

# Grantham Historical Society

www.granthamhistoricalsociety.org



Fall 2010

## NEWSLETTER

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT: THE ROAD TO THE FUTURE

Grantham spent the first two-hundred years of its existence as a relatively insular community. Criss-crossed by a gradually growing network of modest, rustic overland roads connecting it to the surrounding towns, Grantham never benefitted from the construction of a railroad like the neighboring towns of Enfield, Newport and Lebanon. Even after the birth of the automobile in the early 20th century and the construction of State Highway 10, Grantham remained remote.

The arrival of Interstate 89 changed all that. Constructed in the mid-1960s and completed by 1968, I-89 was the local manifestation of the Federal Highway Act of 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's dream of a network of uniform, paved, high-speed highways that would span the nation. An idea formed when he was a young captain in the US Army and reinforced by his admiration for the German autobahn, Eisenhower believed such a modern

road system was integral to the commercial health and prosperity of America, as well as forming the backbone of its domestic security. Interstates built in the western states were required to include one mile-long straightaway every ten miles, solely for the purpose of serving as an emergency landing strip for military jets.



Ken Story

I-89 formed the major transportation corridor between Concord, Manchester and points south with the Upper Valley, Burlington, Vermont, and Montreal, Canada. Exits 13 and 14 provided access to Route 10 in Grantham and North Grantham, effectively making the entire town accessible to the new highway.

The impact of the new interstate was immediate. Previously, Grantham provided public education through the ninth grade; thereafter, students were required to choose a high school in either Newport or Lebanon, or

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### AN HONORED GRANTHAM CITIZEN

On September 19, 2010, more than sixty family members, friends and Grantham residents met at the Town Hall to honor Allen Walker, President emeritus of the Grantham Historical Society and dedicated public servant to the town. An informal program began with remarks from Ken Story, GHS president. Bob Champagne, GHS vice-president, reviewed Allen's military history and then presented him with a replacement for his Air War Medal, the original having been stolen from Allen's home after his return to Grantham in the early 1990s. A newly published history of the Eighth Air Force in England in which Allen served was given to him by the Historical Society. Warren Kimball, representing the Selectmen, then honored Allen for his years of service on town committees. Conrad Frey remembered the early years of the Historical Society and Allen's dedicated support of the organization during his many terms as president. The final – and most delightful – moment of the occasion was a slide show

of Allen's life in photos created by Craig McArt. Allen narrated the show, speaking at length of his colleagues in the service with whom he went on bombing runs during World War II as well as his family and his years in Grantham.

The afternoon ended with many informal photograph sessions and refreshments. As Conrad Frey said in his remarks, "It [has] always been enjoyable to experience [Allen's] quiet chuckle and dry sense of humor, whether at an old Croydon cemetery, [on] his porch, [at] those wonderful birthday parties and, more recently, when he was a captive audience in New London" [at the Clough Center].

Now as resident town historian, Allen serves as "mentor, guide and stay" to those of us who have undertaken the writing of *The History of Grantham*." In many ways, it will be his history, not ours.

— Pat Andrews

# RENEY'S STORE 1908-1991

Even though there had been some form of retail activity at the intersection of Routes 10 and 114 since the early 1800s, a real general store was located there from 1908 until 1991. For fifty-eight years the store was owned and managed by the Reney family.

A series of owners ran the store during the first twenty years of offering services to residents of Grantham. Lorenzo Dunbar, Prescott and Smith, Nelson Cote, George H. Walker, Frank Whitney and Orlando Corliss were some of the early owners. The original building was of two stories with a two-story ell on the south side. The lower floor of the ell was used for storage; the upper room served as a meeting room or space for athletic events. Living quarters for the family were over the store.

In 1927, the Reney family purchased the store. Arthur and Wilfred "Joe" Reney essentially gave up farming on Howe Hill to become merchants.

Twice a week, the brothers brought their supply wagons to the housewives (rarely did women go to the store), took orders and delivered the orders at the end of the week. Later Joe took over the store from his brother and ran it until his accidental drowning in 1946. Subsequently, his wife Cecelia and children, Carl and Walter, became the shopkeepers.

