ~ McGovern, Ann *"If you lived in Colonial Times"* 1964 (for children)
- ~ Moss, Roger W. and G.C. Winkler *Victorian Exterior Decoration: How to Paint Your Nineteenth Century American House* 1987
- ~ Stahl, Frederick A. *A Guide to the Maintenance, Repair and Alteration of Historic Buildings* 1984
- ~ Taylor, Raymond L. *Plants of Colonial Days* 1996
- ~ Whitehead, Russell F. and F.C. Brown *Architectural Treasures of Early America Series: Village Architecture of New England* 1987 the Executive Committee

Baptist Church door. Photo by Rae Tober



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER *Continued from page 1*

of Route 10 and the Springfield Road, with its own store, church and post office. About this same time a road extended eastward from Grantham Village toward Springfield, creating what became the Route 10/Route 114 intersection, around which the village grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The completion of Interstate 89 in the 1960s heralded an entirely new era in

Grantham's transportation history. Given the nature of high-speed interstate highways, the effect on individual neighborhoods was non-existent; and yet, the effect on the entire town was dramatic. It first made feasible the development of Eastman and other housing developments like Olde Farms; later, it connected Grantham with the explosive rise in educational, institutional and commercial activ-

ity in Lebanon and Hanover, fueled primarily by the growth of Dartmouth College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, both of which became major regional employers. By the 21st century, the transformation of the town from a group of successive, small, largely self-contained village centers to a single bedroom community for the Upper Valley was complete.

—Ken Story

# UMBRELLA MAN

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the ground – Yes, I must leave immediately. Carefully he raised the window, and lowered his pack. Even more carefully he lowered himself to the ground and escaped in the night.

A year later the tale of the disappearing ‘umbrella man’ was solved when he returned to the same door step and told how he had overheard the words, “we’ll lay him out tonight.” It was then that Esther learned the truth of the hasty exit. He stated, “I didn’t plan to be laid out, thus my unannounced departure. Soon after I learned of the death of your neighbor and realized my mistake.”

Yes? Those were the days my friend.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Stone’s house was located on the west side of Croydon Turnpike just before the south border of Grantham according to the 1850 Grantham Map.



# CORRECTIONS ABOUT PHOTOS IN SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Joey Holmes has pointed out our errors regarding the photo of the deteriorating Fowler Mill in the last issue which we thought was taken in the 1960s. She notes that the building was torn down by Ralph Barton who died in an accident in Croydon in the early 1960s. She also thinks that the elephant on the lawn shown in another photo was built by boys in the shop in the Community House.

Joey recalls that she learned how to wait on tables beginning when she was 12 years old by working at dinners served in the Community House. Thanks, Joey.

# AN ADVENTURE INTO THE PAST

A hike on a beautiful fall day is a delight! And to walk a two-mile section on the rail line of the former Concord and Claremont Railroad along the Sugar River in Newport with a former train conductor is exciting.

In September 2013, thirty hikers joined Bruce Davison, recently retired from a forty-one year career in railroading. He had been a conductor on this Newport rail line for “the last passenger excursion to Newport in 1975, and the last freight run in the town in 1977.”<sup>1</sup>

Starting at the “green bridge” in North Newport, our first stop was at the site of the long-gone North Newport train station. (See photo.) Only the foundation remains and that is difficult to see unless you know where it is. The station was used by Austin Corbin, builder of Corbin Park, a section of which is located in Grantham. Behind the North Station was a side track that was used for Corbin’s private train car. One of his cars is now preserved in the Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake, near Lake George NY.



N. Newport station Credit: Larry Cote

The sponsor of this hike, the Newport Historical Society, passed out copies of Bruce’s informative handout consisting of photos and stories. As we walked along, he would gather the group and tell us fascinating tales of railroading life and the unusual physical features of the rail line that were visible.

One story revealed the positive persuasiveness of nature. During a storm, the Sugar River rose and carried river debris into the abutments of a railroad bridge. The debris plied up against the bridge until it was so full that the river

had to make a hard left turn along the raised railroad. Rivers normally do not make 90 degree turns—but this time the Sugar River did.

The wise supervisors realized that this new course of the river would eliminate two bridges and save many dollars in maintenance costs. Flat cars brought large cut stones to the site and dumped them into the side of the bank facing the river. Two bridges were now eliminated from use and the previous river bend became an oxbow. You can still see the oxbow and the riprap on the side of the track. (See sketch.)



Bridge changes on Rail Trail. Credit: Rae Tober

Another spot of interest was the Spring Shanty. “The engineer would stop there for a drink of spring water. The spring was behind the Shanty, covered by a flat rock. The water had a slight sulphur smell to it. Sept. 7, 1975”

This was a memorable walk along an easy segment of the Concord-Claremont Railroad, bringing to mind the people who rode the trains, the workmen who kept it safe, and the many vistas that in their day were across open fields before re-growth of forests blocked the views.

<sup>1</sup> Quotes from Bruce Davison’s handout.

—Rae Tober

# NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



18th Century Bouldervale Barns  
Photo by Rae Tober.

## “SEVEN TO SAVE” APPLICATION TO THE NH PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

Rae Tober and Enoch Holu, our new volunteer, completed an application to the Alliance’s program which identifies seven historical structures in New Hampshire each year needing funds for immediate preservation. With permission of Connie Howard, our application focused on the two connected English barns at Bouldervale Farm (visible from Route 10), one of which dates from 1760 and the other from 1780-90. We believe these are the oldest standing structures in Grantham. Dennis and Connie provided excellent stewardship of these barns over the years but now the costs to stabilize them have become excessive and are estimated at \$120,000. The winners were announced on October 22,

20113; unfortunately we were not among them. The Board of GHS wants to do a site survey that becomes registered with the state so that these structures are acknowledged as an important part of Grantham’s heritage.

## 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1938 HURRICANE IN GRANTHAM

GHS was contacted by Kevin Skarupa, meteorologist at WMUR (Channel 9 in Manchester), inquiring about any materials in our archives on the effects of the hurricane of 1938 on Grantham and its people. He was in the process of developing a series of three evening presentations on the hurricane in local communities in southern NH. We provided him with the article published in the summer issue of Soo-Nipi magazine written by Bob Champagne and Pat Andrews as well as the one photograph in our collection from the hurricane of North Grantham. If anyone has Grantham photos of this historic event, we would love to borrow them to scan and return to you. Videos from Kevin’s three presentations can be found at [WMUR.com/extreme-weather](http://WMUR.com/extreme-weather).



1938 Hurricane in North Grantham  
GHS Archives

Thank You

### TO...

- John Larrabee and Deborah Chambers of the Grantham Garden Club for volunteering to care for our perennial bed and Memorial garden
- Paul Osgood and Ken Story for moving the Baptist Church door to GHS
- Laura Jean Whitcomb for donation of five books to our Library and her work on our website
- Barbara Jones for responding to the request in our last newsletter for information about Tompson and Rutter, publishers
- Kathi Osgood for providing free storage space for our overflow in her storage units; and as always to
- Joey Holmes and Connie Howard, the major sources of material added to our Collections

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2013-2014

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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.*

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

## 2013 CALENDAR

Saturday, November 2, 2013  
ANTIQUE APPRAISAL DAY

Center at Eastman  
10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

To benefit GHS  
GHS items for sale



*Handsome couple with car. GHS Archives*

The GHS Newsletter is designed by

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