A devastating fire in 1947 reduced the store to ashes. In typical Yankee fashion, the Reney family continued to run the store from their home on Route 10. Once rebuilt and reopened in

1948, the Reney Store continued to serve the community.

In 1948, another family member, Donas Reney, the lumberman, bought the store and asked his son Maurice "Hap" Reney and Hap's wife, Eleanor, to run it. They did so for the next 37

years. The store was sold to outsiders, Bill and Marie Bitler, who came to Grantham from Long Island, in 1985. Finally, the general store closed in 1991- for good.

The Reney Store

tion from The  
faced competi-  
Store in Rum  
Brook Plaza as  
well as from the  
Mobil station.

These factors in addition to easy access afforded by Interstate 89 to other regional shopping centers contributed to its closing.

For almost 85 years, the store was a popular gathering place. In addition, it sold grain, meats, sugar, flour, oatmeal, pants, shoes, nails, tools, and kerosene. Whatever was needed was provided by the store, all offered in just 1400 square feet. When the automobile became popular, gas pumps were installed. Only in 1936 did the Reney Store acquire electricity.

The store owners were good neighbors too; they bought and sold local maple syrup and vegetables as well as meat and dairy products from Grantham farmers.

It took hard work to maintain the store during the sixty-five years of its operation. It served Grantham

when the town's population rarely exceeded 300 to 400 residents except during its final years.

After the store closed in 1991, the building was used for a time as a second-hand store, then as a dance studio.

Today, a flooring store occupies the space.

The long stewardship of the Reney family, as well as other owners, served Grantham well through two world wars, the Great Depression, a fire and the changing business environment.

—Bob Champagne and Pat Andrews



Reney's Store in 1965—Photo GHS Archives



Sugar River Flooring—2010

Photo by Renee Gustafson

## From the Summer Issue:



This 19th century photograph was of the blacksmith shop in Grantham, originally owned by J.H. Goss and sold to Edwin LeDion in 1890 for \$150.00, to be paid in installments. "Wood and iron work", including horse-shoeing and sleigh repairs, were done here.

# A HISTORY OF A HISTORY

In bits and pieces – that is how the history of the town of Grantham has been published over the years. These fragments have never added up to a whole - a complete history of Grantham. There have been valiant attempts on many occasions to record the story of the town. None has ever come to fruition, even given the generous financial incentive provided by the town’s citizens.

On October 26, 2009, the Executive Committee of the Grantham Historical Society (Allen Walker, Ken Story, Pat Andrews, Kathi Osgood, Bob Champagne, Renee Gustafson and Craig McArt) voted to commit ourselves to completion of *A History of Grantham* by 2013. We were motivated by two concerns: the ethical responsibility of holding town funds without a demonstrable product and the reality that many older people in town who know much unrecorded history are passing on. The Summer 2010 newsletter described our beginning efforts. To place our work in some kind of context, what follows summarizes earlier efforts and highlights the actions taken by the town to support this project.

We have found information about the history of Grantham in written form beginning in 1856. Edwin A. Charlton of Claremont published “New Hampshire As It Was, in Three Parts: A Gazetteer of New Hampshire” which contained a short description of Grantham. In 1874, a similar piece was found in “The Statistics and Gazetteer of New Hampshire” written by Alonso J. Fogg. A more detailed history, presented by Grantham’s own Lorenzo D. Dunbar, was found in “The Histories of Cheshire and Sullivan Counties, New Hampshire,” 1886. In the 20th century, Rev. Ned Witham, pastor of the

Methodist Church, presented an address on Grantham history to the Sullivan County Centennial Celebration in 1927.

Ella Reney, a founder of the Historical Society, advocated for a written history of the town for many years. Perhaps her earliest effort to describe our history was in a presentation to a Neighborhood Library Meeting on June 23, 1940. Her piece was entitled “A Short History of Grantham.” The Bicentennial of the town in 1967 (two hundred years after the signing of the second charter) produced a small booklet with photographs as part of the celebration. Some pictures dated from 1908; many were taken in 1967 for comparison and to document what Grantham looked like then. Amah Howard who edited this booklet also put together a more substantial history for 1976. This 144 page book contained many photographs, both historic and recent, as well as stories of families and sites in town, events that had taken place, and businesses and community organizations.

In more recent years, Walter Backofen of Plainfield (now deceased) published “The Grantham-Plainfield Connection,” a study of the events leading up to the separation of western Grantham and attachment to the Meriden section of Plainfield in 1856. In 1999, sixth grade students at the Grantham Village School interviewed long-time residents of the town as part of an oral history project and published “Grantham Revisited.”

In 2005, the Historical Society sponsored a guided tour by trolley of historical sites in Grantham. For this event, Pat Andrews wrote “A Brief History of Grantham” which

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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 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE CHECK ONE:

New member  Annual renewal

Annual dues: (check one)

Individual (\$10.)

Family (\$25.)

Patron/business/institution (\$50.)

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

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

## A HISTORY *Continued from page 3*

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focused on the sites visited on the tour. Ken Story, who has led several walking tours of the village area, compiled specific histories of the buildings he spoke about in his Grantham Village Walking Tour booklet. Several papers have been written by students in college courses on selected aspects of Grantham history, Delia Anderson (no date, Plymouth State College) and Emily Hanson (2008, Macalaster College).

Short articles on Grantham have been published over the years in a variety of magazines.

The Community Builder, a newsletter put out by Rev. Ned Witham as part of the activities that focused around the Community House, contained a "Historic Sketch Of Grantham, N.H." in the May 1926 issue. It was written by the eighth grade students at the Grantham Village School. The Dartmouth-Lake Sunapee Region Echoes in March 1942 described Grantham as one of several attractive towns in the area. During the 1990's Eastman Living Magazine did a series of brief articles on Grantham history. "Bits of Grantham History" was published in Soo-Nipi magazine in 2005. Laurajean Whitcomb summarized our history for a Chamber of Commerce brochure in 2006. Lastly – not of our own doing – Grantham, New Hampshire can be found on Wikipedia with a two-sentence summary of our history.

The Historical Society was founded in 1993. Even before the formal incorporation, residents of Grantham, notably Ella Roney and Dennis Howard, lobbied for funds from the town to support an updated version of the 1976 history. Voters in 1992, 1993 and 1994 were asked for money for a history and it was approved each year. However, money was not transferred to the Historical Society. Another effort was made in 2002 in Warrant article #4: "To see if the town will raise and appropriate the sum

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

the private Kimball Union Academy in Meriden. The town would pay their tuition, but they were required to secure their own transportation. In 1968 the town signed a contract with the Lebanon school system and secured a bus to transport students to and from the schools in Lebanon. This would have been inconceivable prior to the construction of a modern interstate highway between the two communities.

The development of the Eastman community was another direct result of the interstate. Eastman Pond was an isolated, rustic pond located in the northern part of town, accessible mainly by horseback and four-wheel-drive vehicles. The presence of a modern interstate immediately

of \$5000 for the use of the Grantham Historical Society, restoring the sum raised at the 1992-93 town meetings but never paid to the Society." This was approved by voice vote and paid to the Society in July 2003. Since that time, it has been the understanding of the officers that the money is to be used only for producing and publishing a history of the town.

Even before the Society became organized, there was discussion about writing a history. As the members came together, it continued to be a source of discussion and if not controversy, at least differing ideas of what it should be. There were advocates for including detailed genealogical information on families who had been in town from the start; there were advocates for simply updating the 1976 publication; and there were advocates for publishing a history that contained primarily photographs. From conversations with members who sat through many of these discussions, there seemed also to be some reluctance to take on the project because the scope, regardless of size of the finished product, seemed overwhelming. Last October, the current Board agreed that we could not continue to hold the town funds any longer without coming up with a History. The members of the Board have different interests and strengths which we feel will support and lead the effort needed to complete a History. Consequently we have enthusiastically commenced work on the project.

The Board agrees that as this is a town history, residents and others who participate in the daily life of our community should take part in its development. To that end, please contact any of the Board members to offer whatever you feel you can contribute. We welcome participation from everyone. We will periodically give you updates in the Newsletter and will preview chapters that have been drafted there as well.

—Pat Andrews

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adjacent to the pond made its development as a second-home community feasible for the Controlled Environment Corporation and its investors. It is no coincidence that they purchased the pond and the surrounding land by 1970, barely two years after the completion of I-89. In subsequent years, the presence of the interstate in Grantham would encourage other real estate development such as Olde Farms and the Gray Ledges.

Considering the depth and breadth of the changes it brought, the relatively recent vintage of I-89 makes it no less historic. Once it was completed, Grantham would never be the same.

—Ken Story, President

# NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## HISTORY OF GRANTHAM VOLUNTEERS

Four Grantham citizens have come forward to offer assistance with the *History of Grantham*. Dean Jarvis of Olde Farms does independent research on cemeteries, burials and genealogy for Cheshire and Sullivan Counties. She has contributed information from the Brown (Burpee Hill), Leavitt, Hastings, Mountain (Four Corners) and Dunbar Hill cemeteries in Grantham to the website [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). Nancy King of Gray Ledges has offered to assist with the final stages of production, including proof-reading. Cynthia Carlson, whose family has resided in Eastman from its earliest years, is assisting with research. Rae Tober, also of Eastman, who has a long interest in maps, will assist with map illustrations and is writing the chapter of the geology and geography of the Grantham area. We are very grateful to these four women for their willingness to move the *History* forward.

## COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE NEEDS NEW MEMBERS

The GHS Collections Committee has gradually lost its numbers – the last member will move away in November. Please consider volunteering for this interesting job which allows a first look at new donations to the Society. The time involved is small. The chairman (Pat Andrews) does all the paperwork and research on donated items. The Committee meets perhaps four times a year (depend-

ing on the number of donations). We decide whether to accept or reject items. That's it! The recommendations of the Committee are then sent to the Board for final approval. If you would like to contribute a small number of hours that will have a big impact on GHS's mission, please contact Pat Andrews. (Contact information on page 6.)

## NEW ITEMS IN OUR COLLECTION

Recent revisions of our Collections Policy divided our collections into four main sections: permanent collection, exhibit collection (items used exclusively for GHS exhibits), research collection and educational collection. In September, several items were added to the permanent collection:

- a set of wedge and feathers for splitting granite, donated by Dianne Wallace
- five 19th century Sunday School books from the Grantham churches (one from the North Grantham church) donated by Connie Howard
- eight copies of Leavitt Almanacs of various dates donated by Troy Casa of Academic Book Auctions, Merrimack, NH

Added to the exhibit collection are a pair of candlesticks made from old wooden bobbins, donated by Barbara Rodgers.

## WE REMEMBER....

After much deliberation, the GHS Board has chosen the crabapple tree, known as the "tree of love" by the ancient Celts, for the memorial garden which is located on Town Hall Drive near the Dunbar Hill exit. Not only will the trees help us to remember past Board members of the Grantham Historical Society but they will help to soften the barren look of the area adjacent to the road. Six trees, three different varieties, with pink, red and white springtime flowers followed by dark red fruit and brilliant fall foliage, now line the west side of the road. The fruit will provide important food for the birds that arrive early in the spring such as robins as well as cedar waxwings and ruffed grouse. A plaque will be added to the upright granite stone listing deceased Board members who will be remembered for their outstanding work for the Grantham Historical Society. We are hoping to plant wildflowers in a ribbon-like row that will weave behind and between the trees.

Many thanks to Paul Osgood for his help in transporting, planting and watering the trees.

—Renee Gustafson



Photo by Renee Gustafson

*In remembrance.....*

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2010-2011

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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)

## 2010-2011 CALENDAR

*Check our website and posters around town for more details.*

**May 14, 2011**

GHS ANNUAL MEETING.  
Speaker: Allen Koop, NHHC  
lecturer on the German prisoner  
of war camp in Stark, NH.

## WHAT'S NEW ON THE GHS WEBSITE

Three slideshows produced by Craig McArt for GHS are available for viewing on the website. These include the 1953 Grantham Mountain fire, Draperville, and Allen Walker's life in photographs from the September 19th testimonial. The summer issue of this Newsletter is also available on the website.

Our thanks go once more to Laurajeau Whitcomb of Howling-Beagle Communications for continued maintenance of our website.

